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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Daily cases cross 5 after more than a month

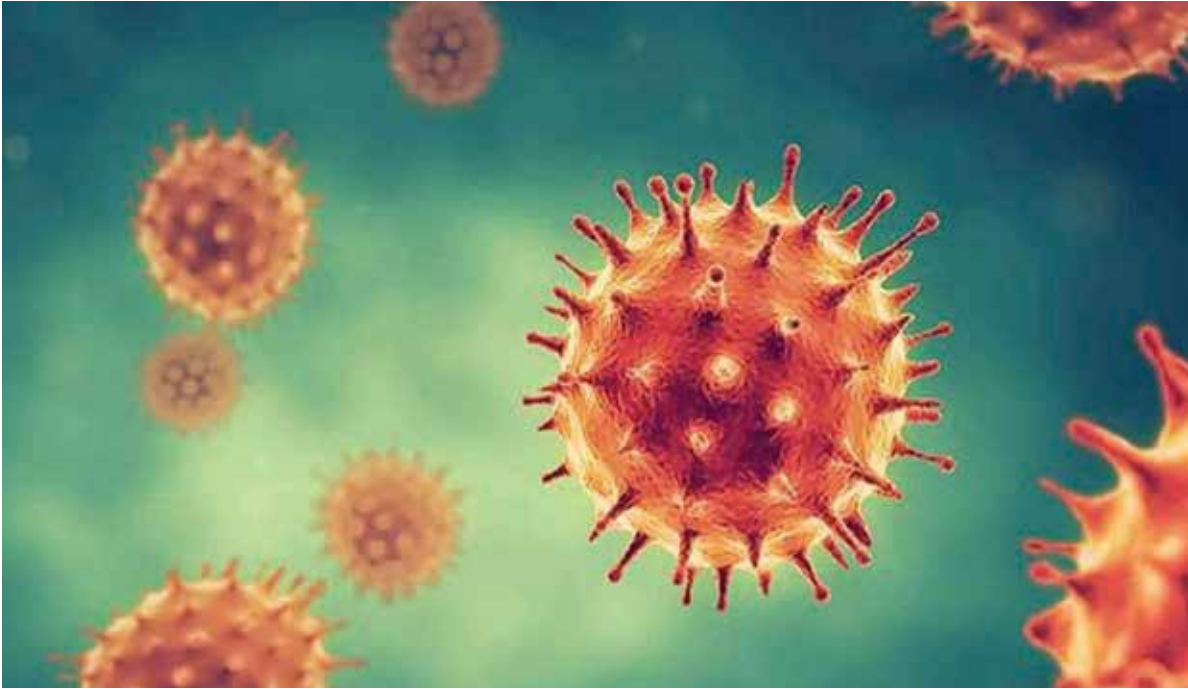
**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 FEB:**

After more than a month of daily COVID detections remaining below 5, Sikkim saw what now seems like a spike of 8 new cases being recorded in a day.

Of the eight new cases, three were reported in East District and five in South District to take the state tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far to 6145.

In the meantime, the state has witnessed six new recoveries on Saturday to improve the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim to 5867. There are currently 46 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State.

In his daily health bulletin on Sunday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia mentioned that



eight new cases were reported from the testing of 153 samples for COVID-19 on Saturday. He added that all eight cases were found in RT-PCR testing of 138 sam-

ples. Nine samples tested by TrueNat and six through rapid antigen testing returned negative for COVID-19.

While giving details of new cases reported in

the capital, he mentioned that two persons from SIB colony quarter, Vajra Area and one from Chandmari reported positive for COVID-19. Likewise, samples of one person from

Wok, two from Bhanjyang Road, Namchi, one from Tharpu, Namchi and one from Jorethang in South District were also found positive for COVID-19, Mr Bhutia said.

CoWIN registration for vaccine opens 9 AM tomorrow, what you need to know

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB [PTI]: A user manual for registration and appointment for COVID-19 vaccination has been shared by the government. The second phase of the vaccination campaign will start on Monday. "The exemplary groundwork and precaution advisory by the government has helped in containing the spread of the virus in our country," the centre said in the introduction to the user manual.

The registration on the CoWIN 2.0 portal will open at 9 am tomorrow, the government said. See cowin.gov.in for details. More than 10,000 private hospitals empanelled under Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY, more than 600 hospitals under the CGHS and other private hospitals empanelled under state schemes can function as vaccination centres. The latest announcement was

on private hospitals - they can charge up to ₹ 250 per dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

People above 60 and those over 45 with comorbidities will be inoculated from tomorrow in a vaccination drive that will run for six weeks.

The centre has specified 20 comorbidities among people between 45 and 59 years who will get the vaccine. For example, heart failure with hospital admission in the past year. The COVID-19 vaccine will be given for free at government hospitals, while people will need to pay for it at private facilities.

All private health facilities that will serve as the government's vaccination centres must follow strict norms of due process, quality and safety, including integration with the national CoWIN technology platform.



Plastic waste littered along the banks of Rong Chu at Singtam is an eyesore. [from Yogen Thatal]

Notice issued to 3 Nashik labs over high positivity rate of Covid tests

NASHIK, 28 FEB [PTI]: The district administration in Nashik has issued notices to three private labs in view of the high positivity rate of the COVID-19 tests carried out there, officials said on Sunday.

As per the notices issued on Saturday, one lab has been asked to stop conducting tests, another has been asked to get swab samples rechecked, while officials in Thane district have been intimated as the third lab is headquartered there, they added.

The number of COVID-19 cases in Nashik is on the rise over the past few days and a study carried out by local health officials found tests conducted in private labs were return-

ing positive in far larger numbers than the ones carried out in government facilities, they informed.

"An inquiry was ordered, and we found that seven of 16 people who tested positive in a private lab actually did not have the infection. We found positivity rate in government labs to be 7.8 per cent while it is between 18-20 per cent in these three private facilities," an official said.

One of the labs that has been pulled up later said in a press release that it has issued a "Rs 500 crore defamation notice" to the district collector "in his official and personal capacity", as well as the state chief secretary and health

secretary. "We have preserved all swab samples collected since January 2021 and requested the administration to get them rechecked by the NIV. If there will be no difference in the reports by the company in the rechecking by NIV, the collector should take responsibility and leave his post immediately," the private lab's release further added.

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They are selling their post, Chamling on SDF leaders joining SKM

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 FEB:**

Former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling has said that all leaders who have left SDF are selling the post and position they earned in the party.

He said this while responding to his weekly question-answer initiative, an SDF press release informs.

Responding to this week's question on why some leaders and workers leaving SDF will not have any real impact, Mr Chamling said that the state's longest serving party will grow into a better and stronger party with renewed energy.

Responding to the question on how the SDF party is going to keep its flock together and march ahead when so many leaders and workers are leaving the party to join the ruling party, Mr Chamling said, "As a senior politician, I have learnt that politics doesn't depend on a large number of leaders. Nor does it depend on self-proclaimed leaders and workers joining a party. We have seen them all. Ours was the party with the largest number of leaders and the largest number of workers joining our party even in the last election. But we lost the election despite all of that."

Those achievements also do not help politics and this has been a sad

realization, he added.

While explaining where SDF failed, Mr Chamling said, "We failed to realize that the SDF party was becoming more like a corporate house where many leaders and workers were coming for personal gain - jobs, business, contracts, tickets, posts, positions, etc. There were plenty of so-called leaders and workers who personalized gains and socialized losses. The party was filled with a large number of hypocrites. We were looking at the large multitude of leaders but we failed to see the hypocrites in that multitude who were with us for the sole objective of building their own homes by destroying the party."

He added that Sikkim politics needs leaders and people who are willing to struggle. He stated that in fact, the past election highlighted more the defeat of SDF and not the victory of the SKM.

People were compelled to vote for them because the SDF failed to see the party's internal problems and people wanted to support the SDF but they had seen hypocrites in the party who were behaving like saints in front of us and bullying people when they were in the field, said Mr Chamling.

"All those so-called leaders who have left the SDF are now selling their post and position that

they earned in the SDF. The former Ministers, former MLAs, former Chairperson, former this and former that - they are now merchandizing the names and titles that the SDF party gave them," Mr Chamling said.

They will leave the SKM party when it loses the election in the future, he added.

This is a time of political Great Depression in Sikkim, he said further adding that when the USA and then the world suffered the Great Depression in the 1930s, the then US President, Franklin Roosevelt had initiated a New Deal (1933-1939) to fight the economic recession.

"Sikkim is in need of a political New Deal and, believe me, the SDF will initiate that political New Deal. The SDF has lost the election but not the battle. We have lost votes to form the government but not the vision to build Sikkim. Many power-hungry political brokers have left the party but the soldiers of democracy are in the party," Mr Chamling said.

He alleged that many honest and sincere SDF supporters have also been misguided, intimidated and forced to join the ruling party by political brokers. "Mark my words, the SDF will come back stronger with renewed energy and strength. The best is yet to come," he adds.

Tamil Nadu extends lockdown till March 31, offices to stagger timings



CHENNAI, 28 FEB [NDTV]: Authorities have been directed to crack down on violations of these or any other Covid-related protocols. Police and municipal authorities have been further directed to ensure that measures in containment zones - which will now be demarcated at micro-levels - are strictly followed.

International travel, restrictions on which were yesterday extended by the DGCA, remains prohibited in the state, except for those related to essential services and permitted exceptions.

The state government has cautioned people over 65, those with co-morbidities, those who are pregnant, and children under the age of 10 to take all necessary and required precautions.

The state reported 486 new cases (and five deaths linked to the virus) over the past 24 hours, the Health Department said on Sunday night, placing it among the top five states on both

counts. Overall the state has reported more than 8.51 lakh cases - of which around 8.34 lakh are recoveries and around 12,000 are deaths - since the pandemic broke in December 2019.

The number of active cases is around the 4,000-mark.

Starting Monday the second phase of vaccination will begin in the state (and across the country), with people over the age of 60, and those over 45 but with co-morbidities, in line to get the shot.

The state is also preparing to hold Assembly elections, with voting for its 234 seats scheduled to take place in a single phase on April 6. The Union Territory of Puducherry, which is around 150 km from state capital Chennai, will vote for its 30 seats on the same day.

On Friday the Election Commission confirmed that polling officials in the state would be eligible for priority vaccination because they were categorised as frontline workers.

Kendriya Vidyalayas to begin online exams for classes 3 to 8 from Monday

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB [NDTV]: Kendriya Vidyalayas will be beginning final term examinations for Classes 3 to 8 in online mode from Monday.

It will also allow its students to appear for the exams in offline mode in case they do not have access to the required devices. The KV students had been asked to inform about the same to the school authorities in advance so that required arrangements can be made in advance.

The KV examinations will be conducted between March 1 to March 20 and the results will be declared on March 31.

For Classes 3 to 5 the final examinations will be of 40 marks out of which the Multiple Choice Questions or MCQs will be of 10 marks and descriptive and oral questions will be of 15 marks. The descriptive questions will be of one or two sentence answers.

For Classes 6 to 8 the exams will be of 80 marks and the question paper will have MCQs of 25 marks. Descriptive questions will be asked for a total of 40 marks, and oral questions will carry 15 marks. The descriptive questions will have to be answered in at least one paragraph or more.

Few schools have already started the oral examinations while others are expected to begin with them soon.

There will be at least four sets of question papers for each class. For every class, two or three different time slots will be planned to address the problem of limited devices and connectivity.

Further no detention will be done for students between Classes 3 and 8. Parents' consent will be required for the offline exams and these exams will have to be conducted in a staggered manner to ensure social distancing inside the classrooms.

The new academic sessions are scheduled to begin on April 1.

