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Summit **T**IMES

Vol 06 | Issue 295 | Gangtok | Tuesday | 23 November 2021

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RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

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TIBETAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION CENTRAL BODY TEAM ON SIKKIM VISIT "Boycott Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, raise voice against human rights violations in Tibet"

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 Nov:**

Tibetan Women's Association [TWA] central body has appealed to everyone to come together and raise their voices against human rights violations by China. They also appealed to the global community to boycott the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

A team of TWA central body consisting of president, Tenzing Dolma and general secretary, Kalsang Dolma are currently in Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference this afternoon, the TWA president thanked the Indian government and Sikkim government for extending support to Tibetan people and their concerns. She further urged Sikkim and the entire country to continue this friendly relationship with Tibetan people.

She mentioned that TWA teams have been going to different parts of the country to reach out to the people with five agendas and to appeal to everyone to raise their voice against the human rights violations in Tibet. Speaking about the



agendas, Ms Dolma mentioned that the people of Tibet have been suffering under China for the last 60 years and China has continuously been violating human rights of the people in Tibet despite criticism from the global community. She added that China has not only captured

Tibet but some other countries in Asia are still under China.

On the same, she stressed that everyone needs to come together for the freedom of all these countries and restoration of human rights. She mentioned that China is also destroying the environ-

ment by rampantly constructing dams in Tibet on water sources for many Asian nations. She added that Tibet's freedom is also in the interest of the environment and other countries.

Ms Dolma said that the 11th Panchen Lama is missing for 26 years now and no one knows

his whereabouts. She demanded the release of 11th Panchen Lama. On behalf of TWA, she appealed to the world community to boycott the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics to protest against the violation of human rights in Tibet.

The TWA general secretary stressed that

the situation in Tibet is getting worse so everyone needs to stand together to put pressure on China.

The TWA team met MP Rajya Sabha, Hishey Lachungpa this morning and was scheduled to meet MP Lok Sabha, Indra Hang Subba this evening.

Kamsel ceremony at Tholung Monastery from 24-26 Nov

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 NOV:**

The Kamsel ceremony, the sunning and airing of relics preserved at Tholung Monastery in Upper Dzongu is scheduled to be held from 24 to 26 Nov, a press release informs.

The ceremony will begin from 10 am on 24 Nov and conclude by 4 pm on 25 Nov in the presence of Gonjang Rinpoche and Minister of Ecclesiastical Department, Sonam Lama.

Devotees who wish to attend this religious event are advised to com-

ply with the following guidelines.

All devotees to strictly follow COVID appropriate behaviour; Must carry warm clothing; Must carry sleeping bags; Littering is strictly prohibited; Use of plastics is completely banned; Smoking and chewing of tobacco is strictly prohibited; and food shall be provided to all devotees.

All vehicles are to be parked at Mantam or as per the direction of district police authorities and devotees should proceed to Bey on a shared vehicle.

Two new cases, and only 11 Covid patients still in hospital in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 NOV:**

The Sunday off at the two VRD Labs in Sikkim, the only labs in which RT-PCR tests can be conducted, gave Sikkim the perception of exceptionally low numbers. Only two new cases of Covid-19 were reported in the past 24 hours, but these still came at a daily test positivity rate of 1.80% since only 109 samples were screened yesterday.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of Health Department, East and West districts registered a new case each

yesterday.

While one new case was detected in RT-PCR testing of 54 samples, the other was picked up in rapid antigen testing of 53 samples. The state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 accordingly inched up to 32,171.

Reassuringly, Sikkim's COVID-19 death toll continues to hold at 403 with no Covid death reported in the last 24 hours.

Also over the same 24 hours, nine more COVID patients were discharged from home isolation after making full recoveries. The number of fully recovered cases in Sikkim now stands at 31,318 at a recovery rate of 98.4%.

ViewPoint

The PPP model in the context of Sikkim

KAILASH PRADHAN

What is PPP [Public-Private partnership] model?

It is a manner of implementing projects where the Government partners with a player from the private sector to execute a public infrastructure project. This is done because the Government does not have the technological / financial / managerial wherewithal to execute these projects efficiently.

SIKKIM'S CONTEXT

Sikkim, from a larger perspective, is a place that is accessibility challenged because of our terrain and fragile geology. As a result we are starved for opportunities to grow and evolve in tandem with the rest of the world. However, this drawback can be considered a blessing in disguise if we were to learn from the mistakes of others: the current global development pattern has played havoc with the environment with its fundamental need for constant growth over everything else. Traditional social fabrics that provided a sense of security are also being disrupted, creating alienation, cut throat competitiveness, growing income disparity, crime, substance abuse etc. We should be asking ourselves: how can Sikkim, which is still precariously poised between these two worlds, navigate its forward journey?

There is another issue, the elephant in the room that hardly gets discussed openly, but pervades all private conversations and has now become a glaring impediment in our development process: corruption, graft and nepotism. This seems to be the one consistent thread of successive Governments. Personal greed apart, lack of stringent rules that overlook the role of money in the electoral process compounds our woes of having to live and grow in this murky environment where we cannot see beyond the next elections.

Why can't we talk about this openly? 2 things: the Government is the sole provider of livelihoods [directly or indirectly] and almost the entire population is dependent on it. That plus the a guilty Government is defensive, therefore sensitive to criticism, resulting in vindictive actions against those who dare to speak up. So we keep shut, look the other way and perpetuate this Conspiracy of Silence.

In this environment, the PPP model is fraught with danger. Private businesses being driven by profit neither have a longterm vision for Sikkim's future [they are mostly from outside Sikkim in any case] nor do they care for the land and its people. Infact, it suits them to collude in any form of graft if it means weaning a sweet deal for themselves.

WHAT IS RELEVANT FOR US?

It should not be hard to understand that our problems themselves are the opportunities by which we can catapult ourselves forward. Sweden, in the early 1900s was an impoverished country with glaring income disparity, desperately in need of housing. They turned the country around by making this an opportunity to build their capacity in engineering, architecture, construction, management as well as nurtured their local building-material industry, logistic infrastructure, energy capacity etc. Not only were their housing demands met in a relatively short time, it kickstarted Sweden's evolution into one of the most progressive countries in the world. All it took was imagination, will and a sense of responsibility for their future.

The PPP model works well for governments with a high level of integrity who have a clear development roadmap to achieve a longterm vision for its people and place. It is relevant where people have good levels of expertise and skill, like metropolitan areas elsewhere. In

places like Sikkim and the North East the PPP model robs us of the learning opportunities that are precious for our onward journey. Someone else reaps the benefit of building their capability and competence to move on further. We remain in the same place.

How do we do things so that we move away from being passive recipients of the development process towards taking ownership not only of our assets but also our problems? Unless we do so, we will remain under-confident of solving them and will forever be dependent on outside agencies. Can we look at projects from the prism of providing livelihoods which implies capacity building and therefore evolving as a people and community? How do we create a thriving private sector that is inclusive and driven by fairness towards socio-economic equity.

Approaching development as a process rather than a race, allows space to ensure that local people are at the forefront of the development agenda. Technology, planning, funding and training should support locals to evolve into a scenario where they have the capacity to solve their own problems and manage themselves with minimal outside interference. This would not only make sure that our indigenous way of life finds continuity but embraces change whilst ensuring our natural and manmade assets remain in our custody. We need a more nuanced approach of incremental growth that considers human development as, if not more important than physical infrastructure development.

Our experience with the Hydropower projects should be lesson enough, where we got taken for a ride by private players [Teesta Urja, Lanco etc.] and caused untold damage to the environment. We squandered precious learning opportunities to up our capacity, create meaningful livelihoods and not just move towards

economic self reliance but also build our technological strength and gain confidence to solve our own problems in the future. But here we are, as dependent on central largesse as ever before. This cannot be our development model. But do we have a development model? Do we even feel we need one?

Bhutan, a country ranked very low on the socio-economic index till recently, leapfrogged from the 19th century to the 21st century. Many would think Sikkim was much better off than Bhutan just a few decades earlier. How did this happen? They chose to invest heavily on human development. They also selected their development partners wisely and their partners were committed because of high levels of mutual trust. Trust is a direct consequence of integrity. How come Bhutan is ranked 24/180 in the international transparency index while India is 86/180? Its because the top leadership there is incorruptible and committed to rooting out corruption. When the top is clean, authority has respect and the entire system gets cleansed. While we may not agree with Bhutan's handling of their ethnic issues, we have a lot to learn from them as far as governance goes.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

The PPP tag has presently become a smokescreen behind which an opaque process of identifying projects and selecting dubious partners is being perpetrated. If profit driven private players are given free rein in a governance culture where public consultation is non-existent, it is we, the public who get shortchanged and suffer the longterm consequences of questionable decision making. In the new system of DBOT [design, build, operate, transfer] that the Government has enthusiastically embraced, the responsibility of deciding the brief [programme] and design of the projects has been handed over

to the contractor / private party! Even the most advanced countries with highly educated societies are wary to practice such adventurism. This sinking feeling of knowing that we are lightyears away from having a development model was a sobering wake-up call and pushed me to write this piece. Meanwhile we are expected to swallow shallow platitudes like this will create employment etc. Please, save us these low end jobs that leave us feeling like second second class citizens in our own land.

True, we may not have enough technical expertise and resources, but what is stopping us from reaching out to value aligned partners who believe in building local capacity and ownership? Partners who care about the environment and the health of the planet. Who want to help local communities stand on their own feet and become self-reliant. There are many out there who would be willing to join hands in partnerships based on alignment of shared values. Of course they would want to work with partners who have integrity and can be trusted. The question is, can we be?

In the end, Ownership is everything. It is the essence and spirit of article 371[F]: protecting Sikkim and the Sikkimese from outside vested interests. Surrendering ownership of our assets and our land, even temporarily is to yield and accept defeat, to acknowledge that we are either incapable or not worthy to be our own masters. So what if we are slower in our development journey? It is more important to find our path so that every step is a sure step that takes us in the direction that's good for us. After all, speed has no meaning if we're heading in the wrong direction.

[the writer is a Gangtok-based architect]

FAMEX/CAP at Kitam School by NDRF



SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 22 Nov:

Team 2N of E coy, 2nd NDRF conducted FAMEX/CAP at Govern-

ment Senior Secondary School, Kitam, South Sikkim, today, a press release informs.

During the pro-

gramme, different activities of NDRF like methods of control bleeding, CPR, improvised splinting, rope rescue tech-

niques, etc. were displayed followed by an exhibition of the CSSR equipment.

