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SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 07 | Gangtok | Friday | 08 January 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

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CM inaugurates SKM office in North Sikkim

WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 07 JAN:
Chief Minister and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha president, PS Tamang inaugurated an SKM office for Lachen-Mangan constituency at Pakshep Kazor ward under Singhik Sentam GPU of North Sikkim today.

He was accompanied by Chairman Teesta Urja, Gyanden Lachungo, four BJP MLAs, few cabinet Ministers, Chairpersons, Secretaries, HODs of different departments, SKM senior party workers and general public.

In his address, the CM informed that the state government has sanctioned Rs. 70 crore for improvement of water supply and work on it will start very soon. Monks will be provided



GCI sheets, house upgradation schemes while economically weak families will be provided Government jobs in a phase wise manner, he said.

Tender process for Rs 50 crore project for

upgradation of North Sikkim highway road upto Tashi view point has been completed, informed the CM further adding that several other projects are in the pipeline to develop tourism

in North Sikkim.

Earlier, the welcome address was given by Arjun Bista followed by Reyoung Lepcha and other party executives. The program then witnessed Chyabrunge dance, offer-

ing of khadas and lighting of lamp.

On the occasion the house owner and Organizing committee members offered letter of appreciation and token of love to the CM.

14 test positive, 13 others discharged

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 JAN:

Sikkim recorded 14 new cases of COVID-19 from 392 tests conducted in the last 24 hours ending 8 am Thursday. Of the new cases, 10 were reported in East, 02 each in West and South Sikkim. There are now 465 active cases of COVID-19 in the state with the total tally reaching 5965.

Meanwhile, 13 persons were discharged taking the total number of discharged to 5276. Currently, there are 04 COVID patients in the ICU facility of STNM hospital and no new deaths have been reported.

So far the state has conducted 70,151 COVID tests.

In the daily health bulletin, State Health IEC Officer, Sonam G Bhutia informed that out of 296 RTPCR tests conducted, 10 returned positive while 04 of the 86 samples tested via Rapid Antigen Testing returned positive. All 10 samples tested via Truenat returned negative.

Among the 10 who tested positive via RTPCR, two are from Singtam Sirwani GP company quarters, one from Upper Shyari below ICDS, one from Daragaon below HDFC building, one from Namnang [containment zone], one from Lower Shyari near ICDS, one from STNM quarters, one from Majhigaon, one from Pakyong and

one from Metro Point Tadong below Hyundai showroom.

Among those tested via RAT, two are from Hee Bazaar, West Sikkim and two tested at CRH Tadong are from Central Pendang, Duga and Metro Point Tadong below ITBP Camp.

Mr Bhutia informed that one person who tested positive for COVID remains untraceable since Wednesday and this has compelled the department to release the name of the person.

He said that one 44-year-old woman Rup Maya Subba of Daramdin, West Sikkim, has been untraceable and she should immediately contact the Health Department.

NHPC takes over Rangit Stage IV HEP

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 JAN:

NHPC Limited has taken over Jalpower Corporation Limited (JPCL) which was executing 120 MW Rangit Stage-IV Hydroelectric Project in Sikkim. JPCL is currently undergoing Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process ("CIRP") which was initiated on 09 April, 2019 vide an order of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

A press release informs that NHPC will make upfront payment of Rs. 165 Crore and cost of the project is considered as Rs. 943.20 Crore.

Jalpower Corporation Limited is the second company after Lanco Teesta Hydro Power Ltd (which was developing Teesta Stage VI HEP) to be acquired through NCLT process by NHPC.

The release mentions that National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Hyderabad bench approved NHPC's Resolution Plan for taking over Jalpower Corporation Limited (JPCL) as going concern vide its order dated 24.12.2020 and uploaded the same on its website on 07.01.2021.

NHPC had submitted its Resolution Plan and was declared the successful resolution applicant by Committee of Creditors (CoC) on 24.01.2020. CoC approved Resolution Plan was filed by Resolution Professional with NCLT Hyderabad Bench on 28.01.2020.

New STNM Hospital Needs Healing

JIWAN RAI

A hospital is where healing is expected to happen. Ironically, often in a country like ours, even hospitals need healing. The new STNM Hospital at Socheygang is one hospital that needs immediate healing. Healing from its deteriorating condition due to public and administrative negligence. The reckless misuse by its users have turned this new hospital building into crumbling infrastructure far too soon – a miracle only we in this part of the globe are (ill) capable of.

A few weeks ago, I wrote a post on my Facebook page on the ever worsening condition of the brand new STNM hospital. I posted a few pictures of the dirty surroundings, the hallway in level four with puddles, paan spit on the walls, broken push buttons on the lifts, water leaking in the basement parking and dirt-ridden stairs and lifts. The response reciprocating my concern was overwhelming - except for one who asked me to 'start cleaning myself so that others would join me'.

The summation of the overall comments is simply this: the pathetic condition of such a new and grand hospital is the result of a combination of administrative negligence and a complete lack of ownership and civic sense on the part of people. An assistant professor and highly engaged citizen commented on my post saying that it is the quintessential local public attitude towards

government (sarkari) property. A gentleman wrote that the Rogi Kalyan Samiti headed by the Lok Sabha MP has been formed but he opined that the hospital situation needs a greater commitment on the part of the government.

"A lack of civic sense is in our genes" – a gentleman, senior doctor by profession wrote. Many parents in our country teach children to pee in public places, outside the house and so on. That's how we 'toilet train' them and when these children grow up, they perform as well as they are trained. Let us face it, civic sense is a cultural thing. Is there anything that we can do to change or improve it?

I am beginning to feel that fines are the only way to change public behaviour. The hospital authorities must come up with stringent rules and fines. However, the implementation of such rules demand diligence, patience and consistence. One month or even one year will not change our behaviors and habits formed over a lifetime. Singapore is an example of how 'fining' can change 'civic behaviour'.

Most of the fast advancing countries in Asia like Japan and China are big on 'fining'. Singapore went on to becoming one of the cleanest countries in the world. Due its strict implementation of fines on littering, spitting, peeing in public and even chewing gum, it is also called a "fine city". Fine, if strategized well, policed diligently and implemented consistently can fix the twin

issues of a "lack of civic sense and a sense of ownership". It calls for visionary and dedicated hospital management leadership.

Another concern raised was about the pitiful, almost unusable condition of the toi-

VIEWPOINT

lets in the new STNM hospital. It is a crying shame that even hospitals have such poorly maintained toilets. The administration must be blamed for the lack of innovative and stricter methods to maintain toilets as much as people must be blamed for the acute lack of basic civic sense. But ultimately, shifting the blame endlessly will not clean one speck of dirt from these horribly filthy toilets.

I found one suggestion from Rinzing Lepcha fascinatingly promising. A gentleman wondered if leasing the hospital toilets to Sulabh could partially fix the problem as they keep urinal pots free flowing by removing cigarette butts from them. This is from a man who has the vast experience of running NGOs for years.

Banning smoking in lavatories is an absolute must. Installing smoke detectors would be essential and fining heavily would solve the issue once and for all. Dirty surroundings, dirty hallways, dirty stairs, dirty lifts, stinking toilets and smoking in toilets - what a horribly depressing and self-contradictory picture of a hospital which is meant

turn to pg02

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Centre turning disaster into opportunity: Sonia Gandhi on fuel price hike

NEW DELHI, 07 JAN [PTI]: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday attacked the Modi government over the ongoing farmer agitation and the hike in fuel prices, and said the country is today standing at the crossroads for the first time since Independence.

On the hike in fuel prices, she accused the government of profiteering and said it is turning a disaster into an opportunity to fill its coffers. She also alleged that the government is breaking the back of the poor, the farmers, and the middle class due to its "insensitivity".

"I demand from the government that the rates of excise duty on petrol and diesel be made similar to that during the UPA regime and provide immediate relief to the affected people.

"I once again appeal to the government to repeal the three farm laws immediately and fulfil all the demands of farmers," she said in a statement.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also accused the government of "looting" the people by imposing heavy taxes on fuel and alleged that this is the reason it is not bringing them under the purview of the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

"There has been unprecedented "development" in prices of petrol and diesel. The Modi government is looting the public by charging heavy taxes on fuel. This is the reason why the government is not willing to bring petrol-diesel under



GST," he said in a tweet in Hindi. Sonia Gandhi said in the midst of a collapsing economy due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Modi government is trying to turn the disaster as an opportunity to fill its coffers.

She said while the price of crude oil is USD 50.96 per barrel -- just ₹ 23.43 per litre internationally -- diesel is being sold for ₹ 74.38 and petrol at ₹ 84.20 per litre in the national capital.

This is the highest in the last 73 years, she alleged.

"The country is standing at the crossroads today for the first time in the history of independent India. On one hand, the country's "annadata" is standing on the borders of Delhi for the last 44 days in support of their legitimate demands, while the country's autocratic, insensitive and ruth-

less BJP government is busy breaking the back of the poor, farmers and middle class," she said in a statement.

The Congress chief said despite lower international prices, the government has broken all records of profiteering by exorbitantly raising excise duty instead of passing on the benefits to common people.

In the last six-and-a-half years, the Modi government has increased excise duty to recover about ₹ 19,00,000 crore from the pockets of common people, she said.

She also said that the BJP government has increased the price of gas cylinders that has hurt the budget of every household.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala also demanded that the government rolls back the fuel price

hike and help provide relief to the common man by reducing the taxes on fuel.

He also urged the government to take back the farm laws and agree to the demands of farmers, who took out a tractor rally around Delhi in support of their demands.

"Modi ji, if you still do not agree, then your ego and autocracy will lead to the downfall of your anti-people government," he said.

"To the blind and deaf government, this is the strength of the organisation of the "annadata". Realising the seriousness of this farmers' struggle in the fierce cold, immediately withdraw all three black laws," he said in a tweet in Hindi and shared some of the pictures of the farmers' tractor rally.

"The Modi government that came to power by making

promises of providing cheap petrol and diesel, if it withdraws the "excise duty" imposed by it in the last 6.5 years, the public will be largely benefitted. Then, petrol will sell at ₹ 60.42 per litre and diesel at ₹ 46.01 per litre. But it will not do so. This is a game of loot," he also said.

He accused the government of "fleecing" people, profiteering from the miseries of common people and decimating the budgets of the poor. "This has become the mantra of the Modi government," he alleged.

"The Congress demands that the Modi government immediately rolls back the excise duty on petrol and diesel and give relief to the common people already facing the vagaries of insurmountable inflation as also the economic slowdown and recession," Mr Surjewala said.

Petrol price on Thursday scaled to an all-time high of ₹ 84.20 per litre in the national capital after state-owned fuel retailers hiked rates for the second day in a row.

Petrol price on Thursday was hiked by 23 paise per litre and diesel by 26 paise a litre, according to a price notification from oil marketing companies.

In Delhi, petrol now costs ₹ 84.20 per litre and diesel is priced at ₹ 74.38. In Mumbai, petrol comes for ₹ 90.83 a litre and diesel for ₹ 81.07.

This is the highest ever price of petrol in Delhi, while diesel is at record high in Mumbai.

Punjab student travels from US to stand with farmers

TRISHA MUKHERJEE
NEW DELHI, JAN 7 (PTI): Had it not been for the farmers' protest against the new agri laws that began over a month ago, 22-year-old Navpal Singh would have never planned a trip home at this time from Texas in the US, where he is a student.

"This protest forced me to come here," said the mechanical engineering student whose father and grandfather are farmers.

"The last time I had come home was less than a year ago...in March, so I had no plans whatsoever to visit again, but the way this protest has taken over this country and also the world, I couldn't stay away," he said.

Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, have been protesting at multiple Delhi borders against the new agri laws.

Singh arrived in India on Monday and has been travelling between Singhu and his ancestral village in Punjab's Jalandhar every day since.

Even though he is not a farmer himself, Singh felt the need to be part of the protest because of his farming roots that have provided for his education. "People might think I have no direct connection with farming...that I am studying in the US, I will also work and get

married there, but my father and grandfather are farmers. "I wouldn't have been able to have my life in the US without the farmers. And now it is my responsibility to come forward and stand with them in their fight for their rights," he said.