SKM Rhenock thanks Govt employees

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 28 FEB:

Rhenock CLC committee of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party held a 'Thanks giving cum Co-ordination Meeting' with government employees at Saramsa Garden near Ranipool today in appreciation of the contribution made by various sections of the government employees in the development of the state.

Area MLA Bishnu Kumar Khatiwada was the chief guest at the event which was attended by various government officials and employees working in various departments of Rhenock area. The MLA thanked everyone on behalf of the SKM party and the people of the area.

Talking to media later, MLA Khatiwada said that the purpose of organizing the Thanks giving cum Coordination Meeting today is



to encourage and energize the employees by thanking them for their contribution to the development of the state. Government employees have always contributed to the development of the state but their work has never been appreciated as the previous government had "suppressed" them for the

last 25 years, he alleged.

Due to the liberal policy of the SKM government led by Chief Minister, PS Tamang, government employees are also being honored for their contribution, said Mr Khatiwada.

Namcheybong MLA, Em Prasad Sharma, who made a special appearance at the event, gave

a short address and said that the initiative of Rhenock CLC to encourage government employees was exemplary. Similarly, Secretary of the Sports and Youth Affairs Department of the Sikkim Government, Raju Basnet thanked the organizers for the program.

Also present on the

occasion were Building & Housing Department Chairperson, Karma Tashi Bhutia, Sikkim State Consumer Cooperative Chairperson, Santosh Kumar Pradhan, SKM Publicity Secretary, Boom Tshering Yonzon and Nari Shakti State Level Committee Vice Chairperson, Prabha Pradhan.

NIT Sikkim hosts online workshop on Thermo-fluids

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 FEB:

Five-day online workshop titled "Recent Trends in Thermo-fluids" was organized by the Mechanical Engineering Department of NIT Sikkim from 22-26 Feb, a press release informs.

The program was inaugurated under the leadership of Prof. M.C. Govil, Director-NIT Sikkim, with a motive of creating an effective forum for exchange of innovative ideas and research works in the areas of Thermo-Fluids as well as their upcoming advancement.

The chief guest of the function was Prof. Rajat Guptam Director NIT Mizoram. The first lecture of the workshop was attended by distinguished speaker Prof. Suman Chakraborty, IIT Kharagpur on Microfluidics for Medical Diagnostics where he intro-

duced the less-expensive medical test techniques and RTPC machine for COVID.

This was followed by the lectures of Prof. R. Gupta, Director, NIT Mizoram; Prof. S.D. Shamra, IIT Bombay; Dr. S. Mondal, NIT Durgapur; Dr. P.S. Mahapatra, IIT Madras; Dr. S. Sett, IIT Gandhinagar; Prof. A. Dalal, IIT Guwahati; Prof. S. Basu, IISc Bangalore; Prof. B.K. Mandal, IIST Shibpur; Prof. S. Sen, Jadavpur University; Dr. S. Chatterjee, Education Technical Evangelist, MathWorks.

The workshop ended with an elite panel discussion and valedictory session on 26 Feb.

Faculty and students alike participated in the event. The workshop was convened by Dr. Ranjan Basak and coordinated by Dr. Shambhunath Barman of ME Department, NIT Sikkim.

Centre turned farming, education into financial commodities: Rahul Gandhi

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB [NDTV]: In a renewed attack on the Centre, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said that the Centre has turned noble professions like farming, education and healthcare into financial commodities.

During an interaction titled "Educators Meet" at Tirunelveli's St Xavier College, Mr Gandhi said, "I personally do not believe that education is a financial commodity. I believe that education should be available to everyone."

Mr Gandhi, who is touring Tamil Nadu for the second day as part of his campaign for the April 6 assembly polls, hit out at the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-led union government and said, "It is the duty of a nation to give education and healthcare to its people. What is happening here is that everything is being seen as a financial commodity," he remarked.

"Agriculture is being seen as a financial

commodity, education is being seen as a financial commodity, healthcare is being seen as a financial commodity. Basically, if you have money, you can get anything. If you do not have money, you get nothing," the Congress leader said.

Mr Gandhi also took to Twitter to slam the Central government.

"GOI has turned noble professions like farming, education and healthcare into financial commodities for the benefit of a few cronies. We're fighting this without any anger, hatred or violence. And non-violence always wins," he tweeted.

The Tamil Nadu assembly elections will be held in a single phase on April 6 and the counting of votes will take place on May 2.

The ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) is contesting the polls in a pre-poll alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). MK Stalin's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has joined hands with the Congress.

National Science Day celebrated at Chujachen SSS



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 FEB:

Chujachen Senior Secondary School observed National Science Day with a science exhibition on 26 Feb, a press release informs.

Chairman of OBC Board, Nirpath Gurung along with Principal CSSS, Jag Maya Chettri kick started the program. Five schools from the vi-

cinity were invited, students from Lokdara, Posakay, Gyangyap, Rongli, Rolep and Chujachen exhibited scientific models made by them.

The main motive behind this programme was to generate scientific temper among the students so even primary students from feeder schools were invited to participate, the release

mentions. Students were also taken to Atal Tinkering Lab.

Ms Chettri stated that programs like these act as a launch pad for future researchers and scientists.

Mr. Gurung briefly addressed everyone present in the program where he encouraged and congratulated everyone. The program ended after the prize distribution.

Ecuador health minister steps down over COVID vaccine roll-out

ECUADOR, 28 FEB [ALJAZEERA]: Ecuador's health minister has stepped down after criticism over the distribution plan of COVID-19 vaccines, the latest vaccination-related scandal to roil governments in South America.

Juan Carlos Zevallos tendered his resignation on Friday after claims of irregularities in a pilot programme for vaccinations that the government has been carrying out since January.

Zevallos is under investigation by state prosecutors for mishandling the roll-out after he participated in an inoculation effort at a nursing home where his mother lives.

"Given the current political situation, and in order to allow the continuity of the National Vaccination Plan, I present to you, Mr. President, the irrevocable resignation of [my] functions of Minister of Health," Zevallos said in a letter that President Lenin Moreno shared on Twitter.

"There are those who only see mistakes. I respect that opinion. I pre-



fer to remember the minister who accepted the difficult task of leading the country's response to the worst health crisis that Ecuador and the world has experienced, [the minister] who helped save hundreds of thousands of lives with work and sacrifice," Moreno tweeted.

The National Assembly had discussed impeaching Zevallos for "poor handling of the pandemic and a poor vaccination process".

Ecuador has reported nearly 252,000 COVID-19 cases and more than 15,700 coronavirus-related deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University data – and the pandemic has worsened an already dire economic crisis in the country, spurring public anger. Government officials in Argentina and Peru

have also stepped down in recent weeks after reports surfaced about COVID-19 vaccine queue-jumping in both countries.

Argentina's Health Minister Gines Gonzalez Garcia resigned last week after he was accused of allowing people to sidestep the proper procedure to get jobs.

"Gines was a great minister, and on top of that, I like him. But what he did was unforgivable," President Alberto Fernandez said in an interview with the Pagina 12 daily after the minister handed in his resignation.

In Peru, the country's health and foreign ministers resigned, among others, after it was revealed almost 500 government officials secretly received COVID-19 jabs before the vaccines were available to the public.

Nepal needs strategy, robust trade deals to graduate from poor club, experts say

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, 28 FEB

[KATHMANDUPOST]: After being labelled a least developed country, an euphemism for being one of the poorest countries in the world, for 50 years, Nepal may by 2026 climb a notch and be officially recognised as a developing country.

The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP), following a four-day review that ended on Friday, recommended Nepal's graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category with a preparatory period of five years, according to a statement issued by Nepal's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York on Friday.

Nepal has met the criteria for graduation for three consecutive reviews based on two of the three set categories.

Nepal has met the criteria threshold of the Human Assets Index (HAI) and the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI) but not that of the gross national income (GNI), the statement said.

The promotion is not, however, a done deal and Nepal has the five-year preparatory period.

In order to make this recommendation irreversible during the review after three years, Nepal has to meet several challenges to make the economy stable and, first and foremost, chart out a national level strategy to this end, say experts and diplomats.

"This is an opportunity for Nepal and challenges remain but it should not delay in charting out a national strategy on how to graduate in five years," said Gyan Chandra Acharya, former UN under secretary-general and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS). "We should work on structural reforms to meet the criteria." In particular as Nepal is set to lose donor support and this has to be offset by income through trade.

While Nepal scored 72.1 in the Human Assets Index, the threshold being above 66 and 25.5 in the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index, the threshold being below 32, in the Gross National Income Nepal's was \$1027 while the threshold is \$1230.

The government is, however, planning to announce \$1400 as the gross national income on the basis of revised indices, according to Kewal Prasad Bhandari, secretary at the National Planning Commission. Since Nepal will lose the economic support given to least developed countries once it graduates, preparations need to be made so that it does not suffer economically, experts said.

"Nepal should start immediate negotiations with the EU, India, China, Japan and other countries so that our trade

will not be hampered," said Acharya.

Nepal had earlier too requested for the graduation in 2015 and 2017 but later rolled back the decisions. The Sushil Koirala government had decided to backtrack on seeking gradual graduation from the least developed country category after the 2015 earthquake.

Again in January 2018, the National Planning Commission asked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to take a decision to seek graduation in 2021 only after meeting robust and sustainable economic development and respectable average per capita income though Nepal had met the criteria.

Then Nepal had set the target to become a middle-income country by 2030.

But with Friday's decision the graduation of Nepal will be effective in 2026 after the preparatory period ends. Due to the circumstances of Covid-19 pandemic, the three years of normal preparatory period has been expanded to five years.

Although it is good for Nepal's standing on the world stage and its confidence to graduate from the least developed country category, it could lose some multilateral funds and opportunities although it will continue to get the support till 2026.

But with the right strategy and planning during these five years, Nepal should not lose much, according to experts.

"LDCs are getting huge concessions on doing trade and once we graduate, we will lose the concession. Therefore, we have to begin negotiations now with major trading countries," said Acharya. "We also have to hold talks with major donors like India, China, the US, Japan and others to seek more help to meet the threshold from graduation so that we can easily take off."

There are other concerns. Nepal is the fourth most vulnerable country to climate change in the world and mitigation efforts need to be addressed, according to Acharya.

"The situation of multi-dimensional poverty is not improving. The cost of doing business is high," said Acharya, the former foreign secretary who served as UN under secretary general from 2010 to 2017.

Whether Nepal will be able to meet the challenges of graduation remains to be seen.

A report released by the National Planning Commission, the focal agency to prepare the country strategy for the graduation, in December last year had stated that Nepal also needs to conduct a fresh review of the scheduled graduation plan considering the impact Covid-19 pandemic.

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CRH provides free health check-ups to Children's Homes

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 FEB:**

Central Referral Hospital (CRH), under Sikkim Manipal University (SMU) provided free health check-up to the students of Kalyan Ashram, Ranipool and Child Care Institute, Bojoghari on Saturday, a press release informs.

The students undergoing this multispecialty health checkup were aged between 5 to 15 years old. A thorough health check of the students was done, including a series of required investigations and consultations like Pediatrics,



Child Care Institute, Bojoghari



Kalyan Ashram, Ranipool



Mamtalaya, ASHI, Gangtok

Orthopedics. Dental, etc. During the health check

CRH provided free diet to the students. Post

screening they were released from hospital.

Being the multi-specialty state-of-the-art Teaching Hospital in the state and the region, Central Referral Hospital has been of service to the people of Sikkim from all socioeconomic strata, the release states. To cater to the sick it runs a multitude of schemes like the Concessional Bed Scheme where the unaffordable and those who are not eligible under any government schemes their out of pocket expenditure is limited to 20% of the cost in general specialties, the release further adds.