The event was held in

the presence of Principal, Lata Sharma, Govt Senior Secondary School, Kitam, staff, students and NDRF personnel.

100 runners and 70 cyclists take part in Serenity Ride & Run 2021

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 22 Nov:

To promote health and fitness through sporting activities among the youth, the first Serenity Ride & Run 2021 was held in a grand manner on Sunday. The Serenity Run 2021, a high-altitude endurance full marathon of 42 km, and the Serenity Ride, a mountain biking competition, received a grand applause from the participants.

The competition was flagged off from Tashi View Point, Gangtok and ended at a height of 12,400 ft at popular tourist spot, Tsomgo Lake.

The event is being organised by a Gangtok-based a rehabilitation and drug treatment centre, Serenity Home with technical support from Hill Bike and Pedal Chain. A total of 100 long distance runners and 70 cyclists participated in the event. The event was flagged off by national boxing coach and Dronacharya Awardee, Sandhya Gurung.

In her address, Ms Gurung appreciated the initiative for providing a



big platform for athletes and to encourage youngsters of the State to take up sports and healthy way of living. She encouraged the organisers to continue such events and expressed her hope that such activities would benefit sports and athletes in the near future.

Serenity Home founder, Udai C Rai shared his plans to take the event to the national and international level in future. He expressed that the main objective of the initiative is to inculcate the spirit of competition

amongst the youth by providing them a new platform and also to test the physical endurance of athletes from the region. He further expressed his hope that such an event would also highlight the potential and talent of local athletes and encourage youth towards sports and fitness.

The organisers presented cash prizes to top three participants in marathon and cycling, while all participants received medals and certificates for complet-

ing their races.

In men's cycling event, Riyant Rai finished in first position with a timing of 2 hours 59 minutes and 69 seconds, while Phuntshok Sherpa [3:01:25] and Adrian Khawas [3:07:51] stood on the second and third positions respectively.

Likewise, Phurba Deki Sherpa came first with a timing of 4 hours 34 minutes and 52 seconds in women's cycling event leaving Lhamu Doma Bhutia [5:28:36] in second and Jamu Bhu-

tia [6:00:09] in third positions respectively.

In men's marathon, Suraj Raj Subba came first with a timing of 3 hours 48 minutes and 17 seconds, while Rohit Harijan [4:02:26] and Jayanta Das [4:08:52] finished on second and third positions respectively. Similarly, Anjali Subba stood first with a timing of 4 hours 28 minutes and 50 seconds in women's marathon and Phurba Tamang [4:55:14] and Bharati Gurung [6:01:00] came second and third respectively.

Participatory Rural Appraisal held at Lower Borong

BIKASH CHETTRI RAVANGLA, 22 Nov:

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Ward Sabha under Borong Phamtam GPU is underway as part of the People's Plan Campaign to prepare Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GDDP) for the financial year 2022-23.

The PRA started on

20 Nov from Sada and Phamtam Ward, and has reached Lower Borong Ward today. The program was attended by Panchayat President,

Borong Phamtam GPU, Rupa Gurung, Panchayat Vice President, T.B Pradhan, Lower Borong Ward Panchayat, Rajee-na Gurung, Phamtam Ward Panchayat, Duk

Maya Rai, Sada Ward Panchayat, D B Rai, officials, GPK staff, and field staff of Agriculture Department.

During the Ward Sabha, PRA exercise was carried out in order to prepare the people's plan under Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GDDP) financial year 2022-22.

SKM rejects Chamling's allegations as false claims born from frustration and disconnectedness

Summit Report Gangtok, 22 Nov:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha has strongly condemned allegations of misgovernance leveled against the State Government by Sikkim Democratic Front president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling.

An SKM press release issued today counters that the SDF president envies the opportunities created by the SKM Government and the support that these have generated for the party and its government. This envy was driving the SDF president to spread misinformation and rumours.

The release advises Mr Chamling to come forward with proof of his allegations instead of speaking online from his room.

The SKM press release, issued by its vice-president [press & publicity] Birendra Tamling, claims that the SKM government has filled new energy among creative and dedicated youth of Sikkim and created opportunities for them not only in government but in the private sector as well.

The release adds

that Mr Chamling should not take out his frustrations on seeing youth getting self-reliant in the State.

The release goes on to allege that Mr Chamling does not have the moral right to speak for the youth after having siphoned away the opportunities of Sikkim's youth during his government to his own children and relatives.

As for the allegations of the underprivileged getting sidelined, the release invites Mr Chamling to look at the number of homes built for this segment of the population under the Sikkim Garib Awaj Yojana.

The release goes on to allege that the SDF government had distributed false allotment orders to misguide the people around elections and that many of those people were still running around to get benefits promised to them on these scripps.

As for Mr Chamling's allegations that the SKM Government has not done enough for the health sector, the release invites him to compare what he did in his 25 years in office and what SKM has managed in two and a half years.

Legal awareness on gender issues at Nandugaon



SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 22 Nov:

A one day legal awareness program on gender issues was organized by the Sikkim State Commission [SSC] for Women funded by the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India at Village Administrative Center, Nandugaon, South Sikkim on 19 Nov, a press release informs.

Zilla Adhyaksha, Tsheringdem Bhutia at-

tended the program as chief guest and spoke on the various schemes of the state government available to women.

The objective of the program was to sensitise members of 20 self-help groups on gender issues like domestic violence act, sexual harassment of women at workplace act 2013, and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

The Resource Per-

sons for the program were Director, Passang Tshering Bhutia, Dishtri NGO, South Sikkim and Member Secretary/Project Director, Yousa Lachenpa.

The program was also attended by Chairperson, Chungkipu Lepcha, Chairperson, Roma Tamang, SCPCR, member, Babita Limboo, Panchayat President, Panchayat members, Project Coordinator and staff of the Women's Commission.

SKM denies allegations of assaulting and intimidating former panchayat



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 22 Nov:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha workers from Melli constituency today refuted allegations of assault leveled against them by former Panchayat member, Purna Kumar Karki, of Sadam-Suntaley. Mr Karki, addressing a Sikkim Democratic Front press conference yesterday, had alleged that the SKM party office bearers had assaulted and forcefully stopped him from participating in a tender process recently.

Addressing a press

conference here on Monday, SKM's Melli CLC general secretary, PB Gurung, condemned these allegations as false and baseless.

He claimed that while an "incident" did occur on the day, there was no assault or intimidation.

Mr Gurung contended today that a discussion took place when the former panchayat refused a proposal to do the contract work in question in partnership.

Mr Gurung went on to state that the allegation

of police not cooperating and exerting pressure to "settle" the case were also false and baseless. He alleged that Mr Karki has been trying to create misinformation with fabricated claims.

Likewise, SKM ward president, Tilak Karki, also condemned the allegations and alleged that the former panchayat has been trying to politicize the issue on the directions of some other people. He suggested that the SDF raise the issue only after finding out the facts.

First SGAY house in Rangang-Yangang inaugurated

NAMCHI, 22 NOV (IPR):

Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), Indra Hang Subba inaugurated the first Sikkim Garib Awaj Yojana (SGAY) house under Rangang-Yangang Constituency at Lower Sripatam, today.

The MP was accompanied by Advisor (State Medicinal Plant Board), Dichen Phigu Bhutia, APS (South), Anjeeta Rajalim, ADC Development (Ravangla), Sunil Mothey along with BDOs and panchayats.

At the outset, MP inaugurated newly completed SGAY house of Dhan Prasad Limboo at Lower Sripatam Ward. Further, he also handed over a total of 13 SGAY house keys to the beneficiaries of the constituency.

Addressing the gathering, Indra Hang Subba extended his congratulations to all the beneficiaries for their new houses and also thanked the concerned department



and other stakeholders for the successful completion of the houses within the stipulated time frame. He said that the houses built under the scheme is a validation to improving the living standard of the society especially that of the weaker section.

The MP apprised about the state government efforts to set up a campus of Sikkim University in Yangang. He said this campus shall soon be functional as it is the utmost priority of the government.

Additionally, he spoke about various developmental projects, new schemes and policies introduced by the state

government for the upliftment and sustenance of rural livelihood in Sikkim.

Sunil Mothey highlighted the aim and objectives of SGAY which is to enhance the living standard of the poor and marginalised section of the society. He informed about the status of the completion of SGAY houses in the first phase of the scheme and also spoke about the facilities and amenities provided under the scheme at an estimated construction cost of Rs 17 lakh.

The event also saw a brief presentation on the technical report of SGAY house by Mungpia Enterprises.

SFA women's wing chairperson meets Sikkim team in-training in Jorethang

SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 22 Nov:

Chairperson of the women's wing of Sikkim Football Association, Chungchung Bhutia, today visited the State's senior women's team which is currently under training at Jorethang in South Sikkim.

The team is preparing for the Women's Senior National's scheduled to begin 25 November at Khozikode in Kerala.

The Sikkim squad is

scheduled to play three matches, with its first qualifying round match on 29 Nov against Jammu & Kashmir followed by one on 01 December against Arunachal Pradesh and the third on 03 December against Rajasthan.

The Sikkim team has already completed one round of training at Guards Ground in Gangtok, and had moved to Jorethang for acclimatization.

The 23-member team, including officials, will leave for the tournament on 24 November.

Apart from giving the footballers a pep-talk, Ms Bhutia also cleared the team's lodging dues in Jorethang.

Meanwhile, the SFA joint secretary, Arjun Rai, thanked the Chief Minister for providing to and fro flight tickets for the team along with pocket money for all players, a first for a Sikkim team.

Transport Minister launches online SNT bus booking facility FLAGS OFF 18 NEW SNT TRUCKS

SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 22 Nov:

Transport Minister Sanjit Kharel officially launched Online SNT Bus Booking Portal here at the office of Secretary Transport Department on Monday. The Minister also flagged off 18 new SNT Tata Ultra T.16 trucks from SNT complex at Jalipool later in the afternoon. Both events were organized under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav under the Transport Department.

The Minister was accompanied by Advisor, ST Bhutia and Chairman, Basant Tamang of Transport Department along with Secretary

Transport Department, PN Sherpa, SNT General Manager-cum-STA Manish Pradhan and other senior officials of the department.

The Minister expressed his gratitude to the Chief Minister for his direction and support in this initiative. He further congratulated the officials of Transport Department on coming up with the Online SNT Bus Booking Portal and further thanked the team of NIC from Sikkim and Uttarakhand for their technical support to develop this facility.

The facility will help people in saving their time and energy

by booking their tickets online and is in keeping with today's digital world, said Mr Kharel. He added that this facility would also help in decongestion at the booking counter.

