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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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4 more cases and five new recoveries in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

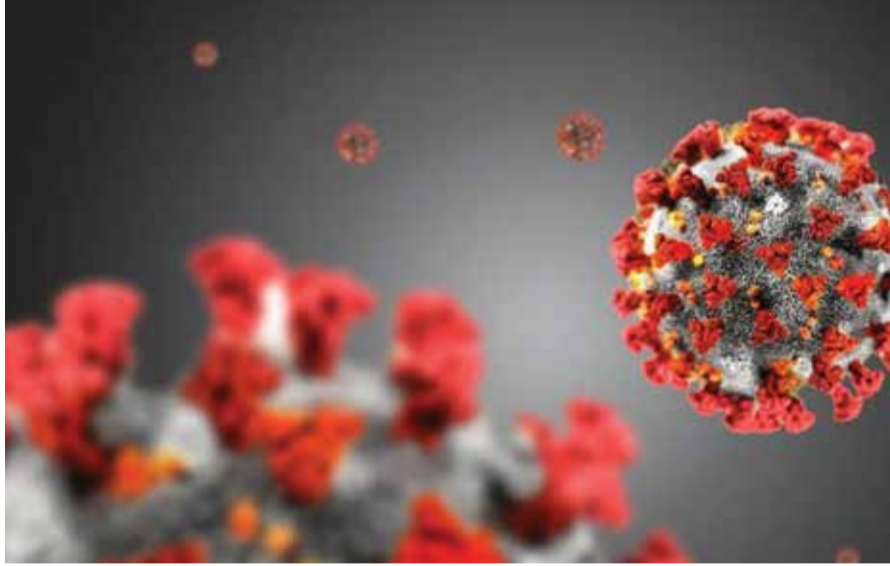
GANGTOK, 21 FEB:

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 6,132 on Sunday with four new cases of novel coronavirus reported in the last 24 hours in the State.

In the meantime, five more Covid patients ended their quarantine to improve the number of recovered cases so far in Sikkim to 5,848. There are currently 52 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State.

That said, Sikkim appears to have turned the curve on Covid infections and even more reassuringly, the number of people requiring hospitalization because of health complications caused by Novel Coronavirus has dropped substantially.

Of the 52 active cases in the State, only two are currently admitted at STNM Hospital and there is no one in the ICU. All the



rest are in home isolation.

In the daily health bulletin on Sunday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, informed that the four new cases were picked up in the testing of 187 samples on Saturday. All four cases were detected in the RT-PCR testing of 162 samples, while 12 samples tested by TrueNat and 13 through rapid anti-

gen testing returned negative for COVID-19.

Three of the new cases are from Namchi and one from Sumbuk also in South District.

Today being a Sunday, no vaccination was carried out today.

The number of active cases which currently stands at 52 had come down to two-digits only on 29 Jan 2021 after hav-

ing hovered in the upper reaches of 500 in early December 2020.

To put the falling number of active cases in context, around a month back, on 15 January, Sikkim had 162 active cases. By 15 Jan, 2021, Sikkim had already lost 130 lives to Covid after having recorded the first Covid-fatality on 26 July 2020. In the month since, only five more lives

have been lost to the virus.

Sikkim has thus far lost 135 lives to the virus, a very small fraction of which have been officially attributed to Covid with most of the fatalities having been in people with co-morbid conditions. That last case of a Covid death in Sikkim was reported on 01 February.

While every life lost is distressing, what cannot be lost sight of is that where Sikkim was losing, on an average, more than 20 lives per month to Covid between end-July 2020 and mid-January 2021, this has now come down to less than 5.

Sikkim has carried out a total of 77,760 tests thus far – 55,599 via the touchstone of Covid tests, RT-PCR [of which 4,451 returned positive], 16,641 through Rapid Antigen Testing which picked up 1,432 positive cases and 5,520 TrueNat tests which detected 249 positive cases of Covid-19.

One Cow-One File scheme launched at Keusa-Anithang



AARON RAI
GANGTOK, 21 FEB:

The one cow-one file scheme was launched at Keusa Milk Collection Centre, Anithang, under Barfun constituency of South Sikkim on Sunday. The programme organized by the South District Zilla Panchayat also included an awareness camp on milk production and distribution of milk cans.

The milk cans for dairy farmers of the area were procured from the Zilla Panchayat Fund.

The gesture was a significant recognition of the success of dairy farming at Keusa-Anithang, which has now emerged as the third-highest milk producer in South Sikkim with most of the farmers here now registering milk supply as their main source of income.

Assistant Milk Procurement Officer of Sikkim Milk Union, Yadav Sharma, in his address

highlighted the role of Sikkim Milk Union and commended the dairy farmers of Keusa-Anithang for their perseverance.

The village is now earning more than Rs 40 lakh annually from milk supplies which is highly commendable, he said.

He also assured that Sikkim Milk Union will extend all required assistance to them in the future as well.

Highlighting the purpose of one cow-one file, he said that none of the customers will be deceived once a dedicated file is opened for each cow.

Sarita Thatal, vice-president of Barfung Jarung Gram Panchayat Unit, encouraged the dairy farmers to continue expanding their livestock and production and assured even more support from the Panchayat Sarita Thatal, ward Panchayat Man Kumari Rai.

Morcha's CLC president, Bishnu Sharma, in his address, highlighted that the State Government was initiating several schemes earmarked for dairy farmers.

The contribution made by Sikkim Milk Union to the Sikkimese dairy farmers is commendable, he added.

Shankar Chhetri, president, Sikkim Co-operative Milk Production Association, in turn delved on the past and future struggles, activities, achievements and development of the association.

He expressed gratitude on behalf of the association for contributions made by Zilla Panchayat Sarita Thatal to their association.

The programme today was chaired by Premal Chhetri accompanied by Zilla Panchayat Tika Maya Chhetri, Panchayat Sarita Thatal, ward Panchayat Man Kumari Rai.

Bengal govt reduces tax on petrol and diesel by Re 1 per litre

KOLKATA, 21 FEB [PTI]: The West Bengal government on Sunday announced a reduction of tax by Re 1 per litre on petrol and diesel effective from midnight.

State Finance Minister Amit Mitra said the move will provide some respite to people

stung by burgeoning prices of fuel.

"The Centre earns ₹ 32.90 per litre in taxes from petrol, while the state gets ₹ 18.46 only. In case of diesel, the central government's earning is ₹ 31.80 per litre as against ₹ 12.77 for the state," Mr Mitra said.

He also alleged that the Centre had imposed cess to avoid devolution with states, which is "against the characteristics of federalism".

To a question, Mr Mitra said the Union government should reintroduce the planning commission.

Suspicion cannot take the place of proof: SC

NEW DELHI, FEB 21

(PTI): Suspicion, however strong, cannot take the place of proof, the Supreme Court has said, stressing that an accused is presumed to be innocent unless proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. There has to be a chain of evidence so complete as to show that in all human probability the act must have been done by the accused, a bench of justices Indira Banerjee and Hemant Gupta observed while upholding an order of the Orissa High Court which acquitted two men accused of murdering a home guard by electrocuting him.

"It is well settled by a plethora of judicial pronouncement of this court that suspicion, however strong cannot take the place of proof. An accused is presumed to be innocent unless proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt," the bench said.

As per an FIR lodged with the police by Gitanjali Tadu, her husband Bijay Kumar Tadu had been working deputed at Chandabali police station.

The woman has alleged that the accused Banabihari Mohapatra, his son Luja and other accomplices killed her husband with an electric shock after administering some poisonous substances to him.

The apex court said the post mortem report reveals that the cause of death was electric shock and there is no conclusive evidence that the death was homicidal.

turn to pg02



PHURBA WINS GORUBATHAN MARATHON:

Phurba Tamang, a student of Sikkim's "Marathon Man," Amar Subba, stood first in the 21 KM Marathon organised by Gorubathan Runners on Sunday. More than 300 runners from different parts of the State and the country participated in the marathon which covered the distance from Mall Basti to Ambiyok in Gorubathan, West Bengal. Phurba completed the distance in an hour and 35 minutes.

Coronavirus variants with 2 specific mutations may evade antibodies: Expert

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB [NDTV]: Variants of the novel coronavirus carrying two specific mutations in their spike protein may evade antibodies and make vaccines less effective, according to eminent virologist Shahid Jameel, who says the need of the hour is to improve surveillance for "homegrown" lineages of the virus. Mr Jameel, Director of the Trivedi School of Biosciences at Ashoka University in Haryana, said these two mutations would lead to a "drastic change" in the structure of the part of the spike protein that binds with antibodies, making vaccines less effective against such variants.

The spike protein of the coronavirus enables it to bind to the ACE2 receptor on host cells -- a process which studies have shown to be crucial for the virus to enter the cells and cause infection.

According to the virologist, currently, the data is consistent with poor activity of neutralising antibodies against the South African lineage of the coronavirus, which carries both these mutations on the spike protein.

At GYANTEEKA, an online presentation-discussion series hosted by the Indian National Young Academy of Science (INYAS), New Delhi to spread awareness and bust myths on vaccines, Mr Jameel said these mutations are in the 501st and 484th amino acid building blocks that make up the virus spike protein. In his presentation on Saturday, the virologist said both these mutations happen at the interface where antibodies bind to the virus spike protein.

"At the interface, there are a couple of key amino acid residues. One is the N501Y mutation. Another emerging mutation is the E484K mutation, and if you notice, the 484 changes negatively charged amino acid into positively charged amino acid," he explained in his presentation, citing studies.

"If you have both 501 and 484 mutations happening at the same time in the same virus,

that virus is likely to either evade antibody response, or it is going to make the antibodies less effective. That's the take-home," he added. On Tuesday, the Health ministry said four people in the country tested positive for infection with the South African variant, and one for the Brazilian variant -- a first for India.

While in India, there have not been reports of community transmission of these virus, Mr Jameel believes the need of the hour is also to look out for homegrown variants.

"Remember India already has about 11 million infections now, so there could easily be homegrown variants and I think for that it is very important to have genomic surveillance, which is done at scale," the virologist said.

"And for that government of India has set up an inter-ministerial Group which is called INSA COG which brings together 10 different National Laboratories to start sequencing at a density of about 5 per cent," he added.

Currently, the virologist said India is se-

quencing at a density of about 0.05 per cent.

"So essentially, the plan is to upscale sequencing about a hundredfold in the country," Mr Jameel added. A recent study by the scientists of CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad analysed over 5,000 coronavirus variants, describing how the virus has evolved over the course of the pandemic.

It found that a variant carrying the N440K mutation is spreading a lot more in the southern states of India.

"We now have emerging evidence that the N440K variant is spreading a lot more in southern states. Closer surveillance is needed to understand its spread properly," CCMB Director Rakesh Mishra said in a statement.

While variants with immune-escape such as the South African variant have been identified with only a low prevalence in India, Mr Mishra believes this could be because not enough sequencing has been done.

WHO says "Not Reviewed," Patanjali doubles down

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB [NDTV]: Coronil, a medicine that claims to boost immunity against COVID-19, developed by yoga guru Ramdev-promoted Patanjali Ayurved has run into a controversy over claims of certification.

At the launch event on February 19 where Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari were also in attendance, the Patanjali product was billed by the company as the "first evidence-based medicine for COVID-19".

Written on a big poster behind the table where Ramdev and Union Ministers sat were the claims that the "medicine" was CoPP and WHO GMP certified - meaning it holds a certificate of pharmaceutical product (CoPP) and is recognised by the World Health Organisation's Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP). Both these standards approximately define quality assurance in medicinal products.

