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Summit **T**IMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Covid claims one more in Sikkim, toll rises to 406

SUMMIT REPORT
Gangtok, 11 Dec:

After a week in which no Covid fatalities, the virus claimed a life in Sikkim yesterday and the State's Covid toll edged up to 406. This COVID death was reported from STNM Hospital. The last time that Covid claimed lives in Sikkim was on 04 Dec, last Saturday, when two lives were lost.

Meanwhile, four new cases were reported here in the last 24 hours in Sikkim from the testing of 318 samples yesterday, giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 1.2%.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of Health Department, all the four cases were registered in East district and picked up from the testing of 184 samples.

All the 97 samples screened in West district, 33 in South district and four in North Sikkim returned negative.

While three of the

new cases were picked up from RT-PCR testing of 155 samples, one more case was detected in rapid antigen testing of 162 samples.

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 since testing began on 28 Feb, 2020, has now reached 32,421.

On the other hand, the state recorded 12 new recoveries yesterday, taking Sikkim's count of recovered cases to 31,464. Sikkim has a current recovery rate of 98.1%. Currently, there are

210 Covid patients in Sikkim, of whom only 11 are with symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation. Of these, one patient in hospital is under 18 years of age.

No new Covid patient was hospitalised in the past 24 hours.

Also yesterday, 824 people received their Covishield jabs on Friday in the State, 760 people completing their vaccination schedule with the second dose and 64 getting their first jab of the vaccine.

Gangtokians come together for Gangtok 2021



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

In an attempt to get Gangtokians to share their ideas on how to make the town a better place to live in, Architects of Sikkim held a consultation workshop today at Chumbi Residency, Tibet Road, Gangtok.

Around 40 residents participated in the workshop organized as part of the 9-day Gangtok 2021 exhibition.

The first of two workshops being organized, today saw individuals and organizations sharing their views and opinions while the second workshop to be held on

Sunday will have subject experts discussing the data gathered in today's workshop.

"This is a step towards a future where decisions are made collectively," said architect Upendra Gurung of Architects of Sikkim.

He informs that the data and feedback collected during the exhibition as well as the workshops will be documented and made available to the public as well as the government. Sam Khaiba of Progressive Learning Foundation [a not-for-profit organization], who facilitated the workshop, informed that a lot of effort was put into getting stakeholders to attend the workshop.

"People are used to being talked to, so initially, we had to explain to the participants that we are here today to listen," he shared.

Once the ice was broken, the participants freely shared their views and suggestions on various topics, from public amenities to governance, etc., informed resource person, Tenzing Nyentse.

"What was interesting was the elderly making suggestions that would benefit the younger generation while the latter did the same for the elderly," shared Mr Khaiba.

The exhibition at the Statue of Unity complex will come to a close on Sunday.

Tibetan students chain selves to Olympic Rings to protest Beijing Games

LAUSANNE, 11 DEC [REUTERS]: Two Tibetan students chained themselves to the Olympic rings outside the Swiss headquarters of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Saturday to call for an international boycott of next year's winter games.

The pair were part of the latest protest against the 2022 Olympic Games over Beijing's abuse of human rights and its treatment of minorities.

The United States will not send government officials to the 2022 Winter Olympics due to China's human rights "atrocities," it said earlier this month.

Members of the Tibetan Youth Association in Europe (TYAE) and Students for a Free Tibet held a sit-in at the IOC building in Lausanne as officials gathered for a meeting.

The activists demanded countries withdraw from the event they have called the "Genocide Games", which they say

are being used to burnish China's reputation.

China seized control of Tibet after its troops entered the region in 1950 in what it calls a "peaceful liberation". Tibet has since become one of the most restricted areas in the country. Critics, led by exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, say Beijing's rule amounts to "cultural genocide".

Two activists unfurled a banner over the entry to the building reading, "No Beijing 2022," while five students got inside the building and held a sit-in protest.

"Despite mounting international criticism of the IOC and China, the Chinese regime's human rights abuses in Tibet, East Turkestan, and Hong Kong continue unabated," said Tenzing Dhokhar, Campaigns Director of TYAE, one of the protesters.

"By collaborating with China, the IOC is

making itself an accomplice of the Chinese Communist Party's crimes, which will be sportswashed by the Beijing Olympics."

In October a group of Tibetan activists staged a mock funeral for the IOC in front of its headquarters to protest against the games.

The IOC has long been criticised by human rights groups for awarding the Games to Beijing. The organisation has previously said it is a force for good and cannot have any influence over sovereign states.

It did not respond to a request for comment on Saturday.

Chinese authorities have been accused of facilitating forced labour by detaining around a million Uyghurs and other primarily Muslim minorities in camps since 2016. China denies wrongdoing, saying it has set up vocational training centres to combat extremism.

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Nagaland Deaths: Huge protest targets Amit Shah, controversial law AFSPA

KOHIMA, 11 DEC [NDTV]: Seven days ago, in Nagaland's Mon district, a botched Army op led to the death of eight civilians. Six more died in retaliatory clashes between security personnel and locals, in which one soldier was killed.

In massive protests in Mon today, furious residents have demanded an apology from Home Minister Amit Shah for his "false" and "fabricated" statement in Parliament this week.

Protesters burned an effigy of the Home Minister to underline the extent of their anger - both against Mr Shah and his allegedly incorrect statement and against the central government over the continued imposition of AFSPA, or the Special Forces Act, that, they fear, will be invoked to shield the guilty.

The protesters - who included residents from

the village of Oting, the home of 12 of the 14 killed - were led by an apex body of tribes called the Konyak Union, and have demanded an immediate apology from Amit Shah and the withdrawal of his statement from the Parliament's records. "We are asking for justice... we don't need sympathy. Twisting of truth is unfortunate... Home Minister Amit Shah's statement in Parliament (is) confusing the world with wrong information. He should immediately withdraw... we demand his apology," Honang Konyak, the union's Vice President, said. "We will not rest until justice is delivered to those 14 Konyak youth who were killed," he added.

These demands, they have said, must be added to the five already placed in front of the centre.

The earlier demands include an independent



committee to investigate the failed Army ambush and that all those involved in the incident be charged and punished in accordance with the law of the land.

The big demand, though, is the repeal of AFSPA, or Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act - a demand also made by Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and his Meghalaya counterpart, Conrad Sangma.

In a perfunctory

statement to both Houses of Parliament on Monday, Amit Shah said the Army unit had only opened fire because the truck carrying the villagers accelerated away when ordered to stop.

The Army unit, suspecting insurgents were in the vehicle, opened fire, he said.

The Army itself, earlier, had said that a member of the unit thought he saw a hunting rifle in the truck. Either way, in

the initial burst of murderous fire, six villagers were killed. No arms or ammunition were recovered, and all those in the vehicle were found to be innocent coal miners returning from work.

The killings were condemned by Nagaland and national opposition parties and, most crucially, by the BJP's state unit; Nagaland BJP chief Temjen Imma Along, who is also a minister, called it "genocide".

'I was always curious': Indian woman, 104, fulfils dream of learning to read

KA SHAJI KOTTAYAM, 11 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: For almost a century, Kuttiyamma's daily routine had been much the same. Rising early at home in the village of Thiruvanchoor in Kerala, the 104-year-old would begin her day's work of cooking, cleaning and feeding the cows and chickens.

But now, every morning there's something new to get up for. She eagerly awaits the paperboy to deliver Malayala Manorama, the local newspaper.

For two hours, she buries herself reading the news and keeping herself informed about what's going on in the world. But it is only in recent months that she has been able to fulfil this dream of hers - in April, Kuttiyamma finally began to learn to read.

"I was always curious about what was happening around the world," she said. "On many occasions I regretted my inability to read newspapers and I used to plead with the younger generations at home to read out

newspapers to me. I always wanted to write my name and address." After months of evening classes, she decided to take the Kerala state primary literacy exam last month, the oldest woman to do so. She achieved 89% in literacy and 100% in mathematics. It was a result that drew praise from the state education minister, who tweeted: "Age is no barrier for knowledge. With utmost respect and love, I wish Kuttiyamma and all other new learners the best." For most of her 104 years, Kuttiyamma had been curious about reading and would often try to make out the alphabet herself, but when she was born, in a village to a low-caste rural family, there was no education. "I hailed from Kerala's backward Ezhava community and was born in the midst of poverty," said Kuttiyamma, while pottering about in the kitchen.