Several rounds of talks with the government have failed to break the deadlock with the government pushing the new legislations as important reforms in the agricultural sector.

The next round of talks is scheduled on Friday. The farmers on the other hand have maintained that they want the three laws to be repealed.

They have also threatened to enter Delhi on January 26 if their demands are not met.

About the stalemate between the government and the farmers, Singh said it was the former's way of "breaking their spirit". "By scheduling talks after talks, the government is trying to simply drag the protest as long as it can, and hoping that it would eventually break our spirits, but they are mistaken.

"A movement like this does not happen every now and then. Today's rally alone has shown our strength and numbers," said Singh, who will return to Texas on January 18.

No proof against Muslim man accused in forced conversion case, UP Govt admits

LUCKNOW, 07 JAN [NDTV]: There is no evidence against a Muslim man who was among the first in Uttar Pradesh to be charged under a controversial new law against forced conversions, the Yogi Adityanath government told the Allahabad High Court today.

Nadeem, 32, and his brother Salman, were named in a complaint on November 29, 2020, two days after the UP ordinance was passed, in western Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar by Akshay Kumar Tyagi, who works in a prominent pharmaceutical company as a labour contractor.

Akshay said Nadeem, a labourer, used to visit his house in Muzaffarnagar and had "trapped" his wife Parul in a "web of love" to try and convert her. To seduce her, Nadeem gifted her a smartphone and promised to marry her, Akshay alleged in a First Information Report or FIR.

Last month, taking up a petition by Nadeem to scrap the FIR, the Allahabad High Court said the police cannot take any coercive action against him and granted him protection from arrest until the next date of hearing, which was today. The court today extended that protection and posted the case for a fresh hearing on January 15.

"When the case was taken up in the honorable High Court today, the state gave an affidavit that said naming them in the FIR under the anti-conversion law was found to be false and nothing was found in the investigation that he tried to forcibly convert the woman for marriage.

As far as the challenge to the Act goes, the main ground is that Article 25 guarantees that any person is free to choose his or her religion and the challenge is that the govt is interfering in our private affairs," Nadeem's lawyer Syed Farman Ahmad Naqvi said.

A six-page 'short affidavit' filed on Wednesday by Awadhesh Pandey, Joint Director, Prosecution, on behalf of the UP government says, "The Investigating officer has found that it is not a case of UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance 2020 and the Act UP Ordinance No. 21 of 2020... There is no evidence found that the accused Nadeem is having an illicit relation with Parul, nor has any evidence come forward that he tried to change the religion of Parul."

The affidavit, however, adds that the investigating officer found evidence that Nadeem had threatened Akshay, and so a charge-sheet for "criminal intimidation and provocation causing breach of public peace" had been submitted in a court on December 31.

In the last hearing, the High Court had said there was no evidence placed before it yet "that any force or coercive process is being adopted" by Nadeem.

"The victim is admittedly an adult who understands her well-being. She as well as the petitioner have a fundamental right to privacy and to being grown-up adults who are aware of the consequences of their alleged relationship," the court said in an important statement that could impact similar cases.

Farmers hold Tractor Rally rehearsal, block expressway to Delhi

KUNDLI, 07 JAN (REUTERS): Tens of thousands of farmers on tractors occupied a stretch of an expressway on the periphery of the Indian capital New Delhi on Thursday in one of the biggest shows of strength since they began a sit-in against deregulation of farm markets more than a month ago.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has held several rounds of talks with the farmers to placate them, offering concessions on the three laws it passed last year to bring private investment into the country's antiquated agriculture markets.

But the farmers have resisted the overtures and been camped at an interstate border near the village of Kundli outside Delhi for more than 40 days demanding the government withdraw the laws.

On Thursday, the protesters mostly from the Sikh-dominated northern state of Punjab, which is one of the country's leading producers of wheat and rice, took to the highway. Turbaned young men



and elderly farmers with flowing beards rode a convoy of tractors numbering in the thousands, some with loud music blaring. There was no sign of any police presence.

"We want Modi to repeal the three laws," said Rajvinder Singh, 35, a farmer from Punjab's Gurdaspur district.

He said the rally was a way to build pressure on the government in the lead-up to India's Republic Day on Jan. 26 when the farm unions have threatened to march on to the centre of the capital if the laws are not revoked by then.

Govt clears eight hydel projects on Indus in Ladakh

NEW DELHI, 07 JAN [PTI]: The government has cleared eight hydropower projects of 144 MW on the Indus river and its tributaries in Ladakh, the highest so far, sources in the Jal Shakti Ministry said on Thursday.

At present, there are several small projects, with a collective capacity of 113 MW on Indus in Ladakh, and the new projects will have much more capacity than those constructed so far, a senior official added.

The official said the new projects have been cleared by the Central Water Commission as well as the Indus Commissioner after a separate Union Territory of Ladakh was announced last year. These projects will come up in Kargil and Leh districts of Ladakh.

Because of its topog-

raphy, it is not feasible to construct big hydropower projects in the Ladakh region.

Durbuk Shyok (19 MW), Shankoo (18.5 MW), Nimu Chilling (24 MW), Rongdo (12 MW), Ratan Nag (10.5 MW) hydropower projects have been cleared for Leh, while Mangdum Sangra (19 MW), Kargil Hunderman (25 MW) and Tama-sha (12 MW) have been cleared for Kargil, the official added.

Many of the existing projects as small as 1 MW of capacity.

The construction of the new projects will begin after other mandatory clearances are obtained, the official said.

"The designs of these projects have been certified as compliant with the Indus Waters Treaty by the Central Water

Commission. The information on the design of these projects is being provided to Pakistan as per the provisions of the treaty," the official said.

"The development of projects on the Indus river has been slow, especially in the Ladakh region. Only two major projects have been constructed so far --- Chutak project of 44 MW on Suru, a tributary of the Indus, and Nimoo Bazgo of 45 MW on the Indus," the official said.

Under the Indus Waters Treaty between New Delhi and Islamabad, the usage of water of Indus and its five tributaries flowing from India to Pakistan have been divided.

The treaty specifies that waters of three eastern rivers namely Ravi, Beas and Sutlej, have been reserved for India

Farmers fear that the deregulation under which food processors and big retailers can directly buy produce from them will eventually replace government-regulated wholesale markets where they are guaranteed a minimum price for their produce.

The government says the state-regulated market yards will continue alongside the new ones and has offered to give written assurances to the farmers they will continue to get a minimum price.

On Friday, the two sides will sit down for another round of talks.

while that of western rivers, namely Indus, Chenab and Jhelum, are for Pakistan.

However, India claims it has unrestricted rights to develop hydroelectric power projects on the western rivers within the specified parameters of design. Of the total 168 million acre-feet, India's share of water from Ravi, Beas and Sutlej is 33 mcf, which is nearly 20 per cent.

India uses nearly 93-94 per cent of its share under the Indus Water Treaty. The rest of the water remains unutilised and goes to Pakistan.

The efforts to tap that water through a number of projects like Ujh Multipurpose project, Shahpurkandi Dam project and the second Ravi Beas Link are being made, the official added.

New STNM...

to be the hallmark of cleanliness and healthy behaviour! When the hospital itself is sick, how fair it is to expect effective healthcare services from it? The most dreadful question that I can think of is this – if this is the condition of a multi-crore hospital within less than a year of its inauguration, what will it look like in ten years and beyond? Many reciprocated my view that perhaps we, as a society, do not deserve better facilities than what we have made them to be. However, self-condemnation without a willingness and determination to change is the mark of a declining culture. Given that civic sense and a sense of ownership are not going to grow overnight, the onus is on the hospital authorities to make a difference. There are different ways to do so. The authorities are entrusted with power to serve people and they will be fully justified when they use that power to redeem this crumbling infrastructure and make it more useful for people.

LOST

I, Miss Karuna Sharma daughter of Shri Ganga Ram Nirola resident of Tumin Saley, East Sikkim has lost my Migration Sikkim has lost my Migration Certificate bearing roll no. 1663700, Admit Card No. JD KB 003790 & Registration No. G220/05409/0015 of CBSE 2020.

I have registered a GD in Makha Out Post vide GD No. 150 dt. 21.12.2020. If found contact : 8927832443.

ANTHYESTI KRIYA

The Anthyesti Kriya of late Mrs. Karna Kumari Baraily who left her heavenly abode on 30th of December, 2020 falls on 11 January, 2021 (Monday). All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at DEORALI, HOTEL CHOWTARA BESIDES BUTTERFLY FLY OVER.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement and to thank you all for your kind support and concern.

Ujjal Baraily (Son)
Pradeep Baraily (Son)
Mamta Thapa (Daughter)
Parina Baraily (Daughter)
Marena Baraily (Daughter)
Susil Thapa (Son-in-law)
Kalpa Baraily (Daughter-in-law)
Sumitra Baraily (Daughter-in-law)
And all other Baraily Family members.

Contact: 9775996049 Ujjal Baraily (Son)
9563068906 Marena Baraily (Daughter)
9749683189 Susil Thapa (Son-in-law)

"Build Gallows in Public": Mamata's nephew on "Tolabaj" slurs

KOLKATA, 07 JAN [NDTV]: Trinamool MP Abhishek Banerjee hit back Thursday at extortion allegations leveled against him by the BJP, inviting the opposition party to "build gallows in public (so I can) embrace death" if they can prove the charges.

"They are attacking me everyday. They say 'remove the extortionist nephew'. I have said this earlier and I am saying this again in front of the cameras here. If you can prove that I am involved in extortion and if you can prove I am involved in any wrongdoing, you don't have to send the Enforcement Directorate and CBI after me. Build

gallows in public and I will embrace death," Mr Banerjee said at an event in Bengal's South Dinajpur district.

The public meeting, which was streamed live on Facebook, showed Mr Banerjee, who is Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew, standing on a wooden platform with hundreds of Trinamool gathered around and many more packed on the rooftops of neighbouring buildings, loudly cheering him on.

Mr Banerjee has been relentlessly targeted by the opposition party ahead of Assembly elections due in Bengal in a few months. For weeks, "tolabaj bhaipo", or "ex-

ortionist nephew" has been the party's punch line in an already bitter campaign against Ms Banerjee, whom the party has also accused of nepotism by favouring and propping up her nephew.

On Tuesday Union Minister Anurag Thakur took his shot, comparing Mr Banerjee to sheikhs in the Gulf countries - an allusion to the Lok Sabha MP's growing influence in the ruling party.

Former Trinamool leader Suwendu Adhikari, whose high-profile exit and controversial switch to the BJP was followed by that of nearly 60 other leaders, has been at the forefront of his new

party's calls for "tolabaj bhaipo hatao", or "remove the extortionist nephew".

Last month Mr Banerjee counterattacked and said it was Mr Adhikari who was the extortionist.

"It is your name in the Sarada scam. You are the tolabaj. And you dare to say tolabaj bhaipo hatao? My friend, I am neither in Sarada nor in Narada. Enforcement Directorate, CBI will get nothing by tracking me. Do what you please," he said.

Yesterday Mr Banerjee also sent a legal notice to Union Minister Babul Supriyo, for allegedly making "defamatory and false statements" in connection with links to an

illegal coal mafia.

The BJP and the Trinamool are locked in increasingly vicious rhetoric ahead of elections. At stake is control of Bengal, where the BJP has never managed to win power.

Home Minister Amit Shah has set his party a target of 200 of 294 seats and warned opponents against underestimating the BJP, particularly after it won 18 seats in last year's Lok Sabha election.

The Trinamool has dismissed the BJP's aim to form a government in Bengal as "daydreaming" and has said it is confident of retaining power despite the large-scale defections.

Tiger monitoring starts at Kaziranga National Park

GUWAHATI, 07 JAN [SHILLONGTIMES]: Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve officials have started the phase four tiger monitoring for 2021 to assess the population and other important aspects of tigers at the park.

Park Director P. Sivakumar along with Ramesh Kumar Gogoi, divisional forest officer inaugurated the phase four tiger monitoring for the year in the presence of senior forest department officials and other members.

"This year, the entire Kaziranga Tiger Reserve has been divided into four blocks. While the first two blocks are in eastern Assam wildlife division, block three is in

Biswanath wildlife division and block 4 is under Nagaon wildlife division comprising 1000 square kilometres of a total of 1055 square kilometres of tiger reserve area," Sivakumar said.