The WHO, however, has clarified in a tweet that it has not reviewed or certified any traditional medicine to treat or prevent COVID-19. "@WHO has not reviewed or certified the effectiveness of any traditional medicine for the treatment #COVID19," WHO



South-East Asia tweeted.

During the launch event on Friday, Patanjali in a statement had said, "Coronil has received the Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (CoPP) from the Ayush section of Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation as per the WHO certification scheme."

Rakesh Mittal, one of the top executives at Patanjali Ayurved, had doubled down on the claim that Coronil has been "recognised by WHO". "Patanjali has made history in the field of Ayurveda as Coronil has been recognized by WHO as First Evidence Based Medicine for Corona," Mr Mittal had tweeted. He has deleted the tweet.

Patanjali Ayurved managing director Acharya Balkrishna later made a clarification about what he said was "to avoid confusion".

"We want to clarify to avoid confusion that our WHO GMP compliant CoPP certificate to Coronil is issued by DCGI, Government of India. It is clear that WHO do not approve or disapprove any drugs. WHO works for building a better, healthier future for people all over the world," Mr Balkrishna tweeted.

WHO provides benchmarks for certifications but does not certify or approve the medicine itself. The GMP guidelines provide a set of quality control benchmarks to

ensure that medicines are consistently produced and controlled to the quality standards appropriate for their intended use.

If a country wants to import Patanjali's Coronil, it will request a CoPP from the country's regulator Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) through Patanjali. The certificate is then issued by the DCGI in accordance with WHO's guidelines.

The opposition citing WHO's clarification attacked the centre. "I hope our Health Minister stops embarrassing the nation with such claims to promote Coronil. I strongly believe in Ayurveda but to claim it as a WHO

guaranteed cure against COVID and endorse it, is nothing but cheating as well as misleading the nation," Shiv Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi tweeted.

NDTV contacted Patanjali Ayurved and the Health Minister and their responses are awaited.

In July 2020, long before vaccines were yet to reach final trails and lockdown measures across nations were still very strict, Patanjali Ayurved had claimed Coronil could provide strong protection against the coronavirus. Later, the AYUSH Ministry in statement said Coronil can be sold only as an immunity-booster and not as a cure.

Woman dies week after taking vaccine, Manipur CM orders probe

IMPHAL, 21 FEB [NDTV]: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh has ordered a probe by a medical expert team into the death of a frontline worker who died a week after receiving her first dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

The Chief Minister has told NDTV that the state government has taken a serious note of the allegations by the family members of the 48-year-old Anganwadi worker, who claimed "medical negligence" led to her death.

"We have asked for a probe to ascertain if there was medical negligence. We have assured suitable compensation duly considering post-mortem reports and have instructed for taking strong action against defaulting officials based on the report of the medical experts," Biren Singh said.

The autopsy has been carried out and the state police has registered a suo moto case, an official said.

The family members of the frontline worker had met with Mr Singh on Saturday and alleged that she had informed the medical team administering the vaccine that she has a history of acute asthma and allergies,

but the medical team allegedly overlooked this and administered her the vaccine.

The Anganwadi worker, Wahengbam Ningol Naorem Ongbi Sundari alias Chaoba, used to work at the Kumbi Tera kha Anganwadi Centre of Kumbi in Bishnupur district of Manipur, 60-kilometre from state capital Imphal. She was administered her first vaccine dose on February 12 at the Public Health Centre in Bishnupur, sources said. She started suffering from allergic reactions and fever from February 13, they said. She, however, did not go to any hospital for check up and took medicine brought from a pharmacy, they added.

The woman's family members got her admitted to a community health centre on February 16 and later moved her to a primary health centre. As her condition worsened, she was again admitted to the community health centre where she died on Friday.

Locals held a public meeting at Kumbi Lai Sandhong, alleging negligence on the part of the doctor and demanding action against those responsible for the death.

Need to increase pace of COVID-19 vaccinations: Centre to States



NEW DELHI, 21 FEB [PTI]: The Union Health Ministry has written to all states and UTs highlighting the need to significantly enhance the pace of COVID-19 vaccinations, noting that a large number of health-care and frontline workers still remain to be covered.

In a letter addressed to chief secretaries of all states and UTs, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said the number of days of vaccination in a week should also be increased to a minimum of four days per week at the earliest to speed up the process of vaccination and gear up system to take up the vaccination of the 50+ population.

While some states are carrying out vaccination twice a week some others are carrying out more than that.

Adequate provisions have been made in the Co-WIN software to support such expansion of services, he said.

The letter dated February 19 stated a large number of healthcare

and frontline workers still remain to be covered and the progress is variable across several states and UTs.

"As highlighted during several review meetings that have been conducted with the states and UTs, the pace of vaccination drive and its coverage needs to be accelerated exponentially to cover all identified beneficiaries in a minimum possible time. "Further, the operational strategy for initiating the vaccination of next priority group of elderly population and persons with comorbidities to be taken up in March, 2021 is also being finalised," the letter said.

"In view of the anticipated high number of beneficiaries to be vaccinated at a high speed in the forthcoming days", Bhushan advised states and UTs to ensure that all public health facilities from tertiary level medical colleges, hospitals and institutes to district hospitals, sub-divisional hospitals, community health centres, PHCs,

health and wellness centres, health sub-centres etc. should be prepared for offering COVID-19 vaccination services on all designated vaccination days beginning March 1.

"You are requested to kindly direct the concerned officials to immediately undertake measures for expansion of COVID-19 vaccination drive. Your continuous guidance to the state and UT teams has been instrumental in driving the ongoing vaccination process and the same is anticipated for upcoming phases as well. I look forward to your continued collaboration in this critical mission of national importance," the letter stated.

Till February 21, a total of 1,10,85,173 vaccine doses have been administered through 2,30,888 sessions, as per the provisional report. These include 63,91,544 healthcare workers (1st dose), 9,60,642 healthcare workers (2nd dose) and 37,32,987 frontline workers (1st dose).

More office-bearers quit SDF to join BJP



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 FEB:

Sikkim Democratic Front continues to drain office-bearers into other political parties, read SKM and BJP, and the process continued Sunday with new joinings in Bharatiya Janata Party parting ways with SDF.

At a joining programme held at the

BJP-Sikkim party office at Singtam, SDF labour front general secretary, Hari Prasad Chettri, convener Hemant Subba from West Pendam, legal advisor and advocate, Dr BC Tamang from Temi-Namphing, convener Dipendra Rai from Chujachen, convener Nareh Tamang from Shyari and convener Sukraj

Subba from Gangtok officially joined the saffron party.

A BJP press release informs that the BJP state general secretary, Bharat Dulal, vice-president SB Karki, East District president Bhanu Dahal and former MLA NB Khatriwada and other leaders and workers welcomed them into the party.

Trinamool's "Pawri Ho Rahi Hai" counter to BJP's "Bella Ciao" rendition

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

[NDTV]: Catchy phrases and songs have found their way into a full-blown social media campaign war on the Internet between the BJP and the Trinamool Congress ahead of the West Bengal assembly elections.

After the Trinamool launched its election slogan "Bangla Nijer Meyekai Chaye", which translates to "Bengal wants its own daughter", and pitched Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in that role, the BJP released a music video on Saturday on the tunes of the popular Italian protest folk song "Bella Ciao", converting it to say "Pishi Jao" which means "Go Away Aunty."

The Trinamool hit back today by using the viral "Pawri ho rahi hai" trend on Twitter to mock the BJP and shared a photo from a BJP public meeting in Bengal showing empty chairs, with the caption: "Yeh @BJP4Bengal hai. Yeh unki jansabha hai. Aur yahaan inki pawri ho rahi hai! (This is Bengal BJP. This is their public meeting.

And they have a party going on.)"

The "Pawri ho rahi hai" trend went viral earlier this month after a Pakistani influencer posted a hilarious video on Instagram following which several people on the Internet started making memes and videos of their own over it, besides political parties using it to reach voters in creative ways.

The Trinamool's rebuttal came a day after the BJP posted the animated music video taking a leaf out of the Italian Communist song "Bella Ciao" and using Bengali lyrics to ask voters to get rid of current Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee's rule.

The Bella Ciao song has been adapted several times in the past and has become a protest song against fascist forces across the world.

"A tune from Communist Italy, sung to protest against atrocities, echoes once again in West Bengal as people stand up to the injustices of the ruling dispensation. Our

ideologies may differ, but the language of protest always rings true. #BanglaDidirThekeMuktiChay #Pishijao," the BJP's official Twitter handles posted along with the video.

In the song, Ms Banerjee has been accused of corruption, violence, weakening the industry and infrastructure like roads, and failing to create jobs. The BJP talks about several problems faced by the state under her rule, demanding the exit of "Pishi" or aunty - a reference to the charges against her nephew Abhishek Banerjee.

In what is set to be a battle of slogans as much as one of development issues, the Trinamool's campaign in this election has been about fighting "bohiragato" or "outsiders" while the BJP wants voters to oust Ms Banerjee and is going all out by using its star campaigners.

Elections to the 294-seat West Bengal assembly are due in April-May with the Election Commission expected to announce the poll dates early next month.

Suspicion cannot...

"The mere fact that the deceased was lying dead at a room held by the accused respondent No 1 and that the accused respondents had informed the complainant that the deceased had been lying motionless and still and not responding to shouts and calls, does not establish that the accused respondents murdered the deceased," the bench said.

The top court said the prosecution miserably failed to establish the guilt of the accused respondents and the trial court rightly acquitted the accused respondents.

The bench said that in this case, it cannot be said that the reasons given by the High Court to reverse the conviction of the accused are flimsy, untenable or bordering on the perverse appreciation of evidence

"Before a case against an accused can be said to be fully established on circumstantial evidence, the circumstances from which the conclusion of guilt is to be drawn must fully be established and the facts so established should be consistent only with the hypothesis of guilt of the accused.

"There has to be a chain of evidence so complete, as not to leave any reasonable doubt for any conclusion consistent with the innocence of the accused and must show that in all human probability, the act must have been done by the Accused," the court said.

There is a strong possibility that the accused, who was as per the opinion of the doctor, who performed the autopsy, intoxicated with alcohol, might have accidentally touched a live electrical wire while he was asleep, it said.

KUTSE SHEGU



The 49th days Kutse Shegu (Anthyesti Kriya) of our beloved father Lt Lerap Shandarpa (Sokay Kaila) of Rabongla Yangyang Road who left for his heavenly abode on 04 Jan, 2021 falls at our residence, Rabongla Yangyang Road near Foodgodown South Sikkim on 21 Feb, 2021. We would like to request all relatives, friends and well-wishers to present their prayers and offering to the departed soul.

Family members-
Dechen Doma Bhutia (Eldest daughter)
Karma Tseten Bhutia (Eldest son)
Laki Doma Bhutia (Daughter)
Ugen Bhutia (Son)
Sedenla Bhutia (Daughter)
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SAATHI outreach reaches Nalam

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 FEB:**

The community outreach campaign of SAATHI [Sikkim Against Addiction Towards Healthy India] is arrived at Nalam in South Sikkim on Sunday and reached its aware-

ness against stigmas related to substance use disorders.

The program, supported by Titan Company Ltd, was attended by 27 Nalam residents, a press release informs.

Psychologist and research scholar, Roshni Chhetri, ex-

plained the medical aspects of substance abuse and how to identify signs of addiction. She stressed that detoxification was important and emphasised that after a patient returns from rehabilitation, it's the responsibility of the

community create the right environment to facilitate a normal life and remove all stigma associated with substance abuse.

The outreach led to positive feedback, the release adds.

Bengal BJP complains to Election Commission about "Biased Officers"

KOLKATA, 21 FEB [PTI]:

Claiming that the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) had attacked its "Parivartan Yatra" rally in North 24 Parganas district, the BJP's West Bengal unit on Sunday complained to the Election Commission and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, accusing the state police of bias and not providing enough security to the participants.

