



**PATTY JENKINS OPENS UP
ABOUT LEAVING 'THOR 2'**
pg 08

**SIX WAYS TO 'REBOOT YOUR BRAIN'
AFTER A HARD YEAR OF COVID-19 – AC-
CORDING TO SCIENCE**
pg 04

**KAJOL'S DIGITAL DEBUT
'TRIBHANGA' TO PREMIERE
ON NETFLIX ON JANUARY 15**
pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CM gifts new house to constituency elder to welcome New Year

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 JAN:

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang and his wife, Krishna Rai, gifted a house to Partuman Rai of Kholaghari ward under Poklok-Kamrang constituency as a New Year gift on Friday.

The house was constructed from donations contributed by the CM from his salary, an SKM press release informs.

Keys to the house along with a new television set and a supply of essential commodities were handed over to Mr Rai on the first day of the year yesterday, the release adds.

The house was inaugurated by BDO Namchi, Babita Rai, at a function also attended by coordinator to the CM for Poklok-Kamrang, RB Tamang, SKM's Poklok-Kamrang CLC president, Dawgyal Lepcha and other senior members of the party.



Two deaths in the New Year take Sikkim's Covid toll to 129

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 JAN:

An 86-year-old male from Lower Lungchok in West District succumbed to novel coronavirus on Friday evening taking the COVID-19 related deaths in Sikkim to 129. This is the second COVID-19 related death reported so far this year with a 72-year-old male having passed away at Chumbung in West District on Friday.

In his daily health bulletin on Saturday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that the 86-year-old male from Lower Lungchok, West District, was admitted to the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital after he tested positive for COVID-19 at Gyalshing on 25 December.

He informed that the patient passed away at around 6:05 PM Friday evening due to cardiac failure. He had been ad-

mitted to hospital with fever and general weakness. His passing away is being recorded as a COVID death since no co-morbidities were diagnosed.

Earlier, a 72-year-old male from Chumbung in West Sikkim, who had tested positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing at Namchi District Hospital on 17 December and had opted for home isolation, passed away at his home in Chumbung.

This death is being recorded as a COVID death with co-morbidities as the patient was suffering from asthma and hypertension.

In the meanwhile, 10 new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in Sikkim in the last 24 hours, taking the State's tally of confirmed cases to 5,911. On the other hand, the number of recovered cases here has further improved to 5,157.

There are now 530 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State,

of whom three are currently in the ICU facility of STNM Hospital.

Mr Bhutia informed that the 10 new cases were picked up from the testing of 205 samples on Friday; eight via RT-PCR testing of 184 samples and two in rapid antigen testing of 11 samples. While nine of the cases were reported from East District, one was detected in South Sikkim.

Among the new cases reported from in and around the capital are two persons from Upper Sichey, one from Zero Point in Lower Arithang, one from Lower Tathangchen and one from Upper Burtuk, while two persons from Ray Khola Road and one from Sama Lingdum near the ITBP camp in East District were also found positive for Covid-19.

Likewise, samples of one person from Dalep and one from Ghurpisey in South District were also found positive for COVID-19.

JK Maheshwari takes charge as Chief Justice of Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 JAN:

President of India, Ramnath Kovind has signed the warrant of transfer of Chief Justice, High Court of Sikkim, Arup Kumar Goswami to the High Court of Andhra Pradesh following which former Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh, JK Maheshwari took charge as the Chief Justice of the High Court of Sikkim from 31 Dec, 2020.

Last month on 16 Dec, the collegium headed by Chief Justice of India, SA Bobde recommended the transfer of Justice Maheshwari, who was heading the Andhra Pradesh High Court with a sanctioned strength of 37 judges, as Chief Justice of Sikkim while Justice, Arup Kumar Goswami was recommended to become the Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh.

Five states contribute to 62% of active cases in India, says Health Ministry

NEW DELHI, 02 JAN [PTI]:

Kerala, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh have contributed to nearly 62 per cent of India's active cases of the novel coronavirus, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has informed.

The total number of active cases in India stands at 2,50,183.

Talking about these states, the MoHFW as per Friday, Kerala has 65,054 active COVID-19

cases in the country. And, more than 3,000 people have died to the disease in Kerala. With nearly 2 million COVID-19 cases, Maharashtra has reported active cases at 52,084 so far.

The country's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh has reported over 56,454,1 Covid-19 cases till now. A total of 13,831 active cases in the state reported so far.

West Bengal has logged more than

turn to pg02

Dry run for COVID-19 vaccine at Old STNM



SHRAVAN CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 02 JAN:

Twenty-five health workers received dummy vaccines at Urban PHC Gangtok [Old STNM Hospital] today as part of the nation-wide dry run to check the best way to vaccinate people against COVID-19.

This dry run will also test the operational feasibility in the use of CoWIN application in a field environment. Short for Covid Vaccine Intelligence Network, CoWIN is a digital platform to roll out and scale up the vaccination drive.

The massive exercise comes a day after a panel

of government-appointed experts recommended approval for the Oxford COVID-19 vaccine, manufactured by Serum Institute of India, to the regulator Drugs Control Authority of India.

The following Officers were present for monitoring and supervision of the dry run in Gangtok: Director RCH cum State Immunization Officer; ADHS, Urban PHC; ADHS, Immunization; SDM, East; MO, RBSK; HEO; CHO, PHNO, LHV; and UNDP Team.

The 25 beneficiaries received dummy vaccines as per the given SOP and was reported in

the CO-WIN app. A three room (waiting area, vaccination room and observation room) was set up for the dry run at UPHC, Gangtok according to operational guidelines.

Dr. Phumzay Denzongpa, Director RCH cum State Immunization Officer briefed the media about the ongoing dry run for COVID-19 vaccination.

It may be mentioned that the first dry run in the country was conducted on 28 and 29 Dec in Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Gujarat. However, today's dry run was conducted in all states of the country.

Bharat Biotech's Vaccine Cleared By Panel, Regulator's Approval Awaited

NEW DELHI, 02 JAN [NDTV]:

Covaxin, the coronavirus vaccine from Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, has been recommended for "restricted use in emergency situation in public interest" by a government-appointed panel, which submitted its findings to the Drugs Controller General of India - on Saturday evening.

The recommendation comes a day after the panel sent another drug - Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, and manufactured by Pune's Serum Institute - for approval.

A third vaccine - developed by American pharma giant Pfizer - had also applied for emergency fuse authorisation and is currently being reviewed by the panel.

As for Covaxin, the DCGI will now take the final call on

approving rollout of the vaccine in the country. The SEC (Subject Expert Committee) recommendation comes despite the lack of efficacy data - to show how effective the drug is in protecting against



the virus. Covaxin has completed only two of three phases of clinical trials; the third phase - which tests for efficacy - began in November last year. Trials were expected to be completed by December 31 but the lack of volunteers led to the date of registration being extended.

Vaccine efficacy data is the

result of a combined analysis of the results of three phases of clinical trials.

Interim findings of Phase I trials showed Covaxin induces an immune response and registers no serious side effects.

Data from Phase II trials showed "tolerable safety outcomes", suggesting antibodies may persist for six to 12 months.

Emergency use approval is normally granted if there is sufficient evidence to suggest the drug is both safe and effective.

Dr Savita Verma, a pharmacology professor from Haryana's PGIMS who is working on the vaccine, told NDTV that around 10 million doses of Covaxin are ready.

The government on Saturday conducted a day-long trial run of the vaccine delivery system to check for potential problems once a vaccine is made available. The Health Ministry said dry runs were held in 116 districts, with nearly one lakh personnel undergoing necessary training.

The Health Minister, Dr Harsh Vardhan, said this morning that there should be no misconceptions about the safety of the coronavirus vaccines that India plans to use. He also reiterated that there was no evidence to suggest the vaccines could not protect against mutated strains of the virus.

Dr Vardhan also said that around three crore frontline workers, including doctors, nurses and essential services like the police, will be first in line to be vaccinated.

India records less than 20,000 fresh COVID-19 cases; recoveries go past 99 lakh

NEW DELHI, JAN 2 (PTI):

The number of fresh COVID-19 cases was recorded below 20,000 in India on Saturday, taking the country's caseload to 1,03,05,788, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease crossed 99 lakh, according to the health ministry.

A total of 19,079 people tested positive for the coronavirus infection in a day, while the death toll due to the disease climbed to 1,49,218 in the country with 224 new fatalities, the ministry's data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease

surged to 99,06,387, pushing the national recovery rate to 96.12 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stood at 1.45 per cent.

The number of active COVID-19 cases remained below three lakh for the 12th consecutive day.

There are 2,50,183 active coronavirus cases in the country, which accounts for 2.43 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally has crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16.

It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh

on October 11, 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 17,39,41,658 samples were tested for COVID-19 in the country till January 1, including 8,29,964 on Friday.

The 224 new fatalities include 59 from Maharashtra, 26 from West Bengal, 23 from Kerala and 21 from Delhi.

Of the 1,49,218 COVID-19 deaths reported in the country so far, Maharashtra has accounted for the highest of 49,580, followed by Tamil

turn to pg02

Summon Me, Not My Officers: CM vs Governor in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, 02 JAN [NDTV]: Reacting strongly to governor VP Singh Badnore's summons to Punjab's top officials over vandalism of mobile towers last month, Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Saturday accused the BJP of dragging the constitutional office into its "unsavoury agenda". Amarinder Singh said the governor has "bowed down" to the party's propaganda on the state's law and order. "Summon me, not my officers if you want any clarification," the Chief Minister said in a statement.

Captain Singh, who looks after the state's home portfolio, said that the BJP, by raising questions on the state's law and order, is trying to deflect attention from the protests against the three contentious agriculture laws.

"While the propaganda of the BJP on collapse of law and order in the state was nothing more than a tactic to divert attention from the farm laws issue and the resultant farmers' agitation, if the governor nevertheless had any concerns on the situation, he should have taken up the matter directly with me as custodian of the Home Portfolio," a Punjab government statement quoted him as saying.

"At a time when the very existence of our farmers is at stake, the BJP leaders are busy indulging in petty politics and also dragging the Constitutional office of the Governor into their unsavoury agenda," he added. Hundreds of mobile towers in Punjab, mostly belonging to Reliance Jio, were put out of action last month, allegedly by farmers protesting the centre's agriculture laws. Captain Singh had issued a stern warning regarding the incident and had asked the police to take action against those responsible.

Captain Singh today said that the BJP is trying to undermine the peaceful agitation against the laws by terming a "few minor incidents of damage to some mobile towers as a law-and-order problem". "These damaged towers can be and are being repaired, but what about the lives of the farmers lost in the bitter cold at Delhi borders, where they continue to fight for their rights amid total apathy from the BJP-led government at the centre?" he asked.

Farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana, have been protesting the laws for weeks in and around the national capital. They fear that the laws will phase out the traditional crop markets and the minimum support price guarantee and make them susceptible to exploitation by big corporate houses. The protesting farmers have targeted some Punjab BJP leaders in the last few days to press for their demand of a repeal of the laws.

On Friday, a tractor trolley carrying cow dung was unloaded in front of the house of a BJP leader in Punjab's Hoshiarpur.

Skill Development Training begins at ITI Namchi

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 JAN:

The second phase of Skill Development Training Program in Sikkim commenced at ITI Namchi, South Sikkim, today. The inaugural program was attended by 27 of the total 30 participants, a press release informs.

The program was organised by ITI Namchi and attended by General Manager, NHIDCL, Shankar Bhaumik and Principal ITI, Namchi, MN Bhutia along with other NHIDCL Engineers and faculty of ITI.

