



VARUN DHAWAN SAYS THREE A-LIST STARS WARNED HIM ABOUT WORKING WITH SARA ALI KHAN: 'BACH KE REHNA'
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MEDIA SHOULD INVITE MORE CRITICISM
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THIS JIM CARREY FLICK JUST HIT #1 ON NETFLIX—& IT'S DEFINITELY THE MUST-WATCH MOVIE OF THE WEEK
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SummitTIMES

Vol 05 | Issue 335 | Gangtok | Thursday | 24 December 2020

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

CM One Mile Golden Run launched in Sikkim



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 DEC:**

With the aim to promote Sports & Olympic movement with fitness for all at the grassroot level, Chief Minister One Mile Golden Run 2020 was launched in the State on Wednesday. One Mile Run with the tagline 'Run with Purpose' was organised at various Blocks Administrative Centers under the supervision of Deputy Directors of Districts and Assistant Director of BACs, Department of Sports & Youth Affairs, Government of Sikkim.

A press release from Sports & Youth Affairs Department informs that the run was organised in all 10 BACs and at Gangtok in East District, 10 BACs of West District, 04 BACs of North District and 08 BACs of South District.

It is added that a total of 796 children [426 boys and 370 girls] at various BACs in East District, 957 [547 boys and 410 girls] in West, 207 [121 boys and 86 girls] in North and 770 [415 boys and 355 girls] in South District participated in the run. It is informed that

a total of 2730 children [1509 boys and 1221 girls] in the State participated in the run.

This programme has been initiated based on the announcement of the Chief Minister on 'National Sports Day 2020' at Namchi on 29 August this year and the programme is being conducted under the guidance of the Minister Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Government of Sikkim, it is informed.

The release adds that the scheme focuses on leading a healthier way of life for children, youth and general public as

well as to increase awareness among the public regarding the benefits of physical and mental wellbeing.

"Further, this initiative would be beneficial for creating a large talent pool in the future, as it would be a very inclusive approach for scouting and nurturing new and raw talent. The Run will be organized every Saturday by BACs, Institutions and Clubs etc. in a mass movement. Instruction has been given to conduct the programme following the SOP of Covid-19 Pandemic," the release adds.

Melli-Dara GPU steps forth with Cyber Village mission



**AARON RAI
MELLI, 23 DEC:**

Melli Dara Village Administrative Centre [VAC] is now on course to achieve its Cyber Village plans for the area, starting with Kera Bari ward going fully digital today.

The IT in-charge of the VAC, Panchayat member, Diwash Gurung shares that the project had already started in the year 2011 but could not progress as they had hoped because of not having local software developers and the resultant lacked coordination between the software developer and

VAC. This has now been changed with the VAC as its own local software developers: Dichen Lepcha, Sudarshan Subba, Lekh Nath Chettri and Ong Tshering Lepcha who floated their own company, Bolds Innovation Pvt Ltd, are taking up the project.

This is the first phase that features customised software which they have deployed initially for Kera Bari ward. The GPU has seven wards. The IT in-charge is confident that all the wards will be digitised within 2021.

The team had put in a lot of work during the lockdown wherein all

their required documents of the residents were collected and have been digitised.

Speaking with SummitTIMES, the VAC President, Kusum Dhakal pointed out that this cyber village project was the need of the hour and was hence supported from the Panchayat Fund. She is confident that the project will be beneficial to all. She thanks all the VAC members for their hard work in over the past months and making this project possible, and is also thankful for all the local software developers and villagers who cooperated.

COVID-19: India records 23,950 new cases

NEW DELHI, DEC 23 (PTI): India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 1,00,99,066 with 23,950 new infections being reported in a day, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 96.63 lakh, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday.

The death toll increased to 1,46,444 with 333 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 96,63,382 pushing the national recovery rate to 95.69 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

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

There are 2,89,240 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country which comprises 2.86 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 16,42,68,721 samples have been tested up to December 22 with 10,98,164 samples being tested on Tuesday. The 333 new fatalities include 75 from Maharashtra, 38 from West Bengal, 27 from Kerala and 25 from Delhi.

Nawin Kiran releases names of SBS loan defaulters

**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 23 DEC:**

Sikkim Subject Committee vice-convener, Nawin Kiran Pradhan, today released a 157-page document containing names of loan defaulters of State Bank of Sikkim to media persons. He stated that with this, he has fulfilled his promise of making names of SBS loan defaulters public.

There are a total of 2,342 defaulters of the State Bank of Sikkim [SBS] with default amount of Rs 622,88,59,539/- [Six hundred and twenty-two crores, eighty-eight lakhs, fifty-nine thousand, five hundred and thirty-nine rupees] from the year 1968 to till date.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Pradhan informed that amongst the loan defaulters, the Power Department has the highest amount due to the SBS.

As for the loans that have gone bad, these range from Rs 2,500 to Rs 115 crores. Mr Pradhan also informed that several defaulters have contacted him and informed that the reason they have not been able to service the loans was because of uncleared dues by the State Government for works for which they had taken out the loans.

He also said that around 34 defaulters of the State Bank of Sikkim have submitted their undertaking to return the loan. He added that this would bring back around Rs 35 crore of the total Rs 623 crore default amount to the bank.

He thanked them for starting the process to return their loan amount and further appealed to the other defaulters to come forward to pay back their



loans to the bank. He stressed that SBS should also work to ensure that at least the principle amount of the loan is repaid.

He suggested that the bank could offer some relaxation on the interest but such relaxation should be equal for all.

Mr Pradhan mentioned that while Rs 623 crore is the default amount, with interest this amount could go over Rs 1000 crore.

Meanwhile, Mr Pradhan has also filed a complaint in Sadar Thana today alleging that some individuals are using fake social media accounts to launch personal attacks on him and his family members. He had also filed two other complaints at Sadar Thana recently for similar incidents.

Mr Pradhan has said that he hopes the police investigate his complaints with the same diligence as they did when following up on similar complaints by those from the ruling party in the recent past.

"If the police are unable to do so, I will take this matter to court," he stated.

Sikkim gears up for 24th National Youth Festival

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 DEC:**

Sikkim is gearing up to participate in the 24th edition of National Youth Festival to be held from 12 to 19 January. However, all activities in the festival are scheduled to be held virtually and on hybrid mode this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The state level selection for National Youth Festival would be held on 06 and 07 January at Gangtok.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, Secretary to Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Raju Basnet mentioned that

National Youth Festival is an annual event of the Central government but this time it is scheduled to be held virtually and on hybrid mode following safety protocols of COVID-19.

He added that all activities in the competitive and non-competitive categories would be held online. "The festival is a great opportunity and great platform for the youth to showcase their talents. The festival has been providing wide exposure to many talents and boosting their confidence to do well at higher levels," he said.

The Secretary mentioned



that Sikkim has done well in previous editions of the festival and winning medals and laurels for the State at the national level. He informed that a participant from Sikkim had won a gold medal for the State in guitar playing in the last edition of the festival.

SYA Additional Director, Doma Tshering mentioned that the state level selection

of the National Youth Festival was scheduled to be held on 06 and 07 January at Gangtok.

She informed that interested participants have been asked to send in their entries with a 3-minute video at the block and district levels. NYK clubs and NSS volunteers have been involved in this process to ensure maximum participation, she added.

A panel of judges will shortlist participants for the State level wherein they will perform at the venue in Gangtok.

The Additional Director mentioned that the State level National Youth Festival at Gangtok would be attended virtually by judges of the national level. She informed that there would be around 100-member state contingent in the national youth festival.

Likewise, SYA Joint Director, Dr RB Biswakarma mentioned that participants in the age group of 15 to 29 years are eligible to participate in the festival. He added that the festival has competitive events in music, dance, regional attire show, art and expression art, knowledge session, indigenous and in other categories.

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CM One Mile Golden Run in Namchi

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 23 DEC:

The Chief Minister One Mile Golden Run based on the theme "Run with purpose" was launched today at Central Park in Namchi, South Sikkim. The run was simultaneously launched in all the eight block administrative centers of South Sikkim. The event will be held every Saturday at the BAC level for one month.

One Mile Golden Run is organized by the Department of Sports and Youths Affairs, Government of Sikkim. The function at Central Park in Namchi was the launch of the run for Namchi BAC, and was flagged-off by Ganesh Rai, SKM in-charge Namchi/Singithang constituency.



Altogether, eighty-five students from Namchi participated in the Chief Minister One Mile Golden Run in the categories of under-14 and under-16 boys and girls.

The One Mile Golden Run has three categories namely, under-14, under-16

and open category.

The Chief Minister One Mile Golden Run was initiated by the Sports department after the announcement made by Chief Minister, PS Tamang on National Sports Day 2020 which was observed in Namchi.

According to the Deputy Director of Sports and Youths Affairs Department, Namchi, the focus is more on the under-14 category so that the young talents can be streamlined further. She further informed that two boys

and two girls from each of the eight BACs of South district will be selected based on their time, who will be then sent for state level event to be held on 23 Jan, 2021.

The run was also launched in other parts of the state today.

CM meets Patanjali representative

Summit Report

Gangtok, 23 Dec: Chief Minister, PS Tamang today met Pankaj Shah, co-ordinator of Patanjali Yoga and Ayurveda accompanied by Bishnu Kumar Khatiwada.

On his Facebook page, the CM shared that Pankaj Shah informed him regarding their plans to set up a branch of the company in Sikkim. Mr Shah informed the CM that they intend to utilise



the untapped potential of herbal and medicinal plants in the State.

"I welcomed their proposal which I feel

will benefit the people of Sikkim. It will also be a great source of a natural alternative to various ailments," the CM wrote.

NHPC 'Best Performing PSE' at 13th Enertia Awards



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 23 DEC:

NHPC Limited, India's premier hydropower company has been awarded as 'Best Performing PSE' for Excellence in Hydropower and Renewable Sector at the PRAKASHmay 13th ENERTIA Awards 2020.

A press release informs that CMD,

AK Singh, NHPC presented the award and citation at NHPC Corporate Office on 23 Dec, 2020.

NHPC has been conferred this award for its sustained performance and delivery of projects in the hydropower sector with 7.07 GW of Capacity Index via 24 power stations and is

India's Largest Hydro Renewable Asset Public Sector and by far India's largest renewable energy company in the public sector with its forays into the solar arena (100 MW installed capacity of Solar and Wind).

The award has been instituted by REPA (Renewable Energy Promotion Association) and ENERTIA foundation.

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Voluntary Blood Donation Camp at Pachak

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 23 DEC:

A Voluntary Blood Donation Camp was organized by Jan Sewa Samiti Pachak in collaboration with Voluntary Blood Donors Association of Sikkim

(VBDAS) and Budang Kameray Gram Panchayat Unit at Pachak Primary Health Sub Center (PHSC) on 22 Dec, 2020.