BJP state vice-president Pratap Banerjee alleged in the complaint that miscreants owing allegiance to the TMC had attacked the "Parivartan Yatra" at Minakhan in Basirhat of North 24 Parganas district on Saturday with bombs and brickbatted participants, injuring two saffron party workers.

"Despite prior intimation, the local administration did not take any steps for the safety and security of the participants," Mr Banerjee wrote, seeking action against "biased officers, TMC miscreants, and also deploy honest and neutral personnel to conduct

peaceful and fair assembly election."

The BJP has launched "Parivartan Yatra" rallies ahead of the assembly election in the state, which is due in April-May.

Mr Banerjee alleged that the local police remained "mute spectators" when the attack took place.

Police had said, a convoy of cars led by West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh was attacked in Minakhan, triggering a fight between activists of the saffron party and the TMC on Saturday.

However, no bombs were used in the attack and there was no report of any casualty, they said.

The TMC alleged that workers of the saffron party had ransacked its party office in the area.

A few days ago, BJP leader Fitoze Kamal Gazi alias Babu Master was injured in an attack in Minakha area.

BJP national president JP Nadda's convoy was attacked in December last year in South 24 Parganas district.

India witnesses rise in COVID-19 active cases

NEW DELHI, FEB 21 (PTI):

India has been witnessing a rise in the COVID-19 active cases over the past few days which is pegged at 1,45,634 comprising 1.32 per cent of the country's total infections, the Union Health Ministry said.

According to the ministry, 22 states and UTs have not reported any COVID-19 death in a span of 24 hours.

More than 74 per cent of the active cases of the country are in Kerala and Maharashtra.

"Of late, it is seen that there has been a spike in the daily cases in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh also. Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir too are witnessing a surge in daily new cases," the ministry said.

It said 85.61 per cent of the new cases are from five states. Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new cases at 6,281. It is followed by Kerala with 4,650 while Karnataka report-

ed 490 new cases. Only two states - Maharashtra and Kerala -- account for 77 per cent of daily new cases reported in a span of 24 hours.

Twenty-two states and UTs have not reported any COVID-19 death in a span of 24 hours, the ministry said.

These are Gujarat, Odisha, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Jharkhand, Puducherry, Assam, Meghalaya, Lakshadweep, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim, Ladakh, Nagaland, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Ninety deaths were reported in a day, the ministry said, adding that five states account for 80 per cent of the new deaths.

Maharashtra saw a maximum of 40 casualties. Kerala reported 13 deaths, while Punjab has reported another eight fatalities.

O Priye to release on Thurs

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 FEB:**

Nepali musical video, 'O Priye,' is now all set for its official release here on 25 February.

This music video is by popular Nepali singer, Thupden Bhutia, crooning to music by Rapden Bhutia and lyrics by Dhiraaj Pradhan. The video has been directed by Sonam Pakhrin.

A press release informs that the release function is scheduled to have Minister Sanjit Kharel as chief guest, while Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling, and Thukchuk Lachungpa are also scheduled to attend the function as guests of honour.

The music video fea-



tures Dikpal Karki and Anju Chaulagai and was shot in Kathmandu. The

video will be premiered on a popular OSR digital platform, it is informed.

Novak Djokovic routs Daniil Medvedev to claim his ninth Australian Open title

TUMAINI CARAYOL

MELBOURNE, 21 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:

Come rain or shine, an opening week filled with whispers of injury concerns or a perfect bill of health, rest assured that Novak Djokovic will deliver.

For over a decade he has made winning the Australian Open an almost yearly habit and he did so once again, holding off early pressure from Daniil Medvedev before cruising to a 7-5 6-2 6-2 win, clinching his ninth Australian Open title. Thirteen years since he stood on the same stage with his first title at 20 years old, he maintains his perfect record in finals at Melbourne Park.

In the process, Djokovic pulled off numerous notable achievements. He recovered from the abdominal injury sustained in his third-round match and ended Medvedev's rousing 20-match winning streak with a statement performance. Of the 15 times in the open era that the Australian Open men's singles title has been defended, Djokovic accounts for five of those instances.

With his sixth grand slam title since turning 30, he moves level with Rafa Nadal in that category. He still doesn't really seem that old. This is such a unique period in the sport, however, where every slam win and loss carries such weight, affecting how people view the history of the sport for years to come. As a result, one achievement stands above all: Djokovic has now won his 18th grand slam title.

Having burst into what once seemed a two-man race, both Nadal's and Roger Federer's 20 titles have rounded into view for the current world No 1. Truthfully, it seems most likely that Djokovic will catch them as he continues to line up all of the achievements that will define his career. In two weeks, Djokovic will record his 311st week at No 1 in the world rankings, surpassing Roger Federer as the all-time record holder.

Despite Medvedev's suggestions that it would be Djokovic under the pressure of history against a challeng-

er with nothing to lose, in the opening games it was he who looked arrested by the moment, immediately handing over his first service game. But what followed was a quality, tension-filled opening set as both players worked each other out in baseline exchanges of the highest quality.

In the inevitable long, breathless exchanges that followed, Medvedev drew numerous tired drop shots from Djokovic, while Djokovic chipped away at Medvedev with his subtle shot variation. The match seemed completely level at 5-5, but then all of a sudden it looked over. After holding serve to love, Djokovic seized the moment by transcending his level on the shot that has served him so well throughout his career - his return of serve. He swept to a 0-40 lead at 6-5 and broke to take the set. Despite losing his opening service game of the second set, Djokovic spent the

following 40 minutes tearing Medvedev's serve to pitiful shreds. He broke serve three times in total, constantly returning Medvedev's boldest efforts inches from the baseline. One of the criticisms of Djokovic over his career is that he doesn't have a distinctive finishing shot. That is not really his fault. Most of his winning returns were not even replayed or discussed by broadcasters, but they are as spectacular as any other shot in the sport.

Djokovic ended the set by nailing a forehand return from a bold 116mph second serve straight at Medvedev's laces. By the time the Russian fell two sets down, he had demolished a racquet and seethed towards his team in French, Russian and probably also English.

Medvedev's deeply impressive 20-match winning streak ended here with a convincing defeat that will give him plenty to think about. Still, the current world No 4 has a great chance of becoming the first player other than Djokovic, Nadal, Federer or Andy Murray to reach the top two since Lleyton Hewitt in 2005. He will continue to be an irritant for years to come.

2 ex-students donate TV and DTH set to Lingi Payong Secondary School

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 FEB:**

Two ex-students of Lingi Payong Secondary School - Thakur Prasad Koirala and Gopal Adhikari - donated a 21 inch LED TV and an Airtel DTH Set (with one month's subscription paid up) to the school on Sunday.

They handed over the items to the headmaster who informs that the school has seen an increase in enrolment in pre-primary classes and that the television will be placed in the kindergarten classroom to keep the toddlers engaged and enter-



tained with rhymes, phonetics, action songs & dance.

"This generous act will motivate students and encourage other parents to enroll their

children in our school," he adds in a press release while thanking the two ex-students on behalf of the school family, parents and students.

Thailand's prime minister survives no-confidence vote

BANGKOK, FEB 20 (AP):

Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha survived a no-confidence vote Saturday in parliament amid allegations that his government mismanaged the economy, bungled the provision of COVID-19 vaccines, abused human rights and fostered corruption.

Nine other ministers also survived the vote.

It marked the second no-confidence test Prayuth's government has faced since taking office in July 2019, following a contested election after Prayuth seized power in a 2014 coup as the army chief. In February last year, Prayuth and five Cabinet ministers easily defeated a no-confidence vote in the lower house.

In the latest motion, his government was also criticized for misusing its power to promote police officials and for establishing a cyber unit to attack government critics on social media, among other complaints.

But a more serious allegation was that Prayuth has deepened divisions in society by using the monarchy as a shield against criticism of his government.

A student-led protest movement has campaigned since last year for Prayuth and his government to step down. They want the constitution to be amended to make it more democratic, and for the monarchy

to be reformed to make it more accountable.

The biggest fault of Prayuth is that he does not understand the principles of the constitutional monarchy, said Pita Limjaroenrat, leader of the opposition Move Forward Party.

He used the monarchy to protect himself whenever he was criticized or opposed. This is an evil action, making him no longer qualified to be prime minister, he said.

His accusation refers to the enforcement of Article 112 in the criminal code, also known as the lese majeste law. Prayuth said in June last year that King Maha Vajiralongkorn had expressed his wish for the government not to use the law against defaming the monarchy to prosecute pro-democracy protesters.

The legislation allows anyone to file a complaint with the police, with convictions carrying jail terms of up to 15 years per offense. According to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, at least 59 people including several minors were summoned under the law between November and February.

The monarchy is widely considered an untouchable bedrock of Thai nationalism.

Four well-known protesters including human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa, student leader

Parit Chiwarak, and political activists Somyos Prueksakasemsuk and Patiwat Saraiyaem were prosecuted under the law and on sedition charges earlier this month. Their lawyer requested bail but the court denied it.

Prayuth said the debate in parliament was "a good opportunity for both sides to do something together for our country and people. And I am ready to clarify every allegation."

Of the 487 lawmakers, 277 are part of the ruling coalition and 210 are with the opposition. The censure motion would require a simple majority, or 244 votes, to pass. Prayuth received 272 votes with 206 voting no-confidence and three remaining silent.

On Friday evening, hundreds of protesters held a mock censure motion against Prayuth and the other ministers on the street in front of the parliament building, calling out their alleged corruption and noting their failure to address rising financial inequality in Thailand.

Protesters said another rally was planned on Saturday afternoon.

Police said they would deploy more than 10,000 officers in Bangkok over the weekend to control the crowds and maintain law and order. Police vehicles, including water canon trucks, have been dispatched near the parliament.

RUCHI DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC

Behind telephone Exchange Near Old STNM Hospital. Gangtok

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9.30 am

ORTHO AND GYNEA CLINICS & O P D
3.00 pm

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

Of Latrines in a Nirmal Rajya

Now, Focus on the Left-Out

The socioeconomic indicators for Sikkim, as recorded in the Census 2011 data for household amenities and assets data present an impressive improvement when compared against the indices recorded ten years earlier in Census 2001. While congratulations are aptly due for such a substantial improvement within a decade, the data also flags sectors which need special attention. These stats are of seven year old vintage now, but in the interim arrived the Earthquake and an apparent slowdown in “development”; safe then to suggest that the situation on ground would not have changed too much. Progress, it needs to be accepted, does not always march forward on a steady clip and dips and spikes can happen due to several factors, not all of which are avoidable. What statistics also do is flag issues of significance and help inform where the “developmental” thrust should focus. We take up the socioeconomic indicators of Census 2011 to flag some of those issues here.

While the socioeconomic improvements in Sikkim have been universal, in that the amelioration has been across the board, what remains a worry is that those who have been left out remain cut off from most of the amenities.

To begin with sanitation levels in the State - Sikkim was deservedly the first State to bag the Nirmal Rajya award for the total sanitation it achieved many years ago. There had been a qualitative improvement in this sector with 75% of the households (as of 2011, and this figure must have grown) having water closet latrines [with flush] as against 32.1% in 2001. Sikkim was the best performing State on this count, posting the strongest figures among the States with only the metropolitan union territory of Chandigarh doing better at 87.1% in Census 2011. This is obviously conversion from pit latrines to the better water closet option because the number households with pit latrines has come down from 32.1% in 2001 to 12% now. If one were to focus just on the rural scenario, the numbers remain as impressive for Sikkim. The State tops the listings among State with 68.5% of the rural households having water closet latrines, a huge leap from the merely 24.3% in 2001. Against the 40.6% of the rural households which had no latrines in 2001, the number had come down to 15.9% in 2011 and continues to fall. These statistics for urban Sikkim are also the best in the country with 91.8% of the urban households having water closet latrines, 3.3% having pit latrines, and only 8.2% in 2011 having no latrines. The overall figure for Sikkim reveals that against 36.6% of the households in Sikkim which had no latrines in 2001, in 2011, only 12.8% are so disadvantaged. This is indeed a noteworthy achievement.