'Make in India' lion statue, new attraction in Bengaluru



BENGALURU, FEB 28 (PTI): The 'Make in India' lion statue inaugurated by Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Saturday has turned out to be the new attraction in the city, as passersby were seen catching its glimpse and clicking its pictures.

The city civic body-the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP)-has installed the statue of the roaring lion at Windsor Square, which is close to the Chief Minister's official residence.

The statue, which weighs over 1,000 kg, is

made from fibre-reinforced plastic, is 23 feet long, 4.5 feet wide, and 10 feet high.

It is placed on a platform which rotates, officials said, adding that it will take nearly eight minutes for one complete rotation.

Sculpted at Ghaziabad near Delhi the statue and the overall cost of the project that included beautified Windsor Square is Rs 1 crore, officials said.

BBMP Commissioner N Manjunath Prasad said, Chief Minister Yediyurappa was the driving force behind the state.

District Neighbourhood Youth Parliament held in Namchi



NAMCHI, 28 FEB [IPR]: A day long District Neighbourhood Youth Parliament was held at Officer's Club, Namchi, today. The Parliament was jointly organized by (South, SJ&WD) District Child Protection Unit and Nehru Yuva Kendra, Namchi.

The child Parliament

tarians discussed, debated and deliberated on the topic "Youth Entrepreneurship" and the session was presided by the Speaker along with the opposition and ruling Member of Parliaments debating on the subject.

The programme was attended by Chairper-

son, Sikkim Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Rama Tamang as the chief guest, District Magistrate (South), M. Bharani as the guest of honor, DCPO West, Panchayat President of Lungchok Kameray and Panchayat of Barfung-Jarong as SPECIAL GUESTS.

India launches Brazil's Amazonia-1, 18 other satellites

SRIHARIKOTA (AP), FEB 28 (PTI): In the first dedicated mission of its commercial arm NSIL, the ISRO on Sunday successfully launched Brazil's earth observation satellite Amazonia-1 and 18 co-passengers, including five built by students, onboard a Polar rocket from the spaceport here.

The satellites were placed in precise orbits one after another after the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle PSLV-C51 lifted off at 10.24 am from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SHAR), in the first mission this year for the Indian Space Research Organisation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated ISRO on the success of the first dedicated commercial launch mission of PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1, saying it ushers in a new era of space reforms in the country.

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao also lauded ISRO, whose tally of foreign satellites launched rose to 342 with today's mission.

The co-passengers included Satish Dhawan Satellite (SD-SAT) nano satellite from Chennai-based Space Kidz India (SKI) which is engraved with a picture of Modi and also carried Bhagavad Gita in a Secured Digital card format.

According to SKI, the picture of Modi has been engraved on the top panel of the spacecraft to show solidarity and gratitude for his Atma Nirbhar initiative and space sector reforms.

Of the five built by students, the SD-SAT is intended to study radiation levels among others, while UNITYsat, a three-in-one satellite by universities, is for providing radio relay service and SindhuNetra developed by Bengaluru-based PES Universi-

ty would be used for identifying suspicious ships through satellite imaging, officials said.

Amazonia-1, a fully Brazil built satellite with a mission life of four years, is intended for providing remote sensing data to users for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon region and analysis of diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory.

SKI said besides the picture of Modi, it was also sending 25,000 names on-board the SD-SAT.

"Congratulations to NSIL (NewSpace India Limited) and @isro on the success of the 1st dedicated commercial launch of PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 Mission. This ushers in a new era of space reforms in the country," Modi tweeted.

The prime minister also congratulated Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro on the successful launch of Amazonia-1, and said this is a historic moment in space cooperation between the two countries.

Earlier, at the end of the 25.5 hour countdown, the four-stage 44.4 metre tall PSLV, a workhorse launch vehicle of ISRO in its 53rd mission, soared into clear a sky at the scheduled time of 10.24 am from the first launch pad here, over 100 kms from Chennai.

"After a flight of about 17 minutes, the vehicle injected the Amazonia-1 into its intended orbit and in the succeeding 1 hour 38 minutes, all 18 co-passenger satellites successfully separated from the PSLV in a pre-determined sequence," the ISRO said.

Describing it as a special mission for the country, ISRO Chairman K Sivan said the agency guided the universities in building the satellites, adding it will enthuse industry and

academic institutions to build their own satellites in future.

Sivan, also the secretary, Department of Space, said the mission was also special as the five satellites come under the new space reforms announced by the Union Government last year.

The Centre has decided to open up the space sector to private enterprises to carry out space activities like building rockets, satellites and providing launch services.

Sunday's mission was also the first dedicated launch by the New Space India Limited (NSIL), a PSU set up under the Department of Space in 2019, which undertook it under a commercial arrangement with Spaceflight Inc, a satellite ride-share and mission management provider based in Seattle, US.

The co-passenger satellites placed in the orbit are -- four from ISRO's Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) and 14 from NSIL, including 13 from the USA.

Brazilian Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation Marcos Pontes, who witnessed the launch here, said this was the beginning of a stronger relationship between his country and India.

Appreciating ISRO for the successful launch, he said, India and Brazil would work together a lot.

"...I am talking here on behalf of the Brazilian government. We are going to work together and we are going to win together," he said, speaking at the mission control centre here.

Sivan said: "Today is a very great day for the entire ISRO team and the PSLV-C51 is a special mission for India. Let

Junior Olympic Games concludes at Sumbuk



**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 28 FEB:**

Block Level 1st Inter School Junior Olympic Games held in Melidara Senior Secondary School, Sumbuk Block, South Sikkim under the banner of 'Sports For Peace and Development' concluded today.

The 4-day event was organized by the South district Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, Government of Sikkim with the support of Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India.

The event had started on 25 Feb and saw 11 schools from Sumbuk BAC with 395 under-14 and under-17 participants from primary, ju-

nior high, secondary and senior secondary schools from the BAC.

The selected young talents get to participate in the district level and state level game to be held later this year. The sportspersons selected in state level will then take part in national level sports tournament of 'Khelo India 2021-22'.

The Olympic Games for under-17 and under-14 boys and girls categories were held in the disciplines of athletic, archery, boxing, football, table tennis, taekwondo, badminton and karate.

The panchayats of Sumbuk BAC, SKM sports Wing Executive members, teachers of schools

from Sumbuk and Sumbuk BAC Sporting Club executive Members were present to witness the event.

On the concluding day of this event, football match was organized wherein Sadam Senior Secondary School defeated Sumbuk Senior Secondary School in penalty shoot-out (4-3) in the under 14 boys category.

In under 17 girls, Melligumpa Senior Secondary School defeated Sumbuk Senior Secondary School with a score of 2-0, and in under 17 boys football match Melligumpa Senior Secondary School defeated Melli Bazaar Senior Secondary School by 2-0.

Odisha to host Indian Women's League this year

New Delhi, Feb 28 (PTI): Odisha will host the 2020-2021 Hero Indian Women's League, the All India Football Federation said on Sunday.

The dates for the tournament are yet to be finalised and will be announced soon, the football body added.

AIFF president Praful Patel thanked the Odisha government for agreeing to play host to the event.

"The government of Odisha has been a great supporter of Indian football. We are very thankful to Shri Naveen Patnaik ji, Mr Vishal Kumar Dev, Mr Vineel Krishna and the entire sports department of Odisha for extending all the support and help to organise the Hero Indian Women's League," Patel said in a statement.

"Over the years, the tournament has pro-

vided the platform for a lot of budding women footballers to show-case their talent and provide them the option of taking up football as a career."

The AIFF further stated that it "stays committed to the development of women's football in the country."

India are scheduled to host the AFC Women's Asian Cup in 2022 which will be followed by the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2022.

The AIFF, thus, is hoping to utilise the event to scout and unearth new talent for the women's national team.

Odisha sports minister Tushar Kanti Behera said, "Holistic development of sports in India, and Indian football in particular is Odisha sports' vision. Odisha has been synonymous with women's football in In-

dia for long. "I am an ardent supporter of women empowerment, and the hosting of the Indian Women's League in Odisha allows us the opportunity to contribute to the development of women's football in the country along with the All India Football Federation."

Odisha principal secretary, Sports and Youth Services Department, Vishal Kumar Dev added: "Hosting the 2020-21 edition of the Indian Women's League will be another feather in the cap of Odisha sports. Under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Odisha has turned into the biggest sporting hub in our country.

"I am sure the IWL will lead to tremendous excitement amongst the football aficionados of the state.

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Rally Faith for Suicide Prevention

Leverage Faith to save those who have lost hope

This space has spoken often about the problem of suicides and of how it remains largely un-addressed by agencies and organizations which should get more involved. Today, we return with some more on the same problem. The fact that suicides are a problem for Sikkim is universally recognized; no one denies it, and even politicians, despite their shallow analysis of the suicide situation, have already dropped comments on the disturbing signals being conveyed by the number of suicides that take place in Sikkim. The pandemic was not easy on minds already compromised by medical conditions like depression, and although some efforts were initially made to reach out to those whom Covid had made more vulnerable than just the physical impairment that Novel Coronavirus causes, the initiative and its impact remains largely unknown. While newspapers have also realized the worrisome challenge of suicides and report on suicide cases not just to fill news-space, but also to inform readers of a continuing affliction of the social fabric here, the problem made worse by the pandemic has not been adequately analysed or reported.

It is important to bear in mind that while social situations and psychological health can conspire to lead to suicides, the decision to end one's own life is a very private one.

Awareness camps and suicide prevention workshops contribute to the battle against suicides, but an ally which could reinforce suicide prevention initiatives has unfortunately still not stepped up to its responsibility towards Sikkim. Religion, because it is, like suicides a private affair and can touch individuals with a healing touch that largely impersonal workshops and generic awareness camps cannot, should play a more proactive role in saving lives that are otherwise being avoidably expended. Yes, the pandemic saw places of worship shut their doors to the devout for fear of congregations becoming super-spreader events, and while such a move was required, it has also been noticed that this also disconnected people from the centres of their faith at a time when alternatives should have been considered to keep them more attended to. Apps like Zoom were leveraged to keep connections alive, but look around, which religious leaders apart from those from Christianity used this option?

A person with suicidal tendencies is almost always one who has shut the world away, but because Faith is also a private affair becomes impossible to ignore even for those teetering on the brink. Religion, since it also carries, in most cases, a deeper and more intimate influence, becomes the only medium with access to a troubled soul when all other interventions have failed. Shouldn't it then be more involved in combating suicides?

Shouldn't the religious practitioners and leaders take some time out from their obsessive pursuit of rituals and displays to address some real issues of living and the still alive? People turn to religion for answers and turn to religious masters to guide them along the way. This casts the perfect foil for religious leaders to become counselors who wean the troubled minds away from suicidal tendencies and towards medical aid and religious succour. Sikkim is a State of very religious people who are also very skeptical of government and NGO-driven programmes. Because lives need to be saved, it would be advisable if the policy makers worked out a way by which religion could be invited to join the initiatives to contain suicides in Sikkim.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Time, Like Memory, is Fickle: Days Wrap Back on Themselves

GRACE LINDENIS
psyche.co

"Today I wondered What is the worth of a day? Once, a day was long. It was bright and then it wasn't, meals happened, and school happened, and sports practice, maybe, happened, and two days from this day there would be a test, or an English paper would be due, or there would be a party for which I'd been waiting, it would seem, for years. Days were ages. Love bloomed and died in a day."

So writes Heidi Julavits in *The Folded Clock: A Diary* (2015), a looping, enveloping memoir in which, as with much of life, both a lot and also very little takes place.

Like many people, like me, Julavits kept a diary when she was young. She grew up believing that in those pages lay the signs of her preternatural talent. But when she returned to the scribbled booklets many decades later, she discovered that mostly her writing was unimaginative, boring. She'd recorded her test scores, the boys she found cute, TV shows she'd watched. Her diary was notable solely because she wrote in it every day.

