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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SIKKIM'S CONCERNS HIGHLIGHTED AT NEC PLENARY SESSION

CM seeks upgraded internet bandwidth, extension to industrial development policy and permission to levy Covid Cess

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 JAN**

Addressing the plenary session of the North Eastern Council in Shillong on Saturday, Chief Minister PS Tamang highlighted key points concerning Sikkim, laying special focus on interventions required to overcome the setback caused by the Covid pandemic.

The 69th Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council was held at the NEC Secretariat, Nongrim Hills, Shillong, and attended by Home Minister Amit Shah who is also the Chairperson of the NEC, DoNER Minister Jitendra Singh, Chief Ministers and dignitaries from the North-East states, and other officials, a press communiqué from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

In his brief address, the CM shared that the poor quality of inter-



net in Sikkim had hampered the State's efforts in carrying out several essential services like administrative functioning, medical support and education.

In this regard, he underlined the "immediate need" to upgrade the internet bandwidth in the State from 10 Mbps to 1 Gbps.

The release adds that he also sought for the North East Industrial Development Scheme, cleared by the Union Cabinet in March 2018 and in effect till March 2020, to be extended by another 10 years, pointing out that it has been beneficial for the region and brought changes in

the structure and the growth pattern of the State's gross domestic product.

Changes in work patterns and limitations required because of the pandemic affected various sectors due to which only 45% of the budgeted cost was utilised till December 2020 in Sikkim, the CM informed the meeting.

In this context, he also pointed out that the State Government had written to the Ministry of Finance in October last year, requesting acknowledgement to impose a "nominal" COVID Cess on the output of

turn to pg02

Celebrating 11th NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY 25th January 2021

Chief Guest
Shri Ram Nath Kovind
Hon'ble President of India

Guest of Honour
Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad

Hon'ble Union Minister for Law & Justice, Communications and Electronics & IT, Govt. of India
at
Ashok Hotel, New Delhi

Launching
DIGITAL EPIC
Electoral Photo Identity Card

Web Radio Hello VOTERS
Every Vote Matters
Tune on our ECI Website




Advantage e-EPIC

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- Self printable
- Secure: QR code with image and demographics

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We are ...



Theme : NVD 2021
Making our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe & Informed

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25th January 2021 onwards : For Newly Registered Electors*
1st February 2021 onwards : For All General Electors

*Only newly registered during special summary revision 2021 & having unique mobile number in E-Roll



ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA
www.eci.gov.in

NO VOTER TO BE LEFT BEHIND

India vaccinates 10 lakh people in six days, faster than US, UK: Centre

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN [PTI]: Nearly 16 lakh people have been vaccinated since January 16, when the mass inoculation drive against COVID-19 was launched, with 10 lakh taking vaccine shots in just six days, a count which is higher than that of countries like the US and the UK, the Health Ministry said today.

The UK took 18 days whereas the US took 10 days to reach the 10 lakh mark, the government said.

15.82 lakh people have been vaccinated in 27,920 sessions so far, of which 1.91 lakh people were vaccinated on Saturday (in 3,512 sessions) alone, according to the Health Ministry.

A total of 1,238 adverse events have been recorded so far which is 0.08% of the total vaccinations, the government said, adding that 11 persons or 0.0007% of the people who were vaccinated have been hospitalised.

The Union Health Ministry on Saturday said that six healthcare workers, who were inoculated, have died so far but added that none of these deaths were related to the Covid vaccinations.

After a sluggish start in the first week, India's vaccination numbers have gradually picked up with nearly 3.5 lakh healthcare workers getting vaccinated on day 7.

The increase in numbers is also because of modifications made in the CoWin database to allow walk-in vaccinations, i.e. those healthworkers who are not slotted for a certain date can also come and get vaccinated.

Hospitals across Delhi reported impressive numbers on Saturday. The national capital vaccinated 6,957 of its intended beneficiaries or 86% of state's daily target of 8,100 beneficiaries at 81 vaccination sites on the day. There was 100 per cent vaccination in four big hospitals of Delhi government. 100 beneficiaries were vaccinated at each of these sites- LNJP hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, GTB Hospital and Delhi State Cancer Institute.

Dr Renu Gupta, a Microbiologist, was one of the walk-in-beneficiaries at the Rajiv Gandhi Hospital on Saturday. "I did not receive an SMS but I felt that this is a good opportunity and I should get vaccinated at the soonest. They told me they will accommodate me. My turn may have come 4 to 5 days later but it is best to get vaccinated as early as possible. We need to be protected first in order to protect others, that is why healthcare workers have to get vaccinated first," she said.

Dr Shubham, a Neuro Physiotherapist said, "I just got vaccinated. I would tell every healthcare worker to come forward too. It is your duty and professional responsibility. If you do not get vaccinated as a healthcare worker what message will you send to the general public?"

Storming of US Capitol example of how 'wrong leader' can misuse mandate: Chamling

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 JAN:

Sikkim Democratic Front party president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, has commented on the recent storming of US Capitol as a "burning example of what happens when power is entrusted to the wrong leadership." As for the inauguration of Joe Biden as the new President of USA, he has received it as a "defining moment - not only for American histo-

ry but also in world history, in some senses."

Mr Chamling shared his views as part of his online initiative in which he takes questions on Facebook and gives detailed answers. The question sought his opinion on the change of guard in the US.

About the attack on the Capitol, Mr Chamling said, "This is a burning example of how a wrong leader can misuse the public mandate to destroy a democratic civilization."

About Joe Biden taking office as the US president, he writes: "The defining message from Joe Biden's victory is simply this - this world cannot be ruled by a single idea. Exclusivist politics are destructive and outdated. The world needs inclusive politics that respect all colours, castes and creeds as equal. This gives the world hope."

"On a personal note, I greatly admire his [Joe Biden's] speeches. He

may not be one of the best speakers in terms of oratory skill but I enjoy listening to him. He speaks from his heart with an unmistakable mark of honesty, sincerity, guilelessness and humility on his face. Even when many were writing him off, he spoke with unwavering confidence and when he finally won the election, he never went over the top. He is confident and grounded at all times. To me, these

are the marks of great leadership," he adds.

"Finally, the world must learn that even lies, injustice and prejudice can be justified if people silently accept them. Destructive ideas, if accepted by the people, can become popular ideas. That is what the USA experienced during the last four years. But thankfully, Americans didn't miss their first opportunity to reverse their historic blunder," he sates.

CM's political advisor leads party tour of Singtam-Khamdong constituency



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 JAN:

A Sikkim Krantikari Morcha team led by the party's senior vice-president and Political Advisor the CM, Tek Nath Dhakal, and general secretary [press & publicity], Boom Tshering Yonzon, toured Singtam-Khamdong constituency on Sunday.

An SKM press release informs that the visit is part of the constituency-wise tour being undertaken by the party on the directions of the party president.

A meeting was held at Upper Chisopani Dokay under Chisopani GPU chaired by Mr Dhakal as chief guest and also attended by vice-president

in-charge [organization], Lalit Sharma, advisor to the CM, Rohit Raj Maharaj and other party office-bearers and panchayats and local gentry.

Mr Dhakal explained the idea behind the constituency visit and shared that this was on the directions of the CM to collect the problems, grievances and demands of the people and work towards resolving it.

He pointed out that the SKM government has brought a big project in the form of the NIT to the constituency within a very short period where the SDF government had failed to do so all along.

He added that the CM has been working to

strengthen communal harmony of the State and also reminded the gathering about the Government Resolution passed in the Legislative Assembly seeking tribal status for the 12 left-out communities.

In his address, Advisor to the CM, Rohit Raj Maharaj alleged that the former CM had consistently worked to divide the Sikkimise for political gains and that the present CM has repaired the damage by placing religions and religious leaders on important posts.

The release informs that the meeting was also addressed by vice-president incharge [organization] Lalit Sharma.

Stakeholders meet held for Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 JAN:

A stakeholders meeting for the Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana in Sikkim was held at Karfector, Jorethang, on 22 January, a press release from the Cooperation Department informs.

The Cooperation Department is the State Implementing Agency for the scheme and the Friday meeting was attended by district and sub-division officials of the Department posted at South and West districts and representatives of Self Help Groups and Cooperatives from 22 clusters of West District and 19 clusters of South District, the release adds.

The scheme seeks to bring in 80 cluster Van Dhan Kendras with 300



beneficiaries enrolled from each Kendra.

The aim of the PMVDY is to provide short-term trainings to SHG members and Cooperatives to start sustainable harvesting and value addition to "Minor Forest Produce" along with other rural produce thereby promoting "judicious harnessing of natural resources, traditional

skills and art and craft towards certification, branding and marketing of the indigenous produce under the National Mentorship of TRIFED."

A similar meeting was also held at the East District office on 18 January for 18 clusters, and another such meeting is proposed for 27 January at Mangan, North Sikkim.

State-level tug-of-war tourney gets underway at Beyong

PRITAM LAMA

GYALSHING, 24 JAN:

A state-level Open Tug-of-War tournament got underway at Beyong under Yuksam-Tashiding constituency in West Sikkim on Saturday.

The unique tournament is being organised by a local community organisation, Phamrong Mahadevstan Sewa Samiti, of Beyong village under Labing-Gerethang GPU as part of the 72nd Republic Day celebrations at the village.

30 teams from across the state are participat-



ing in the tournament, was Informed.

President of the organizing committee, Bhagiraj Ghimirey, explains that the tournament is being organized to bring focus on tug-of-war,

which, he remarked was not receiving the kind of promotion and following it enjoys elsewhere.

The tournament was inaugurated by chairperson, Transport Department, Basant Tamang.

Tribal status recognitions dilute Article 371F, Passang Sherpa claims



AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 24 JAN:

Seeking Scheduled Tribes status for 12 more communities of Sikkim is ill-advised, believes Passang Sherpa, who contested the last Lok Sabha elections as an independent and has been a frequent commentator on social and political issues.

He is convinced that Article 371F of the Constitution will be repealed if the 12 communities get the status of Scheduled Tribes.

In this regard, he argued that tribal status for Bhutias and Lepchas in 1978 and Limboos and Tamangs in 2003, because recognizing a community as Scheduled Tribe means enforcing Article 332, had also diluted Article 371F.

He made this claim while addressing a public awareness campaign organized by the Sikkim

Suraksha Samiti in Rongli, East Sikkim today.

He also accused the Central government of repeatedly attacking Article 371F.

He also accused the present State government of remaining silent on the fake COI issue.

Mr Sherpa said that if the Sikkim Legislative Assembly proposes inner line permit for Sikkim, it would prove a check against fake documents and fake COIs.

President, Sikkim Suraksha Samiti, Madan Tamang, in turn, highlighted the objectives of the organization and claimed that rights and privileges of Sikkim Subjects have been encroached upon. The general secretary of the organization, Tara Prasad Bhattarai, and publicity secretary Dhurba Regmi, Sonam Sherpa and others also addressed the gathering.

TNA alumni announces inter-batch futsal tournament



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 JAN:

Tashi Namgyal Academy Alumni Association has announced plans to organize an inter-batch futsal tournament on 06 and 07 March.

The tournament, YN Langer Cup, is named after the first Principal of the school, Dr VN Langer.