Reportedly, as many as 276 close monitoring cameras would be installed across the area to capture movements of tigers in the park.

Each camera will cover a grid of around 2 square kilometres.

"Apart from forest personnel, volunteers from local schools and colleges will also be engaged for the purpose," he said.

According to reports, the tiger census of 2018 found around 120 tigers in the park.

Delhi orders re-opening of medical colleges as Covid cases decline



NEW DELHI, 07 JAN: As the COVID-19 situation improved in the national capital, the Delhi government on Thursday ordered re-opening of the medical colleges under the Government of National Capital Territory with immediate effect.

An order issued by the Delhi Health and Welfare Department said the step has been taken as there is a reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases in the national capital. The medical colleges will be reopened by observing social distancing and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

"Consequent upon the reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases reported in the NCT of Delhi and after assessing the current situation, the reopening of the medical colleges under GNCT of Delhi are hereby ordered

with immediate effect by observing distancing and SOPs issued after lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic," read the order.

Initially, the first year MBBS/BDS batch will be called in a staggered manner. "Teaching and practicals will be completed within a period of one and a half to two months from the date of re-opening of college. Subsequently, final year students will be allowed to join college," it said.

Moreover, the final year student will be eligible to appear in final year annual exams on successful training, on passing of which they will be eligible to join as interns. Thereafter, the process will be initiated for permitting second-year MBBS/BDS students to rejoin college, the order said.

Covishield, Covaxin vaccines to be available soon: Health Minister

NEW DELHI, 07 JAN [PTI]: Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan on Thursday said that the COVID-19 vaccines "Covishield" and "Covaxin" are on the verge of being available in the country.

The Health Minister, while addressing a press conference, said, "COVID-19 vaccines 'Covishield' and 'Covaxin' are on the verge of being available in the country. Our efforts are to ensure seamless last mile delivery of the vaccine."

The Minister further stated that some priority groups have been decided for vaccination as advised by the experts' group formed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The expert group was formed for vaccine administration, vaccine delivery, strategies related to the vaccine, or taking any decisions for vaccine or for taking feedbacks from various places.

"In the first phase, the health care workers either of the public sector or private sector, frontline workers like central police, armed forces, home guards civil defence organisations,



municipal workers will be administered the vaccine. In the second phase, people over 50 years will be prioritised for the vaccine," he said.

The Health Minister said at the meeting with Health Ministers of all States and UTs that we have to ensure that no misinformation campaign on the COVID-19 vaccine is successful.

Maharashtra, Kerala and Chhattisgarh have seen a sudden spike in coronavirus cases recently. This gives us a warning that we shouldn't forget precautions and continue our fight against COVID-19.

Giving the feedback on dry run of COVID-19 vaccine, he said "Feedback on a dry run of COVID-19 vaccine in 4 states was reviewed. We have made improvements based on the feedback. Tomorrow dry run

will be done in 33 States and Union Territories".

Meanwhile, government sources said that the transportation of the COVID-19 vaccine will begin by today or tomorrow.

Pune will be the central hub from where the distribution of vaccine will take place. Passengers aircraft will be allowed to transport vaccine in the belly of the carrier. There are total 41 destinations (airports) across the country finalised for delivery of vaccines.

For northern India, Delhi and Karnal will be made mini-hubs. For the eastern region, Kolkata and Guwahati will be the mini-hub for distribution. Guwahati will also be a nodal point for the Northeast. Chennai and Hyderabad will be the designated points for southern India.

Shah's visit historic, says SICA

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 JAN:

Sikkim Cricket Association has said that the BCCI team visiting the state is a historic moment for the state since it is the first time that a BCCI Secretary has visited Sikkim. Board of Control for Cricket in India [BCCI] Secretary, Jay Shah's visit to Sikkim was an official trip to inspect and assess the current infrastructural status and operations of cricket in

the state of Sikkim.

In a press release, SICA informs that the BCCI team led by Secretary, Jay Shah held a meeting with SICA following the meeting with Chief Minister, PS Tamang on Wednesday. The meeting discussed various agendas relating to cricket in Sikkim. The SICA executives made presentations on planned infrastructural projects in detail as well as submitted various re-

ports including the Audit report.

"It would be pertinent to mention here that BCCI, Secretary was very pleased after having perused the audit report stating that it is good to see that SICA has maintained its balance sheet in proper order," the release states.

The meeting was then followed by cultural show and gala dinner, hosted by Sikkim Cricket Association.

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New Year! New Resolution

Create space for new collaborations, more understanding

Accepted, still talking about the prospects of A New Year a week in by when even the resolutions have started failing and the New Year eve binge during which the resolutions were drawn up, is a bit too much. But then again, this is also an exercise which will not present itself for another whole year, so here goes another attempt.

There are rarely good years or bad years, the annual cycle playing out in a mixed bag kind of routine. Occasionally, like once in a lifetime, an annus horribilis like the one gone by ambushes us and then 2021 arrives and we start crawling back in the hope of making it to normal. Of course, in individual experiences, years can be brilliant or disappointing, lucky or depressing, but when it comes for a collective people, like say the residents of Sikkim, the best one can hope for now is a “normal” year – one in which the dejections, shocks and lost opportunities are balanced out by a fair share of what was routine a year back. A year in which we can just be, have the basic right of individual choice and the freedom to step out forgetting not only the wallet but also the mask, will be welcome.

Year 2020, save Covid which dominated everything and robbed us of too many things and memories, was otherwise a largely uneventful year in that very little of lasting consequence happened in it beyond whatever harm the virus delivered, which, while it was damaging and lasting in itself, was made worse by poor leadership and even poorer empathy. The empathy reference here is to the babudom which proved yet again that it lives in a world disconnected from how the lay people survive. Empathy, however, was in glorious display when it came to the lay people and there were many examples of people with better means stepping out to reach food, supplies and compassion to those forced by yet another monumental lapse of sensitivity to walk hundreds of kilometers to get home. It warmed the heart in Sikkim to see a reporter who chanced upon stranded and ignored migrant workers in Rangpo, report the incident and then marshall a friend’s vehicle, call in favour to arrange snacks and then return to stranded workers and reach them some nourishment. In Delhi, there was a teenager who did not have the resources to open a langar for the masses on the roads, but he still wanted to help, so he would wake up early in the morning, get in line at the community kitchens, collect a meal and then walk out to find a worker too weak to stand in line himself and give him the food packet. He would then get back in line and continue doing so till the kitchen closed. And he did so every day till the kitchen was in operation and till there were stranded people who could use his service. Contrast this against people who peered from behind curtains to call in the cops on tenants stepping out of cramped rooms during the lockdown for some fresh air, or cops who humiliated people without connections for breaking the lockdown even as the force broke clear rules governing entry and exit from the state for those who could get the right officials to make phone calls on their behalf. In this year of extremes, we had health workers toiling to contain the pandemic without complaint and leaders getting upset for not getting enough credit. Campaigning and elections were okayed but Parliament denied... and the list goes on. Novel Coronavirus was doing what evolution has engineered it to do, but governments and leaders refused to deliver on what they were trusted by the people to do, but thankfully, the people held up their end to keep humanity and hope afloat.

In a way this was perhaps well prescribed since it allowed us a pause from the frenetic stirring that a politics-dominated 2019 had served the State. While alignments changed even as status quo prevailed in a way, the animosities that 2014 had entrenched did not dwindle post-2019 and Covid allowed the Sikkimese to get their priorities in order even if its parties appeared still stereotyped

Sikkim is too small a place to hold on to its grudges for too long; its people should bury at least the irrational dislikes that have been allowed to take root. Such positions will serve no one any good. Once that has been done, a wider awareness can be generated to inculcate healthy skepticism instead. Sikkim needs to converse more; at present, those who have found a voice, shout and shut out, it will be nice to get some conversations going, some deliberations, disagreements and a respect for divergent approaches and attitudes. For this process to begin, more civil voices will need to engage in the public space which is currently monopolized by political noise which is not serious about accountability and is obsessed instead with, well, politics.

Let a resolve to get more involved, more engaged be the resolution for this New Year.

Happy New Year, Sikkim!



‘Once you engage in political violence, it becomes easier to do it again’

NAOMI SCHALIT
theConversation.com

ORE KOREN is a scholar of civil conflict and political violence. Before the November 2020 election, he wrote a story for The Conversation about the likelihood of election-related violence in the U.S. So we went back to him on Wednesday, while what some are calling an insurrection unfolded at the U.S. Capitol, to ask him for some perspective on the event. This transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: YOU'RE A SCHOLAR OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE. WHAT WERE YOU THINKING AS YOU WATCHED WHAT'S HAPPENED AT THE U.S. CAPITOL?

KOREN: First of all, I felt pretty stunned. I think that's a natural response to this. This is a new situation; it shows the power of misinformation and stuff that we're not really good at dealing with.

My research focuses on organized political violence, which often happens in places where the state does not have much power to prevent violence, where the economy is underdeveloped, where democratic institutions are weak, and where there is a history of organized violence. And usually when we see events at this magnitude, they are accompanied by many casualties, which thankfully was not the case today.

What happened at the Capitol, from what I can tell, was a messy riot where people lashed out at the heart of American democracy, but it remains unclear how organized an effort this was.

Still, it is kind of shocking. We have the biggest economy in the world. Based on what we see in the research, weak economic performance is a strong predictor of organized political violence. The people marching on the Capitol have much more to lose than to gain from this, and to me that's puzzling.

With an incumbent who has been advocating for a strong law-and-order agenda, many people did not expect this. In a country with a strong domestic security apparatus, militias and vigilantes hurt rather than help in promoting the rule of law.

What separates the U.S. and other advanced and militarily capable democracies from other countries where deadly election violence happens is the ability to wage an effective state response

and very quickly implement the rule of law, cracking down on both the perpetrators and any groups they might be affiliated with.

One example of a very effective state response was in Michigan, where the militias plotting to kidnap the state's governor were quickly apprehended by federal authorities.

Q: HOW DOES THIS COMPARE WITH POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN COUNTRIES YOU'VE STUDIED?

KOREN: Compared to other countries, I'm hoping it won't get to that threshold of being more extreme. A lot of violence actually happens when a party refuses to give away power or a party blames the other for cheating. Well, that's kind of what we saw happening here, right, one party was blaming the other for cheating. Only here, we had lots of evidence to the contrary, and we had legal and institutional ways of verifying any cheating or lack thereof.

In the U.S., most of the election challenges happened through formal legal channels. The main problem in places where we see violence happen is because they don't have these kinds of institutions to deal with this, courts, all those things that our legal system can handle. But in countries where such institutions are weak, the state can't handle that, and can't address election challenges through a peaceful process. In this case, we see many political leaders, and not only angry citizens, saying those political institutions are not valid.

Also, in other countries, those engaging in such violence are often pro-government militias, but these are not pro-government militias we're seeing here; as we saw today, they are actively opposing the police.

Q: BUT WHAT YOU'VE GOT IN THE U.S. IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY DON'T BELIEVE THAT THOSE INSTITUTIONS HANDLED THIS, THAT IT'S ALL CORRUPT, THAT IT'S ALL FAKE AND NOT REAL AND CHEATING AND PLOTS HAPPENED. AND WE'VE HAD A PRESIDENT SAYING THAT.

KOREN: Well, you have the president saying he was cheated, but going through the legal channels. The president didn't just go and say, "OK, let's go charge the Capitol," although Wednesday morning's speech could definitely be interpreted as instigating something like this. Until now, his rhetoric could be considered more about mobilizing

support, and trying to create enough reasonable doubt that could then be used to pressure the results through formal channels.

But we do have a very unpredictable incumbent pushing the legal envelope during the worst pandemic in a century. What we're seeing today, I think, has a lot more to do with his unpredictability and things we can't account for in models we use to study political violence events. It's been more than two months since the election and we didn't see any serious violence until now, but as the legal options closed, the situation became more problematic. We don't often see election-related violence months after an election.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS MEANS FOR THE STABILITY OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT OR U.S. ELECTIONS?

KOREN: I'm not an election expert, but it's a bad precedent. We don't have a recent history of election violence and, now we can say we do have it, and that's not a good thing.