A rural-urban comparison reveals that the improvements in sanitation levels has been more marked in rural Sikkim where the number of rural households without latrines has come down from 40.6% in 2001 to 15.9% in 2011. For urban Sikkim, the numbers have dropped from 8.2% in 2001 to 4.8% of the households. When the percentages are converted to numbers, one realizes that of the 1,28,131 households in Sikkim, 16,400 households have no latrines. This lack is explained to the large migrant population in Sikkim and the less than adequate tenements available to them [39,208 families in Sikkim live in rented accommodations].

But what needs immediate attention is the worrying fact that only 1,922 households [of the 16,400 without latrines] have access to at least public toilets. The remaining 14,478 households have to rely on open latrines. And this is a worry. Most of the already underprivileged and denied section of the population here remains left out from access to proper sanitation. It is important that immediate measures are undertaken to expand the footprint of public toilets to ensure that this section of the people receive at least the most basic of amenities.

Another section of the ‘left out’ from the strides made in socioeconomic indicators are the 18.2% of the households here which have none of the “assets” common to the rest of Sikkim. 23,320 households here own neither a radio, nor a TV, computer, telephone nor a vehicle. This section obviously needs to be prioritised in the release of whatever aids or grants are released by the State Government. Admittedly, a substantial number of this group might not qualify to make it to the beneficiaries list, so the least that can be done is extend all civic amenities to them which they deserve by way of their residence in Sikkim. Undoubtedly, the entire lot of households without latrines will fall in this category as well. It would have been ideal if this section had been serviced first when Sikkim made a stab for Nirmal Rajya status, but since that is in the past, one hopes their requirements are addressed on priority now.

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Australia Shows the Way. It's the Job of Governments Not Big Tech to Run Democracies

JOHN NAUGHTON
theGuardian

The problem with the dispute between the Australian government and the two social media giants Google and Facebook is that it's a squalid argument between ethically challenged contestants about a really important question – the survival of liberal democracy.

The Australian parliament is in the process of passing a law – called the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code – which would force Facebook and Google to pay publishers if they host their content. The law is a response to complaints from Australian news outlets about the role that both have played in the decline of journalism and the destruction of their business model.

The two companies have responded in different ways: Google is making deals with Australian news publishers – including Guardian Australia, part of GNM, also publishers of the Observer; Facebook is cutting them off entirely. It is preventing publishers and Facebook users in Australia sharing or viewing Australian and international news content. In its typically crass style, the company implemented this ban immediately, clumsily and without warning, with the result that many important public and other services (including, for example, the fire service) were caught in the censorship net.

This in turn prompted a furious, self-righteous response from the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison – published (and I am not making this up) on a Facebook page. “Facebook’s actions to unfriend Australia today, cutting off essential information services on health and emergency services, were as arrogant as they were disappointing,” he wrote. “They may be changing the world, but that doesn’t mean they run it.”

Those last six words capture the essence of the problem. The past three decades have seen the rise of five huge global corporations – Alphabet (owner of Google and YouTube), Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft, each of which wields monopolistic power in its own and contiguous domains. These companies have grown in a largely law-free environment – in the sense that they operated in domains where there was either little applicable law, or where there was no government interest in applying existing law.

Now they bestride the world, having seen their valuations, and their perceived role as critical infrastructure, amplified by the pandemic. Their leaders see themselves (though, of course, they do not express this in public) as the new masters of

the universe. And so they are shocked and irritated when mere national governments fail to recognise their elevated status.

Google’s and Facebook’s initial responses to the Australian proposals oozed with this hubris. Didn’t these dumb Aussies understand that news outlets needed them more than they needed the outlets? Without Google search, many readers wouldn’t find the news they were looking for. And the same ungrateful outlets were desperate to publish and publicise their content on Facebook. Surely the Morrison government was bluffing?



As it happened, it wasn’t and the bill will become law. In one sense, that’s important because it establishes the principle that democratically elected governments, not tech companies, decide what happens in their jurisdictions. And that’s vital, because a working democracy cannot have unaccountable corporate powers loose on its patch. If we’ve learned anything over the past 150 years, it is that you can have democracy or you can have monopolies, but you can’t have both.

Since 2016, there has been a growing realisation that this narrative has to be challenged. The question now is not how can democracies mitigate the harms inflicted by tech companies on society, but what will democracies permit – and, more importantly, prohibit – tech companies to do? Which business models will we deem acceptable, and which will we outlaw? What, in other words,

does democracy want from tech, not the other way round?

Applying that to the Australian case, the argument that the government should have been making was not about payments for linking to news outlets but that a vibrant, functioning democracy needs independent journalism capable of providing reliable information to citizens. Given that the social media giants have polluted the public sphere with disinformation, hatred and lies, and destroyed a business model that once funded good journalism, the companies should be subjected to

a tax used to support that same good journalism. A bit like the BBC licence fee, in other words. It is the price they have to pay for the consequences of their ultra-profitable business models and insane profit margins. And for the privilege of being allowed to exist in a democracy.

The dominance of the five tech giants represents the same existential threat to liberal democracy that Louis Brandeis saw in the huge industrial trusts of early 19th-century America. The Silicon Valley narrative that sees democracies in the role of the guy who followed processional elephants during the Indian Raj, sweeping up their dung, is as ridiculous as it is pernicious. It is high time we called the industry’s bluff.

[John Naughton chairs the advisory board of the Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy at the University of Cambridge]

What Belief in Extraterrestrial Visitors to Earth Reveals About Trust in Elections

JOSHUA LAMBERT &
ANTHONY LICCIARDI JR.
theconversation.com

Partisanship is not enough to explain why so many Americans – mostly Republicans – distrust the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

As scholars in political behavior and methods, we are aware of another

19, 2021, the eve of President Joe Biden’s inauguration, we conducted a survey of 633 Louisiana registered voters, selected at random. We asked a series of questions about their religious beliefs, their beliefs in extraterrestrial life and whether Joe Biden had been the rightful winner of the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

The key questions we asked were:

cies a person believes.

Belief in conspiracy theories – the idea that secret causes are behind real-world events – have circulated broadly in the pandemic crisis and election cycle in part because of the evolution of social media networks and their ability to create echo chambers, communities where people encounter only those who agree with

spondents believe that aliens have actually visited Earth, though governments continue to deny any such thing. Third-party and independent voters are more likely to believe this than Democrats or Republicans.

We also found that just over half of the respondents did not believe Biden was rightfully elected president. There was a clear partisan split there, with 74% of Democrats trusting the results but only 12% of Republicans believing them. Third-party and independent voters were more evenly divided, with 36% trusting the results, 45% not believing them and 19% unsure.

Both of these beliefs express doubt about government officials’ truth-telling: In one, leaders are covering up an alien visit, and in the other, they are misleading the public about election results. When we look at people who share both of these beliefs, we find that out of the respondents who believe aliens have visited Earth, 57.6% also believe Biden was not rightfully elected president.

The connection between belief in ET visitation and electoral mistrust is statistically significant, even when controlling for various other determinants such as partisanship, age, race and sex.

These findings are limited because we surveyed only Louisiana voters. But we believe voters’ beliefs could be similar in several other states where Trump also won by double-digit margins, including Alabama, Idaho, Kansas and West Virginia.

While a specific belief in extraterrestrial visits to Earth may not be directly causing a belief in election fraud, these two ideas are conspiracy-oriented: People who believe the government is lying about one are more likely to believe officials are hiding the truth about the other.

[Joshua Lambert is Postdoctoral Research Fellow, School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs, University of Central Florida; Anthony Licciardi Jr. is Research Associate in Political Science, University of New Orleans]



er factor in voters’ thinking that has increased right alongside electoral distrust: Americans’ beliefs in conspiracy theories, especially those that express mistrust of government officials.

Our research, which has not yet been published, finds that these two beliefs are linked – to the extent that Americans who believe aliens have visited Earth are more likely than disbelievers to say that Joe Biden is not the legitimate winner of the 2020 presidential election. As conspiracy theory beliefs grow in the U.S., we expect a corresponding drop in public trust in elections.

POLLING VOTERS

Drawing on academic literature focused on trust in electoral processes, we decided to look specifically at voters’ conspiratorial beliefs. On Jan.

- Do you believe that there is life in the universe other than on Earth?
- Do you believe that extraterrestrials have visited the Earth?
- Do you believe that Joe Biden is the rightful winner of the 2020 U.S. presidential election?

We weighted the answers to reflect the statewide population balance of gender, age and race.

ALIENS AND ELECTORAL TRUST

We found that Democrats and third-party and independent voters were somewhat more inclined to believe conspiracy theories than Republicans. That fits with other recent surveys indicating that both parties do indeed have conspiratorial leanings, though the partisan divide may influence which particular conspira-

them.

The QAnon movement, which holds the election was fraudulent in particular, has developed from periphery to a growing mainstream group with widespread influence.

Conspiracist thinking fits well with Donald Trump’s false claims that the election was fraudulent. QAnon believers consider the fact that he has lost all the legal challenges attempting to prove his claim to be more evidence that powerful and secretive forces are at work to steal the election and hide the truth from the public.

Most of our survey’s respondents – 59.7% – believe the defensible possibility that life exists elsewhere in the universe than just on Earth. And 32.3% – nearly one-third – of the re-

Bengal observes International Mother Language Day

KOLKATA, FEB 21 (PTI): West Bengal on Sunday observed the International Mother Language Day with floral tributes, processions and cultural programmes as people remembered the martyrs who laid down lives for their mother tongue.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greeted people on the occasion and paid homage to those who had sacrificed their lives for the Bengali language.

International Mother Language Day is observed on February 21 to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

"Today is the 21st of February. Language Martyrs' Day.

I pay homage to those who sacrificed their lives for the Bengali language on this historic day."Best



wishes to all on the International Mother Language Day. Respect all languages but take pride in your mother tongue," Banerjee wrote in Bengali on Twitter.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar wished people on the occasion and said

linguistic diversity is a "foundational pillar of our civilisation".

"Linguistic diversity is a foundational pillar of our civilisation; connects us with our heritage and defines our socio-cultural identity. Emphasis in well evolved New Education Policy on mother tongue is a remarkable milestone," the governor said on the microblogging site.

The day was celebrated by various organisations and institutes across the state.

Students, faculty and

officials of Visva Bharati observed the day in Santiniketan by organising a procession on the premises of the central university. Several cultural programmes were organised across the state to mark the occasion in which folk singers and dancers took part.

Leader of Congress party in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said, "Words that come out from the lips of the mother are perpetually golden which starts teaching the humanity of how to lead the days ahead. We are proud of the mother tongue."

In Bangladesh, February 21 (known as 'Amar Ukeshe') is observed to remember the sacrifice made by the 'language martyrs' of erstwhile East Pakistan for the cause of getting recognition for Bangla as their official language in 1952.

Govt working on law to regulate social media: Ram Madhav

KOLKATA, FEB 21 (PTI): Senior BJP leader Ram Madhav said that social media has become so powerful that it can even topple governments, leading to anarchy and weakening democracy, and solutions to tackle this are needed to be found within the constitutional framework.

Speaking at the launch of his new book 'Because India Comes First', Madhav said democracy is stressed and facing new challenges with the rise of "non-political" and "non-state" forces.