The Minister mentioned that this online booking facility has been started with two SNT buses plying on the route of Gangtok to Siliguri on trial basis and the department is working on covering all inter-state and intra-state SNT buses.

He mentioned that both manual and online facilities are available at present for the convenience of the people. The department will reach out to the people to create awareness on

this online booking facility, he added.

Speaking to media persons after flagging off 18 new SNT Tata Ultra T.16 trucks from SNT complex at Jalipool, the Minister thanked the CM for sanctioning funds to buy 15 vehicles for SNT in the last financial year and now 18 vehicles.

"There is a deep sentiment for SNT since the Chogyal era, so the department has been working to revive its original blue color in its vehicles from the existing green on the direction of the CM," he expressed.

He said that officials and staff of the department have been working hard to take SNT to its new heights.

Anju Tamang in Indian team to play in Brazil

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 Nov:

The Indian Women's Senior National Team left yesterday to play in a 4-nation international tournament in Brazil where it will lock horns with Brazil, Chile and Venezuela. These matches are part of the team's

preparation for the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022.

Sikkim's Anju Tamang is part of the Indian squad and shares that it was dream come true for her to in Brazil against teams from South America.

An SFA press release

conveys what the Head Coach, Thomas Dennerby, believes to be the main objective of the Brazil tour - putting in "three good performances" and receiving "the opportunity which will allow us to evaluate ourselves."

"This tour and everything we have been doing

in the past two months is about the preparation for the AFC Women's Cup which kicks off in January. It is all about finding out whether we are doing the right things on the pitch and evaluate our performances in each and every department," Dennerby stated prior to the team's departure.

This will be the sixth country the Indian women's team will be touring this year.

The team had been camping in Jamshedpur with infrastructural and logistical aid from the Government of Jharkhand over the last four months.

SKM sports wing organizes anti-drug awareness in Chandmari

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 Nov:

The sports wing of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party organized an anti-drug awareness programme here at Kiduk community hall in Chandmari on Sunday.

The programme was organized in association with Kalyan Samaj, Vatika Samaj, Gyonten Yargay Kiduk Dromo [Thompoo and Khumpo] Khiduk, Sangam Samiti, Saathi Group, Chandmari Women's Association, Chandmari Sporting Club and Sunakhari Samiti. Advisor to the CM, Rohit Raj Maharaj was present as the chief guest.

In his address, Rohit Raj Maharaj, who is also the chief patron of SAARTHI, highlighted activities of SAARTHI in creating awareness against drug abuse among students in school, colleges and universities and at grassroot level.

The organization has been working to control and eradicate substance abuse from the state by creating mass awareness, he said further informing that the organ-



isation is also preparing a documentary film on this issue. He added that SAARTHI is ready to extend financial assistance and other support for rehabilitation of a drug user.

Chairperson Khadi & Village Industries Board, Chung Chung Bhutia appealed to all to work together to address this issue. She expressed that all frontal organisations of SKM are always ready to help out the youth in every way.

SKM sports' wing

president, Rinzing Wangyal Chopel urged representatives of different organisations to play an important role in checking if any drug peddling is going on in their areas and to support youths to come out from addiction. He said that drug addiction is a disease so it is important for the family to support users and help them defeat addiction.

While sharing his experience during the programme, Freedom Facility founder, KC Nima spoke about the

importance of support from family, friends and society for any person to defeat addiction and come back into the mainstream. He appealed to people not to judge but to help the person.

An entrepreneur Rojan Rai said that fitness is the best alternative in keeping children and youth away from substance abuse. He urged youths to be mentally strong to stay away from any addiction. Likewise, DB Luitel spoke about SADA

and NDPS Acts and other legal issues related to drug addiction.

Earlier, in her welcome address, Councilor Chandmari, Chungkela Lepcha urged everyone to come together to address the issue of substance abuse. She mentioned that awareness among youths on substance abuse is very important in order to lead them onto a productive and healthy path. The programme ended with the vote of thanks presented by Jiwan Lama.

ICAR-KVK East conducts training on Rabi crop production

GANGTOK, 22 NOV [PIB]:

As part of the Azaadi ka Amrut Mahotsav, ICAR-KVK East Sikkim organized a training programme on "Doubling Farmers' Income through Rabi Vegetable Production" on 20 Nov at Thanka Martam village.

Dr. Ramgopal Laha, Joint Director I/c, ICAR, Sikkim Centre, attended the programme in presence of Panchayat Member, Martam Nazitam GPU, Nimden Bhutia.

About 43 farmers from Thank-Martam, Dhankutey and Lingtam village. Farmers were given hands-on training on vegetable nursery management, improved production practices of rabi vegetable crops and nutrition gardening. Healthy seedlings of cole crops and quality seeds of vegetable pea, cabbage and cauliflower also distributed to the farmers during the programme.

The programme was initiated with the welcome address by Dr. J. K. Singh, Incharge KVK-East Sikkim, Ranipool and highlighted the important activities of KVK East Sikkim for the welfare of Farm-

ing community of East district.

He also elaborated about the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav programme. He further requested the farmers to opt the improved production methods to increase the production and productivity of the crops along with scientific livestock management practices.

Dr. R. Laha, Joint Director, ICAR, Sikkim Centre encouraged the farmers to work together with scientific institution for the real growth of farming community through integrated organic farming system (IOFS) in the hill farming system. He further requested the farmers to adopt the scientific production practices as there are farmers' friendly technologies have been developed by ICAR Sikkim Centre, Tadong and other research institutes in the state to double their income through the organic farming system.

Dr. Tshering L Bhutia, Scientist (Horticulture), ICAR, Sikkim Centre, Tadong talked about the organic cultivation of rabi vegetable and requested to make use of available moisture in the paddy field for vegetable cul-

tivation.

Boniface Lepcha, Subject Matter Specialist (Horticulture), KVK-East Sikkim talked about the Nursery Management of Vegetable Crops. He also stressed on low cost water harvesting structure Jalkund for life saving irrigation during winter season. Anushree Gogoi, Programme Assistant (Home Science), KVK East Sikkim taught about the importance of Nutrition Garden. Linden Bhutia, Panchayat president, Thanka Martam GPU apprised the ICAR-KVK East Sikkim, Ranipool and ICAR Sikkim Centre, Tadong for the constant support through training and inputs support through quality seeds, biofertilizers, biopesticides and biopesticide, piglets, backyard poultry birds for the sustainable farming system in the village. The programme was followed by Video Show on Integrated Farming System model and ended with a vote of thanks delivered by Anushree Gogoi. The programme was successfully coordinated by Boniface Lepcha, SMS-Horticulture, ICAR-KVK East Sikkim.

BAS official nominated Team Manager of Indian Badminton team



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 Nov:

General secretary, Badminton Association of Sikkim (BAS) and Executive Member of the Badminton Association of India (BAI), Sukanta Das, has been nominated by president BAI, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, as the Team Manager of

the Indian Badminton team which is participating in the Total Energies BWF World Badminton Championship to be held at Palacio de los Deportes in Huelva, Spain from 12 to 19 Dec 2021, a press release informs.

Sukanta Das, has also in the past, had the

honour to lead the Indian Badminton team as the Team Manager during the South Asian Games, Korean Open, Japan Open, and the BWF Junior World Championship held at Myanmar.

The Badminton Association of Sikkim has extended best wishes to him and Team India.

Vaccine plan for children, additional doses within 2 weeks: Sources

NEW DELHI, 22 NOV [NDTV]:

COVID-19 inoculation for children is among several important points to be discussed at a meeting of the government's top advisory group on immunisation in the next two weeks, sources have said.

The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation in India, or NTAGI, will also draw up a comprehensive plan for giving additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine to adults, people with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Vaccination for children with comorbidities would likely start in January, sources said, asking not to be identified. By March, all other children are likely to become eligible for vaccination, they said.

The subject of addi-

tional doses for adults is significant as some nations have also called for solid protection against the highly contagious coronavirus with booster doses.

Children are seen as priority group for vaccination now, with schools starting on-site classes in several states depending on the pandemic situation. After the devastating second wave that killed lakhs in India, concerns exist on whether children would be vulnerable next, since adults have already been vaccinated at least with one dose if not both.

A debate on whether additional or booster dose is needed is going on among policymakers and scientists around the world. The US is set to become the latest country to widen COVID-19

booster eligibility beyond those with comorbidities, the elderly and other high-risk groups.

Many scientists tracking the data believe it's the right time for the move; however, some have expressed misgivings, since the original vaccines are still holding up well against severe disease and death among the general population.

Boosters have been a contentious issue for medical experts. An independent panel advising the US Food and Drug Administration, or USFDA, in September initially voted against having boosters available for everyone, demanding narrower criteria. This time around, the US media has reported the USFDA is set to broaden booster dose eligibility without convening the outside experts.

Child Parliament held at Sankhu Radhu Khandu

GYALSHING, 22 NOV [IPR]:

A day long workshop on formation of the 1st Village Level Child Parliament amongst the newly constituted Bal panchayats of child friendly GPU, 23-Sankhu Radhu Khandu was held today. The workshop was organized by the District Child Protection Unit, West Child Protection Scheme, Women and Child Development Department, Gyalshing on 22 Nov, at the said GPU.

The main objective of the Workshop was to give an advocacy platform for the chil-

dren to promote their rights.

The programme was presided over by District Child Protection Officer, West, Bhawana Subba and other dignitaries from different GPUS of West Sikkim, Tez Kumar Thapa, Child Protection Officer of Anuglya and DCPU staff attended the said programme.

DCPO, West briefly highlighted regarding child rights and other child related issues.

The children/ Bal panchayats elected their representatives Ananya Chauhan as Prime Minister, Bir Bdr. Chettri as Deputy Prime Minister, Supriya Pradhan as Min-

ister of Parliamentary Affairs and Rinchen Tamang as Finance Minister.

The oath taking ceremony was conducted today in the presence of Zilla Panchayat of Sangkhu Hee Teritorial, Panchayat President of Gitang Karmatar, Sopakha, Maneybong and Sangkhu Radhu Khandu GPU.

Tez Kumar Thapa, Child Protection Officer, Anuglya Darjeeling, in his technical session explained the roles and responsibilities of Child Parliamentarians, who had been invited as a Resource person for the said programme.

Bring Home the Hivre Bazaar Experience

Invest social capital and the results will be good

A remote village in Maharashtra easily outshines the more celebrated civil societies of the country's metros. And they do so not because of the brilliance of one man alone, although that helped, but because the residents were willing to push their realities towards a brighter tomorrow. The village experienced mass exodus during the severe drought in 1972. Even as the village folk abandoned agriculture and moved out, those who could not move, stayed back and fell into despondency and alcohol.