What hugely contributed to all of this is misinformation. People mobilized based on a conspiracy with no evidence. I think this is a major problem that has to be addressed – I don't know how. But it is really crucial to address the underlying problem – that people believe in what they feel is real, not what is real.

Once you engage in political violence, it becomes easier to do it again. But if there's an effective state response to these events, then it can help strengthen those institutions.

So, I think a lot of people will be saying, look, this is all going to have long-term negative implications. But there's also a possibility that this can actually help in the long run by showing the grave consequences of manipulating democratic institutions for political gain. Again, it depends on how the state and politicians and security and everybody responds to this. But having a history of political violence is a pretty strong predictor of future violence.

I think it's really important for federal authorities to show their ability to tackle this. When it comes down to it, the government must show that it can protect American democracy, through force if necessary.

[the writer is Senior Editor, Politics + Society, The Conversation US]

Pro-Trump Rioters Storm U.S. Capitol as His Election Tantrum Leads to Violence

JACK L. ROZDILSKY
theconversation.com

In the lead-up to the American presidential election, risk of post-election violence was high. Those predictions came true when thousands of pro-Trump rioters stormed the U.S. Capitol in an unprecedented act of anarchy as Congress was set to confirm President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

The violence in Washington comes after one of the most tumultuous years in U.S. history. In 2020, the Insurance Information Institute estimated sustained losses of over \$1 billion — perhaps the costliest civil disorder in the U.S.

Since Trump lost the Nov. 3 election — all the while fomenting false theories that the vote was rigged — many have wondered how his presidency would end. With an unpredictable president remaining in the White House until Jan. 20, potential dangers to democracy were predicted given that Trump supporters believe his false claims about the election.

But as the sun sets on Trump's administration, it's clear the past four years have made the United States a more fragile state.

NOT UNPRECEDENTED

Predictions of violence in the United States weren't unfounded be-

cause election unrest is not unprecedented.

During the 1920 election, violence in Florida intimidated and prevented Black people from voting, and dozens of African Americans were subsequently killed in the election-related Ocoee Riot of 1920.

That riot almost exactly 100 years ago was the worst instance of election day violence in U.S. history.

One sobering warning about potential violence came from the International Crisis Group, a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Brussels, Belgium.

In the lead-up to the election, for the first time in its 25-year history, the group turned its attention to analyzing the risks of political violence in the U.S. The organization typically provides warnings concerning conflict-prone regions where democracy is fragile.

RED FLAGS

Certain items consistently emerged as red flags, indicating potential electoral violence. These risk factors include a polarized electorate, highly segregated and mutually mistrusted sources of information and the existence of armed citizens and militias with easy access to weapons.

In addition, prior to the election, unresolved racial tensions were still present in the U.S. stemming from the killing of George Floyd in May and the

subsequent widespread civil unrest.

In June, during a peak period of racially driven civil unrest in the U.S., the president threatened to use the Insurrection Act to put down protests and used his rhetoric to inflame rather than to quell violence.

Perhaps the most dangerous top indicator of electoral violence was Trump's tendency to use the executive branch as a bully pulpit to fuel divisions and sow chaos. In fact, as late as election eve, Trump tweeted that a court decision he did not favour would allow cheating and also lead to violence in the streets.

Presidents have never spoken in ways that link their election prospects and violence immediately prior to election day.

PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF POWER

The historical norm of the post-election peaceful transfer of power in the U.S. dates back to 1801, when John Adams ceded political power to his opponent Thomas Jefferson after a contested election.

In the period of transition, the new test of American democracy is whether a lame-duck president like Trump can undo 200 years of post-electoral norms to weaken American democracy.

There are four characteristics of fragile states: a loss of the monopoly

on the legitimate use of force, the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide reasonable public services and the inability to interact with other nation-states as a full member of the international community.

Even falling a little towards the direction of a fragile state prior to Jan. 20 can create a more permissive environment for inappropriate expressions of grievances through violence.

CONDITIONS FOR VIOLENCE STILL EXIST

Insights can be gained from studies of democratization in post-war societies. For example, peace and conflict researcher Kristine Höglund has studied the factors that encouraged violence at elections.

Höglund found that conditions that enabled the use of electoral violence include situations where violence is viewed as a legitimate political tool, and agitators have access to arms. Other factors that trigger electoral violence are false interpretations of close elections, misuse of political rights and militant mobilization.

Those conditions currently exist in America — and were on full display during the attack on the U.S. Capitol.

[the writer is Associate Professor of Disaster and Emergency Management, York University, Canada]

What's stopping joint political movement against Oli's move?

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, 07 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: It has been almost two weeks since Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli dissolved the House of Representatives, a move that has prompted all political parties to hit the streets.

From the Madhav Kumar Nepal and Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led faction of Nepal Communist Party, which parted ways with Oli in the wake of the House dissolution, to the Nepali Congress, Janata Samajbadi Party, Bibeksheel Sajha Party to Rastriya Prajatantra Party, all of them have raised strong objection to Oli's action, calling it "unconstitutional and undemocratic".

But while their opinion concerning the dissolution of the lower house of Parliament remains the same, they are yet to come together on the streets to challenge Oli's December 20 move.

The big political forces, namely Nepali Congress, which was the main opposition party before the House dissolution, Janata Samajbadi Party and the Nepal-Dahal-led Nepal Communist Party, which severed ties with Oli days after he dissolved the lower house, have so far staged separate rallies and protest programmes.

So what's holding them from forming a joint front against Oli's decision to disband the House of Representatives and call for snap polls on April 30 and May 10?

Some political analysts say that these political parties must have a clear roadmap of the protest, where they want to reach and what they want to achieve, in or-



der to form a united front. This has not happened so far, although the parties are trying to bring all political forces together to challenge Oli's move through street protests.

In order to launch a joint protest movement, the Dahal-Nepal faction of the Nepal Communist Party held two back-to-back interactions with various political parties and civil society groups on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Baburam Bhattarai, former prime minister and the leader of Janata Samajbadi Party, said during Wednesday's interaction that a joint protest movement has not kicked off because the relations between the two factions of the Nepal Communist Party is still unclear.

"What if the two factions decide to patch up? Our protest movement will be meaningless then. We want to be clear which side the Nepal Communist Party

is on," Bhattarai said, demanding answers from the Dahal-Nepal faction.

Meanwhile, the Nepali Congress is also not comfortable joining forces with the Dahal-Nepal faction of Nepal Communist Party.

The party has decided to maintain an equal distance from both the Dahal-Nepal and the Oli factions for now.

This apparent lack of unity is not limited among the political parties alone, though. Even civil society groups are a scattered lot.

Prof Krishna Khanal, a political commentator, believes the current agenda concerns the political parties and it is them who should decide their destination.

"What do the political parties want—restoration of the House or the elections? What is their destination? What do they want to achieve? They have just been protesting so far, it is not an agita-

tion. Agitation and protest are two different things. Parties have not gone into the agitation stage yet. I think they will do so once the Supreme Court delivers the verdict on Oli's House dissolution move," said Khanal.

The Supreme Court has started hearing on the petitions filed against Oli's move of dissolving the lower house.

Meanwhile, three major political parties, Nepali Congress, the Dahal-Nepal faction of Nepal Communist Party and Janata Samajbadi Party, have announced their second round of protests, which they plan to hold separately.

Raghuji Pant, a leader from the Dahal-Nepal faction, believes that the parties will eventually join forces against Oli's action.

"We have just completed the first phase of our protest. It will take some more time for the people and the parties to come togeth-

er," he told the Post. "There will be a series of protests once the political parties and the people arrive at the same conclusion, that Oli's move threatens to demolish the system and undo all achievements."

Pant also sympathised with former prime minister Bhattarai's concern regarding the unclear relations between the two factions of Nepal Communist Party.

"We are clarifying our position, but it does not seem to be enough. But I have sensed that there is a growing positive environment among the political parties, civil society members and others to hold a joint protest," he said.

A senior Nepali Congress leader told the Post that the party president, Sher Bahadur Deuba, was still unconvinced that the Nepal Communist Party had really split.

"According to President Deuba's contention, the party is still one because the Elections Com-

mission has not acknowledged the split by registering two separate parties," the leader told the Post.

Nepali Congress Spokesperson Bishow Prakash Sharma also confirmed the position maintained by the party leadership.

"Yes, we do have common views against Oli's move, but we have decided to hold separate protest programmes, because we still see Oli, Dahal and Nepal as the leaders of the same party," he said.

"Where was Dahal and Nepal and their faction leaders who were in the Oli Cabinet when anti-democratic laws were introduced? Why didn't they oppose those anti-constitutional and anti-democratic laws then?"

Uddhab Pyakurel, assistant professor at Kathmandu University and a political columnist, says doubts are warranted against the Dahal-Nepal faction from the parties because it had done little to keep Oli in check when his government introduced a series of oppressive laws in the past.

"The Dahal-Nepal faction is the first victim of Oli's move, so they are now calling for a joint protest movement. But what did it do to make Oli responsible towards the people, the system, the parliament and the constitution when it was part of the same party?" said Pyakurel.

"Dahal and Nepal cannot convince or win over the parties and the people overnight to forge an alliance to stand up against Oli's move. It will take some more time for the people and the parties to realize the situation and come to the streets as a single, united force."

No fresh COVID-19 case in Andamans, tally at 4,949

PORT BLAIR, JAN 7 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands did not record a single fresh COVID-19 case in the last 24 hours, a health department official said on Thursday.

The coronavirus tally in the union territory remained at 4,949, while a total of 62 people have so far died due to the contagion, he said.

Two persons were cured of the disease since Wednesday, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 4,859, the official said.

The union territory now has 28 active COVID-19 cases of which 27 cases are in South Andaman district and one case in North and Middle Andaman district. On

January 4 also the archipelago had reported zero COVID-19 cases and on Tuesday only one coronavirus case.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 1,88,351 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 2.63 per cent, he added. The union territory reported its first COVID-19 case in June 10 last year and the first COVID-19 death on July 27, 2020.

Official sources said anybody arriving by ship from Kolkata or Chennai are mandatorily required to show a negative coronavirus report before the authorities allow them to enter the islands.

Novel reimagines the Kurukshetra war

NEW DELHI, JAN 7 (PTI): Investment banker Keerthik Sasidharan narrates the final days of the Kurukshetra war in his debut book "The Dharma Forest".

Publishers Penguin Random House India said "The Dharma Forest" is filled with complex characters, conflicted loyalties and erotic jealousies from India's most beloved epic that draws out an amoral canvas that is beyond good and evil.

On the last day of his illustrious life, Krishna asks the gods what does it truly mean to be human? To answer this question, an all-too-human narrator tells Krishna about nine lives from the days of the great Mahabharata war, where each life embodies a rasa -- love, courage, wonder, disgust, fear, ridicule, sorrow, anger, and tranquillity -- colours from man's emotional palette.

This first volume of the "Dharma" trilogy tells about Bhishma's wondrous immortal life,

Draupadi's loves amid erotic jealousies, and Arjuna's war-weary courage. "Looking up into the plum-dark midnight sky that spanned from one end of Kurukshetra to another, like some thousand-headed serpent resting in the heavens, Bhishma saw the portent of his own death fly above him in the form of a bird whose wings were on fire. They were common enough sights these days, with fires raging everywhere on the battlefields, but it was rare to see them so late into the night," the book begins.

"Howls of pain that rose and fell, like cica-das at night, had gotten worse with each passing day of the war. A war that was sold across the kingdoms of Aryavarta as the war to end all wars. But nine days into the fighting, broken legs, torn limbs, and intestines that poured out from perforated abdomens belied that original dream of easy, sweet smelling victories," the author writes.

Nepal's Covid-19 toll reaches 1,903 with four more deaths

KATHMANDU, 07 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Nepal on Thursday reported four more Covid-19-related fatalities, pushing the death toll to 1,903. The country also recorded 412 new cases.

The overall infection tally has reached 263,605 with 5,058 active cases.

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, 256,644 infected people have recovered from the disease so far; of them 483 in the past 24 hours.

Kathmandu Valley recorded 251 new infections in the past 24 hours. Of them, 198 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu, 28 in Lalitpur and 25 in Bhaktapur.

