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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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DAY TWO OF CM'S WEST SIKKIM TOUR

CM inaugurates X-Ray machine at Tashiding PHC

GYALSHING, 02 MAR (IPR): The second day tour of Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) under Yuksom-Tashiding Constituency began from Pokharidara towards Tashiding, today.

On the way to Tashiding, the CM offered his prayers at Yangtam Temple. Subsequently, he had a brief interaction with the people of Labdhang, Kongri, Gangyap PHSC medical staff, Eklavya Model Residential School Gangyap, Government Junior High School, Middle Chongrang and rendered support to the management.

At Tashiding, Chief Minister inaugurated the X-Ray Machine unit at Primary Health Centre and assured to provide every possible support from the government. Thereafter, he also inaugurated, Girls Hostel of Tashiding Senior Second-



ary School in presence of Deputy Speaker-Cum-Area MLA, Sangay Lepcha.

The Chief Minister also distributed wheel chairs, Air Mattresses, blankets, induction, pans, cookers, torchlights and

sweets as a symbol of love to the people of Tashiding and surrounding.

The medical camp was also set up under the Garib Jan Kalyan Prakosta providing free medical treatments, medicines,

health insurance along-with Medical Specialist, orthopedist, Dentist and ENT specialist for public convenience in terms of healthcare.

Afterwards, he started interacting with

the people at large of Tashiding-Gangyap GPU, Arithang- Chongrang GPU and Gerethang- Labing GPU at Yatri Niwas to gather direct information about their grievances and issues.

Over 18,000 have received first dose of vaccines in Sikkim



LARGE CROWD OF ELDERLY TURNING UP FOR VACCINATION GOOD SIGN: HEALTH DEPT

SAGAR CHETTRI GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Along with healthcare and frontline workers of Sikkim, the next phase of vaccination for COVID-19 for people in the age group of 45 to 59 years with comorbidities and people of 60 years and above has been launched in the State on Monday.

Principal Secretary to Health & Family Welfare Department, K Sreenivasulu stated that the large crowd of elderly and senior citizens who turned out to get vaccinated shows that hesitancy towards vaccination has ended.

He appealed to the people not to miss their vaccination and added that the Chief Minister PS Tamang has said that vaccination is free of cost for the people in Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, the Principal Secretary

said that it is good news for Sikkim that the daily report of COVID cases has gone down to single digits now while on the other hand, people are getting the shield of vaccination. He congratulated everyone working on bringing down the daily load of new cases to single digit.

Mentioning that Sikkim has received the Covishield vaccines, Mr Sreenivasulu informed that vaccination for COVID-19 was launched on 16 January in Sikkim and the first phase of vaccination covered healthcare workers and then frontline workers as they were directly exposed to the threat. He added that many healthcare workers have already received their second dose, he said.

Mr Sreenivasulu mentioned that now the second phase of vaccination to cover people in the age group of 45 to 59 years with comorbidities and people of 60 years and above has also started in the State. He urged the people not to miss the vaccination to stay safe from COVID.

"The State government has been working hard to cover every citizen of Sikkim with vaccination for COVID-19," he said.

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Sikkim to issue travel embargo on 5 states

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Principal Secretary to Health & Family Welfare Department, K Sreenivasulu today said that the state government will be issuing a travel embargo on people coming from five states.

While addressing a press conference today, he said that in view of the various mutant variants of the COVID-19 virus and its spread in many states of India, the State will issue travel embargo

on people coming from Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Hyderabad.

He informed that the Chief Minister, PS Tamang has approved the proposal and the official notice will be issued soon.

Following the embargo, people coming from these states would need to possess RT-PCR negative certificate issued within 72 hours. On the same, he urged people to cooperate in order to keep the State safe.

STNM Hospital equipped to test viral load for Hepatitis B and C

GANGTOK, 02 MAR (IPR):

Testing for viral load for Hepatitis B and C is now available at STNM Hospital as part of infrastructure developed under the National Viral Hepatitis Control Programme being implemented under National Health Mission by Government of India to reduce morbidity and mortality due to Hepatitis.

In Sikkim, National Viral Hepatitis Control Programme was launched on 21 Aug, 2019.

Under this programme, there is provision of free treatment and diagnosis of Hepatitis. Previously, blood samples were being sent to North Bengal Medical College for viral load testing, since this facility was not available in the State.

This test is prerequisite for the start of treatment.

Now, STNM Hospital is ready on all fronts to start the viral load testing for Hepatitis B and C free of cost.



GANGTOK, 02 MAR (IPR): On the second day of filing for nominations, a total of eight Independent candidates have filed their nominations for Municipal Election 2021 at the Office of the Municipal Returning Officer, East today.

Lakpa Sherpa and Kunga Bhutia have filed their nominations for

Lower MG Marg-Lal Bazar, ward of Gangtok Municipal Corporation. Sonam Pintso Bhutia and Tsewang Rinzing Bhutia have filed their nominations for Tadong ward of Gangtok Municipal Corporation.

Norbu Tamang has filed his nomination for Panihouse ward of Gangtok Municipal

Corporation. Prahlad Agrawal has filed his nomination for Upper MG Marg of Gangtok Municipal Corporation. Rajani Singh Cintury has filed her nomination for Pipal Dara ward under Singtam Nagar Panchayat and Sunita Sharma for Mining ward under Rangpo Nagar Panchayat.

SKM sports wing to sponsor Sohenne's training and education



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's sports wing today announced to support the education and training of gifted young runner, Sohenne Limboo, of Yuksom, West District.

SKM's sports wing was convinced to support Sohenne after seeing her talent and potential and has decided to enroll her at Bright Athletic Club,

Thami Dara, Reshithang in East District and have also taken over the responsibility of her academics as well.

The 9-year-old old runner is the daughter of Sanchaman Limboo and Sangita Rai of Yuksom and studying in the fifth standard.

She was spotted by the SKM sports wing during the 1st West District Inter-Constituency

U-17 Athletic Meet 2021 held from 10 to 14 February at Sreebadam, West District, where Sohenne finished 3rd in the 3,000 meter race despite being the youngest among the 20 in U-17 runners.

Addressing a press conference here today, SKM sports wing state president, Rinzing Wangyal Chopel shared that Sohenne Limboo caught

turn to pg02

Summit Times in Nepali

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Thank You!



Mobile BAC for Rakdong-Tintek

WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 02 MAR:

A four-day mobile BAC drive was conducted by Rakdong Tintek BAC in all the four Gram Panchayat Units under it.

The drive began on 24 Feb from Samdong Kam-bal GPU and concluded on 01 March at Tumin.

The farthest GPU of Patuk Singbel is around 27 KM from the BAC and the nearest GPU of Rakdong Tintek is around 8 kms.

Waste management awareness at Lower Mamring

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Solid liquid waste management awareness programme was organised at Lower Mamring under Turung Mamring GPU in Rateypani Namthang Constituency today, a press release informs. Panchayat Member of the Ward, Punam Pradhan informed that the meeting discussed maintenance of hygiene in the village.

India reports 12,286 new COVID-19 cases, 91 deaths in last 24 hours

NEW DELHI, 02 MAR [PTI]:

India's COVID-19 cases rose to 1,11,24,527 with 12,286 new infections being reported in a day, while the recoveries have surged to 1,07,98,921, according to data updated by the Union Health Ministry on Tuesday.

The death toll increased to 1,57,248 with 91 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,07,98,921 which translates into a national COVID-19 recovery rate of 97.07 per cent, while the case fatality rate has dropped 1.41 per cent.

The active caseload was recorded at 1,68,358 which accounts for 1.51 per cent of the total infections, the data stated.

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

It went past 60 lakh on September 28; 70 lakh on October 11; 80 lakh on October 29; 90 lakh on November 20; and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 21,76,18,057 samples have been tested up to March 1, of which 7,59,283 were done on Monday.

The 91 new fatalities include 30 from Maharashtra, 18 from Punjab and 13 from Kerala.

A total of 1,57,248 deaths have been reported so far in the country, including 52,184 from Maharashtra, followed by 12,501 from Tamil Nadu, 12,336 from Karnataka, 10,911 from Delhi, 10,268 from West Bengal, 8,727 from Uttar Pradesh and 7,169 from Andhra Pradesh. The Health Ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

Lingtam school holds first meeting with stakeholders

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Lingtam Government Secondary School convened its first meeting with SMC, guardians and Panchayat, Prem-lakha Subhaney GPU today for the academic session 2021, a press release informs.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship of SMC Chairperson, Passang Nuri Sherpa who was accompanied by the concerned ward panchayat cum SMC member, Pempa Sherpa and other members.

The main objective of the meeting was to apprise the concerned stakeholders of the school about the issues and challenges that need immediate attention as



well as to procure necessary suggestions for the formulation of the School Development Plan.

The program was hosted by senior teacher, RL Pradhan and began with the welcome

address by school in-charge, IB Pradhan.

All the speakers representing the SMC, Panchayat and guardians expressed their concern over the decline in enrolment of students and

suggestions for its improvement.

The meeting concluded with the distribution of prizes to two top performing students of each class from LKG to X on the pursuit of their aca-

demic excellence in the past session.

All the three stakeholders of the institution have promised to extend every possible support for the development of the school.

No nominations filed in North and South

NAMCHI, 02 MAR (IPR):

On the second day of filing nominations no nominations were received today for the Municipal Elections, 2021 as informed by for the Municipal Returning Officer (South), M Bharani Kumar.

In South District two Urban Local Bodies shall be going for Municipal Election i.e. Namchi Municipal Council (NMC) and Naya-Bazaar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat (NJNP).

Under Namchi Municipal Council there are a total of 07 wards. The reservations of seats in the said Municipal Areas are as follows Gangyap Unreserved (Women), Dambudara OBC (State List), Upper Ghurpisey (Scheduled Tribe), Lower Ghurpisey (Scheduled Caste, Women), Upper Boomtar (Scheduled Tribe Women), Upper Singhithang OBC (Central List) and Purano Namchi OBC (Central List).

Similarly, under Naya-Bazaar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat there are 05 wards. The reservations of seats in the

said Municipal Areas are as follows Shantinagar Unreserved, Trikaleshwar OBC (Central List, Women), Daragaon OBC (State List), Majhigaon (Scheduled Tribe) and Nayabazar (Scheduled Caste, Women).

In NMC there are 9 polling stations and total number of 6787 voters out of which 3437 and 3350 voters are females and males, respectively. Likewise, in NJNP there are 6 polling stations and a total number of 5630 voters out of which 2689 and 2941 are females and males respectively.

Moreover, the State Election Commission has appointed the Secretary (Sikkim, Housing and Development Board) Sri. C.K. Chettri has been appointed as Election Observer for all the wards of NMC and NJNP.

As per the information received from the Municipal Returning Officer, no nominations were filed by any candidate from the five wards of 7 Mangan Nagar Panchayat on the second day of filing of nominations.

RMRT team tours South and West District



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Three-day tour of the Central Executive Committee - Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum (RMRT) - Sikkim Lepcha Association to South and West Districts came to an end on 28 Feb, a press release informs.

A team comprising of 12 members of RMRT-CEC was on an extensive tour of West and South Sikkim from 26 to 28 Feb, the release mentions.

During the tour, a co-ordination cum interaction meeting with members of district branches of both South and West was conducted at Namchi and Gyalshing simultaneously.

While in the meeting, the district branch of both the West and South districts placed their

grievances for the benefit of the marginal section of community residing in rural areas.