Recalling the formulation she had used as a child, the entries in *The Folded Clock* each begin in the today: "Today I had a dinner party." "Today my husband and I cleaned out our storage space." "Today I swam out to sea with a stranger."

Julavits gossips with friends, takes the bus, visits antique stores. Hers is a lovely, lucky life, marked by summers in Maine and residencies in Italy and Germany. But it is also a life like every other, in which very rarely do individual moments seem momentous as they happen.

A distrust of an objective reality runs throughout Julavits's writing. The selves she has conjured over several novels and works of nonfiction mutate and mutiny, sensations that Julavits, too, has perceived in her own body. Indeed, it was after receiving a medical misdiagnosis that she began keeping an adult diary. As she explained to an interviewer:

"I don't want to get too deep or morbid, but I suddenly became aware of my body as an unreliable container. There's always a great distance between the internal and the external selves, but this distance, when I was in pain, seemed scarily unbridgeable."

Time is the subject of *The Folded Clock*, but in Julavits's hands it is made pliable. Her clock is defined by echoes and returns that wrap back upon themselves: 16 November comes after 7 September but before 5 August. While structurally fickle, this is how memory operates: people circle in and out, objects serve minor, then major roles; there are acts and reprises and second chances. The experience of time is hardly ever chronological.

In illness especially, time can take on new forms. "It was no longer linear," writes Julavits. "I did not see time ahead of me. I experienced time on top of me. I experienced time underneath me. Time became a hollow, vertical enclosure." She suffered from 'plummet[s] in time altitude' in which moments in her life seemed to speed up or recede. Her days became asynchronous.

The *Folded Clock* was published in 2015, but Julavits's 'drops' could easily describe 2020. Only now, such plummets are more an anaesthetising, interminable ooze than the vertigo that Julavits described. The COVID-19 pandemic has wrung mean-

ing from time. Each day is so like the former. April disappeared entirely; Thanksgiving feels as close, or faraway, as last June. I no longer can keep track of the dates; time has become a pool of standing water.

At this time, what the Greeks termed Kairos, designating the correct or auspicious moment (as opposed to Chronos, which refers to sequential time, or Aion, which denotes the ages or cyclical time) feels very out of reach. Even so, there is no singular clock, no one 'time organ,' as the psychologist Robert Ornstein put it, to which we all adhere. Instead, our temporal perspectives are cultural (one friend tells me that she sees a year in the shape of a sea cucumber, and a lifetime as vast and unknowable as the ocean floor), and physiological. As neurobiologists have shown, how quickly or how slowly we feel time passing fluctuates wildly for each of us, its pace, according to researchers at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, linked to the formation or lack of new memories and the flow of new experiences. Time is ruled entirely by one's own sense of being, by hunger and humiliation, by love-sickness and dread and delight. The metrics cannot be severed from the rhythms of a life.

In his novel *Austerlitz* (2001), WG Sebald's titular character finds the cultural segmentation of



time almost incomprehensible:

"And is not human life in many parts of the earth governed to this day less by time than by the weather, and thus by an unquantifiable dimension which disregards linear regularity, does not progress constantly forward but moves in eddies, is marked by episodes of congestion and irruption, recurs in ever-changing form, and evolves in no one knows what direction?"

Time, as he sees it, is always in flux. It is as uncontrollable as the wind. For Austerlitz, who allows himself to learn the fate of his family during the Holocaust only as an adult, this awareness is a crippling, debilitating force that bears down upon his body: this temporal vortex is entirely autobiographical, and serves as a reminder of all that he has lost.

During these lockdown cycles, especially in the darkness of winter gloom when evenings stretch on endlessly, I've found duration to be incalculable. I read, I put the book down, I pick it up again, I stop. Time lags. Time sags. Politicians repeat their assurances that we will defeat this virus, but a lethargy directs the days, making them melt together. To anchor myself, I reach for things that took place decades and centuries ago. I read about Albert Kahn, the 19th-century French banker who, afraid of losing the world he knew to industrialisation, tried to inventory the whole of humanity. He created an archive of more than 72,000 images in his efforts to stave off a disappearance – a collection that, un-

surprisingly, was never completed. Much of what Kahn saw no longer exists, or no longer exists in the way that he saw it, and I imagine him in his last years leafing through the images, bathed in what he believed to be the truth of the world.

"Today I went to the Grand Central Station Oyster Bar at midday," writes Julavits, at the close of her book: "I was feeling lost and this bar is like a church." Beneath the vaulted ceilings, she sips a restorative drink then wanders down Park Avenue where she spots Le Relais de Venise, a restaurant that summons a memory of a long-ago semester she spent in France. Suddenly, it is 20 years earlier; then just as suddenly, it is 10 months in the future, and she is in Rome with her children.

For Julavits, all time is autobiographical. Like Marcel Proust's madeleine, one bite of which plunges the narrator back to his childhood, her sense of time seems as much governed by the sun rising and setting as it is by a series of objects. Regularly, Julavits is struck by the transformative potential of certain items: an enamel tap handle, a second-hand necklace, a Rolodex fished out of a trashcan at JFK. She holds on to these until their true purpose is unveiled. Part of her captivation comes from her failure to fully 'possess' these objects. Their everydayness renders them magical. Their purpose is simply to endure.

Some things overtly suggest their timeliness – photographs and films being obvious examples. But we put a false faith in such images, believing that they can show us the world as it truly was, when, in fact, the final product is just one translation, and at a remove at that. Perhaps a more useful analogy is the Rolodex, which, like a clock, says Julavits, 'runs forward and backward. There's an order but there's no predetermined point of entry.' As a result, autobiographical sincerity has many forms. As the literary scholar Paula Backscheider argues in *Reflections on Biography* (1999): 'Biography is more interesting today because of the acknowledgement that the portrayal of an individual is not the only possible one.'

Like a lifetime or a story, Julavits's objects persist; they exist and then eventually become. Until then, she lugs them around, totemically, the things onto which she projects her life. These objects inhabit the present perfect, a reverberation which has yet to be concluded. Their timestamp might be more hidden, but it is no less forceful.

Today it is my birthday, and we are going to the National Gallery in London, which has just reopened. Because of the pandemic, the museum has set out specific pathways through its permanent collection. Scanning the map in the entrance queue, we select route B for the Caravaggios, though that means that I will miss Edouard Vuillard's La Terrasse at Vasouy, The Lunch with its incandescent whites. I take photographs of gilded frames and of Dutch men sporting ruffs. I could live 100 lives through the painted portraits stored on my phone.

Each birthday acknowledges the revolution of the wheel; who is to say that the year must begin on 1 January? Last year, I went swimming in the Ladies' Pond, on Hampstead Heath in London, to celebrate, and I will go again later this year too. My new year has begun, but all around me the same one drags slowly on. In Confessions 11:21, Saint Augustine asks: 'In what space then do we measure time passing?' But Augustine, I have no idea anymore.

Napping in the afternoon can improve memory and alertness – here's why

JOHN AXELSSON & TINA SUNDELIN
theconversation.com

Some people swear by an afternoon nap – whether it's to catch up on lost sleep or to help them feel more alert for the afternoon ahead. Even Boris Johnson supposedly favours a power nap during his work day (though the prime minister's staffers contest this claim). Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein, and Leonardo Da Vinci were all famous nappers.

But while many of us may not feel we usually have enough time to squeeze a nap into our day, working from home during the pandemic may now afford us an opportunity to give napping a try.

Napping is a great way to feel more rested and alert – and some research shows it can benefit our cognitive function. However, you may want to consider how long you have to sleep before heading to bed for your midday nap.

If you need to be alert right after waking up (for example, if you're catching a few extra minutes of sleep during your lunch break), so-called "power naps" of 10-30 minutes are recommended. Longer naps may cause some initial drowsiness – though they keep sleepiness at bay longer. But drinking coffee directly before a nap may help you wake up without feeling drowsy while also boosting your alertness.

While short naps are great for increasing energy, longer naps are both more restorative and beneficial for learning. For example, they improve activation of the hippocampus – an area of the brain important for learning and memory. A one to two hour afternoon nap is shown to benefit both your motor skills and your ability to recall facts and events.

A recent study from China has even suggested that regular afternoon napping is linked to better cognitive function in older adults. The researchers asked 2,200 over-70s about their napping habits before having them undergo a series of cognitive tests which measured things like memory and language skills. They found that those who usually napped were less likely to have cognitive impairments than those who didn't. This was true regardless of age or level of education.

But nap length may play a role here – a similar study showed that those who usually napped for 30-90 minutes had better overall cognition compared to those who napped for longer or shorter, or who didn't nap at all.

Why naps work

The reasons why short naps are so beneficial for alertness and focus are not well understood. It's possible that napping helps the brain clean up sleep-inducing waste products that would otherwise inhibit brain activity, and that they replenish the brain's

energy stores. Short naps may also help improve your attention by letting particularly sleepy areas of the brain recover, thereby preventing instability in the brain's networks.

Longer naps are more restorative, but you may feel more drowsy after waking up. Dusan Petkovic/ Shutterstock

Longer naps, on the other hand, are more restorative partly because there is time to enter multiple sleep stages, each of which supports different learning processes. For example, during REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, the brain is almost as active as when awake. This activity in different brain regions – including those important for learning and memory – may be why REM sleep supports both long-term memory and emotional memory.

During REM sleep in particular, the brain strengthens newly developed connections that are important for improvements in motor skills. Longer sleep also reduces unimportant connections, and this balance can improve how quickly and effectively the brain works as a whole.

Non-REM sleep – the sleep stage we spend most of our time in – contains both slow brain waves and sleep spindles. The sleep spindles are periodic burst-like signals between different brain areas, which are believed to reactivate and consolidate memories. Both the slow brain waves

and the spindles increases plasticity – the brain's ability to learn and adapt to new experiences.

Although napping has many positive short-term effects, they are not recommended for people who suffer from insomnia. Because naps decrease sleepiness, they may make it harder to fall asleep when going to bed in the evening. Naps should also be avoided in situations where optimal performance are needed instantly afterwards, as it may take some time to fully wake up.

Other research has shown that frequent napping was related to high BMI and high blood pressure. Napping was more common in shift workers, retired people, and smokers, and in people with genes related to sleep disorders or obesity. To what degree napping was harmful or beneficial for these groups remains unknown, but it's clear that napping is more common in groups who have disturbed sleep or need more sleep.

If you're finding that your attention span is wavering in the afternoon while working from home, perhaps try squeezing a nap into your lunch break. Short naps are great at improving alertness and attention – and if you have time for a longer nap, this can support memory and learning.

[John Axelsson is Professor, Clinical Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet; Tina Sundelin is Research fellow in Psychology, Stockholm University]

Bengal needs development-oriented govt, not copycat of TMC, BJP: Surya Kanta Mishra

KOLKATA, FEB 28 (PTI): Criticising the "communal agenda" of the TMC and the BJP, West Bengal CPI(M) secretary Surya Kanta Mishra Sunday stressed the need for an alternative and said the Left-Congress grand alliance will fight to provide employment and usher in industrial development in the state.

Addressing a mega rally at the Brigade Parade Ground here, Mishra accused the ruling TMC and the opposition BJP of dividing people on "communal lines" to serve their political interests, and said, West Bengal needs a government that will not be a "copycat" of those run by the TMC and the BJP.

"Both the TMC and the BJP are two sides of the same coin. Their agenda is to divide people on communal lines and rule the masses. We have seen how TMC leaders are joining the BJP lock, stock and barrel. Except for the chief minister and some of her leaders, the rest have switched over to the BJP.