"Social media is so powerful that it can even topple governments and regulating them is difficult as they are borderless. These forces can promote anarchy, which will weaken democracy but solutions should be within the constitutional framework," he said at the event hosted by the Prabha Khaitan Foundation on Saturday evening.

The existing laws are not adequate for this, he said. "We require new rules and laws to tackle and manage.

The government is already working in this direction," he added.

Madhav's comments come amid a row be-



tween the government and Twitter over blocking of accounts with Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad asking the micro-blogging site to follow the Indian law.

Besides, the Supreme Court has issued a notice to the Centre and Twitter on a plea, seeking to regulate hate content and to make a law as per which action can be initiated against Twitter and their representatives in India for willfully abetting and promoting anti-India tweets and penalise them.

Madhav said that in his new book he has penned his observations on several decisions of the Modi government.

Answering a question on Gandhi, he said the RSS does not undermine any leader's contribution.

Gandhi was a great leader and his mantra of

Ahimsa has been adopted by many global leaders, he said.

"There may be differences of opinion, which we even find between Nehru and Gandhi from the letters exchanged between them but that does not mean we disrespect a national leader. In the RSS morning prayer, we have Gandhi's name along with other leaders," Madhav said.

On Kashmir, he said that with the abrogation of Article 370, grassroot leaders are coming up against the hegemony of a few families.

He also emphasised that it is the responsibility of the people of the country to make Kashmiris feel that they are part of the 1.3-billion-strong family.

"Kashmiris are victims of propaganda for long. Things are changing but may take some time," he said.

No new COVID-19 case in Andamans in last 3 days

PORT BLAIR, FEB 21 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands did not report any new COVID-19 case in the last three days, an official said on Sunday.

The coronavirus tally in the union territory remained at 5,014, the official said. The archipelago now has only three active COVID-19 cases and all the patients are in South Andaman district, he said.

The other two districts of the union territory - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - are COVID-19 free as both don't have any active coronavirus case, the official said.

One more patient was cured of the disease on Saturday, taking the total number of COVID-19 re-

coveries to 4,949, while 62 people have succumbed to the infection so far, he said.

The administration has so far tested 2,57,213 samples for COVID-19 and the test positivity rate is 1.95 per cent, he added.

Official sources said any person arriving by flight in the union territory is required to produce RT-PCR negative report before he or she is allowed entry into the islands.

A total of 5,089 health care and frontline workers have received COVID-19 vaccine in the union territory so far, he said. At least 1,306 health care workers have received the second dose of the vaccine, the official added.

Odisha: Policeman arrested for forging judge's signature



BERHAMPUR, FEB 21 (PTI): A police officer was arrested in Odisha's Ganjam district for allegedly forging a magistrate's signature to secure the release of a man from jail on bail, officials said on Sunday.

Surya Narayan Behera, an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of police, was arrested on Friday, they said.

He was posted at a court in Buguda, inspector in-charge Chitta Ranjan Behera said.

A case under IPC section 466 (forgery of record of court) was registered against him after an FIR was filed by Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) Sonali Aparajita on Wednesday, police said.

Behera allegedly forged the signature of the magistrate in a court order of the bail and sub-

mitted it to the jail superintendent to release a man, they said.

Babula Behera of Karchulli was arrested on the charge of attempt to murder his nephew, police said.

He had filed a bail petition before the Additional District Judge of Bhanjanagar for his daughter's marriage. The bail order was passed on February 12 and sent to Buguda JMFC court, they said.

The Judicial Magistrate of Buguda was on leave on that day and the JMFC of Aska was in charge.

Instead of presenting the court document before the magistrate, the accused ASI allegedly forged the signature of the judicial magistrate on the bail order and the accused was released, police said.

India-China military talks last for around 16 hours

NEW DELHI, FEB 21 (PTI): India and China held extensive deliberations on expanding the disengagement process in eastern Ladakh at the 10th round of the military talks that lasted for around 16 hours, official sources said on Sunday.

The Corps Commander-level talks at the Moldo border point on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control began at around 10 am on Saturday and ended at 2 am on Sunday, they said.

The sources said the focus of the talks was to take forward the disengagement process in friction points like Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang in eastern Ladakh.

However, there was no official word on the talks so far.

The talks took place two days after both militaries concluded withdrawal of troops and weapons from North and South banks of Pangong Tso in the high-altitude region.

In the talks, India is learnt to have insisted on a faster disengagement process in areas like Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang to bring down tension in the region.

On Saturday evening, sources had said that bringing down the tension in the region was the broad priority of the talks. India has all along been maintaining that disengagement at all the friction points was necessary to de-escalate the situation in the region.

On February 11, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced in Parliament that India and China reached an agreement on disengagement in the North and South banks of Pangong lake that mandates both sides to "cease" forward deployment of troops in a "phased, co-ordinated and verifiable" manner.

Under the agreement, he said China will pull back its troops to east of Finger 8 areas in the northern bank of Pangong lake while the Indian personnel will be based at their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3 in the region. Similar action would take place on the south bank of the lake as

well, he said. The sources said troops of both sides have retreated to positions in line with the agreement.

The disengagement process began on February 10.

The Indian delegation at Saturday's talks was led by Lt Gen PGK Menon, the Commander of the Leh-based 14 Corps.

In his statement in Parliament, the defence minister also said that it was agreed to convene the next meeting of senior commanders of both sides within 48 hours of completion of the disengagement in the Pangong lake areas so as to resolve all other remaining issues.

Days later, the defence ministry said other outstanding "problems" including in Depsang, Hot Springs and Gogra will be taken up at the upcoming talks between military commanders of the two countries.

The border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted on May 5 following a violent clash in the Pangong lake areas and both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry even as the two sides continued military and diplomatic talks.

Last year, the Chinese military built several bunkers and other structures in the areas between Finger 4 and 8 and had blocked all Indian patrols beyond Finger 4, triggering strong reaction from the Indian Army.

In the nine rounds of military talks, India had specifically insisted on withdrawal of Chinese troops from Finger 4 to Finger 8 on the North bank of Pangong Lake. The mountain spurs in the area are referred to as Fingers.

On its part, the Chinese side was insisting on withdrawal of Indian troops from several strategic peaks on the southern bank of the lake. Around five months back, Indian troops occupied a number of strategic heights in the Mukhpuri, Rechin La and Magar hill areas around the southern bank after the Chinese PLA attempted to intimidate them in the area.

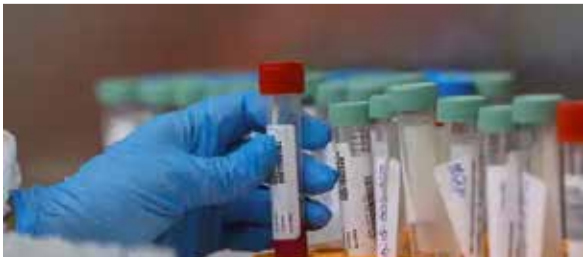
No fresh COVID-19 case in Arunachal Pradesh

ITANAGAR, FEB 21 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh did not report any fresh COVID-19 case in the last two days, a senior health department official said here on Sunday.

The coronavirus case-load remained at 16,836, State Surveillance Officer Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

Arunachal Pradesh currently has five active COVID-19 cases, while 16,775 people have recovered from the disease so far, he said.

The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state has touched 99.63 per cent, while the positivity ratio



stands at 0.02 per cent and the fatality rate at 0.33 per cent, the official said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the state is 56.

Altogether, 4,03,289 samples have been tested for COVID-19, including 226 on Saturday, the SSO said.

Meanwhile, State Im-

munization Officer (SIO) Dimong Padung said that 18,697 health and frontline workers have received vaccine shots so far in the state.

The health department has been carrying out the inoculation drive four days a week -- Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

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Indians win two gold medals at Montenegro boxing tourney

NEW DELHI, FEB 21 (PTI): Vinka (60kg) and T Sana-macha Chanu (75kg) clinched gold medals as Indian youth boxers continued their outstanding show at the 30th Adriatic Pearl Tournament in Budva, Montenegro.

Apart from the two gold medals, the Indians added two silver and three more bronze to their tally on the penultimate day of the competition.

Earlier, Alfiya Pathan (+81kg) secured the country's first gold in the on-going tournament.

Rohtak's Vinka blanked her opponent Kristina Kriper from Moldova 5-0 in the final, while in an all-Indian clash in the 75kg category, Manipuri girl Sana-macha, outpunched Raj Sahiba 5-0.

Another silver for the day, in the women's event, came when Gitika went down fighting 1-4 against Uzbekistan's Farzona Fozilova in the 48kg final.

In the 57kg women's semi-final, Preeti went down 1-4 to Montenegro's Bojana Gojkovic to settle for a bronze.

Meanwhile, Priyanshu Dabas (49kg) and Jugnoo claimed bronze medals each for the Indian men's team.

Both the boxers lost their respective semi-final bouts.

While Priyanshu suffered a narrow 2-3 loss to Ishjonov Ibromkhim of Uzbekistan, Jugnoo went down to Ukraine's Vasyl Tkachuk 0-5 in the +91kg.

In the 64kg women's last-four match, Lucky Rana notched up 3-0 win against Uzbekistan's Gulshoda Istamova.

Lucky will take on Finland's Lia Pukkila in the final later on Sunday.

Apart from Lucky, two more Indian women boxers will be in contention for gold medals on the final day as Babroyisana Chanu (51kg) and Arundhati Choudhary (69kg) will feature in their respective title clashes late in the night.

Chanu will face Uzbekistan's Sabina Bobokulova while Arundhati will fight against Maryana Stoiko of Ukraine.

Not cricket: religious divide threatens a last bastion of secular India

HANNAH ELLIS-PETERSEN

DELHI, 21 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: It is often described as India's greatest unifier, a sport that – at least on the field – has been insulated from the religious schisms that have long divided the country.

But in recent weeks cricket's position as one of the final bastions of a secular India has come under attack, as the anti-Muslim sentiment that has been on the rise in India under the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) reared its head in an ugly cricketing scandal.

Wasim Jaffer, one of India's greatest living cricketers who has scored more runs than any batsman in Indian cricketing history and Muslim, found himself accused of selecting players based on religion for the Uttarakhand state team, which he began coaching in June 2020 when he retired as a player.

The accusations came after Jaffer resigned his post in early February, citing “so much interference and bias” in the selection of “non-deserving players” by local state administrators. He named Mahim Verma, the secretary of the Cricket Association of Uttarakhand, as one of the key figures who was interfering with player selection and making his job as coach untenable.

In quotes splashed across the front page of the Hindi newspaper Jagran, senior figures from the state cricket association hit back at Jaffer. Navneet Mishra, the Uttarakhand team manager, was quoted accusing Jaffer of favouring Muslim players for selection, stopping the team chanting a slogan that mentioned a Hindu god, and sowing religious discord. Jaffer was also accused of bringing in a Maulana, an Islamic religious leader.



“His [Jaffer's] interference in selection matters was getting too much,” Verma told Indian media. However, he has since denied all knowledge of allegations that Jaffer fractured the team along religious lines.

Jaffer denied all the allegations as “false and baseless”. In a press conference, he said the “communal angle that has been levelled against me, that is very, very sad” and emphasised the equal position that Hindu and Muslim players had held on his team.

Jaffer said the team had never had a slogan mentioning a Hindu god but in fact had often used a Sikh chant which he had encouraged them to change to something more universal. “I said to them, we are not playing as a community, we are playing for Uttarakhand, so our slogan should be for Uttarakhand,” Jhe said.

“If there was indeed a communal bias, I wouldn't have resigned, they

would have sacked me,” he added. Jaffer declined to talk to the Guardian, saying he “did not wish to talk on this any more”.