In his address, Principal ITI Namchi discussed the necessity of the training and requested the trainees to take it seriously in order to be self-reliant. He also con-



veyed his thanks to Chief Minister, PS Tamang, Secretary and the Director of Skill Development for extending the Training Program in ITI Namchi.

Officer in-charge Training, CIDC, RK Mishra, pointed out the objectives

of the Training Program.

Further, GM, NHIDCL, Shankar Bhaumik, informed about the objectives and guidelines of the Skill Development Training Program. He expressed his gratitude towards MORTH, Govt.

Of India and MD, NHIDCL for extending support for the second phase of Skill Development Training Program in Sikkim.

He also conveyed his gratitude to Secretary Skill Development, DC South, ED, NHIDCL and

SDM (HQ) for providing necessary guidance and support for the program. He congratulated the participants who have been selected for the training and also congratulated ITI, Namchi for their support and cooperation.

SKM organizes musical day cum picnic



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 JAN:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's Namthang Ratepani Constituency regional level executive members with the support of Transport Minister, Sanjeet Kharel organized

a musical day cum picnic for Turuk Mamring Gram Panchayat Unit at German Lepcha School Playground, South Sikkim, today.

A press release informs that Forest Minister, Karma Loday Bhutia, PHE Minister, Bhim Hang

Limboo, Rhenock MLA, Bishnu Khatiwada, Chairpersons, party leaders and functionaries attended the program.

During the program, 13 SDF leaders and members joined SKM, the release mentions.

Dzuko wildfire in Manipur border raging, choppers, NDRF teams rushed

GUWAHATI, 02 JAN [NDTV]: A team from the National Disaster Relief Force (NDRF), and three more Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopters will be pressed in, from today, to help the ground forces in Manipur contain the Dzukou Valley wildfire that started on December 29. The centre has assured all necessary help to combat the massive blaze that started in Nagaland four days ago and has since spread to its neighbouring state.

On Saturday, the centre airlifted an NDRF team to the Manipur side of Dzukou Valley where over 200 firefighters of the state fire service are on ground battling the blaze.

The IAF, which has sent a total of four Mi-17V5 helicopters to the site, also started relief operations this morning.

"The NDRF has deployed 60 personnel at the wildfire site in Dzukou Valley. Also two helicopters with Bambi buckets have been deployed," Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh tweeted thanking Home Minister Amit Shah and Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh "for the swift response".

According to officials, state's firefighters have been able to partially control the forest fire in the picturesque Dzukou Valley. But, the wildfire on the southern side is yet to be brought un-

der control, they added.

"The wildfire on the eastern side of the Dzukou Valley, spreading from Mount Khungho towards Mon, has been brought under control," Mr Singh said.

Officials of both state, Nagaland and Manipur, have claimed that by now the wildfire is expected to have destroyed much of the pristine forest, and harmed the rich biodiversity of the valley, which is a globally famous trekking site.

The Dzukou Valley ranges between Nagaland and Manipur. The forest fire had started earlier this week from the Nagaland side of the forest and shifted to the Manipur side.

After the fire spread, the Manipur Government had sought the assistance of the Indian Army and the NDRF. On Thursday, the Manipur Chief Minister had conducted an aerial survey.

A day later, when the fire could not be brought under control by the state forest and fire service officials, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had called the chief minister.

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Nagaland Governor RN Ravi had also visited the site on Wednesday.

The Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority is yet to confirm the cause of the wildfire.

Haryana Protesters Push Past Police Barricade Outside BJP Minister House

CHANDIGARH, 02 JAN [NDTV]: Dramatic visuals

have emerged of protesters - backing farmers' demand for repeal of centre's three contentious agriculture laws - pushing past a police barricade outside BJP minister's house in Haryana.

A short video shows tens of protestors, carrying red flags, trying to advance towards Minister Kamlesh Dhand's house in Haryana's Kaithal and succeeding with the use of a tractor.

No one was injured in the face-off.

This is the latest in line of incidents that reflect growing anger against the state's ruling dispensation - the BJP and the Janata Jannayak Party (JJP) - amid ongoing protests against the three "black laws" along Delhi's borders.

The incident also comes close on heels of BJP losing mayoral races in Sonapat and Ambala, as well as three of five other civic body polls.

While the BJP attributed the losses to its absentee voters who were "on holiday during the polls", dismissing local sentiment against the farm laws as a contributing factor, their leaders continue to face the music.

Numerous villages across Haryana, including Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala's home seat of Uchana Kalan, have issued orders telling people to socially boycott all members and leaders of BJP and JJP, including Chief Minister

Manohar Lal Khattar.

They have also issued statements condemning the attempts by the government and its leaders to spread misinformation about the farmers "misled by the Opposition".

Since protests against the farm laws started in Punjab and Haryana, Mr Khattar's convoy has been gheraoed and forced to change route at least twice.

Mr Chautala, whose party's main voter base is farmers, also had to cancel a scheduled visit after villagers dug up a temporary helipad and chanted "Dushyant Chautala go back".

While the JJP chief, whose support props up the BJP government in Haryana, has repeatedly said he would quit if he is unable to ensure Minimum Support Price for farmers, Mr Khattar has gone a step ahead and said he would quit politics altogether if this demand is not met.

A few kilometres away in Delhi, lakhs of farmers and their families - from neighbouring Haryana and Punjab besides other states - have been camping in biting cold and rain since November 26 demanding that the laws be repealed stating these would leave them vulnerable to exploitation by corporates.

Farmers have added that they were not among the stakeholders consulted before the laws were enacted.

Five states contribute...

53,186,2 cases thus far. A total of 11,616 active cases, the state's total Covid-19 cases.

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Chhattisgarh has nearly 26,578,8 cases of Covid-19 of which 11,344 are active. This gives Chhattisgarh 4.09 per cent active cases of its total tally.

Meanwhile, the dry run of Covid-19 vaccination programme began across all states and union territories on Saturday morning.

India records less...

Nadu (12,135), Karnataka (12,096), Delhi (10,557), West Bengal (9,738), Uttar Pradesh (8,379), Andhra Pradesh (7,108) and Punjab (5,349).

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that a state-wise distribution of the figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

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ANTHYESTI KRIYA

The Anthyesti Kriya (13th day rites) of Late. DK Gajmer (IAS), former Principal Secretary and Chief Information Commissioner who left for heavenly abode on 26th December 2020 falls on 7th January 2021 (Thursday).

Prayers for the departed soul are being performed at our residence opposite State Bank of India (SBI) ATM, Development Area, Gangtok.

We would like to thank each and every one of you for being there for us at this time of bereavement.

At the same time, we would also like to request all to kindly adhere to the prescribed COVID-19 protocols please.

**Pamela Gajmer (Wife),
Vaishnav and Binita (Son and Daughter
-in-law), Deepkant (Son),
D.B. Gajmer (Brother) and the
entire Gajmer family.
Contact: (98320 92256/ 97332
89642 / 99320 31526)**



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LAND FOR SALE

Two plots available - 30X40 sq ft and 50X30 sq ft
Junkeri Dara, Samlik Marchak
Price negotiable
Contact : 6296366498,
9641878315, 9593262407

LAND FOR SALE

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

LAND FOR SALE

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

FOR RENT

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

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

BUILDING FOR SALE

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

Dzukou forest fire on Nagaland side under control

KOHIMA, 02 JAN [PTI]: The forest fire raging in Dzukou range in Nagaland has been brought under control with the help of the Indian Air Force helicopters, police, forest department and local volunteers, officials said today.

The Dzukou range in which the majestic Dzukou valley, a tourist hot spot in Nagaland is located, had a forest fire on Tuesday afternoon. Efforts to extinguish the wildfire in Dzukou range continued for the fifth day today, sources told news agency Press Trust of India.

OSD of Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority, Johnny Raungmei said that IAF choppers were used to put out the fire. On the Nagaland side, it



is relatively controlled because of the preventive measure taken by the Kohima District Disaster Management Authority along with personnel from forest, police, fire and emergency services and volunteers from Southern Angami

Youth Organisation. The fire has also spread to neighbouring Senapati district of Manipur.

"Based on the requisition by the state government, an IAF Mi-17V5 helicopter equipped with Bambi bucket for firefighting

was used in Dzukou valley near Kohima," said PRO (Defence) Kohima, Lt Col Sumit K Sharma.

The IAF choppers conducted recce on Thursday, said Lt Col Sharma, adding that the mission is still on and it would continue even today. About the fire being completely put out, Mr Raungmei said, "We can't rule out (possibility of fire) because as per the pilots there are multiple spots where the fire is burning".

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Kohima Rajkumar M said that as per the latest information from the Range Officer, Kohima, a stretch of about 5 km fire line has been cut in the priority area. As per the present situation, the main valley is safe from fire, he said.



Youth club thanks Lingi Payong School for support

SUMMIT REPORT

LINGI PAYONG, 01 JAN:

Pragatishil Yuva Club of Lingee Payong, South Sikkim, felicitated Lingi Payong Secondary School for supporting the constituency-level New Year Cup football tournament organised by the youth club.

The tournament was held from 15 to 31 Dec, 2020.

The school's teachers and students participated in various activities organised by the club during the tournament, a press release informs.

The token of appreciation was received by the Headmaster of school from chief guest of the day, MLA Raj Kumari Thapa, during the final day of the tournament held at Lingi Payong Secondary School Playground on 31 Dec, 2020.

Gafai-Gafma Samuha confers at Namthang



SUMMIT REPORT

NAMTHANG, 02 JAN:

Gafai Gafma Samuha [GGS] of Namthang met at Namthang today and unanimously decided to prepare a calendar of activities for the year ahead covering engagements like career counseling, health awareness,

blood donation awareness sessions, awareness against substance abuse, addressing addiction to mobile games, and observe national and international days.

The meeting was attended by all executive and other members of the Samuha.

Adani Green gets 600-MW wind-solar hybrid power project from SECI



NEW DELHI, JAN 1 (PTI):

Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) on Friday said its wholly-owned subsidiary Adani Renewable Energy Holding Eight Ltd (AREHEightL) has been awarded a 600-megawatt wind-solar hybrid power project by Solar Energy Corporation of India.

"AREHEightL participated in a tender issued by SECI for setting up 1,200-MW ISTS-connected wind-solar hybrid power project.

"It has won the letter of award (LOA) for 600-MW wind-solar hybrid project. On December 31, 2020, AREHEightL received the LOA," AGEL said in a statement.

The tariff for this project capacity has been fixed at Rs 2.41 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for 25 years. The project is expected to be commissioned in a duration of 18 months from the date of signing the PPA (power purchase agreement), the company said.

With the latest win,

AGEL's total capacity stands at 14,795 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy. Of this, 2,950 MW of renewable energy projects are operational and 11,845 MW projects are under implementation, it said.

AGEL Managing Director and CEO Vneet S Jaain said, "The LoA of the 600-MW wind-solar hybrid power project is in line with our ambition to achieve renewable power capacity of 25 GW by 2025." It is also a step closer towards becoming the world's largest renewable power company by 2030 and contributes to India's decarbonisation targets.

AGEL has a renewable portfolio of over 14 gigawatts of operating, under-construction and awarded projects catering to investment-grade counterparties. The company develops, builds, owns, operates and maintains utility-scale grid-connected solar and wind farm projects.

Auto-repair service Dr Wheels launches in Sikkim

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 02 JAN:

Dr. Wheelz brings auto-repair service right at your doorstep starting 03 Jan 2021 in Sikkim. The company was launched in a function held at Gangtok today which had Chairman, Transport Department, Basant Kumar Tamang as chief guest. Also present was Additional SP East, Arjun Tamang.

Founder and CEO, Dr Wheelz, Balaji Mohan informed that the company will be able to provide its services for vehicles from a wide range of companies. Now customers will not have to visit a garage for any repairs, he added.



