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Summit **TIMES**

Vol 06 | Issue 296 | Gangtok | Thursday | 25 November 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | RS. 5

Centre wants Sikkim to increase testing, but that is not an urgent Covid-concern

SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

National news-reports announcing that the Centre has raised concern over fall in Covid-testing rates in the State, while it might have flagged valid concerns, has once again highlighted how health situations are best understood by the States and this centralized hand-holding instinct to micro-manage is probably not the best utilization of limited resources.

Sikkim is among the 13 states which received a letter from the Union Health Secretary, Rajesh Bhushan, a few weeks back holding forth that "in the absence of sustained levels of sufficient testing, it is very difficult to determine the true level of infection spread in a geography."

The concern is valid, but the inference that states like Sikkim had slackened on testing and that this was

affecting Covid-containment is inaccurate.

While calling for more testing is not a problem in itself, a letter from the Centre diverts attention and resources, and that can be a problem.

Admittedly, testing numbers have slumped in Sikkim, but that statistic in itself is not an indication of undetected Covid in the community here.

For instance, in the episodes which had led to much speculation on WhatsApp groups here, even extensive testing of primary contacts did not lead to a surge of detection.

The reference here is to a student each testing positive at two schools in Gangtok which triggered wild speculations in WhatsApp groups on how many other students were infected.

When contacted, the Director General and Secretary, Health Depart-

ment, Dr Pempa T Bhutia, informed that while one school provided a list of 40 primary contacts, the other provided a list of 180 primary contacts.

When these primary contacts were screened for Covid a week after the feared "exposure," none of them tested positive. While all 40 primary contacts of one school showed up for testing, of the 180 listed in the other school, 112 turned up for testing. And none of them tested positive.

While there can be many reasons why now infections occurred in these two incidents, the insistence on more testing could distract from other necessary interventions to handle Covid like complete vaccination. Sources in the Health Department inform that a 40-year-old who succumbed to Covid recently had not taken even one vaccine

even as complete vaccination coverage in the State has reached 90%.

Doctors also inform that most of the hospitalisations, especially those who require admission in ICU, is among the still un-vaccinated.

Meanwhile, Dr Bhutia, when asked about the letter from the Health Ministry, confirmed that such a letter was received, and went on to assure that the fall in testing was not because of reduced capacity or intent, but because not only were symptomatic infections low, but also because there was now increased hesitancy among the people to get tested.

After the letter, however, the Director General convened a meeting with all the Chief Medical Officers and directions issued to encourage people to get tested. This, however, is eas-

ier said than done, especially since even asymptomatic cases come with containment orders. With the life returning to normal and economic activity picking up, people exposed to the virus, but not presenting any symptoms, will understandably not be too keen to get tested even if that is the medically advisable thing to do.

The planners and "notification-drafters," instead of worrying over how to get the testing numbers high enough to satisfy the Centre, could spend their time better on devising how testing-positive can be made less inconvenient.

This will be an investment of time and resources well spent because hesitancy among the people is also affecting Sikkim's response to the other health emergency it is facing - Dengue.

...turn Pg2

3/387: Sikkim daily test positivity rate dips to 0.87%

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

Sikkim's daily test positivity rate dipped down to 0.87% on Wednesday with just three new cases reported from the testing of 357 samples yesterday.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of Health Department this morning, while two cases were reported in East District, the third was from West District.

Two of the cases were picked up in RT-PCR testing of 221 samples, and one person tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 134 samples. The state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has now reached 32,179.



Even more reassuringly, no new Covid deaths were reported in Sikkim in the past 24 hours and the Covid toll here continues to hold at 403.

Also over the same 24 hours, four more people made full recoveries and were discharged from home isolation. 31,328 people have beaten the virus in Sikkim and the state now has a recovery rate of 98.4%.

Meanwhile, of the 114 active Covid cases in the State, 13 are with symptoms severe

enough to require hospitalisation and five of them are in the ICU. There is no under-18 year old Covid patient in hospital at present.

On the vaccination front, 791 people received their Covishield jabs in Sikkim on Tuesday, of whom 750 completed their vaccination schedule with the second dose and 41 received their first shot. 89.95% [4,65,076 people] of Sikkim's adult population is now fully vaccinated against the virus.

Architects of Sikkim to continue dialogue on architecture and urbanism with Gangtok 2021

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

Architects of Sikkim, an organisation, as the name suggests, of Sikkim-based practicing architects, has announced plans to organise the third edition of its decadal event, Gangtok 2021, billed as a platform for people to dialogue on how Gangtok can be made a better place to live and work in.

Gangtok 2021, AS informs, will feature a series of exhibitions, workshops and conversations for residents on the architecture and urbanism of Gangtok and its present and future. The event is scheduled to be held from 04 to 12 December. The first edition of "Gangtok" was held in 2001, and the next in 2011.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, AS coordinator Upendra Gurung explained that the exhibition and workshop will address the need for people to hold healthy conversations on how Gangtok can be made better in light of the rapid urbanisation that the capital is undergoing.

About Gangtok 2021, he informed that the exhibition will be hosted at the District Control Room at MG Marg where some of the government projects coming up in Gangtok will be showcased in collaboration with the Urban Development Department, Buildings & Housing Department and Gangtok Smart City project.

He added that this exhibition also gather

public feedback on the projects.

The same venue would also host an exhibition in collaboration with Gangtok Municipal Corporation of the IEC on blueprint applications and building bye-laws and other related information.

The Statue of Unity complex will, in turn, host an exhibition on ideas and proposals for possible public projects and infrastructure designed by practicing architects and their firms.

He added that this exhibition will share ideas and projects of local architects and project their competence and capability to take up big projects.

Also at the same venue will be an exhibition on Traditional Archi-

ecture of Sikkim along with a display of selected works of Sikkim's architects and their firms and an interactive cultural mapping of Gangtok.

Mr Gurung mentioned that workshops to be held from 10 to 12 December will be the other highlights of the event and provide space for open discussions on Sikkimese architecture - its conception, interpretation, relevance and future.

Likewise, a two-day intensive workshop that seeks to understand public aspirations about the city and strategize with a group of resource persons to work on a road-map will also be held on 11 and 12 December, he added.

He informed that the event will have experts

from Bhutan, Nepal and Delhi.

He mentioned that the outcome of workshop will shared with the people for their feedback which will then be presented to the concerned authorities.

Satellite events are also planned from 04 to 12 December. These include a photography competition in collaboration with The Confluence Collective and prose and poetry competition in collaboration with Converse Sikkim.

Architects of Sikkim founding members, Prashant Pradhan and Sanjog Prakash Raya, inform that the association was formed by a handful of local practising architects 20 years back mainly to inform people about

architecture and its importance. They mentioned that positive and encouraging feedback was received in 2001 and 2011 and received positively by the government as well.

They also stressed the need to hold discussions and dialogue with stakeholders on government proposals and master-plans. The association has been trying to play the role of a mediator to this process through this event, they added.




PRIZE MONEY

HALF MARATHON 21 KM (OPEN)

MALE	FEMALE
1 st prize : Rs 25,000	1 st prize : Rs 25,000
2 nd prize : Rs 15,000	2 nd prize : Rs 15,000
3 rd prize : Rs 10,000	3 rd prize : Rs 10,000

WE CARE RUN (13-17 YEARS)

BOYS	GIRLS
1 st prize : Rs 10,000	1 st prize : Rs 10,000
2 nd prize : Rs 7,000	2 nd prize : Rs 7,000
3 rd prize : Rs 5,000	3 rd prize : Rs 5,000





SCAN ME

RED RUN ROUTE MAP

LAST DATE OF REGISTRATION
27th NOVEMBER, 2021

Forms can be collected from MG Marg, Gangtok or the office of Sikkim State AIDS Control Society, Old StNM Hospital, Gangtok.

Helpline No : 9733300515, 7811038628, 6295145135.

For more details visit : www.sikkimsacs.com & follow Sikkim SACS on FB, Instagram & Twitter.

[@sikkimstateaidscontrol](https://www.facebook.com/sikkimstateaidscontrol) [@sikkimsacs](https://www.instagram.com/sikkimsacs) [@sikkimsacs](https://www.twitter.com/sikkimsacs)




MARATHON RED RUN

ON THE OCCASION OF
WORLD AIDS DAY on 1st December, 2021

Theme : End Inequalities. END AIDS. END Pandemics

CATEGORIES:
Half Marathon - 21 kms (OPEN)
WE CARE RUN - 10 kms (13-17 years)
Walkathon, Walk for the theme - 5 kms

Venue - MG Marg, Gangtok

[@sikkimstateaidscontrol](https://www.facebook.com/sikkimstateaidscontrol) [@sikkimsacs](https://www.instagram.com/sikkimsacs) [@sikkimsacs](https://www.twitter.com/sikkimsacs)

Centre wants Sikkim...

Dr Bhutia, when asked about the degree of hesitation among the people, informed that people are hesitating to come for dengue testing to government hospitals since their samples are screened for other ailments at the same time, including Covid.

What people developing Dengue symptoms are doing instead are going to private testing labs and getting screened on for dengue to avoid chance detection of Covid.

Dr Bhutia does not, however, dismiss the necessity for wider testing and agrees that this was required to get a proper idea on the spread of the virus in Sikkim. The Department makes regular appeals to people to get tested, and especially encouraging primary contacts to do so. Contact tracing is working well for institutions [like schools] which maintain and share proper records, and in such instances, as was seen in the case to two schools in Gangtok, extensive testing is also conducted.

That said, the lower number of testing in Sikkim is not a real concern since test positivity and hospitalisation are very low in Sikkim. Today for instance, only three of 387 samples screened in the past 24 hours returned positive for Covid giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 0.87%.

Of the 114 people who are still positive for Covid in Sikkim, only 13 are with symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation.

Court orders inquiry into police investigation in Delhi Riots case

NEW DELHI, 24 NOV [PTI]: A Delhi court has ordered the police to investigate whether a deliberate attempt was made to shield five men who were discharged in a February 2020 riots case due to the lack of sufficient evidence.

Additional Sessions Judge Virender Bhat discharged five men accused of allegedly being part of a riotous mob, looting a medical shop and house of the complainant Firoz Khan, and taking away medicines and cosmetics worth about ₹ 22-23 lakh on February 25, 2020.

The judge said the accused were not let off because the incident in question did not happen or that they were falsely implicated but merely for the reason that there was no sufficient evidence produced against them.

"Let the DCP North-East District conduct an enquiry into the manner in which the investigation was conducted by the IO in this case to find out whether or not there had been any deliberate attempt to shield the offenders and submit a report to this Court on the next date of hearing," he ordered.

The sessions judge further noted that Firoz Khan was the only witness in the case who claimed to have identified the accused as assailants and that too from the photographs shown to him in the police station.

Week-long Paddy Harvesting Festival concludes in Toyang

GYALSHING, 24 NOV [IPR]:

The week-long Paddy Harvesting Festival 2021, organised at Toyang under Yangthang constituency in West Sikkim concluded on a high with the spirit of farming practices and traditional cultural events today.

Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma graced the occasion as chief guest accompanied by Minister Bhim Hang Subba, who is also the area MLA, as the guest of honour. The programme also had the presence of Advisors, Chairpersons, Panchayats, Secretary Agriculture Rinzing C Bhutia, Secretary AH&VS Dr Sangey D. Bhutia, Principal Director Horticulture Sadan Tamang, officials, farmers and others.

On the occasion, both the Ministers came forward to take part in "Kunew phorney/ Dahin" exercise along with the farmers.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Sharma congratulated Yangthang constituency for organizing such a unique paddy harvest festival and setting an example for promotion of farming practices in traditional tune.

He detailed governmental initiatives accom-



plished under the leadership of the Chief Minister and mentioned that the ruling government has given utmost priority to agriculture and livestock farming sectors for sustainable upliftment of rural population.

He informed that the state government recently accorded approval to provide 35% subsidy in fisheries sector under its Skill Startup scheme.

Further, he highlighted fisheries potential of the locality and informed that, at least 19 families from the constituency were benefited with Intensive Carp Farming and Raceway Trout Farming.

He also highlighted financial benefits of Production Incentive being provided under 'Mukhyamantri Krishi Atmanir-

bhar Yojana' and urged departmental official and all concerned to give priority in transforming the society by promoting agriculture and livestock farming.

He also highlighted financial incentives in Dairy and Piggery sectors under 'Mukhya Mantri Pashudhan Samridhi Yojana' and elaborated provision of subsidy under 'Mukhya Mantri Matshya Utpadan Yojana', Development Through Credit and other farmer friendly schemes. Minister Sharma also touched upon provision of 50 percent subsidy under 'National Livestock Mission'.

He also recalled governmental initiatives taken up for the Sanskrit teachers in recent years, launching of Sikkim Ad-

hoc Teachers Regularisation Policy 2021 and 'Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana'.

The organizing committee also felicitated both the ministers, volunteers and individuals for their contributions to succeed the event. Birkhaman Limboo was also honoured for laudable role in transforming large area of barren land into cultivable land in the locality.

During the programme, over one hundred farming household received agricultural tools and farming machines including power tiller, fabricated green house, water harvesting Genap Tank, Water Harvesting Flexi Tank, Pulverizer Machine, Knapsack Sprayer Machine, HDPE Pipe, Chaff cutter, Goatery,

Sheep, poultry farming, Intensive Carp Farming, Trout Culture in Raceway etc.

The programme also saw colourful traditional cultural performances and traditional stalls. The final match of the volleyball tournament was also played between Kyongsa Youth Club -A and Super 6, 7th Mile, won by former and lifted the winning trophy along with cash award.

Earlier, Chairman SIDICO, Janak Gurung, who was also the patron of organizing committee, proposed welcome address and the Additional Political Secretary to CM (West) Madhu Sudan Sharma presented thanks note to down the curtain of seven days long Paddy harvesting festival 2021.

Workshop organised on MOMA initiatives

NAMCHI, 24 NOV [IPR]:

A workshop on Initiative of Ministry of Minority Affairs (MOMA) was organised in joint coordination with Primitive Tribe Welfare Board, Social Justice, Government of Sikkim at NMC Conference Hall, Namchi, today.

The program was attended by Chairperson, Primitive Tribe Welfare Board, Chewang Norbu Lepcha. He was accompanied by Additional Director KL Lepcha, Primitiv Tribe Board Member Nomi Lepcha, Skill Development Research Person Jaganath Sharma, Panchayats from 10 GPUs under Namchi BAC, WI (MOMA) Division Gyalsten Wongdi Lepcha,



Institute Nodal Officer.

Additional Director KL Lepcha, in his address, highlighted the various schemes of Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikash Karyakram (PMJKV) under which 80% of the resources can be utilised for projects related to Education, Health & Skill.

He informed that Minority Concentrated

Blocks (MCB) can be developed by creating socio-economic infrastructure, providing basic amenities and ensuring holistic development of the minority communities.

He also reflected about Minority Scholarship Schemes like Post Matric Scholarship to students belonging

to Minority students, Pre-matric Scholarship to students belonging to Minority students, Merit cum Means based Scholarship Students belonging to Minority Students.

Gyalsten Wongdi Lepcha, WI Headquarter, spoke about the technical issues and process for applying Minority Scholarship Schemes through National Scholarship Portal (NSP) www.scholarship.gov.in.

He also informed about the roles and responsibilities of Institutional Nodal Officer at school or institutional level. He also highlighted about various scholarship schemes like

Pre-Matric and Post-Matric scholarship for ST, SC, OBC, & EBC (Economically Backward Class) through state portal website-

www.socialwelfare-scholarship.sikkim.gov.in.

He further informed that the last date of submission of the form is 30th November 2021 which can be extended for a week.

Jaganath Sharma informed about the various Skill Development Schemes being initiated by Central Government.

It may be mentioned here that the same program was conducted simultaneously at Ravangla BAC, today.

Demonstration on bee-keeping at Tashiding



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

Demonstration on transferring bee from traditional to a movable frame hive was conducted under the NEC fund for the year 2020-21 by District Collector PIA, KVK, West Sikkim

at Tashiding, West Sikkim, today. Resource person KVK Scientist, JP Dulal, and Tech Helper, Scientist KVK West, Bijay Biswakarma, BDO, Garap Dorjee Bhutia, PI, BS Subba and about 50 progressive beekeepers attended the program.

Cabinet approves Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021: Govt

NEW DELHI, NOV 24 [PTI]:

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a bill to repeal the three farm laws, which triggered protests at Delhi borders by thousands of farmers.

This was announced by I&B Minister Anurag Thakur after the Cab-

inet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Thakur said the Cabinet completed the formality of approving the repeal of three laws, as announced by the Prime Minister on November 19.

The new bill will now be introduced in Parlia-

ment for passage in the upcoming Winter session beginning November 29.

The repeal of these three legislations has been one of the key demands of around 40 farmer unions protesting against these reforms for nearly a year now.

Agri Minister chairs meeting on Krishi Mela in Melli

NAMCHI, 23 NOV (IPR):

Minister, Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Lok Nath Sharma held a meeting with the departmental official of South District with regard to organize 'Krishi Mela-cum-distribution Program' in Melli constituency today.

The meeting had the presence of Additional Political Secretary (South), Anjeeta Rajalim, Additional (Director) Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services/(South), Dr Artha Lal Rai, Joint Director (Horticulture), Dr Dikendra Bhujel, Joint Director (Agriculture), Dr Pratap Subba, officials, social activists and others.

The Meeting had detail discussion on various components to be included in Krishi Mela namely exhibition of Self Help Groups, distribution of subsidised loan under Development Through Credit, Awareness generation on farmers friendly

schemes, token distributions and many others. The day long programme has been scheduled to be held on 08 Dec 2021.

Minister Sharma also suggested official's to encourage participation of students during the Krishi Mela to enhance their practical skills in farming.

Additionally, he also shared that a notable growth is observed in Dairy sectors in the state with sharp rise in production of milk and formation of new Milk Producers Cooperatives Societies.

Dr Dikendra Bhujel, informed that the department has released around Rs 55 lakh as production incentives to over 1000 farmers in the first installment in South District under newly launched Mukhya Mantri Krishi Atmanirbhar Yojana. The Farmers have received the production incentives of notified crops, vegetables and fruits through Direct Bank Transferred.

Lok Sabha MP attends Futsal Gold Cup at Yuksam



PRITAM LAMA

YUKSAM, 23 NOV:

The Sports department is preparing a futsal ground in every Government School, said Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba, today while addressing the gathering at Futsal Gold Cup tournament in Yuksam, West Sikkim.

Mr Subba was the chief guest of the 10th day of the tournament which has 45 teams participating. The tournament is being organised by Friends Forever Sporting Club Yuksam.

Mr Subba highlighted the initiatives of the state government in the sports sector and criticized the previous government for failing to bring development in the state.

Futsal Association of Sikkim president, Remon Chettri, who is also a sports medicine expert,

attended the function as guest of honour.

Mr Chettri appreciated the efforts of Yuksam Friends Forever Sporting Club in organising the first futsal Gold Cup in the state.

An exhibition futsal match was also held between SKM Sports wing led by Sikkim Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba and Yuksam veterans wherein the SKM sports wing won the match.

Remon Chettri was also felicitated on the day while the organising committee also felicitated MP Indra Hang Subba for his support.

Organising Committee general secretary, Sonam Chewang Bhutia in his key-note address said that this event is being organised with an aim to provide proper platform for young talents and engage them in sports.

Awareness on livestock rearing by ICAR-KVK East



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

ICAR-KVK East Sikkim organized an awareness programme on "Profitable Livestock and Poultry Rearing" for doubling farmers' income on 23 Nov at Beyong-Phegyong Gram Prasasan Kendra as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebration, a press release informs.

The programme was attended by Joint Direc-

tor, ICAR, Sikkim Centre, Tadong, Dr R Laha, Panchayat President, Kesang Tamang and other Panchayat members of the GPU.

About 30 farmers from Tirkutam, Sangkhola, Tshalumthang, Beyung and Zinglamasha wards of the GPU were given hands-on training on scientific livestock management during the programme.

Free vaccination camp by Rotary Club of Siliguri



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

Free vaccination camp was organised by Rotary Club of Siliguri Metropolitan in as-

sociation with Siliguri Municipal Corporation at Bright Academy, Punjabipara, today where around 325 people were vaccinated.

Sikkim lad declared state winner of India@75: Youth Ideathon

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

Sikkim boy Mehraj Pradhan's idea of Army Safety Gate was selected as the top innovative idea from the state of Sikkim for which he was declared state winner of India@75: Youth Ideathon 2021, an online event organized for students of Class 6 to 12 by CBSE in collaboration with Management & Entrepreneurship and Professional Skill Council (MEPSC) established under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. The ideathon intended to develop and build innovation and entrepreneurship skill in school students.

Mehraj's innovative idea of Army Safety Gate is based on sensor tech-

nology which can avert car suicide bombing attack in the Army cantonment area as such incidents are repeatedly happening in many parts of India which motivated him to develop such technology. His idea was selected from amongst 62000 ideas submitted by students from across the country who participated in the ideathon. Top 125 innovative ideas were selected for the final round selection process in a 3 stage event.

The Certificate and the token prize money was handed over to him in an award function held at IIT Delhi on 20 Nov 2021. For the same innovative idea, he was able to secure first position in Online Scientific and Innovative Idea Compe-

tion held on 28 January 2021 as a part of INNOVO-FEST 2021 organized by North Bengal Science Centre.

Mehraj is the eldest son of Ashok Pradhan and Sharmila Kri. Pradhan of Tarpin, Rhenock and is a class ten student currently pursuing his education from St. Augustine's School, Kalimpong. His interest lies in Mechatronics; he has set-up a small lab in the house itself where he has developed several devices using sensor technology such as obstacle avoiding cars, smart stick for visually impaired person, smart dustbin, smart hand-sanitizing machine, land mine detector, street light generator from the road speed breaker, etc. during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.