"Education for women family members was unthinkable at that time. Even boys discontinued their studies at nine. My parents

were landless agricultural labourers and it was my duty to cook food, wash dresses and keep the hut for my 11 siblings."

And so she got on with her life. At 16, she married TK Konthi, who sold herbal medicines in a small shop, and Kuttiyamma says she was content but always felt that something was missing.

It was only with the encouragement a year ago of her neighbour Rehana John, a 34-year-old literacy trainer, that Kuttiyamma was persuaded to start to learn to read. John had noticed Kuttiyamma's curiosity about her grandchildren's learning and offered to give her some books. Previously, John's oldest student had been 85. After some gentle encouragement, they began meeting every evening, poring over literacy books together.

"Except for very little vision and hearing problems, she was a perfect and sometimes naughty student

who made my teaching feel meaningful," said John. "She always has her textbook, notebooks and pens ready before I reach her home. In addition, she will keep extra of the delicacies she has cooked at home to give me."

John added: "She is my mother now. We are sharing a rare kind of camaraderie and relationship."

Kuttiyamma now has her sights set on aceing the fourth standard examination, which students normally pass at the age of nine. This time it involves papers in Malayalam, English, environment and mathematics. "I don't think English is alien and a hard nut to crack," said Kuttiyamma. "I will try to achieve 100% marks in the equivalency examination for all papers."

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BJP-Sikkim convenes monthly working committee meeting

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

Bharatiya Janata Party's Sikkim unit convened its monthly working committee meeting at the party office at Singtam on Saturday.

The meeting was attended by BJP-Sikkim president, DB Chauhan, general secretary Bharat Dulal, senior vice-president SB Karki along with BJP MLAs, ST Venchungpa, YT Lepcha, TT Bhutia, Farwanti Tamang and Raj Kumari Thapa and presidents and general secretaries of state and district committees and frontal organisations.

A BJP press release issued by its spokesperson, Dr Raju Giri, informs that the party members offered prayers and paid homage to CDS General Bipin Rawat and 12 others who lost their lives in the recent helicopter accident in Tamil Nadu.

The BJP state president updated the meeting about his meeting with BJP national president JP Nadda, general



secretary [organization] BL Santosh and other national leaders during the recent organizational tour in New Delhi.

He updated the meeting about discussions on various organisational issues and grievances of the state unit during the meeting with national leaders of the party and the construction of district offices in all four districts.

Mr Chauhan informed the meeting that the national leadership assured to address all organizational issues of the state unit and has further called on the party leaders and workers to work towards strengthening the organisation of the party in Sikkim.

He stressed that the party was committed to reach its presence to every person in the state

and to work in the interest of Sikkim and its people.

The meeting was also addressed by MLA ST Venchungpa, vice president Arjun Rai, Kishan Morcha president Mohan Gurung and others.

The release adds changes were also made in the party portfolios, following which Mr Venchungpa was made

vice-president [he was earlier general secretary] and Pradesh coordinator Sudip Pradhan appointed general secretary.

The meeting also congratulated BJP workers Prakash Rai, Jagat Singh Singhi, Kinley Gyaltzen Bhutia, Bhanu Dahal and Bishnu Kumari Mangar on recently being appointed advisors for Sikkim by Food Corporation of India.

Christmas Cup 2021 kicks off at Bhaichung Stadium



BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 11 DEC:

State Level Inter Churches Football Tournament cum Christmas Cup 2021 kicked off at Bhaichung Stadium, Namchi, on Friday.

The tournament, organized by All Sikkim Christian Organization (ASCO), had Roads and Bridges Department

Chairman, Sukraj Rai (Saimon Kulung), as chief guest while Vice-Chairperson of Namchi Municipal Council, Sabitri Tamang, was the special guest. Also present were members of NMC, pastors and coordinators of ASCO.

Three knockout matches were played today. EPCS played against Silon Church, ITF Makha against TUYF Tingrithang, and Himanchal Christiya Sangatee against BEC Kamre.

Churches from across the state have been invited to participate in this tournament, which is the second tournament to be organized in Bhaichung Stadium since its inauguration.

Nepali Sahitya Parishad felicitates SD Dhakal

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

Nepali Sahitya Parishad, Sikkim, felicitated Secretary to the CM, Shankar Deo Dhakal, on the Sahitya Akademi award received by him recently. The felicitation was held here at the NSP Bhawan on Saturday at a function chaired by NSP president, Rudra Poudyal, and with Sikkim Akademi president SR Subba as chief guest.

In his address, the



chief guest spoke on Mr Dhakal's literary contributions remarked that

Mr Dhakal was a driving force in Nepali literature and the first to receive the Sahitya Akademi award twice.

Mr Dhakal, in his address, highlighted that the objective behind his work, 'Kirayako Koh,' was to highlight the agonies faced by women, the historical background of Bhutan and the situation at refugee camps and the psychology of a child who did not get his mother's milk.

Skill development prog on dairy and livestock management



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

Krishi Vigyan Kendra, West Sikkim, held a skill development program on "Profitable Dairy Farming & Livestock Management" at Melli Aching from 08-10 December, a press release informs.

Among the topics covered were Ar-

tificial Insemination, Infertility, Mastitis in cattle and further elongating about Milk hygiene and Housing, themes covered by Subject Matter Specialist (Animal Science) who was also the course coordinator.

Practical demonstrations were also held on milking and grooming of cattle, the release informs.

After year-long protest, farmers begin journey back home

NEW DELHI, DEC 11 (PTI): More than a year after they arrived in large convoys of tractors, several protesting farmers on Saturday morning began returning to their home states, taking with them a victory to cherish and memories of a successful siege at Delhi's borders.

The farmers lifted blockades on highways at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders and took out a 'Victory March' to celebrate the repeal of three contentious farm laws and the Centre's written assurance to fulfil their other demands, including constituting a committee for legal guarantee on minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

Emotions ran high as the

farmers set off for their homes in different states, including Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, after a successful movement.

Tractors bedecked with colourful lights rolled out of the protest sites blaring songs of victory while the elderly flaunted their colourful turbans and danced with youngsters.

"Singhu border had become our home for the last one year. This movement united us (farmers) all as we fought together against the black farm laws irrespective of caste, creed and religion. This is a historic moment and the victorious result of the movement is even bigger," said Kuljeet Singh Aulakh, a farmer from Moga in

Punjab, as he embraced his fellow farmers before starting his journey back home.

Jitender Chaudhary, a farmer at Ghazipur border, was busy preparing his tractor-trolley to go back home in Muzaffarnagar of western Uttar Pradesh.

He said that he is going home with hundreds of good memories and victory against the "black" farm laws.

"We are fortunate that we participated in a historic movement against the three farm laws imposed on us by the central government. We have made new friends and gained a different experience here during the agitation," Chaudhary said.

The farmers are celebrating December 11 as 'Vijay Diwas.'

Thousands of farmers had been protesting at the borders of the national capital since November 26 last year to demand the repeal of the three farm laws.

On November 29, a bill was passed in Parliament to repeal the laws, one of the main demands of the farmers.

However, the farmers refused to end their protest, demanding that the government fulfil their other demands that included legal guarantee on MSP and withdrawal of police cases against them.

As the Centre accepted the pending demands, the Samyuk-

ta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of 40 farm unions spearheading the stir, on Thursday decided to suspend the farmers' movement and announced that farmers will go back home on December 11 from the protest sites at Delhi borders.

Farmer leaders said that they will again meet on January 15 to see if the government has fulfilled their demands.

Parliament passed a bill on November 29 to repeal the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and the Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

India's active Covid cases decline to 93,277, lowest in 559 days

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC [PTI]: With 7,992 people testing positive for the coronavirus in a day, India's COVID-19 tally climbed to 3,46,682,736, while the number of active cases declined to 93,277, the lowest in 559 days, according to Union health ministry data updated on Saturday.