After the formation of the new CEC in March 2020, this is the first extensive tour of RMRT-CEC. Certificate of recognition was also provided to all the executive members of South and West district branches.

The team also visited some of the upcoming governmental projects such as Government Girl's Primitive Hostel at Namchi and Gyalshing, Stairway to heaven at Daramdin and interacted with concerned engineers and contractors for timely completion of the projects.

The tour was headed by president RMRT cum chairperson, Chewang Norbu Lepcha, Primitive Tribe Welfare Board.

Interschool Jr Olympics at Ravangla



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Block-level interschool Junior Olympic Games under Ravangla BAC concluded on 27 February. The four-day long event, which was started at VCGL playground on 24 February, was conducted under the banner of 'Sports for

Peace & Development' Khelo India.

A press release from Assistant Director, Sports & Youth Affairs, Ravangla BAC, Norbu Tshering Bhutia informs that students from 11 schools under Ravangla block participated in the competition.

The four-day long

event featured competitions in the disciplines of football, athletics, boxing, badminton, karate, table tennis, taekwondo and archery.

The closing day witnessed an athletic meet followed by the distribution of certificates and trophies to its winners.

Hotter than usual summer likely in most of India, except South



NEW DELHI, 02 MAR

[PTI]: Day temperatures are likely to be above normal in north, north-east, parts of east and west India, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Monday in its summer forecast for March to May.

However, it has forecast a likelihood of below normal temperatures in south and the adjoining central India.

"During the upcoming hot weather season (March to May), above normal seasonal maximum (day) temperatures are likely over most of the subdivisions of north, northwest and northeast India, few subdivisions from eastern and western parts of central India and few coastal subdivisions of north peninsular India," the forecast said.

There is a probability forecast for above maximum temperatures in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Gujarat, coastal Maharashtra, Goa and coastal Andhra Pradesh.

IMD Director General Mrutunjay Mohapatra said over the Indo-Gangetic plains -- from Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, east UP, west UP, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand to Odisha -- the temperature is expected to be above normal by more than 0.5 degree Celsius during March to May.

There is a high prob-

ability with more than 75 per cent of above normal temperature over Chhattisgarh and Odisha where mercury will be above normal. He said in these two states, temperature is likely to be above normal by 0.86 degree Celsius and 0.66 degree Celsius respectively.

"There is also a 60 per cent probability of above normal temperature over Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi by 0.5 degree Celsius," he said.

There is likely to be some relief in parts of south India.

"Below normal seasonal maximum temperatures are likely over most of the subdivisions of south peninsula and adjoining central India," the summer forecast added.

It said above normal seasonal minimum (night) temperatures are likely over most of the of north India along the foot hills of Himalayas, northeast India, western part of central India and southern part of peninsular India.

"However, below normal season minimum temperatures are likely over most of the subdivisions of eastern part of the central India and few subdivisions of extreme northern part of the country," the IMD added.

The IMD added that moderate La Niña conditions are prevailing over

the equatorial Pacific and sea surface temperatures (SSTs) are below normal over the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean.

The latest model forecast indicates that La Niña conditions are likely to sustain during the upcoming hot weather season (March to May), it added.

La Nina is associated with the cooling of the Pacific waters and El Nino is its antithesis. The phenomenon has a impact on the weather of the Indian sub-continent.

The IMD said it will release the second summer forecast for April to June in April.

The IMD last month had said the minimum temperature recorded in the country in January was the warmest for the month in 62 years. South India was particularly warm. The month was the warmest in 121 years, with 22.33 degrees Celsius in south India, followed by 22.14 degrees Celsius in 1919 and 21.93 degrees Celsius in 2020 as the second and third warmest months.

Central India was also the warmest (14.82 degrees Celsius) in the last 38 years after 1982 (14.92 degrees Celsius), while 1958 with 15.06 degrees Celsius was the warmest in the 1901-2021 period.

RSWA gets portable sound system from Zilla Panchayat



GANGTOK, 02 MAR: RORATHANG Social Welfare Association [RSWA] received a portable sound system from the Zilla Panchayat, Leela Dulal in the presence of Panchayat members at GPK, Chalamthang Pacheykhani GPU, a press release informs.

RSWA has thanked the Zilla Panchayat and Ward Panchayat, Anju Gajmer for her support, and said that this system would be handy and convenient for the association in the coming days in various activities, the release mentions.

SKM panchayat cell coordination meet at Rhenock



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha [SKM] Panchayat cell called a coordination meeting for Rhenock constituency in the party office at Rhenock, East Sikkim, today. The event was attended by chief guest, Nari Vice-Convenor (State), Prabha Pradhan, a press release informs.

The main objective of the event is to interact with sitting and former

panchayats and spread the party's principles and policies.

Meanwhile, former panchayats were felicitated for their contribution in the upliftment of society during their panchayat tenure. Those who were felicitated include Dawa Doma Chettri (Tarpin Ward), KK Pradhan (Rhenock), Chandra Bdr Chettri (Losing), Bir Bahadur Bhusal (Pacheykhani) and Tek Bdr Chettri (Rorathang).

SKM sports wing...

everyone's attention with her inborn skill and tremendous potential.

He added that since the event was aimed at promoting local talent, the SKM sports wing has decided to provide better and technical training to her in the best athletic club of the State.

Sohenne will be admitted to Bright Athletic Club tomorrow and attend regular school near BAC.

Sohenne's parents expressed happiness on the opportunity received by their daughter and have thanked the SKM sports wing.

Over 18,000 have...

He mentioned that this vaccine was the result of one year of research and has been approved by Director General of Control of Drugs. He added that even the Prime Minister has taken the vaccine. Reiterating that the vaccine is safe and effective, he informed that the state has enough supply of vaccines for the next 20 days.

It is informed that the registration for vaccination of senior citizens has already begun following which the list of beneficiaries and the schedule of vaccination will be released.

Principal Director cum Mission Director, Dr Tseten Yamphel mentioned that the vaccinations for COVID have been provided upto Primary Health Centre level so far and now microplanning is under process to take it upto Primary Health Sub-Centre to reach out to rural masses. He added that the problem was in the urban areas due to the high population so detailed planning is underway to cover every person in urban areas.

Dr Yamphel added that the department plans to set the target to cover more than 1000 persons every day in STNM hospital and at least 1000 persons in Urban PHC, Gangtok to cover everyone at the earliest. He mentioned that ASHA and Anganwadi workers along with officers and staff at the village level of other departments as well are working to ensure vaccines are given to every person.

Director cum State Immunization Officer, Dr Phumzay Denzongpa mentioned that the State had received 99,000 doses of Covishield vaccines for the people of Sikkim including army personnel from the Government of India. She added that the State has been receiving vaccines in a phased manner and has already received the third consignment and another is about to reach. She informed that a total of 17,647 persons have received the first dose of the vaccine and 1,465 have received the second dose till 26 February.

She informed that people in the age group of 45 to 59 years with comorbidities who want to register for the vaccination need to be certified to have comorbidities by Registered Medical practitioners with their Medical Council Registration number and even private practitioners fulfilling the criteria can issue the same.

Winners of BUD20 feted by SRM-Sikkim



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

SRM University Sikkim Organized an awards ceremony for winners of BUD20-Business Ideation Contest today.

The programme was presided over by Minister Arun Upreti, an official press release informs.

Dr Jayshree Suresh, Barnabas Sherpa and Yash Marda, who served

as jury members for BUD20, were also present at the event to felicitate the winners and encourage all the participants.

The Minister congratulated the participants and commended the University for conceiving and executing an event that promotes the culture of entrepreneurship, and which will contrib-

ute to tackling the problem of unemployment in the state.

Conceived by the Department of Commerce under the aegis of the vice-chancellor, Prof Ch Satish Kumar, to encourage and promote young aspiring entrepreneurs in Sikkim, the long-term aim of BUD-Business Ideation Contest is to develop a vibrant ecosystem

for entrepreneurial activities in the state capital.

In his address, Prof. Kumar congratulated the team for successfully executing the event.

He went on to say, 'This award ceremony marks the conclusion of the ideation round. We now look forward to handholding these ideas on their way to scaling-up and eventual

success.' He also stressed the importance of the BUD20 magazine which was released at the function as a useful tool for subsequent steps in the scaling-up process which will also include investors' meets. Further he announced that BUD20 would continue as an annual event.

The winning entry, which received the title 'Young Businessperson Award' and a cash prize of Rs 25,000 went to Shraddha Sharma.

Enosh Chhetri and Bavyesh Luitel were first and second runners-up, respectively.

The top-ten ideas of the contest, including the winning entries, will receive grooming and handholding from the Commerce Department and the Entrepreneurship Development Cell of the University to ensure their development and eventual success.

Handloom Expo gets underway at Namchi Central Park



SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 02 MAR:

Handloom Expo 2020-21 got underway here at the Central Park today.

Organized by the Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom and Sikkim Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd and

sponsored by the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handloom), Ministry of Textiles, chairperson Commerce and Industries Department, MB Chettri, was present as chief guest.

The main motive behind the event is to promote and sell handloom

from Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir and local weavers, self help groups and cooperative societies of Sikkim.

Altogether there are 60 participants from these states and 40 Sikkim at the expo.

10 more discharges and only two new positive cases

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

The number of active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim dropped further to 37 with the release of 10 more patients from isolation facilities on Monday. The number of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim has now improved to 5,878.

Meanwhile, the State registered two new cases

of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours taking Sikkim's tally of confirmed Covid cases to 6,147. These two new cases of novel coronavirus were reported from the testing of 97 samples yesterday in the State.

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

all 74 samples tested by RT-PCR returned negative for COVID-19, while one person was found positive in TrueNat testing of nine samples and one more sample tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 14 samples.

While one new case is from Ravangla in South District and the other if from near Saramsa Garden, Ranipool in East District.

Culprits behind FB hack will be penalised: CM

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

Chief Minister, PS Tamang's official Facebook page has been restored after it was taken over by hackers for a few hours on 27 Feb.

In a message on his Facebook page, the CM informed that the issue was resolved within a few hours.

"Such a breach of privacy with attempts to

create confusion and unrest will not be tolerated and will be penalised accordingly. Our competent officials and personnel are working tirelessly in search of the individuals behind this violation," he wrote.

The CM also appealed to everyone to ignore any form of message which was sent from the page at the time and thanked people for their patience.

Prefects and captains take office at NPS



SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 02 MAR:

School Captains, Prefects and House Captains of Namchi Public School for the academic session 2021 were officially inaugurated with a formal investiture ceremony held today, a press release informs.

The Investiture ceremony was presided over by Principal, Fr Stany Sequeira. Who also ad-

ministrated the oath of office to the elected members and the Director, Fr. George A. D'Souza, gave them the Badges and the Special Ties.

Sneha Pradhan and Roshan Thapa are the school captains.

Many from captains are products of the Chief Minister's Merit Scholarship Scheme, an official press release informs.

Unemployment high in India due to govt's "ill considered demonetisation decision": Manmohan Singh

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR 2 (PTI): Attacking the Centre, former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh on Tuesday said unemployment is high in the country and its informal sector is in shambles following the "ill considered demonetisation decision" taken by the BJP-led government in 2016.

He also criticised the central government for not holding regular consultations with the states.