Sikkim kicks off Santosh Trophy campaign with a win

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

Sikkim started its campaign with a victory in the zonal round of the 75th Hero Santosh Trophy 2021-22 at Kalyani Stadium, West Bengal. In its first match on Tuesday, Sikkim outplayed Chhattisgarh by 2-0.

Abishek Rai scored the first goal for Sikkim in the 35th minute and Bibek Bhutia sealed Sikkim's 2-0 victory with his goal in the 78th minute. Sikkim's Kintup Lachungpa was adjudged as Player of the Match. The prestigious tournament is being organised by All India Football Federation.

Sikkim Football Association president, Menla Ethenpa congratulated the chief coach and the entire state team for the victory. Sikkim will take on West Bengal in its next match to be played on Thursday.

Govt extends 5-kg free foodgrains scheme till March 2022

NEW DELHI, NOV 24 (PTI): The Union Cabinet on Wednesday decided to extend till March the free foodgrains supply under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) to provide relief to ration cardholders.

The 5 kg foodgrain per person per month is being provided free of cost to more than 80 crore beneficiaries under the PMGKAY.

The scheme was initially launched for three months from April 2020 to provide relief to poor people amid the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the nationwide lockdown. It has been extended several times since then.

The 5 kg foodgrain is being provided over and above the normal quota under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

The PMGKAY has been extended by four months till March 2022, informed I&B Minister Anurag Singh Thakur after the Cabinet meeting.

Two-day training on packaging of fresh and processed Foods

GANGTOK, 23 NOV (IPR):

A two-day capacity building and training programme on "Packaging of Fresh and Processed Foods" was conducted here at Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Training and Extension Hall, Gangtok today.

The programme was organized under Pradhan Mantri Formalization of "Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme" (PMFME) under the aegis of Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of Sikkim and Indian Institute of Packaging, Kolkata Centre. A total number of forty-five participants registered for the training programme.

The (PMFME) scheme launched under Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, is a centrally sponsored scheme with an objective to enhance the competitiveness of existing individual micro-enterprises in the unorganized segment of the food processing industry and to promote formalization of the sector and provide support to FPOs, SHGs, and Cooperative societies to add further value to their



products through attractive packaging methods.

Secretary, Commerce and Industries Department, HK Sharma in his inaugural address said that packaging plays a vital role in marketing the product at national and international level. He said that the State of Sikkim has all the products but lacks the knowledge of packaging to market the product. The main objective of the two-day programme was training on packaging of Sikkimese products to the general public of the State.

Various subjects such as principles and functions of Packaging for Fresh and Processed

Foods, Packaging of Fresh Foods, Processed Foods and Packaging of fruits and vegetables. Live demonstration and Screening of Video and Packaging Operation for Food Products and Packaging of Food Products were also displayed during the programme.

The second day of the programme will include Testing and Evaluation of Packaging Materials for Food Products, Thermoforming- Skin and Blister Packaging for Food Products of MSME Entrepreneurs and Bar Coding for Supply Chain Management and Logistics. The programme is

also scheduled to have an interactive session and distribution of training certificates.

The programme had the presence of Director, MSME, Commerce and Industries Department, Deputy Director-cum-Branch Head, Ravikumar, Indian Institute of Packaging, Kolkata Centre, members from FPOs, Bidhan Das, SIMFED, Temi Tea Estate, Directorate of Handloom and Handicrafts, Spices Board, various Co-operative societies, rural and urban Self-Help Groups, individual entrepreneurs and individuals involved in food processing sector.

Falcon FC and XI-Batch Police in finals of Futsal Gold Cup in Yuksam

PRITAM LAMA
YUKSAM, 24 NOV:

Falcon FC edged past Phoenix FC 1-0 today to make it to the finals of the Gold Cup Futsal tournament underway here at the community ground.

Falcon FC will be taking on XI-Batch Police for the title after XI-Batch Police squeezed past Munal FC in the second semifinal decided in a shootout 5-3.

The day also featured cultural presentations by school students and local cultural troupes and had Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's West District coordi-



nator Nandu Gurung as chief guest.

The tournament had

begun on 14 Nov and will be decided on the 25th. Deputy Speaker Sangay

Lepcha is scheduled to attend the Futsal Gold Cup finals as chief guest.

Fresh Covid cases 22% higher than yesterday, active cases in country lowest in 537 days

NEW DELHI, NOV 24 (PTI): India added 9,283 new coronavirus infections taking the country's total tally of COVID-19 cases to 3,45,35,763 while the active cases declined to 1,11,481, the lowest in

537 days, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday.

The death toll climbed to 4,66,584 with 437 fresh fatalities, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The daily rise in new coronavirus infections has been below 20,000 for 47 straight days and less than 50,000 daily new cases have been reported for 150 consecutive days now.

Model Energy Efficient Village Campaign at Ribdi-Okhrey



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

Power Department a State Designated Agency, Government of Sikkim organised "Model Energy Efficient Village Campaign" at Ribdi-Okhrey, West Sikkim, on 23 Nov, a press release informs. Minister for Power and Labour Department, MN Sherpa attended the event as chief guest.

Senior officers of the Department PCE-cum-Secretary, Karun K Pradhan, PCE-I, Ganesh Chettri, Chief Engineer(West), Bikash Deokota, Additional Chief Engineer (West), BK Rai also attended the program. All the Panchyat members of Ribdi and Okhrey along with general public were gathered for awareness

program on energy conservation.

Superintending Engineer-cum-Nodal Officer(SDA), Pemba Lepcha made the gathering aware about the State Designated Agency, Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) and shared importance of Energy Conservation act 2001.

On the occasion PCE-I, Ganesh Chettri addressed the gathering and highlighted various schemes of Power Department. PCE-cum-Secretary, Karun K Pradhan congratulated the public of Ribdi-Okhrey for being the first Energy Efficient village in the state.

The state Designated Agency also displayed First Energy Vehicle for the public of Ribdi-Okhrey and shared the driving experience to

the public.

The Minister instructed the officials of the department to work efficiently and maintain the quality of sanctioned work. Further, he urged all the substations to take all safety measures. He urged the public to utilize power judiciously.

The Minister also shared about Electrical Appliances Loan for C&D categories of regular government employees for which potential borrower can avail upto Rs.1 lakh interest free loan from SISCO bank for buying 5star label electrical appliances like refrigerator, AC, TV, washing machine, etc.

Five 9 watts LED bulbs were given to each household and total 960 households were covered in this scheme.

SICA conducts parents & guardians awareness meeting



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

Sikkim Cricket Association [SICA] conducted an awareness program/meeting for the parents and guardians of cricket players and children of Sikkim.

A SICA press release informs that the parents and guardians from all districts of Sikkim were

invited to Gangtok for a meeting wherein they were apprised of the camps that are being conducted by SICA at Rangpo Sikkim Cricket Ground from 01 Dec, 2021 till 02 Jan, 2022 for U-16 boys of the state.

The floor was kept open for any suggestions, especially for families who live in remote

areas of Sikkim as it is a challenge to keep them informed regarding the various activities that are regularly being conducted.

"We hope that such interactions will help bridge the gap if any and improve information sharing and communication," the release mentions.

Painting exhibition-cum-auction begins at MG Marg

SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 24 NOV:

A two-day long exhibition-cum-auction of paintings started here at MG Marg on Wednesday. The event is part of a literary festival Sikkim Sahitya Utsav 2021 to mark the second anniversary of a local media house, Hamro Varta Television on 26 Nov at Manan Kendra.

Speaking to media persons here on Wednesday, Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling, who is patron of the organizing committee, mentioned that a sit-and-draw painting competition was organised as part of Sikkim Sahitya Utsav 2021 to provide a platform to students to showcase their talent and to further encourage them.

It is informed that the organizers have received

more than 100 online entries for the competition and judges shortlisted 40 artists for the final competition held on 21 Nov at White Hall. He informed that the painting competition was organized in three categories of class III to VI, Class VII to X and Class XI to Under Graduate students.

The paintings of first three winners of each category and other paintings have been displayed in this exhibition-cum-auction for two days at MG Marg, Mr Khaling informed. He appealed to people to visit the exhibition and buy paintings to motivate students.

Speaking on the upcoming Sikkim Sahitya Utsav 2021, he informed that celebrity poet, Navraj Parajuli from Nepal was scheduled to reach Gangtok today for the festival, while popular

poets, Pavitra Lama from Darjeeling and Manoj Bogati from Kalimpong will arrive tomorrow. He added that these popular poets along with litterateur, Parvin Rai Jumeli from Sikkim would recite their poems in the main function. The stage would also be shared by winners of poem recitation competition.

The event is part of the mission to build an intellectual society and to promote literary tourism in the near future in Sikkim, he stated.

President Press Club of Sikkim, Joseph Lepcha mentioned that around 70 guests from Nepal, Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Doars are coming for the festival. He mentioned that eminent literary figures from Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong would be felicitated during the programme.

Against Gender-Based Violence

For a fortnight, discuss the denials and ill-treatments foisted on women

Each year, from 25 November to 10 December, the United Nations and women's groups around the world gather ranks to organize "Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Violence" to draw attention to the continuing violence against women, at home, out in the open and in the work-place. The string of special Days include 25 November, designated by the UN as "Day Against Violence Against Women"; 01 December, "World AIDS Day"; 06 December, "anniversary of the Montreal Massacre" when 14 women engineering students were gunned down for being feminists and 10 December, "Human Rights Day".

A Day is earmarked for issues demanding consistent governmental and people's support so that at least once a year, they take centre-stage and force everyone to take notice. The fact that violence against women demands 16 Days of Activism in the public domain [with those involved in curbing it working at their own levels the rest of the year] says a lot about how much this underbelly of the society continues to haunt. The 16 Days are not just marked for India or the Middle East which are notorious for their persistent insult of women, but are observed across the world. The choice of 'Days' which fall during these 16 days is also telling. It is important to remember abused women on World AIDS Day because a victim of abuse is not in a position to demand safe sex. The carnage of Montreal remembered on 06 December is important because it brings home the fact that violence against women is not just a Third World aberration and is a social concern all over the world. Rounding up the 16 Days of Activism against gender violence with the Human Rights Day is apt for obvious reasons – human rights are infringed upon not only by the establishment, but also by people at home, by husbands who beat up their wives and families which sanction female foeticide and look the other way when an abused lady needs support or work hard to justify denials on the basis of gender and appear comfortable with unequal treatment.

In the context of Sikkim, as far as the official policy goes, women's issues are not ignored here, but the establishment can only ensure the Rights, it cannot prick social conscience. For something like that, women, at least for some days in the year, need to come out on the streets, they need to be contacted in the bastis and the towns, they need to rally together and understand what their rights are, realize how some of them are still victims at home and at the work place and decide how things can be improved. In any society where alcoholism and substance abuse are high and where parochial nationalism is not only not frowned upon but even embraced and where women continue to be denied equal treatment, domestic violence can be expected to be high as well.