Both the TMC and the BJP now stand unmasked," he said.

The state needs a government that can take up industrialisation and generate employment, the CPI(M) leader said.

"We need a government which can fill up all the vacancies in state government jobs and semi-government sectors within a year. Neither the TMC nor the BJP can do it. Only the Left and secular forces are capable of it," he said.

Claiming that the TMC has "stifled" the democratic space in the state during its 10-year rule, Mishra said, "The upcoming assembly election is about restoring democracy, and unity among the people".

"There will be an effort to divert attention from today's meeting by engineering other incidents after the rally is over. But please don't get swayed away. When there was an attack on the livelihood of the common man, then a war of words was going on between the TMC and the BJP," the CPI(M) leader said.

"Minorities, backwards, scheduled castes and tribes are being divided on caste and communal lines practised by both the forces," he said.

Reaching out to the people of the hills in north Bengal and Jangalmahal region in the south, Mishra said, there is a need to protect the identity of indigenous people residing in these places.

The forested areas of West Midnapore, Jhargram, Bankura and Purulia districts in the southern part of the state forms Jangalmahal.

On TMC poll slogan- "Bangla Nijer Meyekai Chaye" portraying Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as its mascot, RSP general secretary Manoj Bhattacharya said, "Bengal wants to get rid of dictatorship, and the grand alliance will fight for it."

When Stalin's daughter defected from India!

ZAFRI MUDASSER NOFIL
NEW DELHI, FEB 28 (PTI): Former American ambassador to India Richard Celeste has come out with his memoir in which he shares many interesting facts including the sensational defection of Joseph Stalin's daughter Svetlana from India on a US visa.

Celeste, who served as ambassador from 1997 to 2001 when Bill Clinton was president, first came to India in the 1960s as an assistant to the then envoy here Chester Bowles.

In "Life in American Politics & Diplomatic Years in India: An Unvarnished Account", Celeste shares "as honestly as I can the influences that led me to devote my life to public service - both in and beyond the political arena".

He says he has tried to "illuminate some of the dark corners of political life" in his book, published by Har-Anand Publications.

On a March night in 1967, Celeste was suddenly called to the American embassy. On reaching there, he came to know that a woman Svetlana Alliluyeva was at the embassy with a pair of suitcases asking for asylum. She had presented a Russian passport and claimed to be Stalin's daughter.

"It didn't take much imagination to suspect the Russians were up to something. A few weeks earlier the Soviets had sent a new number two to



their embassy in New Delhi who, according to the agency, specialised in black propaganda," the author says.

"There were regular efforts to recruit young American officers by Soviet intelligence. The Stalin daughter ploy might be another effort to embarrass us," he claims.

"Her story was hard to believe. Not only did this woman say she was Stalin's daughter, she claimed to be the common-law wife of an older Indian gentleman who worked at the Foreign Language Press in Moscow

"Her husband had died the previous November. She had promised to bring his ashes from Moscow to immerse them in the Ganges. Six months had passed. She had

stayed in India after scattering the ashes. She now wanted asylum," Celeste writes.

According to him, all were worried that at "any moment that she might cry rape or that the Soviet Embassy would allege we had kidnapped her. We would be ordered to produce her and she would confirm whatever wild accusations had been made by the Soviets". Svetlana told the American officials she had come back to Delhi that weekend - March 5 was a Monday - and taken an apartment at the Russian Embassy compound. The Russians expected her to take the Aeroflot flight to Moscow very early Thursday morning.

The last straw, she alleged, occurred when the Soviet Am-

bassador invited her to lunch that afternoon and served Polish ham. She ate the vegetables on her plate but didn't touch the ham, thus offending the ambassador.

"What's happened to you," he asked her, adding whether she has become a "vegetarian, a Hindu", the book says.

After talking to her at the consular office here, the Americans were left with three options - inform the Indian government and make a formal request for its help in facilitating her departure, turn her away or give a visa to the US but buy her a ticket only half way, Celeste recalls.

So it was decided to "give her the visa and let her know she has got to get on the plane on her own". Soon a cable mes-

sage was sent to Washington around 2030 hours: "Individual claiming to be Stalin's daughter arrived at Embassy 1910 hours seeking asylum. Unable to confirm identity. Concerned that individual may be a provocation. Propose to issue US visa but send her to Rome on Quantas ETD 0100 hours. Seek your guidance."

There was a Quantas flight to Rome that would leave at one in the morning.

Thus Svetlana reached Rome from where she travelled to Geneva later.

"An already delicate situation became more delicate the next day when, at every post around the world, meetings between Soviet and American diplomats were called off. One of the reasons behind the So-

viet Ambassador's eagerness to persuade Svetlana to return home was that he himself was headed back to Moscow for reassignment," the book says.

The KGB chief too was livid and demanded an answer from the CIA station chief in Delhi on why Svetlana was "kidnapped".

Celeste claims that later it was found out that the "Soviets had decided that Svetlana's departure was an Indian, not an American, problem".

"The Indians had simply not taken proper care of this very important visitor. The Soviets went very hard at the Indira Gandhi government. After a couple of weeks LK Jha, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister at the time, was sent by Indira Gandhi to meet Svetlana in Switzerland, where she'd moved," he writes.

"Jha tried to talk her into returning to Moscow saying that her defection was harming relations between two countries she loved and because her children wanted her back in Russia. One of her children was a doctor and the other was an academic, and she talked to them on the phone with Jha observing.

"The children urged her to return, but she refused, saying that she simply would not return to Moscow under any circumstances," the book says.

Eventually Svetlana left Switzerland and came to the US. "The brouhaha in Delhi subsided.

India has disappointing level of AI development: Book



NEW DELHI, FEB 28 (PTI): India currently has a disappointing level of artificial intelligence (AI) development and it needs to embark on a rapid program to catch up, says a new book by researcher-author Rajiv Malhotra.

In "Artificial Intelligence And The Future Of Power: 5 Battlegrounds", he argues that AI-driven revolution will have an unequal impact on different segments of humanity and for countries like India, where a large percentage of the population lacks the education that is vital to survive a technological tsunami, the adverse effects could be shattering.

There will be new winners and losers, new haves and have-nots, resulting in an unprecedented concentration of wealth and power. There is a real possibility that AI may trigger an unprecedented level of unemployment and precipitate social instability, he claims.

According to Malhotra, India is an important case study on the impact of AI because that is where all the battles come together into one large and complex battleground. "Indian society

has forsaken its metaphysical roots in dharma to chase the Americanisation of artha (material pursuits) and kama (gratification of sensual desires). As a result, it is neither here nor there - having lost its traditional strengths both individual and collective, it is at best a poor imitation of the American dream," he says.

Overpopulation, unemployment and poor education make India especially vulnerable, he says, adding many of its industries are technologically obsolete and dependent on imported technologies.

"India presently has a disappointing level of AI development and it needs to embark on a rapid program to catch up," Malhotra writes in the book, published by Rupa Publications.

He also claims that India is not only lagging behind China in AI by at least a decade, but it also has routinely given away its unique data assets to foreign countries because of the ignorance of its leaders.

"If the present trajectory continues, India could be heading toward re-colonization, this time

as a digital colony under the domination of the US and/or China," he says.

Malhotra says AI is amplifying human ingenuity and is the engine driving the latest technological disruption silently shaking the foundations of society.

"My use of the term is not limited narrowly to what AI is specifically in the technical sense, but also includes the entire ecosystem of technologies that AI propels forward as their force multiplier. This cluster includes quantum computing, semiconductors, nanotechnology, medical technology, brain-machine interface, robotics, aerospace, 5G, and much more," he says.

Malhotra uses AI as an umbrella term because it "leverages their development and synergises them".

On the one hand, AI is the holy grail of technology; the advancement that people hope will solve problems across virtually every domain of our lives and on the other, it is disrupting a number of delicate equilibriums and creating conflicts on a variety of fronts, he argues.

Given the vast canvas on which AI's impact is

being felt, he says one needs a simple lens to discuss its complex ramifications in a meaningful and accessible way.

After several rounds of restructuring the book, Malhotra zeroed in on using the following key battles of AI as the organising principle.

"Artificial Intelligence plays a pivotal role in each of these disruptions, and each of these battlegrounds has multiple players with competing interests and high stakes: battle for economic development and jobs, power in the new world order, psychological control of desires and agency, metaphysics of the self and its ethics, and battle for India's future," he says.

These battles, he says, already exist but AI is exacerbating them and changing the game.

"In each case, the prevailing equilibriums are disintegrating, and as a result, creating tensions among the parties held in balance. We are entering an epoch of disequilibrium in which a period of chaos is inevitable. Eventually, however, a new equilibrium will be established, and a new kind of world will emerge," he writes.

One new COVID-19 case in Andamans



PORT BLAIR, FEB 28 (PTI): One more person has tested positive for COVID-19 in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, pushing the coronavirus tally in the union territory to 5,018, a health department official said on Sunday.

The new case was detected during contact tracing, he said.

The union territory now has four active COVID-19 cases.

The overall COVID situation is under control in the archipelago as the local administration has

been strict to ensure that health safety protocols are followed to contain the spread of the disease, he said.

The administration has made it mandatory for passengers arriving by flight to produce a negative RT-PCR test report before they are allowed entry into the islands.

The COVID-19 death toll remained at 62 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours.

No one was cured of the disease on Saturday

and the total number of recoveries in the archipelago stood at 4,952, the official said.

Altogether, 6,451 health professionals and frontline workers have been vaccinated so far of which 2,565 health care workers have received the second dose of the vaccine, the official said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 2,67,209 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 1.88 per cent, he added.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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Bruno Fernandes the driving force behind United's road trip brilliance

BARNEY RONAY

LONDON, 28 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: On the road with Manchester United: a journey in 19 acts. As with most road stories, the biggest question around United's record unbeaten away run is whether, for all the fun, the jazz, the poetry, the roman candle pyrotechnics, it's actually leading them anywhere.

This is a bildungsroman that will head back to its start point once again on Sunday afternoon. It is almost exactly a year since United set off on their magic bus tour with a 2-0 victory at Stamford Bridge. Those 19 Premier League away matches without defeat have cut across two seasons, the mixed and varied delights of pre- and post-Covid football, plus one disorientating midsummer overspill. From here United face two immediate tests: Chelsea and then Manchester City's title-bound cavalry charge at the Etihad a week later.

Get through those two with the chassis intact and Ole Gunnar Solskjær's team will find themselves four winnable games from an entire Premier League season unbeaten away from home – a run that will, on current standings, still get them nowhere near actually winning the thing.

It is in keeping with the uncanny nature of the football year that it is still hard to get a proper look at this achievement, to interpret it in any sensible way. Is this a sign of something tangible, progress made towards an end point? Or just an oddity of the plague football times?

Home advantage has always been a puzzling thing, based in emotion, ritual, mythology, noise. There is no dispassionate reason why one square of grass, one bus journey, one group of shouting humans should have such a profound effect on a cho-



reographed athletic performance. And yet the history of all football ever played confirms that this is very much the case, an affirmation of the role of emotion, of how a footballer feels in the way the games play out.

Home and away form was always likely to converge when players are essentially performing in front of plastic and cobwebs. Only Chelsea of the top nine Premier League clubs have lost more away games than they have at home.

With United, however, this is something else, a straight flip between the two. The away record (W14 D5) is the stuff of an imperious, title-winning romp. At Old Trafford over the same period United are Europa League also-rans. The last time they lost this many home games (four) was 2013-14, the Moyes Interlude, when Old Trafford was a place of sorrows and mischievous energies. Look closely and there is no

great mystery here. This isn't about mentality, or being spooked by the empty stands. United are a different team away from home because they are literally a different team.