A press release informs that 40 units of blood were collected during the camp. Donors

from Upper Pachak, Lower Pachak, Kameray, Sajong and Duga BAC attended the camp.

Health staff from District Hospital Blood Bank Singtam and STNM Hospital, Gangtok, supported the camp.

ED attaches assets worth ₹ 255 Crore in Maharashtra farm loan fraud

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

[PTI]: Properties worth ₹ 255 crore have been attached in connection with a money laundering probe linked to a case of alleged agricultural loan fraud and duping of farmers in Maharashtra, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said on Wednesday.

"Assets worth ₹ 255 crore of Gangakhed Sugar & Energy Limited (GSEL), Yogeswari Hatcheries and Gangakhed Solar Power Limited have been provisionally attached under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)," the

central agency said in a statement.

"The case pertains to fraudulent availing of agricultural loans in the name of innocent and poor farmers," it said.

The attached assets include a sugar plant and machinery of GSEL worth ₹ 247 crore situated at Gangakhed in Parbhani district of Maharastra, land worth ₹ 5 crore of GSEL, Yogeswari Hatcheries, Gangakhed Power Solar Limited in Parbhani, Beed and Dhule, bank balance of ₹ 1.58 crore and investment in shares of ₹ 1.91 crore held in the name of GSEL, it said.

No interference if adult marries per her choice, converts: High Court

KOLKATA, 23 DEC [PTI]:

Hearing a petition by a father claiming that his daughter has been unduly influenced to marry a man of a different religion, the Calcutta High Court has observed that there can be no interference if an adult marries as per her choice and decides to convert.

After a 19-year old woman married a person of her choice, her father petitioned the high court, complaining that his daughter's statement before a magistrate may not have been recorded in an atmosphere where she felt comfortable.

On a case filed by the father, the police had produced the woman before a judicial magistrate, before whom she made a statement

that she had married of her own will.

"If an adult marries as per her choice and decides to convert and not return to her paternal house, there can be no interference in the matter," a division bench comprising justices Sanjib Banerjee and Arijit Banerjee observed on Monday.

Upon the father's complaint, the high court had directed that the woman would meet the senior-most additional district judge in Tehatta and that sufficient care was to be taken so that she was not under any coercion or undue influence.

The bench noted that despite a clear and clean report being furnished by the additional district judge, the father

harbours some suspicion.

Susmita Saha Dutta, the lawyer representing the father, claimed before the division bench that the husband was present within the court premises in Nadia district when the woman appeared before the judge.

The bench directed that to allay the fathers suspicion, the woman will meet additional public prosecutor Saibal Bapuli in his chamber in Kolkata on December 23.

The bench further

directed that at the time the woman meets Bapuli, who is representing the state in the matter, there should be no one else in the room, including her husband.

It directed Saibal Bapuli to file a short report when the matter appears for hearing again on December 24.

Maharashtra COVID-19 task force head doubts vaccine potential

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

[PTI]: Maharashtra COVID-19 task force head Dr Sanjay Oak on Wednesday said vaccines currently available in some countries may not be 100 per cent effective against the new variant of coronavirus found in UK.

Talking to reporters, Mr Oak also said mass gatherings were acting as COVID-19 super-spreaders and should be avoided.

He said there was a need to be careful, and that he feels people need to wear masks for the next one year.

Referring to the new COVID-19 variant detected in Britain, he said "a minor change in themRNA has created a new strain of the coronavirus".

The vaccines which are in approval stage or have been approved in some countries were developed on the earlier strains of coronavirus, he said.

"Even a minor change in the mutated COVID-19 strain could challenge the efficacy of the vaccines which are recently developed," Mr Oak said.

The outer layer of the virus has spikes which look like a coronavirus, hence the virus is called as coronavirus. "Even a change in one spike could increase or decrease its severity," the official said.

"Because of the new

strain, the currently available vaccines may not have 100 per cent impact on the virus (variant)," he said.

With a new strain found in some of the western countries and South Africa, there is a need to check whether the vaccines will have similar efficacy against the new strain or not. It will take some time to ascertain it, he said.

"A vaccine is always developed on a particular strain of virus. At the same time, though a new strain has been found, we must not forget that all these strains are part of one coronavirus family; hence the vaccine could have some impact on its spread," Mr Oak said.

But, it will take time to find out how the new strain responds to the vaccine, he said.

Mr Oak said the general practice is that a new vaccine is to be developed for a new virus.

"It has been said that the wait for new vaccine for the newly found strain is minimum six weeks," he said.

"Another factor that needs to be understood is once a person has COVID-19, his/her body develops some neutralising antibodies against the virus," he said.

Chances of COVID-19 re-infection in the recovered person are dependent on the amount of

antibodies developed.

"If there are good number of antibodies, then despite second round of infection, the person may not fall ill," he said.

"If you ask me about chances of infection from the newly detected strain of coronavirus, the answer is yes," said Mr Oak, who contracted COVID-19 in June and later recovered.

"A person who has recovered from COVID-19 may get fresh infection from the new strain, but its impact on the body depends on the number of antibodies developed during the first infection," the official said.

"If there are sufficient number antibodies, then the new strain may not be very harmful," he said.

"A virus can mutate once its travels from one continent to another. Hence, we need to be more careful in the coming months. I personally feel we need to wear mask for next one year," he said.

He also said mass gatherings, like weddings or other functions attended by hundreds of people, are acting as super spreaders and should be avoided.

"There are chances of many people catching infection by coming close to each other, not wearing masks and gathering in large numbers in a small place," he said.

11 new cases push Nagaland's COVID-19 tally to 11,877

KOHIMA, DEC 23 (PTI):

Nagaland's COVID-19 tally rose to 11,877 on Wednesday as 11 more people tested positive for the infection, a health official said.

One more patient succumbed to the infection in Dimapur, pushing the state's coronavirus death toll to 77, he said.

Fifty more people have been cured of the disease, pushing the recovery rate among the coronavirus patients in the state to an all-time

high of 95.09 per cent, the official said.

Dimapur reported five fresh infections, Kohima four and Mokokchung and Phek one each, Health Minister S Pangnyu Phom said.

Nagaland now has 377 active cases, while 11,294 people have recovered from the disease, Health Department Director Dr Denis Hangsing said.

Sixty-six COVID-19 patients have so far died due to the

contagion, while 10 had comorbid conditions, he said.

Altogether 129 patients have migrated to other states, Hangsing said.

Kohima has the highest number of active cases at 179, followed by Dimapur (112) and Mokokchung (45), he said.

The state has so far conducted 1.19 lakh COVID-19 tests, including 72,124 RT-PCR, 36,608 TrueNat and 10,497 rapid antigen tests, he added.

Union Cabinet nod for revised DTH service guidelines

NEW DELHI, DEC 23

(PTI): The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved revision in guidelines for providing direct to home (DTH) services in the country under which licenses would be issued for 20 years, Union minister Prakash Javadekar said.

He said the change in guidelines would also allow 100 per cent FDI in the DTH sector.

While the Commerce Ministry had spoken of 100 per cent FDI in the DTH sector, the guidelines of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry

needed to be changed.

Changes have been approved for 100 per cent foreign direct investment in the sector. Till now, the FDI was limited to 49 per cent, Javadekar told a media briefing.

The TRAI was consulted in this regard, he added.

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AFFIDAVIT

This is to state that Mr. B.Pradhan and Smt S. Mukhia were legally bound in marriage in the year 2011. This is also to state that Mr. B. Pradhan has been living separately from Smt. S. Mukhia since march 2020 i.e. 9 months.

This is also to state that Mr. B.Pradhan & Smt S.Mukhia are not socially and martially obligated to each other

Sd/-
B.Pradhan

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LAND FOR SALE

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

LAND FOR SALE

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

FOR RENT

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

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

BUILDING FOR SALE

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

ASSCWA inaugurates new office



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 DEC:

All Sikkim Scheduled Caste Welfare Association inaugurated its office here at Development Area today. The

event was attended by the Speaker, Legislative Assembly, LB Das, as chief guest along with MLA Zoom Salghari, Sunita Gajmer, president ASSCWA, Shekhar Sewa and other dignitaries.

Centre explains cancelled India-Russia meet after Rahul Gandhi barb

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

[NDTV]: The India-Russia annual summit was cancelled because of the Covid crisis, the government said today, denouncing what it called "false and misleading" reports suggesting otherwise. The foreign ministry's statement came shortly after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted that "damaging traditional relationships" was dangerous for India's future.

"The India-Russia Annual Summit did not take place in 2020 because of the COVID pandemic. This was a mutually agreed decision between the two governments. Any imputation otherwise is false and misleading.

Spreading false stories in important relationships is particularly irresponsible," foreign ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said.

Earlier, Rahul Gandhi had tweeted, along with a media report: "Russia is a very important friend of India. Damaging our traditional relationships is short-sighted and dangerous for our future."

Some reports have linked the cancellation of the summit for the first time since 2000 to Moscow's comments on Monday expressing reservations about India joining the Quadrilateral coalition or Quad, saying it would be detrimental to inclusive dialogue for ensuring peace and stability in the region.

The Quad, a grouping of the US, India, Japan and Australia, is aimed at ensuring a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and is seen as a counter to growing Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.

Deputy Chief of the Russian mission Roman Babushkin was quoted by news agency PTI as saying: "We are facing some attempts by some countries to create containment and alienation in the Indo-Pacific region which could threaten and jeopardise basic principles for regional cooperation, for example ASEAN centrality and ASEAN unity... Quad would be detrimental to the inclusive dialogue in the region."

Won't bow before anyone: Farooq Abdullah on money-laundering case

SRINAGAR, 23 DEC [PTI]:

National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah, who is facing an ED probe in connection with the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) money-laundering case, asserted on Wednesday that he will not bow before anyone.

Addressing party workers at the NC headquarters, Nawa-i-Subah, a day after the results of the DDC polls were announced, Mr Abdullah, in an apparent reference to the BJP, said the saffron party thinks he will bow before it, but he will not.

"They think Farooq Abdullah will bow before them. I will only bow my head before my god and no one else. He is my creator. They are trying to induce fear, but they do not know Farooq Abdullah. I am the Sher-e-Kashmir's (NC founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah) son," he said.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) attached assets worth ₹ 11.86 crore of Mr Abdullah in

connection with the JKCA case on Saturday.

The agency said after conducting investigations under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), it found out that between 2005-06 and 2012, the JKCA received funding totalling to ₹ 109.78 crore from the Board of Cricket Control in India (BCCI).

A visibly emotional Mr Abdullah, who turned 83 in October, asked the NC workers not to be afraid of challenges.

"We will face challenges as the god poses challenges before us to test us. Had there been no challenges, I will not have read Quran the way I did while in custody. So do not fear the challenges," he said.

The NC president said the DDC poll results have proven that the steps taken by the party and the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) were in the right direction.