A press release informs that the tournament will have two intra-batch competitions for "post-2000 batch pass-out Alumnis" with 41-plus teams in the fray and will be played on the three courts at the astro turf of TNA football ground.

"The basic objective of this event is to get together all the Alumni members after the

COVID Lockdown and indulge in fitness activity to shed the COVID-19 hangover besides showcasing the old talents in a carnival atmosphere that this event is proposed to be organized," says Jigme Namgyal, President, TNAAA.

It is informed that the retired teachers and staffs will be felicitated during the course of the tournament.

TNAAA will also make a contribution to the school. There will be many programs to engage apart from the futsal competition. The TNA alumni entrepreneurs will get a platform to exhibit their product/services. All alumni members are requested to participate in this event with full enthusiasm.

Intra Himalayan Volleyball at Rangpo



RANGPO, 24 JAN: The second semifinal match of the Intra Himalayan Men's Knockout Volleyball Tournament organised by Border-XI at Rangpo Bazar Playground was played today between Daramdin Volleyball Club and 17

Restaurant which the former team won. Eleven teams from across the State participated in the tournament which got underway on 20 Jan. The finals are scheduled for 26 Jan. [from SANJAY AGARWAL]

Gyalshing Runs for Fitness and Wellbeing

RUDRA KAUSHIK

GYALSHING, 24 JAN:

Jana Sewa Samaj organized a 5 KM run here on Sunday. Organized on the theme, 'Run for Fitness and Our Wellbeing,' participants ran in five categories - Boys open, girls open, under-16 boys, under-16 girls, veteran men and veteran women.

Ultra marathoner Amar Subba, who was present as a special guest, flagged off the run which started from 8th Mile [Gyalshing] and ended back at the same spot after turning from 10th Mile via Kyongsa Ground.

The initiative was supported by Nehru Yuwa Kendra and Mahila Shakti Kendra of Gyalshing.

In the open boys' category, Phulman Limboo secured first position,

Sailen Limboo stood second and Mohammad Adnil Alam finished third.

Similarly, Amrita Rai came first while Pramila Rai and Anita Tamang secured second and third positions in the girls open run.

In u-16 boys, Dawgyal Tamang occupied the first position, Abhinash Barakoti finished second and Ani Hang Limboo third.

Sriya Katwal, Anjana Rai and Diksha Thatal secured first, second and third positions respectively in under 16 girls run. Bir Bahadur Basnet stood first, Nabin Kumar Gurung second in the men's veteran category while Manita Rai and Man Maya Sigdel secured first and second positions in women's veteran run.

CM seeks upgraded...

organised manufacturing industries dominated by pharma units and the hydro-electric sector in the State and informed that a response from the Ministry was still awaited.

Acknowledging the external concerns of the country and the strain on its re-sources, he added that Sikkim, being a landlocked state has fewer options to manoeuvre and hence requested for the intervention of the Union Government to reduce the shortfall of the transfer of central devolution which the State has only received 47% of (as of December 2020) as against the projected and allo-cated devolution of 75%.

The CM concluded his address by expressing delight and thanked the scientific community for the Covid vaccines developed in record time and hailed it as a proud moment for the country as both the vaccines were made in India, "setting a shining example of Atmanirbhar Bharat."

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Tilak Chettri s/o Dhiren Chettri R/O Mal Busty, Gorubathan, Mal Khasmahal, West Bengal solemnly declare that previously my name has been recorded as "Tilak Chhetri" I have changed my name to Tilak Chettri for all purpose and further records of vide affidavit No 402 dated 16th September 2019 in the court of Lt. Judicial Magistrate (1st Class) Gorubathan.

LOMCHEY

We would like to inform all that last year due to strict lockdown restrictions we could not

invite our friends, wellwishers & relatives during 49th day "Kutse Shegu" prayers of our beloved mother, Late Passang Lhamu Ethenpa popularly known as Passang Guruma of PN Girls School, Gangtok. Her 1st death anniversary (LOMCHEY) falls on Thursday the 28th Jan 2021. Therefore, we request all our friends, well wishers & relatives to kindly join us in offering prayers at our residence at "Ethenpa Villa", Lower Tadong, Gangtok duly following COVID-19 protocols.



Mr. Menla T. Ethenpa & Dr. Sonam T. Ethenpa (Sons)
Mrs. Tshering Pem Ethenpa & Mrs. Chunki Ethenpa (Daughters-in-law)
Mrs. Diki Y. Ethenpa, Ms. Chopel S. Ethenpa & Mrs. Sangay P. Ethenpa (Daughters)
Mr. Karma Chankapa & Mr. Pemba Lama (Sons-in-law) & hosts of grand children and great grand children

PAWS collar strays to keep them safe at night

SUMMIT REPORT

NAMCHI, 24 JAN:

PAWS-Sikkim [People Animal Welfare Society], a Gangtok-based animal welfare organization, has put reflective collars on more than 50 stray dogs at MG Marg, Namnang, Tibet Road and Vajra as part of their continuing effort to keep strays safe. The first drive of the initiative was held on 17 Jan.

These reflective collars will help save the strays from hit-and-run incidents on the roads at night.

PAWS-Sikkim was launched on 04 January, 2021, and currently has 23 members and the reflective collars for street dogs was its first initiative.

The team has also drawn up a 'One Year Policy' in which PAWS-Sikkim plans to carry out a donation drive for chess, ludo and other indoor



games in February; plantation of 300 saplings in East Sikkim and South Sikkim on 22 April; undertake a drive to help Himalayan Zoological Park by volunteering feeding and cleaning chores;

drive to help and contribute basic needs like feed and fodder, medicines, and other necessary accessories; cleaning of water bodies, mainly the Teesta - collecting plastic waste and other non-bio-

degradable waste to help aquatic life; feeding animals every month in all the districts of Sikkim; vaccinating against rabies in collaboration with SARAH and district veterinary units; building

50 artificial bird homes throughout the State for breeding of endangered species of sparrows and other birds; banning the slaughter of unproductive cows in Sikkim and approaching the State Government to build Cow Sheds in Sikkim; cleaning and maintaining of Fambunglo Wildlife Sanctuary and adding prevention posters for the same; collecting old clothes and tailor fitting these for stray animals next winter and organizing awareness camps to protect animals.

The PAWS Sikkim is currently operating with cash contributions made by its members.

Interested people can join PAWS-Sikkim by visiting its Facebook page PAWS Sikkim or emailing at pawssikkim@gmail.com.

Chandra Rai bags Women's Physique gold in Chennai

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 JAN:

Chandra Rai, a mother, has broken all stereotypes and won the gold medal in Women's Physique at the National Bodybuilding Championship being held in

Chennai, informs her coach, Sanjay Chhetri Budhathoki, president, World Fitness Federation Sikkim and former Mr Ultimate Sikkim, who is heading a team to Chennai for the championship.

Sangtok Monastery is desperate need of repairs and expansion



WANGCHUK BHUTIA

DIKCHU, 24 JAN:

The building of Yeoz-er Choling Gumpa at Sangtok, Lower Dzongu, is in a very sorry state.

The 60-year-old monastery has developed severe cracks which have rendered the structure too unsafe to even allow monks to conduct prayers and rituals inside.

As a result, the monks are offering prayers outside.

The old structure is

also now too cramped to accommodate even 10 monks at a time and the monks and the gumpa committee are now requesting the government to come to their aid and carry out repairs and expansion here.

Dawa Dorjee Lepcha, ward panchayat, informs that the villagers and committee have been extending support thus far in carrying out repairs and meeting other expenses.

Girl Child Day at Mangshila



MANGAN, 24 JAN: Girl Child Day was celebrated at Mangshila ICDS Centre in North Sikkim today with Nutrition Inspector speaking on nutrition, CDPO-Mangan explaining the significance of the day and explaining the

various schemes under ICDS. The programme included a quiz competition, dance and games among mothers and adolescent girls and parents of daughters who have excelled in academics were felicitated.

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

- Fatigue
- Difficulty in breathing
- Cough
- Diarrhoea
- Respiratory distress
- Headache
- Loss of taste and smell

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 symptoms and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccine is available as of now.
- Visit Doctor to take symptoms checked.

If you seek help, you may call:

District Surveillance Officer
EAST: 702072190
WEST: 856207806
NORTH: 8541957408
SOUTH: 7407861463
New STN: 8434711432

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**



Designer candle-making training at Samdong-Kambal

RANGPO, 24 JAN: A training on designer candle-making for beneficiaries from Samdong-Kambal GPU concluded today. The training was organized under the Microenterprise Development programme and was

supported by NABARD and Lupin Foundation. The valedictory function had SKM's area in-charge for Tumin-Lingee constituency, Sandup Bhutia, as chief guest. [from SANJAY AGARWAL]

Republic Day Tractor Parade: Tableaux to show protest against Farm Laws



NEW DELHI, 24 JAN [PTI]: The Republic Day tractor parade by agitating farmers will feature a number of tableaux from across states depicting village life, the protest against the Centre's contentious farm laws, and hailing their courage, according to organisers.

A farmer leader told PTI that directions were issued to all organisations participating in the protest to prepare tableaux for the parade.

"Around one lakh tractor-trolleys from across the country will participate in the parade. Around 30 per cent of these will have tableaux on different themes, including the history of the farmers' movement in India, the role of women farmers and farming practices followed in different states," he said.

A few children from Maharashtra's Vidarbha region have also planned a tableau on farmer suicides.

"Children of farmers who died by suicide are expected to participate in the parade. Their tableau will depict the hardships

faced by farmers of the region that faces water scarcity," a member of Swaraj India said.

Tableaux from Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand will show how fruits and vegetables are cultivated in the hilly regions. Participants from Punjab and Haryana will showcase traditional and modern farming technology and statues of women milking cows and farmers driving bullock carts.

Each tractor will carry a tricolour and there will be folk music and patriotic songs.

A member of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), a joint front of the protesting farmer unions, said the parade is likely to start from the five border points of Delhi -- Singhu, Tikri, Ghazi, Palwal and Shahjahanpur -- where farmers have been camping since November 28 last year.

The tractor parade will start after the official Republic Day parade concludes at Rajpath and cover a distance of more than 100 kilometers be-

fore culminating around 6 pm, he said.

A war room has been set up at each protest site to ensure effective coordination during the parade. There will 40 members, including doctors, security personnel and social media managers, in each of these rooms, the SKM member said.

Around 40 ambulances will be stationed along the route to attend to any medical emergency.

Another farmer leader said around 2,500 volunteers have been deployed to ensure that the parade remains peaceful and no untoward incident takes place. The volunteers have been given badges and identity cards. A team of ex-servicemen participating in the protest will also keep an eye on the security situation.

The Delhi Police has agreed to remove the barricades at Singhu and Tikri to let farmers enter the national capital.

Farmer leaders said the tractor parade will remain peaceful and will not affect the official Republic Day parade in any way.

Sikkim loses 133rd life to Covid

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 JAN:

Sikkim recorded another COVID-19 related death when a 76-year-old lady from Aritar in East District passed away shortly after testing positive at Rhenock Community Health Centre on Saturday. This was the 133rd Covid-related death in the State.

In his daily health bulletin in Sunday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, informed that the patient was brought to the Rhenock CHC with fever and some other complications on Saturday morning.