As of Thursday, the number of confirmed cases in the Valley has reached 122,757. While Kathmandu has report-

ed 476 Covid-19-related fatalities so far, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur have recorded 149 and 110 deaths respectively.

According to the ministry, 951 individuals from Bagmati Province, 243 from Lumbini Province, 218 from Province 1, 216 from Province 2, 188 from Gandaki Province, 62 from Sudurpaschim Province, and 25 from Karnali Province have died of Covid-19 so far.

As of Thursday, 1,969,292 PCR tests have been carried out across the country.

A total of 5,132 PCR tests were performed in the past 24 hours, according to the data released by the ministry.

In the past 24 hours, 19 new infections were reported in Province 1, nine in Province 2, and 289 in Bagmati Province.

Similarly, Gandaki, Lumbini and Karnali provinces reported 38, 50 and seven cases respectively.

While Kathmandu has more than 500 active cases, Solukhumbu, Dolpa and Mugu districts do not have any active cases, according to the ministry.

While 184 individuals infected with the virus are being treated in intensive care units across the country, 32 others—19 in Bagmati Province, seven in Gandaki, five in Lumbini, and one in Karnali—are on ventilator support.

Nepal on Wednesday reported six Covid-19-related deaths and 409 new infections. Similarly, eight deaths and 1,893 new cases were recorded in the country on Tuesday and seven deaths and 403 new cases on Monday.

No bird flu case found in Odisha so far: Chief Secy



BHUBANESWAR, JAN 6 (PTI): The Odisha government on Wednesday decided to form Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) at the state and district levels to avoid the outbreak of avian influenza, though not a single case of bird flu is detected in the state.

Chief Secretary S C Mohapatra reviewed the possibility of outbreak of the disease which has sparked scare in various states. Of the 11,000 samples tested so far in the state, not a single positive case has been found so far, he said.

The samples were collected from different

bird congregation locations like Chilika Lake which this year recorded the arrival of over 11.42 lakh birds, Bhitarkanika National Park (97,866 birds) and Hirakud Dam area (1.60 lakh birds).

While claiming that the state is well prepared to face any challenge, the chief secretary asked officials to intensify surveillance activities in order to counter and control any possible outbreak of bird flu.

Fisheries and Animal Resources Development secretary Raghu Prasad said that generally migratory birds are carriers of the avian influenza.

Therefore, the state has to be very cautious and focus on the places attracting migratory birds.

Apart from bird congregation localities, samples were collected from the poultry firm of Odisha University of Agriculture & Technology and sent to the Animal Disease Research Institute at Phulnakhara for tests as a precautionary measure.

The state government also launched a training programme for poultry farmers of Khurda, Bhubaneswar and other areas to educate them about precautions needed against possible bird flu outbreak, he added.

M'laya MPs nudged on ILP

SHILLONG, 07 JAN [SHILLONGTIMES]: The Confederation of Meghalaya Social Organisation (CoMSO) has appealed to all the three MPs of the state to take up the issue of Inner Line Permit (ILP) in the Parliament for discussion.

"We appeal to all the three MPs to please raise the issue and see how the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister responds to it," said CoMSO chairman Robertjune Kharjhrin on Thursday.

Stating that the session of the Parliament is very important for the state, he said, "If any of the three MPs can raise ILP and other issues in the Parliament it would be a big moment for the people of Meghalaya."

"It will be good if they can ask the Home Ministry about the status of the ILP because they will have to answer on the floor of the House," he added.

He said that if the MPs take up ILP in the Parliament and MLAs ag-

itate in Delhi, it will send a message on the movement to protect indigenous rights.

The CoMSO said the ruling Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) and opposition Congress should leave aside their political rivalry for the 2023 state polls and unite on important issues such as the demand for implementation of ILP.

"The Assembly elections are due in two years time and it is obvious that there will be political rivalries between the ruling dispensation and the Opposition. We will choose the best. But on important issues, such as ILP, inclusion of language and border disputes, they must unite," Kharjhrin insisted.

He said it will go in the cause of ILP movement if the political parties as well as the Independent MLAs unite.

Reiterating that all 60 MLAs, who passed the ILP resolution, should pursue the matter with the Centre and stage a

protest in New Delhi, Kharjhrin said, "Mawlai MLA, PT Sawkmie, has endorsed that view and we are of the opinion that it is the duty of all legislators to go to the national capital and agitate. They must make it clear that Meghalaya wants ILP and the Centre should take up the matter at the earliest."

He suggested that the Budget Session of Parliament will be a perfect time to stage the protest.

"If they can do it, the movement will get further momentum. We are ready to accompany them if they so want. We want this to be a mass movement," the CoMSO chairman added.

According to reports, the Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs has recommended that the Budget session of Parliament be held from January 29.

The first part of the Budget session is from January 29 to February 15 while the second part is scheduled from March 8 to April 8.

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Manchester City purring again after stumbling upon winning formula

JONATHAN WILSON
LONDON, 07 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Football feels at times almost wilfully contrarian, as though it delights in confounding those who try to plot a rational course through it. You can plan and plan and plan. You can have a manager who is famous for his attention to detail. You can study all the data, watch all the videos, think and plot and cogitate, formulate your grand strategy, then it turns out the answer all along was John Stones.

Manchester City needed a right-sided central defender, everybody said. They had Aymeric Laporte, who was probably alongside Virgil van Dijk the best central defender in the league, but he prefers the left side, so City's job in the summer was to find somebody to play alongside him. In that area, it was widely agreed, their recruitment had gone a little awry.

They signed Nathan Aké from Bournemouth for £41m, the first senior central defender City had signed since Laporte in January 2018. But one who plays on the left. A squad player, then: cover, back-up for Laporte. Aké played in the first two games of the season, in the second of which City let in five against Leicester. He has started only three league games since, and given the last two of those were against West Brom and Newcastle United, two of the five lowest-scoring sides in the division, it's fair to say his role is to be used against less threatening opponents to rest the frontline.

But then City pounced. Rúben Dias, for £61.5m plus Nicolás Otamendi. A right-sided central defender, the first senior player City had bought in that position since Stones in August 2016. This, then, was the future: Dias and Laporte, the rock on which Pep Guardiola's new cathedral would be built.

And Dias has excelled this season. Few central defenders have adapted quite so unobtrusively into the Premier League, with all its long diags and elbows and second balls. His unruffled authority, the galvanising effect he has had, has drawn comparison to Van Dijk, which may be premature but is not unreasonable. The difference between City now and the porousness of the Leicester game is profound.

But he hasn't done it on the right of central defensive pairing; he's done it on the left and alongside him is Stones. The solution, it turns out, was there all along.

Stones is one of those unfortunate players who has become a cipher for a wider debate. It's never just about him or his form: conversations always end up in debates about the nature of defending and how central defenders should behave. As soon as Everton signed him from Barnsley, he became the icon of a new age: an angular, slightly gawky figure more notable for his reading of the game and his passing than for the

more traditional defensive arts of heading, tackling and marking.

It's a concept with which English football has never been entirely comfortable. Stones made errors, as all young defenders will, as all defenders will, particular those asked to play in the proactive way he is, and each one felt like a blow on the whole concept of defending he represents. The nadir perhaps came in England's defeat against the Netherlands in the Nations League semi-final in 2019. However many mistakes could be tolerated for the benefits brought by his willingness to pass out from the back, this was too many.

Form and confidence disintegrated. Last season he started only 12 league games. He played only one of the first nine this season. At 26, he felt like yesterday's man. But then he came into the team against Burnley at the end of November. Since then, when he has been on the pitch, the only goal City have conceded is Callum Hudson-Odoi's largely inconsequential late strike for Chelsea on Sunday.

Against Manchester United on Wednesday, the Stones-Dias partnership was exceptional again, and Stones's goal a welcome bonus. United didn't play badly in a high-quality game, but the threat they offered was restricted largely to a couple of long-range efforts, a handful of set plays and some extremely optimistic appeals for penalties. Fernandinho was superb, not only in his goal, but in the way he protected the space in front of Stones and Dias, stifling Bruno Fernandes.

City this season have been scratchy. They've lacked their usual flow. When they drew at home with West Brom, it seemed reasonable to wonder whether this might be the worst side of which Guardiola had ever been in charge. But against Chelsea and then again on Wednesday, there was a zip to their football. In 12 games since the defeat at Tottenham, they've conceded only three times.

The question was how well the new partnership would stand up against a strong counterattacking side. Here, perhaps, was the beginning of an answer: United beat City three times last season, each time by sitting deep and playing on the break. In the league meeting last month, Guardiola was so concerned by United's counter he had his side sit off and essentially accept a 0-0. There was no such caution on Wednesday. City in spells looked back to their fluent best, and that is part down to the sense of security the defence gives them. In Stones's resurgence, perhaps, there is a reminder that players are not mere bundles of attributes and statistics. They have lives beyond the pitch. Form and confidence can fluctuate. A few bad games, a few bad months, shouldn't mean a player is written off for ever. They are human and therefore unpredictable. Planning can only ever go so far.

'This is who we are': NBA reacts in dismay at mob's invasion of US Capitol

MILWAUKEE, 07 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: The NBA, and the wider US sports world, showed dismay on Wednesday hours after a violent mob loyal to Donald Trump was able to storm the US Capitol.

Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr, a long-time critic of Trump, said the invasion of the Capitol was "a pretty clear reminder that the truth matters".

He added: "A legitimate election is suddenly questioned by millions of people, including many of the people who are leading our country in government, because we've decided to – over the last few years – allow lies to be told. So, this is who we are. You reap what you sow."

The mob in Washington DC had delayed Congress from certifying the results of November's election and paving the way for US president-elect Joe Biden to be sworn in later this month.

"It's an embarrassing and shameful day in our country," New Orleans Pelicans coach Stan Van Gundy said.

Boston Celtics coach Brad Stevens was also critical of the Trump administration. "They've operated in a win-at-all-costs attitude," he said. "I don't know, our sports world is a lot less important, obviously. But I've always thought if you operated with a win-at-all-costs attitude, it's going to be a pretty unfulfilling ending. And



in this situation, a disgraceful ending. So, I'm looking forward to two weeks from now, as I know a lot of other people are, too."

Philadelphia 76ers coach Doc Rivers, who is black, spoke of the stark difference between rallies across America last summer that often included violent skirmishes between protesters and police and what he watched at the Capitol on Wednesday.

"The symbolism of storming the Capitol without force done to them, if you're a black American, it definitely touches you in a different way," Rivers said. "This is not a black thing. This is an American thing."

Other sports stars agreed with Rivers. "Never thought Americans would let terrorists into [the Capitol] without a fight...sad day," wrote San Francisco 49ers cornerback Richard Sherman.

Former Miami Heat star Dwyane Wade posted a photo of the mob in the Capitol walking around mostly undisturbed along with the caption: "Black people get pulled over and don't make it out alive. We can't sleep in our own beds without being killed. We can't jog without being killed. We can't walk down the street with our hoodies up without being killed but they can do this???"

Meanwhile, Olympic cham-

pion gymnast Simone Biles, perhaps the finest athlete in America, summed up her feelings in a few lines. "embarrassed but not surprised. disgusted but not surprised. sad but not surprised. angry but not surprised. speechless but not surprised," she wrote on Twitter.

There was also discontent in response to a decision by a Wisconsin prosecutor on Tuesday not to charge a police officer who shot a black man last year.

In Milwaukee, the Bucks and Detroit Pistons both took turnovers on their first possessions – intentionally, with all 10 players on the court kneeling. In Miami, the Heat and Celtics

released a joint statement saying they were playing "with a heavy heart" in a game where most players and coaches knelt for the national anthem. And in Phoenix, the Suns and Toronto Raptors stood in a circle and linked arms for the American and Canadian anthems.

Wednesday's events came one day after the decision to not to bring charges against the officer who shot Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin last year was announced. Blake's shooting was one of the many issues players focused on last season in the NBA restart bubble, where the issues of racial injustice and police brutality were a constant focus.

Comeback kings Bayern count on Lewandowski goals in Gladbach

BERLIN, 07 JAN (REUTERS): Bundesliga top scorer Robert Lewandowski has struck twice in each of Bayern Munich's last three league matches but the champions will need even more from him if they are to beat hosts Borussia Mönchengladbach on Friday and stay in top spot.