"We did not campaign. We did not go out to

do propaganda or raise flags. But we believed in the people and that if our actions are right, then the god will help us. It has been proven that our actions were right. This is the success of the party workers and every citizen of Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

The PAGD, an alliance of several mainstream parties, including the NC and the PDP, seeking the restoration of the erstwhile state's special status, which was revoked by the Centre in August last year -- contested the maiden DDC polls in Jammu and Kashmir under a seat-sharing arrangement.

Mr Abdullah said forging the alliance was not easy but the decision was taken for the greater good of the people.

"We gave many sacrifices. The hearts of my colleagues were broken over seat-sharing. But we had to render those sacrifices for the greater good. People supported us and understood the aim behind the alliance.

CM One Mile Golden Run at Lingi Payong School



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 DEC:

Lingi Payong Secondary School joined other schools across South district in launching the Chief Minister One Mile Golden Run programme for school going children today.

A press release informs that students from Classes VI to X and between the age group of 11-16 years participated in the event. The event was organised under two categories i.e. under 16 years and under 14 years (11 years and above).

The event was organised under the leadership of S Singh and supported by staff; Bibas Rai, Goma Sharma, Pemkit Lepcha, Aron Rai, Bishnu Lamichaney, Manoj Gautam, Diwas Gautam, Binod Bhattacharai and Ghanshyam Khatiwara.

PANCHAYAT MEMBER DONATES FURNITURE TO SARASWATI SISHU NIKETAN AT RIDHANG



Tharpu-Timburbung Zilla Panchayat member, Savitri Dhital, donated 30 desks and chairs to Sarsawati Sishu Niketan, Ridhang, West Sikkim, run under the Vidhya Bharati Sikkim. The furniture was handed over at a special function hosted at the school in the presence of Vidhya Bharati office secretary Surya Dhital and other officials who also felicitated Ms Dhital on the occasion. [from SANJAY AGARWAL]

SC says irony that no action ever taken against officers who sit on file

NEW DELHI, DEC 22

(PTI): The Supreme Court has said it is an irony that despite its repeated observations deprecating the practice of government authorities filing appeals before it belatedly to complete a mere formality, no action has ever been taken against officers who sit on file and do nothing.

The apex court, which dismissed the plea filed by Deputy Conservator of Forests against the Bombay High Court's February last year order on grounds of delay and imposed a cost of Rs 15,000 on the petitioner for wastage of judicial time, observed that it has repeatedly deprecated such a practice.

The irony is that despite observations, no action was ever taken against officers who sit on the file and do nothing, a bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said.

The matter is further aggravated in the present case and even the present petition is filed with a delay of 462 days and once again the excuse is of change of counsel. We have repeatedly deprecated such attempts of the state governments to approach this court only to complete a mere formality, said the bench, also comprising justices Dinesh Maheshwari and Hrishikesh Roy.

The top court noted in its order that it has dealt with the issue of government authorities approaching courts belatedly as if the statute of limitation does not

exist for them.

The special leave petition has been filed after a delay of 462 days. This is one more case which we have categorized as a certificate cases' filed before this court to complete a mere formality and save the skin of officers who have been throughout negligent in defending a litigation! the apex court said.

The top court, while referring to a judgement passed by the apex court in October this year, said it had defined certificate cases the objective of which is only to put a quietus to the issue by recording that nothing could be done because the highest court had dismissed the appeal.

We have repeatedly deprecated such practice and process, it said.

When the counsel appearing for the petitioner contended that a valuable land is involved in the matter, the bench said, In our view, if it was so, then the officers responsible for the manner in defending this petition must be made to pay for it.

We are thus constrained to dismiss the petition as barred by time and impose cost of Rs 15,000 on the petitioner for wastage of judicial time. We put it to the counsel that the cost would have been much greater but for the fact that a young counsel is appearing before us and we have given considerable concession in the costs on that factor alone, the bench said.

Hyderabad cops freeze 75 bank accounts with 423 Cr over lending scam

HYDERABAD, 23 DEC: Hyderabad Police have frozen 75 bank accounts holding ₹ 423 crore in connection with a multi-crore money lending scam - that charged victims up to 35 per cent interest - conducted via 30 mobile phone apps that were not approved by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Police in Telangana were alerted once three people died by suicide after reportedly being harassed and humiliated by money lenders. Authorities conducted multiple raids in Hyderabad and Gurgaon in Haryana, and arrested 16 individuals.

Cyberabad police are carrying out independent investigations and have arrested seven, including an engineer with a degree from the United States. Sarath Chandra, 32, ran money-lending operations via two companies - Onion Credit Pvt Ltd and Cred Fox Technologies, which were started in 2018-19. He also developed and sold loan apps to companies in Bengaluru.

The business operated through firms registered at Bengaluru in January and February this year; as well as call centres in Gurgaon and Hyderabad.

Officials say the call centres employed hundreds of youngsters trained to lure customers, entrap them into borrowing successive sums from multiple apps, and were

trained to "abuse, defame and blackmail" victims in order to recover borrowed money and the interest.

Call centres connected to the scam were set up in Gurgaon, Bengaluru and Hyderabad

In three call centres alone over 1,000 people were employed, many of whom were college graduates paid between ₹ 10,000 and ₹ 15,000 per month.

The scale of the fraud, made more tragic by running at a time when tens of thousands have been left jobless and in dire financial straits because of the pandemic, was highlighted after links to China - a woman with a Chinese passport was arrested in Gurgaon - and Indonesia. Links have also emerged to nine NBFCs (non-bank financial company) in Delhi, Ghaziabad, Nagpur, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Officials say a "multi-city" probe is needed to understand the true extent of the scam. The money itself was routed through shell companies, multiple bank accounts, payment gateways and digital wallets to avoid detection.

On Wednesday evening the RBI cautioned individuals and small businesses against falling prey to unauthorised digital lending platforms and mobile apps that promised hassle-free loans.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

Symptoms of nCoV

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccinations available as of now.
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.

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WEST : 9593297809
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SummitTIMES

Media Should Invite More Criticism

There can, after all, be no improvement without analysis

The news media is introduced as the fourth estate, the fourth pillar holding up the shelter of democracy.

Interestingly, while the other “estates” of democracy – the judiciary, the executive and the legislative – have a screening process to get where they do and are also occasionally, very rarely nowadays, nevertheless, occasionally held accountable for their actions in a formal way in the public domain, the news media is an unfettered opportunity sector where anyone can get in and work answerable to no one if it so desires.

In a perfect world, this is how things should be with “open access” graduating to meritocracy and excellence in this estate. The watchdog in a true democratic system should not be subservient to anyone or anything if it is to deliver on its responsibilities properly. It is, however, not a perfect world that we live in, so checks and balances are required at every level. One could argue that the readers are the best agency to rein in the media when the power of the pen goes to the head. And, in a way they are. No matter how sensational its content, a newspaper, news channel or any other vehicle of information loses credibility in the reader’s mind if it keeps reporting rumours for facts and highlighting trivialities as issues. Things are too muddled now and lack of credibility is no longer a deterrent because eyeballs and clicks trump reliability when it comes to the economics of the business. Readers might turn to them for entertainment, and even if they take the information with a pinch of salt, this audience comprising of echo-chamber bhakts and the voyeuristically inclined who seek out conspiracy theories and vicious rumours. However, with so many other modes of entertainment available nowadays, even the USP of reach becomes a liability very fast because the public nature of media does eventually seed the desire for credibility. So, yes, readership/ viewership (or followers if you are more SocialMedia-inclined) is the one factor that fixes accountability on the info-media.

Obviously, sometimes, just this much is not enough. The quality of readership is not recognized to the extent it should be – neither in Sikkim nor in India as a whole. While simple numbers are enough to decide readership in Sikkim, at a national level it becomes slightly more complicated. The numbers game that media houses indulge in to inflate circulation is no secret and it is perhaps for this reason that an editorial post common in West is now being toyed by some newspapers in India too. The Hindu had started the ball rolling with the offer to appoint a Reader’s Editor, an Ombudsman of sorts. This was a brave decision as the Reader’s Editor, the in-house critic, is expected to be scathing in her analysis of the newspaper. That experiment has played out to mixed results, but is worth exploring on a wider scale. A Reader’s/ Public Editor does not only question and challenge the veracity of news-reports, but also pulls up the intents and vested interests behind the highlighting, prominence and display of certain stories. That is not all, she is also allowed to question journalistic ethics of the newspaper itself and also air opinion when some stories are downplayed or dropped. She does all this not in internal memos, but in a space allotted in the newspaper, in the public domain. Reader’s Editors in the West have been known to be extremely sharp in their criticism. Their performance in India leaves a lot to be desired but is a necessary undertaking. It is also unlikely to happen with any significance because media criticism/ analysis is still a rare animal in media circles. Some online platforms are trying to correct this, but their reach is still limited.

The reason this is being shared here is to highlight the fact that there can be no improvement without criticism. And, there is no such thing as “positive criticism.” Criticism is criticism, its positivity or negativity depends on the target of the criticism and how it is used. Newspaper reports are not the final word. Everyone knows that, and since there is still a lot of room for improvement as far as our conduct is concerned, we, in the media, should invite more responses. To begin with, there will be crude and poorly informed outbursts, but if we give it time, discussions on newspapers in the public domain will soon become more coherent and, yes, “constructive”.

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Even Though Mass Testing For COVID Isn’t Always Accurate, it Could Still be Useful – Here’s Why

JONATHAN PUGH
THECONVERSATION.COM

The mass testing of asymptomatic people for COVID-19 in the UK was thrown into question by a recent study. In a pilot in Liverpool, over half the cases weren’t picked up, leading some to question whether using tests that perform poorly is the best use of resources.

The tests involved in this study were antigen tests. These see whether someone is infected with SARS-CoV-2 by identifying structures on the outside of the virus, known as antigens, using antibodies. If the coronavirus is present in a sample, the antibodies in the test bind with the virus’s antigens and highlight an infection.

Antigen tests are cheap and provide results quickly. However, they are not always accurate. But what do we mean when we say that a test is inaccurate? And is it really the case that “an unreliable test is worse than no test”?

SENSITIVITY vs SPECIFICITY

When testing, one thing we’re interested in is how good a test is at detecting the virus in people who are actually infected. The more sensitive a test is, the less likely it is to deliver a false negative result to someone who has the virus.

False negatives can have significant costs. If people receiving them are also infectious, this may increase the risk of viral transmission, as they’ll behave as if they don’t have the virus – what’s known as “false reassurance”.

But sensitivity is not the only kind of accuracy that matters – we’re also

interested in how good the test is at providing positive results only to those who are actually infected. The more specific a test is, the less likely it is to deliver false positives to those without the virus. False positives also have costs – a person’s liberty might be restricted even though they pose no risk of transmission.

THE LIVERPOOL DATA

Preliminary data from the Liverpool pilot suggests that the test used was 48.89% sensitive. That translates into a very high false negative rate, risking widespread false reassurance. The test cannot robustly confirm that someone isn’t infected.