Even though the stadium is empty, Solskjær has continued to pick different XIs and different formations for home and away. One near-constant in the away team is his use of that gristly two-man defensive midfield pivot. Scott McTominay has played in 16 of those 19 away games. Fred has started 12 of them, and been missing for all but one of the home defeats.

On the other hand Solskjær has tended to play a more attacking hand at home, often starting with five overtly attacking players on the pitch. Paul Pogba has started every home league game in which United have dropped points this season, bar the 0-0 with Chelsea where he came on for the last 32 minutes. Study

these variations and the mystery of United's inverted form is no mystery at all. Solskjær isn't just picking a more defensive team away from home. He's picking a more effective one. That pared back, double-pivot "away" formation is United's best self right now. Only Stuttgart have scored more counterattacking goals in the whole of Europe this season. This is a function of the same forces. The midfield pivot gives the platform to be comfortable without the ball, to allow an opponent to be drawn forward.

Then, as ever, there's Bruno Fernandes. The start point for all this, that win against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in February 2020, was also Fernandes's first Premier League away game. Looking for a register of one man's creative influence? United's 19-match run has spanned Fernandes's entire United career to date. Thirteen of his 23 league goals

have come away from home.

The away team, the away shape: it all just seems to fit a little better. The best of this team has been Fernandes lurking in those half-spaces, with licence to take risks, to look for a point of incision every time, with Marcus Rashford (this season: home goals three, away goals six) haring off into space ahead of him.

It is, of course, a self-fuelling process. Fernandes has spoken about "the belief" United feel away from home. That road-trip spirit feels like something robust and galvanising at a time when football can seem vague and half-formed. Before the 2-1 win at Fulham in January – game 17 – it was striking how fiercely bonded the players looked at kick-off. There are always hugs and backslaps. These were hugs and backslaps with feeling.

United won at Craven Cottage with another late goal, another three points gained from a losing position. This has been the pattern recently, with four draws and three victories by a single goal in their last seven away games. It is a run that will be tested to the full on Sunday by opponents in a powerful swell of form.

This is the other point of fascination, a meeting of second and fifth, that also pitches Solskjær against Thomas Tuchel, the man who oversaw United's ejection from the Champions League in December. That night at Old Trafford it was Tuchel's redeployment of his Paris Saint-Germain frontline after half-time that tipped the game. Tuchel also loves a double pivot. He loves a tactical puzzle.

United aren't just a good away team: they are a good team when they play a certain way. Extending that run to 20 on Sunday afternoon would confirm that this road story really does have some substance to it.

Serie A: Cristiano Ronaldo scores as Juventus held in Verona

VERONA, 28 FEB [AFP]: Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 19th goal this campaign but champions Juventus had to settle for a 1-1 draw at Hellas Verona in Serie A on Saturday. The draw gives leaders Inter Milan the chance to pull 10 points clear of Juventus when they play mid-table Genoa at the San Siro on Sunday. Juventus are third and three points adrift of second-placed AC Milan who travel to Roma, two points behind the champions in fourth, on Sunday.

"We managed to take the lead, which was the hardest part, it's a pity not being able to hold it," said Juve coach Andrea Pirlo.

Pirlo's side paid for their many absences and a redesigned defence with Leonardo Bonucci and Giorgio Chiellini out injured and Danilo suspended.

Also missing were Juan Cuadrado, Arthur and Paulo Dybala to injury with Alvaro Morata recovering from a viral infection.

"We lacked experienced players, we had many youngsters on the pitch and there are details that they don't understand," continued Pirlo.

"I asked Ronaldo and Alex Sandro to make their voices heard, but it wasn't enough."

Goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny and the post saved Juventus just minutes into the game at the Stadio Bentegodi following a Davide Faraoni header.

Ronaldo broke through four minutes after the break connecting with a perfect lay-off from Federico Chiesa to fire in.

Aaron Ramsey missed a chance for a second before the hour mark after a Dejan Kulusevski pull-back which the Verona defence closed down.

Antonin Barak headed in an equaliser with quarter of an hour to go and the hosts were denied a late winner with Szczesny deflecting a Darko Lazovic effort onto the crossbar.

- IMMOBILE PENALTY MISS -

Lazio's European ambitions took a knock with a 2-0 loss at Bologna, days after a heavy defeat by Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

Ciro Immobile missed a penalty with goals in either half from Ibrahima Mbaye and Nicola Sansone sealing all three points for Bologna who snapped their 15-match winless league run against the Romans.

"The missed penalty set the tone for the game," said Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi.

Inzaghi's side showed signs of fatigue as they came off a 4-1 Champions League last 16, first leg loss to holders Bayern Munich.

"We must forget about these two defeats which hurt. An ambitious team like ours needs to roll up our sleeves and do better." Lazio have lost momentum since losing to Inter Milan in the league two weeks ago, and next host Torino before travelling to Juventus.

Canelo Álvarez subdues Avni Yildirim then announces Billy Joe Saunders fight



MIAMI, 28 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:

Saul 'Canelo' Álvarez outclassed Avni Yildirim and retained his world super middleweight titles with a technical knockout after Yildirim failed to answer the bell for the fourth round Saturday night, setting the stage for a highly anticipated unification fight with Britain's Billy Joe Saunders in May that was announced in the immediate aftermath.

Álvarez, arguably boxing's biggest star, dropped the Turkish challenger with a left-right combination to the head midway through the third round. Álvarez followed with additional combinations, pinning Yildirim on the ropes. Yildirim survived the round but absorbed sufficient punishment that forced his trainer Joel Díaz to stop the fight.

With the victory, Álvarez (55-1-2, 37 KOs) successfully defended his World Boxing Council and World Boxing Association belts.

"I needed the knockout and that's what I did," Álvarez says in Spanish through a translator. "It doesn't matter if they're taller or if they have more reach, if they have a good trainer or no good trainer. It doesn't matter. I come here to do my job.

I come to win. I come to make history."

Eddie Hearn, who promotes Álvarez, stepped in during the ringing interview to reveal the worst-kept secret in boxing: Álvarez has signed for a 8 May fight with Saunders, the undefeated Briton who holds the World Boxing Organization's version of the super middleweight title. Hearn said venue for the fight will be announced shortly.

That fight represents an opportunity for Álvarez to move one step closer to his goal of unifying the four major sanctioning body belts at 168lbs. Caleb Plant, an unbeaten American, holds the other.

"It's because it hasn't been done," Álvarez said. "In Latin America, no one has done it. And in the world, only very few, only the best. And I want to make history, I want to be one of the best in the world."

He added: "I want to make my own history. I don't want to be equal to anyone. I want to make my own history and when they talk about boxing that they always remember: Canelo. I respect everyone in history, but I want to make my own history and I respect everyone." Saturday's

fight, where a crowd of about 15,000 spectators were permitted to attend, headlined the first boxing event at 34-year-old Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins. A pre-fight performance by South American reggaeton superstar J Balvin, who accompanied Álvarez on his journey to the ring, was arguably more entertaining than the fight that followed.

In a methodical first round, Álvarez set the pace early with lead left jabs to the head and lefts and right to the body.

Álvarez landed uppercuts and continued to score with combinations to the body in the second. Yildirim (21-3) rarely threw punches and the few he did, Álvarez blocked or slipped his shots. Álvarez stayed within punching range and increased his output but also was effective from distance and connected with a flush counter right to the head.

Saturday's bout was the first of what Álvarez hopes will be a busy year seeking unification fights.

Inactive since February 2019, Yildirim landed the match against Álvarez after the WBC designated him mandatory challenger.

Álvarez and Yildirim both weighed 167lbs, a pound under the super middleweight limit.

Earlier, Puerto Rico's McWilliams Arroyo won a second-tier world flyweight title with a fifth-round technical knockout over late replacement Abraham Rodriguez.

Ligue 1: Kylian Mbappe On Target Twice In PSG Cruise



PARIS, 28 FEB [AFP]: Kylian Mbappe scored twice to take his tally to 18 goals in Ligue 1 this season as Paris Saint-Germain eased to a 4-0 victory at bottom club Dijon on Saturday to keep the pressure on leaders Lille in the title race.

Moise Kean and Danilo Pereira also scored for Mauricio Pochettino's team, who bounced back from a 2-0 home defeat by Monaco last weekend and moved back up to second in the table, a point behind Lille. The leaders play on Sunday at home to Strasbourg, while Lyon are two points behind the capital club but can leapfrog them again with a win at Marseille, also on Sunday.

Fourth-placed Monaco are six points off top spot but can extend their unbeaten run to 12 games when they face Brest in the principality.

"I am very proud. We were very professional and it was important for us to get back to winning ways," Pochettino told Canal Plus.

PSG, who go to Bordeaux in midweek, have now won seven and lost two of Pochettino's first 10 league games in charge.

"The team needs to be more consistent in the league," Pochettino added. "Of course it is a mental thing, but it is also physical, it is about performance."

Former Monaco striker Mbappe had been kept quiet by his old club but he got back among the

goals against the division's bottom side, who have now lost their last seven games. Mbappe scored twice when PSG beat Dijon 4-0 at home in October and repeated the feat here to move onto 23 for the season in all competitions. The victory was achieved in the ongoing absence of Neymar, with the world's most expensive player missing a fourth consecutive game with a groin injury.

He has returned to individual training but, having already missed the first leg, he remains a doubt for the Champions League last-16 return match at home to Barcelona on March 10.

Angel Di Maria, Marco Verratti, Mauro Icardi, Leandro Paredes and Alessandro Florenzi were also missing at the Stade Gaston-Gerard along with long-term injury victim Juan Bernat. "We have a big squad and we need to show that everyone can fight for their place," replied Pochettino.

- Kean makes mark again - On-loan Everton striker Kean kept his place and he opened the scoring inside six minutes, taking a touch and poking home from close range after being set up by Abdou Diallo. Kean, who was also on target twice in the last meeting of the sides, has now scored 15 times for PSG, who could well be convinced to make his loan move into a permanent transfer come the season's end. Mbappe made it 2-0 in the

32nd minute, converting a penalty awarded for a Bersant Celina handball.

Julian Draxler had another goal disallowed for offside but Mbappe scored again six minutes into the second half, sweeping a low, first-time shot into the corner from a Rafinha pass to finish off a flowing move. Danilo, on loan from Porto, wrapped up the win late on as he headed in Draxler's corner for his first goal in French football, before being replaced by 17-year-old midfielder Edouard Michut who was making his senior debut.

Dijon are eight points adrift at the bottom and nine points from outright safety.

Saturday's other game saw Metz win 2-1 at Bordeaux thanks to a stoppage-time goal by Cape Verde international Vagner Dias Goncalves.

Metz are fifth, a position which brings with it qualification for the inaugural UEFA Europa Conference League next season.

Elsewhere, Marseille on Friday announced the appointment of Argentine Jorge Sampaoli, 60, as their new coach on a deal to 2023.

He is the permanent successor to the sacked Andre Villas-Boas and arrives after a year at Brazilian side Atletico Mineiro.

Sampaoli, who coached Argentina at the 2018 World Cup, will not however be on the bench for Sunday's game against Lyon.

*Tanzania
COVID U-turn
'a good move'
– but is it good
enough?*

SAMMY AWAMI

DAR-ES-SALAAM, Tanzania – Esther Mngodo, like other Tanzanians, was relieved to hear this week government officials are finally urging people in the country to take precautions against the coronavirus – and even wear face masks.

“It is a good move,” said Mngodo, a 34-year-old resident of Dar-es-Salaam. “But much more needs to be done to increase public awareness, testing and treatment. Most importantly, we must have a clear strategy on how to navigate through these unprecedented times.”

In a surprise change in the official stance on coronavirus, President John Magufuli on Sunday said the government had not forbidden the wearing of masks and encouraged those who wanted to do so.