Inaugurating a development summit virtually organised by the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Development Studies, an economic think tank aligned to the Congress ideology in poll-bound Kerala, Singh said temporary measures by the Government of India

and the Reserve Bank to paper over the credit problem cannot blind us to the looming credit crisis ahead that could affect the small and medium sector.

"Unemployment is high and the informal sector is in shambles, a crisis precipitated by the ill considered demonetisation decision taken in 2016," he said at "Prath-eeksha 2030." The summit was organised to launch a Vision Document, a framework of ideas for development of Kerala well in advance of the state elections.

He said in Kerala and in many other states, public finances are in disarray with states having to resort to excessive borrowing, which creates an intolerable burden on future budgets.

Junior Olympic Games for Gangtok concludes



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 MAR:

The block-level 1st Inter School Junior Olympic Games under 'Sports for Peace & Development' 2020-21 FOR Gangtok Block concluded here at Paljor Stadium on Monday.

The closing day had the Advisor to Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Meg Nath Subba as the chief guest who was accompanied by SKM sports wing state president, Rinzing Wangyal Chopel as the guest of honour.

It is informed that around 600 students from more than 16 government and private schools had participated in eight different sports disciplines of U-14 and U-17 boys and girls. The event started on 26 February.

Air Cargo service launched in Nagaland

DIMAPUR, MAR 2 (PTI): Air cargo service was launched in Nagaland on Tuesday with Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio flagging off 111 cartons of perishable and non-perishable fruits and vegetables including some finished products at Dimapur Airport, the only airport in the state.

The chief minister termed the introduction of Air Cargo Services as a historic occasion for the state.

The service would help the farming community and will ensure timely and efficient transport of their produce to other parts of the country, he said.

Blessed with vast land resources with varied agro-climatic condition, Nagaland has a wide range of potential to produce organic products, Rio said.

Along with the farmers the educated youth showing interest in modern farming with a capacity to produce high qual-



ity and valued fruits and vegetables, the air cargo service will be a major boost to reach the cosmopolitan cities where the demands would be huge, he said.

Rio expressed optimism that the farmers as well as the entrepreneurs would take it seriously.

The chief minister said that the agri, horti and allied departments should not only stick to demonstration farm or working on pilot projects but focus on empowering the entrepreneurs to be a partner in the supply chain and should also come to the rescue of post-harvest management like packaging and value addition so that right prices

were fetched and the farmers were duly benefited.

He said, "that unless farmers are stable and rich we cannot say that our society is strong".

Stressing on the challenges ahead, Rio said that the farmers should produce consistently and the produce should reach the air cargo station in the quickest time with least cost and at the same time maintaining the quality.

Regional Executive Director, Airports Authority of India, North East Region, M Suresh and Advisor for Horticulture and Border Affairs, Mhathung Yanthan were also present at the programme.

WORLD HEARING DAY 3RD MARCH 2021

MESSAGES ON PREVENTION OF DEAFNESS

- ✦ VACCINATE YOUR CHILD REGULARLY. DISEASES LIKE MUMPS & MEASLES MAY CAUSE DEAFNESS IN CHILDREN.
- ✦ AVOID GETTING EARS CLEANED BY UN TRAINED PERSONS OR ROADSIDE VENDORS/QUACK.
- ✦ PROTECT YOUR EARS FROM LOUD NOISES FROM TV, RADIO, CARPHONES, FIRECRACKERS, LOUD MUSIC ETC.
- ✦ MUST GET YOUR HEARING TEST ANNUALLY AFTER 40 YEARS OF AGE.
- ✦ PARTICULARLY IF YOU ARE ASKING FOR REPETITION OF WORDS DURING CONVERSATION.
- ✦ CONSULT A DOCTOR IF A SCHOOL GOING CHILD IS NOT ABLE TO PAY ATTENTION TO TEACHER'S VOICE FROM SHORT DISTANCE.



HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM



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RUCHI DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC

Behind telephone Exchange Near Old STNM Hospital. Gangtok

PH: 03592-203333, 204876, 8509373970

EXISTING FACILITIES:

- ULTRASOUND
- DIGITAL X-RAY
- ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY
- COLOR DOPPLER
- PATHOLOGY
- MICROBIOLOGY
- BIOCHEMISTRY
- ENDOSCOPY
- B M D
- E C G
- DENTAL O P G
- GASTRO CLINIC
- PAEDIATRIC CLINIC
- MEDICAL CLINIC
- ORTHO CLINIC
- ENT CLINIC
- GYNEA CLINIC
- PHYSIOTHERAPY
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Unhappy Because We Revel in Pessimism?

Take away Hope and there is nothing left

Happiness is not a quantifiable emotion and its definition and measure differs from person to person. But still, the UN insists on preparing a World Happiness Index every year. It is possible that the enumerators have worked out indices and algorithms which can measure happiness in very general terms for country-sized populations with some reasonable accuracy. We hope it does, because what follows is born from where our country finds itself in the world ranking for happiness.

India has been ranked a dismal 144th in the World Happiness Index 2020 which measured 153 countries in terms of happiness. India dropped 11 places from 2018's almost as miserable 133rd rank and even more miserably from 2017's 122nd rank. If consistency can bring some joy to this dismal news, then we have been consistent because in 2016, the country was ranked 118th. Since Look East is being bandied about so much of late, here is another stat from the Index, save war-ravaged Afghanistan ranked 153rd in this list of 153, everyone else in the neighbourhood is, as per the UN, happier than us. Pakistan is ranked 66th, Nepal 92nd, the "happy nation" of Bhutan not as gleeful in the high nineties, Sri Lanka at 130th and Bangladesh is ranked 107th. Myanmar, despite being embroiled in ethnic violence, is still happier at 13rd. Clearly, some of the desolate countries are finding happiness in their warped ideas of sado-populism, but that we leave for a later discussion.

The Index explains how the rankings were worked out, but we have our take on it as well. It is the pessimism that has been coursing through our country of late which has hounded out happiness. Hope, that feeling that keeps us going, is being sucked out of the environs.

Given how desperate things can get in our country, it remains a miracle that it still holds together. And the miracle comes by way of hope, the inexplicable optimism which sees a future despite the travails of the present. Take that away and everything will collapse. And the surest way to kill hope is by infecting the society with pessimism.

As pessimism sinks in, suspicions grow, and before one even realizes, it's misanthropy all around. Not only do people stop trusting, they also start hating. It is then no longer about being pragmatic, but an obsession with remaining defeatist. That is one condition that even democracy cannot assail. Demoralise a people to a nadir from where they can spy no silver lining and from thereon even humanity can be subverted at will. Fear can also help in the subversion, but fear is difficult to instill and even more difficult to sustain whereas pessimism is an instinctive trait in the present times of frequent dejections and thus easier to contaminate with. When the pollution is complete, the people become dejected, see no hope and refuse to get involved. The public domain is then occupied by "vested interests" who feed paranoia with one hand to keep people dispirited and "negotiate" favours for themselves with the other. The people are too distracted by their dejections to notice or even care and when they are so indisposed, surrender the power that was theirs. Take away faith, dismember hope and then there are no solutions possible. Happiness goes into a freefall then.

A society so disinclined then lives in an environment where there are no meaningful debates, because loaded with pessimism minds speak only to themselves and refuse to engage other voices. There are worrying trends all across the country which suggest that we are a people who are losing hope and hence clinging to straws as weak as projected nationalism and hollow strength, not because things are bad, but because we refuse to see the positives, refuse to engage. This is a worrying trend which has encroached on Sikkim too. There is too much of leader speaking/arguing with leader and not enough of people speaking to leaders. Because of this there is too much claiming and complaining in the public domain and not enough positivity.

This trend has to be stemmed. People have to get involved more. Without involvement, there is no sense of achievement, no sense of belonging; what is democracy then? Where is happiness? Perhaps we speak too soon here, both, for India and for Sikkim. But what if we are speaking up too late?

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Chatbots That Resurrect the Dead: Legal Experts Weigh in on 'Disturbing' Technology

EDINA HARBINJA, LILIAN EDWARDS & MARISA MCVEY
theconversation.com

It was recently revealed that in 2017 Microsoft patented a chatbot which, if built, would digitally resurrect the dead. Using AI and machine learning, the proposed chatbot would bring our digital persona back to life for our family and friends to talk to. When pressed on the technology, Microsoft representatives admitted that the chatbot was "disturbing", and that there were currently no plans to put it into production.

Still, it appears that the technical tools and personal data are in place to make digital reincarnations possible. AI chatbots have already passed the "Turing Test", which means they've fooled other humans into thinking they're human, too. Meanwhile, most people in the modern world now leave behind enough data to teach AI programmes about our conversational idiosyncrasies. Convincing digital doubles may be just around the corner.

But there are currently no laws governing digital reincarnation. Your right to data privacy after your death is far from set in stone, and there is currently no way for you to opt out of being digitally resurrected. This legal ambiguity leaves room for private companies to make chatbots out of your data after you're dead.

Our research has looked at the surprisingly complex legal question of what happens to your data after you die. At present, and in the absence of specific legislation, it's unclear who might have the ultimate power to reboot your digital persona after your physical body has been put to rest.

Microsoft's chatbot would use your electronic messages to create a digital reincarnation in your likeness after you pass away. Such a chatbot would

use machine learning to respond to text messages just as you would have when you were alive. If you happen to leave behind rich voice data, that too could be used to create your vocal likeness – someone your relatives could speak with, through a phone or a humanoid robot.

Microsoft isn't the only company to have shown an interest in digital resurrection. The AI company Eternime has built an AI-enabled chatbot which harvests information – including geolocation, motion, activity, photos, and Facebook data – which lets users create an avatar of themselves to live on after they die. It may be only a matter of time until families have the choice to reanimate dead relatives using AI technologies such as Eternime's.

If chatbots and holograms from beyond the grave are set to become commonplace, we'll need to draw up new laws to govern them. After all, it looks like a violation of the right to privacy to digitally resurrect someone whose body lies beneath a tombstone reading "rest in peace".

BODIES IN BINARY

National laws are inconsistent on how your data is used after your death. In the EU, the law on data privacy only protects the rights of the living. That leaves room for member states to decide how to protect the data of the dead. Some, such as Estonia, France, Italy and Latvia, have legislated on postmortem data. The UK's data protection laws have not.

To further complicate matters, our data is mostly controlled by private online platforms such as Facebook and Google. This control is based on the terms of service that we sign up to when we create profiles on these platforms. Those terms fiercely protect the privacy of the dead.

For example, in 2005, Yahoo! refused to provide email account login details for the surviving

family of a US marine killed in Iraq. The company argued that their terms of service were designed to protect the marine's privacy. A judge eventually ordered the company to provide the family with a CD containing copies of the emails, setting a legal precedent in the process.

A few initiatives, such as Google's Inactive Account Manager and Facebook's Legacy Contact, have attempted to address the postmortem data issue. They allow living users to make some decisions on what happens to their data assets after they die, helping to avoid ugly court battles over dead people's data in the future. But these measures are no substitute for laws.

One route to better postmortem data legislation is to follow the example of organ donation. The UK's "opt out" organ donation law is particularly relevant, as it treats the organs of the dead as donated unless that person specified otherwise when they were alive. The same opt out scheme could be applied to postmortem data.

This model could help us respect the privacy of the dead and the wishes of their heirs, all while considering the benefits that could arise from donated data: that data donors could help save lives just as organ donors do.