Such communal mudslinging had not been seen in cricket for over a century and the chief minister of Uttarakhand has ordered an inquiry.

Among cricket commentators and fans, there were fears it marked an alarming infiltration of the widespread targeting of India's Muslims into the sacrosanct secular sphere of Indian cricket, where Muslims and Hindus have played alongside each other on the national team since 1911.

“In the last few years, hate has been normalised so much that even our beloved sport cricket has been marred by it,” tweeted Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the opposition Congress party, in a veiled response to the Jaffer incident.

The refusal to let religious divisions on to the pitch has deep roots.

Even during India's Bombay Pentangular cricket tournament, which ran from the 1890s to 1946, where the teams were divided down religious lines – Parsees, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and other faiths – players of all faiths defended the tournament.

More recently, after India's historic cricket triumph against Australia in January, it was the story of a young Muslim member of the team, Mohammed Siraj, who had stayed on tour despite the death of his rickshaw driver father, that captured the national imagination back in India.

“This is a sad, shocking incident because cricket has by and large remained protected from India's communal tensions,” said Sharda Ugra, one of India's most respected cricket writers.

“We have seen this kind of communal toxicity played out in politics and public forums in India but now it's permeated into cricket,” she said.

More Liverpool misery: 1st home loss to Everton in 22 years

LIVERPOOL, FEB 21 (AP): A first win at Anfield since 1999 for Everton. The worst form for Liverpool at home in the league since 1923 after a fourth straight loss.

The English title that took 30 years to win again is being surrendered far too easily by Liverpool.

Richarlison scored after three minutes and Gylfi Sigurdsson netted a late penalty to give Everton a 2-0 victory in the Premier League on Saturday.

A first Merseyside derby win since 2010 put Everton behind sixth-place Liverpool only on goal difference with a game in hand, while the champions are 16 points behind leader Manchester City. Chelsea is three points ahead in the fourth and final Champions League place after drawing 1-1 at Southampton. Even worse for Liverpool was losing yet another center back option as Jordan Henderson was forced off injured in the first half.

October's derby was the start of Liverpool's defensive problems when Virgil Van Dijk was ruled out for the season with an ACL injury by Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford. Henderson's problem appeared to be a groin injury as he pulled up running the ball out of defense in the first half, leaving his side with an 18th different and most inexperienced pairing of Ozan Kabak and substitute Nat Phillips.

But by then the damage had already been done as Everton had made its intent clear.

Straight from kickoff, the ball was hit forward and, under no pressure, Kabak conceded a corner after six seconds.

The on-loan Schalke player was immediately targeted by Richarlison. It paid off after just three minutes as two weak headers, one from Thiago Alcantara and another from Kabak on his Anfield debut, saw the ball fall to James Rodriguez. He slipped in a pass behind the new boy for Richarlison to run onto and fire an angled drive across Alisson Becker.

The Brazilian also gave the visitors their first lead in a derby since October 2010, the date of their last victory which came at Goodison Park.

Kabak's edgy nerves were not eased when he allowed Pickford's clearance to drop over his head straight to the feet of Richarlison, before moments later clattering James Rodriguez after a mistimed challenge and he finished the half with a booking for the third successive match to cap a poor 45 minutes. His confidence would also not have been helped by the loss of Henderson just before the half hour, with the 23-year-old Phillips arriving off the bench as the senior partner despite making just his eighth appearance for the club.

At least Alisson, responsible for three errors in his last two league matches, was back on form with a good save to deny a diving Seamus Coleman header from Lucas Digne's cross.

Pickford was also in good form. He flew to his right to tip Henderson's swerving volley around

the post before the Liverpool captain's exit.

The England No. 1 was in action again catching Sadio Mane's header early in the second half. Pickford dived at the feet of striker Mohamed Salah as Liverpool turned up the pressure without really laying siege to the Everton goal.

More holes opened up in Liverpool's defense and, from a counter-attack, substitute Dominic Calvert-Lewin was adjudged to have been brought down inside the box by Trent Alexander-Arnold.

Substitute Sigurdsson stroked home the penalty to spark wild celebrations among the Everton contingent. The only disappointment for Carlo Ancelotti's side will have been not having any fans allowed into the home of its greatest rival, due to the pandemic, to see the landmark triumph.

TUCHEL'S CONCERNS Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel criticized Callum Hudson-Odoi after hauling off the forward in the draw at Southampton only 31 minutes after replacing the injured Tammy Abraham at halftime. I was not happy with his attitude, energy and counter-pressing, Tuchel said.

In a game where it's hard to create chances, you need to rely on counter-pressing to force maybe errors, to get a second ball and get an easy chance.

For that we have to be totally on and totally showing for counter-pressing. And I did not feel this from Callum today. He missed some opportunities for counter-pressing, he missed some easy balls.

Jonny Bairstow should make England return to ease burden on Joe Root

EBONY RAINFORD-BRENT

LONDON, 21 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: England are in Ahmedabad with the series tied at 1-1 with two to play and a day-night Test to come that might favour their seamers – we don't know how the pink ball will react to the floodlights, but if anyone's going to get it moving it's Jimmy Anderson. It will also get soft quicker and tends to go dead after 20 overs, which means Ravi Ashwin should get less bounce, rag and spin and the batsmen get a fraction more time to react to it.

If England's seamers benefit from conditions Jasprit Bumrah will as well, but some of the advantages India had in the second Test might be nullified.

The captain is averaging 90.37 in eight innings in 2021, but of those who played the second Test with the exception of Ben Foakes, whose figure is skewed by his first-innings 42 not out, the next best is Ben Stokes with 28.75.

They really need another player to come to the party in these conditions, so it is a great time for Jonny Bairstow to return to the squad, a player with plenty of experience and proven ability against spin. The young batsmen have done well but I would parachute Bairstow in at No 3 and Dan Lawrence would step aside. Everything is fine when Root scores double-centuries, but when he doesn't someone else needs to stand up.

The second Test, on a turning pitch, highlighted England's issues with spin, both with bat and ball. Of the English spinners Jack Leach showed good control, but across the board there were too many full tosses and loose deliveries. India's batsmen only had to stay patient because they knew a bad ball was coming and that makes it hard to build pressure.

Root has enough responsibility as the team's captain and outstanding batsman, but he bowled well and might have to get through a few more overs until a more reliable second spinner is found.

Foakes's excellence behind the stumps illustrated a real issue with



England's selection policy. The first three names I would put on any teamsheet would be my best batter, bowler and keeper, but England have stuck with their game-plan of wanting a keeper who is a batsman first and foremost.

Especially in Asia, as Foakes showed, a specialist can make a real difference – there was one take against Rishabh Pant, with the ball going down the leg side, ripping and turning off the pitch and going through the gate, that not many keepers in the world would have made look as easy as Foakes did. Plus his batting, particularly against spin, is a real bonus.

England change their batsmen and bowlers according to conditions and I hope in the future they will also be adaptable with their keeping selections, because Jos Buttler is not always the answer.

Foakes got his opportunity because Buttler left for a scheduled break before the limited-overs matches, an unexpected benefit of a good policy. Some people would say you should always pick your best side, but this is a time to recognise the importance of protecting players' mental health and England have done a reasonable job of that. But they made a real mess of Moeen Ali's departure, suggesting he was turning his back on his team in choosing to return to his family. To make that request to stay on with one day's notice, of a man who had not seen his family for weeks and had recovered for Covid-19 in isolation, is unfair and to discuss his decision in public

“Jaffer is our highest-scoring batsman but because of this, his name has now been dragged through the mud and his Muslim religion has been thrown in his face to settle a score.”

Ugra expressed disappointment that none of cricket's biggest names nor the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the country's powerful cricket governing body, had not come out in support of Jaffer. The BCCI president, former cricketer Sourav Ganguly, had once been Jaffer's teammate in the Indian cricket team.

In reference to Sachin Tendulkar, a Hindu and one of India's greatest players, Urda added: “It shows us that regardless of a player's stature, because they are a Muslim, they can be a target. No cricket official would dare make any kind of allegation against Sachin Tendulkar.”

Dr Prashant Kidambi, a history professor at the University of Leicester and author of Cricket Country: An Indian Odyssey in the Age of Empire, described the incident as “unprecedented” and said any previous religious tensions in cricket had always been isolated to fans.

“This has never happened in relation to the politics of domestic cricket and especially not involving a cricketer's religious identity,” said Kidambi. “Muslims have always been present in the national team, it's been very important to the imagination of plural secular India.

“If incidents like this become a trend, that would be really disastrous,” he added. “It will wreck the one thing that, at least on the face of it, seems like it's been sealed off from this kind divisive communal politics that's happening elsewhere in India.”

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A ‘war zone’: Witnesses describe violence at Myanmar protests

ANDREW NACHEMSON

YANGON, 21 FEB [ALJAZEERA]: Saturday was the worst day of bloodshed yet during mass protests in Myanmar against the February 1 military coup, which overthrew the elected government headed by Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy. Police opened fire on peaceful protesters in Mandalay, Myanmar’s second-biggest city, killing two – including a 16-year-old who was shot in the head – and injuring more than 20.

The country’s biggest city, Yangon, has seen the biggest protests with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets, but so far there has been no violent crackdown on demonstrations there. It has been a different story in Mandalay and other parts of Myanmar, where police and soldiers are using increasingly violent methods to snuff out protests.

A doctor who was on the front lines of Saturday’s protests in Mandalay spoke to Al Jazeera on the condition of anonymity, describing scenes reminiscent of a “war zone”.

She and her team witnessed police deploying water cannon, beating protesters, and firing on them with live rounds, rubber bullets, and slingshots. The first incident occurred near the Mandalay port, where sailors had occupied a ship and removed equipment so it could not set off, as part of a growing civil disobedience movement aimed at crippling the military government.

She said a group of protesters had also gathered near the port, creating a crowd that police could not pass through. After negotiations with the ship’s chief officer, the sailors told

the protesters to allow the police through. “The crowd listened and made way for the police and water cannon truck. While the crowd was making way for those cars, the water cannon truck stopped and blocked the way. Then another water cannon truck came from 35th Street and, without warning, it started to attack the protesters,” she said. Soon after, police “started beating people”. “I saw with my own eyes that there was an old lady who was just watching the protest from her house and the police attacked her. She had a terrible head injury,” she said. Her team was called over by police to treat two injured protesters who were being held in a police van. “One had a split head and needed stitches. The other had two bullet wounds in the side of the thigh. From what I saw, it didn’t look like a rubber bullet. The patient was bleeding too much,” she said. The doctor requested the police release the two injured people so she could give them emergency medical care, but the police refused. “I was only able to give them antiseptic and put bandages on the open wounds,” she said. From there, the doctor and her team went to 40th Street, where the situation was “far worse” with multiple protesters “terribly injured”, including one with a bullet wound to the stomach who was being treated by another doctor. “I was inside the monastery helping the injured who were taken inside by other civilians. Even as I was tending to the wounded, they kept shooting at the monastery. We could see the ground burst” as it was sprayed with bullets, she recalled.