It goes without saying that domestic violence is not rare in Sikkim, or anywhere for that matter. What is also a fact is that domestic violence is loud and vicious, meaning that neighbours in the now cheek-by-jowl tenements of Sikkim are also in the know of these violent episodes. But no one intervenes. Even if one is to accept that domestic disputes are uncomfortable situations to intervene into, surely, when violence comes into the mix, someone should have done something... called in the cops at least. Societal indifference is actually an instigator for domestic violence. According to a report released by the World Health Organisation [WHO], up to 70% of women experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. What is the statistic for Sikkim? We have not even bothered to find out. That is how uncaring Sikkim is because it is comfortable with being so un-informed. Violence against women is an issue that needs to be addressed and it is not the government's job to do even this for the society – it has to be the civil society, social bodies and women's organizations that have to stand up to the task and address the problem. Such engagement is also necessary because only after the society at large resolves to address an obvious problem which stares them in the face every day, will it eventually mature to address the more nuanced and chronically internalized denials and ill-treatments like compromised identities, stifled ambitions and inexcusable sidelining of women in Sikkim. But then again, with even the tokenism missing, expecting genuine interventions might be a bit too much.

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The lessons 'Moby-Dick' has for a warming world of rising waters

AARON SACHS

THECONVERSATION.COM

As an environmental historian and scholar of the 19th century, I spend a lot of time thinking about how the past can help us confront our current crises – especially climate change.

And there's a lot of help to be found in the 1800s, from the appreciation of wildness in Henry David Thoreau's famous "Walden," to the rise of ecology, the science of interdependence. "We may all be netted together," Charles Darwin scribbled in his notebook.

But my nomination for the most helpful climate manual ever written might be a surprise: "Moby-Dick."

Herman Melville's epic novel about life aboard a wayward whaling ship, published 170 years ago this month, does not have a reputation for being particularly pragmatic, unless you're looking for tips on swabbing the decks or hunting creatures of the deep. And no, I'm not suggesting that we go back to burning sperm oil.

What makes "Moby-Dick" especially relevant right now is that it offers a spur to solidarity and perseverance. Those are qualities societies may need to stock up on as we face the overwhelming threat of climate change. The novel has no straightforward moral, but it does remind readers that we can at least buoy each other up, even as the water swirls around us.

EXISTENTIALISTS AT SEA

Climate change touches on time scales and planetary systems that humans aren't wired to fathom. But at the same time, it can be seen as just another challenge we've brought upon ourselves through societal failings.

Perhaps it's more helpful, then, to think about climate change not as a brand-new "existential threat," but as the kind of age-old crisis that is tailor-made for existentialism – a philosophy, as the scholar Walter Kaufmann put it, that is all about "dread, despair, death, and

dauntlessness." The basic idea is to recognize how treacherous and unknowable your path is, and then to continue on anyway.

"Moby-Dick" is clearly an existentialist text, though it was published almost a century before the term was coined. One of the founders of modern existentialism, Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus, explicitly acknowledged Melville as an intellectual forebear. And two of the main characters in "Moby-Dick" are near-perfect existentialists: the narrator, Ishmael, and his friend, Queequeg, a harpooner from the fictional isle of Kokovoko.

From the beginning of his tale, Ishmael makes clear his obsession with the horror of the human condition. He's bitterly depressed, angry, even suicidal: "it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul," he says on page one, and he finds himself "pausing before coffin warehouses." He hates the way modern New Yorkers seem to spend their days "tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks." All he can think to do is go to sea.

Of course, it's not long before he has a near-death experience on the open water. He and a few crewmates get chucked out of their small boat in the midst of a squall after failing to nab the whale they were after. Queequeg signals with their one faint lantern, "hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair."

Immediately after they're saved, Ishmael interviews the most experienced of the crew and, confirming that this sort of thing happens all the time, goes below decks to "make a rough draft of my will," with Queequeg as his witness. The "whole universe" seems like "a vast practical joke" at his expense, but he finds himself able to smile at the absurdity: "Now then, thought I, unconsciously rolling up the sleeves of my frock, here goes for a cool, collected dive at death and destruction."

NO MAN AN ISLAND

Again and again, "Moby-Dick" forces readers to confront despair.

But that doesn't make it a grim read, or a paralyzing one – in part because Melville himself is such an engaging companion, and much of the book imparts a powerful sense of fellowship.

Literary critic Geoffrey Sanborn writes that Melville meant for "Moby-Dick" "to make your mind a more interesting and enjoyable place."

"It's about the effort," Sanborn he writes, "... to feel, in the deepest recesses of your consciousness, at least temporarily unalone."

When Ishmael stops by the Whaleman's Chapel before his fateful journey, "each silent worshiper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable." But once aboard his ship, he finds all the crew members suddenly "welded into oneness," thanks to their shared sense of purpose and their awareness of the dangers ahead. And he sees the same kind of unity in "extensive herds" of sperm whales, as though "numerous nations of them had sworn solemn league and covenant for mutual assistance and protection."

That's the sense of interconnectivity human nations need today. When I picked up "Moby-Dick" earlier this month, I almost immediately thought of the climate change negotiations in Glasgow – and Queequeg's small island home. I could easily imagine the harpooner as an eloquent representative of a nation in danger of being swallowed up by rising waters.

"It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians," Ishmael imagines Queequeg saying at one point in the novel. "We cannibals must help these Christians." That's a startling line, emphasizing Melville's suggestion that Queequeg, whom many characters dismiss as a "heathen," is actually the most ethical character in the book.

But in Glasgow, it seems, wealthy nations' recognition of the need for mutual aid fell short. Though their disproportionate greenhouse gas

emissions are largely to blame for poorer countries' disproportionate suffering, their funding for developing nations to weather the storm is far below what's needed – and eventually, that may come back to bite everyone.

Queequeg's interdependent relationship with Ishmael is at the very center of "Moby-Dick." Their fates are interwoven; Queequeg is Ishmael's "inseparable twin brother." In one scene, the harpooner dangles over the water, attached by a cord to Ishmael, so that "should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more," our narrator would go tumbling into the sea as well.

At the end of the novel, all the whalemans except Ishmael sink to rise no more. The narrator is saved by a coffin Queequeg had carved for himself, then given to the First Mate to replace a lost lifebuoy. Much about "Moby-Dick" will always remain murky, but this symbolism is clear: To ponder death and prepare for the worst are age-old survival strategies.

Queequeg's culture led him to confront the hardest realities of life. As Ishmael notes admiringly, the harpooner had "no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceptions," no tendency toward denial. He had thoroughly enjoyed carving his coffin, and when he lay down in it to check the fit, while suffering from a life-threatening fever, he had shown a perfectly "composed countenance." "It will do," he murmured; "it is easy."

Queequeg's existentialist determination in the face of dread, his willingness to sacrifice, his caring forethought, made all the difference. And maybe that could be an inspiration. The key to addressing climate change won't be some abstract injunction to save the planet; it will be about acknowledging interdependence and commonality and accepting responsibility. It will be about returning Queequeg's favor.

[The writer is Professor of History and American Studies, Cornell University]

Do you use predictive text? Chances are it's not saving you time – and could even be slowing you down

PER OLA KRISTENSSON

THECONVERSATION.COM

Typing is one of the most common things we do on our mobile phones. A recent survey suggests that millennials spend 48 minutes each day texting, while boomers spend 30 minutes.

Since the advent of mobile phones, the way we text has changed. We've seen the introduction of autocorrect, which corrects errors as we type, and word prediction (often called predictive text), which predicts the next word we want to type and allows us to select it above the keyboard.

Functions such as autocorrect and predictive text are designed to make typing faster and more efficient. But research shows this isn't necessarily true of predictive text.

A study published in 2016 found predictive text wasn't associated with any overall improvement in typing speed. But this study only had 17 participants – and all used the same type of mobile device.

In 2019, my colleagues and I published a study in which we looked at mobile typing data from more than 37,000 volunteers, all using their own mobile phones. Participants were asked to copy sentences as quickly and accurately as possible.

Participants who used predictive text typed an average of 33 words per minute. This was slower than those who didn't use an intelligent text entry method (35 words per minute) and significantly slower than participants who used autocorrect (43 words per minute).

BREAKING IT DOWN

It's interesting to consider the poor correlation between predictive text and typing performance. The idea seems to make sense: if the system can predict your intended word before you type it, this should save you time.

In my most recent study on this topic, a colleague and I explored the conditions that determine whether predictive text is effective. We

combined some of these conditions, or parameters, to simulate a large number of different scenarios and therefore determine when predictive text is effective – and when it's not.

We built a couple of fundamental parameters associated with predictive text performance into our simulation. The first is the average time it takes a user to hit a key on the keyboard (essentially a measure of their typing speed). We estimated this at 0.26 seconds, based on earlier research.

The second fundamental parameter is the average time it takes a user to look at a predictive text suggestion and select it. We fixed this at 0.45 seconds, again based on existing data.

Beyond these, there's a set of parameters which are less clear. These reflect the way the user engages with predictive text – or their strategies, if you like. In our research, we looked at how different approaches to two of these strategies influence the usefulness of predictive text.

The first is minimum word length. This means the user will tend to only look at predictions for words beyond a certain length. You might only look at predictions if you're typing longer words, beyond, say, six letters – because these words require more effort to spell and type out. The horizontal axis in the visualisation below shows the effect of varying the minimum length of a word before the user seeks a word prediction, from two letters to ten.

The second strategy, "type-then-look", governs how many letters the user will type before looking at word predictions. You might only look at the suggestions after typing the first three letters of a word, for example. The intuition here is that the more letters you type, the more likely the prediction will be correct. The vertical axis shows the effect of the user varying the type-then-look strategy from looking at word predictions even before typing (zero) to looking at predictions after one letter, two letters, and so on.

A final latent strategy, perseverance, captures how long the user will type and check word predictions for before giving up and just typing out the word in full. While it would have been insightful to see how variation in perseverance affects the speed of typing with predictive text, even with a computer model, there were limitations to the amount of changeable data points we could include.

So we fixed perseverance at five, meaning if there are no suitable suggestions after the user has typed five letters, they will complete the word without consulting predictive text further. Although we don't have data on the average perseverance, this seems like a reasonable estimate.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

Above the dashed line there's an increase in net entry rate while below it, predictive text slows the user down. The deep red shows when predictive text is most effective; an improvement of two words per minute compared to not using predictive text. The blue is when it's least effective. Under certain conditions in our simulation, predictive text could slow a user down by as much as eight words per minute.

The blue circle shows the optimal operating point, where you get the best results from predictive text. This occurs when word predictions are only sought for words with at least six letters and the user looks at a word prediction after typing three letters.

So, for the average user, predictive text is unlikely to improve performance. And even when it does, it doesn't seem to save much time. The potential gain of a couple of words per minute is much smaller than the potential time lost.