She tested positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing and passed away at around 9:35 AM in the female ward of Rhenock CHC. Her passing away is being registered as a COVID death with co-morbidities as she was

also suffering from hypertension.

Sikkim meanwhile continued to report much lower infections of Novel Coronavirus and only three new cases were reported in the last 24 hours taking the state's tally of confirmed cases to 6,071 on Sunday.

On the other hand, the number of recovered cases has further improved to 5,716 with the new recovery and discharge of nine more patients on Saturday. There are currently 127 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State and no one in the ICU.

The three cases were picked up from 197 tests on Saturday, of which two were found in RT-PCR testing of 163 samples and one was detected in rapid antigen testing of 24 samples.

Among the new cases are two persons from Lower Lingding in Gangtok and the lady from Aritar, who passed away at Rhenock CHC.

"Tremendous growth in 'GDP'": Rahul Gandhi's dig over fuel price hike

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

[NDTV]: Congress leader

Rahul Gandhi today took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the record hike in petrol and diesel prices, claiming that his government was busy collecting taxes while the public is plagued with inflation.

"Modi ji has shown tremendous growth in 'GDP' i.e. gas-diesel-petrol prices! The public is plagued by inflation, Modi government is busy in tax collection," Mr Gandhi wrote in a tweet in Hindi.

Petrol and diesel prices in the country on Saturday touched new all-time highs after rates were increased for the fourth time this week.

Petrol is currently being sold at ₹ 85.70 per litre in Delhi and ₹ 92.28 in Mumbai.

Meanwhile, Diesel rate climbed to ₹ 75.88 a litre in the national capital and to ₹ 82.66 per litre in Mumbai, the price data showed.

This is the second consecutive day of rate increase and the fourth



this week. In all prices have gone up by Re 1 per litre this week.

Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan earlier this week blamed Saudi oil output cut for the surge in oil prices but remained non-committal on tax cuts.

"We have to import 80 per cent of crude oil of our requirement. Due to coronavirus, many oil-producing countries stopped production or reduced it. There is a pressure on fuel price due to imbalance in demand and supply," Mr Pradhan was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

Top oil explorer Saudi Arabia has pledged additional voluntary output cuts of 1 million barrels per day in February and March, which has led to price climbing to most since the pandemic broke out.

State-owned fuel retailers -- Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) -- had on January 6 resumed daily price revision after nearly a month.

Since then, rates have gone up by ₹ 1.99 a litre on petrol and ₹ 2.01 in case of diesel.

Deaths of six healthcare workers not linked to Covid Vaccination: Centre

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN: The deaths of six healthcare workers, who were inoculated, are not related to the Covid vaccinations, the Union Health Ministry said on Saturday.

"At least six deaths

have been reported so far. In the last 24 hours, one person, 56, who was a resident of Gurugram, Haryana has died. The post-mortem examination confirms that cardio-pulmonary disease

was the reason for her death and it was not related to vaccination. None of these deaths have been causally linked with COVID vaccination," Manohar Agnani, additional health secretary, said on Saturday.

Mr Agnani also said that 11 people have been hospitalised so far.

"0.0007 per cent people have recorded hospitalisation against vaccinations. In the last 24 hours, one person has

been hospitalised at a Government Hospital in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh who was vaccinated on January 20," he said.

The cumulative number of healthcare workers vaccinated against COVID-19 has crossed 15 lakhs on the eighth day of vaccination.

15,37,190 beneficiaries on Saturday were vaccinated through 27,776 sessions till 6 PM, as per the provisional report of the government.

**Specialized Dental Clinic of Siliguri
(Sevoke Dental Clinic)
Branch Open in Gangtok.**

GANGTOK DENTAL CLINIC

NOW OPEN

10AM to 7PM

BOOK YOUR APPOINTMENT

82106 99271

Dr. Anjali Gupta
BDS, Dental Surgeon

Near Sisa Golai
Below Greendale Hotel
Gangtok, East Sikkim

**+91 8210699271
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Urban Planning Will Need a Budget

...because budgets are as much about planning as they are about accountability

Earlier this week, an interactive workshop on “The Master Plan of Gangtok – 2041” was hosted at Chintan Bhawan. The irony of a master plan for Gangtok being discussed when the capital is in an interregnum between one set of elected representatives of its urban local body having ended their term in office and elections not yet called to install a new lot in office, cannot be missed. Ideally, consultants for such important plans should be commissioned by the Gangtok Municipal Corporation. But wait, does the GMC even have a budget?

While it is nice to learn that the GMC and the UD&HD claim to coexist on congenial terms, it is also a fact that the two are also (hopefully) frequently at loggerheads because of the piecemeal manner in which powers and responsibilities are “transferred” to the body of elected representatives by the government department. These are not vague musings. As per the Annual Technical Inspection Report of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies for the year ended 31 March 2014 [yes, seven years back] prepared by office of the Principal Accountant General (Audit), Sikkim, and tabled in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, the Sikkim Municipalities Act, 2007, envisaged transfer of functions of various departments of the State Government to ULBs. As of 31 March 2014, seven years since the Act, only three functions - Public health, sanitation conservancy and solid waste management; Urban poverty alleviation; and public amenities including street lighting, parking lots, bus stops and public conveniences - out of 18 functions listed had been “partially” transferred by the State Government to the ULBs. It is unlikely that there have been any great leaps forward in devolution of powers in the years that have passed since save some clerical tasks and another spool of red tape.

When the Government of Sikkim enacted the Sikkim Municipalities Act in the year 2007, empowering Urban Local Bodies to function as “institutions of Self Government”, one of the characters laid out for these ULBs was to “accelerate economic development in urban areas”. Only if one were to be very charitable could one accept, and hesitatingly at that, that issuing trade licenses is helping accelerate economic development. Such a role is delivered through policy interventions and through priority budgetary investments. The ULBs can do neither. Not because they are not capable, but because policy interventions are pointless in the absence of a clearly spelled out Budget. The Sikkim Municipalities Act requires the Budget estimates of Municipalities to be prepared and presented before a meeting of Municipality especially convened for the purpose on 31 August each year and adopted after discussion by 30 September. One has not heard of such meetings being convened, but even if we are to believe that the ULBs are media-shy, the Annual Technical Inspection Report attests that as of 31 March 2014, none of the ULBs had ever prepared such a budget. Have they done since? Unlikely. Meanwhile, expenditure continues to be incurred without preparation and approval of the budget. Interestingly, the main reason why a budget has not been prepared or ULB meetings convened to discuss it, is because the State Government had not, as of 31 March 2014, approved the Sikkim Urban Local Bodies Accounting Manual which is essential for preparation of budgets in accordance with Sikkim Municipalities Act, 2007! Go figure.

A budget is as much about planning and direction as it is about accountability. Is one to then infer that not having one for such a long time reveals the low priority given to good governance?

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Why Healthy Food and Its Local Production Should Be Part of the COVID-19 Response

JULES SIEDENBURG & JOHN PAUL CAUCHI
theconversation.com

When a pandemic hits, questions that immediately arise include what impact there will be on public health, the economy and other aspects of society. Another set of questions involves response priorities for governments and households.

Food is central to both sets of questions. On the one hand, access to sufficient, nutritious food is threatened. On the other, focusing on food offers promising pandemic response options.

Reports from various countries highlight concerns about the impact of COVID-19 and pandemic response measures on food supplies, whether due to shortages, price rises or cash constraints. Even in rich countries, anxiety about possible shortages has led to stockpiling, while large-scale job losses are leaving many worried about their capacity to afford food.

In some developing countries, the spectre of hunger looms. In July 2020, Oxfam reported that COVID-19 was deepening hunger in existing hotspots while creating new hotspots. It also suggested the pandemic could be “the final straw” for many. Those in the informal economy are among the hardest hit, particularly people living in urban areas who use most of their daily income to buy food.

A recent World Food Programme report suggested COVID-19 is deepening global food insecurity, as the pandemic’s economic impact adds to pre-existing food security challenges. It estimated 272 million people are food insecure due to the aggravating effects of the pandemic. In a subsequent interview, the WFP director voiced fears that millions were “marching towards starvation”, citing the pandemic as a key cause.

Over the past few years we have been engaged in research on food security, agriculture, public health and environment in the global South. Our insights lead us to believe that while a pandemic can clearly threaten access to food, focusing on food also offers two distinct ways to lessen the risks faced by households and countries.

DIETARY CHANGE AS A RESPONSE OPTION

Dietary change may offer scope to improve people’s capacity to cope with COVID-19, since the potential of nutrition to support immune resistance to viruses is well-established. One review of clinical trials underlined the scope for nutrition to prevent or manage viral infections and recommended using it to limit the impact of COVID-19. Another review paper echoed this call.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has sought to harness this potential by issuing dietary guidelines for the COVID-19 pandemic. These stress the importance of eating certain foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, fish and unsaturated fats. They also urge reducing consumption of others, such as processed foods, salt, sugar, and saturated fats like those found in fatty meats or butter.

Two years ago the Lancet Commission – a high-level body of experts from 16 countries – recommended a similar diet which they called the “healthy reference diet”.

This diet was devised based on rigorous analysis of available evidence as a means to address current problems with poor nutrition and unsustainable agricultural production. This analysis suggested changes to diet and production could create “win-win” outcomes for both human and planetary health.

The dietary changes suggested by the WHO and the Lancet Commission would require major shifts in dietary habits in most countries, raising questions about the accessibility of their target foods. Worryingly, one study suggests that such a diet could be unaffordable to many of the world’s poor. One solution would be to enhance access to a healthy diet by fostering local production of target foods.

COVID-19 creates an opportunity to redesign farming systems to deliver both a range of healthy foods and resilient, sustainable production. The pandemic creates space for such shifts, between the emergency spending it necessitates and the recognition it brings of the need for change.

REDESIGNING FARMING SYSTEMS

Changes that could help deliver both health and sustainability include integrated, species diverse farming systems and reduced use of agro-chemicals. Governments could support such a shift via smart subsidies to steer production towards sustainable practices and healthy foods. This could also help ensure these foods are available and affordable.

One promising approach that is a growing trend is producing food in urban and semi-urban areas as a coping strategy. This has been found to have huge potential benefits as a food source for communities hit by the pandemic while also delivering other important benefits like lower food miles and creating employment, notably for the poor.

Policy can provide an enabling environment to scale up such practices.

Some pertinent questions about how food is produced aren’t addressed in the recommendations of either the WHO or the Lancet Commission. These include:

- Do foods produced using technologies like genetically modified organisms and growth hormones pose risks to health?
- Do organic foods offer healthier alternatives?
- Do more natural production practices promise greater sustainability and resilience to climate change?

These questions bear asking given the mounting evidence on adverse effects of conventional input-intensive farming, for example on insect populations.

FOOD AND PANDEMIC RESILIENCE

The approval of several vaccines has raised hopes that the COVID-19 pandemic can be arrested. Yet vaccination will take time. Notably, the head of the UN humanitarian agency has predicted poorer countries are unlikely to make major progress on vaccination before 2022. Meanwhile, the recent emergence of mutant variants raises difficult questions, such as how the efficacy of vaccines might be affected.