Mr Mohan informed that they have acquired Sikkim-based AutoBizz company and will be working together.

It is informed that people can avail their services via three modes: on the company's web site; contact number - 7483643694; or Mobile App.

Addressing the gathering, Mr Tamang assured every possible help to the company and expressed happiness on the initiative. He said that such initiatives can help generate employment in the state.

ASP, Arjun Tamang also assured support from Sikkim Police.

Everyone is allowed a bit of slump, I had that in England: Warner comes to Smith's defence

MELBOURNE, JAN 2 (PTI): Once in a while, everyone is allowed a bit of slump in form and Steve Smith is no exception, feels David Warner, who can relate to his former skipper's woes against India having endured a similarly wretched run during the 2019 Ashes.

Smith has been in horrible form in the ongoing series with R Ashwin removing him twice and Jasprit Bumrah once. But Warner believes that it's more about India bowling well than anything lacking in Smith's approach as he has left no stone unturned in terms of preparation.

"Steve Smith has been recently knocked off by Kane Williamson as best batter in the world (ICC ranking) but if you look at his numbers, he still averages over 60. Everyone is allowed to have a bit of lack of form and I saw that myself when I was in England (Ashes 2019)," Warner said in a virtual news conference on Saturday.

He believes that if faced with a good ball, any batsman can get out.

"On a day, if you have your name on that delivery, it is what it is and you can't do anything about it."

"As you can see that it's not due to lack of preparation as the guy (Smith) doesn't get out of nets. He works off his backside all the time."

For Warner, the 84 Test experience that he possesses has taught him one thing -- the intent and aggression should always be pre-meditated if one wants to unsettle the opposition.

"My 84 Test matches have always been about pre-meditated attacks and it doesn't change for me but it's about how the team looks at it. When I talk about intent, I mean by putting pressure back on the bowlers not just by swinging the bat.

"There are other ways of showing intent which could lead them into bowl-

ing those odd full-pitched balls and short of length balls which you can pull or cut. That's what I talk about when I talk about putting pressure on bowlers.

"It's about going out there and playing your shots," said the man, who has 7244 runs and 24 hundreds in 84 games. What Warner has observed is that both Indian and Australian batsmen, for the better part, have allowed rival bowlers to gain the upper-hand.

"If you allow very good attacks, which both these teams have, to dictate their terms, without applying pressure, then it becomes difficult to score. Both teams have lacked a bit of fluency at the top in two Tests. "You need to show that intent in loud calling, shoulders are back, you are in the bowlers' face, unsettle their line and length and I am speaking from experience."

Warner has observed that Australia, in the first two games (one of which they won), didn't do simple things like "tap and run" which does create pressure on the opposition. "Lengths are key to Australian wickets and they have been hitting some nice lengths as I heard from some of the guys. Drive on the up and drop and run and apply that pressure, some of that was missing.

"You can't allow great attacks to dictate terms to you as batsmen. It has its challenges by all means but you have got to play outside the square (out of box) and be a little bit brave," he said.

"I would rather go out there swinging than sitting back on the crease. If I am able to go out there, I will try and have that intent like I always have," Warner made it clear.

The flamboyant batsman has often spoken about the bio-bubble fatigue and even though groin injury happened at an inopportune time, Warner counts it as a blessing as it helped him spend some time with his young family.

Biswajit Basu takes charges as Director Projects at NHPC

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JAN:

Biswajit Basu took over as Director (Projects), NHPC Limited, on 01 Jan. Prior to his appointment, he held the position of Chief General Manager, Project Monitoring and Support Group Division, NHPC.

An electrical engineering by training from Tripura Engineering College [now NIT, Agartala], Mr Basu joined NHPC in the year 1987 as a Trainee Engineer (Electrical) at Loktak Power Station, Manipur.



During his career with NHPC, he has worked on various projects during construction and O&M stages, some of which are Kurichu [60 MW, Bhutan], Chamera-II [300

MW, Himachal Pradesh], Subansiri Lower [2000 MW, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam], Sippi [4 MW, Arunachal Pradesh], Loktak Down Stream [66 MW, Manipur], Dibang [2880 MW, Arunachal Pradesh].

In Sikkim, he was in charge of O&M at Rangit HEP and was in-charge of commissioning Teesta Low Dam Project Stage III power station.

He is also a nominee Director on the board of Lanco Teesta Hydro Power Limited which is now a subsidiary of NHPC.

Arm Wrestling c'ship in Martam



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 JAN:

An encouraging turnout of 35 participants competed in the Open Arm-Wrestling Championship held at Martam, East Sikkim, on Friday.

The daylong championship was organised by Martam-based Pema's Gym and Health Club in collaboration with Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's sports wing of East District.

Thinlay Wangdi Bhutia in junior category, Punya Sharma in seniors, Prem Gurung in master's category and Rajen

Rai in master's [60 kg and above] category emerged as champion of champions in their respective categories.

SKM sports wing [East] vice-convenor, Ranjit Sharma, was present as chief guest, accompanied by Sikkim Arm Wrestling Association president, Lhendup Dorjee Bhutia and Martam-Rumtek constituency sports wing convener, Milan Sharma as guests of honour. Likewise, Namgay Bhutia, Sonam Doma Bhutia, Homnath Siwakoti and Tshering Dawa also attended the match-ups as special guests.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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

Treatment

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

If you seek help, you may call :

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District surveillance Officer
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WEST : 9593297809
NORTH : 9641957468
SOUTH : 7407691463
New STNM
AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Delinquency Hardening into Crime

Pause. Listen. Care

Localities across the State are reporting crimes which might appear petty on first read, may even become conversation starters for a while, but because they are not scandalous or “bloody” enough, fade away from memory and conversations. Occasionally, when these excesses touch those with influence or the willingness to invest time to make some noise or generate awareness, the incidents remain in the public domain for slightly longer and cops might even get pulled away from VIP or event-management duties to patrol the streets, but things normalize eventually and we go to back to forgetting or not bothering.

That, however, would be the wrong response.

These are desperately disturbing trends and require deeper deliberations. Burglaries have now become so routine that they are not even always reported, and there have been instances when even the donation boxes from temples and monasteries have been raided. Unattended LPG cylinders are often lifted away, and now, at least in Gangtok, there have been enough instances of bag snatching to flag them as a worry as well. The one common thread running through this span from piggy-bank lifting to actual mugging is that these are opportunistic crimes; not necessarily committed by a “career criminal”, but those carried out by the criminally inclined who have not yet gathered the courage to make a career out of it.

And that is a worry.

Career criminals have a track record – a history-sheet as the cops like to call it – and can be traced down, interrogated, charged and locked away. The criminally inclined move around with their tendencies in check and act upon them when opportunity presents or when they are egged on by others with similar dispensations or are just bored and looking for some excitement. Unless identified, they cannot be traced down. As the heat of increased police patrolling and brighter street lighting ramps up, this group lays low, and once policing relaxes, they will surface again or find release is some other disruption. Locking them away is not recommended either because that would be condemning them before any efforts were made to reclaim them back into the folds of society.

Policing, hence, does not offer permanent solutions. But we all always knew that. The Indian experience with the police is not one of reforming but one of hardening criminals, so, that might not even be the advisable route to take. What Sikkim faces is a growth in opportunist/ casual crime, and that is a whole different ball game since it is fused into the societal make-up, occupying that grey area where delinquency starts fermenting into harder stuff. Because it infiltrates slowly, it catches everyone off guard when it explodes. These are not situations which developed overnight, but surface after decades of failure to notice. A brawl ending up in a stabbing, a scuffle leading to a fatal bludgeoning, a bag violently snatched in a dark alley, a vehicle torched in the dead of the night, inhuman beating over a minor ego bruising or a bullet to settle perceived slights... These are not instincts born overnight, but impulses acted upon after years of experiencing disinterest and uncaring.

These are still not the handiwork of ‘criminals’. These are obviously expressions of a bored and frustrated youth to begin with, and also suggestive of growing habits and dependence which need to be financed through such risky undertakings.

Irrespective of how one sees it – as adventures undertaken to relieve boredom, outbursts of rage against the system, or signs of a generation screaming for attention or just a depressing sense of worthlessness which needs violence to overcome - these are all evidence of increasing delinquency that could go out of hand if left unattended, and the response required is the same – the generation above needs to pause and listen, share and care.

WRITE US:

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



Six Ways to ‘Reboot Your Brain’ After a Hard Year of COVID-19 – according to science

CHRISTELLE LANGLEY
theconversation.com

There’s no doubt that 2020 was difficult for everyone and tragic for many. But now vaccines against COVID-19 are finally being administered – giving a much needed hope of a return to normality and a happy 2021.

However, months of anxiety, grief and loneliness can easily create a spiral of negativity that is hard to break out of. That’s because chronic stress changes the brain. And sometimes when we’re low we have no interest in doing the things that could actually make us feel better.

To enjoy our lives in 2021, we need to snap out of destructive habits and get our energy levels back. In some cases, that may initially mean forcing yourself to do the things that will gradually make you feel better. If you are experiencing more severe symptoms, however, you may want to speak to a professional about therapy or medication.

Here are six evidenced-based ways to change our brains for the better.

1. BE KIND AND HELPFUL

Kindness, altruism and empathy can affect the brain. One study showed that making a charitable donation activated the brain’s reward system in a similar way to actually receiving money. This also applies to helping others who have been wronged.

Volunteering can also give a sense of meaning in life, promoting happiness, health and wellbeing. Older adults who volunteer regularly also exhibit greater life satisfaction and reduced depression and anxiety. In short, making others happy is a great way to make yourself happy.

2. EXERCISE

Exercise has been linked with both better physical and mental health, including improved cardiovascular health and reduced depression. In childhood, exercise is associated with better school performance, while it promotes better cognition and job performance in young adults. In older adults, exercise maintains cognitive performance and provides resilience against neurodegenerative disorders, such as dementia.

What’s more, studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of fitness have increased

brain volume, which is associated with better cognitive performance in older adults. People who exercise also live longer. One of the very best things that you can do to reboot your brain is in fact to go out and get some fresh air during a brisk walk, run or cycling session. Do make sure to pick something you actually enjoy to ensure you keep doing it though.

3. EAT WELL

Nutrition can substantially influence the development and health of brain structure and function. It provides the proper building blocks for the brain to create and maintain connections, which is critical for improved cognition and academic performance. Previous evidence has shown that long-term lack of nutrients can lead to structural and functional damage to the brain, while a good quality diet is related to larger brain volume.

One study of 20,000 participants from the UK-Biobank showed that a higher intake of cereal was associated with the long-term beneficial effects of increased volume of grey matter (a key component of the central nervous system), which is linked to improved cognition. However, diets rich in sugar, saturated fats or calories can damage neural function. They can also reduce the brain’s ability to make new neural connections, which negatively affects cognition.

Therefore, whatever your age, remember to eat a well-balanced diet, including fruits, vegetables and cereal.

4. KEEP SOCIALLY CONNECTED

Loneliness and social isolation is prevalent across all ages, genders and cultures – further elevated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Robust scientific evidence has indicated that social isolation is detrimental to physical, cognitive and mental health.

One recent study showed that there were negative effects of COVID-19 isolation on emotional cognition, but that this effect was smaller in those that stayed connected with others during lockdown. Developing social connections and alleviating loneliness is also associated with decreased risk of mortality as well as a range of illnesses.

Therefore, loneliness and social isolation are increasingly recognised as critical public health issues, which require effective interventions. And social interaction is associated with positive feelings and increased activation in the brain’s reward system.

In 2021, be sure to keep up with family and friends, but also expand your horizons and make some new connections.