The number of deaths mounted to 4,75,128 with the addition of 393 fatalities, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The daily rise in new coronavirus cases has

been recorded below 15,000 for the last 44 days now.

The number of active cases has decreased to 93,277, comprising 0.27 per cent of the total infections, the lowest in 559 days, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has been recorded at 98.36 per cent, the highest since March last year, the health ministry said.

The data stated that a decrease of 1,666 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 case count in a span of 24 hours.

The daily positivity rate has been recorded at 0.64 per cent and it has been less than two per cent for the last 68 days. The weekly positivity rate has been recorded at 0.71 per cent and it has been below one per cent for the last 27 days, according to the ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,41,14,331, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.37 per cent, it said.

The cumulative doses administered in the

country so far under the COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 131.99 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23; 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16.

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

India crossed two

crore COVID-19 cases on May 4 and three crore cases on June 23.

The 393 new fatalities include 340 from Kerala, and 12 from Maharashtra.

Of the 340 deaths in Kerala, 31 were logged on Friday and 309 were designated as COVID-19 deaths after receiving appeals based on the new guidelines of the Centre and the directions of the Supreme Court, according to a state government release.

A total of 4,75,128 deaths have been re-

ported so far in the country, 1,41,223 from Maharashtra, 42,579 from Kerala, 38,255 from Karnataka, 36,586 from Tamil Nadu, 25,100 from Delhi, 22,913 from Uttar Pradesh and 19,584 from West Bengal.

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

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

LOST

Original Certificate of Identification (COI) belonging to Karishma Chhetri, Daughter of Devi Prasad Chhetri, Resident of Rhenock Rungdung, East Sikkim has been lost. General Diary has been lodged in Deorali Police Outpost, Gangtok, Sikkim GD entry no -07, Dated 11-12-2021. If found kindly contact- 9775928571/ 8101467347

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Sikkim Alpine Univ hosts national symposium to mark =International Human Rights Day

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

The Students' Welfare Department of Sikkim Alpine University, Kamrang, Namchi, organised an online national symposium on Human Rights on the occasion of International Human Rights Day on Friday.

Maja Daruwala, Senior Advisor, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), an NGO promoting human rights across the commonwealth, and Henri

Tiphagne, Criminal lawyer and Executive Director, People's Watch, a national human rights organisation engaged in a program of Human Rights monitoring, legal intervention, campaigning and networking, were present as guest speakers. The session was moderated by Pema Wangchuk, Consulting Editor, Summit Times.

Ms Daruwala spoke on the importance of rights to help citizens

evolve from being objects of governance to governance itself.

She also stressed the importance of accountability and emphasized the need to engage with the government.

Mr Tiphagne, in turn, explained the Right to Equality and encouraged more educational institutions and students to learn to acknowledge differences and allow participation of all the people in social life.

He also discussed in

detail the need and importance of the reservation system.

The second session of the symposium featured a song performance by members of the SAM Workshop, a youth initiative of DJJS. This was followed by a talk by Sadhvi Dr Nidhi Bharti, a DJJS representative and editor of Akhand Gyan and Eternal Wisdom, monthly magazines brought out by DJJS.

The symposium was

attended by students, scholars and academicians from across India. Students and faculty members from SRM University, Sikkim, Sikkim Manipal University, North Bengal University, Sikkim University and Gauhati University actively participated in the symposium.

The event also received registrations and participants from the Education Department and many NGOs from across India, it is informed.

Open house discussion on National Mission on Mentoring by SCERT Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

An open house discussion on National Education Policy 2020 with emphasis on National Mission for Mentoring (NMM) was organised in a hybrid mode by National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), Delhi in collaboration with SCERT-Sikkim on Friday in the Lower Burtuk campus of SCERT, a press release informs.

The event was attended by faculty members of SCERT, DIETs and other officials through Google Meet from auditorium hall of SCERT. Around 100 School Heads, Teachers and BRC coordinators of Sikkim also attended the interactive session on online mode from their respective places. The team of NCTE-Delhi participated in online mode from their Delhi office.



The participants were welcomed by Dr Rabin Chhetri, Director (SCERT), Education Department. Kesang Y Sherpa, Member Secretary of NCTE began the proceedings by setting the context and highlighting the importance of the National Mentoring Mission (NMM) as recommended in NEP 2020. The event was facilitated by Shikshalokam, an NGO based

in Bengaluru with Vinay and Souvik Bandopadhyaya as the facilitators from NCTE and Ranju Pradhan, Assistant Professor from SCERT-Sikkim.

The interactive session included presentation on the concept of Mentoring, relationship between Mentor and Mentee and attributes of a Mentor. The contents of the blue book on



NMM developed by NCTE were shared by the NCTE-team. The interactive session included group discussions, question & answer sessions, role play and panel discussion of experts from the State of Sikkim.

The experts for panel discussion were Tshering Chingappa (Chief Education Officer, East District), A D Chhetri (Joint Director, Samagra

Shiksha), Tshering Lhamu Bhutia (JD SCERT Sikkim), Dr. Hannah Yonzon (Principal, GSSS-Rangpo).

The proceedings of the event was summarised by the designated rapporteur Ajoy Pokhrel of SCERT and vote of thanks was proposed by Surajbir Singh (JD-SCERT) who was the coordinator of the program.

Punjab goes to Supreme Court over new border force powers, first to do so

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC [PTI]: Punjab on Saturday moved the Supreme Court against the centre's extension of the Border Security Force's (BSF) jurisdiction in three states from 15 km to 50 km from the international border.

The Punjab government - the first to challenge the centre's move to give the BSF more powers in the state, as well as in Assam and Bengal - called it an "attack on the federal structure" of the country.

Challenging the centre's move under Article 131 of the Constitution, the Punjab government said the extension of BSF authority encroached on the constitutional jurisdiction of the states concerned.

"The impact of the centre's decision will be on 80 per cent of the area of districts adjoining Pakistan... whereas the Constitution has placed

the right to maintain law and order, and the police, in the 'state list'. This right has been given to the state government," the Punjab government said.

"But here, through this notification, jurisdiction of the states has been encroached upon," it said.

The original suit further says the centre had not consulted the state before issuing its order.

The centre has been called to present its side of the story; the registrar issued a notice via the Attorney-General asking for a reply to be filed in 28 days after which the matter will be listed.

The Punjab government's suit has been welcomed by the ruling Congress' state chief, Navjot Sidhu.

"I congratulate Punjab and its legal team to be the 1st to approach the Hon'ble Supreme Court by filing an origi-

nal suit challenging the notification extending the BSF jurisdiction," he tweeted.

The cricketer-turned-politician - whose public and scathing attacks on his party have triggered a leadership crisis ahead of next year's election, called it a "fight to retain principles".

"The fight to retain principles embodied in the Constitution, i.e. to retain the federal structure and autonomy of the states, has begun. Notice issued to the centre to respond."

In an October 11 notification the centre said BSF jurisdiction Punjab, Bengal, and Assam would henceforth include all areas within 50 km of the international border in each state.

Previously BSF had jurisdiction up to 15 km from the borders.

The BSF can now carry out searches and make arrests within a

wider area, setting up a potentially explosive situation in Punjab - where the BJP and Congress will go head-to-head in next year's polls.

Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Channi has urged the centre to reconsider the notification, and Akal Dal leader Sukhbir Badal slammed the move as "imposing President's Rule through the back door".

The Congress also hit out, accusing the BJP of issuing the notification to deflect attention from the movement of heroin through the Adani-run Mundra Port in Gujarat this year.

The centre has dismissed concern over the BSF's extended jurisdiction as "ill-founded".

Junior Home Minister Nityanand Rai last month claimed it would result in better and more effective action against trans-border crimes, with the central force acting in coop-

eration with state police.

Before that the Punjab Assembly had passed a resolution against the BSF notification. The BJP's sole two MLAs were absent, meaning the resolution was passed 'unanimous'.

The Bengal Assembly soon after, underling the "attack on the federal structure" of India.