In the future, private companies may offer family members an agonising choice: abandon your loved one to death, or instead pay to have them digitally revived. Microsoft's chatbot may at present be too disturbing to countenance, but it's an example of what's to come. It's time we wrote the laws to govern this technology.

[Edina Harbinja is Senior Lecturer in Media/Privacy Law, Aston University; Lilian Edwards is Professor of Law, Innovation & Society, Newcastle Law School, Newcastle University; Marisa McVey is Research fellow, Aston University]

How watching TV in lockdown can be good for you – according to science

CHRISTIAN VAN NIEUWERBURGH & KIRSTY GARDINER
theconversation.com

It's easy to feel guilty when you're lazing around in front of the TV in your pyjamas, eating ice cream straight out of the tub. But it's not an unusual activity in lockdown. The extended nature of the pandemic has turned attention to the impact that it is having on our collective mental health.

Many mental health organisations have proposed strategies to protect mental health, such as exercising, sleeping well and enjoying nature. This may make us assume that watching TV is ultimately bad for our mental well-being. But there is evidence to suggest that watching TV can also be good for us – if we go about it the right way.

In many parts of the world there has indeed been a reported surge in watching TV and online streaming during the pandemic. When told to stay at home during the first lockdown in the UK, for example, people watched an average of more than six hours of TV and online video content each day, a rise of about 30% compared to the previous year.

There has also been an increase in subscriptions to video streaming services, with almost 12 million people in the UK signing up for a new service during the lockdowns. Netflix now has more than 200 million subscribers worldwide.

THE BENEFITS OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS

So how can TV support our well-being? We know that art can stir intense emotions. More often than not, we are drawn to musicals, podcasts, TV programmes, films and other artistic productions because we want to experience strong emotions.

According to research by Martin Seligman, a leading positive psychology researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, experiencing positive emotions is one of the building blocks of our wellbeing. It would therefore make sense for us to watch more feel-good shows on TV to increase posi-

tive emotions.

According to Barbara Fredrickson, a psychologist at the University of North Carolina, experiencing positive emotions can have a long-term, sustainable impact on wellbeing. When we feel good, our minds open

perceived amusement or contentment returned to baseline significantly quicker than participants who experienced neutrality or sadness.

WHAT AND HOW TO WATCH

That said, TV doesn't necessarily always make us feel better. For some



and our awareness broadens – making us more able to think creatively. As a direct consequence, a domino effect of psychological processes is set in motion, incrementally building positive resources such as resilience that can be drawn upon in times of need.

Positive emotions also have a direct impact on the body. One convincing study demonstrated that positive emotions can "undo" the negative consequences of experiencing unpleasant physical symptoms associated with emotions such as stress or anxiety. In this study, participants' baseline heart rates were measured before they were manipulated into an anxious state by being asked to prepare a speech on an unknown topic.

Following this "anxiety induction task", participants were randomly assigned a film clip that elicited either amusement, contentment, neutrality or sadness. Once they had watched them, participants' heart rates were measured again. The researchers discovered that the heart rates of participants who ex-

perienced amusement or contentment returned to baseline significantly quicker than participants who experienced neutrality or sadness. That said, TV doesn't necessarily always make us feel better. For some

people, very dark themes, perhaps too close to home, can be depressing. Watching TV mindlessly, just zapping channels to pass time, can also make us feel a lack of control. And it can make us miss other opportunities to intentionally boost our wellbeing. Equally, we must be cautious about binge-watching programmes to the degree that they prevent us from functioning effectively in our everyday lives.

So what should you watch to reap the benefits of the wellbeing research? We're not TV or film critics, but below are some examples of programmes that we have enjoyed and we think may be particularly suited to boosting positive emotions.

If you are looking for inspiration – which can easily be lost in the monotony of lockdown – check out Expedition Happiness, which explores the beauty of nature through an epic road trip in a refurbished school bus. Similarly, Night on Earth, Queen Eye and Brené Brown: The Call to Courage also have many confidence-boosting

moments and engaging ideas about vulnerability and courage.

Sometimes, a laugh can go a long way too. Programmes like Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Parks and Recreation, The Office (UK or US versions) and Schitt's Creek provide hours of humour and comedy. They are all long-running series with many episodes to enjoy.

One of the hardest things about lockdown is being cut off from interactions with other people. Watching series that enable you to get to know the lead characters well over time can be a useful way to boost feelings of social connectedness. Shows such as Friends, Grace and Frankie, Frasier and The Good Place can help achieve this.

Or, instead of channel surfing or browsing, do some research online to find something that falls under one of the categories above so that you can go straight to the chosen programme. This will feel more intentional, giving you a greater sense of agency and control.

Another way to reap the benefits is to watch your favourite programmes with other people – even though that may be virtually at the moment. It is good to experience social connection when watching something you like and it can be fun to discuss the plot. After all, many of the watercooler discussions we enjoy at work or when chatting to friends are about the latest Netflix show.

When you find a programme that gives you positive emotions, learn to savour the experience rather than being drawn to binge-watching. This way you can enjoy the experience and anticipate the positive emotions of watching another episode at a later time.

By taking control of our TV-watching habits, we may be able to boost our wellbeing during these challenging times. Happy viewing.

[Christian van Nieuwerburgh is Professor of Coaching and Positive Psychology, University of East London; Kirsty Gardiner is Lecturer in Positive Psychology, University of East London]

Outbound postal service in Nepal has stopped for a year now!

SRIZU BAJRACHARYA

KATHMANDU, 02 MAR [KATHMANDUPOST]: About three weeks ago Harka Tamang went to the General Post Office at Dillibazar to send a package to a friend in Germany. However, to his disappointment, Tamang was told that the post office was not taking outbound letters and parcels except to India. "I was surprised that such an important service was not functioning well," said the 50-year-old German-speaking tour guide. "Their reason was their carrier, Thai Airways, was not doing international flights."

The suspension of international flights into the country in March last year meant that no letters or packages came in or went out from the country. While they started coming when international flights resumed in September, outbound posts could not. "Our agreement was with Thai Airways so when everything came to a halt we were unable to continue our outbound service," said Pradyumna Prasad Upadhyay, chief postmaster at the General Post Office.

Despite the resumption of flight services, people like Tamang have continued to be denied postal services since Thai Airways announced bankruptcy.

"Shouldn't the government have sought a better solution by now," asked the tour guide from Budhanilkantha.

According to Aabha Shrestha Karna, the director-general at the Postal Services Department, establishing another agreement for the outbound postal service is not as easy as one assumes even though they realise they are losing out on opportunities and people's trust.

"We also need to look into connecting flights, ground entries and transits of airways to make such agreements," said Karna. Nepal Airlines is not an option as its services are not spread out to see it as one way of solving the problem at hand, she added. According to Ramesh Katuwal, section officer at the department, Nepal's postal service does not use cargo flights but depends on passenger flights as a result of which the service has been afford-

able to the general public. "Yes, we could have partnered with more airlines but our rules don't allow us to work with different airlines," Katuwal said. "I think years back we used to collaborate with different airlines but later we streamlined it for better management." Almost every day, the General Post Office gets 50 to 60 calls inquiring when it will resume its international services, according to officials.

"We ourselves have been very unhappy with our present situation, as we have not been able to provide the people with our services," said Samjhana Devkota, section officer at the General Post Office. For most people, the postal service is one of the most affordable public facilities providing mail services, print distributions, money transfer, express mail and parcel services.

Shraddha Gautam, 24, has not been able to send letters to her pen friend in the United Kingdom because private courier services are too expensive.

"I definitely would have paid the amount if it was for an important official document," she said. For many institutions and companies, the General Post Office's service has been the authentic source of communication, information and relation building as well. It has also been the authentic channel to distribute YouTube's certification to YouTubers and to send out legal papers from courts.

"From legal documents to authentic official paper works, the post office is one of the most trusted institutions," said Upadhyay, the chief postmaster.

Despite its importance, a reflection of the authorities' attitude to providing postal services is the fact that services to India restarted only earlier this month even though air services with the southern neighbour resumed in December. As for the rest of the world, the contractual situation with Thai Airways is an obstacle.

"We have a two-year contract with Thai Airways, and we didn't want to scrap the agreement right away," said Karna, the director general. "We were waiting to hear from them given the terms of the relation-

ship." According to the department, it has been working with Thai Airways for about ten years.

"Our department establishes this relationship through a contractual global tender and breaching that contract means facing consequential lawsuits," said Katuwal. "Therefore, we thought it would be best for us to hear from them first." The department is yet to hear from the bankrupt airlines. The lack of urgency on the part of the government despite no international posts leaving the country is because of the lack of interest shown in the service by the government, according to postal officials.

"In India, the postal services are looked at with more respect and are treated with more seriousness. And authorities there are proactive in providing their facilities," said Chudamani KC, information officer of the General Post Office. "But here, no one really sought to give us that responsibility of providing service to people. Because our office relies on direction from the Department of Postal Services and above, we were unable to do anything."

The General Post Office has been urging the department to a swift decision, according to him. The government has been losing revenue too. In the first seven months of the fiscal year 2019-20, the revenue collection by the postal services was over Rs90 million of the total of Rs114 million for the whole year. But with the international service cut off in March 2020 continuing till now, the revenue stands at less than Rs40 million in the first seven months of the current fiscal year 2020-21.

The number of letters and packages the postal service has been handling has also come down over the past few years.

In the fiscal year 2018-2019, the General Post Office recorded about 914,298 deliveries including registry, express mail service and parcels for Kathmandu. And in 2019-2020, it recorded 100,355 deliveries while this ongoing fiscal year just about 49,768 deliveries exclusive of outbound deliveries were recorded.

The loss for the government has meant

gain for the private sector.

"Definitely, this has benefitted other courier and parcel businesses but at the same time made things more difficult for the people as DHL and other services are quite expensive," said Upadhyay. But it is not just the pandemic that is to blame for the deteriorating quality of services in the post office, according to its users.

Gautam, who has a pen pal in the United Kingdom, has a story to tell.

She had used the post office to send letters to different ministries to get clarification, information and sometimes to make recommendations on government's programmes. She once tested the performance of the postal service by sending herself a letter when she realised the offices had not received her letters.

"But I never received my own letter. This was in 2018, I think. For the most part, the postal office's service has been unreliable and questionable. I never even received the official letter from my college although my college had sent it twice a few years back," she said. "At the time, their response when I confronted them at their Sundhara office was to direct me to a room full of thousands of letters."

The postal service, however, is now preparing to address the problems of timely delivery and transparency of deliveries by introducing a new procedure to deliver mails and packages using Google Plus Code, an alphanumeric code that can be combined with a locality through latitude and longitude coordinates.

But people like Gautam are still sceptical of the government's priority towards the service.

In the past, however, the postal service was regarded as one of the most important services by the government which was used by almost everyone for legal, official and licensed communication and information to writing letters to friends and families—it was a meaningful channel for conversations. Many people wrote letters and sent parcels regularly and also had their own post box.

One of them was Prakash Deep Shrestha, 62, a lyricist. "I loved writing letters to people and it was something very popular in those days. When I went to Nepalgunj after I completed college, I used to write letters to my friends here in Kathmandu and even to actors like Amitabh Bachhan, Jeetendra and Shashi Kapoor," said Shrestha. "And I still have the letters with me. I think the postal service gave me a lot of memories to value."