A student activist in Mandalay, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity for safety reasons, told Al Jazeera that during the day, protesters risk “getting captured, beaten or shot”. At night, they fear “arbitrary arrests and all kinds of military-orchestrated terrorism”. There have been recurring reports of night-time attacks by security forces on protesters in Mandalay. On Wednesday evening, soldiers and police attacked a housing complex for the staff of the government-run Myanma Railways, many of whom are on strike, refusing to work for the military government. The student activist said civil servants participating in the nationwide strike have been threatened and some detained. Activists and protest organisers have also been targeted by the security forces. “They have broken into Students’ Union offices ... there were spies among the protest crowds and they tail us and raid our houses at night,” the activist said, describing the atmosphere in Mandalay as “truly hellish”. In another incident that drew widespread outrage, a 21-year-old with cerebral palsy was brutally beaten by police in Mandalay while working as a volunteer to clean up rubbish after protests. Demonstrations have also been violently dispersed in Mon State, Kachin State, and the isolated capital of Naypyidaw, where a 19-year-old woman who was shot in the head by police during protests on February 9 died on Friday. “The shooting of peaceful protesters in

Myanmar is beyond the pale,” the United Kingdom’s foreign secretary Dominic Raab tweeted on Saturday. “We will consider further action, with our international partners, against those crushing democracy and choking dissent.” Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch’s Asia division, said “the time for talk is over”. “Governments and the UN need to front-load sanctions against Myanmar’s military-controlled companies now to show [Senior General] Min Aung Hlaing and the State Administrative Council junta how bleak their future will be if they continue down this path,” he told Al Jazeera in an email. Robertson said the military has been “wantonly killing civilians for its entire existence”, including during its brutal campaigns against ethnic minorities. “When it is conducting operations in the field, the Tatmadaw [Myanmar’s military] operates on a scorched earth basis, killing civilians who flee, torturing and murdering men they capture and raping women and girls,” he said, adding the military routinely turns to looting and arson. Robertson said Yangon on the other hand, is likely to be “the last place where the junta cracks down”. “Yangon has the embassies, the UN offices, the international journalists, and the heart of the business community centred there,” he said. But the student activist said the harsh crackdown in Mandalay is only creating fiercer resistance, with protests growing on Sunday. “We are all the more resentful towards their horrible acts and more motivated to win this revolution,” he said. “I couldn’t live my life in shackles and fear.”

Niger votes in presidential runoff to usher in first democratic transition

BOUREIMA BALIMA NIAMEY, 21 FEB (REUTERS): Niger voted on Sunday in the second round of a presidential election that is expected to usher in the first democratic transition of power since the West African nation gained independence from France in 1960.

Ruling party candidate Mohamed Bazoum is seen by many as the favourite after leading in the first round on Dec. 27 with 39.3% of the vote. He is up against former President Mahamane Ousmane, who scored 17%.

Bazoum, who had held several top positions in outgoing President Mahamadou Issoufou’s governments including the foreign and interior ministries, is backed by the candidates who came third and fourth in the first round.

In the capital Niamey, crowds of voters, some wearing masks to protect against COVID-19, queued in dusty school courtyards.

“I am satisfied by the calm that characterised our second-round campaign,” Bazoum said after voting. “I hope that luck is on my side, but I have many reasons to believe it is indeed.”

Bazoum, 61, has vowed to continue Issoufou’s policies, making security a focal point as the country battles insurgencies, while introducing policies to revamp the economy.

Ousmane, 71, was Niger’s first democratically elected president and was ousted in a 1996 military coup. He has been endorsed by around a dozen smaller parties and first round candidates. He has promised to bring change and tackle corruption.

The Sahel nation of around 24 million is one of the poorest in the world and struggles with recurring drought and destructive floods. The coronavirus pandemic has weighed on its economy, while weak prices for its main export, uranium, have hit revenues.

Debris falls from plane during emergency landing near Denver



GILLIAN FLACCUS, DAVID ZALUBOWSKI BROOMFIELD, FEB 21 (AP): Debris from a United Airlines plane fell onto Denver suburbs during an emergency landing Sunday after one of its engines suffered a catastrophic failure and rained pieces of the engine casing on a neighborhood where it narrowly missed a home. The plane landed safely, and nobody aboard or on the ground was reported hurt, authorities said.

The Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement that the Boeing 777-200 returned to the Denver International Airport after experiencing a right-engine failure shortly after takeoff. Flight 328 was flying from Denver to Honolulu when the incident occurred, the agency said.

United said in a separate statement that there were 231 passengers and 10 crew on board. All passengers were to be rebooked on a new flight to Hawaii, the airline said.

The Broomfield Police Department posted photos on Twitter showing large, circular pieces of debris leaning against a house in the suburb about 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of Denver. Police are asking that anyone injured come forward.

Passengers recounted a terrifying ordeal that began to unfold shortly after the plane full of vacationers took off.

The aircraft was almost at cruising altitude and the captain was giving an announcement over the intercom when a large explosion rocked the cabin, accompanied by a bright flash.

The plane started shaking violently, and we lost altitude and we started going down, said David Delucia, who was sitting directly across the aisle from the side with the failed engine. When it initially happened, I thought we were done. I thought we were going down.”

Delucia and his wife took their wallets containing their driver’s licenses and put them in their pockets so that in case we did go down, we could be ID’d,” said Delucia, who was still shaken up as he waited to board another flight for Honolulu.

On the ground, witnesses also heard the explosion and were scared for those on board.

Tyler Thal, who lives in the area, told The Associated Press that he was out for a walk with his family when he noticed a large commercial plane flying unusually low and took out his phone to film it.

While I was looking at it, I saw an explosion and then the cloud of smoke and some debris falling from it. It was just like a speck in the sky, and as I’m watching that, I’m telling my family what I just saw and then we heard the explosion, he said in a phone interview. The plane just kind of continued on, and we didn’t see it after that.

Thal was relieved to learn no one was injured or killed from what he saw.

Video posted on Twitter showed the engine fully engulfed in flames as the plane flew through the air.

Kirby Klements was inside with his wife when they heard a huge booming sound, he said. A few seconds later, the couple saw a massive piece of debris fly past their window and into the bed of Klements’ truck, crushing the cab and pushing the vehicle into the dirt.

He estimated the circular engine cowl at 15 feet (4.5 meters) in diameter. Fine pieces of the fiberglass insulation used in the airplane engine fell from the sky like ash for about 10 minutes, he said, and several large chunks of insulation landed in his backyard.

If it had been 10 feet different, it would have landed right on top of the house, he said in a phone interview with the AP. And if anyone had been in the truck, they would have been dead.

The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating.

Aviation safety experts said the plane appeared to have suffered an uncontained and catastrophic engine failure. Such an event is extremely rare and happens when

huge spinning discs inside the engine suffer some sort of failure and breach the armored casing around the engine that is designed to contain the damage, said John Cox, an aviation safety expert and retired airline pilot who runs an aviation safety consulting firm called Safety Operating Systems.

That unbalanced disk has a lot of force in it, and it’s spinning at several thousand rotations per minute ... and when you have that much centrifugal force, it has to go somewhere, he said in a phone interview.

Pilots practice how to deal with such an event frequently and would have immediately shut off anything flammable in the engine, including fuel and hydraulic fluid, using a single switch, Cox said.

Former NTSB Chairman Jim Hall called the incident another example of cracks in our culture in aviation safety (that) need to be addressed.

Hall, who was on the board from 1994 to 2001, has criticized the FAA over the past decade as drifting toward letting the manufacturers provide the aviation oversight that the public was paying for. That goes especially for Boeing, he said.

Despite the scary appearance of a flaming engine, most such incidents don’t result in loss of life, Cox said.

The last fatality on a U.S. airline flight involved such an engine failure on a Southwest Airlines flight from New York to Dallas in April 2018. A passenger was killed when the engine disintegrated more than 30,000 feet above Pennsylvania and debris struck the plane, breaking the window next to her seat. She was forced halfway out the window before other passengers pulled her back inside.

In that case, the breakdown was blamed on a broken fan blade in an engine of the Boeing 737. The Federal Aviation Administration ordered airlines to step up inspections of fan blades on certain engines made by CFM International, a joint venture of General Electric and France’s Safran S.A.

Only 'language of power' and sanctions can free Navalny, ally says

ANDRIUS SYTAS VILNIUS, 21 FEB (REUTERS): Russia would only consider releasing Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny if its leadership was hit with painful personal sanctions, a close ally said ahead of a meeting with European policymakers in Brussels on Sunday.

European foreign ministers are expected to agree on Monday to impose sanctions on allies of Russian President Vladimir Putin in response to the jailing of Navalny. Navalny was arrested last month on his return from Germany following treatment for poisoning with what many Western countries say was a nerve agent. He was jailed on Feb. 2 for violating parole on what he and the Western countries said were trumped-up charges. He lost an appeal on Saturday.

Leonid Volkov, Navalny’s chief of staff, told Reuters on Saturday he believes Putin would only consider releasing him if hit by sanctions.

“Putin is a dictator, but he is quite rational. If the upsides of having Navalny in prison become less than the downsides,



he will change his decision,” said Volkov.

“If many of his closest allies become unhappy, this can be dangerous to Putin and this could lead him to decide to change his mind,” Volkov added. “Or maybe not - but sanctions is the best thing that Europe can do now.”

In Brussels on Sunday at the invitation of Lithuania, where he has been sheltering since 2019, Volkov said he will tell policymakers to use the “language of power” towards the Russian government, as he believes Putin sees bridge-building attempts by the West as a sign of weakness.

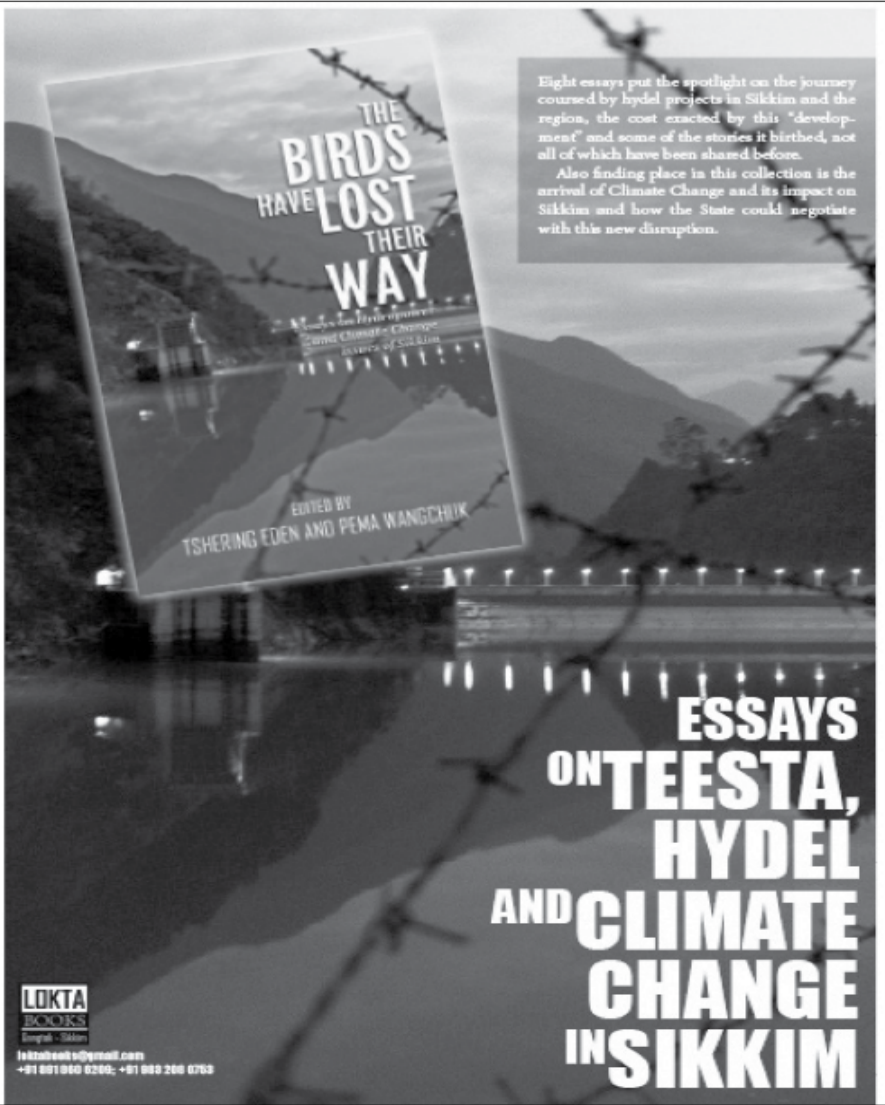
Asked to comment

on Navalny’s political future after the court decision on Saturday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, “It is absolutely none of our business.”