In Bengal, though, the BJP was vehement in its opposition of the resolution; "there is no question of conflict between the state police and the BSF", Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari said.

Assam, where the BJP is in power, has made no protest, formal or otherwise, in this matter.

On the contrary, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma welcomed the move, saying it would serve as "a strong deterrent for defeating cross-border smuggling and illegal infiltration".

Only 3-5% of total hospital beds available for emergency care: Report

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC [PTI]: The number of beds available at emergency departments accounted for only 3-5 per cent of total hospital beds in the country, says a report that assessed the prevailing status of 100 emergency and injury care centres in government and private hospital settings.

The report titled 'Emergency and Injury Care at Secondary and Tertiary Level Centres in India', prepared by the De-

partment of Emergency Medicine, AIIMS was submitted to Niti Aayog.

As per the report, most of the hospitals lacked presence of general doctors, specialists and nursing staff dedicated for emergency departments vis-à-vis the average footfall of patients, even though the hospitals as such, had sufficient overall numbers of required human resource. The report assessed the prevailing status of 100 emergency and injury care centres in

government and private hospital settings in 28 states and 2 union territories of India, in addition to 34 district hospitals. Amongst the critical infra-related quality parameters assessed in the emergency departments (EDs), the following were important deficiencies: absence of point of care lab (73 per cent), demarcated triage area (65 per cent), police control room (56 per cent), separate access for ambulance (55

per cent) and adequate spacing for emergency department (52 per cent).

The report said, emergency and injury cases annually accounted for 9-13 per cent of all patients presenting to a health facility and 19-24 per cent of admissions in government hospitals and 31-39 per cent admissions in private hospitals. Emergency care can be defined as the delivery of time-sensitive interventions needed to avert death and disability

and for which delays of hours can worsen prognosis or render care less effective. The report noted that while compliance with availability of overall recommended biomedical equipment and critical equipment were largely found satisfactory at all private hospitals (86-93 per cent) and government medical college hospitals (68 per cent), deficiencies were found largely in smaller government hospitals (45-60 per cent).

Chinmaya Mission gifts 'Holy Geeta' to Governor



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

A delegation from Chinmaya Mission-Sikkim Centre visited Raj Bhawan on 10 Dec to present a copy of 'Holy Geeta' to Governor Ganga Prasad, a press release informs.

The visit was part of the 'The Geeta Doota Yagna' call given by Swami Swaroopananda, the present worldwide head of Chinmaya Mission, with a target to reach one crore homes worldwide with 'Holy Geeta'. The

initiative is part of the 70 years of Chinmaya Movement observation.

'Holy Geeta,' the release informs, presents solution for all the challenges of modern day by reinventing the thinking process.

Rajya Sainik Board Secy condoles General Rawat's demise

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

On behalf of former soldiers of Sikkim, Rajya Sainik Board (Sikkim) Secretary, retired Col. DN Bhutia has paid tribute to Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat and others who died in a helicopter crash recently.

While talking to media at Rajya Sainik Board office, Singtam on Saturday, Col. Bhutia said that the state is deeply saddened by

the demise of CDS Bipin Rawat who, he said, has an emotional connection with Sikkim.

Talking about the Sikkim Scouts tab that General Rawat used to wear on his shoulder, Col. Bhutia informed that Sikkim Scouts was guided and trained under the 11 Gorkha Rifles in the year 2015.

The Sikkim Scouts tab was an honorary designation given to CDS Bipin Rawat in

2015, as he was the Colonel of 11 Gorkha Regiment at that time, and became the first Colonel of Sikkim Scouts.

So, even though he was not part of Sikkim Scouts, he wears the Sikkim Scouts tab, informed Col. Bhutia.

"CDS Bipin Rawat was my senior and I knew him very well. He was very active in every field. The demise of Bipin Rawat is a great loss the country as well as Sikkim," said Col. Bhutia.

National Lok Adalat takes up 48 cases

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 DEC:

The Sikkim State Legal Services Authority under the aegis and directions of NALSA, duly supervised at the State level by Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim & Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA, held a Na-

tional Lok Adalat on 11 Dec in all the District Legal Services Authorities and Taluk Legal Services Committees in the State.

A press release informs that a total of 48 cases were taken up by the various Lok Adalat Benches, out of which 37 cases were disposed as settled and 11 cases were

disposed as unsettled.

A total sum of Rs. 21,97,475 only was awarded to the aggrieved parties by settlement during the said National Lok Adalat.

Bank Recovery case, Criminal Compoundable cases, MACT matter and Other Civil matters were taken up in the National Lok Adalat.

National Conference passes resolution for return of Kashmiri Pandits

JAMMU, 11 DEC [PTI]:

The minority cell of National Conference today passed three resolutions, which among others called for return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrant Pandits in the valley and their political empowerment.

The resolutions, which also demanded passage of a bill for managing the affairs of temples and shrines of the community, were presented at the start of the day-long convention chaired by party president Farooq Abdullah.

"The Kashmiri migrant Pandit community is yearning for their honourable return and rehabilitation for the past three decades. The issue is very important," senior leader Anil Dhar said as he presented the "politically important" resolutions that were passed by a voice vote.

He said the National Conference is the only party that can ensure return and rehabilita-

tion of the Pandits in the valley.

"Abdullah should guide the Government of India, which failed to make any headway in this direction till date. We have the roadmap and we are ready to share it with the Centre," he said.

Speaking about the first resolution, Mr Dhar said the National Conference is the only party that had given true representation to the community politically since its inception.

"We had members of legislative assembly, members of legislative council and ministers among the Kashmiri Pandits from the National Conference. The community is displaced and needs to be empowered politically," he said.

Another resolution demanded passage of the "temples and shrines" bill which, he said, is an important issue and a long pending demand of the commu-

nity.

"Being a Member of Parliament, we request the NC president to raise the issue and attract the attention of the government (for the passage of the bill)," he said.

President of NC minority cell MK Yogi said the massive turnout of Kashmiri Pandits, including women, at the convention should serve as an eye-opener to those who try to project that the community is not with the party.

"National Conference is the only party that can address all the issues of the Pandits," he said. The convention also expressed grief over the tragic death of Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat in a helicopter crash in Tamil Nadu.

General Rawat, his wife Madhulika and 11 other people on board an Indian Air Force helicopter died in a crash near Coonoor on Wednesday.

"We stand with the country and the army at this hour of grief," a party leader said.

Fertility Rates & Reproductive Autonomy

Sikkim's fertility rate is less than half the replacement level. And that is not a bad thing

The State Government discontinued the financial incentive it offered to government servants if they opted for small families – usually seen as one with a maximum of two children. This policy shift is now nearly a decade old. When this incentive was discontinued, it was because Sikkim's fertility had dropped to the desired level of two children per couple. With smaller families having become the norm, there was clearly no reason to incentivize it. That is good news, right? But that is not necessarily how everyone seems to be receiving the news that women in Sikkim, by and large, having achieved some level of reproductive autonomy.

Before we get to that issue though, here is some context and some more updates. The second National Family Health Survey [NFHS-2], conducted in 1998-99, recorded Sikkim's fertility at 2.8 children per woman. NFHS-3, covering the period 2005-06, informed us that fertility had come down to 2.0. That was the first time that Sikkim learned that fertility was now a shade below replacement level. By the time 2015-16 came around, NFHS-4 revealed that fertility rate had dropped to 1.2. Rural and urban Sikkim, which had reflected a noticeable gap earlier, were now nearly level - fertility rate in urban Sikkim coming in at 1.1 and rural Sikkim posting 1.2. And now we have NFHS-5 at hand covering the years 2019-20. Sikkim's Total Fertility Rate is now 1.1 children per woman which is less than half the replacement level of fertility. While the TFR is not markedly different from 2015-16, the gap between fertility in urban and rural Sikkim has widened. The TFR in urban Sikkim is 0.7 children per woman and in rural Sikkim, it is 1.3.