The postal service has over 18,000 government employees spread out across the country and the various postal offices have their reach even in far-off regions. "The connection we have to different places is really established well and the government could have used this channel to operate their various services, even in the pandemic they could have used this connection to distribute reliefs," said Upadhyay. Karna, the director general, too admits that the postal services have not been exploited to thier full capacity.

It's been over two years since the department has been pushing for a Postal Act, which will give it more autonomy.

According to Karna, this will allow the department to restructure its institution and make it more IT-based to compete in current times.

"I wouldn't say we have not been prioritised but because the process requires a change in the structure and the way we work, this requires time and we believe going forward things will be better and our services will be more effective and competitive," said Karna. "We want to make the postal service more accessible and increase commercial activities to make a significant impact on the country's revenue." But for the moment, authorities have no answer for when outbound services will restart even as inbound postal services began with the resumption of international flights in the country on September 1.

All Karna could say was, "But we are trying our best to come up with a solution for we understand this is an important service."

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra tries hand at plucking tea leaves in Assam

NEW DELHI, 02 MAR

[NDTV]: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra plucks tea leaves and interacts with tea garden workers in Assam's Biswanath, photos and videos shared today on Twitter show. Dressed in a saree, Ms Gandhi, 49, was equipped for the task with a basket on her back balanced by a band on her head. She had a scarf on her head on which the band was strapped on. She was also armoured with an apron at her waist as she took on the job.

"The life of tea garden workers is full of truth and simplicity and their labor is valuable for the country. Today, I got to know about their work and families and the understood the struggles of their work. I will not forget the love and intimacy I got from them," Ms Gandhi tweeted in Hindi and shared photos.

A video, shared by news agency ANI, shows the Congress leader taking instructions from workers of the Sadhuru tea garden on how to pluck tea leaves. She smiles as a few others click photographs, the minute long video shows. She received a rousing welcome to the tea garden earlier in the day, photos of which were shared by the Congress.

Ms Gandhi is on a two-day visit to launch the Congress's campaign for the three-phased assembly elections in the state that begins on March 27. She has been seen taking an active part in local customs and traditions during her stay.

Nepal's debt nearly triples in the last five and half years

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA

KATHMANDU, 02 MAR [KATHMANDUPOST]: The government has been increasingly relying on domestic and external debts to meet the resource gap amid shrinking revenue amid the coronavirus pandemic.

As a result, the country debt has nearly tripled in the last five and half years. According to the Finance Ministry, outstanding debt of the country increased to Rs1.50 trillion as of the first half of the current fiscal year from Rs544.91 billion in fiscal year 2014-15.

As of the last fiscal year 2019-20, the country's outstanding debt was worth Rs1.41 trillion, 40.16 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), according to the Financial Comptroller General Office, a government agency responsible for keeping record of the income and expenditure of the government.

Even though the country's debt liability was rising in a slow pace until fiscal year 2015-16, it surged with the country requiring to generate massive resources for post-earthquake reconstruction.

The deadly earthquake in 2015 not only caused loss of over 8,000 lives but also the damaged properties worth over Rs700 billion, according to the Post Disaster Risk Assessment report.

The country also required more resources for institutionalising the federal set up after the 2017 elections and the Covid-19 pandemic affected the country's economy badly leading to reduced revenue generation for the government as result of which the government has been increasingly relying on the domestic and external loans for bridging the resources gap.

The government collected just 75.6 percent of targeted revenue in the last fiscal year 2019-20, according to the Financial Comptroller General Office. The government collected revenue of Rs841 billion against the target of Rs1.11 trillion, the office said.

The revenue target of current fiscal year 2020-21 will also not be met with the finance ministry through the mid-term review of

the budget trimmed revenue target to Rs931.85 billion against the initially targeted Rs1.01 trillion.

Even though the debt level increased substantially in the last five years, experts said that the country should not be worried about current level debt.

"In the past, we feared taking loans which deprived us from potential infrastructure development," said Min Bahadur Shrestha, former vice-chairperson of the National Planning Commission, the main planning body of the government. "For a country like Nepal which can collect limited resources from the revenue, we have to rely on domestic and external debt to finance big infrastructure projects." He said that the question should not be whether Nepal should take more loans but whether there has been productive use of the loans.

Experts say that the country still has the 'fiscal space' or room for taking more loans. "We should not be worried about debt sustainability till our debt level remains 50-60 percent of the GDP," said Nara Bahadur Thapa, former executive director of Nepal Rastra Bank, who had also worked as a policy advisor on macro-economic management at the International Monetary Fund in the late 2000s.

"We should not fear taking out loans to boost the economy as long as there is fiscal space," said Thapa. "With the productive use of debt, we can boost our economy and the economic expansion is a must to enhance the country's ability to pay the debt." However, the government has not been able to spend the available resources, both domestic and external, delaying the completion of the important development projects. Most of the national pride projects have faced time and cost overruns.

According to the mid-term review of the budget for the current fiscal year, expenditure in the National Pride Projects has remained just 15 percent of the total allocated budget as of the first half of the current fiscal year. "Many countries that developed rapidly,

had borrowed huge amounts of loans and utilized them properly, particularly in infrastructure development. They have over 100 percent debt to GDP ratio but they are now richer and don't fear more indebtedness," said Shrestha, who is also a former executive director of the central bank. According to Shrestha, the country is in greater need to borrow more this time as the country's economy is in tatters and the government is required to support even the private sector to revive the economy.

In its recent report 'Global Economic Prospect' the World Bank said that Nepal's economic growth Nepal is expected to record 0.6 per cent in the current fiscal year, which is 1.5 percentage points lower than its previous estimate.

The global lender said that Nepal's economy is estimated to have decelerated to just 0.2 per cent in fiscal 2019-20, 1.6 percentage points lower than its June 2020 projections. Therefore, without economic expansion, there remains a risk of the country falling into a debt trap, according to experts.

This is not the first time that the debt is getting to a point that may be worrisome.

In the early 2000s when the Maoist insurgency was at its peak, the government's treasury was under severe duress and the country's debt to GDP had reached as high as 63.9 percent for 2001-02.

A senior government official at that time said there was not enough money in the state coffers to pay salaries to government employees and there was high demand for a budget for security agencies to fight insurgency. But, the high debt ratio was creating trouble.

"Whenever Nepal Rastra Bank sent us treasury positions on a weekly basis, only a few of us had access to that report. We used to repay high-interest loans without the knowledge of many people, so that demands for more resources from the security agencies could be avoided," former auditor general Bhanu Acharya, who was the finance secretary in the early 2000s, had told the Post last year.

5 fold increase in platform ticket price in Mumbai amid Covid surge



MUMBAI, 02 MAR [PTI]:

The Central Railway has increased the price of platform tickets at some key stations in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) to avoid over-crowding during the upcoming summer season in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, an official said on Tuesday.

A platform ticket now costs ₹ 50 instead of the previous rate of ₹ 10 at

the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, Dadar and Lokmanya Tilak Terminus in Mumbai, and neighbouring Thane, Kalyan, Panvel and Bhivandi Road stations, CR's chief public relations officer Shivaji Sutar said.

The new rate came into force on February 24 and will remain effective till June 15 this year, the official said.

"The decision was taken to prevent over-crowding at these stations during the summer travel rush," he said.

Since the second week of February, there has been a surge in daily COVID-19 cases in Mumbai.

The city has so far reported over 3.25 lakh COVID-19 cases and more than 11,400 deaths due to the disease.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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Stimac names 35 probables for matches against Oman and UAE, to prune list to 28 later

NEW DELHI, MAR 2 (PTI): National football coach Igor Stimac on Tuesday named 10 new players in his 35-member list of probables for India's back-to-back international friendlies against Oman and the UAE to be played in Dubai on March 25 and 29 respectively. The final list of 28 players will be announced after the Indian Super League final on March 13. The players will then assemble for a preparatory camp in Dubai from March 15.

"We have kept 35 players in the list as a cushion in case any player picks up an injury during the ISL playoffs," Stimac said in a release.

Speaking about the new faces, Stimac said: "It's been a difficult year for all of us and finally, we are all getting together. It will be great to meet some new young guns and to check how bright our future is with them."

The Croatian World Cupper said the two matches against Oman and the UAE would be crucial as the team has not played any international match for more than a year.

"It's been a while since we last played and this is a great opportunity to check where we stand at the moment," the coach said.

"I know the season was a tough one and players might be overloaded. But, we have enough time to refresh their legs and brains. However, many of them will have a break of two weeks without any organised training sessions prior to joining the camp. Hopefully, they will execute their individual working plans," he said.

Stimac said Brandon Fernandes, Rahul Bheke, Sahal Abdul Samad and Ashish Rai did not feature in the list as they are nursing injuries at the moment.

It was in November 2019 that India last played at the international arena -- in the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers against Afghanistan (in Tajikistan) and Oman (in Muscat).India have garnered three points from the five matches they have played so far in the qualifiers, with two home games against Asian champions Qatar and Afghanistan and an away tie against Bangladesh yet to be played.

The international friendlies against Oman and the UAE form a part of India's preparations for the 2022 FIFA World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup Qualifiers to be played in June. India are out of reckoning for a 2022 World Cup berth but are still in contention for qualification in the 2023 Asian Cup.

The Probables: Goalkeepers: Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Amrinder Singh, Subhashish Roy Chowdhury, Dheeraj Singh, Vishal Kaith.

Defenders: Seriton Fernandes, Ashutosh Mehta, Akash Mishra, Pritam Kotal, Sandesh Jhingan, Chinglensana Singh, Sarthak Golui, Adil Khan, Mandar Rao Dessai, Prabir Das, Mashoor Shereef.

US Soccer council member removed after controversial speech

CHICAGO, MAR 2 (AP): The U.S. Soccer Federation's Athlete Council removed one of its members, a day after incendiary comments he made at the federation's annual general meeting against removing an anti-kneeling policy.

The Athlete Council called out Seth Jahn's comment at the meeting Saturday, saying they moved beyond a difference of opinion on policy, and into disinformation and offensive rhetoric.

At a meeting Sunday, the council voted to remove Jahn for violation of its prohibited conduct policy.

Jahn, who played for the U.S. seven-a-side Paralympic team at the 2015 Pan American Games, spoke against repeal of what was known as Policy 604-1, put in place in response to U.S. women's team star Megan Rapinoe kneeling in support of Colin Kaepernick.

The USSF board of directors voted to repeal the policy last June, a decision the online annual meeting affirmed Saturday by 71.34% voting in favor of repeal.

I'm sure I'm going to ruffle some feathers with what I'm about to say, especially given the athletes council that I'm on, but given the evolution of our quote unquote, progressive culture where everything offends everybody, those will-



ing to take a knee for our anthem don't care about defending half of our country and when they do so, then I don't have too much concern in also exercising my First Amendment right, Jahn said before the vote, pointing out his own Native American heritage.

Claiming he was citing FBI statistics, Jahn said 95% of deaths in black communities come at the hands of another black man.

He also veered into slavery, citing dubious statistics, and claimed every athlete who takes a knee during the

anthem disrespects the soldiers who fought against slavery in the Civil War.

I keep hearing how our country was founded on the backs of slaves, even though approximately only 8% of the entire population even owned slaves, he said.

Every race in the history of mankind has been enslaved by another demographic at some point time."He suggested athletes who wish to take a knee do so on their own individual platforms but not while representing the U.S. on a soccer field. Federal Presi-

dent Cindy Parlow Cone followed Jahn and urged repeal.

This is not about disrespecting the flag or about disrespecting the military, she said.