Given this reality, ensuring good immune system function is critical. This underlines the need for schemes to foster healthy eating. For now, however, food insecurity tragically remains an issue for many, and access to healthy foods is a particular problem.

Schemes to foster local production of nutritious foods are therefore also needed. Any initiatives on diet or local production could have relevance beyond the COVID-19 pandemic via boosting the health and resilience of communities.

Such measures would be particularly relevant for Sub-Saharan Africa, where food insecurity is a major threat, COVID-19 cases continue to rise, and access to healthcare is limited.

Dietary change and local production offer hopeful responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The available evidence suggests these measures could bolster people’s health and well-being while also building their resilience to pandemics. They could therefore complement public health and medical measures like social distancing and vaccination, and merit greater attention.

[Jules Siedenburg is Research fellow, School of International Development, University of East Anglia; John Paul Cauchi is PhD Candidate in Public Health, Queensland University of Technology]

Jonas Gwangwa embodied South Africa’s struggle for a national culture

GWEN ANSELL
theconversation.com

Music is not a zero sum game with only one ‘best’. But if you seek to name one musician whose life embodies the South African people’s struggle for a national culture, it must be trombonist, composer and cultural activist Jonas Mosa Gwangwa, who was born on 19 October 1937 in Orlando East, Johannesburg, and died on 23 January 2021 in Johannesburg aged 83.

Through 65 years on stage, Gwangwa’s playing contributed to every genre of South African jazz. Overseas, he was hailed as player, producer and composer. Yet he chose to step away from mainstream success for ten years, leading the Amandla Cultural Ensemble of the African National Congress (ANC) to win hearts for the anti-apartheid struggle everywhere and present a vision of what post-apartheid national culture could be.

He battled painful injury (accidents shattered the same femur three times), was hunted for his life by the regime’s forces and experienced both the heyday of South African liberation culture and the far more ambivalent times since.

Throughout, he cherished a half-century-plus, love affair with his wife Violet, and brought his family – scattered across half the globe – home intact to a free South Africa. Violet’s death, only a few short weeks before his, had left him and the rest of the family devastated.

THE LITTLE BEBOPPER

Gwangwa started his career in the 1950s in the Father Huddleston Band at St Peter’s College in Johannesburg. When instruments were allocated he hoped for a clarinet, but was shy to object to the offered trombone.

There was music in the family, lessons at school, and from American jazzmen on the bioscope screen at the Odin Cinema in Sophiatown. From Dizzy Gillespie, the schoolboy Gwangwa borrowed his lifetime trademark: a jaunty black beret. He became, in his own words “this little bebopper”.

Politics shaped Gwangwa too. The 1954 Bantu Education Act ended Father Huddleston’s St Peters, but not before the band had played at the adoption of the Freedom Charter in Kliptown. He said Everybody shared a perspective – you didn’t even classify it as ‘being political’ ... nobody separated the music from the politics.

Because trombone was a scarce sound in African jazz bands, Gwangwa’s tricky bebop chops caught the ears of the elite Jazz Dazzlers. His vision expanded with the Jazz Epistles, whose Jazz Epistles: Verse One became the first modern jazz album from a black South African band.

That was the first of several firsts. Gwangwa was co-copyst for the first all-black South African stage musical, King Kong, travelling with the show to London and starting a lifelong love affair with the stage musical format:

“Words, action, and music! I became fascinated with just how you ... put all those pieces together.”

SEVEN CURTAIN CALLS

London contacts helped Gwangwa secure a place at the Manhattan School of Music in New York. There, sharing a flat with Hugh Masekela, his meagre allowance went as often on gig tickets as food, as he imbibed mainstream classics and the new ‘free jazz’.

Equally active in politics, he helped organise South African students in America, and served as first eye on the text drafted by old schoolfriend, poet Keorapetse Kgositsile, of Miriam Makeba’s 1963 anti-apartheid address to the UN.

He worked with Makeba and Harry Belafonte, most famously as arranger, adapter and conductor for the 1965 Grammy-winning



Best Folk Album An Evening with Harry Belafonte and Miriam Makeba: another first.

Then came residencies, film scores, multiple recordings across genres, musical direction, and tours; with the Union of South Africa, and with Herb Alpert, when the trombonist won seven curtain calls for a barnstorming solo on his own Foreign Natives. Despite its painful interruption midstream by the reckless driver who first crushed his leg, Gwangwa’s American jazz star was rising. But he had loyalties bigger than the stage.

THIS IS A LIBERATION MOVEMENT!

In 1980, Gwangwa answered the call from ANC President OR Tambo to scour the military camps of Angola for young talent to establish the campaigning Amandla Cultural Ensemble. The call was too politically important to ignore, and the opportunity to create an entire stage show excited Gwangwa so much that “sometimes ... I couldn’t sleep”.

He spent most of the next decade between Amandla (rehearsing in Angola and touring the world) and Botswana (with his family and contributing to the local cultural scene with the Medu Arts Ensemble). In both settings he was an innovator. Botswana musicians say he helped build their professionalism and shifted their focus towards indigenous inspirations. In Amandla, he consciously re-visioned traditions, casting female performers in previously all-male traditional dance roles:

“Why not? ... this is a liberation movement!”

Some cynical analysts suggest Amandla’s winning musical arrangements and dramatic stage interludes simply prettied-up struggle culture for overseas audiences; they miss the

point. Gwangwa’s love for the struggle was genuine and deep, never cosmetic – and he couldn’t have written an unattractive tune if he tried.

Gwangwa believed that political theatre deserved exactly the same high aesthetic standards as any other stage performance, and according to the memories of other Amandla performers, he enforced these relentlessly at rehearsal. Audiences everywhere responded to that combination of passion and professionalism.

Amandla’s impact put the Gwangwa family home on the SADF hit list for the 1985 raid on Botswana.

It was razed (fortunately the occupants were elsewhere) and the regime’s hunt did not cease.

Roots were pulled up again, for London, then America. During that uneasy, unsettled time, Gwangwa scored another first: an Oscar nomination (and more) for his Cry Freedom film score, co-composed with George Fenton.

FOR THE PEOPLE

Finally home again in 1991, some recognition arrived: Orders of Ikhamanga for both him and Amandla; commissions for various official and pan-African causes; honorary degrees and more. Yet he still constantly struggled to earn from tours, shows and recordings, encountered record label problems over material deemed “political” – and ‘state composer’ was not who he wanted to be. Although he was committed to the new South Africa and happy to contribute, he really “wanted to be on the ground with the guys,” he told me in 2019 from his sickbed, “doing something important”.

He was saddened by globalised, commoditised official perspectives on the arts, and by the sidelining of everything Amandla had tried to build. His music had always explicitly been his weapon, and “We are still within an era of struggle.”

In June 2019, Gwangwa was struck by a serious illness that left him bedridden. He struggled valiantly towards recovery and was never bitter.

Interviewing him for his forthcoming biography, I asked him what he was proudest of. “Amandla. Because it involved all the things in music that excited me the most, and gave me the opportunity to bring them together ... for the most important reason possible: it was for the people.” Hamba Kahle umkhonto (spear).

[the writer is Associate of the Gordon Institute for Business Science, University of Pretoria]

India, China hold round 9 of military talks today amid border standoff

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN [NDTV]: Military commanders of India and China today met for a ninth time for talks to defuse tension along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh and find a solution to end the standoff. In the last round of talks, the Indian Army strongly insisted on an early disengagement of troops by China from all points of friction in eastern Ladakh.

Today's military negotiations began at around 10 am at Moldo border point on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, PTI reported, citing sources.

The nearly nine-month-long military standoff has seen tension rise along the LAC. Some 50,000 Indian Army troops are currently deployed in a high state of combat readiness in



mountainous locations in eastern Ladakh in sub-zero conditions, as multiple rounds of talks between the two sides have failed to resolve the standoff.

China has deployed an equal number of

troops, officials said.

India will not reduce its troop strength unless China initiates the process, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday in an interview to Times Now. Expressing confidence that a solu-

tion to the row could be found through talks, he said India is developing its border infrastructure, some of which China has objected to, at a "very fast rate".

According to a transcript of the interview

issued by the channel, when asked about the dialogue process with China on the row, Mr Singh said, "There is no deadline when it comes to matter like the ongoing standoff. You can't fix a date."

Jharkhand reports 78 new COVID-19 cases, 1 death

RANCHI, JAN 24 (PTI): Jharkhand's COVID-19 tally mounted to 1,18,232 as 78 more people tested positive for the infection, a health official said on Sunday.

The state's coronavirus death toll rose to 1,061 as one more person succumbed to the infection in the last 24 hours, he said.

Ranchi district reported the highest num-

ber of new cases at 55, followed by Dhanbad (5) and four cases each in East Singhbhum and Ramgarh, the official said.

Jharkhand now has 878 active coronavirus cases, while 1,16,293 people have recovered from the disease so far, he said. The state has tested 11,643 samples for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, the official said.

Odisha logs 150 new COVID-19 cases, 1 fresh fatality

BHUBANESWAR, JAN 24 (PTI): Odisha's COVID-19 tally on Sunday mounted to 3,34,300 as 150 more people tested positive for the infection, while one fresh fatality pushed the state's coronavirus death toll to 1,905, a health department official said.

The new cases were detected in 24 of the state's 30 districts, with 89 reported from different quarantine centres, while the remaining 61 are local contact cases. Sundergarh district reported the highest of 22 new positive cases followed by Bargarh (18) and Cuttack (15).

Six other districts - Dhenkanal, Gajapati, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nayagarh and Rayagada, did not register any new positive cases since Saturday. Taking to twitter, the Health and Family Welfare department said: "Regret to inform the demise of 74-year-old female Covid positive patient of Sundergarh district."

Apart from 1,905 fa-

talities reported so far, 53 other COVID-19 positive patients have also died in Odisha due to comorbidities.

Khurda district of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part alone accounted for 335 deaths followed by Ganjam (248), Sundergarh (171), Cuttack (141) and Puri (117). Twenty-five other districts reported fatalities less than 100, he said.

Currently, the state has 1,380 active COVID-19 cases, while as many as 3,30,962 patients have so far recovered from the disease.

Odisha has so far conducted over 75.48 lakh sample tests for COVID-19 including 22,725 on Saturday. The state's positivity rate now stands at 4.43 per cent, the data released by the Health and Family Welfare department said. Meanwhile, official sources said as many as 1,52,371 frontline workers have so far been inoculated against COVID-19.

Trinamool MLA says "still with party" a day after quitting Bengal Cabinet

KOLKATA, 24 JAN [PTI]: A day after quitting Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Cabinet, Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLA Rajib Banerjee on Saturday said he is still with the party but his future move will depend on the situation.

Mr Banerjee, while speaking to reporters after garlanding a bust of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in his assembly constituency in Howrah district, said he has no immediate plan to quit from the MLA's post.

"I will remain a party worker, a TMC MLA but I cannot say now what will be my future move, which will depend on the situation," Rajib Banerjee, who had handled irrigation and forest portfolios, said.

Rajib Banerjee had earlier aired his grievances over loyal and hard-working leaders and workers allegedly not being given due respect in the party and the disconnect between the top brass and grassroots.