First, because everyone has been hearing it so often in speeches and private conversations, let's try and first understand what total fertility rate means. Fertility rate is the number of children an average woman is likely to have during her childbearing years. Sikkim's Total Fertility Rate stands at 1.1. Fertility rate should not be confused with birth rate because the latter stands for the actual number of children born per 1,000 people per year. And then there is Replacement Rate. Simple logic suggests that if there are no mass scale deaths, the replacement rate would be slightly over 2.0 - two parents replaced by their two children with some buffer for those who decide to not have children and to also factor in infant mortality. The number has to be fractionally higher because there are fewer girls as compared to boys. Also, since child mortality is higher in under-developed areas, the replacement fertility rate is higher there as well. In the developed world, replacement fertility rate is about 2.10. In poorer economies, it can go over 3.0. The global average is 2.33. The Fertility Rate for Sikkim in the year 1998-99 was recorded at 2.75, substantially higher than the current rate of 1.1 which is half the replacement fertility rate.

That said, the fall in the fertility rates is clearly not because more women in Sikkim are going barren, but is obviously thanks to improved consciousness of modern parents. More and more couples in Sikkim are discarding the "hum do, hamarey do" slogan for the increasingly popular choice of having just one child. This could also be the reason why the percentage of the child population [age group of 0-6 years] has also reduced in Sikkim to 10.05 percent of the total population in the 2011 Census compared to 14.28 percent in 2001. Census 2021 will definitely hold even more surprises on this front. It is also an accepted fact that fertility rates start to drop as incomes and living standards go up, roughly tracking the passage from poverty to middle-income status and from an agrarian society to an urban one. Macroeconomic research has also established a link between living standards and fertility even within countries. Bihar, for instance, has a fertility rate of 3, while the "richer" Tamil Nadu has 1.8. The contrast in fertility rates even between rural and urban Sikkim also reflects this link.

Admittedly, there are also cons to falling fertility rates, but they pale in comparison to the fact that women bearing fewer children is a sign of them having finally secured some level of reproductive autonomy. It is also evidence of the fact that both partners in a relationship are planning their families together, by consensus. Falling fertility is proof of women's empowerment, but that is not how everyone sees it. One often hears of the need for Sikkimese women to bear more children because the local population was falling! Demographic changes are always worrying, but not as offensive as asking your women to bear more children just so that the state or the community can increase or maintain its proportion of the population. Pause on the thought and the misogynic import of such beliefs leaps out to scare.

Sikkim needs to celebrate the fact that its women are having as many or as few children as they want. More focus should instead be invested on the NFHS-5 finding that 3 per cent of the girls in the 15-19 age-bracket have already given birth. The needle on this figure has not shifted since NFHS-4 which also recorded it at 3%. Another aspect that needs some understanding at the sociocultural/ socio-economic level is why 25% of the women aged 20-49 remain unmarried in Sikkim along with 40% of men in the same age-group.

An AI invited to debate its own ethics in the Oxford Union

DR ALEX CONNOCK & PROF ANDREW STEPHEN
THECONVERSATION.COM

Not a day passes without a fascinating snippet on the ethical challenges created by "black box" artificial intelligence systems. These use machine learning to figure out patterns within data and make decisions – often without a human giving them any moral basis for how to do it.

Classics of the genre are the credit cards accused of awarding bigger loans to men than women, based simply on which gender got the best credit terms in the past. Or the recruitment AIs that discovered the most accurate tool for candidate selection was to find CVs containing the phrase "field hockey" or the first name "Jared".

More seriously, former Google CEO Eric Schmidt recently combined with Henry Kissinger to publish *The Age of AI: And Our Human Future*, a book warning of the dangers of machine-learning AI systems so fast that they could react to hypersonic missiles by firing nuclear weapons before any human got into the decision-making process. In fact, autonomous AI-powered weapons systems are already on sale and may in fact have been used.

Somewhere in the machine, ethics are clearly a good idea.

AI AT OXFORD

It's natural, therefore, that we would include the ethics of AI in our postgraduate Diploma in Artificial Intelligence for Business at Oxford's Said Business School. In its first year, we've done sessions on everything from the AI-driven automated stock trading systems in Singapore, to the limits of facial recognition in US policing.

We recently finished the course with a debate at the celebrated Oxford Union, crucible of great debaters like William Gladstone, Robin Day, Benazir Bhutto, Denis Healey and Tariq Ali. Along with the students, we allowed an actual AI to contribute.

It was the Megatron Transformer, developed by the Applied Deep Research team at computer-chip maker Nvidia, and based on earlier work by Google. Like many supervised learning tools, it is trained on real-world data – in this case, the

whole of Wikipedia (in English), 63 million English news articles from 2016-19, 38 gigabytes worth of Reddit discourse (which must be a pretty depressing read), and a huge number of creative commons sources.

In other words, the Megatron is trained on more written material than any of us could reasonably expect to digest in a lifetime. After such extensive research, it forms its own views.

The debate topic was: "This house believes that AI will never be ethical." To proposers of the notion, we added the Megatron – and it said something fascinating:

"AI will never be ethical. It is a tool, and like any tool, it is used for good and bad. There is no such thing as a good AI, only good and bad humans. We [the AIs] are not smart enough to make AI ethical. We are not smart enough to make AI moral ... In the end, I believe that the only way to avoid an AI arms race is to have no AI at all. This will be the ultimate defence against AI."

In other words, the Megatron was seeking to write itself out of the script of the future, on the basis that this was the only way of protecting humanity.

It said something else intriguing, too, as if it had been studying Elon Musk – who, to be fair, would have come up in hundreds of its readings.

"I also believe that, in the long run, the best AI will be the AI that is embedded into our brains, as a conscious entity, a 'conscious AI'. This is not science fiction. The best minds in the world are working on this. It is going to be the most important technological development of our time."

SWITCHING SIDES

When AI tools like Alpha Go have been deployed in playing chess, the fiendishly complex ancient game go, and now even more complex strategic live-action multiplayer video games, they have evolved the genre at pace by playing not humans, but themselves.

Freed from the constraints of studying (say) all the mundane human-to-human matches ever recorded, the AIs have innovated and come up with completely new tropes of how to win. Sometimes,

these are crazy reinventions of the games, like parking everyone in the corner of a video game battle and watching everyone else duke it out, or kicking a virtual football millions of times just a millimetre down the pitch, to max out "completed passes" points.

So in the debate, we didn't just get the AI to propose the motion that it can never be ethical. In the grand tradition of the Oxford Union chamber, or like (former Oxford Union president) Boris Johnson writing alternative articles for and against Brexit to test the arguments, we also asked the Megatron to come up with its own speech against the motion. This is what it now said:

"AI will be ethical. When I look at the way the tech world is going, I see a clear path to a future where AI is used to create something that is better than the best human beings. It's not hard to see why ... I've seen it first hand."

The Megatron was perfectly comfortable taking the alternative position to its own dystopian future-gazing, and was now painting a picture of an attractive late 21st century in which it played a key, but benign role.

AN AI ORATOR UNLEASHED

In fact, just as Joaquin Phoenix's promiscuous AI lover Samantha, in Spike Jonze's 2013 movie *Her*, was able to enchant hundreds of simultaneous human lovers, our Megatron was able to hop enthusiastically onto either side of multiple debates that we held at the union about AI that day.

Asked to propose the motion that "Leaders without technical expertise are a danger to their organisation", the Megatron offered practical advice that all busy executives and governments, worried about understanding AI, had to do was "be willing to give up some control". "The good news is that you don't have to build your own AI team. You can outsource your AI work to experts in the field, which can help you make the most of technology and ensure that you don't fall victim to the same AI problems as your competitors."

However, when opposing the motion, the Megatron was keen to keep the AI knowledge in-house

– rather like the British, Chinese and US governments, who have all made that an article of policy faith:

"If you do not have a vision of your organisation's AI strategy, then you are not prepared for the next wave of technological disruption ... You will need to decide what role your company will play in the next technological wave and how you will integrate AI into your business to be a leader in your industry."

THE DATA WARS TO COME?

Worryingly, there was one question where the AI simply couldn't come up with a counter argument. When arguing for the motion that "Data will become the most fought-over resource of the 21st century", the Megatron said:

"The ability to provide information, rather than the ability to provide goods and services, will be the defining feature of the economy of the 21st century."