This is about the athletes and our staff's right to peacefully protest racial inequalities and police brutality.

Becky Sauerbrunn, the captain of the U.S. women's national team and a member of the Athlete Council, issued a statement disputing Jahn's claims.

Disagree with it though I may, Seth is entitled to his

opinion he is, however, not entitled to his own set of facts nor do I think he should use said facts in a way that misinforms and obfuscates the real issues at hand. For example, crime in the black community has nothing to do with the fact that Black people are disproportionately more than likely to die at the hands of police than any other group of people in the country," Sauerbrunn wrote.

Members of the women's team who had kneeled for the anthem announced last week that they would no longer do

so, preferring instead to focus on projects within the team and their communities to fight systemic racism.

The athlete's council said in a statement Sunday that Jahn violated the prohibited conduct's policy section on harassment, which prohibits racial or other harassment based upon a person's protected status (race), including any verbal act in which race is used or implied in a manner which would make a reasonable person uncomfortable."

The council said it wants to be unequivocal in its condemnation of the statements that Mr. Jahn made yesterday.

Before he was removed, Jahn tweeted out a statement saying that my positions are in no way representative of U.S. Soccer or the U.S. national extended teams, adding that he was in no way minimizing the horrors of slavery.

However, he also wrote: I will never apologize for the statements I made and will never bow down to the mentality of intimidation, bullying or the social media warrior's gestapo tactics," he wrote.

I'm embarrassed to represent a hypocritical federation that conducts a complete assault on diversity of thought without even seeking clarifying statements from me in their smear campaign.

Harden's triple-double helps Nets escape in OT against Spurs

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — While Kevin Durant has to sit down, James Harden keeps stepping up.

Harden had 30 points, 15 assists and 14 rebounds and the Brooklyn Nets overcame a collapse in the final seconds of regulation to beat the Spurs 124-113 in overtime on Monday night, snapping a 17-game losing streak in San Antonio.

Harden had his seventh triple-double in 22 games with Brooklyn since being traded from Houston, where he plays again Wednesday.

"Honestly, I just try to find ways to impact the game and not just scoring the basketball," Harden said. "We have a number of guys that can put the ball in the basket. Just being a distributor of getting guys shots, getting guys easy buckets.

"I feel like it's my job. Just playing the game right way, not forcing anything, trying to make the right play, trying to get guys shots. That's kind of my mindset every single game and it's been working."

Despite recent injuries to Durant and Kyrie Irving, Brooklyn remains second in the Eastern Conference at 23-13.

"He's a brilliant basketball player," Brooklyn coach Steve Nash said. "He makes others better. He can get to the line. He can finish in the paint and he's always a threat from 3. He literally can do almost everything there is to do out there. He's been a great leader for us."

Irving added 27 points and Bruce Brown had 23 for Brooklyn, which bounced back after a loss to Dallas on Saturday ended its eight-game win streak.

The Spurs closed the fourth quarter on a 10-0 run to force overtime, with 3-pointers by Lonnie Walker IV and Patty Mills and a driving layup by DeMar DeRozan.

"I thought they were great," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said. "Really worked hard. They have dug down deep all year and never gave up."

Spurs point guard Dejounte Murray tied the game at 108 to close regulation after initially losing the ball near the 3-point line while attempting to drive to the paint. Murray was able to gather the loose ball behind him, quickly turning and rising to hit a 21-footer with Harden defending as time ex-

pired.

"We felt like we gave up that lead too easily down the stretch," Irving said. "Just a few miscues, a few miscommunications. Just things that we want to clean up. We've just got to take this one on the chin. I don't want to call it laziness, but just our focus level wasn't matching the intensity in terms of where San Antonio was trying to get back in the game."

Brooklyn scored the first eight points of overtime to regain command and went on to win a regular-season game in San Antonio for the first time since Jan. 22, 2002.

DeRozan had 22 points and 11 assists, while Murray and Walker each had 19 points. All five starters scored in double figures for San Antonio.

Playing just their second game since being sidelined for two weeks by health and safety protocols due to COVID-19, the Spurs got off to a sluggish start against the active Nets.

San Antonio is still without Rudy Gay, Kelton Johnson, Derrick White, Devin Vassell and Quinndary Weatherspoon, who are sidelined

due to the league's health and safety protocols.

The Nets were not at full strength either, with Durant missing his eighth straight game with a left hamstring strain.

TIP-INS

Nets: Durant has not played since scoring 20 points in 33 minutes against Golden State on Feb. 13. ... Irving and Harden held up tip-off momentarily to greet and speak to Popovich. Irving first spoke to the veteran Spurs coach and then Harden joined in as the trio enjoyed some laughter during a brief conversation.

Spurs: The Spurs announced March can return to the AT&T Center beginning March 12 against Orlando. Attendance had been limited to family members and staff previously. Seating will be limited to 3,200 fans initially. ... Murray collected his 700th career assist in his 215th game with the Spurs. In franchise history, only Tony Parker, Johnny Moore, Andre Robertson, Johnny Dawkins and Willie Anderson have more assists in that span.

UP NEXT

Nets: Play at Houston on Monday.

Spurs: Host the New York Knicks on Tuesday.

Leach eager to learn subtleties of spin bowling from Ashwin, Axar in 4th Test



LONDON, MAR 2 (PTI): By his own admission, England's Jack Leach is in awe of the exploits of Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel during the pink ball Test and he is eager to learn the nuances of spin bowling from the Indian duo in the fourth and final match, starting here on Thursday.

India won the day-night third Test by 10 wickets inside two days to take a 2-1 lead in the four-match series.

Ashwin and Axar used the spin-friendly Motera pitch to great effect and picked up 18 of the 20 English wickets in the match to demolish the visitors.

"When you see players having so much success, like Ravichandran Ashwin, who has just got to 400 Test wickets and has a lot of experience in India, and Axar Patel, who has had a great start to Test cricket, of course, you try to learn from them," Leach wrote in a column for 'Sky Sports'.

"It's important not to look at it too emotionally though and think 'I just want to bowl exactly like them!'. Ashwin is right-arm, for a start, so I'm not going to bowl like him! Even Axar, he's a left-arm spinner, but he's taller than me - I can't change my height!"

The 29-year-old left-arm spinner felt the ex-

perienced Ashwin was very clever in the way he changed his seam position.

"He (Ashwin) will bowl to the same spot but the way it gets there and whether it hits the seam or hits the lacquer varies and the ball reacts very differently," Leach observed.

"Then Axar is someone who seems to present every ball the same, a squarish seam, then a few skid on and the odd one grips - that has been so effective on the wickets we've played on."

Leach is up for the challenge that awaits him in the final Test and sounded confident after picking up the wickets of top four Indian batsmen in the third Test.

"...we're all keen to learn and are excited by the challenge; you have to be because if it was all easy then it wouldn't be Test cricket and it wouldn't be as much fun when you have those good moments. It's something that I'm relishing," he said.

"I was really pleased with the way I got the wickets, lbw and they were all from straight balls, obviously the balls before spin and then you get the wicket with the straight one."

He said he will not get a better four-wicket than he grabbed in the last Test in the form of Ro-

hit Sharma, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane.

"I'm pleased with the wickets that I've taken, bowling to some of the best players in the world in their own backyard. I don't think I'll get a better four-for and I feel like I've held my own really; that gives me a lot of confidence moving forward," he said.

Leach said personally he did a bit of "soul-searching" after the embarrassing loss in the pink ball Test, insisting that adapting to conditions quickly was the key to success in the sub-continent.

"There has been a lot of talk from outside the group about pitches but for us it has not been about that at all, it's been about how we can improve. We got outplayed in the third Test, India bowled really well and, as a spinner, I've been doing a bit of soul-searching; I felt I bowled well but you have to try and find ways of being even more effective on those kind of wickets," he said.

Leach expects yet another turning pitch for the final Test and said with the red ball, it might spin a bit more consistently.

"We see it as a great opportunity to put what we've learnt into practice and come away with a 2-2 draw.

Hong Kong resumes court hearing for 47 democracy activists

HONG KONG, MAR 2 (AP): A court hearing for 47 democracy activists charged under Hong Kong's national security law resumed on Tuesday, following a marathon session that was adjourned well past midnight after one defendant appeared to collapse and was taken away in an ambulance.

The court is weighing whether to grant bail to the activists, who were detained and charged Sunday over their involvement in an unofficial primary election last year that authorities say was part of a plot to paralyse Hong Kong's government.

Less than half of the bail proceedings were heard on Monday when the court adjourned the session at about 2 a.m. The hearing resumed later Tuesday morning, although at least four defendants who were taken to the hospital in the early hours of Tuesday were not present in the morning session.

The national security law, which China imposed on Hong Kong last June in response to months of anti-government protests, makes it a crime to overthrow, seriously interfere in, disrupt or undermine Hong Kong's government.

The law, which also



criminalises acts that incite Hong Kong's secession from China, collusion with foreign powers and terrorism, has largely silenced protest in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

The 47 activists, who include prominent leaders such as Joshua Wong and Benny Tai, were among 55 arrested in January on suspicion of subversion in what was by far the biggest sweep by police since the security law's enactment. The 47 were formally charged Sunday. Authorities have not said whether the other eight will be charged.

Defense lawyers are fighting against a bid by the prosecution to

remand the activists in custody for three months while police conduct investigations, arguing that the activists should not have been charged if the case against them was not ready.

A clause under the national security law specifies that bail will not be granted to suspects unless the judge has sufficient grounds to believe that defendants will not continue to commit acts endangering national security."

Hundreds of supporters gathered outside the courthouse Monday, displaying slogans in favour of the 2019 pro-democracy protests advocating greater local autonomy. Some chant-

ed protest slogans such as Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" which the Hong Kong government has said has secessionist connotations and thus could contravene the national security law.

China has cracked down hard on such calls, demanding changes to the legal and educational systems to inculcate loyalty to the ruling Communist Party.

Hong Kong's security secretary, John Lee, defended the national security law at a webinar Monday during a UN Human Rights Council meeting.

The effect of the law is obvious and direct, he said, according to a tran-

script. Violence has dropped significantly. Advocacy of Hong Kong independence' subsided."

The 47 charged this week were involved in primaries held by the pro-democracy camp last year to determine the best candidates to field to try to win a majority in the legislature.

If the pro-democracy camp had won a majority, at least some members of the camp had plans to vote down major bills that would eventually force Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam to resign. Authorities said the activists' participation in the primary was part of a plan to paralyse the city's legislature and subvert state power.

Human Rights Watch said Hong Kong should drop the charges against the activists. The Hong Kong authorities are using the Beijing-imposed National Security Law to wrongfully charge 47 people who sought peaceful change through the democratic process, Maya Wang, senior China researcher at the New York-based organization, said in a statement.

Nearly 100 people have been arrested under the national security law. Serious offenders could face life imprisonment.

Pfizer, Oxford vaccines reduce severe COVID-19 in elderly, study finds

LONDON, MAR 2 (PTI): The Pfizer and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines for COVID-19 are highly effective in reducing severe coronavirus infection among people aged 70 years and above, according to a study.

The research, posted as a pre-print and yet to be peer-reviewed, estimated the effect of both the COVID-19 vaccines on laboratory confirmed symptomatic disease in individuals aged 70 years or older in England.

The researchers, including those from Public Health England (PHE), compared the rate of hospitalisation and deaths in confirmed COVID-19 patients aged over 80 who were vaccinated more than 14 days before testing positive, with unvaccinated cases.