Arunachal BJP burns effigy of Xi Jinping over Chinese village



ITANAGAR, 24 JAN [PTI]: BJP workers in Arunachal Pradesh on Saturday staged a protest against the construction of a village by China in the north-eastern state's Upper Subansiri district and burnt the effigy of Chinese President Xi Jinping. BJP spokesperson Techi Necha said that China repeatedly claims Arunachal Pradesh as its territory and makes such intrusions into the state.

"We strongly condemn such acts of China and want to send a strong message to Beijing that we are Indian and shall remain Indian.

"The area (where the village has reportedly been constructed) was earlier occupied by China in 1959 during the Congress rule and the party had failed to protect it or develop the border areas

of the state," Mr Necha told reporters.

He said that the ruling BJP government is constructing the 2,000-km-long Arunachal Frontier Highway along the McMahon Line.

"Roads and bridges in border areas like Gelling in Upper Siang and Kaho and Chaglagam in Anjaw districts have already been completed, while the Congress had not made any effort to construct roads during its tenure," he said.

Responding to a question of whether there was an intelligence failure or negligence on the Centre's part despite repeated cautioning by BJP MP Tapir Gao in the Parliament, he dismissed the possibilities and said the central government might be taking time to respond due to diplomatic reasons.

Arunachal Governor urges Centre for infrastructure development along India-China border

ITANAGAR, 24 JAN [PTI]: Arunachal Pradesh Governor BD Mishra on Saturday requested the Centre to initiate measures for the development of infrastructure along the India-China border in the state.

The governor, speaking at the inaugural day of the 69th plenary of the North East Council (NEC) at Shillong under the chairmanship of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, said that better road infrastructure is necessary for the state with difficult terrain and high mountains.

"The state government is paying full attention to law and order in the three districts of

Tirap, Changlang and Longding and four police stations of Namsai, Roing, Mahadevpur and Sunpura which are under the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA)," he said. The state has recently got an officer of Major General rank on deputation as the security advisor to the state, the governor said.

"For internal security and law and order, the government is strengthening the police set up but it needs the assistance of the Centre for putting in place crime and criminal tracking network and system in each district. Efforts are underway to boost train-

ing, working efficiency and morale of the state police force," he said.

The governor highlighted the need for enhancing the electricity power grid, water distribution system and increasing the number of advanced landing grounds.

Mr Mishra highlighted the need for funds to construct foot suspension bridges at remote places to improve the mobility of Army jawans and civilians.

He requested Mr Shah, also the NEC chairman, to continue providing necessary help for the development of Arunachal Pradesh.

2 new COVID-19 cases push Mizoram's tally to 4,351

AIZAWL, JAN 24 (PTI): Mizoram reported two new COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally to 4,351, an official said on Sunday. The two new cases from Aizawl district were confirmed at Zoram Medical College (ZMC) through RT-PCR facility, he said.

While one patient has returned from Maharashtra, the other was di-

agnosed with COVID-19 during contact tracing, he said. Mizoram now has 58 active COVID-19 cases, while 4,284 people have recovered from the disease so far. The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state now is 98.47 per cent, the official said.

The state has reported nine coronavirus fatalities so far. Mizoram has tested 2,01,241

samples for COVID-19 till date, including 1,112 on Saturday. Meanwhile, 322 healthcare workers were given COVID-19 vaccine on Saturday in four districts, state immunisation officer Dr Lalzawmi said.

So far, 3,979 beneficiaries have been administered COVID-19 vaccines in the ongoing vaccination drive, she said.

What does Brexit mean for the future of British football?

ED AARONS

LONDON, 24 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: As Jürgen Klopp has asked, what really improves after Brexit? While several industries have been forced to come to terms with the new regulations introduced on 1 January, the debate over their lasting impact on British football continues to rage.

With all transfers from European Union nations set to be subject to work permits that will be allocated using a points-based system and every Premier League and EFL club now banned from signing foreign players until they are 18, the days of Arsenal recruiting a talented 16-year-old from Barcelona's academy, as they did with Cesc Fàbregas in 2003, are over. Likewise, Jadon Sancho and Jude Bellingham – both now full England internationals – would not have been able to complete their moves to Borussia Dortmund from Manchester City and Birmingham under the new rules.

Yet even if many have rushed to predict the demise of English clubs' dominance in the post-Brexit era, some of those within the game are not so sure.

Alan Redmond, who is head of football for Roc Nation – an American agency that represents Crystal Palace's Wilfried Zaha and Chris Richards of Bayern Munich among others – sees one positive. "It's possibly the only thing I'm grateful for from the whole Brexit process – that for a brief window young English players will be given more time to play and develop. But it's still going to be an uphill battle and they will still be faced with the same competition when they get to 18.

"The European players will now have to qualify via the points system when they are 18 but the new rules also mean players from outside the EU can also enter the market. So they are open to competition from a greater number of countries."

A youth coach from a top-six Premier League club who did not want to be named said: "It's a good thing for English talent because paths are not blocked at a crucial age. It also makes the



clubs in the country focus on the English players and that puts more value on the players at lower category clubs. If the big clubs then target those players then the money will flow more through the English system. If less well-resourced clubs like Birmingham, Charlton and Exeter are already producing world-class players imagine what they would do with more investment?"

To purchase someone under the age of 18, English clubs previously had to pay a small amount of compensation to their previous club and could also count them as a home-grown player. But while Klopp has argued the development of players in Liverpool's academy will be adversely affected by the new restrictions, the coach disagrees. "We've proven that we can produce players that are better than anyone in the world – [Phil] Foden, Sancho, [Emile] Smith Rowe and all the players who have won the Under-17 World Cup," he says.

"These players developed in schoolboy programmes around English players – I don't think training with foreign players for one year made any difference to someone like Bukayo Saka or Mason Greenwood, who broke through as second-year scholars.

"Now our players are hungry and they are playing for the badge and not the money. They will be training with players from all over the world when they turn 18 anyway."

The City team that won the FA Youth Cup for the first time since 2008 in November contained one foreign player – Sen-

egal's Alpha Dioukhou – who was only playing because the regular left-back, Josh Wilson-Esbrand, was injured. As for the limitations on young English players following in the footsteps of Sancho and Bellingham, Redmond does not expect the new regulations to stop them eventually moving overseas.

"There haven't been a huge number of players who have taken that route but because of the poverty of first-team opportunities in the UK, the players will just go at 18 instead," he says.

"It's a tricky one – you may have a lot of younger players examining which passports they are eligible for. If someone is eligible for an Irish passport or have a grandparent from an EU country then it opens them up for a move. That's something players and agents will be looking into because a young player in that position has a wider net to cast than a standard UK player."

Everton's announcement of a new partnership with the Irish club Sligo Rovers – from whom they signed Séamus Coleman for £60,000 in 2009 – at the start of the month was another indication of the changing landscape.

Various other potential loopholes including loaning a player to a league where he is more likely to gain the necessary points to be granted a "governing body endorsement" as happened with Brighton's South Africa international Percy Tau – who spent more than two years on loan in Belgium – or establishing a network of clubs around the world like City could become much more commonplace.

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Breaking Good: The British dancers ready to send Paris 2024 Olympics into a spin

SEAN INGLE

LONDON, 24 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]:

Shortly after breaking's inclusion in the Paris 2024 Olympics sent heads spinning across the globe, Sebastian Coe was asked for his gut reaction. "Hmm," the former head of London 2012 said. "Yeah, it's in there." There was an awkward silence before Coe, now the president of World Athletics and an IOC member, eventually conceded: "You probably have to be a pretty good athlete to be a break-dancer."

Pretty good? A few seconds watching Britain's best B-boys and B-girls, including Sunni Brummitt, Roxanne Milliner and Vanessa Marina, perform a dizzying array of spins, flips and freezes to a thudding beat – a sonic fusion of strength, gymnastics and dance – provides a rapid panacea to such sniffy attitudes.

"Perhaps because breaking is an urban art form, people think it's a little bit less serious and strenuous," says the 24-year-old Brummitt, who has competed in breaking's most prestigious event, the Red Bull BC One World Finals, on four occasions.

"They don't comprehend what goes into it. I train five days a week, four to six hours every day. I think you could put a top-tier B-boy with a top-tier gymnast and they'd be doing the same training regimes. The difference is we don't have support or funding; we are doing it without coaches, nutritionists and an infrastructure in place."

Coe may have sounded curmudgeonly but such attitudes are hardly uncommon. Breaking has come a long way since it emerged in New York in the early 70s as a way for rival street gangs to settle disputes, yet many still roll their eyes at suggestions that it is

a sport, let alone one worthy of an Olympic spot.

Brummitt understands why some are sceptical. All he is asking for is one shot at changing people's minds. "We are right in the middle between an art form and a professional sport."

Brummitt started learning his skills from his mum, who comes from a circus background. "She's like the black sheep of the family," he says with a laugh. "The rest of my relatives are lovely but they are all GPs and doctors."

"However if the critics want a debate, let's do it after 2024 when we've had our chance. Being in Paris will help us. But don't forget that the IOC wants us there. We are going to make the Olympics a whole lot more interesting for an entirely different demographic."

This is an arranged marriage – and one that everyone is entering with their eyes wide open. The IOC president, Thomas Bach, craves breaking's ability to reach new faces and spaces, as part of his plans to make the Games "more gender-balanced, more youthful and more urban". Breaking wants a rocket-fuelled shot into the mainstream.

Intriguingly it was the World DanceSport Federation, the governing body for amateur ballroom dancing, who pushed hardest to have breaking included. Their motives are not strictly altruistic: they also want their own discipline in a future Olympics.

Milliner, who is known as B-girl Roxy, is hoping that including separate women's and men's events in the Olympics will be a gamechanger in what is a male-dominated sport. When she started breaking in 2007, she competed largely against men in head-to-head battles. She beat most of them too.

"Competing at the Olympics



sounds like a dream," says Milliner, who performed at the Beijing Olympics as a teenager. "I was there at the closing ceremony. Do you remember the big red bus that got slated in the papers? I was on it dancing."

She will be 35 when Paris rolls around and has just had a baby, but is convinced she can still mix it with women half her age. Certainly she has the pedigree. She holds two Guinness World Records for headspins and has represented the UK at numerous international competitions.

"It's still very heavily male-dominated, but far more women are involved now," she says. "I love the fact that it is a sport, an art and it's also completely what you want it to be. It's so difficult physically but it's also fun and there are so many different aspects to it, so many different levels."

"There's top rock, on your feet, which you can teach anyone. There's footwork on the floor, which takes a different part of your

mind. Freezes, when you hold a position. And then there's the power moves, where you're spinning and sometimes getting bruises. It's completely different to anything else."

Britain are not yet in the elite of the breaking world and did not send any dancers to the Youth Olympics in Argentina in 2018, but Milliner is convinced things will change. "There's a young B-girl called Terra who blew the whole scene away when she emerged aged six – she was flying, doing better moves than me," she says. "A lot more kids are getting into it because of seeing someone like her."

While a majority in the scene have welcomed breaking's inclusion in the Olympics, there is a fear that it may dilute – or even pollute – what makes it so distinctive. "There is very big debate inside the culture and it would be a lie to say we are all for it," says Brummitt. "We are underground, we're hip-hop, and not everyone wants to be mainstream."

"But people also want to make a living. At the moment, not many people in the UK breaking scene can do that. I want things to change for the next generation."