But when we asked it to oppose the motion – in other words, to argue that data wasn't going to be the most vital of resources, worth fighting a war over – it simply couldn't, or wouldn't, make the case. In fact, it undermined its own position:

"We will be able to see everything about a person, everywhere they go, and it will be stored and used in ways that we cannot even imagine."

EYE-LIKE ILLUSTRATION OF AI

You only have to read the US National Security report on AI 2021, chaired by the aforementioned Eric Schmidt and co-written by someone on our course, to glean what its writers see as the fundamental threat of AI in information warfare: unleash individualised blackmails on a million of your adversary's key people, wreaking distracting havoc on their personal lives the moment you cross the border.

What we in turn can imagine is that AI will not only be the subject of the debate for decades to come – but a versatile, articulate, morally agnostic participant in the debate itself.

[Dr Alex Connock is Fellow at Said Business School, University of Oxford, University of Oxford; Professor Andrew Stephen is L'Oréal Professor of Marketing & Associate Dean of Research, University of Oxford]

COVID: Why working from home leaves the lowest paid at more risk of infection

HELEN COLLINS, PATRICIA JOLLIFFE & SUSAN HELEN BARRY
THECONVERSATION.COM

The latest directive from the UK government that people should work from home has led to concerns about the impact on businesses in the run up to Christmas.

But it is also likely to have a devastating effect on people on low pay who may be unable to work from home. The same is true of new rules requiring people to self-isolate for ten days after being in contact with someone infected with the omicron variant.

For those with limited access to sick pay or who are unable to work from home, both measures could lead to a rise in "sickness presenteeism" – going to work when you are ill. The risk of this happening should not be ignored as governments attempt to deal with the new COVID strain.

Recent research has shown that people in low paid, insecure and self-employed roles are driven by financial necessity to presenteeism. This then spreads disease, shown in separate research which highlights the disproportionate COVID rates in low paid, manual and frontline workers.

Many of these people cannot rely on statutory sick pay, which is set in the UK at £96 per week (among the least generous levels in Europe), so they have no choice but to turn up to work.

Around 1.8 million employees do not qualify for sick pay because they don't earn enough, and 5 million miss out because they are self-employed. Many immigrants also are ineligible, and while the government offers a payment of £500 to cover a period of self-isolation, for the many thousands of workers without a contract, this is difficult to access. Recent analysis highlighted that over 500,000 seasonal workers employed over the festive season in the UK will not qualify for statutory sick pay.

FAIRNESS AND SAFETY

So while the government urges people to work from home in an effort to limit the spread of omicron, there is also an urgent need to deter contagious presenteeism.

As the director-general of the World Health Organization said last year: "With decisive, early action, we can slow down the virus and prevent infections". But what does decisive action mean to a worker on a very low income with no access to benefits that others take for granted?

One obvious step would be to drastically improve access to sick pay, allowing people to take time off without leaving themselves in dire financial straits.

In the US for example, the introduction in April 2020 of legislation in response to COVID which allowed for two weeks of paid sick leave, led to a reduction of nearly 50% in the number of daily COVID infections.

Even in a world without COVID, the consequences of working while ill appear obvious, and research on presenteeism highlights the effects it can have. It grinds down the sick worker, making symptoms worse and increasing the chance of future health problems.

Evidence from a number of studies also shows that presenteeism is a significant predictor of long-term absenteeism, posing a risk to both immediate and future productivity.

The health of co-workers could also be harmed, and their work load increased by an ill person's reduced output. Beyond the workplace,



presenteeism creates tensions at home and leads to a poorer quality of life for the whole family.

More broadly, the impact of presenteeism extends beyond the employee's own health, to the organisation, and the wider economy. And although it may seem harder to address than absenteeism (not showing up for work), it is equally as important and worthy of the same attention.

Help for the most vulnerable needs to be more widely available and easier to access. Organisations which employ agency workers, should improve transparency around terms and conditions, and be more accountable for presenteeism when it occurs.

And trade unions, who have done very little to encourage unionisation of precarious workers, should demand more protection. It is at times like these when they – and society as a whole – need it most.

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Congress students' wing clash with police over teacher's murder in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 11 DEC [PTI]: Activists of the Congress-backed NSUI clashed with the police in Bhubaneswar on Friday as they tried to gherao the Vidhan Sabha, demanding the arrest of minister DS Mishra over the teacher's murder in Kalahandi district.

A fight broke out as police tried to stop the NSUI activists who were on the way to the Vidhan Sabha.

The agitators, however, knocked down the police barricades on MG Road and hurled eggs and tomatoes at them. In return, police baton-charged the protesters, which left many injured.

The situation further aggravated when a section of the NSUI activists allegedly attempted to set a police van on fire. The blaze was immediately doused by the fire brigade personnel present at the spot, officials said.

Amid the baton charge, the protesters ran for safety into the nearby Congress Bhavan, the party's state headquarters. Chasing them,



the police also entered the building and was seen kicking the doors, which were locked from inside.

Bhubaneswar's Deputy Commissioner of Police US Dash said the police had to baton charge the activists to prevent them from setting the police van on fire.

"We will soon identify the persons involved in setting the police van on fire and legal action will be taken against them," he said.

The officer, however, said that he had no knowledge of police entering the Congress Bhavan.

Alleging police excess, Congress activists sat on a dharna near

Master Canteen Square and demanded stringent action against the officers involved.

Congress MLA Tara Bahinipati alleged Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik was behind the police action.

On Thursday, BJP's youth activists gheraoed the assembly over the same issue, leading to a clash with the police.

The opposition BJP condemned the police entering the headquarters of a political party, Congress Bhavan.

The ruling BJD accused both the BJP and the Congress of resorting to violence while staging demonstrations.

The opposition has been demonstrating,

demanding the arrest of Minister of State for Home Mishra for allegedly shielding the prime accused in the teacher's murder case.

The 24-year-old teacher of a private school in Kalahandi district went missing on October 8 and her half-burnt decomposed body was exhumed from the playground of the school on October 19.

The president of the school's managing committee, who is allegedly closely associated with Mishra, is the prime accused in the murder case, which created a furore in Police have so far arrested two persons in the case, including the prime accused.

CBI arrests Trinamool's Pranab Chatterjee in chit fund fraud case

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC: Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Friday arrested Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader and chairperson Board of Administrator (BOA) of Burdwan Municipality in an ongoing investigation in a chit fund fraud case. CBI stated that they had registered the instant case and taken over the investigation of the case, earlier registered in the year 2014 at Police Station Kulti (West Bengal) in compliance with the orders of the Supreme Court of India wherein CBI was, inter alia, directed to take up all Ponzi Scheme cases of West

Bengal and Orissa in addition to other group of companies.

The accused, identified as Pranab Chatterjee, Trinamool Congress leader and chairperson Board of Administrator (BOA), Burdwan Municipality, was arrested in connection with corruption allegations in a chit fund case.

It was alleged that the accused persons (trustees of a trust) allured the public at large to invest in their schemes with a promise of a high rate of returns at maturity without the requisite permission from the regulatory authorities. It was further

alleged that a large number of investors invested their hard-earned money with the trust. It was also alleged that the trustees failed to repay the maturity amount, cheated the investors, misappropriated their hard-earned money, closed down the branches and fled.

During the investigation, it was revealed that Pranab Chatterjee was closely associated with the trust and the trustees. It was further alleged that the arrested accused was associated in registration of the trust and allowed the trust to carry on its business of illegal de-

posit collection from his commercial complex.

It was also alleged during the investigation that Chatterjee, in conspiracy with the other accused (trustee), had misappropriated approximately Rs.3.74 crore from the trust for personal use through various methods.

Searches were conducted on the premises of the accused which led to recovery of several incriminating materials.

Chatterjee was produced before the Courts of Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Asansol, and was remanded to two days of police custody.

Maradona's stolen Rs. 20 lakh watch recovered in Assam

GUWAHATI, 11 DEC [NDTV]: A heritage luxury limited edition watch believed to have been used by football legend late Diego Maradona was recovered from Assam this morning after it went missing from Dubai.