And that is how things remained there for slightly over a decade and a half until, in 1989, Popatrao Baguji Pawar, the only postgraduate in the village contested for the post of gram panchayat sarpanch and won. He started by getting the around 22 illicit liquor shops in the village closed. That is a lot of liquor shops for a village with a population of less than 1,000 people! But it was clearly about more than shutting down these outlets, because he had to also reform the alcoholics, realizing early that for any plan to resuscitate the village, the people will have to participate. Alcohol, as Sikkim will know well, does not lend itself very well to collaborations, well, at least collaborations that help build something. This task achieved, Popatrao managed to secure bank loans for farmers and started rainwater harvesting, water conservation and management programs, which involved building 52 earthen bunds, percolation tanks, 32 stone bunds and nine check dams. This was a huge undertaking and partly inspired by what Anna Hazare had pulled off at Ralegan Siddhi, barely 35 km away from Hivre Bazaar. Before his first term as Sarpanch was over, reverse migration started as families started returning home. Today, the village, with its 235 families and an overall population of 1,250, has a monthly per capita income of Rs 30,000, up from Rs. 830 in 1995, plus it has 60 families with an annual income of over 10 Lakh rupees.

What Popatrao did right was that he learned from other examples, was willing to invest in the people, trust them and work with them. What the villagers of Hivre Bazaar provided was a willingness to contribute, persevere and share.

They traded well in social capital.

Social Capital is counted in one's relationship with others in a community in which citizens have a tendency to engage in civic affairs, band together in voluntary groups, come together for collective action. Social Capital buys better futures because it engages the present in collaborative undertakings for a shared aspiration for a better future, encourages sharing of ideas, fosters debate and resolution. When people collaborate, they do not just clean jhoras and undertake plantation drives, they talk, they discuss, they disagree and while they respect discordant ideologies, believe in the community. In the present times of multiple sources of information, it becomes difficult to sift the rumour from the news and judge inspired intent from ulterior motives. A society that can keep up lucid lines of communication becomes the best informed because it keeps the doors open to all points of views and un-layers developments and issues more intelligently. In doing so, the society discovers common intent, and intent modulated in unanimity can only be good. This Social Capital, once it has matured into an instinctive assembly of concerned citizens, becomes what we know as a Civil Society. Social Capital charts the course for collective development and a Civil Society keeps the journey on the right path.

The Hivre Bazaar experience needs to be attempted more widely; it might be in Maharashtra, but the model can be replicated anywhere in the world, and surely in Sikkim as well.

Why are COVID cases in India decreasing, despite the low double vaccination rate?

RAJIB DASGUPTA
THECONVERSATION.COM

COVID continues to slow down in India. The festival season, which includes Durga Puja and Diwali where large groups of Indians gather, did not lead to a surge in cases. Epidemiological modellers had earlier predicted a third wave peaking during October and November.

Daily new cases have dropped from a peak of more than 400,000 per day in May 2021 to currently below 10,000 cases a day.

And while antibody tests might give us a clue as to why, we can't get complacent about vaccination rates.

SIGNALS FROM RECENT ANTIBODY TESTS

In India, "serosurveys" have been regularly conducted since the pandemic began. This is where blood is tested from large numbers of people to check for the presence of COVID antibodies – the things our bodies make after being infected with COVID or receiving a COVID vaccine.

The fourth national survey in July reported 67.6% of people across India had COVID antibodies present, providing them with a level of immunity against the virus. At that time 24.8% of people were immunised with a single dose of vaccine

and 13% were fully vaccinated. This means a large proportion of those with antibodies had actually been infected with COVID.

Delhi reported 97% of people were positive for antibodies in October, including 80% of children. Some 95.3% of those immunised with the Indian version of the Astrazeneca vaccine Covishield had developed antibodies, as did 93% of those who received India's own vaccine Covaxin.

The state of Haryana's serosurvey in October found antibodies in 76.3% of adults, upwards of 70% among children, and negligible difference between urban and rural populations.

Kerala had the lowest sero-prevalence of 44.4% in the fourth national serosurvey in July, but in October it had risen to 82.6% among the general population and 85.3% among residents of urban slums.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR A "THIRD WAVE" IN INDIA?

A third wave in India is an unlikely scenario with these high levels of antibodies, and vaccination levels continuing to rise.

It's now recognised those who become naturally infected with COVID and recover before vaccination develop better immunity than those who only have

antibodies from vaccination. This is referred to as "hybrid immunity" – those with previous SARS-CoV-2 infection mount unusually potent immune responses to the COVID vaccines.

The Centers for Disease Control in the US notes that both the fully vaccinated individuals and previously infected groups have a low risk of subsequent infection for at least 6 months.

Results of the most recent national serosurvey in India reflect the seroprevalence during the third week of June 2021; the Delta-led second wave had bottomed out at that time. Though about 30% of the population remained susceptible, subsequent serosurveys and an absence of any post-festival surge confirm continuing high levels of protection.

"Patchwork vaccination" areas, where there are pockets of low coverage of vaccination among areas with high levels of coverage, run the risk of small outbreaks, but are unlikely to be large enough to be of any major epidemiological concern.

With high seropositivity among adults, many of the new cases can now be expected among children, particularly with the reopening of educational institutions. But high levels of immunisation among teach-

ers (upwards of 90%) and the emerging evidence that reopening schools has not been associated with significant increases in community transmission, are reassuring.

The WHO's chief scientist said in late August that India seems to be "entering some stage of endemicity". Endemic refers to the constant presence or usual prevalence of a disease in a population within a geographic area, where disease spread and rates are predictable.

Could a new variant, such as the Delta Plus subvariant first detected in India in April 2021 threaten the current relative stability? While it has been said it might be about 10-15% more transmissible than the Delta variant, the evidence from Europe suggests it has not yet been able to establish any dominance over Delta.

IS VACCINATION ON TRACK?

Of India's 1.4 billion people, 26.9% are fully vaccinated and 54.9% have received at least one dose so far. But 35 million fewer women have been vaccinated compared to men and independent analyses show tribal and rural districts continue to lag.

There are two current targets: achieving 90% coverage of the first dose by the

end of November and timely administration of the second dose. While the first is likely to be achieved, there are widespread reports of complacency regarding the second dose. A campaign is underway to encourage people to complete the schedule.

Delivering the billion plus doses has convincingly demonstrated vaccine confidence. But convincing people to take a vaccine when for many it seems like the risk has passed is a difficult task. Prior infection-induced immunity protects against reinfection but this acquired immunity wanes over time. Hence the recommendation for COVID vaccination for all eligible persons, including those who have been previously infected.

Districts with relatively low vaccine coverage require greater outreach efforts to reduce prevailing inequities. India's immunisation program has demonstrated its strengths in polio eradication and measles-rubella elimination campaigns. We need to borrow some of those techniques to ensure all Indians are protected against COVID.

[The writer is Chairperson, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University]

World Cup 2022: if Qatar can silence critics with a strong tournament, an Olympic bid could be next

LEON DAVIS & DAN PLUMLEY
THECONVERSATION.COM

When FIFA picked Qatar as the first Middle Eastern country to host the men's football World Cup in 2022, some considered it a bold gamble. Others thought it was a mistake – including former FIFA President Sepp Blatter.

Since then, controversy has never been far from a mega-event which is now less than a year away. Aside from allegations of bribery during the bidding process, there have been serious concerns raised about human rights, with particular focus on the migrant workers building the new stadia.

Whether these issues will ultimately dissuade supporters from travelling to Qatar in late 2022 remains to be seen. The organisers will certainly not want a repeat of what happened when Qatar hosted the IAAF World Athletics Championships of 2019, which took place in half empty stadia.

Football has more global appeal than athletics, of course, and so far both Qatar and FIFA remain bullish that millions of fans will travel to the Gulf from all over the world. The event is certainly "unique" in sport event terms and that may drive fan interest. No expense has been spared by Qatar to deliver this unique experience, that is for sure. They have certainly spent big in the lead up to the tournament.

Even as early as 2010, estimates of the total cost for Qatar were in the region of US\$65 billion (£48 billion) – a different level to the then record-breaking US\$14 billion which Russia spent hosting the tournament in 2018. More recent reports, however, cite costs closer to US\$300 billion.

The reason for such staggering sums is not just grandeur. The actual stadium costs, at around US\$10 billion, are low in relation to the overall estimated total. The bulk of the money has been spent on infrastructure and transport projects in the country. Some of these were planned anyway, with the forthcoming tournament merely accel-

erating developments.

DIFFERENT GOALS

There is also a bigger picture at play here. In many ways, it has never been about the money for Qatar, one of the richest countries in the world.

The primary gains Qatar is seeking are non-commercial, with international relations at their heart, and an opportunity to introduce itself to billions of people across the world. This has led to accusations of "sportswashing". This can be defined as using sporting events as a way of seeking legitimacy or improving reputations and has been used in the context of Qatar 2022 given the controversies cited above.

Despite the negative press, Qatar will be encouraged by its latest foray into major international sporting events, including the inaugural Qatar Grand Prix in Formula One. The race was the first of a three-part Middle-East finale to the F1 season which also includes races in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi. This could help place Qatar on a comparable level to its Arab neighbours in another very marketable sport.

Events like these, alongside the 2022 men's World Cup, are designed to provide a legacy both socially and culturally – a legacy which creates national identity and places Qatar as a legitimate actor on the world stage.

Yet although money may be no object to the

hosts, one organisation hoping to make some is FIFA. Their entire business model is geared around a successful World Cup. Russia 2018 helped FIFA to generate record revenues of US\$6.4 billion, much of which is spent on "education and development", and it will be hoping for similar takings from Qatar 2022. In the same way, FIFA's (widely condemned) proposals to hold the tournament every two years are largely driven by the desire for more income.

So while the goals for Qatar and FIFA are different, both parties need the rest of the world to play ball. It's worth bearing in mind that to make this happen, the majority of men's domestic professional football leagues have altered their schedules to allow the 2022 competition to be staged, for the first time ever, in the months of November and December.

If the timing works, and Qatar's non-commercial plans are achieved, it will then surely aim to become a regular major player in the sports event hosting market – so expect to see a bid to host a future Olympic Games. Money again here will be no object. Qatar will no doubt put on a show for the World Cup. A show that it hopes the rest of the world will be watching.