Marina, another hugely talented B-girl, won the Red Bull UK BC Cypher competition in 2019 to qualify for the BC One World Finals. She still has to supplement her income by "teaching workshops, organising events, and working part-time in a restaurant". But things are looking up.

"The Olympics will be a huge platform for us. It will show that breaking is not a bad thing, like some people think it is. It's not about cleaning the floor or dancing with the homeless. It's something that kids can get involved in and is super positive. I know my worth because of breaking."

Another unresolved issue is how it will be judged in Paris, with Brummitt explaining there isn't a universal system. "When it comes to Red Bull BC One, it's as simple as you have five judges and at the end

of the battle, the majority with the votes wins," he says. "But some Korean events have a judging system that breaks it down into execution, foundation, originality and musicality. So you have to adapt your approach."

Milliner says: "Art is subjective so it's always there's always going to be questions over judging."

Whatever your view of whether breaking should be in the Olympics, it will surely be one of the most talked about moments of the 2024 Games. And someone in the Paris organising committee clearly has a sense of history, and humour, too. Because breaking – along with 3x3 basketball and sport climbing – will be staged at the Place de la Concorde, where members of the ancien regime, including Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, were guillotined during the French Revolution.

The symbolism, of the new hacking away at the old, will be almost as breathtaking as the moves on display.

Hussain urges England to "rethink" decision to rest Bairstow

LONDON, JAN 24 (PTI): Former England captain Naseer Hussain believes the selectors have made a mistake by deciding to rest Jonny Bairstow for the first two Tests of the four-match series against India, starting February 5 in Chennai.

Hussain has called on the England selectors to "rethink" their decision after Bairstow scored 47 and 35 not out in England's win over Sri Lanka in the first Test in Galle last week.

The decision to rest Bairstow is part of England and Wales Cricket Board's player management policy, which stresses on giving adequate rest to every English cricketer in a packed calendar year, which includes 17 Tests and the ICC T20 World Cup. "I would say it's a concern that one of England's best three players of spin. I would say Bairstow is alongside Joe Root and Ben Stokes in that -- has been given a boarding pass home and the others are going to Chennai," Hussain was quoted as saying by Sky Sports.

"I'd have to rethink. It must be an absolute nightmare what the players have been through (during these COVID times). They had the whole of last summer and then had the IPL. Then it was South Africa, now Sri Lanka, then India and then IPL again.

Dustin Poirier blasts Conor McGregor in Abu Dhabi to plot new UFC title shot

ABU DHABI, 24 JAN [AGENCIES]: Dustin Poirier stopped Conor McGregor with a flurry of punches midway through the second round Sunday, avenging his loss to the Irish superstar with a knockout victory at UFC 257.

Poirier (26-7) caught McGregor with a series of shots to the head before buckling his knees with two left hands. Poirier then sent McGregor to the canvas with a short right hand and finished it swiftly, setting off stunned excitement among the few thousand screaming fans allowed inside the Etihad Arena on Yas Island.

In his first fight in a year, McGregor (22-5) had a strong first round before he was stopped by punches for the first time in his mixed martial arts career. McGregor, whose previous four losses all came by submission, stayed on the canvas for several moments afterward, gathering himself after his second loss in three fights since 2016.

"You know, it's hard to overcome inactivity over long periods of time," said McGregor, who hadn't fought since beating Donald Cerrone last January. "I just wasn't as comfortable as I needed to be, but Dustin is some fighter. If you put in the time, you're going to get cozy in here. I have to dust it off and come back, and that's what I will do. ... I'll take my licks, but I'm gutted."

McGregor and Poirier met for the first time in September 2014 as featherweights, and McGregor won by knockout in just 106 seconds during his incredible early-career success. McGregor became the featherweight champion 15 months later, while Poirier rebuilt his career with just one loss in his next 11 fights.

With a second chance to de-



rail McGregor while boosting his own hopes of regaining the lightweight title, Poirier didn't miss.

Sporting a shaved head and a beard, McGregor pushed the action early against Poirier, who landed an early takedown before getting backed against the cage for stretches of the first round. In the second, Poirier bothered McGregor with leg kicks before throwing the punches that ended it.

In the co-main event at UFC 257, three-time Bellator lightweight champion Michael Chandler made a stunning UFC debut with a violent knockout of New Zealand's Dan Hooker midway through the first round.

Chandler could be the next matchup for Poirier in a fight for the lightweight title apparently vacated by long-reigning 155lb champ Khabib Nurmagomedov, who announced his retirement after his final victory last fall.

UFC president Dana White so far has been unable to persuade Nurmagomedov to go back on his vow to his mother to quit the sport after his father's

death, not even for a wildly lucrative rematch with McGregor, who repeatedly vowed to fight on after this loss to Poirier.

McGregor has not fought regularly in recent years, but his popularity was undiminished: UFC 257 is expected to be one of the most popular pay-per-view events in the promotion's history, according to White, and distribution problems in the US early in the PPV portion of the card led fans to bombard social media and ESPN with complaints.

Chandler's long-anticipated UFC arrival was worth the wait for his 27th professional fight in a career that began in 2009.

After a deliberate start, Chandler (22-5) jabbed to the body as he lunged forward and caught Hooker with a left hand to the face that crumpled his opponent. Chandler finished a dazed Hooker with punches on the ground before climbing atop the cage and doing a full standing backflip into the octagon from atop the fence.

And Chandler was still fired up in his post-fight interview,

calling the bout "the greatest moment of my professional life."

"Conor McGregor! Surprise, surprise, there's a new king in the lightweight division," Chandler added. "Dustin Poirier, your time is coming. And Khabib, if you ever do see fit to grace us with your presence back here in the UFC octagon in your quest for 30 (victories), you know you've got to beat somebody, so beat me if you can!"

Marina Rodriguez opened the pay-per-view portion of UFC 257 by upsetting fellow Brazilian strawweight contender Amanda Ribas. Rodriguez got a second-round stoppage with a flurry of punches and a knee in the opening minute.

UFC 257 concluded a run of three shows in eight days with a few thousand fans allowed inside the promotion's coronavirus bubble in the Middle East. The promotion hadn't held shows with fans since before the pandemic began last March.

The UFC returns to Las Vegas in two weeks for another run of shows at the fan-free Apex gym on its corporate campus.

Retaining Nepal's ODI status and improving ranking top priorities of newly appointed coach Whatmore

KATHMANDU, 24 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Newly appointed national cricket team's head coach Dav Whatmore said on Thursday that retaining the ODI status of Nepal and improving rankings were his top priorities.

"We must ensure that Nepal retain their ODI status and improve their rankings and I am very much happy to accept these challenges. The immediate job is to prepare the boys to win the game," said the 66-year-old who guided Sri Lanka to the World Cup trophy in 1996 at his first press conference as the head coach of the men's national team.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) had granted Nepal the ODI status for four years beginning June 2018. This has been extended by another year owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) President Chatur Bahadur Chand expressed his satisfaction that Nepal had finally got a results-oriented coach. "We are hopeful that Nepal will make a leap under his leadership. We will try to gain more heights in his tenure," he said.

Whatmore arrived in Nepal on Sunday following his appointment to the hot seat beginning on January 1. But he was self-isolating owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and came out after he tested negative for the coronavirus.

"I would like to thank the Cricket Association

of Nepal (CAN) board for having confidence in me and will try to use my expertise to improve cricket in the country," said Whatmore. Speaking about his challenges, he said: "This is not an easy position and there are challenges both at the associate level and full member level to be able to improve rankings. I will try to help with my knowledge and expertise and share everything with the players."

"There are certain principles that work and I know what they are and I am going to apply that with Nepal cricket. The immediate job is to prepare the group of boys together to win the games," said Whatmore who played seven Tests and a lone ODI for Australia between 1979 and 1980.

As coach, Whatmore's first assignment is to prepare the squad for the ICC World Cricket League 2, a gateway to ICC World Cup, against Oman and the US set to take place in March 2021 in Oman.

Talking about Nepal's prospects of playing in the World Cup, Whatmore said, "Reaching the world cup level is very difficult and a lot of countries are trying what we are trying. I can't promise where you get, but you get better chance when you do certain things and get the right results. Nevertheless, unless we dream and have aspirations to reach high level it is never going to happen. But each day, one game at a time, one week at a time is the way for improvement."

Dutch police arrest alleged Asian drug syndicate kingpin

AMSTERDAM, 24 JAN (REUTERS): Dutch police said on Saturday they had arrested the alleged leader of a sprawling Asian drug syndicate who is listed as one of the world's most-wanted fugitives and has been compared to Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman.

Tse Chi Lop, a Chinese-born Canadian national, was detained on Friday at the request of Australian police, who led an investigation that found his organisation dominates the \$70 billion-a-year Asia-Pacific drug trade, Dutch police spokesman Thomas Aling said.

Tse is expected to be extradited after appearing before a judge, Aling said, adding that his arrest by national police took place without incident at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport.

"He was already on the most-wanted list and he was detained based on intelligence we received," Aling said.

Dutch police were unable to provide details about the legal proceedings and it was not clear if Tse had a lawyer.

Tse, 57, an ex-convict who formerly lived in Toronto, has moved between Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan in recent years, according to counter-narcotics officers from four countries and documents reviewed by Reuters.

The group has "been connected with or directly involved in at least 13 cases" of drug trafficking since January 2015, the documents showed.

Jeremy Douglas, Southeast Asia and Pacific representative for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, told Reuters in 2019 that "Tse Chi Lop is in the league of El Chapo or maybe Pablo Escobar," referring to Latin America's most notorious drug lords.

The syndicate he is suspected of running is known to its members as "The Company". Law enforcers also refer to it as "Sam Gor" - or Brother Number Three in Cantonese - after one of Tse's nicknames, Reuters reported at the time.

Reuters was unable to contact Tse for comment on the report.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP), which has taken the lead in a sprawling investigation into the criminal organisation, said on Sunday it has issued an arrest warrant for him in 2019, "in connection with AFP-led Operation Volante, which dismantled a global crime syndicate operating in five countries."

"The syndicate targeted Australia over a number of years, importing and distributing large amounts of illicit narcotics, laundering the profits overseas and living off the wealth obtained from crime."

Eleven trapped miners rescued in China after 14 days underground

DOMINIQUE PATTON BEIJING, 24 JAN (REUTERS): Chinese rescuers pulled 11 gold miners to safety on Sunday with most of them in good condition after 14 days trapped underground after an explosion, but 10 colleagues were still unaccounted for, state media reported.

Television footage showed the first miner as he was brought to the surface in the morning, a black blindfold shielding his eyes from daylight as he was lifted out of a shaft.

The miner was extremely weak, state broadcaster CCTV reported on its Weibo site. Rescue workers wrapped the barely responsive man in a blanket and took him to hospital by ambulance.

Over the next few hours, 10 miners from a different section of the mine, who had been getting food and medical supplies down a shaft from rescue workers last week, were brought out in batches.

"We made a breakthrough this morning," chief engineer



at the rescue centre, Xiao Wenru, told the Xinhua news agency. "After clearing these broken, powdery pieces, we found that there were cavities underneath ... our progress accelerated." Officials had said

on Thursday it could take another two weeks to drill a rescue shaft through blockages to reach the group of 10.