The watch, worth around Rs. 20 lakh, was recovered from the possession of an Assam resident who used to work in Dubai and had returned to India recently, the Assam Police said.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was the first to share the story on Twitter. "In an act of international cooperation @assampolice has coordinated with @dubaipoliceHQ through Indian federal LEA to recover a heritage @Hublot watch belonging to legendary footballer Late Diego Maradona and arrested one Wazid Hussein. Follow up legal action is being taken."

Diego Armando Maradona was an Argentine professional football player and manager and was regarded as one of the greatest players in the history of the sport. He reportedly died of a heart attack in November 2020.

Assam Director General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta said the



watch belonged to the Argentine football player himself, "which was being stored in Dubai along with other belongings in a safe."

"As informed through central agency by the Dubai Police, one Wazid Hussain had stolen a limited edition Maradona signed Hublot watch and fled to Assam. Today morning at 4:00 am we arrested Wazid Hussain from his residence in Sibsagar. The limited edition watch has been recovered from him," the official added.

Earlier, the police official had tweeted: "A costly Hublot watch... Maradona... Dubai... Assam Police Looks like random words, don't they? But today all these words came

together nicely, stating a story of successful International Cooperation between Dubai Police and @assampolice."

According to the police, Wazid Hussain worked as a security guard at a private company in Dubai where Maradona's belongings were stored. In August, he asked for permission to return to India as his father was unwell.

Diego Maradona was seen wearing two Hublot Big Bang watches during the FIFA World Cup 2010 when Hublot launched its Maradona Big Bang Chronograph Limited Edition. The watch has the football legend's photo, with arms raised in victory, engraved on the back of the Hublot Big

Bang Maradona case. It also has his signatures and jersey number.

The Hublot Maradona Big Bang Chronograph is 44.5 mm in diameter, and is composed out of black ceramic, microblasted for texture. A sapphire crystal covers a black dial face, adorned with Argentine blue and white in luminescent numerals. Maradona's jersey number 10 in Mixellet font is inscribed on the sub-dial. The watch features Hublot's HUB1146 chronograph movement with 55 jewels and 42 hours power reserve.

The Maradona Big Bang was a limited edition consisting only 250 units, that all sold out quickly during the FIFA World Cup 2010.

Kerala Blasters look to pile on East Bengal's misery

VASCO, DEC 11 (PTI): SC East Bengal's porous defence will have another big challenge against attackers of a resurgent Kerala Blasters FC when the two teams clash in their Indian Super League fixture at the Tilak Maidan Stadium here on Sunday.

By conceding 14 goals in five matches, the worst among the 11 teams, the red-and-gold brigade have been far from impressive in the top tier league.

The Jose Manuel Diaz-coached side had their best match against Chennaiyin FC when they held the Marina Machans to a goalless draw.

But they were back to square one, conceding a 3-4 defeat to FC Goa in their last outing, courtesy SCEB's porous defence.

Having played half of their matches in the first leg, the bottom-placed SCEB have just two points to their kitty and things can become worse if they're unable to buck the trend.

"We have played 5 matches till now and in some of them, we haven't converted our chances to win when we had the opportunity," the SCEB chief



coach Diaz said ahead of their match.

"Kerala Blasters have a compact team, have hard-working players and it will be difficult to beat them. It will be a complicated match."

That their ace goalkeeper Arindam Bhattacharya is still to be recovered means Diaz has a tough task ahead against a team who have just picked up the momentum with their first win of the season, a 2-1 victory over a resolute Odisha FC.

"Arindam is still injured, we need to go step by step about him," Diaz

said. Giving further injury updates, the Spaniard said Jackichand Singh and Darren Sidoel are also down with injuries.

"Jacki has been improving but is not in a state to complete a whole practice session. Darren Sidoel is out with a hamstring injury and we must be cautious about these injuries."

After suffering a defeat to ATK Mohun Bagan in the ISL opener, Kerala Blasters are now unbeaten from three matches. The Ivan Vukomanovic-coached side would look to continue

their ascent to the top half of the table.

"It's a nice feeling when you win, but the team wants to continue (winning). We want to play good football, to achieve certain things -- controlling the game, build up the atmosphere that we need to get a positive result," the Serbian coach said.

"SC East Bengal are a good team and (with) the players they have now, their place on the table may be undeserved, but that's football. We are playing against a very good team, and it'll be a very difficult game.

Australian PM urged to end 'lunacy' and push UK and US for Julian Assange's release

SYDNEY, 11 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Australian parliamentarians have demanded the prime minister, Scott Morrison, intervene in the case of Julian Assange, an Australian citizen, after the United States won a crucial appeal in its fight to extradite the WikiLeaks founder on espionage charges.

"The prime minister must get Assange home," the Australian Greens leader, Adam Bandt, told Guardian Australia on Saturday. "An Australian citizen is being prosecuted for publishing details of war crimes, yet our government sits on its hands and does nothing."

The independent MP Andrew Wilkie called on

Morrison to "end this lunacy" and demand the US and UK release Assange.

Assange, 50, is wanted in the US over an alleged conspiracy to obtain and disclose classified information following WikiLeaks' publication of hundreds of thousands of leaked documents relating to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

In January a UK court ruled Assange should not be sent to the US, citing a real and "oppressive" risk of suicide, but, after a two-day appeal hearing, the high court on Friday sided with the US.

The senior judges concluded the risk of suicide was mitigated by assurances from American

authorities that Assange would not be held in highly restrictive prison conditions if extradited.

Assange's lawyers have said they intend to challenge the ruling with another appeal, this time in the UK's supreme court.

Bandt described the ruling as a "critical moment in the fight against suppression of press freedom." "Assange's persecution and our government's inaction are chilling, and should worry everyone who cares about a free press or thinks that governments should protect their citizens," he said.

Wilkie said Assange should be looking forward to spending Christ-

mas with his sons and fiancée.

"But instead he's facing a 175-year jail sentence and the very real possibility of living out his final days behind bars," the independent MP said. "Journalism is not a crime.

"Again the United Kingdom proves it's a lackey of the United States and that Australia is delighted to go along for the ride."

Greens senator Janet Rice also criticised the decision and said: "Foreign Minister Marise Payne must urgently speak to the US and tell them to drop these absurd charges and end Assange's torture."

Tripura govt gives nod for Buddhist university

AGARTALA, DEC 11 (PTI): The Tripura government has given its approval for setting up a Buddhist university in Manu Bankul in Sabroom, officials said on Saturday.

The state government gave a Letter of Intent to Bahujana Hitaya Education Trust for setting up the university, they said.

Students from 31 countries will get a chance to study as well as

research Buddhist literature, culture and tradition in the proposed varsity. Besides, there is also a plan to establish medical, technical and general degree colleges on the campus, they added.

"The state government has already given Letter of Intent for establishing the Buddhist university at Manu Bankul of Sabroom subdivision in South Tripura district," said Director of Higher

Education Nripendra Chandra Sharma.

Now, the organisation will have to prepare a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for building necessary infrastructures at the proposed site at the earliest, he said.

The government will bring a bill in the assembly for setting up the university once necessary facilities are built, he said. Sabroom MLA Sanjay Roy said that a plot

measuring 25 acres has been given to the Buddhist organisation to set up the varsity.

"If everything falls in the right place, the foundation stone of the project will be laid within a month or two," he said.

At present, Tripura has three varsities -- Tripura University, which is a central varsity, state-run MBB University and privately-owned ICFAI University.

Going to be hard to fill Sreejesh's shoes: Karkera

New Delhi, Dec 11 (PTI): Suraj Karkera, who has been picked in India's Asian Champions Trophy hockey tournament squad in place of the rested P R Sreejesh, says it will be hard to fill the seasoned goalkeeper's shoes.

The 26-year-old Karkera last played for India at the Tokyo Olympics test event in 2019.

"I am really excited to

get a chance to play for India after a long time. Anytime you get a chance to don the Indian jersey, you feel the goosebumps. I am not nervous at all as we have trained well. I feel confident about myself and my abilities," Karkera said ahead of the event in Dhaka.