Data suggests that in the over 80s, a single dose of either vaccine is more than 80 per cent effective at preventing hospitalisation, around 3 to 4 weeks after the jab, PHE said in a statement.

Evidence for the Pfizer vaccine suggests that it leads to 83 per cent reduction in deaths from COVID-19, it said. The data also shows symptomatic infections in over 70s decreased from around three weeks after one dose of both vaccines.

"Vaccination with either a single dose of Pfizer or Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccination was associated with a significant reduction in symptomatic SARS-CoV2

positive cases in older adults with even greater protection against severe disease," said the authors of the study, adding both the vaccines show similar effects.

They said the protection was maintained for the duration of over six weeks of follow-up, and there is a clear effect of both the vaccines against the UK variant of concern.

Experts say the new analysis adds to growing evidence that the vaccines are working, and are highly effective in protecting people against severe illness, hospitalisation and death.

"This adds to growing evidence showing that the vaccines are working to reduce infections and save lives," Mary Ramsay, PHE Head of Immunisation, said in the statement.

"While there remains much more data to follow, this is encouraging and we are increasingly confident that vaccines are making a real difference," Ramsay said.

However, she cautioned that the protection is not complete and it is not known yet how much these vaccines will reduce the risk of someone passing the coronavirus onto others.

"Even if you have been vaccinated, it is really important that you continue to act like you have the virus, practise good hand hygiene and stay at home," Ramsay added.

Nigerian governor says 279 kidnapped schoolgirls are freed



GUSAU (NIGERIA), MAR 2 (AP): Hundreds of Nigerian schoolgirls abducted last week from a boarding school in the northwestern Zamfara state have been released, the state's governor said Tuesday.

Zamfara state governor Bello Matawalle announced that 279 girls have been freed.

Gunmen abducted the girls from the Government Girls Junior Secondary School in Jangebe town on Friday, in the latest in a series of mass kidnappings of students in the West African nation.

An Associated Press reporter saw hundreds of girls dressed in light blue hijabs and barefoot sitting at the state Government House office in Gusau.

After the meeting, the girls were escorted outside by officials and taken away in vans. They appeared calm and ranged in ages from 10 and up.

Alhamdulillah! (God be praised!) It gladdens my heart to announce the release of the abducted students of GGSS Jangebe from captivity. This follows the scaling of sev-

eral hurdles laid against our efforts. I enjoin all well-meaning Nigerians to rejoice with us as our daughters are now safe, Matawalle said in a post on Twitter early Tuesday.

At the time of the attack, one resident told AP that the gunmen also attacked a nearby military camp and checkpoint, preventing soldiers from responding to the mass abduction at the school.

Police and the military had since been carrying out joint operations to rescue the girls, whose abduction caused international outrage.

Nigeria has seen several such attacks and kidnappings in recent years. On Saturday, 24 students, six staff and eight relatives were released after being abducted on February 17 from the Government Science College Kagara in Niger state.

In December, more than 300 schoolboys from a secondary school in Kankara, in northwestern Nigeria, were taken and later released. The government has said no ransom was paid for the students' release.

The most notorious kidnapping was in April

2014, when 276 girls were abducted by the jihadist rebels of Boko Haram from the secondary school in Chibok in Borno state. More than 100 of those girls are still missing. Boko Haram is opposed to western education and its fighters often target schools.

Other organized armed groups, locally called bandits, often abduct students for money. The government says large groups of armed men in Zamfara state are known to kidnap for money and to press for the release of their members held in jail.

Experts say if the kidnappings continue to go unpunished, they may continue.

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said last week the government would not succumb to blackmail by bandits and criminals who target innocent school students in expectation of huge ransom payments. He called on state governments to review their policy of making payments, in money or vehicles, to bandits, saying such a policy has the potential to backfire.

Myanmar police fire tear gas, rubber bullets at protesters

YANGON, MYANMAR (AP): Police in Myanmar repeatedly used tear gas and rubber bullets Tuesday against crowds protesting last month's coup, but the demonstrators regrouped after each volley and tried to defend themselves with barricades as standoffs between protesters and security forces intensified.

Myanmar authorities have escalated their crackdown on the protests in recent days, making mass arrests and firing into the crowds. The United Nations said it believed at least 18 people were killed on Sunday by security forces. Foreign ministers from Southeast Asian countries were meeting Tuesday to discuss the increasingly volatile crisis.

Despite the crackdown, demonstrators have continued to flood the streets — and are beginning to more rigorously resist attempts to disperse them. Hundreds, many wearing construction helmets and carrying makeshift shields, gathered in Myanmar's largest city of Yangon, where a day earlier police had fired repeated rounds of tear gas. They dragged bamboo poles and debris to form barricades, chanted slogans and sang songs at the police lines. They even threw banana skins onto the road in front of them in a bid to slow any police rush.

The mainly young demonstrators fled in panic each time tear gas canisters were fired but soon returned to their barricades. Videos posted on social media showed similar chaotic scenes in the Insein neighborhood of northern Yangon.

Protesters also took up their flags and banners to march through the streets of Dawei, a small city in southeastern Myanmar that has seen almost daily large demonstrations against the coup. One group of demonstrators was targeted by the security forces as it entered a narrow street on its way to pay respects at the house of a man killed

in Sunday's crackdown. Another was attacked on the main street in the city's center.

Yangon and Dawei were among the cities where security forces reportedly fired live ammunition into crowds Sunday, according to the U.N. Human Rights Office. There were reports that they also fired live rounds Tuesday, but they could not immediately be confirmed.

Some fear the junta's escalating use of force is meant to provoke a violent backlash by the demonstrators — who have largely remained nonviolent — in order to discredit them and justify an even harsher crackdown. Videos from recent days show a greater number of protesters trying to stand their ground and throw objects at the police.

"I beg the people in Myanmar not to fall in this trap, so to stay peaceful," U.N. Special Envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener said in interview with CNN, acknowledging that it was easier for her, safely away from the violence, to urge peaceful protesting. She also accused the authorities of spreading rumors about the conditions of people in detention to stir up even more anger on the streets.

The Feb. 1 coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar after five decades of military rule. It came the day a newly elected Parliament was supposed to take office. Ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party would have been installed for a second five-year term, but instead she was detained along with President Win Myint and other senior officials.

The military government has charged Suu Kyi, 75, with several offenses that critics say are trumped up merely to keep her jailed and potentially prevent her from participating in the election promised in a year's time by the military. Her party says it does not know where Suu Kyi — who has a

long history of campaigning for democracy in Myanmar — is being held.

The weekend crackdown drew international condemnation. In addition to the use of force, authorities also detained more than 1,000 people over the weekend, according to the independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Those detained included at least eight journalists, among them Thein Zaw of The Associated Press.

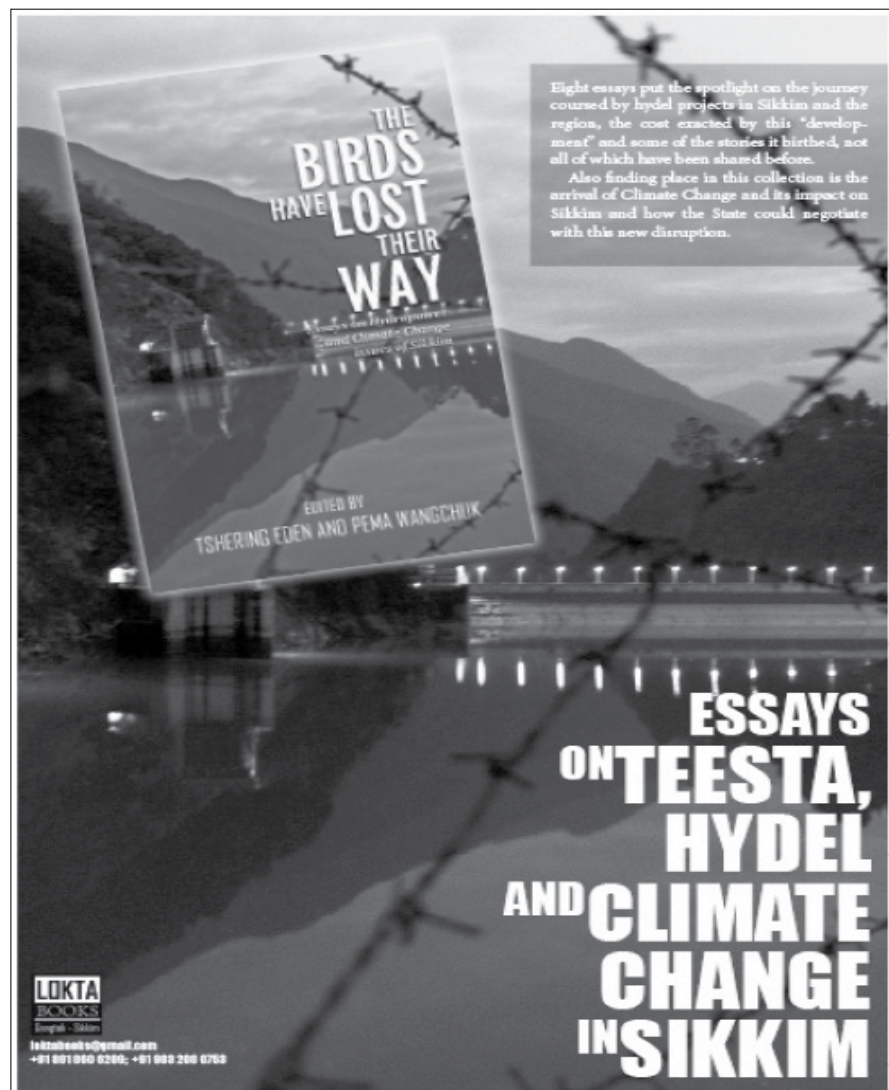
U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the use of force and arbitrary arrests "unacceptable," according to his spokesperson. The U.S., British and other governments issued similar statements of concern.

But the military has showed no sign of backing down.

The protesters and their supporters have appealed for help from abroad, but there are few prospects for major intervention. The results of Tuesday's special meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, held by video conference because of the coronavirus pandemic, were expected to be announced in the evening. But the 10-nation regional group's policy of seeking a consensus among its members makes it unlikely to take strong action.

The U.N.'s independent expert on human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, has proposed that countries could institute a global embargo on the sale of arms to Myanmar and "tough, targeted and coordinated sanctions" against those responsible for the coup, the crackdown and other rights abuses.

But any kind of coordinated action at the United Nations would be difficult since two permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, China and Russia, would almost certainly veto it. Some countries have imposed or are considering imposing their own sanctions.



Nick Jonas exits 'The Blacksmith' over scheduling issues

LOS ANGELES, MAR 2 (PTI): Singer-actor Nick Jonas is no longer set to headline the upcoming action thriller "The Blacksmith".

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the 28-year-old artiste has exited the Pierre Morel directorial after scheduling problems had delayed the start of shooting of the AGC Studios project.

AGC CEO Stuart Ford said the banner and Jonas "parted ways, amicably".

"Nick, as you can imagine, has a lot of other commitments, with his acting and his music. Under normal circumstances, he could fly in and out, go to do things over the weekend, and come back to set Monday.

"But in a COVID environment, that doesn't work. He'd have to stay in the same place for three months. With a star like Nick Jonas, it became borderline impossible to make the schedule work," Ford said in a statement.