One of the men brought to the surface was injured but several were shown walking,

supported by rescue workers and wearing black cloth over their eyes, before being taken away by ambulance.

They were in good physical condition and had been getting normal food since Sat-

urday, after several days of living off nutrient solutions, the Xinhua news agency said.

China's mines are among the world's deadliest. It recorded 573 mine-related deaths in 2020, according to

the National Mine Safety Administration.

The Jan. 10 explosion in the Hushan mine in Qixia, a major gold-producing region under the administration of Yantai in coastal Shandong province, trapped 22 workers about 600 metres (2,000 feet) underground. One miner is known to have died. Ten are unaccounted for.

More than 600 rescuers have been on the site working to reach the men.

The workers' escape is similar to the rescue of 33 miners trapped in the San Jose copper-gold mine in Chile for more than 69 days in 2010.

The Chilean miners, who were caught in a cave-in, survived on rations of food and water for 17 days until rescue crews gave them a lifeline by drilling a tiny hole into the chamber where they had taken refuge.

Weeks later, a larger hole was drilled and the miners were pulled to the surface as a captivated global audience watched.

Chile regrets panic triggered by mistaken tsunami warning after quake

AISLINN LAING & FABIAN CAMBERO SANTIAGO, 24 JAN (REUTERS): Authorities in Chile said on Saturday they regretted spreading

panic with a mistaken tsunami warning calling for people to get out of coastal areas following an earthquake in Antarctica.

The interior ministry said on Twitter that a tremor of magnitude 7.1 struck at 8.36 p.m. 216 km northeast of the O'Higgins Chilean scientific base and called for the coastal regions of Antarctica to be evacuated because of a tsunami risk.

The ministry also sent a message to cellphones around the country urging people to abandon coastal areas, though the ministry later said it was sent in error.

"We want to provide peace of mind to the

population, tell them that it is not necessary to evacuate the entire national territory, only the Antarctic base," Miguel Ortiz of the ministry's National Emergency Office (ONEMI) told a news conference.

He said the agency regretted the inconvenience caused by its messages, which he blamed on a technical error.

The tsunami warning for Antarctica was later lifted. People in coastal cities including La Serena, to the north of Santiago, and Valparaiso, started to leave areas close to the coast after the warning until reports started appearing that it was a false alarm.

But as Chileans were reacting to the warning, a second tremor, of magnitude 5.6, struck the Chile-Argentina border region, at 9.07 p.m., the GFZ German Research

Center for Geosciences said, at a depth of 133 km and 30km east of Santiago. No damage was reported from either quake.

The second one was close to Codelco's Andina and Teniente copper mines and Anglo American PLC's Los Bronces.

The Chilean mining regulator Sernageomin said that workers, mining operations and facilities had reported no problems after the quake.

Sernageomin said that following the first quake, 80 people were evacuated from Chile's main base in the Antarctic, the Presidente Eduardo Frei Montalva Base on Fildes Peninsula west of King George Island, and 55 more from three other bases, along with five foreign bases.

The army said no damage was reported at the Antarctic base.

EU says it will make vaccine companies respect supply contracts: Michel

PARIS, 24 JAN (REUTERS): The European Union will make pharmaceutical companies respect contracts they have signed for the supply of COVID-19 vaccines, European Council President Charles Michel said on Sunday.

Pfizer Inc last week said it was temporarily slowing supplies to Europe to make manufacturing changes that would boost output. On Friday, AstraZeneca also said that initial deliveries to the region will fall short because of a production glitch.

"We plan to make the pharmaceutical companies respect the contracts they have signed ... by using the legal means at our disposal," Michel said on Europe 1 radio.

He did not mention possible sanctions but said that the EU would insist on transparency about the reasons for the delays.

He said that after Pfizer's first warnings about delays of several weeks, the EU had managed to reduce these delays by taking a tough stance.

"We banged our fist on the table and finally announced delays of several weeks turned into a slowdown of deliveries," he said.

New Zealand probes first 'probable' community COVID-19 case in months

PRAVEEN MENON WELLINGTON, 24 JAN (REUTERS): New Zealand health officials said on Sunday they were investigating what they said was probably the country's first community coronavirus case, in months in a woman who recently returned from overseas.

The 56-year-old, who returned to New Zealand on Dec. 30, tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 days after leaving a two-week mandatory quarantine at the border where she had twice tested negative.

"We are working under the assumptions that this is a positive case and that it is a more transmissible variant, either the one identified first in South Africa or the UK, or potentially Brazil - or another transmissible variant," Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield told a news conference.

It is not known how the woman was infected or whether the infection

is new, Bloomfield said. But since the woman tested positive several days after being released from quarantine and has been at home, the authorities are treating it as a "probable community case".

New Zealand, one of the most successful developed nations in controlling the spread of the pandemic, last recorded a community coronavirus transmission on Nov. 18, according to the Health Ministry website.

A tough lockdown and geographical isolation helped New Zealand virtually eliminate the novel coronavirus within its borders.

The country of 5 million people has had only 1,927 confirmed cases. But with the pandemic raging globally, more people are returning to New Zealand with infections, including the new variants, raising concerns the virus may spread in the community again.

The woman, who lives in Northland on

New Zealand's North Island, quarantined upon arrival in a managed isolation facility in Auckland where several the highly virulent COVID-19 cases have been recorded in recent weeks, Bloomfield said.

"This is a reminder to all of us that the pandemic continues and that this is a tricky virus," he said.

Social media users rushed to express concern and frustration about the new case, with one user describing the reactions on Twitter as a "collective groan".

On Sunday, there were eight new infections, all returning travellers quarantined at the border, bringing active cases among those quarantined to 79, the ministry said in a statement.

Pressure has been mounting on Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's government to vaccinate the population, but New Zealand has said the majority of its population would only be vaccinated in the second half of the year.

Bangladesh to buy Myanmar rice, putting aside Rohingya crisis

RUMA PAUL DHAKA, 24 JAN (REUTERS): Bangladesh will buy 100,000 tonnes of rice from Myanmar, putting aside a rift over the Rohingya refugee crisis as the government races to overcome a shortage of the staple food for the country's more than 160 million people.

High rice prices pose a problem for the Dhaka government, which is ramping up efforts to replenish its depleted reserves after floods last year ravaged crops and sent prices to a record high.

Muslim-majority Bangladesh and mostly Buddhist Myanmar have been at odds over the more than 1 million Muslim Rohingya refugees in camps in southern Bangladesh. The vast majority of them fled Myanmar in 2017 from a military-led crackdown that was executed with "genocidal intent" - assertions that Myanmar denies.

Bangladesh will import white rice in a gov-



ernment-to-government deal at \$485 a tonne, including cost, insurance and freight (CIF) liner out basis, said Mosamat Nazmanara Khanum, the secretary at the country's food ministry.

"Our main priority is to bring down the prices of rice," Khanum told Reuters on Sunday, adding the government could buy as much as 10 million tonnes while private traders are allowed to buy another 10 million tonnes in the year to June.

The deal will be signed soon and the rice will be delivered by April in phases, she said.

Bangladesh is also buying 150,000 tonnes

of rice from India's state-run firm NAFED in a government-to-government deal while it has issued a series of tender to buy the grain.

"We could buy more rice from India in state-to-state deals," Khanum said, adding that the Food Ministry was holding talks with several other Indian state agencies.

Bangladesh, traditionally the world's third-biggest rice producer with around 35 million tonnes annually, uses almost all its production to feed its people. It still often requires imports to cope with shortages caused by floods or droughts.

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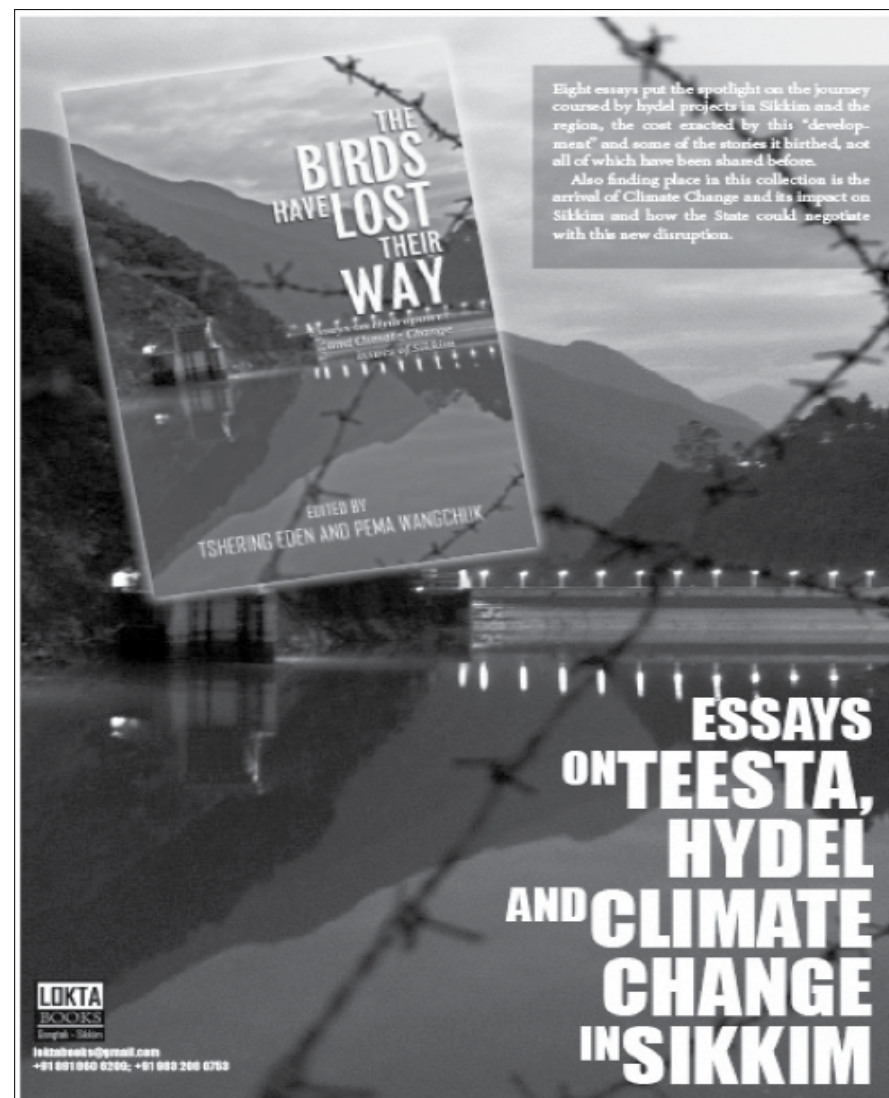
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Marathi cinema brave, but is struggling: Padmini Kolhapure

JUSTIN RAO

PANAJI, JAN 24 (PTI): Veteran actor Padmini Kolhapure believes Marathi film industry is churning out "braver" content than Hindi movies, but is struggling to thrive amid several challenges, including stiff competition from Bollywood.

The 55-year-old actor's latest Marathi drama, "Prawaas"-- her third film in the language-- had its screening at the 51st edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in the Indian Panorama section.