5. LEARN SOMETHING NEW

The brain changes during critical periods of development, but is also a lifelong process. Novel experiences, such as learning new skills, can modify both brain function and the underlying brain structure. For example juggling has been shown to increase white matter (tissue composed of nerve fibers) structures in the brain associated with visuo-motor performance.

Similarly, musicians have been shown to have increased grey matter in the parts of the brain that process auditory information. Learning a new language can also change the structure of the human brain.

A large review of the literature suggested that mentally stimulating leisure activities increase brain-reserve, which can instil resilience and be protective of cognitive decline in older adults – be it chess or cognitive games.

6. SLEEP PROPERLY

Sleep is an essential component of human life, yet many people do not understand the relationship between good brain health and the process of sleeping. During sleep, the brain reorganises and recharges itself and removes toxic waste byproducts, which helps to maintain normal brain functioning.

Sleep is very important for transforming experiences into our long-term memory, maintaining cognitive and emotional function and reducing mental fatigue. Studies of sleep deprivation have demonstrated deficits in memory and attention as well as changes in the reward system, which often disrupts emotional functioning. Sleep also exerts a strong regulatory influence on the immune system. If you have the optimal quantity and quality of sleep, you will find that you have more energy, better wellbeing and are able to develop your creativity and thinking.

So have a Happy New Year! And let’s make the most of ourselves in 2021 and help others to do the same.

[the writer is Postdoctoral Research Associate, Cognitive Neuroscience, University of Cambridge]

Oxford vaccine approved – now, here are 10 reasons why you should get vaccinated

ALESSANDRO SIANI
theconversation.com

The Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine has been authorised for use in the UK, meaning that millions more vaccine doses can now be delivered in the country. This will speed up progress towards achieving widespread immunity to the coronavirus.

However, since the start of the pandemic – and particularly since vaccines for COVID-19 started being developed – many people have expressed concerns about their safety and effectiveness.

If you’re among those feeling hesitant about getting a COVID-19 vaccine – or if you’re wondering why vaccines are considered one of humanity’s greatest achievements – here are 10 reasons why you should consider getting vaccinated.

1. BECAUSE VACCINES SAVE LIVES

Things have come a long way since Edward Jenner first vaccinated a young boy against smallpox in 1796. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that vaccination currently prevents 2 million to 3 million deaths every year.

From climate change to coronavirus, science is at the heart of news

Smallpox, which claimed approximately 300 million lives in the 20th century alone, has been fully eradicated thanks to the development and implementation of safe and effective vaccines.

For some people today, COVID-19 also proves fatal. If you’re at high risk from the disease, getting vaccinated could save your life.

2. TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH

Vaccines also protect us from many debilitating illnesses.

Prior to the development of the Salk and Sabin vaccines for polio, it was common to see dramatic images of people using iron lungs or paralysed children. But over the last three decades, vaccines have led to a 99.9% reduction in polio cases.

COVID-19 can also have long-lasting health effects. Vaccines will protect you against these too.

3. TO PROTECT AND SUPPORT HEALTH SERVICES

Being vaccinated as a child means that you’re less likely to contract infectious diseases over your lifetime. This relieves pressure on health service staff, who can then dedicate their efforts, funds and equipment to helping patients with non-preventable illnesses.

Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 will help in exactly the same way – freeing up resources by lowering case numbers and preventing further backlogs of other treatments.

4. TO PROTECT THE VULNERABLE

When enough people are vaccinated against an infectious disease like COVID-19, it can be effectively stopped from spreading, because there are too few people to infect. This is known as herd immunity.

Reaching herd immunity means that even those who cannot receive the vaccination (for example due to pre-existing conditions) are protected.

5. BECAUSE THEY’RE RIGOROUSLY TESTED

Vaccines are tested in long and large clinical trials that involve tens of thousands of people, and their effects are monitored even after they have been approved. The thorough

way in which vaccines are developed means that they are far safer and have fewer side-effects than most existing medications.

Vaccines for COVID-19 are being tested in the same way as vaccines for other diseases. They have been developed quickly thanks to cutting red tape, not because safety testing has been any less thorough.

6. TO SAVE TIME AND MONEY

Vaccines have been widely recognised as one of the most time- and cost-effective medical interventions you can have. Receiving a vaccination only takes a few minutes and is very cheap (or, for many people, free).

On the other hand, contracting an infectious disease means taking time off from school or work and potentially racking up hefty medical bills.

7. TO BE ABLE TO TRAVEL SAFELY

Travelling to other countries exposes you to pathogens your immune system is not familiar with. By receiving the vaccinations recommended for your destination, you’ll be able to enjoy your holiday without this risking an emergency visit to a local hospital or bringing back unwanted bugs.

Likewise, keeping up to date with your recommended vaccination schedule protects the inhabitants of your holiday destination from any infections you may otherwise carry with you. For this reason, COVID-19 vaccines could become mandatory for travel as they are rolled out.

8. TO LIMIT DRUG RESISTANCE

Antimicrobial resistance has been identified by the WHO as one of the 10 greatest threats to global health (as has vaccine hesitancy). The continuous overuse of antibiotic and antiviral drugs causes bacteria and

viruses to become resistant to them, resulting in untreatable infections spreading.

By preventing us from getting infected in the first place, vaccinations allow us to reduce our use of antibiotics and antivirals, therefore limiting the resurgence of drug-resistant strains of bacteria and viruses.

9. TO PROTECT FUTURE GENERATIONS

Over the course of history, humanity has had to coexist with many debilitating and life-threatening diseases that are now very rare thanks to childhood vaccination programmes.

However, the pandemic provides a dramatic example of the devastating global effect that a single disease can have in the absence of a vaccine. Immunising ourselves and our children against infectious diseases today is an invaluable gift to future generations. Suppressing diseases in the present will allow people in the future to live longer and healthier lives.

10. TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF FAKE NEWS

Research has shown that fake news spreads much faster and farther than truthful information. Over the last few decades, conspiracy theories and misinformation have eroded public trust in vaccines, leading to the re-emergence of nearly eradicated diseases in many countries.

By following evidence-based guidance from the scientific and medical community, you are not only protecting yourself and your loved ones from infectious diseases, but also setting an example that helps fight back against the diffusion of misinformation.

[the writer is Associate Head (Students), School of Biological Sciences, University of Portsmouth]

1 new COVID-19 case in Andamans

PORT BLAIR, JAN 2 (PTI): One more person tested positive for COVID-19 in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, taking the tally in the Union Territory to 4,946, a health official said on Saturday.

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

Four more persons have recovered from the infection, pushing the total number of recoveries in the union territory to 4,830, the official said.

The archipelago now has 54 active cases, while 62 patients have succumbed to the infection so far, he said.

Of the 54 active COVID-19 cases, 53 are in South Andaman district and one in North and Middle Andaman district.

The administration has so far tested 1,82,626 samples for COVID-19 and the positivity rate is 2.71 per cent, the official added.

Arunachal Pradesh reports no fresh COVID-19 case

ITANAGAR, JAN 2 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh did not record a single fresh COVID-19 case in the last 24 hours, a health department official said on Saturday.

The state's coronavirus tally remained at 16,719, he said.

Two more people were cured of the infection on Friday, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 16,566, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state is 99.08 per cent, the SSO said.

Arunachal Pradesh now has 97 active coronavirus cases, while 56 people have succumbed to the infection so far he said, adding that the fatality ratio is 0.33 per cent.

The Capital Complex region, comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas, has the highest number of active cases at 36, followed by Tawang (24) and East Siang (11).

The state has so far tested 3,78,364 samples for COVID-19, including 213 on Friday, while the positivity rate stood at 0.92 per cent, Dr Jampa added.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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Com

TMC steps into 23rd year, sees defections to BJP

CONTAI/ KOLKATA, JAN 2 (PTI): The ruling Trinamool Congress on Friday stepped into its 23rd year amid defections in Contai civic body, which saw majority of the party's councillors deserting it for the BJP in poll-bound West Bengal.

Fifteen of the total 20 councillors of the civic body, including its former administrator Soumendu Adhikari, a brother of Suvendu Adhikari, who was earlier a senior minister in the Mamata Banerjee cabinet, joined the saffron camp.

Soumendu Adhikari had been recently removed from the administrator's post by the Mamata Banerjee government.

Suvendu Adhikari, who had joined the BJP last month, handed over party flags to the councillors at a programme at Contai in Purba Medinipur district.

Adhikari said Soumendu's removal was a "vindictive move" on the part of the state government.

"Soumendu has a long political career ahead of him. He has worked hard all these years, and the same goes for the other councillors. The Adhikari family is no longer with the TMC, which has turned into a company," he said.

The former state cabinet minister also said that the Mamata Banerjee government had been delaying municipal polls, as it was scared of its "imminent defeat".

The Contai Municipality, which has been the Adhikari family's backyard for the last



four decades, has been with the TMC since 1999, just a year after it was formed.

TMC MP Sisir Adhikari, the father of Suvendu Adhikari, was chairman of the municipality for 25 years from 1971 till 2009, except for five years from 1981-86. After he became an MP, he handed over the baton to his younger son Dibyendu Adhikari.

After Dibyendu Adhikari became an MP in a by-election in 2016, his younger brother Soumendu took over the post.

Things took an ugly turn after Suvendu Adhikari switched over to the BJP last month. The TMC top brass was apprehensive about the "motives" of the other members of the Adhikari family, who were conspicuous by their absence in recent party

programmes. "Soumendu Adhikari did not think of joining any other party so long he was an administrator. As he was removed from the post, he joined another party. This only shows their (Adhikari family's) true colour - that they can't live without the chair," senior TMC leader Firhad Hakim said.

Meanwhile, Singur MLA and veteran party leader Rabinindranath Bhattacharya hit out at the TMC leadership for paving the way for "corrupt and dishonest" elements by sidelining the old-timers in the party.

Bhattacharya, one of the prominent faces of the Singur anti-land acquisition movement in 2006, gave the party's foundation day programme at the Hooghly district party

headquarters during the day a miss. He is miffed with the growing prominence of "dishonest people" at various organisational levels.

On its foundation day, the TMC said party supremo Mamata Banerjee is the "true upholder" of Bengal's culture and values.

Senior TMC leaders led by state party president Subrata Bakshi hoisted the party flag at its state headquarters and congratulated workers for their tireless efforts in serving people.

"In the past 23 years, our TMC family fought many battles whereby more and more people bestowed their faith in @MamataOfficial as the true upholder of Bengal's culture, pride & values! As we step into another year, we promise

to always protect & serve the people of Bengal," the TMC tweeted.

The comments by the TMC come in the backdrop of the raging "outsider-insider" debate in the state. the TMC has repeatedly branded the BJP as a party of outsiders which, it claimed, poses a threat to the culture and values of the state.

Banerjee in a series of tweets asserted that she will continue to fight and work for the people of the state in the days to come.

"As Trinamool turns 23 today, I look back at the journey we began on January 1st, 1998. Our years have been of immense struggle, but throughout this time, we have continued to achieve our objective of being committed to the cause of only the people."

Banerjee said on Twitter.

Vowing to carry on her fight to uplift the state, she said "On #TMCFoundation-Day, I extend my sincere gratitude to our Maa-Mati-Manush and all our workers who continue to fight with us in making Bengal better and stronger each day. The Trinamool family will carry on with this resolve for times to come!"

Mocking the TMC, Dilip Ghosh, the BJP state president said, "The TMC government's days are numbered in Bengal. This is the last time that it is observing its foundation day while being in power."

"Once it is voted out in the next assembly polls, anybody can guess the fate of the TMC," he added.

The TMC had issued instructions to its workers to conduct various programmes across the state to mark the occasion.

The party's leaders in districts have arranged various functions and street corner meetings to highlight its achievements in the last ten years.