It would be interesting to study long-term predictive text use and look at users' strategies to verify that our assumptions from the model hold in practice. But our simulation reinforces the findings of previous human research: predictive text probably isn't saving you time – and could be slowing you down.

[The writer is Professor of Interactive Systems Engineering, University of Cambridge]

Uttarakhand govt clears sports policy

DEHRADUN NOV 23 (PTI): The Uttarakhand Cabinet on Tuesday gave its approval to sports policy, 2021 announcing several steps to hone budding sports talent in the state and a slew of incentives for players who represent the state in national and international events.

According to the new sports policy, a physical and sports aptitude test will be conducted for children aged eight years to identify sporting tal-

ent at a tender age and start honing their skills, Cabinet Minister Subodh Uniyal told reporters after the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami.

Centres of Excellence will be set up in the state for high priority games and 3,900 rising sportspersons aged 8-14 years selected on the basis of merit every year will be paid Rs 1500 per month under the Mukhya Mantri Udiyaman Khiladi Unnayan Yo-

jana, he said.

Players aged 14-23 years will be provided scholarships of Rs 2000, sports kits, track-suits and other tools and equipment related to the games they play to encourage them under the scheme.

Out of turn appointment procedure on B and C grade posts in government departments will be simplified for medal winners from the state at major sports events, Uniyal said.

Sportspersons going to

represent the state at prestigious national and international events or to attend training camps will be entitled to travel for free in Uttarakhand Roadways buses.

There will be a sports quota of five per cent for talented sports persons in educational institutions and expansion of sports infrastructure all over the state, he said.

The Cabinet also approved the Uttarakhand Mega Industrial and Investment Policy, 2021.

AP Council clears '3 capitals' repeal Bill



AMARAVATI, NOV 23 (PTI): The Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council on Tuesday passed a Bill to Repeal the controversial AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Act, 2020, that was intended to establish three capitals for the state.

But the opposition BJP and Progressive Democratic Front members demanded that the government stick to only one capital city -- Amaravati -- for the state and drop the idea of bringing in a fresh legislation to enable establishment of three capitals.

Finance and Legislative Affairs Minister Buggana Rajendranath moved the Repeal Bill in the Council on Tuesday, a day after the Assembly cleared it.

Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy had told the Assembly that they would bring a "comprehensive, complete and better" Decentralisation Bill afresh.

BJP floor leader P V N Madhav decried the government's plan to bring in a fresh legislation and demanded that only Amaravati be continued as the state capital.

"We welcome the repeal of the controversial

three capitals law, but we don't want another new legislation on that," he stressed.

Madhav asked the government to do justice to thousands of farmers in Amaravati region, who gave up 33,000 acres of their rich fertile lands for development of the capital city.

PDF legislators K Lakshmana Rao, K Narasimha Reddy and Venkateswara Rao too welcomed the repeal Bill, but said the state should have only one capital.

The Repeal Bill also revived the AP Capital Region Development Authority Act, 2014.

UP: Factory fined Rs 7 lakh for polluting air

MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP), NOV 24 (PTI): The Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board has imposed a fine of Rs 7.12 lakh on a factory producing chemical compounds for allegedly polluting the air in Shamli district, officials said on Wednesday.

The factory, located on the Panipat Road in Shamli, produces compounds such as ferrous sulphate powder and magnesium sulphate among others. It was slapped with a fine of Rs 7,12,500 after it was found guilty of emitting hazardous gases in excess to the prescribed limits, Pollution Control Board regional officer Ankit Singh said.

He said the action is part of the crackdown



against industries that are being operated in violation of the rules and regulations set by the authorities set up to check

pollution. Singh said the Board swung into action following the directives of the newly constitut-

ed Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas, the most powerful body

constituted for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of air in Delhi and surrounding regions.

Ethiopia says Abiy at war front, handing duties to deputy

NAIROBI, KENYA (AP): Ethiopia's government said Wednesday that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has gone to the battlefield to take charge in a yearlong war and left the daily work of running the country to his deputy as rival fighters approach the capital, Addis Ababa. The 45-year-old prime minister, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and former soldier, arrived at the front on Tuesday, government spokesman Legesse Tulu told reporters without giving details on the location, and state media did not show images of him. Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen is handling day-to-day government activities, Legesse said.

The war in Africa's second-most populous nation has killed an estimated tens of thousands of people, and countries including France, Germany and Turkey have told their citizens to leave immediately as rival fighters from Ethiopia's northern Tigray region advance.

U.S. envoy Jeffrey Feltman on Tuesday told reporters he fears that "nascent" progress in mediation efforts with the warring sides could be outpaced by the "alarming" military de-



velopments. The Tigray forces dominated the previous national government for 27 years before Abiy took office in 2018, and a growing political rift turned to war in November 2020.

"Unless there is some kind of divine intervention, I don't see any chance for a peaceful resolution through dialogue because the positions are highly polarized," said Kassahun Berhanu, professor of political science at Addis Ababa University, who added he believed Abiy's decision to go to the front is "aimed at boosting popular mo-

rale." The Tigray forces have said they want Abiy out. Abiy's government wants the Tigray forces, which it has designated as a terrorist group, to withdraw to their region.

The prime minister this week not only announced he would go to the battlefield but also invited Ethiopians to join him, the latest call for every able citizen in the country of more than 110 million people to join the fight. Hurried military trainings and allegations of forced conscription have occurred in recent months, while

analysts have warned of the growing presence of ethnic-based militias as the military was said to be weakened.

Millions of civilians are trapped and going hungry because of the war. Ethiopia's government has blockaded the Tigray region for several months, fearing that humanitarian aid will end up in the hands of fighters, while hundreds of thousands of people in the neighboring Amhara and Afar regions are beyond the reach of significant aid after the Tigray forces retook their region in June and began

fighting their way toward the capital.

Another target of the Tigray forces appears to be the supply line from neighboring Djibouti to Ethiopia's capital, and the U.S. envoy on Tuesday in remarks to reporters warned the fighters against cutting off the road to Djibouti or entering Addis Ababa.

That could be "catastrophic" for the country, Feltman said.

African Union envoy Olesegun Obasanjo also has been mediating but has not spoken publicly about his work in recent days.

Forest officers, illegal tree fellers exchange fire at Assam-Arunachal border

LAKHIMPUR, 24 NOV (PTI): Illegal tree fellers from Arunachal Pradesh and forest officers of Assam exchanged fire along the inter-state boundary in Lakhimpur district on Tuesday, a senior official said. However, none were injured in the incident that took place in Ranga Reserve Forest, he said.

Lakhimpur Divisional Forest Officer (DFO)

Ashok Kumar Dev Choudhury said that Rampur Range Beat Officer Banamali Narah heard sounds of felling of trees in the morning when he was jogging in the area.

"(Mr) Narah immediately informed me and I asked him to go to the spot with a team and check it. As they approached the location, the miscreants fired one round in the air and then

two rounds at the team," Mr Choudhury told news agency PTI.

The forest personnel retaliated and fired three rounds at them, he said.

"As the forest team was not prepared to handle such attacks, I asked my officers to return for their safety. Later, I informed the police and district officials for necessary action," Mr Choudhury added.

German business confidence drops for 5th consecutive month



BERLIN (AP): German business confidence has dropped for the fifth consecutive month amid persistent supply-chain bottlenecks and a resurgence of coronavirus infections in Europe's biggest economy, a closely watched survey showed Wednesday.

The Ifo institute said its monthly confidence index dropped to 96.5 points in November from 97.7 last month. Companies' assessment of both their current situation and their outlook for the next six months worsened. It was the lowest figure since February.

"Supply bottlenecks and the fourth wave of the coronavirus are challenging German companies," Ifo said in a statement. It said that while manufacturers' future outlook brightened somewhat, that of firms in the service sector deteriorated, with the steep rise in COVID-19 infections to a string of new records leading to a plunge in expectations in the tourism and hospitality industries.

The Ifo survey is based on responses from about 9,000 companies in various business sectors.

While the new wave of coronavirus infections has prompted increasing restrictions in Germany and looks likely to lead to more, the country's post-election political transition appears on course to end soon, removing another source of uncertainty.

The three parties that have been negotiating to form Germany's next government planned to present their coalition agreement later Wednesday, a key move toward a new administration under center-left leader Olaf Scholz taking office in the coming weeks.

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Doncic returns, Mavericks beat Clippers in OT to snap skid

LOS ANGELES (AP): It would have been understandable if the Dallas Mavericks folded in overtime against the Los Angeles Clippers after blowing a 10-point lead.

Kristaps Porzingis and Luka Dončić weren't about to let that happen, though, and they dominated the final five minutes.

Porzingis scored 30 points, including six in overtime, and Dončić had 26 in his return to the lineup as the Mavericks defeated the Clippers 112-104 on Tuesday night.

"For a second you are disappointed because we should have finished them off (in regulation), but I think we are growing mentally as a team," said Porzingis, who has scored 20 or more points in a career-high seven straight games. "We realized it was five more minutes and we went out there and proved we are the superior team."

The Mavericks were up 102-92 late in the fourth quarter before the Clippers scored 11 of the final 12 points to force overtime, including a 3-pointer by Paul George at the buzzer.

"That second felt like it was forever. Guess I just got free and let it fly," George said.

Dallas, though, put up the first seven points of overtime and outscored Los Angeles 9-1 to snap a three-game skid that included a six-point loss to the Clippers on Sunday.

Dončić, who missed the past three games due to left knee and ankle sprains, also had nine rebounds and nine assists in 41 minutes.

Dallas trailed by six at half-time but scored 38 points in the third quarter to grab an 80-76 advantage going into the



final 12 minutes. Dončić had 15 points in the period and four assists that resulted in 10 additional Mavericks points.

"Overtime in the first game back? That's tough. But we got the win and I am happy," Dončić said.

Dallas coach Jason Kidd was happy with the way his two stars played, especially Porzingis, who made all 10 of his free throws in 40 minutes of action.

"He's playing at a very high level. He didn't force anything. Sometimes when a star player comes back others might change their game but he didn't," Kidd said.

"Luca's prep work the past two days was at a high level. He has a great feel and there's a big trust that the other guys were going to make plays."

Reggie Jackson led the Clippers with 31 points, his most in 2 1/2 seasons with the team. George scored 26.

Jackson hit a 3-pointer with 4.2 seconds remaining to get LA within 102-100. George then fouled Maxi Kleber with 1.9 seconds remaining. Kleber made his first free throw, but missed the second. George grabbed the rebound and called a timeout with 1.1 seconds remaining.

After the Clippers moved the ball to midcourt, Terance Mann passed to George, who hit a 3-pointer from the right corner to send it to overtime.

"We wanted a catch-and-shoot. Terance made a good pass and he made a big shot for us," Clippers coach Tyrone Lue said.

The teams were facing each other for the second time in three days and things got chippy at times. Dončić received a technical foul late in the first quarter for taunting Mann. The two teams — who don't meet again until February —

don't have many warm feelings toward each other after a contentious first-round playoff series last season that the Clippers won in seven games after trailing 3-1.