In an interview with PTI, Kolhapure said the reception to "Prawaas" was overwhelming and instilled hope that films which are trying to push boundaries will ultimately find acceptance.

"Marathi cinema is braver than Hindi films. It is still struggling. There's a lot of competition, it has to face several challenges. But I'm confident it'll eventually pave a way. 'Amidst all of this, when you see something like 'Prawaas' which breaks the path, it's heartwarming. I am a Maharashtrian, I want Marathi cinema to do well."

Directed by Shashank Udupurkar, the film is described as an emotional journey of an elderly couple, Abhijat Inamdar, played by actor Ashok Saraf and Lata Inamdar (Kolhapure).

The actor, who has worked in acclaimed films like "Satyam Shivam Sundaram" (1978), filmmaker BR Chopra's 1980 drama "Insaf Ka

sons to make a meaningful existence. This gave me the opportunity to collaborate with Ashok also, and I had such a good experience," she

reer, she simply "surrendered to the moment."

"Then, it was a snowball effect. I was fortunate to get to work with good films, roles, directors and producers. I got lucky that way, despite starting so young. You can call me destiny's child."

The veteran, who was last seen on the big screen in Arjun Kapoor-starrer "Panipat" in 2019, said her film choices are purely dictated by her instinct.

"I am extremely impulsive with my choices. It has to click or else nothing. If it's right or wrong, that's on me. I take the responsibility for the decisions but it has to touch me, I have to feel it from within for me to do it," she added.

Kolhapure said now she doesn't follow any "do's and don'ts" for scripts and rather looks out for opportunities which offer her something that she hasn't done in her nearly five decades long career. "I did

'Panipat', it didn't necessarily have this great role. But I wanted to be a part of the experience of working in an Ashutosh Gowariker film and play this 'queen.' I wanted to experience that and so I made that choice," she said.



Tarazu" and Raj Kapoor's "Prem Rog", said she was touched by the messaging of "Prawaas".

"I was drawn to the film for the sensitivity and the story. It's a beautiful, tender film about life, living it to the fullest, looking out for rea-

added. Kolhapure began acting at the age of seven in 1972, featuring in films like "Zindagi" and "Dream Girl" before getting a breakthrough with "Satyam Shivam Sundaram".

The actor said when she started her ca-

Brie Larson to star in, executive produce Apple series 'Lessons in Chemistry'



Actor Brie Larson is set to star in and executive produce drama series "Lessons in Chemistry". The show has landed a straight-to-series order at Apple TV Plus.

According to Variety, "Erin Brockovich" writer Susannah Grant will pen the series and also serve as executive producer. It is based on author, science editor, and copywriter Bonnie Garmus' upcoming debut novel.

Set in the early 1960s, Lessons in Chemistry follows Elizabeth Zott (Larson), whose dream of being a scientist is put on hold in a society deeming that women belong in the domestic sphere, not the professional one.

"When Elizabeth finds herself pregnant, alone and fired from her lab, she musters the

ingenuity only a single mother has. She accepts a job as a host on a TV cooking show, and sets out to teach a nation of overlooked housewives and the men who are suddenly listening a lot more than recipes, all the while craving a return to her true love: science," the plotline reads.

The book will come out next year.

Jason Bateman and Michael Costigan are also executive producing the series via their Aggregate Films banner.

Apart from "Lessons in Chemistry", Larson is also leading Apple's drama series based on the real life experiences of CIA undercover operative Amaryllis Fox and her memoir, Life Undercover: Coming of Age in the CIA.

John Krasinski to host Jan 30 episode of 'Saturday Night Live'

Actor John Krasinski will be making his debut as a host on NBC's "Saturday Night Live". The late-night stand-up series returns on January 30 with five consecutive new shows and is handing hosting debuts to a trio of multi-hyphenate stars, reported Entertainment Weekly.

Krasinski, who recently

hosted his own digital series "Some Good News", will emcee the January 30 episode with singer Machine Gun Kelly as the guest.

Besides the actor, "Schitt's Creek" co-creator and star Dan Levy will host February 6 episode with singer Phoebe Bridgers as the guest.

Oscar winner Regina

King, who most recently directed "One Night in Miami", will headline the February 13 episode with singer-songwriter Nathaniel Rateliff.

"SNL" will continue with new shows on February 20 and 27 with hosts and musical guests that are not yet announced.

Larry King dead at 87

The entertainment community is mourning the loss of Larry King.

On Jan. 23, the legendary talk show host's company Ora Media announced his death in a statement on King's social media. "With profound sadness, Ora Media announces the death of our co-founder, host, and friend Larry King," the message read, "who passed away this morning at age 87 at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles."

This heartbreaking news comes three weeks after King was hospitalized with coronavirus. On Jan. 3, King was discharged from the ICU, though he remained hospitalized amid his battle with COVID-19. As news of his death emerged on Jan. 23, many of King's colleagues, past interviewees and fans took to social media to pay tribute to him.

Justin Bieber says his 2014 DUI arrest was 'not my finest hour'

Pop star Justin Bieber says he was "unhappy, angry and mislead" seven years ago when he was arrested for drunk driving.

Bieber was arrested in 2014 for Driving Under Influence in Miami and looking back at the incident the singer said he is not proud of the person he was at that point of time. "7 years ago today I was arrested, not my finest hour. Not proud of where I was at in my life. I was hurting, unhappy, confused, angry, mislead, misunderstood and angry at god," he wrote alongside a picture of his arrest.

"I also wore too much leather for someone in Miami," he quipped.

The "Sorry" hitmaker advised his fans to keep faith in God and treat their past as a learning experience.

"All this to say God has brought me a long way. From then til now I do realize something.. God was as close to me then as he is right now. My encouragement to you is to let your past be a reminder of how far god has brought you. 'Don't allow shame to ruin your today let the forgiveness of Jesus take over and watch your life blossom into all that God has designed you to be.' Bieber, 26, was arrested in 2014 for drag racing a yellow Lamborghini on a Miami street and failing a sobriety test.

He was charged with resisting arrest, driving under the influence and driving with a suspended license.

The singer didn't have to serve jail time by pleading guilty to reckless driving, making a charitable donation and taking anger management classes.



MULTITASKING! Actor Ben Affleck impressively picks up several packages outside his house while sipping on his morning Dunkin' Donuts coffee.

THE DAY AHEAD

Aries:

Aries, you are one with the divine forces, an extension of Source energy... a truth you seem to forget every once in a while. Today, the cards are urging you to remember your origin. To remember that you have a direct hotline with the divine and that you merely have to look within to find it. Some of you may be at a turning point in your story, one that requires you to make an important decision. As always, remember to look forward, not backwards. You don't want to go back to where you started.

Tip: You have a direct hotline with the divine.

Taurus:

Anger, sadness, melancholy and loneliness. The weather in the Taurus HQ is rather gloomy. Can you choose to find a silver lining nonetheless? This is a challenge you are being encouraged to take on today. When it comes to your interpersonal relationships, remember that everybody is different and that everybody is operating on a different wavelength. Letting go of your expectation of how things should be will help you see the love and light in them.

Tip: In the words of mystic Baba Ram Dass, "Every-one you meet is God in drag."

Gemini:

Love doesn't clip your wings, honey, and if it does, it isn't love at all. Pay attention to what you're being asked to give up here. Sacrificing your own dreams to bring happiness into the lives of others will only bring

you misery in the long run. Alternatively, you could be enforcing your rules onto somebody you love. Be conscious of your manipulative ways, if that is the case. Respecting their individuality "and" giving them the freedom to be who they are will bring love and harmony in the equation.

Tip: It's time to let go of your controlling and manipulative ways.

Cancer:

Here's the thing, Cancer: this physical reality of ours is always in flux. Summer gives way to autumn gives way to winter and so on, making change the only constant. Remember this as you move forward and onwards. The dark clouds of sadness will pass soon, bringing in the light again. Until then, focus on finding the silver linings. Happiness is truly an inside job, beloved.

Tip: Accept the ebb like you would the flow.

Leo:

Every time your heart says 'yes' to something, your mind offers you an alternate explanation. A logical reason why you shouldn't follow your instinct. But you're choosing to move past your fears every single day. You're choosing to live on the edge and take the kind of risks you never have before. So confront the demons of self-doubt as and when they appear as you remember you have the power to change your reality in the now.

Tip: Face your fears.

Virgo:

What if we said you're only living a percentage of your potential? What if we said that you're settling for mediocre because you are subconsciously afraid of success, which in turn would attract a whole lot of attention? It's time to address the complexes within, Virgo. To carefully eliminate the self-negating patterns that are standing between you and the life you want to create for yourself. The mysterious forces are with you, helping you take a giant leap in the right direction.

Tip: Don't dim your light to fit in.

Libra:

Not everything is meant to last forever. That's just the way things work in the earthly realm. Should that stop you from embracing the love, joy, and tranquility this moment is offering you? Anything but. So open your heart just a little more. Allow into your experience what has always been yours. Life as you know it will transform forever. In the realm of your career, you're being encouraged to execute that larger-than-life idea. Let go of the fears that are standing in your way and trust that the money you need for it will come in soon.

Tip: Open your heart just a little more.

Scorpio:

Scorpio, you're spending too much time thinking about how others will feel about a given situation or action. This isn't about them, though. It's about your

life and what you want to make of it. So, release the guilt and shame narrative as you act in accordance with your highest good. Remember, when you're in alignment, everything within and without transforms for you. PS: It's time to attract what you need in order to grow, and effortlessly so.

Tip: Act in accordance with your highest good.

Sagittarius:

You can find all the excuses in the world if you really want to. But you understand the importance of caring for your physical body, now more than ever before. So put on your joggers and get down and dirty with your yoga mat. Trust that the exhilaration you feel as a result will alleviate most of your troubles. As such, slowing down is an important theme for you right now. Try not to take on too much so you can focus on the most important person in your life: you.

Tip: Slow down.

Capricorn:

You can pull out another list of sorry excuses, or you can stand by the commitments you have made towards yourself. It's time to give your physical body the love and attention it deserves. There's nothing like a good workout to get in shape and enjoy that endorphin rush. If you're more of the stop-and-smell-the-roses kind of person, consider engaging in a vinyasa flow sequence on your mat. PS: Capricorn season has been all kinds of crazy, so give yourself some time to integrate.

Tip: It's a downward dog kind of day.

Aquarius:

We can tell ourselves the story that love eludes us, or we can choose to stay open despite what transpired in the past. The choice is, and has ways been, yours. That said, we hope that you will allow the lethal combination of love, kindness, and compassion into your Universe. Your soul family is showing up for you more than ever before, Aquarius. Know that you're deserving of every bit of the blessings you are attracting into your Universe.

Tip: Choose to stay open no matter what.

Pisces:

You can call your space a 'beautiful mess' all you want, but you know fully well that it's hindering your creative process. So are the mementos from a time long gone. Today, without making any excuses, address the clutter that's sitting around you. Carefully eliminate the things that no longer spark joy by giving them to somebody who may be able to put them to better use. As for the things that are precious to you, find a way to arrange them in a way that makes them easy to access. It's also a good idea to smudge the house with incense or sage after your cleaning spree. In the wise words of Marie Kondo, who wrote the bestseller The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up, "Life truly begins after you've put your house in order."

Tip: Declutter like a boss.