Banerjee broke away from the Congress and formed the TMC on January 1, 1998, intending to oust the then Left Front regime from power in the state. The party achieved its goal in May 2011 after allying with the Congress.

The assembly polls are due in April-May this year and will be crucial as the resurgent BJP, which has never been in power in this politically polarised state, will seek to defeat Banerjee who has been in power for the past two consecutive terms.

Over 64,000 tourists have visited Kaziranga since Oct 21



GUWAHATI, JAN 2 (PTI): More than 64,000 tourists have visited the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, famed for the one-horned Indian rhinoceros, since it reopened on October 21, an official said.

The park, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, usually remains closed between June and September because of the annual floods and reopens in November.

The park's Field Director P Sivakumar said that 64,100 tourists

visited since October 21, 2020 while the revenue collected during the 70-day period was Rs 127.32 lakh.

In 2018-19, over 47,10,971 domestic tourists and 25,739 foreign tourists had visited the state.

The park authorities could successfully restrict rhino poaching with only two rhinos poached in the year 2020, he said on Friday.

Sivakumar said that 66 cases, including 17 rhino-related cases, have

been booked during the year while 95 people have been arrested in 38 rhino and other wildlife crime related cases.

In September last, the Assam government had approved the seventh, eighth and ninth additions to the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

In November, according to a directive of Gauhati High Court, the civil administration of Bokakhat Sub-division under Golaghat district handed over the third

and fifth additions to the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

The area of the third addition is 69.76 hectares and that of the fifth addition is 115.36 hectares.

Sivakumar said that as a part of the water conservation in 2020, five additional wetlands - Chirakhowa, Potahi, Deosur, Haldhibari and Banderdubi - were created which are huge and serve as habitats.

NRB invites COVID-19-affected firms to apply for refinance loan

KATHMANDU, JAN 2 [MYREPUBLICA]: Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) has invited applications from the business enterprises affected by COVID-19 for the refinance service offered by the central bank.

Issuing a public notice on Friday, NRB offered the refinance scheme which it has announced through the monetary policy for the current fiscal year. As NRB had received very few applications in the first call, the central bank has again come up with a similar offer by giving a deadline of a month.

The monetary policy has earmarked around Rs 150 billion to provide refinance amount to the coronavirus-affected firms via banks and financial institutions (BFIs). After its first call,



NRB had approved refinance applications for around Rs 64 billion by over 40,000 borrowers.

NRB has turned lenient this time in its criteria to apply for the refinance service. Earlier, NRB had maintained that a minimum of 70 percent of the firms should be cottage and small industries while applying for the refinance loan. The provision has now been removed.

Under refinancing loans, BFIs can issue personal loans and business loans of up to Rs 50 million at a low interest rate

of up to five percent. The central bank now has given priority to those firms that fall in highly-affected and medium-affected groups to receive the refinancing loans.

Though NRB itself had been mobilizing a refinancing fund, the guideline endorsed in last July has provisioned that 70 percent resources of the refinancing fund should be mobilized through BFIs. Refinancing loans will have a maximum maturity period of one year and will not be renewed.

Assam reports 40 new COVID-19 cases, 4 fresh deaths

GUWAHATI, JAN 2 (PTI): Assam's COVID-19 tally rose to 2,16,251 with 40 more people testing positive for the infection, while four fresh fatalities pushed the death toll to 1,049, a bulletin issued by the state government's National Health Mission said on Saturday.

Four persons succumbed to the disease since Friday, taking the total death toll to 1049 with the current death rate at 0.48 per cent while 1,347 COVID positive patients have died for other reasons.

Forty new cases have been reported out of 15,429 tests conducted at a positivity rate of 0.26 per cent, it said. Eighty two more

patients recovered from COVID-19 on Friday, taking the total number of recoveries to 2,11,989. The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state is currently 98 per cent.

Of the total 2,16,251 COVID-19 cases, currently 3,213 are active cases, it said. The state has so far tested 60,14,286 samples for COVID-19, including both RT-PCR and Rapid Antigen Test.

Meanwhile, Health and Family Welfare Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had announced on Friday night that he shall discontinue the sharing of COVID updates which he has been doing daily since the first case in the state was reported

on March 31 as life is back to pre-COVID times. "For 270+ days, I've shared #COVID19 updates. With a positivity rate of below 0.5 per cent and considering life is back to pre-COVID times, including opening of schools and colleges, I shall discontinue the same, except for special updates", he tweeted.

Sarma further said that he has shared the updates for 270+ days, without a break, including on festival days with extraordinary support from health officials.

"I am told this is something that only Assam had done with such regularity. Thank you all for your faith which motivates", he said.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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Uruguayan academics
slam FA over Cavani ban



ANDREW DOWNIE

LONDON, 02 JAN (REUTERS): The Uruguayan Academy of Letters on Friday denounced a three-game ban given to Manchester United’s Edinson Cavani on Friday, calling the sanction for alleged racism an example of English football’s lack of “cultural and linguistic knowledge.”

The 33-year-old Uruguayan used the word “negrito” in an Instagram post after the club’s victory over Southampton on Nov. 29, before taking it down and apologising. He said it was intended as an expression of affection to a friend.

On Thursday the FA said the comment was “improper and brought the game into disrepute”, fined Cavani 100,000 pounds and ordered him to complete “face-to-face education” as part of his punishment. The academy, an association dedicated to protecting and promoting the Spanish language used in Uruguay, said it “energetically rejected the sanction.”

“The English Football Association has committed a serious injustice with the Uruguayan sportsman ... and has shown its ignorance and error in ruling on the use of language, and in particular Spanish, without noting all its complexities and contexts,” the academy said in a statement.

“In the context that it was written, the only value that can be given to negrito – and particularly because of the diminutive use – is affectionately.” Words referring to skin colour, weight and other physical characteristics are often used among friends and relations in Latin America, especially in the diminutive, the academy said.

In that context they are expressions of tenderness and are often used independently of the subject’s appearance.

United said Cavani chose not to contest the charge out of respect for the FA and the “fight against racism in football”. “My heart is at peace because I know that I always expressed myself with affection according to my culture and way of life,” he wrote on Instagram.

How young cyclist Tom Kelsall became an unlikely hero in 2020

SUZE CLEMITSON

LONDON, 02 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: It was the year we locked down and wrapped ourselves in a thick blanket of isolation. But for some the virus rekindled our love affair with the bike and there was something almost magical about seeing parts of the country turn into the Netherlands overnight. For Tom Kelsall it delivered an opportunity he might never have dreamed of otherwise. It took him from ripping the legs off cyclist and YouTuber Francis Cade around the Surrey Hills to the very top step of the notorious ramp test. Now the door stands open to Special Olympics glory.

Tom Kelsall. Remember the name because when they hang the gold around his neck there will be something in your eye. With the sweet, shy smile of a young man caught between boyhood and adulthood, he has the same monosyllabic answers as any teenager. But he has charisma too, and a quiet determination he has demonstrated all his life.

Tom was a floppy baby, his dad Neil says. While his twin brother gurgled and crawled and hit the various milestones of life, Tom struggled and was quiet. From the age of 18 months he started receiving intensive therapy – physio, occupational and speech – but the family remained in the dark about his condition.

Moving to the US for work gave them the opportunity to consult some of the best geneticists in the world, but the news was brutal. “It’s a day I’ll never, never forget,” says Neil. After Tom went through a battery of invasive tests, the family were told he suffered from “mental retardation” and that “one day his development would simply stop”. Neil remembers the shock but also notes that “everything we’d seen from Tom told us that wasn’t going to be the case.”

Crucially, no one told Tom. At 20 months he crawled across the floor, over the back of the family dog Roscoe, and pulled himself upright – in front of a roomful of therapists who couldn’t quite believe what they had just seen. “He looked around as if to say ‘I can do this,’” remembers Neil. “Then he decided he was going to walk and he practised for hours until he nailed it.” And that, says Neil, is the spirit of Tom: “He does what he can to prove people wrong.”

His initial diagnosis was wrong. Tests in the UK showed Tom was born with Koolen de Vries Syndrome, which causes developmental delay and learn-

ing difficulties. For Tom it means a severe language and communication impairment that affects his receptive and expressive language abilities and his ability to process information, and dyspraxia that affects his fine and gross motor control. He has trouble controlling his airways, which makes everyday tasks such as blowing his nose difficult. His movement looks clumsy and his mild to moderate learning difficulties affect how he rides his bike.

“He has to work really, really hard just to get things going in the right direction,” says Neil. “He has limited spatial awareness so is never left to ride on the road alone.” Tom is never “relaxed” on the bike, his dad points out. He has to focus hard to remain upright and balanced and get his feet positioned correctly. It has taken hours of practice just to pedal smoothly.

Then, at the age of nine, Tom was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. His pancreas shut down and stopped producing insulin. Tom’s processing issues also complicate his diabetes management. “He can’t tell us if he is cold or hot, if he feels unwell or why he is sometimes sad,” says Neil. But just weeks after the diabetes diagnosis Tom, his father and twin brother Archie climbed the final 5km of Mont Ventoux, the gradient rearing up to 10%, Tom on a 20-inch mountain bike, eating a handful of jelly babies every few minutes. Undaunted.

It would be easy to medicalise Tom’s story, turn it into a glibly inspirational one, or simply list the hundreds of miles he has ridden and the thousands of pounds he has raised for diabetes research. But above all this is a story about attitude and determination.

As a boy, Tom played for his local football team. It gave him a sense of inclusion and community, and he made some good friends. “Playing for the team was the be all and end all,” says his dad. But sport can be cruel when it stops being inclusive. After six years on the team, one of the coaches called to say there was no longer any room for Tom. “Football was ripped away,” says Neil. Tom and two other autistic players had been excluded “because they didn’t want to be known as a team of oddballs”. The Kelsalls took the matter to the local FA but the damage had been done.

“Our little boy changed,” says Neil. “His self-esteem and self-confidence were shot to bits.” Football left a massive gap in Tom’s life. His parents ex-

plored the idea of special teams but “Tom didn’t want to do that – he didn’t want to be reminded of his differences”. He has since joined a team where he is comfortable being himself.

Anyone who started riding during lockdown will know the positive impact cycling can have on your mental health. But it went deeper for Tom. He found a spiritual home at the local cycling hub, Maison du Velo, where they could not do enough to bring him into the local cycling community.

Back in 2016, Neil contacted Team Novo Nordisk – a pro cycling squad of type 1 riders who are sponsored by the world’s largest manufacturer of insulin. The team’s mission is to inspire, educate and empower people with diabetes, just like Tom Kelsall. Tom met Phil Southerland, the former professional cyclist who founded the team, and Southerland immediately saw himself in Tom: “What it was like to be 14 years old, have ambition and have almost everyone doubt you. Diabetes is challenging enough on its own, so to see him overcome both diabetes and his condition is proof that anything is possible. I saw a spark in his eyes that was inspiring. I challenged him to ride London’s Box Hill once, and he went and did it five times.”

“For Phil” Tom says simply.

Tom kept riding and kept improving, completing his first century ride aged 15. A strong bond developed between Tom, Phil and Sam Brand, a pro on Team Novo Nordisk. When the Manxman rode the Commonwealth Games in 2018, he had Tom’s name painted on his shoes.

Tom turned 16 in April amid the first lockdown. “It dawned on me that there might be an opportunity to give him a birthday to remember,” says Neil, who organised a virtual birthday ride, with Brand, Southerland, Francis Cade and Alex Dowsett all in attendance. For a young man at risk of losing connection and slipping through the cracks into isolation, seeing the faces of his cycling family as he hopped on to his indoor bike was confusing then massively exciting.