"Two great teams. Great players. Both of us come out and focus on our principles," said Jackson, who also had 10 rebounds. "A lot of similarities. I think we're gonna continue to have great battles."

COLD, THEN HOT
The Mavericks were 6 of 30 on 3-pointers in Sunday's loss and started Tuesday's game missing their first 13 from beyond the arc before warming up. They went 12 for 26 the remainder of the game.

TIP-INS
Mavericks: Dorian Finney-Smith, who had a season-high 17 points, scored eight points during a 16-5 run midway through the fourth to give Dallas a double-digit lead. ... Jalen Brunson injured his left foot in the first half and did not return. ... Reggie Bullock (non-

COVID-19 illness) and Frank Ntilikina (right calf strain) did not play.

Clippers: George missed his first five shots from the field and didn't get his first basket until there was 1:44 remaining in the first half. ... Marcus Morris Sr., who missed 15 games due to a left knee injury, had 10 points in 31 minutes. ... Nicolas Batum entered the NBA's health and safety protocol before the game and is expected to miss at least 10 days. LA canceled its morning shoot-around for precautionary reasons. ... The Clippers' largest lead was 11 points during the first quarter and late in the second before Dallas scored the last five points to get to 48-42 at halftime. ... Mann received a flagrant 1 foul during the third quarter.

UP NEXT
Mavericks: Return home to face the Washington Wizards on Saturday.

Clippers: Host the Detroit Pistons on Friday.

Knicks recover to beat Lakers team missing suspended James

NEW YORK (AP): LeBron James couldn't be in the building. Anthony Davis almost wasn't. With one superstar suspended and another sick, the Los Angeles Lakers already had big problems. Then they created one more for themselves by falling into a 25-point hole.

"We weren't playing hard enough. Simple," Russell Westbrook said.

They turned it around but the New York Knicks recovered, with Evan Fournier scoring 26 points and Immanuel Quickley adding 12 of his 14 in the fourth quarter for a 106-100 victory Tuesday night.

Julius Randle added 20 points, 16 rebounds and five assists for the Knicks, but sat for eight minutes of the fourth quarter after picking up his fifth foul. Quickley made sure that didn't matter, hitting four 3-pointers in the period.

"He's fearless," Randle said.

Westbrook had 31 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists, with 18 points in a sensational third quarter that helped Los Angeles tie the game. But with Carmelo Anthony's shot off in his old home, the Lakers never could take the lead.

They beat Detroit on Sunday after overcoming a 17-point deficit in the game James was ejected from for striking Pistons center Isaiah Stewart in the face and drawing blood. The NBA suspended the superstar forward for one game.

But the best Los Angeles could do in this one was tie it twice after New York dominated most of the first two quarters.

"No team wants to come out down 10-0, but it's a long game and we fought back and gave ourselves a chance," Westbrook said.

Davis, who woke up with a fever, had 20 points on 7-for-17 shooting. He said he arrived only about 45 minutes before the game and didn't have his usual warm-up.

"So I definitely think that he was a little bit drained and we used him differently," coach Frank Vogel said. "We tried to keep him in seven-minute runs and he did not play in his normal rotation, so it probably had an impact."

Anthony was just 3 of 14 for 12 points, and the Lakers lost for the fourth time in five games.

Randle went to the

bench with his fifth foul with 9:18 remaining and was hit with a technical foul from there that allowed the Lakers to cut it to 90-87. But Obi Topin scored before Quickley made a 3-pointer to push it back to eight, and it was back into double digits when another 3 by Quickley made it 105-93 with 4:58 to play.

"We were just trying to buy some time there and that group ended up going on a little bit of a run, so it allowed us to go a little bit longer (without Randle)," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said.

The Knicks raced to a 10-0 lead that grew to 36-15 on RJ Barrett's 3-pointer with 1:11 left in the first quarter. It was 59-35 with under 5 minutes remaining in the half before the Lakers put together a 16-2 run that trimmed it to 61-51 just before the break.

"We can be really good man, we just have to trust how we play and when we have a way to play, just stay with it," Fournier said.

The Lakers scored nine straight to open the third and cut it to 63-60, and finally tied it for the first time at 79 on Anthony's dunk.

TIP-INS
Lakers: Anthony got a loud ovation when he checked in during the first quarter. ... Talen Horton-Tucker missed all eight shots in a scoreless outing.

Knicks: New York played without backup point guard Derrick Rose (sprained right ankle) and injured centers Mitchell Robinson and Taj Gibson. Thibodeau said Robinson, out with a concussion, is doing better but still has to clear the league's protocols before he can return. ... New York has won nine of the last 11 meetings at home.

MISSING OUT ON MSG

Vogel called James one of the classiest players in the league who always plays the game the right way. He spoke with James, who was disappointed to miss a second straight visit to one of his favorite arenas. He was hurt last season when the Lakers played at Madison Square Garden.

"He wanted to play. I don't want to get into it more than that," Vogel said.

UP NEXT
Lakers: Visit Indiana on Wednesday.

Knicks: Host Phoenix on Friday.

With Shubman set for new middle-order slot, India to modify Test match ploy

KANPUR, NOV 22 (PTI): The Indian team management, in all likelihood, will ask the talented Shubman Gill to bat in the middle-order in the upcoming Test series against New Zealand to see if the youngster can take on the attack in the absence of big guns, if required.

It is understood that Shubman has been told that he would bat in the middle-order in the first Test against New Zealand in Kanpur, where Ajinkya Rahane will lead the team in the absence of Virat Kohli, who is on a break.

With no Rohit Sharma for the two-Test series, it is an ideal opportunity for the team management to check out Gill's prowess as a middle-order batter in the long run when both Kohli and Rohit will be back for the South Africa tour.

KL Rahul, as of now, is a certainty at the top of the pack and his fine show in England has only reaffirmed his status as one of the most stylish Indian batters in the current team.

He will open with Mayank Agarwal against the BlackCaps.

But how would it be to see Shubman in the middle-order? Former national selector Jatin Paranjape, who was part of the panel that handed a Test debut to Gill in Australia, feels that it won't be a very bad idea.

"I am always a believer that rigidity in team selection doesn't help. I actually feel that playing Shubman as a middle-order batter will help the team. A certain amount of flexibility always helps," Paranjape told PTI.

It is understood that the new selection committee un-



der Chetan Sharma and the current team management feels that they need at least one player in that middle-order apart from Kohli, who can take the attack back to the opposition camp.

Had they included Hanuma Vihari also in the set-up, there would have been three players Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane and Vihari -- who play with the same approach.

If that wasn't enough, Indian team also has Wriddhiman Saha, who is more of a survivor, without a free-flowing game, unlike India's first-choice keeper-batter Rishabh Pant, who will also be on a break.

A batting-order without Rohit, Kohli and Pant requires players with intent and there in comes Gill, who has a wide range of strokes. Having played the new ball, he can also be good against the second new ball when the opposition pacers would be tiring.

The advantage of not hav-

ing to face Trent Boult's incoming deliveries is also likely to work in India and Gill's favour.

The interesting choice will be when Kohli is back at number four in the Mumbai Test and if Gill scores runs and one among Pujara and Rahane fails, what are the options present for coach Rahul Dravid?

Paranjape feels that a specialist opener will not make much of a difference in Indian conditions where there won't be much seam and swing on offer after a certain period of time.

"I don't think in India, it's going to make a lot of difference because overseas it's more of a specialised role opener or middle-order. If they use Shubman in the middle-order, I believe it will work as the SG ball will lose its shine pretty quickly.

"In fact, if you see, KL Rahul had batted in the middle-order and had some success early in his career. Shubman can

replicate that," Paranjape explained.

But won't Gill, who has three half-centuries as an opener in his eight Test matches, find it difficult to straight-away adjust to his new role?

"When you are a young player, the capability to adapt to various roles is much quicker than at later stages of your career when you have already played 50 Test matches," said Paranjape, who in his time as selector had to extensively deal with explaining the players as to what role the team expects from them.

The selectors have included Shreyas Iyer as a specialist middle-order batter but the Mumbaier might have to wait for his Test debut. Paranjape feels, it should happen in due course of time as a few slots will certainly open up.

"Look sooner or later, Cheteshwar and Aju (Rahane)

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Germany faces grim COVID milestone with leadership in flux

ESCHWEILER, GERMANY (AP): Germany is set to mark 100,000 deaths from COVID-19 this week, passing a somber milestone that several of its neighbors crossed months ago but which Western Europe's most populous nation had hoped to avoid.

Teutonic discipline, a robust health care system and the rollout of multiple vaccines — one of them homegrown — were meant to stave off a winter surge of the kind that hit Germany last year.

Yet complacency and a national election, followed by a drawn-out government transition, saw senior politicians dangle the prospect of further lifting restrictions even as Germany's infection rate rose steadily this fall.

"Nobody had the guts to take the lead and announce unpopular measures," said Uwe Janssens, who heads the intensive care department at the St. Antonius hospital in Eschweiler, west of Cologne.

"This lack of leadership is the reason we are here now," he said.

Doctors like Janssens are bracing for an influx of coronavirus patients as confirmed cases hit fresh daily highs that experts say is also being fueled by vaccine skeptics.

Resistance to getting the shot — including the one developed by German company Biontech together with its U.S. partner Pfizer — remains strong among a sizeable minority of the country. Vaccination rates have stalled at 68% of the population, far short of the 75% or higher that the government had aimed for.



"We've increasingly got younger people in intensive care," said Janssens. "The amount of time they're treated is significantly longer and it blocks intensive care beds for a longer period."

Older people who got vaccinated early in 2021 are also seeing their immunity wear off, making them vulnerable to serious illness again, he said. Echoing problems seen during the initial vaccine rollout, authorities have struggled to meet demand for boosters even as they tried to encourage holdouts to get their first shot.

Some German politicians are suggesting it's time to consider a vaccine mandate, either for specific professions or for the population as a whole. Austria took that step last week, announcing COVID-19 shots will become compulsory for all starting in February after seeing a similar reluctance to get vaccinated fuel fresh outbreaks and hospitalizations.

Germany's outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel said in June that she didn't favor such

a measure. Signaling a possible shift in position, Merkel summoned leaders from the three parties negotiating to form the next government for talks Tuesday at the chancellery to discuss the pandemic situation.

Merkel's likely successor, current Finance Minister Olaf Scholz of the center-left Social Democrats, has refused to be drawn on whether he would back compulsory COVID-19 shots.

Together with the environmentalist Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats, his party recently passed a law that replaces the existing legal foundations for pandemic restrictions with narrower measures, starting Wednesday. These include a requirement for workers to provide their employers with proof of vaccination, recovery or a negative test. But the change also makes it harder for Germany's 16 governors to impose hard lockdowns without getting approval from state assemblies.