However, there are other relevant points to consider from the Liverpool pilot. First, the study found that the specificity of the test was 99.93%. That means that only a small proportion of participants who weren’t infected were given a positive result by the test. This specificity is a good thing, but we shouldn’t overstate its importance; high specificity alone does not entail that a positive result is likely to be a true positive. This likelihood, or the test’s “positive predictive value”, is also partly determined by how prevalent the virus is in the tested population.

For instance, say you test 100,000 people with a test that is 99.93% specific, yet the rate of COVID-19 in this group is relatively low – only 70 cases per 100,000 people. Among the 99,930 people who are uninfected, the test would still return a false positive result to 0.07% of them – roughly 70

people. So in this scenario, assuming the test is perfectly sensitive and picks up all the true positives, there would only be a 50% chance of a positive result being true.

Interestingly, the Liverpool data also suggests that the majority of true positive results were in individuals who had higher viral loads. If – and it is an if – higher viral loads are strongly associated with greater infectivity, then these will be the most important asymptomatic cases to identify.

The upshot of this is that antigen testing has some features in its favour for identifying positive cases. The problem is that these benefits may be small if the virus is not prevalent, and they may be massively outweighed by the costs of false reassurance if it is widespread.

CAN WE AVOID FALSE REASSURANCE?

There might be some measures that could potentially reduce these costs. The current messaging that increased testing can “provide reassurance” amplifies the risk of false reassurance, but it could be changed. The advertised purpose of antigen testing could instead be to identify more of the asymptomatic carriers currently flying under the radar.

Some context is important here. In the UK, more accurate testing is currently freely available only for symptomatic individuals and a small number of other groups. This strategy means that many asymptomatic carriers are being missed, and that’s a problem – approximately 40-45% of infections are estimated to be

asymptomatic.

It might also be possible to clarify to people that positive results are robust in a way that the negative results are not. We could also impose further restrictions on people with positive results without similarly using negative results as justification for releasing individuals from other existing restrictions.

One problem with all of these strategies is that they are difficult public health messages to communicate. However, the extent of the problem of false reassurance is also determined by the proportion of infectious people among the false negative cases. The Liverpool data suggests an avenue of further study here.

If we could establish firstly that people with low viral loads pose an acceptably low risk of transmission, and secondly that the false negatives generated by antigen tests were restricted to individuals with such low viral loads, then the harm of these false negatives would also be low. We currently lack crucial data to definitively establish these things. However, if we could, then it would support the argument that these tests could still be used as an effective containment strategy, based around highly frequent testing.

There are significant challenges for mitigating the harms of inaccurate mass antigen testing, and a number of other questions remain. But it’s still possible that some form of mass antigen testing could yet be useful in the future.

[the writer is Research Fellow, University of Oxford]

Why it matters that the coronavirus is changing – and what this means for vaccine effectiveness



DAVID KENNEDY
THECONVERSATION.COM

A new variant of SARS-CoV-2 is spreading rapidly in the United Kingdom, with over 1,400 cases since September. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, generally accumulates mutations slowly over time, but this new variant had accumulated many mutations quickly.

If this new version of the virus is here to stay, as it appears to be, what does that mean? Will this new version of the virus replace the old one? Will it be easier to catch? And, most important, will the current vaccines still be effective?

This interests me because I am an evolutionary microbiologist who studies the link between the transmission and evolution of infectious diseases. In particular, I spend a lot of time considering the effects of vaccines on pathogen evolution and the effects of pathogen evolution on the impact of vaccines.

WHAT IS THE NEW SARS-COV-2 MUTANT THAT HAS EMERGED?

The new version of SARS-CoV-2 – named the B.1.1.7 lineage – is spreading in the U.K. and possibly beyond. The differences between the old and new virus include 23 mutations in the virus’s genetic code that have altered four viral proteins.

Eight of these 23 mutations affect the spike protein. This matters because the spike protein enables the virus to enter human cells, and it is a key target of our immune response, both in fighting off the virus during infection and in protecting us from disease following vaccination with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

If the changes to the spike protein help the virus enter human cells more easily, then the virus could be transmitted from person to person more readily.

These mutations may also alter how well the host’s immune system combats the virus, potentially reducing the efficacy of the current vaccines.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS NEW VERSION OF SARS-COV-2?

Samples of the new virus isolated from patients suggest that this variant has been increasing in relative frequency over the past three months.

The increase in frequency is concerning, as it suggests – but does not prove – that the B.1.1.7 isolates of SARS-CoV-2 are more transmissible than the original virus. Some have estimated that the new virus may be up to 70% more transmissible than the old virus. While these estimates are consistent with the data, it is entirely too early to make a definitive conclusion.

If this increase in transmissibility is confirmed, it might be due to of the mutations in the spike protein allows it to bind more tightly to the ACE2 receptor, which provides a gateway for the virus to enter human cells.

But it might also be due to any of the other changes to the virus.

IS IT MORE DANGEROUS? IF SO, WHY?

If the new version, B.1.1.7, is indeed more transmissible than the old virus, it will be more dangerous in the sense that it will make more people sick.

However, I am not aware of good evidence that there is any difference in severity of disease caused by the new version of this virus compared with the older one. That said, with so few known cases, it may still be too early to say.

WILL THE PFIZER AND MODERNA VACCINES STILL BE EFFECTIVE AGAINST THIS NEW STRAIN?

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work by

training our immune systems to recognize a specific version of the viral spike protein. The version of the spike protein used by the vaccines was designed to match that of the old virus, not that of the B.1.1.7 virus. This means that the vaccines might become less effective than expected should this new virus spread widely.

Vaccine-virus mismatch is an ongoing challenge for scientists charged with developing the seasonal flu vaccine. But even with a virus-vaccine mismatch, the flu vaccine reduces the likelihood, and the severity, of disease.

The question is therefore not whether the vaccines will be effective, but rather how effective they will be. The severity of the mismatch matters, but the only way to determine its impact in this case is through scientific study, and to my knowledge, no data on that has yet been collected. In other words, it’s too early to say whether and how this new variant will influence the overall effectiveness of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

SHOULD PEOPLE STILL GET THE NEW mRNA VACCINE?

The appearance of this new B.1.1.7 makes it even more important that people get vaccinated as soon as possible.

If this new version is more transmissible, or if the vaccine is less effective because of a virus-vaccine mismatch, more people will need to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity and get this disease under control.

Moreover, we now have proof that the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2 can change drastically in a short time, and so it is critical that we get the virus under control to prevent it from evolving further and completely undermining vaccination efforts.

[the writer is Assistant Professor of Biology, Penn State]

Meghalaya Dy CM clarifies restrictions on street carols

SHILLONG, 22 DEC [SHILLONGTIMES]: Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong on Tuesday slammed former Nongkrem MLA Ardent Miller Basaiawmoit for comparing the National People's Party-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA government at the Centre.

Basaiawmoit, a former HSPDP leader, had said the MDA was no different from NDA as he was unhappy with the state government's move to ban street carols.

"The remark made by Basaiawmoit is unacceptable. The MDA government has got its own policies. We are for the minorities and the Christians," Tynsong told reporters.

The deputy chief minister also criticised the ex-Nongkrem legislator for faulting the state government in allowing procession for immersion of Durga idols by following COVID-19 protocols.

"He should talk responsibly," Tynsong said.

Stating that he never expected Basaiawmoit to speak in such a manner, he said the MDA has its own ideology, philosophy and style of functioning.

"A majority of the legislators including Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma are Christians. It was painful for the government to take the decision of not allowing street carols in view of the pandemic," Tynsong said, advising Basaiawmoit to refrain from making irresponsible statements.

"This is an attempt to create more confusion in the minds of the people. We are all out for Christians, for all minorities, for the residents of Meghalaya," he said.

Tynsong clarified that the state government will allow churches to organise Christmas carols and other programmes provided they obtain permission from the respective deputy commissioners.

BSF, BGB discuss host of issues in bi-annual meet

GUWAHATI, DEC 22 (PTI): The 51st director general-level talks between the Border Security Force and Border Guard Bangladesh began on Tuesday with both sides deliberating on a range of issues, including sharing of information and confidence-building measures.

The meet is happening in Guwahati for the first time and it will continue till December 26.

"Development and infrastructure work, sharing of information, joint efforts for effective implementation of the coordinated border management plan, confidence building measures and various other border-related issues were discussed and their solutions were reached," the BSF said in a statement.

NSCN-K announces ceasefire, returns to peace talks

KOHIMA, DEC 23 (PTI): Naga insurgent group NSCN-K, led by dreaded militant Niki Sumi, on Wednesday announced a ceasefire and said that it has contacted the central government for initiating peace dialogue.

The NSCN-K had signed a ceasefire with the Centre in 2001 but unilaterally abrogated it in 2015 when the then 'chairman' of the group, S S Khaplang, was alive.

Sumi is the prime accused in the killing of 18 Indian Army soldiers in Manipur in 2015 and the National Investigation Agency had announced a reward of Rs 10 lakh for his head.

In a statement, Sumi said the NSCN-K has been striving all these years to achieve an honourable and acceptable political solution to the Naga issue and the group is also conscious of the overwhelming sentiments among the Naga people for an early solution to this long



standing matter.

It said that the NSCN-K is aware of the "sincere and genuine efforts" made by the central government in the recent past to find a final and lasting solution to the Naga issue with the involvement of all the stakeholders.

"Therefore NSCN has resolved to strengthen and support the peace process at this crucial juncture. Our leaders have established contact with the officials of government of India in

this connection.

"To facilitate the process and keeping in view the desire of the Naga people particularly Naga civil society organisations and NGOs, the NSCN has further decided to revive the ceasefire with immediate effect by revoking the earlier decision of unilateral abrogation of the ceasefire in 2015," the statement said.

The group also said that it expected the central government to respond positively by

honouring the group's decision as a confidence building measure in the larger interests of peace in Nagaland and Naga people in general.

A home ministry official said this is the last group of Indian origin leaders and cadres operating from Myanmar.

Their joining peace process will give a boost to Naga peace process as the remaining chunk of NSCN-K is Myanmar centric and is irrelevant to the government, the official said.

The other dominant group - the NSCN-IM - had entered into a ceasefire agreement with the central government in 1997 and since then engaged in peace negotiations.

The NSCN-IM had signed a Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015 in presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to find a permanent solution.

The framework agreement came after over 80 rounds of negotiations spanning 18 years, with the first breakthrough made in 1997 when the ceasefire agreement was sealed after decades of insurgency in Nagaland which started soon after India's independence in 1947.

However, the talks with the NSCN-IM is currently going nowhere as the group has been insisting for a separate Naga flag and constitution, a demand rejected by the central government.

Itanagar Zoo reopens



entry gate with a thermal scanner.