“It was a complete surprise. When I saw Phil on Zwift I couldn’t understand what he was doing there. Then I saw Francis, Chris, Sam and Phil on Zoom and I was really excited. It was the best birthday present ever,” Tom says. The group tackled a virtual route that let them climb and sprint as if they were

out on the road together, connected by CGI scenery and very real power outputs.

While Tom pedalled eyeballs out for the line, Southerland couldn’t help but be impressed. And that’s what landed Tom the ultimate prize – an invitation to Team Novo Nordisk’s talent ID camp. The team has run the camp for the last eight years as a recruitment tool for their squad. Tom joined 65 other young athletes from 25 different countries, all of whom have type 1 diabetes, at the virtual camp.

For a young man struggling to communicate through the isolation of lockdown, the camp was a lifeline and he grabbed it, training hard, getting fit and shattering personal best after personal best in the lead-up to the event. “He continued to raise his own bar day after day during camp,” Southerland says. “I saw Tom morph into a champion who finally truly believed in himself.” Neil’s heart almost burst with pride at his son’s virtual exploits.

Tom attended every presentation, diligently kept his blood glucose blog and smashed his way through every workout, posting power numbers that would make elite amateurs proud. Then came the infamous ramp test, in which riders push themselves to their aerobic limits as the watts ramp up until their lungs feel like bursting. With Sam Brand on a video call, urging him to “give me one more minute ... keep going to the top step”, Tom pushed on relentlessly to the very top step. “It blew me away just how much true grit this young man possesses,” Southerland says admiringly.

“It was a life-changing experience for Tom,” says his dad. “He finally found the inclusion from mainstream sport that had been taken away from him by junior football, and he proved to himself and the world that he is an equal.” For Southerland, Tom is the ethos of the team. “We are here to inspire kids to dream big and help them achieve those dreams,” he says.

Tom now has another goal: winning a gold medal at the Special Olympics. “I can’t wait to see how many people Tom can inspire along the way,” Southerland says. Tom is already training hard, going out on club runs with his local Special Olympics group in his Team Novo Nordisk kit. The pathway to the Berlin 2023 Special Olympics is open if Tom continues to ride with the power, spirit and joy that has brought him this far.

Pelé's revolutionary status must survive numbers game against Lionel Messi

BARNEY RONAY

LONDON, 02 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: It seems odd looking back now, but Pelé’s 50th birthday was marked with a star-studded Pelé exhibition match televised live around the world.

Before kick-off a giant Pelé cake was wheeled out at San Siro, on top of which Pelé himself appeared, waving and punching the air in priestly white Pelé-robos, while a massed Pelé-choir sang Happy Birthday Dear Pelé. The Pelé Supremacy filled the skies. And that moment the Pelé-shaped universe was a complete and coherent entity.

Have you noticed I’m saying Pelé a lot? There is a concept in psychology called semantic satiation, which describes hearing a word so many times it loses any meaning.

In the 1960s intense brown-suited social scientists would run experiments where people said the word “window” hundreds of times, recording how long it took before they started to doubt “window” was a word at all, or that windows actually existed.

On some basic level, this is what has happened to Pelé. How many times have you heard that combination of sounds? What does it conjure now? A gold shirt. A haircut. Sun-bleached Mexican grass. A way of running. A man in a white suit waving at people inside a baseball stadium.

Over time that Pelé persona has become fixed, an exhibit in the increasingly distant museum of 20th-century pop iconography – Ronald McDonald, Darth Vader, the Empire State Building, Pelé.

Pelé was even voted the most famous person in the world in 1970. In



a great twist he ended up hanging out with Andy Warhol, the laureate of fame-based inanity, who must have loved Pelé’s opaque, irony-free sense of his own status. The arch piss-taker, Warhol predicted Pelé would have “15 centuries” of fame (“I’m breaking my usual rule”).

True to form Pelé was duly in the news again this week, albeit in a way that inspires some protective feelings. In Christmas week Lionel Messi scored his 644th goal for Barcelona – a total that, it is claimed, surpasses Pelé’s previous record tally for Santos.

But wait! Five days later Santos hit back. Cancel the giant cake – in the opinion of Santos, Pelé’s total stands at 1,091, adjusted to include goals scored in one-off games during the tours of the 1960s.

It is of course unsurprising this has become an object of dispute. The Pelé industrial complex has a multimil-

lion-dollar turnover. Big Pelé will always protect its interests.

On the other hand, for those young enough to have no stake in this cobwebbed old JFK, football’s own Best of the Beatles, there is a natural urge to swish these grandees out of the way, to take your own stake in history. Being cheeked by Messi fans on the internet is probably a fitting end for all our heroes. Kings, pharaohs, Fifa icons. In the end we’re all just a meme.

There is something else here, though. The fear is that Pelé will be unduly downgraded, that a “culture war” dynamic must intrude, and something valuable gets lost in the process.

There was a tremor of this when Diego Maradona died in November. Because two things can’t both be good, because we loved Maradona for his rebel heart, there was some reflex snark at Pelé – an unconnected figure, but the most convenient point of comparison

in the zero-sum morality game; and an easy target for his corporate persona, his buddying up to Fifa.

Maradona played up to this in his lifetime, mocking Pelé as a boss’s man and accusing him of not glorifying football. For all his brilliance it is also important to remember Maradona talked a lot of shit. Pelé didn’t dope, cheat, shoot people or hang out with murderers. So there is always that when it comes to the glorifying side.

Mocking Pelé’s goal record, suggesting his success was some kind of boomer conspiracy is a funnier version of this. But there are a couple of things that deserve to survive the process.

First, for all the corporate schmaltz, the actual Pelé is a true wildflower, and a genuinely revolutionary figure. Comparisons are usually pointless, but they can also be interesting. Next to Pelé, Messi and his generation are hothouse blooms, processed through a world where every surface, every moment in time is managed and regulated.

Lionel Messi is a supernatural talent fully realised. He’s a true sporting genius. But the fact remains, there has never been a better time to be a genius at football. The conditions are perfect, the temperature just right. Messi was, in many ways, inevitable. Whereas Pelé did not have to exist. He was born as Brazilian sport was still struggling to overcome the colour bar. He played barefoot. He worked as a shoe-shiner and a vendor of stolen peanuts. With nothing but talent to guide him, the boy from Minas Gerais became the first black global sporting superstar, and a source of genuine uplift and inspiration.

Man United close in on Liverpool with 2-1 Villa win



MANCHESTER, 02 JAN (REUTERS): Manchester United closed in on the Premier League’s pole position after a 2-1 home win over Aston Villa on Friday put them level on points and games played with champions and leaders Liverpool.

United trail their traditional rivals on goal difference with both teams on 33 points from 16 matches. Liverpool travel to Southampton on Monday.

United stretched their unbeaten league run to 10 games as Bruno Fernandes capped another fine individual performance with a penalty after Bertrand Traore had cancelled out Anthony Martial’s opener for the home side.

The hosts had the up-

per hand in the first half and Martial forced an acrobatic save from Emiliano Martinez before he buried a superb diving header past the Villa goalkeeper after Aaron-Wan Bissaka’s cross in the 40th minute.

The visitors came close through Ollie Watkins before Traore got on the end of a sharp Jack Grealish pass at the far post and beat United keeper David De Gea with a slick shot from close range in the 58th.

But Villa’s joy was short-lived as Fernandes drilled his penalty into the bottom right corner three minutes later after Paul Pogba went down under a challenge from Douglas Luiz, with the spot-kick given after a VAR check.

France praises nationality bid by British leader's dad

CALAIS (FRANCE), JAN 02 (AP): France's government cast a favourable light on Friday on a reported bid by the father of Britain's prime minister to take up French nationality, saying it shows how attached Britons are to the European Union that they're no longer part of.

Reports that Stanley Johnson, the father of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, is seeking to keep a foot in Europe by taking up French citizenship made headlines just as his son lead Britain's split Thursday from the EU. Britain left the European bloc's vast single market for people, goods and services at 11 pm London time on New Year's Eve.

Visiting Calais on Friday to inspect how the French port is adjusting post-Brexit, France's minister for European Affairs, Clement Beaune, described the citizenship application as emblematic of enduring British



sentiment for Europe. If Mr Johnson's father has a right to French nationality, wants to remain a European citizen and become a French citizen, then we will examine that, he said.

To me, this is a wink, or a sign, that lots of British people, in different ways, still love Europe." There are many people in the United Kingdom for whom this is also a

sad day, Beaune added. The elder Johnson, 80, is a former member of the European Parliament who backed remaining in the EU in Britain's 2016 membership referendum. He has since expressed support for his son as the prime minister led the UK out of the bloc.

French nationality would give the elder Johnson the automatic rights

that other Britons have now lost, including being able to travel and live freely in all of the 27 EU countries.

Stanley Johnson told broadcaster RTL on Thursday that he was in the process of reclaiming his French identity.

It is not a question of becoming French. If I understand correctly, I am French. My mother was born in France. Her

mother was completely French, as was her grandfather, he told RTL. So for me it is a question of reclaiming what I already have. I will always be European. That is certain, Stanley Johnson said.

You cannot tell the English: 'You are not European.' Europe is always more than the common market, more than the European Union.

Murakami urges politicians to speak sincerely about virus

Tokyo, Jan 02 (AP): Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami says politicians need to help reduce public uncertainty and fear over the coronavirus and gain people's support by speaking sincerely about the pandemic.

Murakami, in a two-hour live New Year's Eve radio show, urged political leaders to talk honestly from the gut to the people to encourage their participation in slowing an upsurge in infections, which are on the verge of getting out of control.

His comments came hours after Japan's capital announced its new daily cases soared to a record 1,337 on Thursday, up sharply from the previous high of 949 on December 26.

I think an essential problem with the coronavirus is our uncertain future, which is triggering a sense of fear, anger and escapism among people, which I think is the biggest danger," Murakami said in a conversation with one of two guests, Nobel physiology prize winner Shinya Yamanaka of Kyoto University.

It would be difficult for the people to squarely cooperate with the (anti-virus) measures when politicians are not communicating with messages" in words that can reach people's hearts, Murakami said, without identifying any politician by name.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and his predecessor, Shinzo Abe, have been criticized for reading carefully scripted statements prepared by bureaucrats at news conferences, often repeating the same phrases in response to questions asked by reporters.

Japan so far has avoided an explosive growth in infections, but its recent upsurge has many people worried.

Suga took few pandemic measures until mid-December, when he suspended a state-funded discount travel promotion campaign. He has also been criticized for joining a steak dinner for eight people when the government advised against parties of more than five.

Known for bestsellers such as A Wild Sheep Chase, The Wind-up Bird Chronicle and 1Q84, Murakami said during the show that issues raised by the coronavirus seem to be part of developments such as globalism, climate change, rise of populism and widening social disparity.

Murakami has hosted Murakami Radio shows almost every two months since August 2018 on Tokyo FM. Thursday's program was his first live show. In May, he hosted a pre-recorded show from his home to cheer up people who were under stress during a state of emergency in place in parts of Japan, including Tokyo.

Murakami began writing while running a jazz bar in Tokyo after graduating from university.

Following his 1979 debut novel Hear the Wind Sing, the 1987 romance Norwegian Wood became his first best-seller, establishing him as a young literary star.

He has written stories inspired by events that have shaken society, including the 1995 Tokyo subway gassing attack by an apocalyptic cult and a deadly earthquake in Kobe, where he grew up.

No snake soup for Hong Kong's young snake catcher

HONG KONG (AP): Hong Kong is home to a variety of snakes — from the venomous king cobra to larger species such as the Burmese python. Whenever one of these reptiles is spotted slithering into a home or coming alarmingly close to a residential area, Ken Lee is among the snake catchers called to capture the creatures.