Getting those majorities may be hardest in those states where case

numbers are highest. A recent study found infection rates are higher in areas where support is biggest for the far-right Alternative for Germany, a party that has campaigned against pandemic restrictions.

Last week Saxony, an eastern state with the highest infection rates and where the Alternative for Germany is particularly strong, announced that crematoria would be allowed to operate on Sundays to cope with the higher-than-usual number of deaths.

Meanwhile, German authorities have activated an emergency system to coordinate the distribution of seriously ill patients across the country. Earlier this month, two patients were taken from southern Germany to Italy for treatment, a significant change from last year, when Italian patients were being sent to German hospitals.

Germany boasted almost four times as many intensive care beds per capita as Italy had then, a factor that experts say

was key to the low German death toll at the time.

Since January, Germany has had to cut its ICU capacity by 4,000 beds due to lack of staff, many of whom have quit because of the pressure they endured earlier in the pandemic.

"It's hard for people to cope with this, physically and psychologically," Janssens said of the situation doctors and nurses face in the coming months.

"We'll survive, somehow," he added.

The World Health Organization's European office warned this week that availability of hospital beds will again decide how well the region copes with the expected rise in cases over the coming months — along with vaccination rates.

Based on current trends, Europe could see another 700,000 deaths reported across the 53-nation region by next spring, with 49 countries expected to see "high or extreme stress in intensive care units," the agency said Tuesday.

Malaysia, Singapore set to reopen borders to some travel



KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP): Malaysia and Singapore said Wednesday they will partially reopen their borders next week to fully vaccinated citizens and some others, after nearly two years of closure due to the pandemic that had stranded many Malaysian workers in the neighboring city-state away from their families.

Leaders from both countries said limited travel will be allowed across the land border from Monday, with plans to gradually relax restrictions. Air travel will reopen on the same day to fully vaccinated passengers, allowing quarantine-free travel between the two countries, with fewer restrictions.

Travelers crossing the Causeway Bridge that connects the island of Singapore with the Malaysian peninsula must be citizens, permanent residents or long-term pass holders, according to separate statements from the

leaders of both governments. In the first phase, the number of travelers crossing the land border per day will be limited to 2,880 and required to travel on designated bus services, the statements said.

The Causeway was one of the world's busiest land borders before the pandemic struck.

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the partial border reopening would give priority to workers in either country who have not been able to visit their families since the land crossing was shut in March 2020.

Lee said the reopening of the border will be a "big step towards reconnecting our people and economies." A second land link will also subsequently be restored, he added.

Limits on land border crossings will progressively be relaxed to include general travelers and other modes of transportation than the

bus services, the statements added.

Travelers, except children aged two and below, must test negative two days before entering Singapore and are required to register online before purchasing bus tickets. Unvaccinated children aged 12 and below must be accompanied by fully vaccinated parents or guardians, the governments said.

With more than 95% of the adult population in both countries fully vaccinated, Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said this has allowed both countries to reopen their land border in a "gradual, safe, systematic, and sustainable manner."

More than 350,000 people crossed daily the Causeway before it was shut, mostly Malaysians working in Singapore due to a favorable exchange rate. Officials estimated that more than 100,000 Malaysians were stuck in the island-state after the border closed.

Israeli, Moroccan defense ministers meet in landmark visit

RABAT, MOROCCO (AP): Israel and Morocco signed a landmark agreement Wednesday that lays the foundation for security cooperation, intelligence sharing, and future arms sales.

The memorandum of understanding is the centerpiece of a visit this week by Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz to Morocco, which established formal relations with Israel last year as part of the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords.

Gantz's trip is the first official visit by an Israeli defense minister to one of the Arab states that normalized ties under the accords.

In a statement, Gantz said that the agreement was "very significant and will allow us to exchange ideas, enter joint projects and enable Israeli military exports here."

The agreement was signed during a meeting between Gantz and his Moroccan counterpart Abdellatif Loudiyi in Rabat, with military attaches and two Israeli parliament members in attendance. Gantz also

met with the Moroccan military chief of staff, and was greeted by a color guard of soldiers clad in red tunics, blue slacks and gleaming gold epaulettes.

Ahead of his meeting with Loudiyi, Gantz paid his respects at the tomb of Mohamed V, the grandfather of the reigning monarch.

Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan signed agreements to normalize relations with Israel in 2020 as part of the Abraham Accords, which were brokered by the Trump administration.

Israel and Morocco enjoyed low-level diplomatic relations in the 1990s, but Morocco severed them after a Palestinian uprising erupted in 2000. Despite that, the two states have maintained informal relations. Nearly half a million Israelis claim Moroccan heritage — more than 200,000 immigrated to Israel after the founding of the state in 1948 — and thousands visit the country each year.

Morocco is still home to a small Jewish community, and Rabat has one remaining synagogue, where Gantz will visit at the close of his two-day trip.

In exchange for Morocco normalizing relations with Israel, the Trump administration promised in December 2020 to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, a disputed north African territory. The announcement upset decades of U.S. policy and international consensus that Western Sahara's status should be settled by a U.N. referendum.

Since then, the Biden administration has cautiously walked back that recognition.

The Abraham Accords broke a longstanding consensus among Arab states that normalization with Israel only take place as part of a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because of that, the Palestinians view the agreements as a betrayal that eroded their leverage with Israel.

NASA launches spacecraft to test asteroid defense concept

LOS ANGELES (AP): NASA launched a spacecraft Tuesday night on a mission to smash into an asteroid and test whether it would be possible to knock a speeding space rock off course if one were to threaten Earth. The DART spacecraft, short for Double Asteroid Redirection Test, lifted off from Vandenberg Space Force Base atop a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket in a \$330 million project with echoes of the Bruce Willis movie "Armageddon."

If all goes well, in September 2022 it will slam head-on into Dimorphos, an asteroid 525 feet (160 meters) across, at 15,000 mph (24,139 kph).

"This isn't going to destroy the asteroid. It's just going to give it a small nudge," said mission official Nancy Chabot of Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, which is managing the project.

Dimorphos orbits a much larger asteroid called Didymos. The pair are no danger to Earth but offer scientists a way to measure the effectiveness of the collision.



Dimorphos orbits a much larger asteroid called Didymos every 11 hours, 55 minutes. DART's goal is a crash that will slow Dimorphos down and cause it to fall closer toward the bigger asteroid, shaving 10 minutes off its orbit.

The change in the orbital period will be measured by telescopes on Earth. The minimum change for the mission to be considered a success is 73 seconds.

The DART technique

could prove useful for altering the course of an asteroid years or decades before it bears down on Earth with the potential for catastrophe.

A small nudge "would add up to a big change in its future position, and then the asteroid and the Earth wouldn't be on a collision course," Chabot said.

Scientists constantly search for asteroids and plot their courses to determine whether they

could hit the planet.

"Although there isn't a currently known asteroid that's on an impact course with the Earth, we do know that there is a large population of near-Earth asteroids out there," said Lindley Johnson, planetary defense officer at NASA. "The key to planetary defense is finding them well before they are an impact threat."

DART will take 10 months to reach the as-

teroid pair. The collision will occur about 6.8 million miles (11 million kilometers) from Earth.

Ten days beforehand, DART will release a tiny observation spacecraft supplied by the Italian space agency that will follow it.

DART will stream video until it is destroyed on impact. Three minutes later, the trailing craft will make images of the impact site and material that is ejected.

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DON'T BETRAY HER! Singer Olivia Rodrigo turned heads at the American Music Awards in Los Angeles.

Ridley Scott hits back at Gucci family criticism: It was about murder

LONDON, NOV 24 (PTI): Veteran filmmaker Ridley Scott has responded to the criticism from the Gucci estate about his upcoming biographical crime film "House of Gucci", saying they seem to have forgotten there was a murder in the family. The movie stars Lady Gaga as Patrizia Reggiani, the ex-wife of Maurizio Gucci, played by Adam Driver, the grandson of the Gucci fashion house founder Guccio Gucci. Reggiani was abandoned after 12 years of marriage by Maurizio Gucci in 1985 for a younger woman. She was tried and convicted of orchestrating her ex-husband's assassination on the steps of his office in Italy in 1995.

Patrizia Gucci, who is Guccio Gucci's granddaughter and Maurizio Gucci's first cousin, in April said that the MGM film was "stealing the identi-

ty of a family to make a profit to increase the income of the Hollywood system". Rubbishing Patricia Gucci's claims, Scott told the BBC's flagship radio news programme "Today": "It was about murder. They forget: He was murdered. One of the brothers went to jail for tax evasion. So don't talk to me about making a profit. Are you kidding? When you do that you tend to become public domain." The 83-year-old director, known for iconic movies like "Gladiator", said the TV spin-offs of his classic films "Blade Runner" and "Alien" are under development. "We have already written the pilot for Blade Runner and the bible. So we're already presenting Blade Runner as a TV show, probably the first 10 hours," he said. Scott, who recently saw the release of his period action drama "The Last Duel", also

confirmed "Alien" was getting a "similar" small-screen spin-off. "Alien is now being written for pilot," he said, adding that the 8-10 hour bible was also being put together. "Alien" is to air on FX with Noah Hawley as showrunner. There is no news yet on where "Blade Runner" is being set up. Next for the director is "Kitbag", an Apple Studios film on Napoleon Bonaparte, which reunites the director with Joaquin Phoenix after "Gladiator" and Jodie Comer post "The Last Duel". Scott confirmed the film will start shooting January 15. "It's a monster," he said. The director also lashed out at the decision to have live firearms on set of "Rust", which led to the accidental killing of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins. A number of lawsuits have been filed over the fatal shooting.

Movies make my world go round: Ajay Devgn on completing 30 years in Bollywood

MUMBAI, NOV 24 (PTI): Superstar Ajay Devgn completed 30 years in the Hindi film industry on Monday and said the key ingredient for his sustainability in the world of cinema is his passion for movies and the stubbornness to keep evolving.

The 52-year-old actor entered the Hindi film industry with Phool Aur Kaante, which released on November 22, 1991.

The Kuku Kohli-directed romantic-action movie did well commercially and is remembered more so for Devgn's introduction in the film, a 180 degree split while balancing on two moving motorcycles. The stunt was designed by his late father and veteran action choreographer Veeru Devgan.

"I'm warming up and intend to go for another 30-40 years," Devgn promised.

To survive three decades, one needs hard work, grit, good luck, blessings and above all, tenacity, Devgn added.