[Leon Davis is Senior Lecturer in Events Management, Teesside University; Dan Plumley is Senior Lecturer in Sport Finance, Sheffield Hallam University]



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Will meet PM Modi, discuss BSF jurisdiction and Tripura violence: Mamata Banerjee

Mamata Banerjee wondered why the human rights commission was "not taking a note" of the ongoing use of brute force in Tripura. Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said she will be meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi during her visit to Delhi, and raise issues concerning enhancement of BSF jurisdiction as well as "widespread violence" in Tripura.

Ms Banerjee also said she may not join the dharna being staged by TMC MPs in protest against "attack on party workers" in Tripura, but will surely express solidarity with them.

Hitting out at Amit Shah, the TMC supreme said the Union home



minister "is yet to show courtesy" and meet the TMC MPs, who had been seeking an audience with him over the violence in Tripura.

"During my visit to Delhi, I will be meeting the prime minister. Apart from various state-related matters, I will be rais-

ing issues concerning the enhancement of BSF jurisdiction as well as Tripura violence," she told reporters before leaving for Delhi.

Ms Banerjee wondered why the human rights commission was "not taking a note" of the ongoing use of brute

force in the northeastern state.

"The chief minister of Tripura (Biplab Deb) and his government are defying the SC's directive. They have to reply to common people. I will appeal to the higher judiciary to act against his government as per law," she said.

The Supreme Court has asked the Tripura government to ensure that no political party in the fray for the coming local body elections "is prevented from pursuing its electoral rights in accordance with law, and from campaigning in a peaceful and orderly manner.

Staley's "Champ" by her side for No. 1 Gamecocks at Atlantis

PARADISE ISLAND, BAHAMAS (AP): Dawn Staley brought more than her top-ranked South Carolina team to the inaugural women's Battle 4 Atlantis.

Her best pal — 4-year-old dog Champ — is alongside her as she walks the resort with fans recognizing him by name, in the locker room and even at news conferences. The only place Champ hasn't joined Staley is on the sidelines during the tournament, where the Gamecocks play No. 2 Connecticut for Monday's championship.

"On the road I have a certain routine, and it's a routine that doesn't involve Champ because he really doesn't come on the road," Staley told The Associated Press with Champ sitting on her lap.



"So my routine changed a little bit, but I welcome it because he's just such a great boy.

"He's patient. I mean, he's easy, he's easy to get along with. And he's always by my side."

Champ — who has his own Twitter account and is named after the Gamecocks' 2017 NCAA tile run — joined them for last March's Southeastern Conference Tournament in their home

state but had never flown nor ventured outside the U.S. He remains in the locker room during games and has attended two news conferences, sitting attentively on a front-row chair with as-

sistant coach Lisa Boyer after Saturday's Buffalo win.

"After (that game) and all those turnovers we had, it's good to go back to the room and just have somebody to comfort you, because that wasn't how we wanted to play," Staley said.

Staley brought Champ because her usual dog-sitters were attending the tournament. Event founder and director Lea Miller-Tooley, who brought her own English cream golden retriever Hudson, helped work through the Bahamian Ministry of Agriculture for approval.

"It's Dawn's baby. I understand how important that dog is," Miller-Tooley said. "So there was no way I was not going to have that dog travel down here."

34 children among Odisha's 171 new COVID-19 cases

BHUBANESWAR, NOV 22 (PTI): Odisha on Monday reported 171 fresh COVID-19 cases, including 34 children, which took the tally to 10,47,174 while one new fatality pushed the coronavirus death toll to 8,394, a health department official said.

The daily COVID-19 cases in the state dropped below 200 after a week. While 205 infections were detected on Sunday, 239 on Saturday, 242 on Friday, 229 on Thursday, 226 on Wednesday and 206 on Tuesday.

The new cases were reported from 21 districts while nine others did not report any new infection. The rate of infection among people in the 0 to 18 years age group stands at 19.88 per

cent on Monday against the previous day's 21.95 per cent.

Of the new cases, Khurda district of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, reported the highest of 76 new infections, followed by Sambalpur (13) and Cuttack (10).

One fatality was reported from Balasore district, he said, adding that 53 other COVID-19 patients have so far died due to comorbidities.

As 171 people tested positive out of 58,104 samples tested on Sunday, the daily test positivity rate (TPR) stands at 0.29 per cent. The TPR was 0.40 per cent on Sunday, 0.41 per cent on Saturday, 0.42 per cent on Friday, 0.39 per cent on Thursday,



and 0.37 per cent on Wednesday.

The state currently has 2,226 active COVID-19 cases, while 10,36,501 patients have recovered from the highly infectious disease in-

cluding 271 on Sunday.

Odisha has thus far conducted over 2.32 crore sample tests including 58,104 on Sunday. The state's positivity rate stands at 4.49 per cent.

Over 1.43 crore people have so far been fully vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccine in the state, the data released by the Health and Family Welfare department said.

Austria enters nationwide lockdown to fight soaring cases

VIENNA (AP): Austria went into a nationwide lockdown early Monday in a desperate effort to contain spiraling coronavirus infections.

The lockdown in the Alpine nation comes as average daily deaths have tripled in recent weeks and some hospitals have warned that their intensive care units are reaching capacity. The lockdown will last at least 10 days but could extend to 20, officials said. People will be able to leave their homes only for specific reasons, in-

cluding buying groceries, going to the doctor or exercising.

Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg also announced last week that Austria will introduce a vaccine mandate as of Feb. 1. The details of how the mandate will work aren't yet clear, but the government has said that people who do not adhere to the mandate will face fines.

Schallenberg apologized to all vaccinated people on Friday, saying it wasn't fair that they had to suffer under the

renewed lockdown restrictions. Earlier, Austria had tried out a lockdown just for unvaccinated people but it did not slow infections enough.

"I'm sorry to take this drastic step," he said on public broadcaster ORF.

Not quite 66% of Austria's 8.9 million people are fully vaccinated, and inoculations have plateaued at one of the lowest rates in Western Europe.

Austria is among

several Western European countries where infections are rising rapidly and where there are concerns that vaccination rates are insufficient to hold off a winter surge at hospitals.

Thanks largely to inoculations, hospitals in Austria are not under the same pressure they were earlier in the pandemic, but many are still straining to handle rising numbers of COVID-19 patients while also attempting to clear backlogs with exhausted or sick staff.

Austria's new lockdown is its fourth since the pandemic began and comes as the country has struggled without success to stop spiraling case numbers. On Friday, it reported 15,809 new infections, an all-time high.

Christmas markets, restaurants and most stores are closed for at least 10 days, while kindergartens and schools will remain open for those who need them, but all parents were asked to keep their children at home if possible.

Bengal assembly speaker to decide on Mukul Roy's disqualification plea



The High Court, on September 28, had asked the Speaker to take a decision on the plea for disqualification against Mukul Roy by October 7.

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Monday expressed hope that West Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee will take a decision on the petition for disqualification of Mukul Roy as a member of the House on the claim that he has defected to the Trinamool Congress (TMC) after being elected on a BJP ticket.

A bench comprising Justices L Nageswara and

Hima Kohli was hearing two separate appeals filed by the Assembly Speaker and the Secretary and the Returning Officer of West Bengal Assembly against the Calcutta High Court's order.

The High Court, on September 28, had asked the Speaker to take a decision on the plea for disqualification against Mr Roy by October 7.

The Top court, which did not issue notice on the appeals, took note of the submissions of senior advocate A M Singhvi, appearing for Mr Banerjee,

that the disqualification plea is scheduled for hearing on December 21 before the Speaker.

"We hope that the Speaker proceeds with the matter on December 21, 2021 and decides the same in accordance with law," the bench said and fixed the case for hearing in January next year.

Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari had on June 17 had filed the petition before the Speaker seeking disqualification of Mr Roy as a member of the Assembly, claiming that he had defected to the TMC.

Arunachal logs single COVID-19 case, six recoveries



ITANAGAR, NOV 22 (PTI): Single-day COVID-19 recoveries surpassed fresh cases in Arunachal Pradesh, as six more people recuperated from the disease while only one person tested positive for the infection, a senior health official said here on Monday.

As many as 54,929 people have been cured of COVID-19 so far in the northeastern state, including six on Sunday, the official said.

The COVID-19 recovery rate now is 99.42 per

cent while the active percentage dipped to 0.07, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the frontier state remained at 280 as no new fatality was reported in the last 24 hours, he said.

Arunachal Pradesh currently has 38 active COVID-19 cases.

Tawang district has the highest number of active cases at 9, followed by the Capital Complex Region com-

prising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas (8), West Kameng (5) and East Siang (4), the SSO said.

So far 11,96,026 samples have been tested for coronavirus in the state, including 172 on Sunday, Jampa said, adding that the positivity rate is 0.58 per cent.

State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung said that a total of 13,81,862 people have been inoculated so far in the state.

Trinamool MPs Picket Amit Shah's office over Tripura crackdown

TRIPURA VIOLENCE: The MPs in the delegation included Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, Kalyan Banerjee, Sougata Roy, and Dola Sen, among others.

New Delhi: Over a dozen Trinamool MPs sat on a dharna outside Home Minister Amit Shah's office in the national capital today protesting the alleged police brutality against their party workers in the BJP-ruled Tripura.

The MPs in the delegation included Derek O'Brien, Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, Kalyan Banerjee, Sougata Roy, Dola Sen, among others. Alleging repeated instances of violence, the party decided to take the matter to Delhi and had sought an appointment with Amit Shah.

However, they were denied a meeting with the Home Minister.

On Sunday, Tri-

namool Youth Congress president Sayoni Ghosh was detained by Tripura Police for allegedly spreading ruckus during a public meeting of Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Deb.

The party said she was attacked by BJP goons when she was taken to a police station in Agartala for questioning.

Ms Ghosh was accompanied by other party leaders including MP Sushmita Dev, Kunal Ghosh and Subal Bhowmik. The party said all of them were attacked inside the East Agartala women police station. Six supporters were injured in the violence, the party said.

"@Bjpbiplab has become so UNABASHEDLY BRAZEN that now even SUPREME COURT ORDERS

DOESN'T SEEM TO BOTHER HIM. He has repeatedly sent goons to attack our supporters & our female candidates instead of ensuring their safety! DEMOCRACY BEING MOCKED under @BJP4Tripura #NotMyINDIA," Trinamool National general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, who is also Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew, had tweeted.

The BJP has been categorical in its denial of the allegations.

Ms Ghosh was later formally arrested, accused of attempt to murder and creating enmity between people.

There have been reports of a string of violent incidents in Tripura as the Trinamool Congress is trying to gain foothold in the state ahead of the 2023 assembly elections. The party is contesting the Tripura civic polls, due on November 25.