But unlike commercial snake catchers of yesteryear, whose catch is often served up as soup in the city's snake shops, Lee doesn't sell the snakes he captures. He is part of a new breed of snake catchers who strive to release the reptiles back into nature.

"There are occasions where people have caught the snakes before I arrived on the scene, but unfortunately some of them were killed or fatally injured," said 31-year-old Lee, who is one of Hong Kong's youngest registered snake catchers. "Some people caught the snakes bravely, but actually it caused harm to wildlife."

Like many other snake catchers in the city, Lee is self-taught. He first started handling snakes at the age of 17, when he worked as an apprentice in a Hong Kong snake shop. His experience spurred him to learn more about biodiversity and biology, and he eventually went on to study that at a university in Taiwan.

When Lee catches snakes, he uses a range of equipment — puncture-proof gloves, sticks, hooks, a torch and bags. At times, he even uses his bare hands.

In early December, he made head-

lines when he successfully captured a 3-meter-long (10-foot-long) Burmese python in a village located in a rural part of Hong Kong. The same month, Lee was also called to a high-rise residential building in a rural area to capture a bamboo pit viper — a common, venomous green snake whose bite can cause a nasty swell.

The snakes he catches are sent to the Kadoorie Farm and Botanical Garden, a local nonprofit organization that shelters rescued wild animals. After a health check, most of the creatures are then released back into the local parks.

"I hope all these wild animals could be returned to nature," Lee said.

Currently, he works as a research assistant at four universities in the city and volunteers at the Hong Kong Society of Herpetology Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the study of reptiles and amphibians.

Even though Hong Kong has ample green areas that serve as different habitats for snakes, Liz Rose-Jeffreys, Kadoorie Farm's conservation officer, thinks the city's urban development may threaten the survival of snake species.

"I think this is one of mutual respect, really. They are our wild neighbors, they've been here a lot longer than us, and I think we have a duty to respect nature," she said. "They form an important part of our ecosystem, so if we have to remove snakes, then it would upset the balance that has been established for many years."

Vandals damage federal buildings in Philadelphia; 7 arrested

PHILADELPHIA, JAN 02 (AP): A group of people dressed in black vandalized at least two federal buildings in downtown Philadelphia on New Year's Eve, and police said they recovered Molotov cocktails and other suspicious devices as they arrested seven of them, authorities said on Friday.

Officers spotted about 50 people, all in black, around 8:30 p.m. Thursday at the historic US Customs House, police said.

And a 25-year-old man was seen throwing a brick through the windows of a federal building and courthouse shortly before 9 p.m., police said. He fled with a 24-year-old man and two 23-year-old women, all



of whom were arrested.

Damage to the building was estimated at about USD 3,000. Anti-police and anti-prison graffiti were scrawled on walls, a sheriff's van was defaced and several windows were broken.

Three other people were also arrested in the area, a 25-year-old man and two women ages 22 and 26. Police said the man was carrying a glass jar with a fuse that had "a

strong flammable odor," as well as a plastic container with white powder labeled "Fire Starter." The younger woman had bottles with liquids that had "a chemical smell," they said.

Chief Inspector Mike Cram earlier told reporters that officers recovered what he called "numerous Molotov cocktails and some other devices which haven't been identified."

In graying Italy, the old defy biases laid bare by pandemic

ROME (AP): From his newsstand at the bottom of two hilly streets in Rome, Armando Alviti has been dispensing newspapers, magazines and good cheer to locals from before dawn till after dusk nearly every day for more than a half-century.

"Ciao, Armando," his customers greet him as part of their daily routine. "Ciao, amore (love)" he calls back. Alviti chuckled as he recalled how, when he was a young boy, newspaper deliverers would drop off the day's stacks at his parents' newsstand, sit him in the emptied baskets of their motorbikes and take him for a spin.

Since he turned 18, Alviti has operated the newsstand seven days a week, with a wool tweed cap to protect him from the Italian capital's winter dampness and a tabletop fan to cool him during its torrid summers. A mighty battle therefore ensued when the coronavirus reached Italy and his two grown sons insisted that Alviti, who is 71 and diabetic, stay home while they took turns juggling their own jobs to keep the newsstand open.

"They were afraid I would die. I know they love me crazy," Alviti said.

Throughout the pandemic, health authorities around the world have stressed the need to protect the people most at risk of complications from COVID-19, a group which infection and mortality data quickly revealed included older adults. With 23% of its population age 65 or older, Italy has the world's second-oldest population, after Japan, with 28%.

The average age of Italy's COVID-19 dead has hovered around 80, many of them people with previous medical conditions like diabetes or heart disease. Some politicians advocated limiting how much time elders spent outside of their homes to avoid lockdowns of the general population that were costly to the economy.

Among them was the governor of Italy's northwestern coastal region of Liguria, where 28.5 percent of the population is age 65 or older. Gov. Giovanni Toti, who is 52, argued for such an age-specific strategy when a second surge of infections struck Italy in the fall.

Older people are "for the most part in retirement, not indispensable to the productive effort" of Italy's economy, Toti said.

To the news vendor in Rome, those were fighting words. Alviti said Toti's remarks "disgusted me. They made me very angry."

"Older persons are the life of this country. They're the memory of this country," he said. Self-employed older adults like him especially "can't be kept under a bell jar," he said.

The pandemic's heavy toll on older people, particularly those in nursing homes, might have served to reinforce ageism, or prejudice against the segment of population generally referred to as "elderly."

The label "old" means "40, 50 years of life being lumped in one category," said Nancy Morrow-Howell, a professor of social work at Washington University in St. Louis who specializes in gerontology. She noted that these days, people

in their 60s often are caring for parents in their 90s.

"Ageism is so accepted ... it's not questioned," Morrow-Howell said in a telephone interview. One form it takes is "compassionate ageism," Morrow-Howell said, the idea that "we need to protect older adults. We need to treat them as children."

Alviti's family won the first round, keeping him away from work until May. His sons implored him to stay home again when the coronavirus rebounded in the fall.

He struck a compromise. One of his sons opens the newsstand at 6 a.m. and Alviti takes over two hours later, limiting his exposure to the public during the morning rush.

Fausto Alviti said he's afraid for his father, "but I also realize for him to stay home, it would have been worse, psychologically. He needs to be with people."

In the open-air food market in the Trullo neighborhood of Rome, produce vendor Domenico Zoccoli, 80, also scoffs at the belief that people past retirement age "don't produce (and) must be protected."

Before dawn broke on a recent rainy day, Zoccoli had transformed his stall into a cheerful array of colors: boxes of red and green cabbages, radicchio, purple carrots, leafy beet tops, and cauliflower in shades of white, violet and orange, all harvested from his farm some 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) away.

"Old people must do what they feel. If they can't walk, then they don't walk. If I feel like running, I run," Zoccoli said. After packing up his stall at 1:30 p.m., he said he would work several hours more in his field, skipping lunch.

Marco Trabucchi, a psychiatrist based in the northern Italian city of Brescia who specializes in the behavior of older adults, thinks the pandemic has gotten people to reconsider their attitudes for the better.

"Little attention was given to the individuality of the old. They were like an indistinct category, all equal, with all the same problems, all suffering," Trabucchi said.

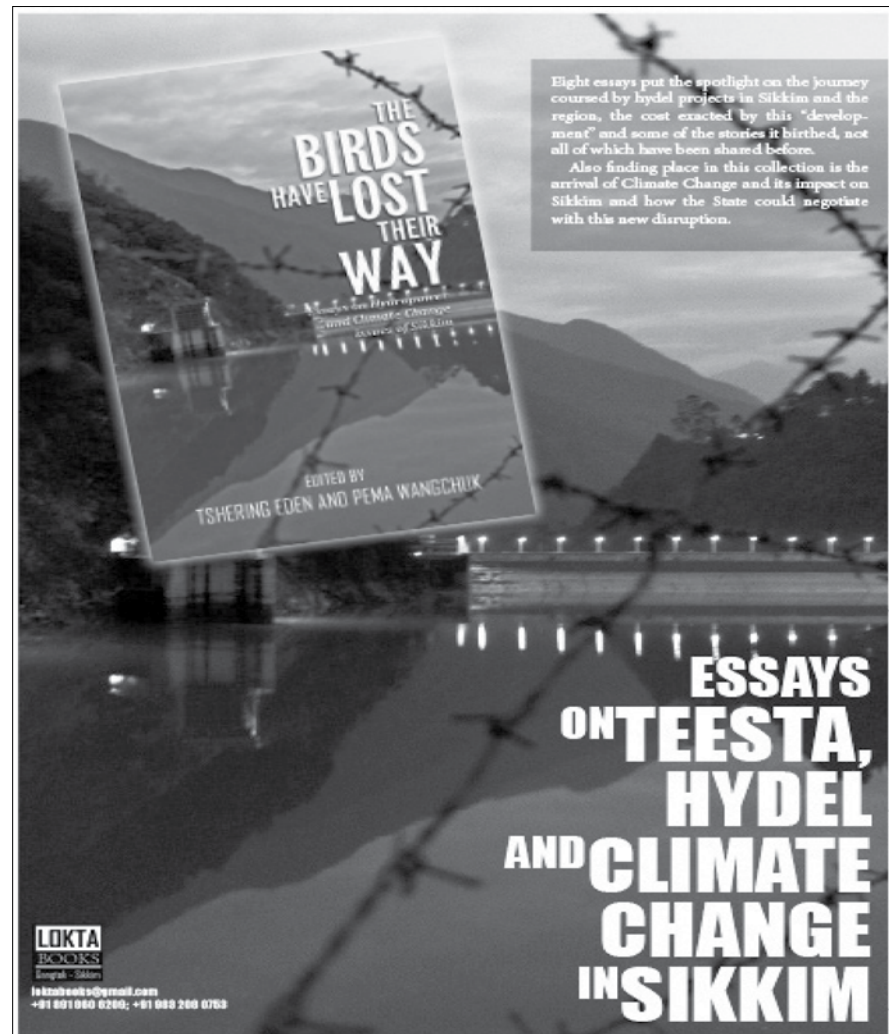
In Italy, with childcare centers chronically scarce, legions of older adults, some decades beyond retirement, effectively double as essential workers by caring for their grandchildren.

According to Eurostat, the European Union's statistics bureau, 35% of Italians older than 65 look after grandchildren several times a week.

Felice Santini, 79, and his wife, Rita Cintio, 76, are such a couple. They take care of the two youngest of their four grandchildren multiple times per week.

"If we didn't care for them, their parents couldn't work," said Santini. "We're helping them (a son and daughter-in-law) stay in the productive work force."

Santini still works himself, a half-day as a mechanic at an auto repair shop. Then, when he comes home, his hands keep busy in the kitchen: stuffing homemade cannelloni with sausage, making meat sauce and baking orange-flavored Bundt cakes for his grandkids.





WINTER SUN! The Brazilian model and former Victoria's Secret Angel, Izabel Goulart catches some rays on the beach in St Barts.

Patty Jenkins opens up about leaving 'Thor 2'

LOS ANGELES, JAN 02 (PTI): "Wonder Woman" director Patty Jenkins has finally opened up about her decision to quit directing "Thor 2" even though she wanted to do a superhero movie.

Jenkins was replaced on "Thor 2", a critical dud, by Alan Taylor. The movie released as "Thor: The Dark World" in 2013.

The 49-year-old director, whose "Wonder Woman 1984" has scored the biggest opening weekend for any film since theatres opened, spoke to Marc Maron on his podcast WTF about why she decided to leave the Marvel Studios' project.