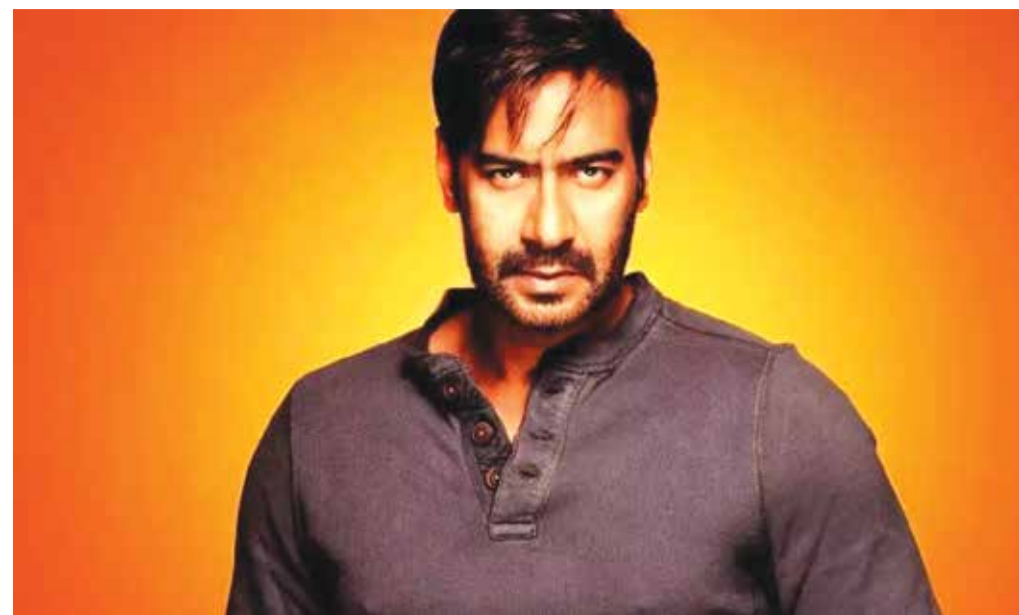
It's often said -- it's the survival of the fittest. Yes, you have to be mentally and physically sound and fit, to last 30 years and not seek a break, the actor, who is also a director and producer, told PTI in an interview.

As an actor some of his most notable films include Jigar, Vijaypath, Diljale, Pyaar Toh Hona Hi Tha, Zakham, Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam, Omkara, Golmaal, Singham series, Raid, Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior, among others.

Over the years, Devgn has witnessed both highs and lows but has managed to prove his mettle as a versatile performer trying out various genres from action, romance to comedy.

Passion for cinema keeps him "ticking every single minute", he said.

I can't tell what it is about the movies that make my world go round. Every aspect of cinema is delightful, enjoyable and to be cherished. From emotion to technology, cinema is constantly evolving and my hunger for this is in-



satiable, he added.

Asked to pick some of his career-defining roles, the actor said it is a tad tough to choose from his 100 films but he is immensely proud of Phool Aur Kaante and Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior.

I'm proud of Phool Aur Kaante that gave me birth and Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior that marked my century. The period in between had some milestones and mistakes. However, I don't believe in dwelling on past glory. One must look ahead.

Devgn turned director with 2008's U Me Aur Hum, which dealt with Alzheimer's disease. He also starred in the romance drama opposite his wife, actor Kajol. In his next directorial venture Shivaay (2016), he showcased high-octane action sequences in a film that had an emotional tale of father-daughter at the core.

He is returning to the director's chair with the tentatively titled Mayday, billed as an "edge-of-the-seat" drama.

Mayday features Devgn as a pilot and Rakul Preet Singh as his co-pilot. Megastar Amitabh Bachchan and "Love Per Square Foot" actor Angira Dhar round out the cast of the film.

Talking about directing films set in different spaces, Devgn said the attempt is to make more "meaningful" movies than "popcorn" entertainers.

I don't go out of my way to choose something just to make a statement. More often subjects have come to me at various stages and at that point, I have felt motivated to make that film. I'm not keen to be associated only with popcorn stuff. Frankly, I don't have anything against popcorn cinema.

However, if I have to choose a subject to direct, I would wish for it to be more meaningful and deep. Perhaps, someday I will make a light film too. Like I said, it's a decision made at that moment in life, he added.

The actor is also set to foray into the digital space with the Disney+ Hotstar crime-drama series Rudra: The Edge of Darkness, a remake of the Idris Elba-starrer British series Luther.

Speaking about his debut series, Devgn said, I loved Luther and enjoyed the multiple seasons long before I was offered the desi remake. Idris Elba plays a cop-on-the-edge with multiple shades and as a viewer he had my attention throughout.

When I was offered Rudra, I felt it was a good beginning for me as an actor on a streaming platform. Besides the nuanced cop character, the element of mystery and thrill made it worth my while.

Devgn continues to be one of the busiest actors even today with a slew of

movies like SS Rajamouli's Telugu action-drama RRR, Sanjay Leela Bhansali-helmed Gangubai Kathiawadi, Madaana, a sports drama, the Kaithi remake, historical drama Chanakya, light-hearted entertainers like Thank God and Golmaal 5 and Singham 3 coming up.

We actors are fortunate and blessed to go out there and do something we love each day of our lives. I didn't choose Amit Sharma's 'Madaana', the film chose me. It's one of those sport-based drama films with a terrific emotional anchor that will stay forever, he said.

As for RRR and Gangubai Kathiawadi, he has cameos in the two highly-anticipated projects.

When you have masters like Rajamouli Sir and Sanjay, you don't question the length of a role. You do it because of the sheer pleasure of being on set with them and sharing their vision, Devgn said.

The actor also informed that Kaithi, for which the Hindi title is yet to be finalised, should go on floors early next year and Singham 3 is expected to start rolling around October.

About the remaining projects (Raid 2, Chanakya, Golmaal 5) there are no set timelines. I know the films will happen. The pandemic made all of us lose a couple of years. So, until the backlog clears, I cannot see that far into the future, he said.

Shahid Kapoor: "After Kabir Singh released, I went like a beggar to everybody"

"I went to all these people who've made these 200-250 crore films," said Shahid Kapoor New Delhi: Shahid Kapoor interacted with the media during the trailer launch of Jersey on Tuesday. He said that he begged the filmmakers who have made 200-250 crore films, stated Bollywood Life. "After Kabir Singh released, I went like a beggar to everybody. I went

to all these people who've made these 200-250 crore films. I've never been a part of this club, so it was completely new to me. Having spent 15-16 years in the industry, I never had such a huge grosser. So, when it finally happened, I didn't know where to go, it was all new to me," Bollywood Life quoted Shahid Kapoor as saying.

Jersey is the Hindi remake of the Telugu hit of the same

name. It showcases the story of a cricketer, who returns to play cricket in his 30s, by joining the Indian cricket team. Directed by Gowtam Tinnanuri (who also helmed the original), the film was initially slated for an August 28 release. However, it was shifted due to the pandemic. The film will finally hit the screens on December 31. The film will also feature Shahid Kapoor's father Pan-

kaj Kapur as his mentor and actor Mrunal Thakur as his wife. Shahid Kapoor was last seen in the 2019 hit Kabir Singh, co-starring Kiara Advani. The film was a remake of the Telugu hit Arjun Reddy, starring Vijay Deverakonda in the lead role. The actor will next be seen in an untitled project with Raj and DK and in another project with Ali Abbas Zafar.

Aries:

You are on a secret mission, Aries, and the Universe is your co-conspirator on this journey. So, take time to tune in and have a conversation about what you are trying to bring into the physical. At the same time, listen. The Universe is speaking to you every day in mysterious ways, and helping you create the joyful, abundant and blissful life you desire for yourself. It's all happening in this moment, beautiful!

Taurus:

Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors, Taurus. Challenges are a part of life and they teach valuable lessons - resilience and adaptability being two of them. If you are feeling down, know that the only way now is up. But before you hasten to get to the 'good' part, stay down for a while. Notice how you feel, the things that trigger you. Learn the lesson this situation is trying to teach you. At the same time, let go of the need to compare your journey with that of others. You are where you need to, so trust the divine plan.

Gemini:

Every mistake is an opportunity to learn. So before you start being harsh on yourself for making the mistakes you have, take a mo-

ment to focus on the learnings. This will lead to many revelations on your journey. The one thing you want to remember as you are reassessing the story is that you are where you are meant to. So, let go of the need to compare yourself with others. This is a tendency that will lower rather than raise your vibrations.

Cancer:

Our past karma has an effect on the present. In the same way, our present karma is the very seed of our future. So, breathe. Take a moment to observe what you're holding onto and whether it has a place in your reality you are building for yourself. Looks like the time to hit the refresh button has come, Cancer! Something tells you are already in the midst of a beautiful transition.

Leo:

If we believed all the stories our mind told us then our life would be entirely different, Leo. So, take a moment to assess the stories you're repeating to yourself and whether or not they are serving your highest good. Upon closer examination, you will realise that you are letting your fears get the better of you, beautiful. So, take a deep breath. Take a deep breath and relax. You know what you've have to do and now is the time to do it. PS: The Universe has

your back!

Virgo:

Oh, illusions! We love our illusions and we love making love to our illusions in the hope that they somehow serendipitously become true. But, no matter how much we try to breathe life into them, they never will for they're not meant to. So, step out of that palace of illusions, Virgo. Into the world. Into this time and space reality, and know that only by being in the here and now will you discover true bliss and freedom.

Libra:

Today's affirmation for you is the Serenity Prayer, "Dear Universe, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." This is the secret to overcoming challenges you are being faced, Libra. Remember, acceptance is a gift. So, shift your perspective and become aware of what you are being shown in this moment. There is oh-so-much to be grateful! And as far as those changes are concerned, be bold and make the move you've been contemplating for some time now.

Scorpio:

Standing in your truth can be intimidating,

especially when you feel like you might face opposition. We all wanted to be loved and accepted, Scorpio, and that includes you. Just make sure you don't end up betraying yourself in an attempt to satisfy the baser desires of other people. The cards are also reminding you of the law of cause and effect. Plant your seeds mindfully. This will ensure that you reap a lush harvest tomorrow.

Sagittarius:

If you are feeling lost or confused, revisit the goals you set for yourself. Remembering why you started can help you refocus on where you're headed and choose the best path to get there. Most successful people will tell you it's a good idea to keep reviewing your progress after certain intervals to account for changes and ensure you're on the right track. And if you haven't found that one thing that ignites your dormant fire, it's time to do some soul searching, beloved.

Capricorn:

As John Maxwell once said, "Change is inevitable. Growth is optional." You are faced with the same choice, Capricorn. Nothing can grow or evolve without movement. Remember that as you stand on the precipice ready for change. You will be tempted to take the easy

way out, as most of us. Let your passion guide you, nonetheless, and you'll find that there is a lot to explore in the unknown realms.

Aquarius:

Open your eyes, Aquarius, and notice the support and love you are blessed with in this moment. There are people in this world, who adore and accept you just the way you are. If that is not a reason to celebrate, we don't know what is! Adopting gratitude as a practice is something that could help you bring about a shift. The cards also reminding you of the virtues of surrender. There are some things that are not working out as per your expectations, and that too is okay. It would be unfair to only accept the joyful experiences as a gift.

Pisces:

Pisces, you are becoming more aware of the river beneath the river beneath the river. The river, which is an unending source of creative nourishment. The river which continues to supply you with inspiration. The river which takes you to realms that exist above and beyond the imagination of the average person. Honour what you're being called to bring to the physical as you are a vessel for the Universe to express itself in the manifest reality.