ISL: Chennaiyin FC face Hyderabad FC in opening test

BAMBOLIM (GOA), Nov 22 (PTI): Two-time winners Chennaiyin FC will begin the 2021-22 Indian Super League campaign against Hyderabad FC here on Tuesday with a new coach, new captain and renewed hopes of a turnaround after a poor run in the previous season.

The team has undergone a revamp. Apart from new coach Bozidar Bandovic, CFC have also signed five new foreign players along with some promising Indian talent and will expect to start on a strong note after having secured only three wins in the 2020-21 season.

However, it is easier said than done with a confident Hyderabad side expected to be a well prepared and tough opponent.

In an early jolt for Chennaiyin, they will be without the services of the influential midfielder Rafael Crivallero as he had 'pain' and is being monitored by the team's medical staff.

"He has pain. The medical staff are monitoring him and we are trying to find what the



problem is. He trained a couple of days ago, but had to walk off. Germanpreet Singh is out as well for tomorrow's game," CFC head coach Bandovic said at a virtual media interaction ahead of the opener.

He further said the team was well prepared and that he was not looking too far ahead, preferring to take it game by game.

"I would go game by game. First game first. We will like to go game by game and try to be in

the top four," the coach said when asked about the team's strategy.

The club's assistant coach Syed Sabir Pasha had said during a recent interaction that they were confident of an improved show and felt the squad appeared to be settled heading into the tournament.

New captain Anirudh Thapa has been a key member of the CFC squad for a few years now and will look to lead from the front, hoping the new foreign recruits

and the Indian stars pull their weight as the team aims to bounce back.

Chennaiyin have signed a handful of foreign players including Polish striker Lukasz Gikiewicz, who is expected to sharpen the attack and bring in goals, which the team missed in the season gone by.

Hyderabad FC, on the other hand, will aim to break into the play-offs after having missed out narrowly last time. Coach Manuel Roca will be hoping the team

continues the good run and the signing of Bartholomew Ogbeche from Mumbai City FC gives the forward line more teeth.

Ogbeche, Edu Garcia and Juanan will be the key players for the team and their performance will have a bearing on the fortunes in a long season.

Marquez's men got the better of CFC in both the matches last season and Ogbeche & Co will look to cash in on a rather weak opposition defence.

(Match starts at 7.30 PM.

Poole, Wiggins have 30-point outings, Warriors beat Raptors



SAN FRANCISCO (AP): Jordan Poole had his second straight 30-point performance with 33, Andrew Wiggins added 32 points and seven rebounds, and the Golden State Warriors beat the Toronto Raptors 119-104 on Sunday night with Stephen Curry's supporting cast taking pressure off the reigning scoring champion.

Poole shot 10 for 13 with eight 3-pointers and became the first Warriors player aside from Curry with consecutive 30-point outings since D'Angelo Russell did so in three in a row from Dec. 27, 2019-Jan. 12, 2020.

Curry scored just 12 points but had eight assists after sitting out a 105-102 win at Detroit on Friday night to rest his sore hip on the second night of a back-to-back. Curry began 1 for 7 and finished 2 of 10 from the floor.

"The scoring balance means that teams can't throw everything at Steph," coach Steve Kerr said. "That's what was happening last year. Teams were throwing everything they had at Steph."

Wiggins made six 3s, knocking down his first five shots for 14 early points. Golden State started 9 for 14 to build a 27-9 lead late in the

opening quarter. The Warriors (15-2) never trailed in winning their fourth straight and 11th in 12.

"We all know what Wiggins is capable of," Poole said.

Pascal Siakam scored 21 points and Fred VanVleet had 17 points and seven assists for the Raptors.

VanVleet's back-to-back 3-pointers midway through the fourth pulled Toronto within 103-93 before Golden State called a timeout with 7:16 to play. The Warriors then stayed safely ahead the rest of the way.

"It's great to have everybody on the roster contributing and understanding that every night's going to be different and they just have to stay ready," Kerr said.

The Raptors had won four of the previous five meetings with the Warriors.

TIP-INS

Raptors: VanVleet was 3 for 12 from deep and the Raptors 15 of 37 from 3-point range. ... F Scottie Barnes grabbed 13 rebounds but shot 3 for 11. ... Toronto has dropped 15 of the last 17 on Golden State's home floor. The Raptors are 6-4 on the road but 1-3 against the Western Conference.

Warriors: Two-way G

Chris Chiozza scored 11 points over 29 minutes off the bench. His teammates gave him a standing ovation. ... G Andre Iguodala sat out a third straight game nursing a tender right knee while Gary Payton II was out as he continues to recover from surgery on his right hernia. ... Otto Porter Jr. returned from sitting out a game protecting a foot injury and scored 15 points off the bench to go with five rebounds. "Everybody is buying in to what we're trying to do," Porter said. ... Golden State has scored 100 or more points in every game — the only NBA team to do so.

ESPORTS EXTRAVAGANZA

The Warriors and Riot Games announced Sunday that Chase Center will be host to the 2022 League of Legends World Championship Finals premier esports event — and Toronto will serve as a semifinal host city.

Kerr sported a League of Legends shirt during his pregame media session.

UP NEXT

Raptors: At Memphis on Wednesday night continuing a six-game road trip.

Warriors: Host the 76ers on Wednesday night.

James ejected after bloodying Stewart, Lakers beat Pistons



DETROIT (AP): LeBron James was ejected for drawing blood from Isaiah Stewart's face, sending the superstar to the locker room early in the third quarter and leaving his teammates to pick up the slack.

Anthony Davis and Russell Westbrook did that in a big way.

Davis had 30 points, 10 rebounds and two big blocked shots late on rookie Cade Cunningham. Westbrook contributed 26 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds, leading the Los Angeles Lakers to a 121-116 comeback victory over the Detroit Pistons on Sunday night.

"Everybody's level went up when LB came out," Davis said.

The 20-year-old Cunningham, the No. 1 overall pick in the draft, had 13 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists to become the youngest player in franchise history with a triple-double.

James' Flagrant 2 foul ended his night after his left elbow and hand appeared to make contact with Stewart's face when they were tangled up while boxing out for a rebound.

Detroit's center, who was called for a foul before James hit him, had to be held back more than once to keep him separated from the NBA superstar and was also ejected.

"I don't think he should be facing anything from the league," Pistons coach Dwane Casey said. "He didn't get off the floor in time, and the league will have to decide about that, and I thought that was why he was ejected from the game."

Westbrook was assessed a technical after the officials reviewed the play and the fallout from it, determining he was an "escalator," while there was pushing, shoving and trash

talking.

All parties were relieved that an all-out melee wasn't witnessed as it was on Nov. 19, 2004, when the Pistons and Indiana Pacers had a brawl that spilled into the stands.

Davis praised players, coaches and security for keeping the peace.

"Everybody did a great job trying to deescalate the situation," he said. "You never want it to get to that point like 17 years ago."

After calm was restored on Sunday night, Detroit closed the third quarter strong and led 99-84 entering the fourth.

"Up and until that point, we're still trying to figure each other out," Los Angeles coach Frank Vogel said.

Westbrook and Davis both scored in double figures in the final quarter, leading a rally that gave

the Lakers a win to reach .500 this season.

Detroit had the ball with 5.9 seconds left with the chance to potentially tie the game, but Hamidou Diallo turned the ball over and Davis made free throws to seal the victory.

"We had 27 assists going into the fourth quarter, which put us in a position to win, but we stopped moving the ball," Casey said. "We didn't have a single assist in the fourth quarter."

James had 10 points and five assists in his second game back in the lineup. After missing eight games with an abdominal strain, he played Friday night in a 130-108 loss at Boston.

"Everyone in the league knows LeBron isn't a dirty guy," Davis said. "As soon as he did it, he looked back and told him, 'My bad.'"

THE CLOSER

Westbrook had 15 points, six assists and

five rebounds in the fourth quarter.

"His offensive determination to attack was something that was very welcome and hopefully is a momentum-builder for him as well," Vogel said.

TIP-INS

Lakers: Carmelo Anthony scored 18 points. ... Dwight Howard had 13 points, making a career-high two 3-pointers. ... Los Angeles will host Detroit next Sunday night.

Pistons: Diallo had 17 points and Frank Jackson had 15 points. ... Guard Killian Hayes missed the game with a thumb injury. ... Cunningham joined Hall of Famers Grant Hill and Dave DeBusschere as Detroit rookies to have a triple-double in their first 11 games with the franchise.

UP NEXT

Lakers: Play at New York on Tuesday night.

Pistons: Host Miami on Tuesday night.

Sports minister wants sanctions after French soccer violence

PARIS (AP): French sports minister Roxana Maracineanu said domestic soccer needs a "radical and immediate" reality check following crowd trouble in Sunday's league match between Lyon and Marseille, the latest in a series of violent episodes.

"What happened in Lyon is unacceptable," Maracineanu said.

The match was halted after a fan struck Marseille player Dimitri Payet on the head with a bottle filled with water in the fourth minute.

"Dimitri Payet has my full support," Maracineanu said. "We cannot allow players to be assaulted in this way. Such acts should result in an automatic stoppage of games at the very least."

Similar incidents have marred domestic soccer since the start of the season, many of them involv-

ing Marseille, and the French league said they are "destroying the image of the league in France and internationally."

In August, a match between Nice and the 1993 European champion was abandoned after fans threw projectiles and invaded the field. Payet was also hit by a bottle in that game and threw it back at the supporters. Players and staff members were also involved in a brawl. Nice was subsequently deducted two points, with one point suspended.

Earlier in the season, Montpellier fans threw projectiles at Marseille players with Valentin Rongier sustaining a cut to his lip. In September, Angers and visiting Marseille supporters invaded the pitch and fought.

According to L'Equipe newspa-

per, four people, including the man who threw the bottle at Payet, have been arrested following Sunday's match.

The French league condemned the attack on Payet, adding that he was also on the receiving end of "insults of a discriminatory nature."

Ahead of Monday's emergency meeting of its disciplinary commission, the league said security at matches is the responsibility of the host club and local authorities.

Other clubs have been affected by crowd trouble this season.

In September, fans invaded the pitch in Lens in the northern derby with Lille, and fighting broke out in the stands. During a game between PSG and Lyon, a teenager was injured by a seat thrown.

In October, a match between Saint-Etienne and Angers was delayed for about an hour because of a pitch invasion and flares being thrown onto the pitch before kickoff.