Masks are a must for every visitor inside the zoo from the time of entry to the exit, Flago said.

"The visitors allowed to enter the zoo should not have cough, cold or fever. People with such symptoms shall not be allowed entry even if they hold a valid entry ticket," he said, adding that they would

have to undergo body temperature scanning and any other such test insisted at the entry gate.

While senior citizens and people with infants have been advised not to visit the zoo, all adult visitors and children aged 7-years or more have been advised to cover their nose and mouths.

The security personnel and zoo staff engaged at the entry

gate and other areas inside the zoo premises shall guide the visitors to avoid congregation and advise them to use hand wash or sanitizer provided at different utility areas, Flago said.

The guidelines warrant visitors to pass through whole body sanitizer, medicated foot mat or any such installation at the zoo entrance. Visitors have also been advised to

avoid carrying luggage, bags, etc, that need a locker or cloakroom.

"Visitors should maintain social distancing on zoo premises and avoid touching barricades and other surfaces.

They should move along the designated visitor paths only," the curator said.

"Visitors should neither spit nor chew tobacco and other prohibited products. Smoking inside zoo premises is also prohibited," he said.

The zoo authorities have also sought minimal interaction between the zoo staff and visitors with social distancing norms.

The staff frequently interacting with the visitors at the entry gate, ticket counter and toilet will wear face shields, gloves and masks," he added.

ITANAGAR, DEC 23 (PTI): The Biological Park Itanagar, popularly known as Itanagar Zoo, reopened Wednesday, nine months after it was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an official said.

Zoo's Curator Raya Flago said the reopening follows a directive from the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife and Biodiversity).

The zoo was closed for public visit on March 21.

Flago said visitors and staff of the biological park would have to adhere to the latest COVID-19 protocols issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Central Zoo Authority.

The dos and donts say five groups of up to 20 visitors each would be allowed in a day and all staff and visitors shall be screened at the zoo

Mamata Banerjee Speaks With Protesting Farmers In Delhi, Assures Them Support



NEW DELHI, 23 DEC [PTI]: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee today spoke to the farmers camping at the national capital's Singhu border protesting the Central farm laws and assured them of her support in their protest, the Trinamool Congress said.

This was second

time in a month that the Trinamool Congress chief had a telephonic interaction with the agitating farmers.

Five Trinamool MPs met the farmers at the Singhu Border today to show solidarity with them on Kisan Diwas.

"On Mamata Banerjee's direction, a five-member delegation comprising Derek

O'Brien, Satabdi Roy, Prasun Banerjee, Pratima Mondal and Md Nadimul Haque on behalf of the All India Trinamool Congress, is meeting and interacting with farmers from who are on a relay hunger strike on the highway at the Singhu Border to show solidarity."

"Farmers in small groups had a telephonic

interaction with Mamata Banerjee who assured them of her full solidarity with their movement. Some farmers also requested her to visit the dharna site," the Trinamool Congress said.

The party also supported the farmers' demand of annulling the Centre's three new farm laws.

During the telephonic conversation, Mamata Banerjee said it was unfortunate that the farmers, who feed the entire country, were being forced to go hungry.

"The Trinamool will stand by the farmers in solidarity in their movement to repeal the anti-farmer bills," she assured the farmers.

Assam Cabinet clears Bill to make Bodo associate official language



GUWAHATI, 23 DEC [SHILLONGTIMES]: Assam Cabinet headed by the Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Tuesday gave its approval for introduction of Assam Official Language Amendment Bill (to replace ordinance) to make Bodo Language in Devanagari script as Associate Official Language.

The Cabinet meeting chaired by the Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal today have its nod for land acquisition through direct purchase in way of negotiated settlement for improvement of State Highways and Major District Roads under Asom Mala Programme and EAP.

In place of Directorate of Social Welfare, two new Directorates — 'Directorate of Women and Child Development' and 'Directorate of Social Justice and Empowerment' — will be created.

The Cabinet Approved taking loan

of Rs. 91 crores from NABARD under RIDF.

Service benefits of NHM employees will be improved in line with SSA — earned Leave, 60 years of service etc. granted.

A bill will be introduced for provincialization of the posts of Librarian in Degree Colleges.

The Cabinet approved proposal for amendment of Autonomous Council Acts- i) Kamatapur, ii) Motok, iii) Moran and Setting up of Bodo Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council.

It also approved taking over of Kokrajhar Music and Fine Arts College, Kokrajhar; Asom Sattriya Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in Jorhat.

The career progression scheme has been approved by the state Cabinet for doctors serving as faculty members of Medical Colleges in Assam. (Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor).

Odisha reports 364 new COVID-19 cases, 3 fresh deaths

BHUBANESWAR, DEC 23 (PTI): Odisha's COVID-19 caseload on Wednesday mounted to 3,27,279 after 364 more people tested positive for infection, while three fresh fatalities pushed the coronavirus death toll to 1,846, a health department official said.

The new cases were detected in 25 of the state's 30 districts, with 210 cases reported from different quarantine centres, while the remaining 154 are local contact cases.

Sundergarh district recorded the highest 64 cases followed by Khurda (42) and Mayurbhanj (26).

Five districts - Boudh, Kandhamal, Malkangiri, Dhenkanal and Deogarh - did not register any new case in the last 24 hours, the official said, adding that 10 districts reported

cases in single digit.

The three fresh fatalities were reported from Balasore, Khurda and Sundergarh district, he said.

With three fresh fatalities, Odisha's coronavirus death toll mounted to 1,846, he said, adding that 53 other COVID-19 positive patients have also died due to comorbidities so far.

Of the 1,846 fatalities, Khurda district of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, alone accounted for 315 deaths followed by Ganja (246), Sundergarh (162), Cuttack (138) and Puri (114).

Twenty-five other districts reported less than 100 fatalities, he said.

The state now has 3,036 active COVID-19 cases, while 3,22,344 patients have recovered from the highly infectious disease.

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From orphan to football agent: the remarkable journey of Michael Kallbäck

DONALD McRAE

LONDON, 23 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Michael Kallbäck was working as an obscure agent in Scandinavian football when, in November 2014, he became a father for the first time. He describes the birth of his daughter, Charlie, as “an epiphany” which transformed his life. Apart from inspiring him to work in women’s football, where he is now an influential agent, the arrival of his daughter encouraged him to discover the secrets of his own extraordinary past.

Nadia Nadim, the first female footballer to work with him, remains the client to whom he is closest. Playing for Paris Saint-Germain and Denmark, Nadim is one of the world’s great footballers whose life transcends sport. Nadim escaped Afghanistan at the age of 11, after the Taliban murdered her father, and fell in love with football in a Danish refugee camp. She is close to becoming a surgeon while continuing to shine at PSG.

“My own story can’t match Nadia’s, but whose can?” Kallbäck says with a wry smile before he recounts the details of his life as a Sri Lanka orphan who was taken to Sweden when he was two months old. Yet Kallbäck, who is 35, only began to probe his moving personal history six years ago, after he held his baby daughter.

Kallbäck leans forward in his office in Stockholm. “I asked myself: ‘What if my daughter becomes as interested in football as I am? She will ask: ‘Why does daddy only work with men?’ That really made me think. I had barely watched the women’s game before but that’s so wrong. Football is football no matter who is playing.

“At the same time I had this epiphany. Charlie’s mother is white and blonde and I thought when my daughter grows up she will ask why her dad is dark. She will ask: ‘Where is Dad from? Why does he look different?’ So I spoke to Frida, my fiancée, and said: ‘I need to find the truth. I need to go to Sri Lanka.’ So I went to find my mother.”

Before we reach the heart of his story, Kallbäck is keen to highlight how women’s football has galvanised him. Kallbäck represents three of the US women’s team that won the 2019 World Cup and he stresses that Megan Rapinoe, who is not one of his clients, stands alongside Nadim as one of the most significant characters in world sport. “Rapinoe’s important for the world because of her social conscience. Nadia is the same. People appreciate them because everyone can see their struggles and that they fight for everyone.”

Rapinoe being named Time magazine’s Athlete of

the Year in 2019 was a sign of how much the women’s game has grown since Kallbäck was mocked after he shifted his focus to female footballers. “This quite well-known football agent said I was crazy. He said women should wear bikinis rather than play football. This was only six years ago but this same agent now represents women who play international football.”

Around 40% of Kallbäck’s client list are women but his aim is to have a 50-50 split. There is far less money to be made in the women’s game and Kallbäck explains that: “I do not take any commission from players when they play in Scandinavia. The majority of my clients are Scandinavian playing over here and so I earn zero from them.”

He earns his commission when clients move abroad and, apart from Nadim at PSG, he has numerous other high-profile players. Sofia Jakobsson, who was shortlisted for the Ballon d’Or last year, is at Real Madrid while Hanna Glas, her Sweden teammate, plays for Bayern Munich. Lotta Ökvist is with Manchester United.

He offers insight into the improved contracts earned by elite women footballers. “The top players in the world are earning around €500,000 (£451,000) a year on salaries only. If you’re at a top club in Europe as a female football player you are highly competitive with other areas of business. It’s like a director’s salary.”

Salaries for the best women footballers are still dwarfed by their male counterparts’ wages, while there is a dramatic fall for female players in the middle and lower tiers. “I don’t think it will change too much,” Kallbäck adds. “I’m a realist. I don’t think female players will ever earn the same amount as men. Everything should be equal but, in reality, we won’t get that.”

Does he talk differently to female players than to male footballers? “In the beginning I did it the exact same way. But sometimes I need to think before I speak. Hanna Glas didn’t appreciate me giving her feedback when Sweden played Thailand in the World Cup. They won 5-1 but the US smashed Thailand 13-0. I was like: ‘See the difference? You conceded a goal against Thailand and you’re satisfied?’

“She barely spoke to me in two days but as we are also very good friends she could then tell me: ‘I didn’t appreciate what you said.’ In the end they won the bronze and she had a fantastic tournament. Hanna accepts now that I try and always speak the truth to her. Hanna is probably the best-paid Swedish player now. When she left PSG I told Bayern I consider her the best right-back in the world after Lucy Bronze.”



Kallbäck’s desire to help female footballers has been shaped by his personal history and a return to Sri Lanka for the first time since his adoption 29 years earlier. He arrived in Colombo with only his mother’s birth certificate and a small photo as links to his past. He hired a taxi driver to take him all over a vast and teeming city as he showed strangers his mother’s photograph. No one knew her and he was about to give up when he returned to Gampola, 80 miles away, and the orphanage from where his Swedish parents adopted him.

A nun seemed to recognise his mother but she could not offer much practical help. So, before flying home to Sweden, Kallbäck drove into the hills above Gampola to check into a hotel “so at least I can see the area where my mother is from. They needed my passport. I opened it and out drops the photo. This guy picks it up and says: ‘I know her. But there was an incident 25 years ago and she left the country.’ That incident was about a baby being born. I told him everything and he said: ‘A woman who is probably your grandmother lives in the house. Relax, I’m taking you tomorrow.’