Voted Best FIFA Men's Player for 2020 in December, the Pole has been on a roll this season, finding the net 19 times in 14 league games as he chases Gerd Müller's legendary 40-goal haul from 1971/72.

Another double strike from Lewandowski would see him equal the league record of scoring twice in four consecutive games.

Last season's treble winners have now been forced to come back from at least one goal down in each of their last eight league games, a club record.

But they also managed at least a point in each of these matches, largely thanks to Lewandowski.

"With Lewandowski, Bayern have a world-class striker who does not need many chances to score goals," said Gladbach coach Marco Rose.

"He will look for spaces and to defend against such a player you have to have a top day. But we have good central defenders and they need to rise to the occasion."

Gladbach, who, like Bayern, have quali-

fied for the Champions League knockout stage, have the best record of any Bundesliga team against the Bavarians since 2014, having beaten them five times and drawn twice in 12 league games.

"We have gathered experiences of playing games against top teams in the Champions League. We need to take these experiences into this game because you have to have the right attitude against Bayern," Rose said.

"We need to have the conviction that we can get something from this game. On a very good day we are able to hurt Bayern and beat them."

It will, however, be tough with Bayern's Joshua Kimmich scor-

ing on his return from a long-term injury absence last week and looking as sharp as ever as they fired five second-half goals past Mainz 05 after falling 2-0 behind.

Bayern winger Kingsley Coman is also set to return after missing the Mainz game through injury.

The champions are top of the standings with 33 points, while Gladbach are in seventh place with 21 after managing just one win in their last four games.

"We have to keep the game open for as long as we can and carve out our chances," said Rose. "We want to get something out of it because in our situation it is very important."

Barty returns to action after 11 months for Australian Open warmup



MELBOURNE, 07 JAN (REUTERS): World number one Ash Barty will return to competitive tennis after a lengthy hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic when she headlines two WTA tournaments in Melbourne ahead of the Australian Open, organisers said on Thursday.

The 24-year-old Queenslander has not played a match since February, opting not to defend her French Open title and also skipping the U.S. Open in New York as the novel coronavirus wreaked havoc on global sport.

The pandemic is still affecting the tennis calendar, with the year's first Grand Slam at Melbourne Park to start on Feb. 8, three weeks later than planned.

Barty, who held on to the top women's singles ranking during last year's disrupted season, will play for the first time in 11 months at one of two WTA 500 events from Jan. 31-Feb. 6 as part of the Melbourne Summer Series. The Gippsland Trophy and Yarra Valley Classic, named after regions in the state of Victoria, will include 49 of the top 50 women players.

The top 32 players will be split across the

two events, with each featuring 64-singles and 32-doubles draws.

American Serena Williams, 39, will also return to competitive action after exiting the French Open with an injury and would hope to get some matches under her belt before embarking on her bid for a record-equaling 24th major title.

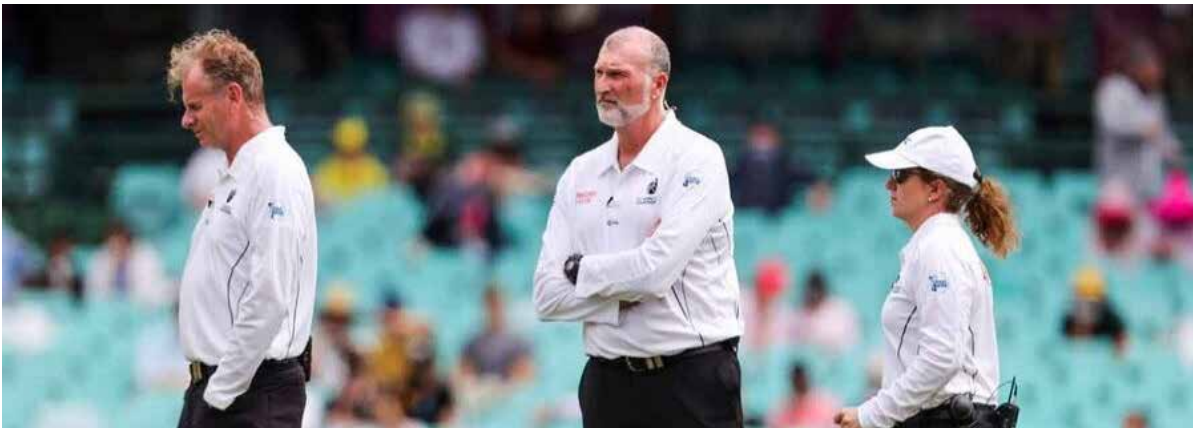
Players will start arriving Down Under from Jan. 15 and undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine before playing the warm-up events, which will be held at Melbourne Park.

Top men's players like Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic and world number two Rafa Nadal will represent their countries in the 12-team ATP Cup from Feb. 1-5 with those unable to make the cut divided into two ATP 250 tournaments.

The Great Ocean Road Open and Murray River Open will feature players including Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka and local hope Nick Kyrgios.

"While we know the circumstances are unique this year, it is a huge coup to secure such strong playing fields," Cameron Pearson, head of TA major events, said in a statement.

Female umpire Polosak makes Sydney test breakthrough



SYDNEY, 07 JAN (REUTERS): Australian Claire Polosak became the first woman to officiate at a men's test on Thursday when she took up her role as fourth umpire for the match between Australia and India.

Polosak was the first woman to officiate onfield in a men's one-day international when Namibia hosted Oman at Windhoek in April 2019 but her duties at Sydney Cricket Ground will be more limited unless one of her fellow umpires is indisposed.

Travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in an exclusively Australian umpiring team for the four-match India series.

Polosak, 32, was also the first woman umpire to stand in an Australian men's domestic fixture after officiating a one-day match between New South Wales and a Cricket Australia XI in 2017.

The fourth umpire at a test match has duties related to pitch preparation, equipment changes

and support for the on-field umpires.

There was another first on the opening morning of the third test when the new edition of the Australian national anthem was sung before the start of play.

The government last week changed the words of the second line of Advance Australia Fair from "for we are young and free" to "for we are one and free" in recognition of the indigenous population's more than 50,000 years of history.

Hong Kongers call US violence a setback for democracy

HONG KONG (AP): Hong Kong residents from across the political spectrum condemned mob violence at the U.S. Capitol, 18 months after protesters stormed their own legislature to demand greater democracy, not the overthrow of election results.

Pro-democracy activists said America's reputation and democracy were damaged by Wednesday's violence, in which supporters of President Donald Trump smashed their way into the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to overturn America's presidential election and keep Democrat Joe Biden from replacing Trump.

Those in Hong Kong's pro-Beijing establishment also denounced the violence, calling it a possible insurrection.

The storming of the U.S. Capitol came one day after Hong Kong authorities arrested 53 pro-democracy activists, accusing them of subversion over allegations they sought to elect lawmakers who would hamstring the Legislative Council's work and force the resignation of Chief Executive Carrie Lam.

The violence in Washington weakened arguments for American democratic values, said Lee Cheuk-yan, a pro-democracy activist and one of the organizers of an annual vigil commemorating the bloody crackdown on student-led pro-democracy protests



in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

"It's very sad for us in Hong Kong to see mobs attacking Capitol Hill and trying to overthrow the election results. We in Hong Kong are fighting for a democracy in which everyone has a right to vote," Lee said. "But when we look at the U.S., it's now a subversion of the will of the people by violence."

Lee said the U.S. has now become a "laughing-stock."

"The most damaging part is that the democratic world has been weakened, and when that happens it strengthens the hand of authoritarian rulers from all over the world," he said.

Hong Kong experienced months of an-

ti-government protests in 2019 against proposed legislation that would have allowed suspects in the semi-autonomous city to be sent to mainland China for trial. The bill was withdrawn but the protesters' demands morphed into calls for greater democracy and other reforms that were rejected by the government amid increasing violence between demonstrators and police.

The July 1-2, 2019, attack on the Legislative Council, in which protesters occupied and defaced the chamber and offices, was seen as a turning point that hardened opinions on both sides.

"At least in the U.S., their elections are fair. In Hong Kong, elections

are canceled," said Leslie Chan, a district councillor in Hong Kong, referring to a year-long postponement of the city's legislative elections by Lam, who cited public health risks from the coronavirus.

Hong Kong's pro-democracy camp accused the government of postponing the vote to prevent the opposition from gaining seats.

Beijing's backers in the territory criticized the U.S. violence as a sign of a breakdown in law and order and respect for the government.

Pro-Beijing lawmaker Regina Ip called the use of violence in an attempt to overturn an electoral outcome "very serious" and said such acts could be seen as an

insurrection.

Ip, a former Hong Kong secretary for security, said some U.S. politicians had dismissed the storming of Hong Kong's legislature as something "not to be taken seriously."

"Our police were accused of brutality, but their police have used much more force. They've already killed one person," she said. One protester was shot inside the Capitol during Wednesday's violence, while three other people died from medical emergencies.

"So I think this is a clear example of how we all live in glass houses, don't throw stones. They lived in a glass house and they kept throwing stones at ours," she said.

Lebanon begins new lockdown amid surge in coronavirus cases

BEIRUT (AP): Lebanon began a 25-day nationwide lockdown Thursday to limit the spread of the coronavirus as infections hit a new record in the tiny Mediterranean nation and patients overwhelm the health care sector.

In Israel, the government prepared for a two-week shutdown as the country's infection rate soars.

The lockdown in Lebanon is the third since the first case was reported in late February. It closes most businesses and limits traffic by imposing an odd and even license plate rule on alternating days. It also reduces the number of flights at the country's only international airport.

As of Thursday, a daily 6 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew takes effect that will last until Feb. 1.

On Wednesday, Lebanon broke its single-day record of new coronavirus infections on the eve of the lockdown with 4,166 cases reported in 24 hours.

It came after a holiday season in which tens of thousands of visitors flying into the country to celebrate Christmas and New Year's. Lebanon also reported 21 new coronavirus deaths Wednesday, bringing the number of total coronavirus cases in the small Mediterranean country to nearly 200,000, with more than 1,500 deaths.

"The best way to limit the spread is to stay at home," outgoing Health Minister Hamad Hassan told the local LBC TV station.

In Beirut's commercial Hamra district, many shops were closed Thursday morning as police patrols drove by to make sure the lockdown was implemented. Police checkpoints fined motorists who violated the lockdown orders.

First responders in the country hit by a severe economic crisis say they have been transporting nearly 100 patients a day to hospitals that are now reporting near-full occupancy in beds and intensive care units.

Lebanon saw new infections begin to increase during the summer, following a massive explosion in Beirut's port in August that shook the city and its health sector, killing over 200 people and injuring 6,000. August's numbers

increased by over 300% from July as a result and have been climbing since.

The new lockdown comes as Lebanon was already struggling with an unprecedented economic and financial crisis that has caused it to default on debt and sent its local currency plunging, losing 80% of its value to the dollar.

The shortage of hard currency in Lebanon has severely curbed imports to the import-dependent country, including medicine and medical supplies. Many medicines are missing at pharmacies as the crisis worsens.

Israel's government Thursday finalized a series of strict lockdown measures as the country's infection rate has soared in recent weeks.

For two weeks starting Thursday night, Israeli schools and all non-essential businesses will shut down, gatherings will be restricted to five persons indoors and 10 outdoors, and movement and travel abroad restricted.

Israel has recorded over 466,000 cases of the coronavirus and at least 3,527 deaths, according to the health ministry. The number of serious COVID-19 cases has steadily risen in the past month, even as Israel started rolling out vaccines to high risk populations, including health care workers and the elderly.

Israeli Health Minister Yuli Edelstein wrote on Twitter on Thursday that the country had already vaccinated nearly 1.6 million citizens, over 17% of the population.

In Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Christians were barred from attending Mass on Christmas Eve as the country fights a surge in coronavirus cases.

The church canceled celebrations around the country and allowed only a limited number of clerics at Midnight Mass on the eve of Orthodox Christmas. Copts celebrate Christmas according to the Julian calendar, meaning it falls on Jan. 7.