Jobs lost, middle class Afghans slide into poverty, hunger

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN (AP): Not long ago, Ferishta Salihi and her family had enough for a decent life. Her husband was working and earned a good salary. She could send several of her daughters to private schools.

But now, after her husband lost his job following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, she was lined up with hundreds of other Afghans, registering with the U.N.'s World Food Program to receive food and cash that her family desperately needs just for survival.

"We have lost everything. We've lost our minds," Salihi said after her registration was complete. With her was her eldest daughter, 17-year-old Fatima, whom she had to take out of school. She can't afford to pay the fees at a private school, and the Taliban so far are not allowing teenage girls to go to public schools.

"I don't want anything for myself, I just want my children to get an education," Salihi said.

In a matter of months as Afghanistan's economy craters, many stable, middle-class families like Salihi's have plummeted into desperation, uncertain of how they will pay for their next meal. That is one reason the United Nations is raising alarm over a hunger crisis, with 22% of the population of 38 million already near famine and another 36% facing acute food insecurity - mainly because people can't afford food.

The economy was already in trouble under the previous, U.S.-backed government, which often could not pay its employees. The situation was worsened by the coronavirus pandemic and by a punishing drought that drove up food prices. Already in 2020, nearly half of Afghanistan's population was living in poverty. Then the world's



shutdown of funding to Afghanistan after the Taliban's Aug. 15 seizure of power pulled the rug out from under the country's small middle class. International funding once paid for much of the government budget — and without it, the Taliban have largely been unable to pay salaries or provide public services. The international community has not recognized Taliban rule, demanding the militants form a more inclusive government and respect human rights.

International aid also fueled projects around the country that provided jobs, most of which are now on hold. The country's banks are cut off from the international banking system, further snarling the private sector. The country's economy is estimated to have contracted 40% in just three months.

Hospitals are seeing increasing numbers of emaciated, malnourished children, mostly from the country's poorest families who were already barely getting by. Now families that have seen their once-stable livelihoods wrecked also find themselves with nothing and must scrape for ways to cover costs of food, rent and medical expenses.

Salihi's husband once made around 24,000 Af-

ghanis (\$264) a month working in the logistics department at the World Bank's office in Kabul. But after the Taliban took power, the World Bank halted its projects. The 39-year-old Salihi said her husband was told not to come to the office and he hasn't received his salary since.

Now she is the family's only source of income. One of her neighbors has a business selling nuts, so they give her bags of nuts to shell at home and she then sells the shells to people who use them to burn for fuel.

Her husband, she said, spends his day walking around the district looking for work. "All he can do is measure the streets with his steps," she said, using an expression for someone with nothing to do.

The U.S. and other international donors are funneling money to Afghanistan for humanitarian aid through U.N. agencies, which ensure the money doesn't go into the coffers of the Taliban government. The main focus has been on two tracks. The U.N. Development Program, World Health Organization and UNICEF are working to directly pay salaries to doctors and nurses around the country to keep the health sector from collapsing.

The WFP, meanwhile, is providing direct cash aid and food to families, trying to keep them above water.

The WFP has had to ramp up its program dramatically. In 2020, it provided aid to 9 million people, up from the year before. So far this year, that number has risen to nearly 14 million, and the rate has risen sharply each month since August. Next year, the agency aims to provide for more than 23 million people, and it says it needs \$220 million a month to do so.

It's not just the poorest of the poor, usually based in rural areas, who need help. "There's a new urban class of people who up until the summer would have been drawing a salary ... and now are facing hunger for the first time," said Shelley Thakral, the WFP spokesperson for Afghanistan.

"People are now having to scavenge for food, they're skipping meals and mothers are forced to reduce portions of food," she said.

Last week, hundreds of men and women lined up in a gymnasium in a west Kabul neighborhood to receive a cash distribution - 3,500 afghanis a month, about \$38.

Nouria Sarvari, a 45-year widow who was waiting in line, used to

work at the Higher Education Ministry. After the Taliban came to power, they told most women government employees to stay home. Sarvari said she hasn't received a salary since and she's struggling to keep food on the table for her three children still living with her.

Her 14-year-old son, Sajjad, sells plastic bags in the market for a little cash. Sarvari says she depends on help from neighbors. "I buy from shopkeepers on credit. I owe so many shopkeepers, and most of what I receive today will just go to paying what I owe."

Samim Hassanzwai said his life has been overturned completely over the past year. His father and mother both died of COVID-19, he said. His father was an officer in the intelligence agency and his mother was a translator for an American agency.

Hassanzwai, 29, had been working in the Culture Ministry but hasn't gotten a salary since the Taliban came to power. Now he's jobless with his wife and three children as well as his four younger sisters all dependent on him.

"I had a job, my mother had a job, my father had his duties. We were doing fine with money," he said. "Now everything is finished."

been able to eliminate delta completely once it's arrived, New Zealand is in a better position than most to tackle it."

The traffic light system is designed to indicate where outbreaks are putting pressure on the health system. A green designation would impose few restrictions, orange would require more mask wearing and distancing, while red would limit gathering sizes even with vaccination certificates. Ardern said Auckland would initially enter the new system under a red light, while other regions would enter under red or orange.

Opposition lawmaker David Seymour, who leads the libertarian ACT Party, said the government should have reopened sooner but had been delaying in order to get its vaccine passport system operational.

Ardern had previously announced that a border around Auckland which has stopped most people from leaving the city will be removed on Dec. 15, allowing Aucklanders to travel over the Christmas holiday period but raising fears among some health experts that it will cause the virus to spread more rapidly throughout the country.

Health minister tells Germans: Get vaccinated or get COVID



BERLIN (AP): Germany's health minister said Monday that the rapid rise in coronavirus cases means it's likely everyone in the country who isn't vaccinated will have caught COVID-19 by the end of the winter — and some of those will die.

Official figures showed more than 30,000 newly confirmed cases in Germany over the past 24 hours — an increase of about 50% compared to one week ago. Hospitals have warned that ICU capacities are nearly exhausted, with some pa-

tients having to be transferred to other clinics far away.

Health Minister Jens Spahn urged Germans to get vaccinated, including with booster shots if their first round of inoculation occurred more than six months ago, to reduce the risk of serious illness.

"By the end of this winter pretty much everyone in Germany (...) will have been vaccinated, recovered or died," Spahn told reporters in Berlin.

He acknowledged some had described this view as cynical. "But it's

true. With the highly contagious delta variant this is very, very likely and that's why we are recommending vaccination so urgently," said Spahn.

Germany expects the European Union to approve vaccines against COVID-19 for children aged 5-11 at the end of the week, he said. School-age children have among the highest infection rates in the country.

The EU will begin shipping vaccines adjusted for younger children on Dec. 20, with Germany initially getting 2.4 million doses, Spahn said.

Russia's coronavirus deaths still hover near all-time highs

MOSCOW (AP): Russia's coronavirus death toll was still hovering near all-time highs Monday, but the number of new infections continued to decline. The state coronavirus task force reported 1,241 COVID-19 deaths, down from the pandemic's record of 1,254 recorded last week.

The task force also reported 35,681 new confirmed cases, reflecting a steady downward trend since early November when the daily numbers topped 41,000, the highest level since the start of the pandemic.

The surge in deaths comes amid low vaccination rates and lax public attitudes in Russia toward taking precautions. About 40% of Russia's nearly 146 million people have been fully vaccinated, even though the country approved a domestically developed COVID-19 vaccine — Sputnik V — months before most of the world.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that on Sunday he got a booster shot of Sputnik Light, a single-dose version of Sputnik V that he received in the spring. Putin said he was feeling fine and felt no side effects.

The Kremlin has delegated the power to introduce restrictions to regional authorities depending on the local situation, and many provinces across Russia have tightened restrictions, allowing access to public places only to those who are immunized or test negative for the virus.

Kazan, the central city of the Russian province of Tatarstan, on Monday became the first in Russia to start de-

manding QR codes proving vaccination, past illness or a negative coronavirus test on public transport.

About 500 people were denied access to public transport in the city of 1.2 million, and a conflict between a passenger and controllers led to a brief suspension of service on one of the city's tram lines.

The Russian Cabinet has submitted new legislation that would restrict access to many public places, as well as domestic and international trains and flights, to those who have been fully vaccinated, have recovered from COVID-19 or are medically exempt from vaccination. The legislation, which is set to take effect early next year, has already triggered protests across the country.

In total, Russia's coronavirus task force has reported over 9.3 million confirmed infections and 265,336 COVID-19 deaths, by far the highest death toll in Europe.

Some experts believe the true figure is even higher. Reports by Russia's statistical service, Rosstat, that tally coronavirus-linked deaths retroactively reveal much higher mortality. They say about 462,000 people with COVID-19 died between April 2020 and September of this year.

Russian officials have said the task force only includes deaths for which COVID-19 was the main cause, and uses data from medical facilities. Rosstat uses wider criteria for counting virus-related deaths and takes its numbers from civil registry offices where registering a death is finalized.

Auckland lockdown to end as New Zealand tries new virus tack

WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND (AP): Bars, restaurants and gyms can reopen in Auckland from early December but customers will be required to show proof they've been fully vaccinated, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said Monday.

The announcement removes the last remnants of a lockdown that began in the nation's largest city in August. It also signals a new phase in New Zealand's response to the pandemic, in which people around the country will need to be fully vaccinated in order to participate in anything from getting a haircut to watching a concert.

Ardern said New Zealand would move into a new pandemic "traffic light" system based around the use of vaccine passports from late Dec. 2.

The system will mark an end to the lockdowns which New Zealand used effectively to completely eliminate virus outbreaks during the first 18 months of the pandemic, but which failed to extinguish an August outbreak of the more contagious delta variant.

Ardern last month set an ambitious target of getting



90% of all eligible people across each of 20 health districts fully vaccinated before moving to the new system.

But although the vaccination rates will fall short of that target by early December, Ardern said it is time to make the move anyway. Currently about 83% of New Zealanders age 12 and over are fully vaccinated, but the rate in some health districts is as low as 73%.

The government has faced increasingly belligerent protests against vaccination requirements and pandemic restrictions. And opinion polls show support for Ardern and her liber-

al government has slipped since they won a landslide election victory just over a year ago, although they remain more popular than their conservative opponents.

The current outbreak appears to have stabilized somewhat with about 200 new infections reported each day, most of them in Auckland. About 85 New Zealanders are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, and the nation has reported just 40 virus deaths from a population of 5 million since the pandemic began.

"The hard truth is that delta is here and it is not going away," Ardern said. "And while no country to date has

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AN ETERNAL STAR! Actress Eternals actress Salma Hayek was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles.