“We go there and find a very old woman. There is a huge wedding photo on the wall and I wonder if it is my mother. The man says, in Sinhala: ‘This could be your grandson.’ The old lady shakes her head: ‘You came to the wrong place.’ But then her eyes

filled with tears. She did this [touching his face] and said: ‘Take care.’ I didn’t reflect on it because I was so disappointed.”

At the airport, Kallbäck checked his social media messages. “On my company’s Facebook page I see a strange name has made a comment on the photo I had posted of my mother. So I pressed that and see the woman from the wedding photo at my grandmother’s house. She wrote: ‘I’m so proud of you.’”

Kallbäck’s voice is thick with emotion. He called the man at the hotel who confirmed that he knew the old lady had lied and so he had given Kallbäck’s business card to her. She was Kallbäck’s grandmother and had called her daughter to explain he was searching for her. Kallbäck’s mother was living in Qatar – coincidentally where he was flying to catch his connection.

“My grandmother asked my mother if she had told her new husband about me. This was the first man she had met since she’d had me. She was like: ‘I haven’t, but I will now.’ So when I came to Doha I went to the lounge and started texting with her. She tells me what she’s been through. It was heartbreaking but at the same time I felt: ‘Wow, you’re alive and I will meet you.’

“When she was home in Sri Lanka a few months later I went back to meet her. She was only 13 when she had me and her village pushed her out. So she took me to the orphanage and the nuns helped arrange my adoption to Sweden. Then somebody tricked her into going to Asia where there was some kind of trafficking and they almost killed her. Years later she worked for a Swedish family in Qatar. She went with them for a visit to Gothenburg and all the time she was looking for somebody that could be me.”

How did it feel to meet his biological mother? “It was a sparkling moment and an experience I never thought I’d have. It was very special.” Kallbäck remains closer to his adoptive Swedish parents who brought him up. But he smiles when he says: “When my youngest daughter turns five, and she’s two now, I will bring my family to meet my mother in Sri Lanka. It will help everyone understand where I came from.”

Kallbäck provides opportunities for women after he was given away when his mother had no option. As the past, present and future merge, he suggests: “I want to say: ‘I was part of the change and did something good in women’s football.’

“I hope the strong voices, like Nadia Nadim and Megan Rapinoe, continue to fight as we create a better environment for the next generation of female footballers.”

Messi surpasses Pele and leads Barca to victory at Valladolid



VALLADOLID, SPAIN, 23 DEC (REUTERS): Barcelona turned on the style to thrash Real Valladolid 3-0 away in La Liga on Tuesday as Lionel Messi scored his 644th goal to surpass Pele as the all-time record scorer for a single club. Messi also finally got his first assist of the season when he picked out defender Clement Lenglet with a splendid cross and the Frenchman rose to head Barca in front after 21 minutes.

The Argentine also had a hand in the visitors’ second goal, laying on a pass for right back Sergino Dest to latch on to down the right flank and play a cross into the path of Martin Braithwaite, who slid in to score in the 35th minute.

Messi capped a brilliant individual display with a splendid goal midway through the second half, running in behind to meet a pass from teenager Pedri and slotting into the far bottom corner to eclipse Pele’s long-standing scoring mark for Santos.

It was also an outstanding team display from Ronald Koeman’s side, who responded to Saturday’s disappointing

2-2 home draw against Valencia by earning their first away league win since beating Celta Vigo on Oct. 1.

Barca remain fifth in the standings, moving on to 24 points after 14 games. Atletico Madrid are top with 32 points from 13 games after a 2-0 win at Real Sociedad on Tuesday.

“Today was a very complete performance. We needed to win this game and we did that while showing some real quality,” said Barca scorer Lenglet.

“Today our tactics worked well and we’re very happy. Our full backs were able to play high up the pitch and it was a consistent performance overall, while we didn’t let our opponents have too many chances.”

Messi, who remarked earlier this week that he sometimes struggled to get motivated for games in the absence of fans, looked up for the match from the first whistle. The 33-year-old nearly gave Barca an early lead when he rattled a shot towards the top corner only to be thwarted by a save from keeper Jordi Masip.

Arsenal in 'big trouble' says Mikel Arteta after miserable Carabao Cup exit

DAVID HYTNER

LONDON, 23 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Mikel Arteta said Arsenal were in “big trouble” and feeling further pain after a 4-1 home defeat by Manchester City dumped them out of the Carabao Cup quarter-finals.

The Arsenal manager picked a second-string team and watched his goalkeeper, Alex Rúnarsson, endure a torrid evening. The low point came when the Icelander fumbled a Riyad Mahrez free-kick into the net to give City a 2-1 lead. Rúnarsson had also been partly to blame for Gabriel Jesus’s opening goal.

It was a night when so much went wrong for Arteta. Gabriel Martinelli, who made Arsenal’s equaliser for Alexandre Lacazette, was forced off after taking a kick to the shin while City’s third goal, scored by Phil Foden, ought to have been disallowed for offside only there was no recourse to VAR.

The bottom line was that it was no hard luck story for Arteta. City had too much quality, they were far the better side and they moved one step closer to a fourth consecutive win



in the competition. Pep Guardiola, who joined them in 2016, has only lost one knockout tie in the competition.

Arteta’s team are mired in a desperate run of Premier League form, having taken only five points from the past 10 games, and they face a difficult home game with Chelsea on Boxing Day.

“We have to turn it around, there’s no question about that,” Arteta said. “We are in big trouble. I am focused on the fighters we have. I see a lot of fighters. This was a really painful moment again. We conceded a soft goal really early and to get through that is difficult but we reacted and scored. After that we were the better team

but then we conceded another soft goal.

“When you give away the goals that we gave against an opponent like this, it makes the game impossible. Then, we have an open situation when we can play Lacazette through and they score on the counter and from an offside position. After that, the game is over.”

Arteta said that he felt his No 1 goalkeeper, Bernd Leno, needed some rest. On Rúnarsson, he added: “He hasn’t played a lot of games and he is just adapting to the league. We all make mistakes and we have to support him. We win and lose together. The responsibility is for us all.”

City have struggled for cutting edge at times this season and Guardiola was pleased with the ruthlessness they showed. But he added: “It’s like in Manchester, raining every day. For one day, the sun rises. It doesn’t mean the weather is going to change. It’s just one game. So we’ll see what happens in the future.”

Guardiola gave his support to Arteta, his former assistant at City, who is under increasing pressure. “They will do a huge, big mistake [if they dismiss him],” he said. “I’m pretty sure they are going to trust him. I know his incredible quality. It’s just a question of time and he will do well.”

Anthony Joshua says he wants to take Tyson Fury's 'head off his shoulders'

LONDON, 23 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Anthony Joshua has warned Tyson Fury of his bad intentions when they eventually meet in the ring next year. “I want to take his head off his shoulders when that fight happens,” Joshua said on Tuesday as he also spoke of his more noble commitment to offer “substantial financial backing” to the amateur national boxing federations of England, Wales and Scotland so that he can help clubs in need of support during the pandemic.

Joshua, who defended his IBF, WBA and WBO world heavyweight titles when knocking out Kubrat Pulev this month, stressed how his local boxing gym in Finchley had saved him from a troubled path which could have seen him end up in jail. But in the midst of calling on the government to help support grassroots boxing, Joshua could not resist remembering a 2010 sparring session between him and Fury at Finchley Amateur Boxing Club.

As he sat in the same gym Joshua suggested that Fury, the WBC heavyweight champion, “knows about my uppercut. He knew about it from when I was [20]. Trust me, he knows what’s coming. All I wanted was his Rolex watch [because] he said before that spar: ‘If you can beat me up or knock me out, you can have

my Rolex.’ It was a good spar and I didn’t really know too much. It was just passion. Now I have some boxing IQ to go with my passion, it will be a great fight.”

Last week the BBC unearthed an interview the 22-year-old Fury did after that sparring session. Fury, who had made his pro debut in December 2008, said: “Anthony Joshua’s red hot. He gave me a big uppercut [and] if I had a bit of a weak chin I’d have been knocked out for a month. I rate myself as one of the top heavyweights in the world but for three rounds he gave me a beating. I thought: ‘Oh my God, an amateur’s killing me!’”

Joshua insisted that: “I was hungry then and I’m even hungrier now. There was a Rolex [on offer then] but now there is an even bigger pot of gold at the end of this rainbow and I want to take his head off his shoulders when that fight happens. I’m sure that I’ll win.”

But he downplayed his promoter Eddie Hearn’s claim straight after the Pulev fight that a £200m Fury-Joshua unification contest would be announced within a few days. “How close are we? I promise you conversations are happening,” said Joshua. “But until you hear it from me, don’t buy into anything. I’m serious about the fight so when I announce it you’ll know it’s real.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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US university establishes endowed chair in Jain and Hindu Dharma

WASHINGTON, DEC 22 (PTI): A US university has announced establishing an endowed chair in Jainism and Hinduism, which will be an integral part of its religious studies programme.

Over two dozen Indian-American families have contributed to creating a joint Endowed Chair in Jain and Hindu studies at California State University, Fresno.

The Endowed Chair in Jain and Hindu Dharma will be housed in the Department of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Humanities and will be an integral part of the University's religious studies programme.

A professor who



is an expert in both the Jain and Hindu Dharma traditions will be appointed as interim chair in 2021.

The groundbreaking partnership between the Jain and Hindu communities and the California State University, Fresno underscores a mutual commitment to educating current and future generations of students

about the principles of nonviolence, dharma (virtue, duty), justice, pluralist philosophy, the interconnectedness of all beings and care for the environment through Hindu-Jain texts, philosophies and traditions, a media release said.

The California State University (CSU) has never seen a partnership like this one with the Jain

and Hindu communities. I'm very pleased that this has happened at Fresno State. It establishes a model for other campuses in the CSU and around the country to do the same, CSU Fresno president Joseph I. Castro said.

Jasvant Modi, of Los Angeles, a prominent Jain philanthropist and supporter of this chair, added, We hope that the younger generation, when they come to the college, they're exposed to this philosophy as we know that Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and others followed a nonviolent way of solving the countries and the world's problems.

The chair will

teach Jainism and Hinduism, furthering Fresno State's efforts to promote understanding of religions and communities, said Saul Jim nez-Sandoval, Fresno State provost and vice president for Academic Affairs.

Additionally, the endowed chair also will support Jain and Hindu scholarly endeavours for students, including scholarships, stipends and research funds. For the professor who holds the chair, the funds may support research and academic publications, conference travel and campus-sponsored events, the university said.

US close on deal with Pfizer for millions more vaccine doses



WASHINGTON (AP): The U.S. government is close to a deal to acquire tens of millions of additional doses of Pfizer's vaccine in exchange for helping the pharmaceutical giant gain better access to manufacturing supplies.