Navalny’s allies have published a list of 35 people they believe should be sanctioned.

His supporters are now gearing up to organise a “huge peaceful protest” in Russia this spring, Volkov said.

Navalny’s organization will then attempt to prevent Putin’s party from achieving a comfortable win at elections in September by campaigning for its rivals, said Volkov.



On wedding anniv Lara Dutta celebrates 10 years of "Ups & Downs" with Mahesh Bhupathi

Lara Dutta and former tennis player Mahesh Bhupathi celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary on Friday - the former beauty queen made it extra special for her husband as she dedicated a heart-warming post on social media.

"A decade done," wrote Lara Dutta and gave a massive shout out to her partner in everything for having her back in every situation.

"Through the ups and downs and ins and outs and rounds and abouts, I got you babe! And I know you got me! To the next decade and beyond," Lara captioned a video, which is a celebration of Lara Dutta and Mahesh Bhupathi's love story through the years.

The montage shared by Lara Dutta features priceless throwback memories, including glimpses of their wedding and adorable photos of their daughter Saira.

Lara Dutta wished Mahesh Bhupathi

on their wedding anniversary with just the perfect song - Christina Perri's A Thousand Years.

Lara Dutta was crowned Miss Uni-

starring in films such as Bhagam Bhag, Kaal, Partner, Chalo Dilli and the Don series. Last seen in Welcome To New York, Lara Dutta co-stars with Akshay Kumar,



verse in 2000, just three years after which she stepped into Bollywood with 2003 film Andaaz. She is best known for

Vaani Kapoor and Huma Qureshi in upcoming movie Bell Bottom, releasing on May 28.

Deepika Padukone reveals why Ranveer Singh refused to watch Schitt's Creek during lockdown

Deepika Padukone, in a chatty mood on Saturday, was discussing her favourite shows when revealed that her husband, actor Ranveer Singh, refused to watch the Emmy award-winning series Schitt's Creek during the lockdown last year because he thought it looked like "rubbish."

Deepika, in the latest video on her Instagram profile, can be seen getting ready for a shoot and saying: "During lockdown, I was like, 'This (Schitt's Creek) looks like a really good show. I think we should watch it.' And he (Ran-

veer Singh) had no interest. He said, 'It looks like rubbish.' And then it won an Emmy. And now he's like, 'Oh, we have to watch Schitt's Creek.'"

Schitt's Creek, a Canadian comedy series created by father-son duo Eugene and Dan Levy, emerged as a winner in the comedy category at the Emmys 2020.

Coming back to Deepika Padukone's post, the actress, in her video, picked The Crown as her "safe" choice for her "favourite show" but went on the reveal that her actual "favourite show" is Scooby Doo.

Sidharth Malhotra's 'Shershaah' to release in July



Actor Sidharth Malhotra-starrer "Shershaah", based on the life of Kargil hero Captain Vikram Batra, is scheduled to hit the screens on July 2.

The film, which takes its title from Vikram Batra's codename, is directed by Vishnu Varadhan. "Shershaah" also stars Kiara Advani.

Malhotra took to Instagram and shared the film's new poster with the updated release date.

The film was earlier scheduled to bow out in July last year, but was pushed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The untold true story of Captain Vikram Batra (PVC) is all set to unravel on the big screens. #Shershaah coming to theatres near you on 2nd July, 2021. See you at the movies," the 36-year-old actor tweeted.

Malhotra will play a

double role in "Shershaah", wherein he will portray both the Param Vir Chakra recipient Vikram Batra and his twin brother Vishal Batra.

The film is co-produced by Dharma Productions, Shabbir Boxwala, Ajay Shah and Himanshu Gandhi.

Malhotra was last seen in Milap Zaveri's 2019 action-drama "Marjaavaan" and also has comedy "Thank God" and espionage thriller "Mission Majnu" up for release.

Advani, meanwhile, had a theatrical release last year with "Indoo Ki Jawani". It was one of the first Bollywood films to release theatrically when cinema halls resumed operations after coronavirus-induced nationwide lockdown.

She will be next seen in horror-comedy "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2" and Karan Johar backed "Jug Jugg Jeeyo".



DOGGIE BAG! The former Bachelor Peter Weber is seen heading to Central Park with his dog Tripp in tow in New York City.

German band turn van into club so fans can rock out one at a time

German two-piece rock band Milliarden have turned a van into a club where they stage gigs for one fan at a time as a way of reaching music-lovers during the pandemic.

Separated by a plastic sheet, Milliarden www.milliardenmusik.de, which translates as Billions, treat fans to acoustic versions of their songs, recreating a club atmosphere with lighting effects, posters and plastic roses.

Large cultural events, including concerts, have become virtually impossible in Germany due to the pandemic.

"The fact that we have the club with us, that we are the club owners, so to speak, is something we use to get to the people who are not so close to this, to this cultural landscape, who are not in the big cities," band member Ben Hartmann said.

"We actually went to the villages and

stopped in front of people's houses and played for them. A crisis like this one brings so many opportunities that you only recognise once you do stuff. You just have to do it."

Milliarden this month released their third studio album, "Schuldig" ("Guilty"). Fans can win tickets for the exclusive shows via social media.

"I think it's so nice that it works like this and that people respect it and accept it like that and get so emotionally connected to us here on this van. I think that is a gift," said Johannes Aue, in charge of keyboards and clapping.

"And that's why it is awesome that we were able to pull it off without thinking how we could earn money with it. Because we are in an immense debt with our fans."

"I'm just happy. Just happy. It was so nice ... It was so great, it was really great," said fan Nadine Spichal, exiting the van parked outside a Berlin nightclub.



Kareena, Saif welcome baby boy



Bollywood star couple Kareena Kapoor Khan and Saif Ali Khan have become parents to their second child, a baby boy, on Sunday. Kareena, who was admitted to the Breach Candy Hospital here, gave birth around 9 am.

"She has delivered a baby boy in the morning around 9 am. I'll be visiting them soon," Kareena's father, veteran actor Randhir Kapoor told PTI. Kareena and Saif had announced the pregnancy in August, thanking well-wishers for their support.

"We are very pleased to announce that we are expecting an addition to our family! Thank you to all our well wishers for all their love and sup-

port," they said in a joint statement. Kareena, 40, delivered their first child, son Taimur Ali Khan on December 20, 2016. The toddler, now four years old, has been an Internet sensation ever since his birth and is followed by the paparazzi round-the-clock.

Back then, soon after the baby boy was named Taimur, people on social media had started questioning the origins of the name. Saif, 50, tied the knot with Kareena in October 2012 after a five-year courtship.

He was previously married to actor Amrita Singh, with whom he shares actor-daughter Sara Ali Khan (25) and son Ibrahim Ali Khan (19).

Aries:

Not all of us are fortunate enough to have a mentor who provides us with the right guidance and holds space for us to realise our highest potential. Recognise that what you have is truly a gift, Aries. Honour this connection in the way that it is meant to be. Trust that you are on the right track at this point of time in your life. Issues related to finances could be a concern for some of you, though. If you're unhappy with how much you're making, it's a good idea to talk to your boss about how you would like to be compensated.

Tip: Have that conversation about money you have been avoiding.

Taurus:

Strangers would say you're a manifestation maven, but you understand that everything works in accordance with the law of attraction; that the Universe responds to what we say and how we feel by sending our way certain experiences. Look around you, Taurus! Your life is a testimony to your co-creating abilities. So, continue to send them good vibes into the cosmos and watch the miracles unfold. PS: You are deserving of the love and abundance you are calling in right now.

Tip: Good vibes.

Gemini:

We all have an idea of how the people in our lives should and shouldn't be. Ideas that contribute to the burden of our expectations. Today, you're being asked to collect all of these expectations in a metaphorical box and offer them to the sacred fire. Once you have completed your ritual, approach your relationships from a space of love, compassion, and surrender. Be your most authentic self in every moment as you hold space for others to do just the same. Trust that the most challenging relationships will transform in the process.

Tip: Release the burden of expectations.

Cancer:

That life on the earthly realm is synonymous with suffering is not news to you, Cancer. But, how long are you going to hold onto the 'bad things happen to me' narrative? Today the cards are urging you to loosen up a little. To laugh and to be silly. What if tapping into your playful side is the secret to bringing about a magnificent shift?

Tip: Loosen up and be silly.

Leo:

Matters of the heart are taking centre stage, Leo. Your tribe is showing up for you in a whole new way. Allow yourself to feel the love, knowing that you deserve every bit of the goodness you have attracted into your Universe. Life may not be perfect, but it is flawless in

every way and you know that you'll get through this. On a side note, some of you may find yourself in a third party situation in the coming days. What you will realise in the process of dropping your inhibitions: we all need a little bit of salt in our relationships.

Tip: A third party situation could be on the cards.

Virgo:

Self-help author Stephen Richards writes, "No matter how small you start, always dream big." Just the words of wisdom you need to reflect upon. Today is a new day, Virgo. So take this opportunity to get up and show up for your dreams in a way you never have before. Remember, the mysterious forces are supporting this journey, and that everything you need in order to succeed will be provided to you at the right moment.

Tip: It's time to get up and show up, beloved.

Libra:

This is a wonderful time for Librans who are working in the field of publishing. You are experiencing a surge of new ideas, ideas that could change the course of your work for the better. So, curate a distraction-free environment for yourself as you become present to what's coming through from the unseen realms. A certain amount of discipline is required from you at this point.

Tip: Be present to the ideas that are coming through from

the unseen realms.

Scorpio:

What you're feeling right now is a sense of saturation, which isn't allowing you to think clearly. You need to step away from what you have been creating, right this minute. That's the only way to gain perspective. Some of you may be yearning to reconnect with yourselves. Word for the wise: throw that to-do list away for a while and focus on activities that help raise your vibrations.

Tip: Step away from what you are creating in order to gain perspective.

Sagittarius:

So what if you have been broken and bruised? So what if you have failed many times before? Beware of making this failure a part of your narrative, Sagittarius. The cards want you to fix your gaze on the given destination as you vow to move forward and onwards. You have mountains to move on this journey, and the time to start taking action is now.

Tip: Failure doesn't define you. Your will to move forward and onwards does.

Capricorn:

This is a beautiful time in the Capricorn HQ. You are not where you envisioned you would be, but you are on your way there. The destination requires a few sacrifices

from you, and that's okay. What you are focusing on right now is making practical decisions and putting your coins away. There's a big dream that will require financial investment on your part. It's best to be mindful of it at every stage.

Tip: Focus on putting your coins away for the future.

Aquarius:

A painful ending could be on the cards for some of you. Others could be mourning the loss of something or nursing a broken heart. Given the chaos that has unfolded recently, the old you would have lost all hope. But, the new you is embracing the virtues of optimism and realising the higher reason behind the seemingly unrelated events in your life. PS: Your guides are with you and their support will help you get through this.

Tip: Everything does indeed happen for a reason.

Pisces:

They say there are always three sides to every story: yours, theirs and the truth. So, don't get caught up in the illusion created by your ego self. Be receptive to what the others have to say as you actively work towards finding a middle ground. If you're playing mediator, practice deep listening. Make both sides feel seen and heard. As far as your decision is concerned, make sure it comes from a neutral space. Tip: Focus on finding a middle ground.