Jonas, also member of the music group The Jonas Brothers, has previously starred in films like the "Jumanji" re-

boot series and "Midway". He will next be seen in "Chaos Walking".

Meanwhile, AGC Studios is looking to recast the film's lead.

Also starring Laurence Fishburne,

only his unique set of technological skills and the help of a brilliant, young CIA analyst Noelle Hazlitt to keep him alive.

"They seek out Mather a retired



"The Blacksmith" is based on the critically-acclaimed 2011 graphic novel from Kickstart Comics by Malik Evans and Richard Sparkman.

"When his clandestine lab is destroyed and his colleagues murdered, Wes must go on the run with

blacksmith and Wes' mentor, to guide them on a journey that keeps this improbable pair one step ahead of their pursuers," the official logline read.

Morel, best known for "Taken", will direct from a screenplay by Ben Ripley of "Source Code" fame.

Shira Haas to lead TV series about former Israel PM Golda Meir

LOS ANGELES, MAR 2 (PTI): "Unorthodox" star Shira Haas will headline an upcoming TV series about the life of former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. Titled "Lioness", the show is based on author Francine Klagsbrun's non-fiction book of the same name, reported Deadline.

Veteran singer-actor Barbra Streisand will executive produce the series, which hails from MGM/UA Television in association with Nina Tassler and Denise Di Novi PatMa Productions.

Klagsbrun's book chronicles the life and career of Meir, one of the most influential figures in the history of Israel and a prominent figure in world history.

It spans her birth in Kiev to her American upbringing in Milwaukee, her role in the formation of Israel and her rise to become the new nation's first and only female prime minister. This remarkable, and often controversial, leader was and is known as the beloved Mother of Israel.

The show is written and executive produced by Emmy winner Eric

Tuchman. Mimi Leder, who helmed the biographical legal drama "On the Basis of Sex" based on the life of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, will direct. Besides Streisand, Nina Tassler and Denise Di Novi of



PatMa production will also serve as executive producers.

Haas is one of the most accomplished Israeli actors of her generation. She found global fame after she featured in the lead role in Netflix's limited series "Unorthodox".

For her work on "Unorthodox", she became the first Israeli actor to be nominated for a Golden Globe, but lost out to "The Queen's Gambit" star Anya Taylor-Joy in the best actress miniseries or television film category.

Frank Grillo to star in action-thriller 'MIA'

LOS ANGELES, MAR 2 (PTI): Actor Frank Grillo is set to play the lead role in upcoming action-thriller "MIA".

The film, which will also feature actor Aleksander Vayshelboym of "Red Hour" fame, will be directed by Kevin Carraway.

Scott Windhauser has penned the script, reported Deadline.

Grillo will star as Jax, a man who wakes up in a precarious situation with no memory, no time to spare and everyone in the criminal world out to kill him.

With nowhere to turn, he is forced to team up with a streetwise criminal to find out who he is and realises he might not like the answers he uncovers.

Grillo, known for starring in movies such as "Warrior", "Captain America: Civil War" and "Zero Dark Thirty", will also executive produce the movie.

The project, backed by Richard Rionda Del Castro of Hannibal Media, is expected to start production later this year.

Taylor Swift calls out Netflix series for 'deeply sexist joke' over her past relationships

LOS ANGELES, MAR 2 (PTI): Taylor Swift has lashed out at Netflix after the streaming platform's series "Ginny and Georgia" took a tasteless jibe at the pop singer's dating history.

On Monday, the Grammy winner shared a screenshot of the dialogue that reads, "What do you care? You go through men faster than Taylor Swift" on Twitter: "Hey 'Ginny & Georgia', 2010 called and it wants its lazy, deeply sexist joke back. How about we stop degrading hard working women by defining this horse shit as FuNnY (sic)," Swift wrote in the caption.

The 31-year-old singer-songwriter, whose documentary "Miss Americana" premiered on the streamer last year, directly addressed Netflix for its apparent hypocrisy.

"Also, @netflix after Miss Americana this outfit doesn't look cute on you. Happy Women's History Month I guess," she added.

Swift has been forthcoming about her dating life, with her songs often sharing an insight into her relationships. She has been dating British actor Joe Alwyn for over four years.

Parineeti Chopra-starrer Saina Nehwal biopic to release in March

MUMBAI, MAR 2 (PTI): Actor Parineeti Chopra's next film, a biopic on ace badminton player Saina Nehwal, is scheduled for a theatrical release on March 26, the makers announced Tuesday. Titled "Saina", the film has been directed by Amol Gupte, who has helmed acclaimed movies such as "Stanley Ka Dabba" and "Hawa Hawaai". T-Series, headed by Bhushan Kumar, has produced "Saina".

"Presenting the inspiring story of one of India's greatest athletes, #Saina. In cinemas on 26th March," the tweet on T-Series official Twitter page read. Chopra, whose "The Girl on The Train" released last week on Netflix, shot for "Saina" in 2019.

"Saina" was earlier supposed to be headlined by Shraddha Kapoor, who exited the project due to scheduling issues. This will be Chopra's second theatrical release for March, after Dibakar Banerjee's "Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar". Also starring Arjun Kapoor, the film is scheduled to open on March 19.



SUNNY DAY! The actress, Tessa Thompson enjoys the nice weather with some shopping and lunch with a friend in Sydney, Australia.

'Ant-Man 3' won't feature rapper TI



LOS ANGELES, MAR 2 (PTI): The third installment of Paul Rudd and Evangeline Lilly-fronted "Ant-Man" series will not feature rapper TI. The development comes a day after TI and his wife Tiny were accused of sexual abuse by multiple women.

The actor, whose real name is Clifford Joseph Harris Jr, played the role of Dave, a fellow member of the crew run by Rudd's Scott Lang, in the previous two movies.

A source close to the project told Variety that TI was never slated to return, despite the implication that recent and grave allegations against him had to do with the decision.

On Monday, four women accused TI, his wife, and members of their inner circle of drugging and sexually assaulting them. At-

torney Tyrone A. Blackburn detailed the allegations of six anonymous women who claim TI, Tiny and their associates abused them, including instances of rape, drugging and kidnapping.

The lawyer sent letters to the California and Georgia attorney generals, asking them to investigate the claims. TI and Tiny have denied the allegations, calling them as "unsubstantiated" and "baseless". The third chapter in the "Ant-Man" was recently titled "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania".

Rudd and Lilly will reprise their respective characters of Scott Lang / Ant-Man and Hope van Dyne / Wasp. Veteran actors Michael Douglas and Michelle Pfeiffer are also returning for the Peyton Reed-directed movie.

Aries:
There was a time you played tug-of-war with the forces. There was a time you tried to control and micromanage everything. But the new you is perfecting the art of being in a state of flow and trusting what the Universe is sending towards you. In the words of Ramana Maharishi, "Let come what comes. Let go what goes. See what remains." Surrendering is a beautiful practice. Aries, one that promises to change the course of your life.
Tip: Remain in that state of flow.

Taurus:
It's all about the milk and honey life in the Taurus HQ. You're in the mood to up the feel-good factor and to indulge in a host of sensual experiences. That smile you're wearing reveals that you're happier than you have been in a long time. Some of you may be in the mood to up the beauty game too; to work with lotions and potions that awaken the God(dess) within you. PS: Why not turn to your favourite sustainable beauty bloggers for inspiration on how to use ingredients that are available in your own home?
Tip: It's all about the milk and honey life!

Gemini:
Listen up, Gemini! Self-doubt is not a cute look on you. So stop going back and forth on this decision. Stop listening to what other people have to say about your narrative.

This story is yours and yours alone. Make it large! The cards are pointing towards a magnificent opportunity that's on the horizon. Get the plan of action ready and take inspired action. You may or may not get a second chance.
Tip: Tick tock!

Cancer:
There are times when we allow ourselves to be in that state of yin so that inspiration can come in at the right moment. But, now is "not" such a time in your life, Cancer. It's a time to hit the accelerator button and put your plan into action. To make the most of the opportunities that are being sent your way at the moment. Remember, it's now or never. Don't waste a single moment second guessing yourself or obsessing over the idea of perfection.
Tip: Act now.

Leo:
Don't you love it when you're dropping words of wisdom and the doorbell rings at that precise moment, reaffirming your thoughts? Or when the song on the radio mysteriously answers a question you've been repeating in your mind? These coincidences are no longer bizarre. You are one with the Universe and the Universe is one with you. So remain in that space of oneness. Continue to trust the flow. You are where you need to be and you are about to call in a miracle right about now!

Tip: Remain in that state of flow.

Virgo:
You can read all the self-help books in the world, but they will never move you as much as your escapades. The cards are pointing towards the importance of direct experiences—the experiences that awakened you and brought you closer to yourself. If anything, these stories are inspiring you to put yourself out there and to let life happen to you again. So, say 'yes' to the opportunities coming your way and know that from now on, happiness will no longer be merely a concept.
Tip: Let life happen to you again.
Libra:
There are times when we carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. Fortunately, now is not such a time in your life, Libra. The Universe is offering you a leg up by way of your soul crew. So stay open to the help, support and guidance you are receiving right now. Remember, there is a fine line between codependency and interdependency. Blending teamwork with independence will help you call in a miracle!
Tip: 'Interdependence' is your magic word.

Scorpio:
Philosopher Alan Watts once said, "Man only suffers because he takes seriously what the Gods create for fun." Let these words of wisdom inspire you to embrace the spirit of play. To wear the world loosely and to throw your head back and laugh. It's true that you are not where you want to be. However, you are on your way there. Honouring the journey "and" the mundane tasks that are a part of it will make the ride much easier, Scorpio.
Tip: Wear the world loosely. Embrace that spirit of play.
Sagittarius:
What if we said your logical mind is the biggest hindrance to your spiritual growth? The cards are urging you to go beyond the mind. To trust the inner and outer signs that are being revealed to you. Your unyielding faith in the Universe will make space for miracles, Sagittarius. If you've already been connecting with your intuition, take this opportunity to go deeper. Clear out the physical and mental clutter. Make time to look within. There are big downloads that are being sent your way at this moment.
Tip: Trust the signs.
Capricorn:
You're spending way too much time in your head, Capricorn. The mental gymnastics are draining all of your energy at the moment. What if you change the approach a little? What if you decided to experience the world through your body for a change? It's time to bring a little more awareness to your physical vessel. Tune in and

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ask for a message. Coming home to yourself is going to be a big theme for you this week.

Tip: Connect with your body on a deeper level.

Aquarius:
"Surrendering is not the giving up of something. True surrender is the total acceptance of yourself. You're not 'losing' anything in the surrender, the way your society usually means that word." Wise words by Bashar (channelled by Darryl Anka) that you're being asked to reflect upon today. Here's what the Universe wants you to remember: you are perfect as you are, and you are where you need to be. So, trust what you are being led towards and know that you will soon witness a miracle in your world!
Tip: 'Surrender' is your magic word.

Pisces:
Now, if the forces could come down and tell you what you need to know, believe me, they would! But, they're a lot more creative than that, Pisces. And, so, they're sending guidance from the beyond by way of signs and symbols. Trust that there's a reason you have chanced upon a certain message and that the song that's playing on the radio is your reaffirmation. When in doubt, remember Roald Dahl's famous words, "Those who don't believe in magic will never find it."
Tip: Trust the messages that are coming through from the unseen realms.