Egypt has reported nearly 145,000 confirmed coronavirus cases, including nearly 8,000 deaths. However, the actual number of COVID-19 cases in Egypt is thought to be far higher, mostly due to limited testing and uncounted patients treated at home or in private hospitals.

Wong questioned, US lawyer released in Hong Kong crackdown

HONG KONG (AP): Jailed Hong Kong pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong was arrested on a new charge under the national security law on Thursday while an American rights lawyer who was detained in a sweeping crackdown was granted bail.

Friends and family of Wong, who is serving a 13 1/2-month prison sentence for organizing and participating in an unauthorized protest in 2019, were informed that he was arrested on suspicion of violating the national security law and was taken away to give a statement on the new charge, according to a post on his Facebook page.

The post also stated that Wong's lawyer was unable to meet with him, and that Wong had been transferred back to prison after giving the statement, which was not disclosed.

Separately, John Clancey, an American human rights lawyer who works at law firm Ho Tse Wai & Partners, was granted bail, his associate said. He was one of 53 activists arrested Wednesday under the national security law. He did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

The activists are accused of taking part in an unofficial primary election last year that authorities say was part of a plan to paralyze the government and subvert state power.

The mass arrests were the largest move against Hong Kong's democracy movement since Beijing imposed the law last June to quell dissent in the semi-autonomous territory following months of anti-government protests in 2019.

The primaries were held by the pro-democracy camp to determine the best candidates to field as they sought to gain a ma-



jority in Hong Kong's legislature.

While most of those arrested were candidates in the primaries, Clancey was a treasurer for political organization Power for Democracy, which was involved in the event. The arrests drew condemnation from the U.N., the U.S. and Europe.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he was "appalled by the news of the arrest of an American citizen as part of this campaign of political repression." He said the United States would not tolerate the arbitrary detention or harassment of its citizens and would explore further sanctions and restrictions on Chinese and Hong Kong officials and entities.

The legislative election that would have followed the unofficial primaries was postponed by a year by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who cited public health risks during the coronavirus pandemic.

The remaining activists will be granted bail without charge, although most had their passports confiscated as evidence, according to the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post, which cited unnamed

sources. The security law criminalizes acts of subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign powers to intervene in the city's affairs. Serious offenders could face up a maximum punishment of life imprisonment.

Authorities pointed to a plan called "10 steps to mutual destruction" allegedly indicating that the primaries were part of a broader push to cause damage to both Hong Kong and mainland China.

That plan was published as an opinion piece in Apple Daily newspaper by former law professor and pro-democracy activist Benny Tai, who was also arrested on Wednesday. He said that between 2020 and 2022, there would be 10 steps to "mutual destruction," including the pro-democracy bloc winning a majority in the legislature, intensifying protests, the forced resignation of Lam due to the budget bill being rejected twice, and international sanctions against the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

Liz Throssell, a spokesperson for the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva, said the ar-

rests indicate that "the offence of subversion under the National Security Law is indeed being used to detain individuals for exercising legitimate rights to participate in political and public life."

Kurt Tong, the former U.S. consul general in Hong Kong, saw the arrests as part of a methodical and escalating campaign to eradicate viable opposition politics both among the protesters and elected parties.

"The national security law provides the legal foundation to do that," said Tong, now a partner at The Asia Group consultancy in Washington, D.C.

China wants to preserve Hong Kong's economic vibrancy and free market without what it views as political complications, he said. He didn't predict a mass exodus by companies, saying the city retains its residual energy and dynamism, but warned there could be a measurable impact over time.

"China's taking a big gamble by picking away at parts of the Hong Kong system that it doesn't like," he said. "It really risks damaging parts that it values."

Indonesia's Merapi volcano spews hot clouds, 500 evacuate

YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA (AP): Indonesia's Mount Merapi volcano spewed avalanches of hot clouds Thursday morning as hundreds more residents were evacuated from its fertile slopes.

Authorities evacuated more than 500 people living on the mountain in Magelang district on Java Island. Thousands of people already have had to leave their homes and farmland because of the dangers on Merapi, Indonesia's most active volcano.

Light eruptions continued during the day — one sending a column of hot clouds rising 200 meters (yards) into the

air. The initial eruption was obscured by fog, but using seismic and other data, the Geological Disaster Technology Research and Development Center estimated the hot clouds spread less than 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) from the crater.

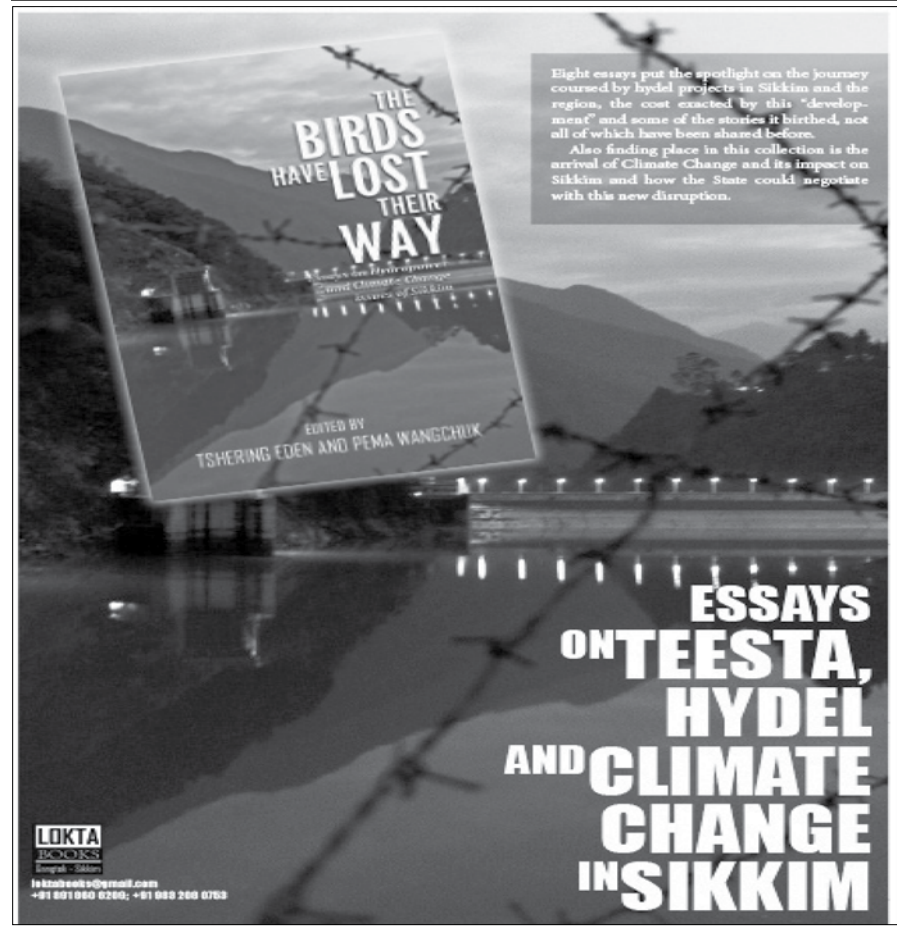
"Until now, the potential danger is not more than 5 kilometers (3 miles)," chief of Yogyakarta's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center, Hanik Humaida, said in a statement.

The geological authority had raised the alert level of Mount Merapi to the second-highest level in November

after sensors picked up increasing activity. Tourism and mining activities were halted. Some evacuees had returned to the slopes after the activity subsided but had to leave again Thursday.

The 2,968-meter (9,737-foot) mountain is about 30 kilometers (18 miles) from the Yogyakarta city center. About a quarter million people live within 10 kilometers (6 miles) of the volcano, according to authorities in surrounding districts.

Merapi spewed ash and hot gas in a column as high as 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) into the sky in June, but no casualties were reported.



Inside Kim Kardashian's Next Chapter as She Considers Divorcing Kanye West

Kim Kardashian's is moving forward in life as she still considers divorcing Kanye West.

Kimye is coming to an end, and Kim Kardashian is figuring out her next steps after her fallout with Kanye West.

As the couple discusses the possibility of divorce, E! News has exclusively learned what Kim envisions for her family's future moving forward.

A source revealed that not much will change for Kim and Kanye in their day-to-day lives. For now, they plan to continue living separately, her in Calabasas, Calif., and him in Wyoming.

Kanye will fly in to Los Angeles to see their four children "at his own leisure," which is how they've been managing in recent weeks.

Some of their kids (North, 7, Saint, 5, Chicago, 2, and Psalm, 20 months) have visited their dad in Wyoming a few times, but nannies have always been there to help Kanye. Regardless of their marital issues, Kim wants to remain in LA, so the kids can continue their stable and consistent lifestyles and going to their current schools.

A source told E! News, "Kanye is aware the marriage is over. It's upsetting to him. He loves Kim but they don't get along half of the time. He's truly in his own world and gets in the zone of focusing solely on his own projects."

Their lifestyles don't mesh anymore. The 43-year-old Grammy winner creates his music and Yeezy apparel, while Kim runs her fashion and beauty empire, including the brands KKW and SKIMS.

As we previously reported, Kimye is in marriage counseling, but they both know it's not working. Going forward, Kim and Kanye are focused on how they will co-parent, as well as the logistics of their settlement. The insider added, "It's really upsetting to both of them because

they did try and make it work for a very long time."

In the meantime, Kim is trying to keep the kids occupied as much as possible. "She is focused on keeping them

quo for months now. "They know Kanye will still be a part of their lives and be at family functions, but everyone supports Kim in her decisions," the source said.

The feeling appears to be mutual for



happy and healthy and wants them to have a good relationship with their dad. It's very important to her," the source explained.

Her sisters Kourtney and Khloe Kardashian both babysit the West kids often. They'll spend time with 2-year-old True Thompson or Kourt's kids Mason, 11, Penelope, 8, and Reign, 6, meaning the cousins are always together at one of their houses. They feel it's nice for the sisters to be able to "trade off and get work done."

The source continued, "All of the sisters are aware of the situation and are very supportive. They all love Kanye like a brother but agree it's best they part ways."

The Kardashian-Jenner clan have all adjusted and are used to the current situation, because it's been the status

Kanye. When news broke on Tuesday of their impending split, E! News reported that he has no beef with the rest of the Keeping Up With the Kardashians stars. An insider noted, "Kanye loves his extended family. They are super close."

On Jan. 5, Kim took to Instagram to share her latest lifestyle rituals to start the New Year with a clean slate. "Sister Boot Camp starts this month!" the 40-year-old reality star wrote. "Plant Based and Two workouts a day for 30 days to get our mind and body right this year."

The celebs got married in 2014 in Italy. One year prior, Kanye sang his soon-to-be bride's praises in a BBC interview, saying, "Family time—it's what Kim gave me. She gave me everything. She gave me a family. She gave me a support system."

Crystal Hefner Reveals She's Recovering After Near-Fatal Cosmetic Procedure

Crystal Hefner shared that she was hospitalized with major blood loss following a fat transfer in October and "almost didn't make it through."

Crystal Hefner is getting candid about her recent health scare involving a cosmetic procedure gone wrong.

The 34-year-old model and widow of late Playboy magazine founder Hugh Hefner shared to Instagram on Wednesday, Jan. 6 that she underwent a fat-grafting surgery in the fall that led her to lose a significant amount of blood, and she is just now feeling like her usual self.

"I had a fat transfer surgery October 16 and almost didn't make it through," she wrote. "I lost half the blood in my body and ended up in the hospital needing a blood transfusion. I've been slowly eating my way back to health since then and I [am] now finally feeling ok."

Crystal acknowledged that this is not the first time she has dealt with repercussions from a cosmetic operation. She posted to Facebook in July 2016 that she had her breast implants removed at

that time due to toxic effects from the chemicals.

"I advocate for being natural since I got very ill and removed my implants and everything else toxic in my body in 2016," she continued on Jan. 6. "I should have learned my lesson the first time but I guess the universe keeps sending you the same lesson until you learn it. Our culture is a trap and makes women feel terrible about themselves."

She went on to criticize elements of society, including Hollywood projects, social media and advertising, for exacerbating the pressure that women can feel to conform to certain beauty standards.