A person with knowledge of the negotiations told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the deal is under discussion and could be finalized shortly. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to describe ongoing deliberations.

Pfizer's vaccine was the first to gain approval from the Food and Drug Administration and initial shipments went to states last week. It has now been joined by a vaccine from Moderna, which was developed in closer cooperation with scientists from the National Institutes of Health.

Moderna's vaccine comes under the umbrella of the government's own effort, which is called Operation Warp Speed. That public-private endeavor was designed to have millions of vaccine doses ready and available to ship once a shot received FDA approval.

But another deal with Pfizer would move the nation closer to the goal of vaccinating all Americans.

A law dating back to the Korean War gives the government authority to direct private companies to produce critical goods

in times of national emergency. Called the Defense Production Act, it's expected to be invoked to help Pfizer secure some raw materials needed for its vaccine.

Pfizer already has a contract to supply the government with 100 million doses of its vaccine under Operation Warp Speed, but government officials have said it's more of an arms-length relationship with the company and they don't have as much visibility into its operations.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said last week that the government was negotiating with Pfizer for more doses, but details provided Tuesday about the company's desire for better access to supplies are new.

Earlier, U.S. officials had said they were discussing the purchase of another 100 million doses of Pfizer vaccine for delivery as early as the middle of next year. Those details and timing may have changed.

Pfizer said in a statement that "we continue to work collaboratively with the U.S. government to get doses of our COVID-19 vaccine to as many Americans as possible. The company is not able to comment on any confidential discussions that may be taking place with the U.S. government."

The vaccine from Pfizer and German pharmaceutical BioNTech immediately raised hopes of taming a pandemic that has killed nearly 320,000 people in the U.S. and hobbled much of the national economy. Health care workers and nursing home residents topped the list as local TV stations across the country began broadcasting scenes of the first vaccinations. Some polls show skepticism about getting vaccinated may be easing.

After early failures with testing, Trump administration officials are hoping to write a very different ending with vaccines. Operation Warp Speed has financed the development, manufacture and distribution of millions of doses, with the goal of providing a free vaccine to any American who wants one.

Operation Warp Speed is on track to have about 40 million doses of vaccine by the end of this month, of which about 20 million would be allocated for first vaccinations. Distribution of those doses would span into the first week of January. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two shots to be fully effective.

The New York Times first reported the new details of negotiations between Pfizer and the Trump administration.

Pandemic reaches Antarctica, last untouched continent

SANTIAGO, CHILE (AP): The pandemic has finally reached every continent on Earth.

Chilean authorities announced that at least 58 people that were at two military bases in Antarctica or on a navy ship that went to the continent tested positive for the new coronavirus.

So far no other country with a presence in Antarctica has publicly reported any other cases.

Chile's army announced Monday that 36 people at the Gen. Bernardo O'Higgins Riquelme Antarctic base have tested positive, and on Tuesday the health minister for the Biobio region in Chile said there are 21 infections involving people aboard the Chilean navy's Sergeant Aldea supply vessel.

One more case was reported in Las Estrellas' village, where civilian personnel working at the Lieutenant Rodolfo Marsh Martin Air Force Base live, said Eduardo Castillo, regional health secretary for



the Magallanes area, which oversee Chilean operations in the Antarctic. The Sargento Aldea ship docked at that village, he added.

The army said the first group of 36 people includes 26 members of the military and 10 civilian employees of a maintenance contract company. It said none so far had shown complications.

Michelle Rogan-Finnemore, executive

secretary of the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs, said in a statement that the office received a report from the Chilean Antarctic Institute on Friday about positive cases aboard the Sergeant Aldea vessel "who would have disembarked in the ports of Punta Arenas and Talcahuano" on Chilean mainland.

"We have yet to receive further formal

information," she added.

The first three people on the Sergeant Aldea vessel tested positive last week and all 208 crewmembers are being quarantined aboard that ship, according to the navy. It said the vessel had serviced the base on the Trinity Peninsula between Nov. 27 and Dec. 10.

The U.S. National Science Foundation, the agency overseeing U.S. programs in Antarctica,

said it was aware of the reports of positive cases in passengers aboard the Sergeant Aldea.

"Personnel at U.S. Antarctic Program stations have had no interactions with the Chilean stations in question or the personnel who reside there," the foundation said. "NSF remains committed to not exchanging personnel or accepting tourists at USAP stations."

France lets some UK cargo, people in; huge backlog remains

CALAIS, FRANCE (AP): Freight from Britain and passengers with a negative virus test began arriving on French shores Wednesday, after France relaxed a two-day blockade over a new virus variant that had isolated the U.K., stranded thousands of truck drivers and raised fears of food shortages.

Associated Press reporters saw a ferry from Britain pulling into the French port of Calais before dawn, and trains carrying freight and car passengers were allowed to cross into the continent beneath the English Channel again.

People arriving from Britain are required to have a virus test capable of detecting the new variant, according to a late-night agreement reached after 48 hours of frenzied negotiations among French, British and EU authorities. European nations and others around the world began slamming borders shut to Britain on Sunday, a day after the U.K. prime minister

announced that the new variant was mostly responsible for a surge in new infections in London and southern England and imposed tight new lockdown restrictions.

The company that runs the Eurotunnel said Wednesday that truck drivers lined up on the highway leading to the English port of Dover are being tested for the virus, but that it may take some time to for traffic to resume as normal after the massive backup.

On the English side of the Channel, soldiers and the U.K.'s official test-and-trace workers were being deployed for the mass testing program to ease the backlog of trucks. A negative test result taken less than 72 hours before the journey is required for anyone entering France from Britain.

British Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick said around 4,000 trucks may be waiting in the southern county of Kent and urged other borders shut to Britain there until the backlog is cleared. It will take



"a few days" to test all the drivers before they can travel to France, he said.

"Whatever the number is, whether it is 4,000 or more, it is a significant number to work through," Jenrick said.

Calais is a major conduit for trade and travel between Britain and the continent, and France had argued that the blockade was necessary in order to work out safety measures to protect European citizens.

The French travel restrictions had angered and worried many in the U.K. because the nation relies heavily on

its cross-Channel commercial links to the continent for food at this time of year, especially for fruit and fresh produce.

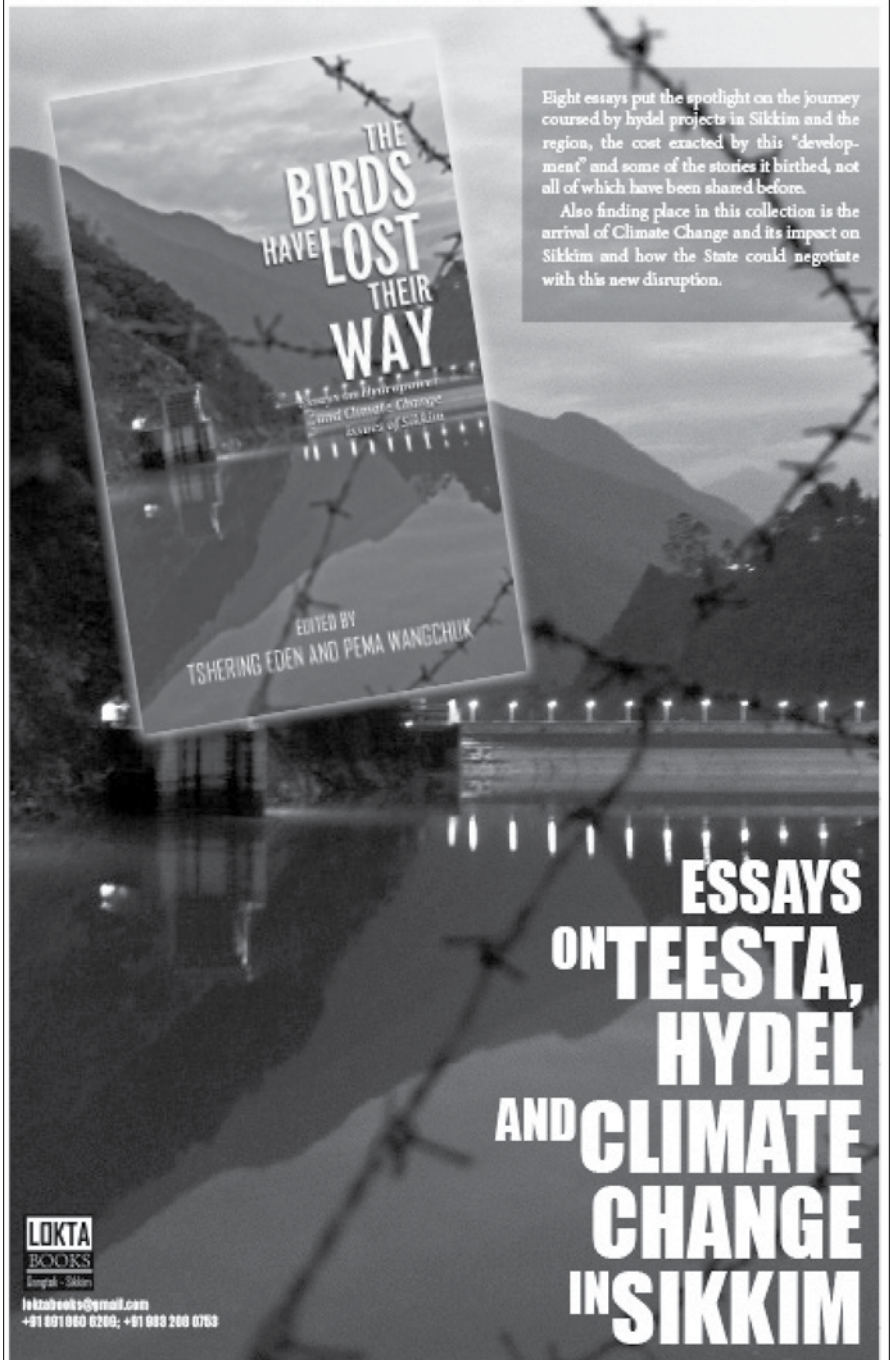
Dozens of other countries in Europe and beyond are continuing to bar travellers coming from the U.K. Japan announced Wednesday that it will reinstate entry ban on most new arrivals from Britain.

Eurostar passenger train traffic was also resuming from Britain to the continent Wednesday, but only for citizens of Europe's border-free zone, British citizens with EU residency and those with a special

reason to come to the continent temporarily, such as truckers.

French authorities have insisted that the blockade was based on scientific concerns and not politics, though it came amid tense talks between Britain and the EU on a post-Brexit trade deal. The pileup of trucks in Britain served as a glimpse of what the border could look like if no deal is struck by the Dec. 31 deadline.

France's Europe minister, speaking on BFM television Wednesday about the talks, noted that it comes to trade, "the British side has much more dependence on Europe than the reverse."