Word got out that I wanted to do a superhero film and to Marvel's credit on a movie that didn't require a woman at all they hired me. So, I've always been super grateful to them even though it didn't work out. They wanted to do a story that I thought was not going to succeed, and I knew it couldn't be me. "It couldn't be me had that happen. If they hired any guy to do it, it wouldn't be a big deal, but I knew in my heart that I could not make a good movie out of the story they wanted to do, Jenkins said.

Directing the movie would have made Jenkins the first female filmmaker to helm a big-budget superhero movie but she realised that if the film did not

do well, it would ruin her prospects of directing other tentpole films, something that probably would not happen if she were a man.

She wanted to direct "Wonder Woman" immediately after the success of

After her initial meeting with Warner Bros, Jenkins met with the makers every two years thereafter but the studio "didn't know what to do with Wonder Woman" and "were freaked out by previous female superhero films that



"Monster" in 2003.

I wanted in. I wanted to do a big superhero film after Monster. And I started saying that right away after Monster. People were confused I got every woman's film, any story about women. And I was like, I want to make movies about women but I don't want to make movies about being a woman, that's so boring. I want to make movies about women doing all kinds of things.

failed, she said. That's when she got the opportunity with Marvel Studios.

With "Wonder Woman" in 2017 scripting history at the box office and its sequel "Wonder Woman 1984" doing well, both critically and commercially, Jenkins no longer needs to look back.

She is all set to direct "Star Wars: Rogue Squadron" in 2023 for Lucasfilm and is also returning for "Wonder Woman 3".

Ranbir Kapoor to star in 'Kabir Singh' director's next

MUMBAI, JAN 02 (PTI): Actor Ranbir Kapoor has signed director Sandeep Reddy Vanga's next film titled "Animal", the producers have announced.

The makers - Bhushan Kumar's T-Series, Murad Khetani and Vanga at midnight unveiled audio teaser of the film, giving a sneak peak into the world of "Animal".

The over one-minute long video, shared by T-Series on Twitter, begins with an eerie whistle and Ranbir is heard talking to his father about being reborn and love. The clip ends with sound of gunshots. The movie also features veteran actor Anil Kapoor, Bobby Deol and Parineeti Chopra.

Anil Kapoor too shared the announcement teaser on the microblogging site and said he is looking forward to start the work on the film.

"Oh boy! The new year just gets better with this whistle! Presenting, #Animal, can't wait for our journey to begin," he wrote.

Vanga, best known for helming Shahid Ka-

poor-starrer 2019 "Kabir Singh" and 2017's original "Arjun Reddy", tweeted, "Experience the emotion."

Sharing her excitement, Chopra said, "It keeps getting bigger and better! 2021 you already have my heart."



The dialogues of the film are being penned by writer duo Siddharth and Garima, who had also written dialogues for "Kabir Singh".

Produced by T-Series, Pranay Reddy Vanga's Bhadrakali Pictures and Murad Khetani's Cine1Studios.

Rapper MF Doom dies at 49

LOS ANGELES, JAN 02 (PTI): British rapper MF Doom has passed away at the age of 49, the musician's family said in a statement.

The masked rapper, whose real name was Daniel Dumile, died on October 31.

The statement, signed by Dumile's wife Jasmine, was issued by his record label, Rhymesayers. It did not reveal the cause of the rapper's death.

MF Doom enjoyed a huge underground fan base courtesy his offbeat wordplay and

comic-book persona.

In his over two decades long career, the rapper released six solo albums between 1999 and 2009 and five collaborative LPs between 2004 and 2018.

Hip hop artistes ScHoolboy Q and Q-Tip expressed their shock over Doom's demise.

"Damn. NOT DOOM HOMIE," ScHoolboy Q posted on Twitter.

"RIP to another Giant your favorite MC's MC.. MF DOOM!! crushing news," QTip wrote.

Alia Bhatt's 'Gangubai Kathiawadi' to release in 2021

MUMBAI, JAN 02 (PTI): Alia Bhatt-starrer "Gangubai Kathiawadi", directed by celebrated filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali, will arrive in cinema halls this year, the makers announced on Friday.

The film has been adapted from one of the chapters of noted author Hussain Zaidi's book, "Mafia Queens of Mumbai".

The drama features Bhatt as Gangubai, one of the most powerful, loved and respected madams from Kamathipura during the 1960s.

In an eight second video shared on Instagram, the filmmaker's banner -- Bhansali Productions -- announced that the movie will come out

sometime this year. "Brave, bold and ready to take over 2021 with fire in her eyes and fierceness as her style #GangubaiKathiawadi awaits to reign over the coming year," the production house captioned the video.

According to a source close to film's production, the movie's shoot was resumed at Film City in suburban Mumbai from October last year and it's near completion.

"Gangubai Kathiawadi" was earlier scheduled to arrive in theatres on September 11 in 2020 but was delayed to the coronavirus pandemic.

Bhansali is co-producing the film with producer Jayantilal Gada's Pen India Limited.

Kajol's digital debut 'Tribhanga' to premiere on Netflix on January 15

MUMBAI, JAN 02 (PTI): Actor Kajol's maiden digital project "Tribhanga" is set to release on streaming platform Netflix on January 15.

The multi-generational story, directed by actor Renuka Shahane is backed by Kajol's husband, actor-producer Ajay Devgn, in collaboration with Bannijay Asia and Siddharth P Malhotra's Alchemy Films.

"Tribhanga, matlab, tedhi, medhi, crazy, but sexy. #Tribhanga, premieres 15 January, only on Netflix," Kajol wrote on Twitter.

The film, which derives its title from an Odissi dance pose, is described as a heartwarming storyline that looks at the importance of family

in everyday lives.

"Tribhanga" is a story of three women from the same household who belong to different generations.

Set in Mumbai, it weaves a complex



tale that goes back and forth through three generations of the same family, from the late 1980s to the present day.

The film also stars Mithila Palkar, Tanvi Azmi and Kunaal Roy Kapoor.

Medical humour drama 'Starting Troubles' to premiere on January 15 on BuddyBits

MUMBAI, JAN 02 (PTI): "Starting Troubles", a medical humour drama based on Dr. Jagdish Chaturvedi's autobiography Inventing Medical Devices, is set to premiere on digital media platform BuddyBits on January 15. The six-episode series features Chaturvedi as himself in the lead role along with veteran actors Renuka Shahane, Parikshit Sahni, Kurush Deboo, Rajesh PI, Anushka Nair, Jui Pawar and Bharat Chawla.

Watching one's own story manifest on screen is a dream come true for every story-teller. This show is very close to my heart; I have lived through all those terrible yet funny events.

"I can confidently say that this show is going to be a delight for the audiences and will keep them hooked to their seats throughout the course of the show," Chaturvedi said in a statement.

"Starting Troubles" is produced by Dr. Gunda Srinivas, Parameshwarans, Peeru Kaushik under the banner of HiiiH Innovations Pvt Ltd.

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Aries: In his bestseller Eleven Minutes, Paulo Coelho wrote, "You can either be a victim of the world or an adventurer in search of treasure. It all depends on how you view your life." Today, you're being asked to reflect upon both, his golden words and the tale you tell yourself. What are you giving power to, Aries? The failures or the victories? Spirit wants you to choose both your words and your thoughts wisely, as you consciously reaffirm the good in your reality. Tip: Choose both your thoughts and words wisely. Taurus:

How do you feel about the selfless acts of giving, loving, and supporting? Do you share what's yours with a smile on your face, or by maintaining a mental excel sheet? Today, the cards are urging you let go of the calculativeness and embrace the spirit of giving. Remember, it's not about the person you are holding space for. It is the Great Spirit that you are serving through them. Tip: Give with all your heart. Gemini:

Discovering your hidden potential is going to be a big theme for you this year, with your higher self helping you realise all the ways in which you are infinite. Let go of the old stories, Gemini. Break up with the lies you have been telling yourself. If the cosmic cues are anything to go by, you will find that you are able to manifest golden opportunities that

will take you places. What's more, you'll find that the help and resources you need in every moment are available to you. So, open your arms and allow yourself to receive. Your life is about to change in ways you cannot even imagine right now. Tip: This is a lucky time. Cancer:

The trouble is, we allow the opinions of other people to determine how we feel about ourselves. But, there is nothing to heal and nothing to fix. You are whole and integrated, perfect as you are. It's time to allow the light within you to shine brighter and brighter, knowing that your unshakeable faith in yourself will help you move mountains. Tip: Nothing to heal. Nothing to fix. You are perfect as you are. Leo:

Leo, you may find yourself playing the role of the jester as things get topsy-turvy around you. But, what your journey to enlightenment has taught you is that there's nothing more spiritual than the ability to laugh, make people laugh, and turn the metaphorical lemons into limoncello. Some of you may find yourselves struggling to make an important decision. The key is to find a balance between your head and your heart. The sooner you let go of your judgement, the easier it will be for you to see things from a higher perspective. Tip: There's nothing more spiritual than the ability to

laugh and make others laugh. Virgo:

Virgo, take a moment to reflect upon the joy of receiving. That mysterious smile on your face tells us that there are very few things in life that match up to the happiness that being cared for brings. Now, wouldn't you want those you love to experience the same exhilaration that you have as a result of their presence in your life? Author Gary Chapman explains the five love languages that can make those around us feel special, and they include words of affirmation, giving presents, acts of service, quality time, and physical touch. PS: Choose one that resonates with you or work with a combination of them all! Tip: It's time to make those around you feel celebrated. Libra:

Maybe it wasn't love, Libra. Maybe you were just craving carbs. The beginning of the year finds you smiling your brightest smile, with the inner knowing that you are in paradise. It doesn't matter what went wrong in the past and how things turned out. What matters is the present moment, which you are determined to make the most of. Some of you may be drawn to meditation and mindfulness at this point. It's a good idea to start the year by cultivating a habit that will support your lifestyle. Tip: You're embracing what the present is offering

you. Scorpio:

Here's an existential question to begin the year with: Are you living, existing or merely surviving? If you're on the survival end of the spectrum, let 2021 inspire you to take all kinds of chances, let go of the limitations created by your small, three-dimensional self, and embrace your life in all of its glory despite the risk it entails. You know what they say! In the end, we only regret the chances we didn't take. Tip: It's time to take life by the horns. Sagittarius:

It's easy to feel like everything is falling apart, and that your life will never be the same. That Spirit is going out of its way to sabotage the game for you. But the truth is, you are where you need to be and you are protected even if you cannot see it. So, be here now. Adopt 'surrender' as your magic word this year. You will soon understand the higher reason behind the circumstances you have attracted. Tip: Spirit is working with, not against you. Capricorn:

It doesn't matter who said what. It doesn't matter what transpired in the past. The only thing that matters is the love that first brought you together, and that love is strong. So, focus on the good in your life. Focus on the strength of this bond. In doing so, you will be giving the positive aspects of your life the power to increase manifold. Some of you may

have to step into the role of the mediator as well. Remember, it's all good in the hood as long as the white flag helps things move forward. Tip: Let's focus on the love! Aquarius:

Aquarius, you are a master manifestor and you're just beginning to realise the magic that is coursing through your veins. Take a moment to revisit your intentions. If there's something sacred you missed out on, find a way to work it in. Then, sketch a visual representation of the life you're working towards (brownie points for adding colours!). Remember, you are the creative director of this film. So, align your actions with your intentions and get ready to watch the miracles unfold. Tip: It's time to creatively visualise the life you desire. Pisces:

This is a troubled time in the Pisces HQ. You may feel like the people around you are not supporting you in the way you desire and that your depressive tendencies are resurfacing right now. Here's the thing: most people are too caught up in their own heads to notice what's happening in their environment. Until you don't express your needs to them, they will be unaware of how they need to hold space for you. Word for the wise: Speak up. This silence is not serving you, or others, well. Tip: Express your needs.