"Physically fake people make it worse (I was one of them)," the December 2009 Playmate shared. "Women are overly sexualized. I know from the worst kind of experience. For ten years my value was based on how good my physical body looked. I was rewarded and made a living based on my outer appearance. To this day I need to write reminders of why I'm worthy to have nothing to do with my physical appearance to convince myself that I'm enough."

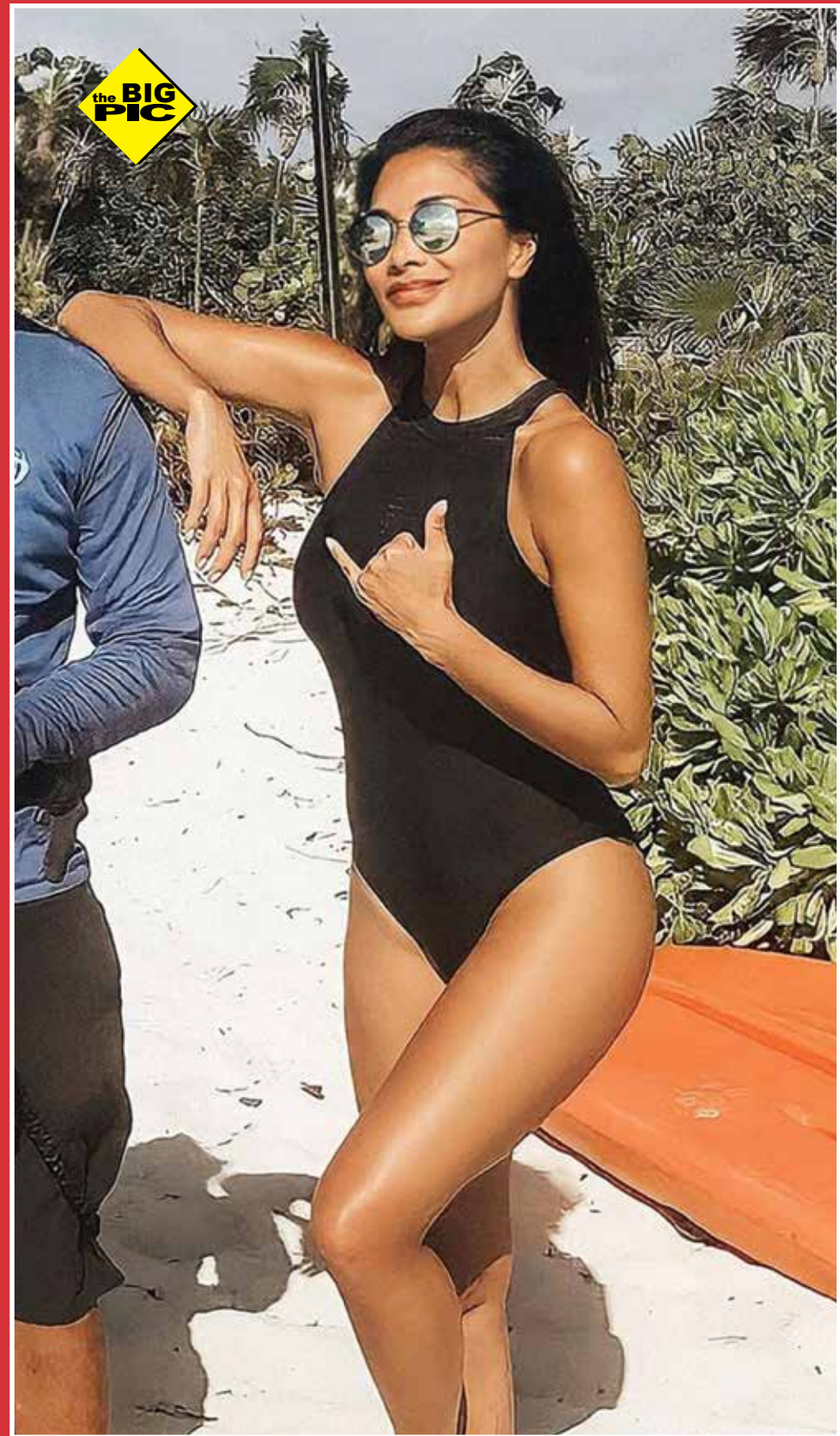


Divyendu Sharma Reveals Rejecting 'a Lot Of Money & Directors' To Play The Roles He Liked

Actor Divyendu Sharma recently opened up about rejecting 'a lot of money and directors' to change his boy next door image and play the roles he liked

One of the most popular and faces in the OTT world, Divyendu Sharma has been a part of Bollywood for over a decade as he has starred in multiple films including Pyaar Ka PUNCHAMA, Chashme Baddoor and Toilet: Ek Prem Katha to name a few. However, the 37-year-old was not OK with the boy next door roles he had been playing for years in his films and thus decided to change his image by experimenting with the kind of roles he played on screen. However, it came with a cost of saying 'no' to a lot of money and directors, revealed Divyendu himself in a recent interview with Hindustan Times.

While Divyendu Sharma's roles in web series brought him countrywide acclaim and fame, the actor had to let go of a lot of Bollywood film offers to carve a niche for himself as an actor, different from his boy next door image back in the days.



BEACH TIME! The songstress, Nicole Scherzinger rocks a black swimsuit on the beach in Turks & Caicos.

Ryan Reynolds Shares Touching Jeopardy Message After Appearing In Alex Trebek's Final Episodes

It's a bittersweet week for Jeopardy! fans, as the show is currently airing the final episodes to feature late host Alex Trebek. Before his death in November, Trebek had already taped a number of episodes, with the final ones eventually being delayed until the beginning of 2021. So far, the episodes have shown Trebek doing what he did best - informing and entertaining the public while also providing some thoughtful messages. One of these final shows also included a surprise appearance from Ryan Reynolds, and the actor took to social media to share a touching message about the experience.

Ryan Reynolds was involved in the episode's "The Movies" category, in which he virtually appeared to set up a question related to his upcoming film, Free Guy. The actor couldn't help but acknowledge his brief role in one of Alex Trebek's final Jeopardy! shows. Take a look at his sweet Twitter post below:

I think most of us would agree with Ryan Reynolds' sentiments. Like many, the actor was a fan of Alex Trebek, and knowing that he's now forever linked to the late host's legacy must be truly special. The fact that Trebek was also a fellow Canadian is sure to add another layer of pride as well.

Since Alex Trebek lost his battle with pancreatic cancer, many of his colleagues have reflected on what it was like to work with him. Jeopardy!'s longtime narrator, Johnny Gilbert, recently remembered Trebek fondly, making note of his sweet interactions with the show's live studio audience.

The crew has also opened up about what it was like to work with Trebek on his final set of episodes. Jeopardy! executive producer Michael Richards recalled Trebek being an "absolute warrior" despite being in "enormous pain." At the time of the tapings, no one could have known that Trebek was so close to passing away, but Richard says the host still appeared to be his usual self.

Richards also recalled Trebek's last day before his death. According to the producer, the host spent a peaceful day with his wife in their backyard. He says the fact that Trebek had this serene day brings some comfort to him and the rest of the Jeopardy! family.

After Alex Trebek's final Jeopardy! episodes finish airing, former champion Ken Jennings will serve as a guest host. He'll then be followed by other guests before the show decides on a permanent host.

Aries:

The trouble is, we spend too much time worrying about 'the how' and 'the why'. We spend too much worrying about whether or not things will work out. Take a moment to reflect upon how much energy you're wasting by going back and forth on this decision. Energy that could be utilised for your highest good. So, take a deep breath, Aries, as you realign with your sacred purpose. Your guides are right here with you, helping you navigate the tricky territories of the earthly realm.

Tip: Just take a step in the right direction. That's all! Taurus:

Many a times, we find ourselves stuck, repeating patterns we thought we'd broken up with a long time ago. You may find yourself enslaved to one such pattern that you've seen generations before you struggle with. But the past does not and should not define you, Taurus. Do not be under the illusion that you have to suffer because they did. Today, your guides are reminding you that true freedom is available to you right now and in this moment. Break the chains.

Tip: You have the power to create heaven on earth despite what you have gone through.

Gemini:

Following the plan to tee is a good thing. But you know what's even better? Tearing your to-do list apart and allowing your spontaneous side to take

over. A new and exciting adventure is in store for you, Gemini, one that is likely to knock at your door unexpectedly. For some of you, this could translate into a wellness retreat over the weekend, a mindfulness workshop, or a visit to a spiritual/religious place you feel a deep, deep connection with. Word for the wise: Don't look for reasons to say no when the Universe wants you to say yes. Nothing will expand your mind *and* your consciousness like opening yourself to new experiences.

Tip: Say yes to spontaneity and a brand new adventure.

Cancer:

There's no such thing as a coincidence. Each experience we attract is a result of our own choices—choices we made prior to boarding the spaceship to the earthly realm. Now, if the challenges are chosen by our higher selves, wouldn't the solutions to these problems be hidden somewhere accessible to us? Unlock the door to your subconscious, Cancer. Reconnect with your higher wisdom. You are the Oracle. You are the light. The tools you need are already within you.

Tip: Unlock the door to your subconscious.

Leo:

Not all of us get the love, approval and validation we desire from our families. Some of us go through our entire lives seeking that warmth in our interactions with the outside world, only to be disappointed

time and again. But, you are one of the chosen few, Leo. One who has been granted the gift of a soul family. These are no ordinary connections. They transcend the boundaries of space and time, and inspire you to become your true and most authentic self. Take a moment to honour the radiant beings of light that remind you that you are perfect as you are, and that you have nothing to hide.

Tip: A prayer of gratitude for your soul family is in order.

Virgo:

There is a reason we refer to all of Creation as Mother Nature. She is the ultimate nurturer. The sacred womb through which we take birth in the earthly realm. The connection we share with her is truly special, and when we are cut off from this connection is when problems such as fear and anxiety arise. Today, instead of receding into the void, reconnect with your inherent wildness. Consider a walk in the park, a grounding meditation, or a breathwork session outdoors.

Tip: Reconnect with Mother Nature.

Libra:

We all have a little bit of madness in us, and we all have a little bit of chaos too. But, the combination chaos and madness is what makes you, you. It's what inspires you to take life by the horns and make the most of what's being offered. So, take yet another chance, Libra. Flirt with life in a way you

never have before. Feel a sense of oneness with the rhythm of the cosmos. You are being led in the right direction and the journey you're on will truly help you come home.

Tip: Flirt with life in a way you never have before.

Scorpio:

In an attempt to raise the bar, we often set unrealistic expectations for ourselves. Expectations that we may or may not always be able to live up to. And, what happens when we fail in our own eyes? We begin to repeat the story of failure, which inadvertently takes us into a downward spiral. Breathe, Scorpio, breathe.

Tip: Let go of unrealistic expectations and focus on being a better friend to yourself.

Sagittarius:

There are times in our lives when we feel like we are being stripped off all things familiar, and that everything we once considered sacred is being taken away from us, one by one. Some refer to this period as 'the ego death'. Others often call this phenomenon the dark night of the soul. Either way, the transition to the new is seldom easy. Remember to keep it simple, Sagittarius. Hydrate. Nourish yourself. Practice self-care rituals.

Tip: Keep it simple.

Capricorn:

You are here because you are meant to be here. Your presence here is no coincidence, Capricorn.

So, step into your role as a leader and change-maker. See how you can stand up for yourself and those around you. Remember to act in accordance with the law as you do, which in turn will ensure the law works in your favour.

Tip: Fighting against injustice is going to be a big theme for you today.

Aquarius:

When people discourage you from following that which is sacred to you, there's a chance they're acting out of their own limitations. Limitations that have nothing to do with you to begin with. So, let go of what isn't yours, Aquarius. Let go of what isn't yours—whether it's fears, or negative beliefs borrowed from other people. Know that you are where you need to be, and you are making great progress. Facing your true north (no matter what the cost) will help you get through this.

Tip: You are the author of this story.

Pisces:

We spend so much time catering to the needs of other people, being there for them at the cost of our own well-being. Today, you're being encouraged to shift your focus. Ask yourself the question, "How would you like to be nurtured?". A hot oil massage, a walk in the park, a journaling or doodling session, or a guided meditation are some of the ways in which you can alleviate the stress and connect with yourself on a deeper level. Tip: It's time to prioritise your own well-being.