When Alia Bhatt Confessed In Front Of Ranbir Kapoor's Ex Deepika Padukone That Emotional Infidelity Is The Deal-Breaker For Her



We're talking about the famous Koffee With Karan episode graced by Alia Bhatt and Deepika Padukone.

Ranbir Kapoor is known to be a lover boy. The actor has dated some of the most beautiful women from Bollywood. While his romance with Deepika Padukone has been the talk of the town since years, relationship with Katrina Kaif has been under the radar too. RK is currently dating Alia Bhatt and is said to soon tie the knot with her.

But do you remember the time when Deepika Padukone was asked about cheating in front of Alia Bhatt? Yes, we're talking about the famous Koffee With Karan episode. To our surprise, the beauty proved that they have been really good friends despite sharing the common factor – Ranbir. During the rapid-fire, Karan Johar asked Deepika Padukone if she would want to know about being cheated upon or not know at all. To this, the actress chose the former option. Of course, it led tails wagging but that wasn't it!

Karan Johar went onto ask Alia Bhatt what would be the deal-breaker for her in a relationship. To this, the Brahmastra actress replied, "emotional infidelity." We wonder what would have been Ranbir Kapoor's reaction to the same!

Meanwhile, there have been rumours for a while now that Alia and Ranbir are soon tying the knot. It was even said that the couple is planning to get hitched soon after Brahmastra shooting was over. Some other reported that they ditched a wedding in 2020 due to work commitments.



HOLIDAY HELP! Model, actress and director Roselyn Sanchez took to Instagram to join real mothers throughout California to kick off the "Love Means Staying Away" campaign, advocating for people to stay home this holiday season - urging to pause plans to gather for the holidays, to avoid further catastrophic effects of the pandemic.

ARIES:

You didn't think you could ever make it here, yet you did! If this doesn't tell you about your capabilities, what does? Today, you're being asked to hit pause, take a moment to lovingly gaze at your creations, and give yourself the validation you sometimes seek from others. Remind yourself that you deserve every bit of the success you have attracted into your Universe. Yes, there is an important lesson in here for you, Aries—the realisation that stepping into your power makes you a magnet for miracles.

TAURUS:

That this is an emotionally challenging time for most of us is not brand new information, Taurus. The real question is: are you willing to become the eye of the storm? To move through the turbulence with the awareness of a Zen master? Remember, you have been preparing for this monumental change. The tools required to turn the wounds into wisdom are already within you.

GEMINI:

The thing is, you're too hung up on the outcome. You're too hung up how you will be perceived, and whether or not your endeavours will be profitable. But you've always

been the most creative member of the crew, one who inspires others to push their own boundaries time and again. What's keeping you from practicing your own mantra, Gemini? Today, consider changing the approach a little. Do what you love with all your heart and let everything else fall in place. The mysterious forces are with you, helping you at every step along the way.

CANCER:

You gave them a fair chance, Cancer. You gave them a chance to prove their mettle. Yet, they failed to recognise the strength of this bond. They failed to show up for you in the way you showed up for them. It's time for you to understand what the signs are pointing towards. Choosing yourself has never come easy to you. But you've got to do what you've got to do for yourself.

LEO:

Suppressed emotions don't just go away, Leo. They continue to live on and influence our behaviour from the depths of our unconscious. What are the dark alleys of your unconscious drawing your attention towards? Recognise the unhealed wounds that are secretly sabotaging your growth. The Universe is holding space for you to do the inner

work. So, don't shy away from looking within and confronting the so-called darkness that's looking back at you.

VIRGO:

It's easier to practice kindness with strangers. But, what happens when somebody we know and love comes into the equation? Are we ever able to give with all of our heart, or do we maintain a record and weigh the relationship down with our (unrealistic) expectations? It's time to come face to face with the truth, Virgo. It's time to let go of the false, and meet your innermost self, who has mastered the art of being unconditional in every sense of the word.

LIBRA:

Libra, the mysterious smile on your face reveals you're happier than you've been in a while. That you are becoming increasingly aware of the truth that the present is where the magic is—and where it has been along. So, instead of oscillating between the past and the present, you are awakening to the gifts this moment is offering you. Trust that this shift in your consciousness will lead to a massive shift in your reality too.

Varun Dhawan says three A-list stars warned him about working with Sara Ali Khan: 'Bach ke rehna'

Varun Dhawan has said that as many as three stars -- Ayushmann Khurrana, Vicky Kaushal and Kartik Aaryan -- warned him about working with Sara Ali Khan. The two will be seen together in the upcoming Coolie No 1 remake.

Varun Dhawan was told to beware of Sara Ali Khan by as many as three other actors. Varun and Sara will be seen together for the first time in the upcoming Coolie No 1 remake.

In a promo video for an episode of The Kapil Sharma Show, Varun revealed that Ayushmann Khurrana, Vicky Kaushal and Kartik Aaryan all had the same warning for him regarding Sara.

In the video, Varun said, "Inke saath kam kar raha tha toh mujhe Ayushmann, Kartik, Vicky Kaushal, sabne message kiya tha (Ayushmann, Kartik, Vicky Kaushal all warned me about working with her)." Sara asked, "Kya bola tha (What did they say)?" and Varun replied, "Ki bachke rehna (To beware of you)."

Aapko khulkar hasaane, aapko entertain karne, aur aapke weekend ko no. 1 banaane aa rahein hai humare special guests Coolie NO.1 ki star cast #TheKapilSharmaShow mein iss Sat-Sun raat 9:30 baje.

Sara, who made her debut with director Abhishek Kapoor's Kedarnath, opposite the late Sushant Singh Rajput,



has also starred in Simmba and Love Aaj Kal. She is currently filming director Aanand L Rai's Atrangi Re, opposite Akshay Kumar and Dhanush.

Coolie No 1 is a remake of David Dhawan's 1995 hit of the same name. The original film starred Govinda and Karisma Kapoor in lead roles. Sara in a recent interview had defended the 'problematic' plot of the original, and said that the remake should be viewed with an 'open mind'.

She told Mid-Day in an interview, "I'd urge people to watch the film with the honest intention with which it is told. There is a difference between

what you say on Twitter, and what an entertaining comedy tries to say. If everybody [expects] everything to be politically correct, any scope of humour in our lives will be [lost]. Of course, you can't be demeaning. Govinda sir duping Karisma to make her believe that he is not a coolie, is funny. It's not about him cheating. Ultimately, he falls in love with her, and that's what most of us look forward to in life."

Directed by David Dhawan, the new Coolie No 1 also stars Paresh Rawal, Jaaved Jaaferi, Rajpal Yadav, and Johnny Lever. It's slated for a Christmas release on Amazon Prime Video.

Diddy gave his mom a \$1 million check for her 80th birthday

King of birthdays Sean Combs proves that no one parties like Diddy.

This time, he went all out to celebrate his mom, Janice Combs' 80th birthday on Monday. The music mogul threw a birthday dinner where he and his children showered her with gifts.

Combs' son, Justin, gifted her a diamond necklace with her moniker "Mimi" on it. Diddy then surprised her with a \$1 million check — but the gifts didn't stop there. He proceeded to take his mom out to the driveway, where he surprised her with a Bentley.

"I can't believe this," a shocked Janice said.

"A very important add-on to the gift: a driver comes with it. You ain't gotta worry about it. You can just tell him your destination. It's your favorite color," Diddy said.

His twins, Jessie and D'Lila, 14, share a birthday with their grandmother. He surprised them with a birthday party on a yacht.



"I love birthdays," Diddy said in video he posted on Instagram about the festivities.

This Jim Carrey Flick Just Hit #1 on Netflix—and It's Definitely the Must-Watch Movie of the Week

Move over, Christmas Chronicles 2. Jim Carrey's original Christmas classic just made its way to the number one spot on Netflix's most popular movie list.

Yep. Just two days before the holiday, How the Grinch Stole Christmas is officially the most-watched flick on the streaming platform surpassing Let it Snow, Christmas with the Kranks, Klaus and more. If you're like us, you've probably watched HTGSC already this season (and in previous years). However, we'll take any excuse to screen the comedy again. And if you haven't seen it yet, you've still got some time.

In short, Carrey stars as the antisocial Grinch who absolutely hates Christmas. The bitter and hateful Grinch becomes increasingly irritated at the thought of the nearby village planning their big Christmas celebrations. To ruin their holiday, he disguises himself as Santa Claus (and his dog to look like a reindeer) and travels to the village to raid it of all of the presents, trees and decorations. But after a run-in with a little girl, he begins to have a change of heart.

Based on Dr. Seuss's book of the same name, How the Grinch Stole Christmas also stars Taylor Momsen (Gossip Girl), Jeffrey Tambor (Arrested Development), Christine



Baranski (Mama Mia), Bill Irwin (Lady in the Water), Molly Shannon (Never Been Kissed), Clint Howard (The Waterboy) and Mindy Sterling (Austin Powers). Oh, and we can't forget Kelley who plays our beloved Max the dog.

What better way to get into the holiday spirit than with a little comic relief from our good pal Jim? In the words of Mr. Grinch himself, "Cheer up dude, it's Christmas!"

SCORPIO:

You've spent so much time manifesting this love in your life, Scorpio. What's keeping you from embracing it fully? What's keeping you from sending out that prayer of gratitude into the Universe? Take a good look in the mirror, Scorpio. Take a good look at the reflection staring back at you and start a dialogue with your innermost self. In moments of silence, you will realise you are deserving of this love. You have been deserving of it all along, beautiful.

SAGITTARIUS:

You're all about the fireworks, Sagittarius. You're all about the connections that make you feel alive. But, sometimes the fire is ignited immediately. At other times, the connection builds slowly. So, don't be in a rush to reject somebody or repeat the 'things aren't quite right' story. Truth is, everything is working in your favour. Cultivating patience will help you open your eyes.

CAPRICORN:

Sometimes, you try your best, but you don't succeed. At other times, your intention combined with inspired action helps open many doors for you. It's such a time in the Capricorn HQ, and you'll find that the forces are

giving you that much-needed push. Once again they're asking you the question, "What do you want to create over the next 365 days?" Don't wait until tomorrow. Start now.

AQUARIUS:

It's a cup-hath-runneeth-over kind of day in the Aquarius HQ, and you'll find your familial ties are taking centre stage. It's a time to get to know your tribe on a deeper level and to share both your joy and your sorrows with them. Their support will help you get through whatever it is that you're going through, the turbulence you may be experiencing at the moment. What's more, marital bliss is on the cards. Couples who've said 'I do' will find that the passage of time is making their love grow stronger.

PISCES:

Deadlines, who? Prepping for the holiday season is a big mood around here, and you're consciously reconnecting with old friends and family alike. Some of you may be planning to travel to see a sibling too. Keep it simple (and small) this time around, Pisces. Exchange gifts, sip on mulled wine, sing your favourite songs, and let each member of your tribe know how much they mean to you.