However, he warned against what he claimed were faulty face coverings on sale in the country, suggesting that high coronavirus-related death rates worldwide could be linked to the uptake of such products and claiming those in Tanzania’s rural areas were less likely to fall victim to the virus because they tended not to wear them.

“The government has not forbidden mask-wearing. But we have to be careful about which masks we wear. We will perish. Don’t think we’re loved so much. Economic war is bad,” Magufuli told a congregation at a church service in Dar-es-Salaam.

“These masks which we buy in the shops—we’re killing ourselves,” he argued, before advising Tanzanians to either to make the masks themselves or use those produced locally.

Magufuli has long downplayed the severity of COVID-19, urging Tanzanians to pray, use steam inhalation and embrace local remedies to protect themselves from the respiratory disease. Tanzania stopped releasing infection numbers in April 2020, weeks before Magufuli declared the country coronavirus-free in June through divine intervention.

For Mngodo, the recent U-turn could be a result of what seems to be a deadly resurgence of infection, which has swept across the country over the past few months.

“It appears that the extent of the problem has reached to a point where the government cannot deny the severity of the problem,” said Mngodo, a media consultant.

Announcements of deaths often attributed to “the current pneumonia” or “breathing problems” have flooded social media.

Among the deceased are a number of high-profile individuals, including several university professors, a former governor of the central bank, the country’s chief secretary and Zanzibar’s first vice president, Maalim Seif Sharif Hamad.

'Myanmar is like a battlefield': UN says at least 18 dead as security forces fire on protesters

REBECCA RATCLIFFE

YANGON, 28 FEB [THE GUARDIAN]: At least 18 people have been killed, according to the UN, after security forces in Myanmar used lethal violence against anti-coup protesters in the most deadly crackdown since the military seized power at the start of February.

Live bullets, stun grenades and teargas were fired at demonstrators in several towns and cities as police, backed by troops, attempted to stamp out countrywide rallies held in defiance of the junta.

At least 18 people are believed to have been killed, and 30 injured, according to the UN human rights office, which strongly condemned the escalating violence against peaceful protesters.

The deaths reportedly occurred as a result of live ammunition fired into crowds in Yangon, Dawei, Mandalay, Myeik, Bago and Pokokku, it said.

In Yangon, a woman died after police used stun grenades to break up a teachers’ protest, though the cause of her death was not yet known, Reuters reported. In a separate incident in the city, a 23-year-old man was shot dead.

“The police approached and got their guns ready. We didn’t think that they would actually shoot,” said Ye Swan Htet, the man’s cousin, also 23, told the Guardian. The protest had been peaceful, he said, with crowds singing songs and clapping. “That’s all we did. And then they started shooting.”

Social media footage showed protesters in the city



lifting bloodied people to safety. In one image published by Mizzima news, a protester raised his hand in a three-finger salute as he was taken away on a stretcher, a gesture used by demonstrators to signal their opposition to the military.

“Myanmar is like a battlefield,” the Buddhist-majority country’s first Catholic cardinal, Charles Maung Bo, said on Twitter. He shared a photograph of a nun in Kachin state, northern Myanmar, who knelt before a line of police officers, pleading for restraint.

Residents in Yangon rushed to build makeshift road blocks, ripping up pavement slabs and assembling bins to prevent police from charging. On top of a pile of rubble used to seal off a road,

protesters had laid a poster of Aung San Suu Kyi, with the words: “She is our only belief.”

Live ammunition was used across the city, including Hledan Junction, a gathering point for protesters, after police attempted to disperse crowds using teargas and stun grenades.

“We were part of an engineers’ march,” said a protester who was among a crowd of 10,000 people, but had fled to take refuge in a resident’s house. “Police started firing [teargas] at us at about 9am. We all ran in different directions. I don’t know what to do now. I will wait here for a while and see. It’s really bad, it was scary.”

Many of those taking to the streets wore gas masks, hats and goggles for protec-

tion, following an increasingly violent response by police on Saturday, when teargas and rubber bullets were used to disperse crowds. According to state-run MRTV television, more than 470 people were arrested at Saturday’s protests.

It is not clear how many were detained on Sunday, though dozens of medics are believed to have been taken. Social media footage showed doctors and nurses in white lab coats fleeing as the police threw stun grenades outside a medical school in Yangon.

“They are shooting civilians, they are terrorists. There is real cruelty,” said a paramedic who had transported the injured to Yangon General hospital. Several people were being treated for serious gun

shot wounds, he said. “Many of the patients are young, some in their early 20s.” Medics had been striking in protest against the military, but returned to the hospital to treat wounded demonstrators.

A teacher in Yangon said she woke up to texts from her students saying goodbye, in the event that they were killed in the protests. “One messaged me and thanked me for my support over the years, ending with ‘we love you, bye for now’ while taking cover from police fire,” she said.

The military has faced huge public opposition after it seized power from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi this month, detaining her and other politicians from her party,

National League for Democracy. It has accused the NLD, which won last year’s election, of voter fraud, a claim that has not been substantiated.

The military, which previously ruled the country for half a century, has promised to hold elections in one year’s time. Protesters are unconvinced by such pledges and have demanded the release of their elected leaders.

Over the past three weeks, rallies have been held in towns and cities across the country, at times with hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets. Meanwhile, a national strike, which has drawn support from doctors, engineers, railway workers and farmers, has brought the country to a standstill, paralysing the military junta.

On Friday night, Myanmar’s ambassador to the UN, Kyaw Moe Tun, gave an emotional address calling for international action to restore democracy and protect the people. By Saturday evening, MRTV, a Myanmar state-run television channel, announced he had been dismissed from his post, stating that he had abused his power.

Aung San Suu Kyi has not been seen in public since the coup, and her lawyer has said he has been unable to meet with her. She is accused of illegally importing walkie-talkies and of violating a natural disaster law by breaching coronavirus restrictions. Her next court hearing is expected to be held on Monday. If convicted of the charges, she may be prevented from running in future elections.

La Liga: Lionel Messi helps Barcelona brush aside Sevilla to reignite title hopes



BARCELONA, 28 FEB [AFP]: Barcelona reignited their title hopes after Lionel Messi and Ousmane Dembele scored in a 2-0 victory over Sevilla on Saturday to put them two points behind Atletico Madrid. Atletico still have two games in hand, the first of those coming against sixth-placed Villarreal on Sunday, but a dip in form from La Liga’s leaders has given their chasing rivals hope. Barca looked dead and buried a few weeks ago but this was their ninth win out of 10 in La Liga, a surge that has put them back in contention, with Atletico playing against Real Madrid next weekend.

Sevilla started the day as arguably the form team at the top, having won all of their last six league games, the last five of those without conceding a goal.

But they were second best at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan, a dominant performance from Barcelona exposing them still as slightly short of Spain’s top three.

It also creates an intriguing back-drop to Wednesday’s Copa del Rey semi-final second leg when these two teams meet again, with Barca hoping to overturn a 2-0 deficit at Camp Nou.

Pedri and Ronald Araujo could

be doubts after both were substituted in the second half with what looked like injury problems.

Coach Ronald Koeman could well stick with his new 3-5-2 system, which saw Jordi Alba and Sergino Dest playing as wing-backs ahead of a back three and Dembele deployed up front alongside Messi.

Without Antoine Griezmann, who dropped to the bench, Koeman sacrificed some creativity in the final third for control through the middle, not to mention the threat of Dembele in behind.

Certainly for the best part of an hour Sevilla struggled to escape Barcelona’s press or establish any sustained pressure, even after Julen Lopetegui introduced three substitutes at half-time and switched formation to match their opponents.

Marc-Andre ter Stegen was passed fit to play by the team doctor despite hurting his right thumb in the warm-up and in truth it was hardly tested in the first half.

Barca controlled the game and while Alba and Dest never really advanced as much as Koeman might have liked, Frenkie de Jong and Pedri were a constant threat through the middle, with the speedy Dembele just in front.

Chances, though, were few and far between and it took a counter-attack for Barcelona to take the lead.

Fernando gave the ball away cheaply up front and two passes were enough, Messi curling the decisive one through for Dembele to race clear and finish.

Lopetegui reacted with three changes at half-time and two more after the hour but even by matching Barcelona’s system, Sevilla struggled to gain a foothold.

Alba came up just short of De Jong’s cross, Dest slammed against the post and Messi blazed over after another surge from Dembele.

One of Lopetegui’s substitutes Youssef En-Nesyri had Sevilla’s best chance but headed over.

Yet without a second goal, a nervy finale was always likely and En-Nesyri found the corner on the turn but had the goal ruled out for a handball, his tussle with Araujo seeing Barca’s defender go off and he booted some chairs over in frustration. But Sevilla’s push was brief, ended by Messi with six minutes left.

He traded passes with Dembele, nipped inside Diego Carlos and tried to finish with a chip. Bono saved but the ball came to Messi, one yard out.

'I will never shut up': LeBron James responds to Ibrahimovic criticism

LOS ANGELES, 28 FEB [THE GUARDIAN]: LeBron James has responded to criticism from Zlatan Ibrahimovic and vowed never to stay silent about social causes.

In an interview on Thursday, Ibrahimovic said sportspeople such as the Los Angeles Lakers star – who has been one of the NBA’s leading voices against racial injustice and police brutality – should avoid involving themselves in political matters and focus only on sports. “I don’t like when people with a status speak about politics,” he said. “Do what you’re good at doing.”

After the Lakers’ win against the Portland Trail Blazers on Friday, James told reporters: “I will never shut up about things that are wrong. I preach about my people and I preach about equality, social justice, racism, voter suppression – things that go on in our community.”

“Because I was a part of my community at one point and saw the things that were going on, and I know what’s still going on because I have a group of 300-plus kids at my school that are going through the same thing and they need a voice.

“I’m their voice and I use my platform to continue to shed light on everything that might be going on, not only in my community but in this country and around the world.”

James also pointed to comments made by the Milan striker in 2018 when Ibrahimovic, the Swedish-born son of a Bosnian father and a Croatian mother, claimed “undercover racism” had caused the media to treat him differently from players that had names like Andersson or Svensson.

“He’s the guy who said in Sweden, he was talking about the same things, because his last name wasn’t a [traditional Swedish] last name, he felt like there was some racism going on,” James said. “I speak from a very educated mind. I’m kind of the wrong guy to go at, because I do my homework.”

Indeed, Ibrahimovic told Canal Plus that “undercover racism” caused the Swedish media and public to treat him with less respect and reverence: “This

exists, I am 100% sure, because I am not Andersson or Svensson. If I would be that, trust me, they would defend me even if I would rob a bank.”

James’ longtime activism on racial justice issues and his criticism of Trump prompted white Fox News commentator Laura Ingraham in 2018 to tell him and fellow black NBA player Kevin Durant to “shut up and dribble”.

James, who arrived in Los Angeles in 2018 while Ibrahimovic was in the middle of a two-year spell with LA Galaxy, also gave a nod to former WNBA star Renee Montgomery, who earlier Friday became the first ex-player to become both an owner and executive of a WNBA team when the sale of the Atlanta Dream that ended the controversial ownership of defeated US senator Kelly Loeffler was announced.

“There’s no way I would ever just stick to sports, because I understand this platform and how powerful my voice is,” James said. “He can just ask Renee Montgomery if I would have shut up and just dribbled, just seeing that beautiful black woman today (become) part of the ownership group with the Atlanta Dream.”

Dennis Schröder, the Lakers’ German point guard, gave his support to James and confirmed the obvious truth that Ibrahimovic’s attitude is decidedly not shared by many European athletes.

“Every athlete can use our platform and try to make change in this world,” Schröder said. “Zlatan, he’s a little different. Unique player, unique character.”