Hitmakers BTS stamp their authority on American Music Awards

NEW YORK (AP): South Korean superstars BTS were crowned artist of the year at the American Music Awards on Sunday, brushing aside challenges from Taylor Swift, Drake and The Weeknd as they took home a total of three awards and teamed up with Coldplay for a raucous "My Universe" and closed the show with "Butter."

"Seven boys from Korea, united by love for music, met the love and support from all the armies all over the world," said BTS' RM after the group won their artist of the year for the first time. "This whole thing is a miracle. Seriously, we would never take this for granted."

The band was also named favorite pop duo or group and got the favorite pop song award for "Butter."

The show celebrated the best popular music for a second pandemic year with a mix of live and pre-taped performances. Silk Sonic's Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak kicked off the awards on a funky, R&B and pre-taped note with their "Smokin Out the Window" and Jennifer Lopez pre-taped her "On My Way" from her upcoming romantic comedy "Marry Me."

An earlier scheduled performance of "Butter" by BTS and Megan Thee Stallion was scrapped after the rapper cited personal reasons for dropping out Saturday. She turned out to be a big winner: named favorite female hip-hop artist, her "Good News" winning for favorite hip-hop album and her "Body" was crowned favorite trending song, a new award this year.

Olivia Rodrigo came into the night with a leading seven nominations but only took home the crown for favorite new artist of the year. "Writing songs is my favorite thing in the whole world and I am so grateful for everyone who has embraced my music," she said.

Rodrigo lost favorite pop album to



Taylor Swift's "evermore." In a taped speech, Swift told her fans: "I'm so lucky to be in your life." Swift also won for favorite female pop artist, giving her a career total of 34, the record for the most awarded artist in AMA history.

Rodrigo performed her hit "traitor" live on a stage covered with flowers and Carrie Underwood and Jason Aldean brought a little country to the stage when they sang their pre-taped duet "If I Didn't Love You." With a little help from Julieta Venegas and Tainy, Bad Bunny performed their hit "Lo Siento BB :/."

Among live performances, Italian band Måneskin made their U.S. awards show debut with their viral hit "Beggin." Chloë of Chloe x Halle floated down onto the stage to perform her hit debut single as a soloist "Have Mercy," swinging her hair and twerking. Mickey Guyton got loud cheers while singing her patriotic song "All American" in a silvery dress, periodically screaming out "How y'all doing?"

The fan-voted awards show aired live from Los Angeles on ABC. Nominees were based on streaming, album and digital sales, radio airplay and social activity, and reflect the time period of Sept. 25, 2020, through Sept. 23, 2021.

Becky G won for favorite female Latin

artists and thanked the Latinx community. "You are not alone," she said. "We are the American dream."

Machine Gun Kelly grabbed the favorite rock artist award. "I want to accept this for all the aspiring musicians, the one who desires to play an instrument, wants to rap, wants to sing — not just the rock artists, but all the artists," he said.

Earlier Sunday, in awards announced before the show, Swift was named favorite female pop artist, Ed Sheeran got the favorite male award and Doja Cat featuring SZA on "Kiss Me More" was named collaboration of the year. Kanye West was named favorite gospel artist.

Underwood won for favorite inspirational artist and favorite female country artist and Doja Cat also won two other awards: favorite female R&B artist and her "Planet Her" was named favorite R&B album.

Luke Bryan was named favorite country artist and Bad Bunny was the favorite male Latin artist. The Weeknd was crowned favorite male R&B artist and Drake won the favorite male hip-hop artist. Gabby Barrett took home the favorite country album for "Goldmine" and favorite country song for "The Good Ones."

a cup of poison and turn into a sweet elixir. Look at it all as a part of the Leela that's unfolding, beautiful. You are not being punished. You are simply being prepared to become a vessel for the multitude of blessings that are yet to come your way.

Cancer:
As a water sign, you tend to be more sensitive than most people. As a result, you feel more deeply too and can't always tell the difference between your feelings and that of others. Given that your sensitivity is going to be a lot more heightened during the eclipse season, it is essential to draw certain boundaries around you. Start by grounding your energy first thing in the morning. A yoga session at home, a run in the park or a simple visualization technique can help you with this intention. If you feel drawn towards crystals, consider harnessing the power of lapis lazuli or tiger's eye.

LEO:
We can keep playing these ego games endlessly or we can take responsibility for our actions and bring about positive change. Do the right thing, Leo. Be the bigger person. Your inner transformation will bring about a shift in the physical. In the realm of creativity, you're

being asked to take more risks. To be as bold and fearless as can be whilst freeing yourself of the burden of how others would perceive your journey.

VIRGO:
Sometimes things work out seamlessly. At other times, they require a little more effort on our part. Today, you're being asked to get down and dirty with the work as you continue to hold the vision you are manifesting in your mind's eye. Something tells us you will soon turn your breakdown into a breakthrough.

LIBRA:
It's all about love and other intoxicants in the Libra HQ. You and your beloved are learning to keep the past where it belongs—in the past—and stay present to the magic that is being offered to you in this moment. Mutual respect and understanding have always been the key to transforming your relationship. So keep the communication game strong and know that you will only grow from strength to strength as you move forward here.

SCORPIO:
Full moons are usually about climaxes and conclusions, and the latter has been a big theme for you over the course of the weekend. Truth be told, you're still reeling from some of the cha-

Adele interview bungle leaves Australian TV reporter 'mortified'

This is the most important email I have ever missed,' Seven's Matt Doran says after failing to listen to singer's new album 30

A "mortified" Australian TV reporter has tried to explain how he bungled an exclusive interview with the singer Adele about her new album.

The host of Channel Seven's Weekend Sunrise, Matt Doran, and a crew flew to London for the chat, which was reportedly part of a A\$1m package including broadcast rights to Adele's One Night Only television special. It would have been Adele's only Australian interview.

After Doran conceded during the interview that he had only heard one track from her latest work, 30, the interview was canned. Sony is refusing to release the footage.

Doran said he simply missed the email that contained a preview of the album.

In the fiercely competitive world of Australian breakfast television, the interview would have been a major coup for Channel Seven, which is locked in an eternal battle with Channel Nine's Today in the ratings.

Doran has now admitted he missed an e-card with a preview copy of her latest work.

The oversight had many asking how he could have made such a mistake.

The entertainment reporter Peter Ford tweeted it was "pretty shoddy" but also "totally out of character" for Doran.

The writer Tarla Lambert described it as "privi-



lege personified". "There are thousands upon thousands of highly qualified, talented reporters waiting in the wings who would kill for Matt Doran's position," she wrote in Women's Agenda.

"The fact that he thought it was reasonable to rock up to an interview with one of the world's most influential women, and fail to ask her about her work, is reason enough to give one of these other young hopefuls a chance."

Doran told the Australian he was "totally unaware" he was in possession of her album, which was only publicly released on Friday, a couple of weeks after Doran's London trip.

"It was an oversight but not a deliberate snub," he said. "This is the most important email I have ever missed."

The Daily Telegraph reported that, after the exclusive interview, Adele asked him what he thought of her much-anticipated fourth studio album.

"I haven't listened to it," Doran reportedly responded. Sony had veto rights on the interview as well as

footage of Oprah Winfrey's One Night Only special with Adele.

Doran said he had "somehow" missed the email on landing in London but denies initial reports that Adele walked out on the interview.

"Adele didn't storm out," he said. "In fact, it was the polar opposite. What was meant to be 20 minutes was extended to 29 minutes.

"The majority of the chat was about the album. I told her: 'I've only had the privilege of hearing Easy on Me, but not the other tracks.'"

Doran also says he wasn't formally suspended from Sunrise, after reports suggested he'd been spoken to and suspended for two weeks.

When Doran posted to Instagram on 4 November that his imminent interview with Adele was "going to be pretty special", he didn't realise how much of a splash it would make.

Meanwhile, the ABC political reporter Matt Doran was copping some heat after being mistaken for the Sunrise star with the same name.

"Go easy on me ...," he tweeted.

Joey Morgan, Actor in 'Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse,' Dies at 28

He also starred in the comedies 'Flower' and 'Compadres.'

Joey Morgan, star of comedies Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse, Flower and Compadres, has died. He was 28.

"Joey Morgan passed away early Sunday morning. It was a shock and devastated all of us who loved him. He will be dearly missed. We hope everyone understands how painful this is for his loved ones and can respect boundaries and allow them to grieve in private," a rep for the actor said in a statement to The Hollywood Reporter. No cause of death was given.

Scouts director Christopher Landon paid tribute to the actor on Twitter, writing, "Joey Morgan came into my life nearly 9 years ago when I made Scouts. He was quiet, funny, intelligent and thoughtful. And when the cameras rolled he was magnetic. He passed today and the news is heartbreaking. I am honored to have known him."

On Instagram, Flower star Zoey Deutch posted a picture of her and Morgan with a caption that said, "Rest in peace Joey. A deep-

ly kind, talented, special person. We love you."

The Chicago-born Morgan made his acting debut in Paramount's action-comedy Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse (2015), playing the role of Augie Foster, and was one of three leads alongside Tye Sheridan and Logan Miller. The following year he was the co-lead in the Mexican-American production Compadres, a comedy in which he played a teen hacker paired up with an ex-cop played by Omar Chaparro.

In 2017, Morgan starred as the troubled teen Luke Sherman in Max Winkler's dark comedy Flower, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Morgan was praised for his performance and was selected by Indie Wire as one of Tribeca's breakout talents for that year.

Morgan enjoyed a prolific 2018, starring in the indie comedies Sierra Burgess Is a Loser and Camp Manna and making an appearance in the TBS comedy Angie Tribeca. His last major film credit came in 2020 in the sci-fi comedy Max Reload and the Nether Blasters.

ARIES:

The eclipse may have shaken a lot of things up, but it has also brought forth clarity, and that is something you are grateful for. The next stage of your life is about adopting single-minded focus and working towards the given goal. So, take action in the right direction and know the Universal forces are propelling your growth. A mantra you want to remember now and for the rest of the lunar cycle: go big or go home!

TAURUS:

The Universe wasn't punishing you, Taurus. It was merely preparing you for the big changes that are yet to come. So, instead of labeling your experiences as good or bad or ugly, make peace with them. Give them a giant kiss and thank them for all that they have taught you. Something tells us the change you have been working towards is not very far from where you are. Allow the Universe to work its magic through you.

Gemini:

Ebb and flow, ebb and flow, ebb and flow, making space for the ebb once again. The wheel is constantly turning, Gemini. Sometimes life offers us the saccharine fruits of our labour, and other times it compels us to drink