James’s entry into the social justice arena has been careful and measured over the past decade: a 2012 tweet that declared #WeAreTrayvonMartin; the I CAN’T BREATHE shirt worn before a 2014 game; the 2016 establishment of the I Promise School, a district-run public school in his Ohio hometown that was the brainchild of James’s foundation and the city’s public school district.

But the four-time NBA Most Valuable Player winner has taken his activism to new heights since Trump began picking fights with prominent black US athletes to score political points.

The Bachelor announces Chris Harrison's replacement for After the Final Rose Special

Earlier this month, Chris Harrison announced he was "stepping aside" from the ABC franchise after he received backlash for defending the controversy surrounding contestant Rachael Kirkconnell during an Extra interview with Rachel Lindsay.

Following the longtime host's departure, many have wondered who would take his place, especially since Matt James' season of The Bachelor is currently airing. Well, Bachelor Nation fans no longer have to guess.

On Saturday, Feb. 27, Emmanuel Acho announced he will be hosting The Bachelor: After the Final Rose special—which is scheduled to air on Monday, March 15.

"IT'S OFFICIAL," he began his Instagram caption. "I've accepted the Rose and am honored to be hosting the @bachelorabc After the Final Rose this year. It's been a pivotal season, and this episode will hopefully be one of the most storied shows in TV history. Empathy is needed and change is coming. Share the news! I'll see y'all then!"

The 30-year-old star then shared a few fun facts about himself, including bits about his NFL career, his college education and his work.

"I'm the author of 2020 NYT best seller, 'Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man.' A book that answers all the racial questions you've been too afraid to ask. Go read it," he noted, adding, "Lastly, I love being a bridge for reconciliation. Our world is disconnected & divided, my goal is to unify."

After making his announcement, Emmanuel opened up about taking on the ABC franchise in the upcoming special.

"It's both an honor and privilege to be hosting After the Final Rose," Emmanuel said in a statement shared with E! News. "This is an incredibly pivotal episode on one of the most storied shows in television history."

According to a press release shared with E! News, the author will sit down with Matt James to discuss his season of

the dating series, along with the controversy surrounding the show. The former NFL star will also have a conversation with the final three women: Bri Springs, Michelle Young and Rachael.

Earlier this week, Rachel Lindsay said she'd love to see Emmanuel host

photos of Rachael Kirkconnell and the interview between Rachel Lindsay and Chris Harrison."

"The reality is that I'm learning about these situations in real-time," he pointed out, "and it has been devastating and heartbreaking, to put it bluntly."



The Bachelor and even noted that Rachael was "reading his book, so it kind of all makes perfect sense."

Speaking on the Bachelor Party podcast on Feb. 23, The Bachelorette alum explained why she felt Chris' replacement shouldn't be part of the franchise's bubble. Put simply, she said it should "be somebody people trust to have these conversations."

"Emmanuel would be great," she added. "He's not biased in any way, he doesn't watch the show, he doesn't know the people involved. He should be there to be able to facilitate a conversation that we need to see happen."

In recent weeks, the dating series has been embroiled in controversy. On Monday, Feb. 22, Matt addressed both Rachael and Chris' scandals head-on.

"The past few weeks have been some of the most challenging of my life," he began his Instagram post, "and while there are several episodes left of the season, it is important that I take the time to address the troubling information that has come to light since we wrapped filming, including the incredibly disappointing

In the wake of the show's controversy, Rachel has had to deactivate her Instagram account after receiving "hateful" comments. On Friday, Feb. 26, Rachel's Higher Learning podcast co-host Van Lathan shared in more detail why she deleted her page.

"She did it because that's how much hate she is getting from Bachelor fans, who are spamming her with all kinds of rude, hateful things to say," Van said in a video posted on his Instagram. "Y'all gotta get a f--king life, seriously."

"This harassment is going too far," he captioned his post, "@chrisharrison Are you okay with people getting at Rachel to the point she can't even exist on IG. Is anyone from the entire 'Bachelor Nation' going to stand up and condemn this harassment of a Black woman? Yo it's just a f--king TV SHOW, y'all need to relax for real. I love you RACH. F--k these people."

Bachelor Nation stars have expressed their support for The Bachelorette alum. Moreover, many former and current contestants have also banded together to call for change within the franchise.



DINING IN STYLE! Rapper Saweetie looks stunning in black and yellow during a night out at Catch LA.

Lady Gaga happily reunited with her dogs after promising half a million dollars for their safe return



All dog lovers empathised with Lady Gaga as she revealed how her heart was "sick" after her two French bulldogs, Koji and Gustav were stolen.

Two days ago, in a shocking incident her employee, Ryan Fischer was shot at by thieves who escaped with her two French bulldogs, Koji and Gustav. But they were returned to the cops. The Los Angeles police tweeted, "Lady Gaga's two French bulldogs - stolen two days ago by thieves who shot and wounded the dogwalker - were recovered unharmed today."

On February 24 at around 9.40 pm, the thieves caught hold of the dog-walker and de-

manded that he hands over the three French bull dogs.

Lady Gaga wrote on Instagram, "My heart is sick and I am praying my family will be whole again with an act of kindness. I will pay \$500,000 for their safe return."

While the two dogs, Koji and Gustav were taken by the miscreants, the third one Miss Asia ran away from the scene.

She later returned to the scene to the wounded man before law enforcement agencies took it away. Ryan Fischer is now in the hospital and stable. The Los Angeles Police is investigating the case of robbery and homicide.

Rana Daggubati's Haathi Mere Saathi Postponed - New Release Date Is...

Rana Daggubati's multilingual film Haathi Mere Saathi will release on March 26, the actor announced in a tweet today. The film, titled Kaadan in Tamil and Aranya in Telugu, was to have released this month to coincide with Pongal. "Welcoming the new year and the new normal, we are excited to bring Haathi Mere Saathi, Aranya and Kaadan on 26th March in a theatre near you," Rana Daggubati tweeted. Haathi Mere Saathi was originally slated for release last April but was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdown, like so many other films. The film is directed by Prabhu Solomon and co-stars Pulkrit Samrat, Vishnu Vishal, Shriya Pilgaonkar and Zoya Hussain.

Haathi Mere Saathi, which takes its name from the 1871 film with Rajesh Khanna in the lead, features Rana Daggubati as Bandev, whose close companions are a herd of elephants. The 36-year-old actor, known for his imposing physique in films such as the Baa-

huabali series, lost 30-odd kilos for the role. His drastic transformation prompted concern from fans and triggered ru-

(blood pressure), calcification around your heart and you have failed kidneys... It would have been a 70 percent chance



mours about his health last year. Rana Daggubati dismissed the rumours at the time but revealed many months later that he had been seriously ill. Speaking to actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu on her talk show, Rana said, "There was BP

of stroke or a haemorrhage and 30 percent chance of death."

Rana Daggubati, who married Miheeka Bajaj in 2020, also has several other films in the works, among them 1945 and Virata Parvam.

Aries: If there's anything your life has taught you, it's that every day is a gift from the Universe, which is precisely what you are celebrating today—with your soul crew, of course! Speaking of celebration, some of you could be moving closer to D-Day. Alternatively, somebody close to you could be getting engaged soon. PS: You're going to love playing bridesmaid/groomsman!

Tip: It's all about joy and celebration in the Aries HQ.

Taurus: What's the point of playing the coy game? What's the point of beating around the bush? You like them just as much as they like you. It's time to confess your innermost feelings today. In the realm of work, you may find yourself bridging the gap between passion and profession. There was a time you were okay with clocking in the hours simply for the sake of it. But the new you wants to offer the world something that is of value and has the potential to bring about positive change.

Tip: It's time to confess your innermost feelings.

Gemini: "I hope you will go out and let stories, that is life, happen to you, and that you will work with these stories... water them with your blood and tears and your laughter till they bloom, till you yourself burst into bloom." Wise words by Clarissa Pinkola Estés to inspire you to let go of the inhi-

bitions that have been weighing you down, and take life by the horns. There is so much you are yet to discover in your journey towards personal freedom. Let the adventures begin now!

Tip: Let life happen to you, Gemini. It's time to feel oh-so-alive!

Cancer:

You can keep updating your vision board to look better than it did before, or you can get your act together and start putting in the work. The choice is and has always been yours, Cancer. If the cosmic cues are anything to go by, you won't shy away from getting your hands dirty today. Remember, you don't have to have the entire plan of action ready. Adopt 'one step at a time' as your mantra for now. Everything you need to know will be revealed to you in due course of time.

Tip: One step at a time, honey!

Leo:

Doing things the way that you have been doing them is comfortable. But comfort never leads to growth, does it now? Today, the cards are urging you to shake things up a little. To adopt the spirit of play and approach the most mundane tasks in a manner that's different from what you're used to. The more you bring your individuality to the table, the more the quality of your work will improve.

Tip: Bring your individuality to the table.

Virgo:

The connection you share is both soulful and sensual. It's a love that awakens the latent passion within you and makes you believe in magic again. This weekend, you're breaking the barriers that stand between you and your beloved and experiencing intimacy on a deeper level. Yes, the fears and insecurities will rear their ugly heads as you choose vulnerability over everything else. You have what it takes to watch the ebb and flow of these emotions without giving into them.

Tip: Stay in the vibration of love, Virgo.

Libra:

There are certain rules that apply to all those of us who are experiencing life in the earthly realm, and the law of karma is certainly one of them. Today, you're being guided to act mindfully—to be conscious of the law of cause and effect. Remember, everything you put out there will have a karmic repercussion. When it comes to decision making, find a balance between your head and your heart. Yes, that means not getting carried away by what the emotional landscape is showing you at this moment.

Tip: Keep the law of cause and effect in mind before you act today.

Scorpio:

What if you're the only person standing in your way? We repeat: what if you're the only person standing in

your way? Once again, the cards are pointing towards a serious case of impostor syndrome and urging you to work through the self-worth issues that are weighing you down. You were chosen for this mission for a reason and it's time to remember that. Today, no matter how daunting this feels, take the first step. Do something that scares the living daylights out of you and know that you possess the strength, courage, and wisdom to transcend this. PS: Your spirit team is with you, providing you with the help and assistance you need in each moment.

Tip: Address the self-worth issues, Scorpio.

Sagittarius:

If you've been at loggerheads with somebody, take a step back. Retreat into your sacred space, Sagittarius, where you can reflect upon what transpired with the other person, and your own BS. We all have our triggers, and there's no shame in that. However, it's important to heal the unhealed parts of our psyche so that we do not continue to repeat the old patterns.

Tip: Self-reflection is key.

Capricorn:

Beginning a project is the easy part. It is synonymous with that mad surge of energy that comes from stepping into the unknown. What happens when you enter the second stage of a project, though? Does the same optimism continue to fuel your actions or do you find yourself

stuck in a rut? Word for the wise: stay in the energy of passion, Capricorn. You have a long way to go from here.

Tip: Stay in the energy of passion.

Aquarius:

You can sulk about how unhappy you are at this moment, or you can take things in your hands and turn your circumstances around. The choice is and has always been yours. Have the conversation you have been carefully avoiding. That's the only way out of the maze you have found yourself in. Remember, it's not just about what you say, but also about how you say it. The secret to getting through to the other person is by approaching the subject from a space of openness.

Tip: Talk about it.

Pisces:

Pay attention to what you are giving your time and energy to. We repeat: pay attention to what you are giving your time and energy to. Not all of these projects are worth your time, Pisces. It's okay to be picky. It's okay to let a few people down. The only person you owe an explanation to is yourself. When it comes to love and other intoxicants, you're being warned about the fleeting nature of a particular romance. So, flirt your way into their heart without expecting any sort of commitment.

Tip: Your time and energy are precious.