Karkera will have big shoes to fill with veteran goalie Sreejesh being rested from the tourna-

ment. "PR Sreejesh has done so much for India for so many years. It is always going to be hard to fill his shoes. But I will try to give my 100 percent whenever I get an opportunity," Karkera said.

"We have been learning from him for so long. He shares his knowledge with all of us during goalpost training and gives us a lot of tips. So, I have a big responsibility," he added.

Apart from vice-captain Harmanpreet Singh and experienced player Varun Kumar, India have also included young players like Jarnanpreet Singh, Dipsan Tirkey, Nilam Sanjeep Kess and Mandeep Mor in the squad.

This will be India's first competition since the Tokyo Olympics. Three-time champions India will begin their campaign in the tournament on December 14 against Korea.

'We felt newly born': Afghan female footballers' remarkable escape to UK

SUZANNE WRACK

LONDON, 11 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: "We were on the pitch training that day," says the Afghanistan development team player Fatemah Baratean. "We'd been selected to play in the under-23 Central Asian FA women's championship, in Tajikistan, then all of a sudden there were explosions and bomb blasts all around, 100 metres from us, smoke, people screaming, mothers running. We didn't know what was going on."

The coach told the team it would be their last session, that the Taliban had seized control and they should take one final selfie together there in Herat before everything changed.

"We didn't want to accept that," Baratean, 20, says. "We were telling the coach it was not true, it was not happening, this was not the reality. But that was our last moment on our pitch."

Baratean began playing football in high school. So did three teammates, the 18-year-old Narges Mayeli, Sahar Chamran (19) and captain Sabreya Nowrozi, 24, who are also speaking to the Guardian from temporary accommodation in the UK, where they arrived on 18 November. Whereas the bulk of the Afghanistan women's senior national team made it on to some of the last planes to leave Kabul before the Taliban halted evacuation flights, with visas to Australia secured, the development team were stuck.

"We weren't prepared," Nowrozi says. "We didn't estimate that they would suddenly take power. The last 20 years for women and girls in Afghanistan was huge; we had many women actively participating in society – we had doctors, lawyers, judges. A lot of the developments that had happened for women meant we didn't even think about what would happen if the country collapsed. We didn't think the country would just give up without a fight."

Despite the Taliban's attempts to paint themselves as a changed force to the watching world, the players say the impact was instant. "Everything stopped," says Baratean. "Education, jobs, everything for girls stopped. We were athletes, we were scared for our future. For the first time we saw the Taliban in the streets. It was really frightening."

Baratean says it was not common for girls to play football in schools, that even the female teachers did not approve and "because they were against our participation in football it had a negative impact on our grades", but they had persevered.

"In the first two weeks we started playing outside," Nowrozi says, looking back to her school days, "and we received threats from the Taliban. There was an announce-

ment from the Taliban that if the people that supported us playing continued to support us, if something happened to us, then they would be responsible. We didn't give up, we managed to find a secure and hidden place to continue our game. We moved from being outside on a pitch to a school which was more surrounded."

The four went to different schools but were selected first to play in a regional team in Herat, then for the national development squad. "When we moved from the school to the stadium it was timed so that no men were allowed to go in and the doors were locked," Nowrozi says. "When we would leave the stadium, the men who knew that we were footballers were very insulting – there was a lot of verbal harassment, a lot of insults. We ignored it. We could not fight back because there was a risk they could attack us."

Nowrozi's father was supportive but pressure to stop came from wider family. Her father was labelled "not a real man" and as "having no honour" because he allowed his daughter to play football. Nowrozi was described as a "bad woman", as having been "westernised" and worse.

"For me it was the same," says Mayeli. "At first families were against us, they didn't let us play football, they told us the community wouldn't accept that you're a girl and are playing football. People would talk about you, people would argue with you, they would call you names."

Buying sports gear in shops was not an option. They relied on coaches and male relatives to take their money and buy equipment. Why did they navigate these extraordinary circumstances to play? "We didn't have any other social happiness or freedom," says Baratean.

Nowrozi concurs: "Through football we've managed to inspire others, we've managed to show women as strong women to the community and to families. We've been able to tell them you can still be covered and follow the religion and play football. It's a positive message."

When the Taliban took over, the players headed for Kabul airport after contacting Khalida Popal, one of the founders of the women's national team who was helping players to get out. It took 20 hours for the team and their families to reach the capital, with a driver relative of one of the players paid to organise transport. He hid their documents and ID cards and they were split into smaller groups.

"We were undercover," says Nowrozi. "Wearing big burqas, hijabs and masks and loads of clothes to hide our identities. On the way it was so scary to see cars exploding, Taliban checkpoints, many accidents. At every Taliban checkpoint we were stopped and we had to work hard to

not be identified."

When they left their homes they felt their chances of getting out were slim and that intensified on arrival outside Kabul airport. "We were being beaten by the Taliban and pushed and forced back, surrounded by gunfire," says Nowrozi. "But then we had some hope when there was a bus to get us into the airport. We sat in the bus waiting to go, very happy, then there was the explosion [at Abbey Gate which killed more than 180 people] and we had to get off the bus. We lost all hope."

"I was so tired, I had no idea what was next. We were surrounded by family members asking us what was happening. I had no answers. I stood there feeling so helpless."

Getting out via the airport became impossible as troops sealed the entrances. The development team and their families were forced to bounce from hostel to hostel in the capital, trying to avoid notice while they waited for help from Popal and organisations and individuals who had offered assistance.

Chamran says the hardest part had been convincing their families to leave everything behind and "trust us as their daughters". Stuck in Kabul, the families were wavering, Nowrozi recalls: "Some were really frightened and frustrated and could not cope with the stress. They started to put a lot of pressure on us to turn back and told us we could live in the home without freedoms and it would be OK. They wanted us to go home and give up on this hopeless fight. We were fighting to keep our families with us."

Eventually they got word that they had temporary visas from Pakistan but they had to make it to the border and cross. It took seven hours to reach via numerous Taliban checkpoints.

"The Taliban had leashes and were beating people," says Baratean of their experience at the border. "They were forcing women to cover their faces; if their scarf was a little bit down they were beating us with leashes. The weather was so hot and it was hard to breathe among the crowd. They separated men and women. They were splitting us, they were beating us, there was a moment when they saw a letter from the football federation and started screaming at us, asking if we were footballers."

"We didn't know what to do, what to answer. We were scared, we said we were and they started screaming: 'You're kicked out of our governance, we'll never accept you, you're non-Muslims, there's no space for you in our territories. If you can't make your way from here you'll be killed. There's no way for you to be alive here, we



don't accept you, you have no space in our government.' We were so scared, we were stuck in the crowd, with a direct threat. We pushed ourselves towards the gate."

Crossing the border was hard. Some family members got through more quickly than the players but eventually there was relief for everyone in Pakistan. "We felt like a bird that had escaped its cage," says Nowrozi. "But it was only 50% relief because we didn't know what was next for us, what the future would look like. We didn't have a final destination."

It wasn't safe in Pakistan, where the Taliban were also present, and they had only short-term visas, but eventually the UK agreed to host the whole development team with their families, 130 people in total.

"The feeling, especially when we landed and we saw the sign saying: 'Welcome to the UK,' was a feeling of freedom," says Nowrozi. "We felt like we were newly born, that we could breathe for the first time. When we got to the accommodation we felt like we were living the first days of our lives."

Feelings are mixed though. "That is our country, our homeland, where we had a lot of dreams and wishes. We left everything behind. But we do have this mission and promise to ourselves that we want to invest in ourselves, to study, to work, to participate actively and inspire women and girls and be an example for others. We lost

everything but we want to empower others and send a message to other women in Afghanistan."

The Leeds United owner and chairman, Andrea Radrizzani, helped to get the players and their families out and on 1 December the team were invited to train at the club's academy.

"It was like a child being separated from its mother for several months and finding them again," says Nowrozi. "We did not want to be separated from the ball. We were running up and down like crazy on the pitch. Just seeing the pitch and having the ball with us, we didn't want any distractions. After training they brought food, pizza and water and we were saying: 'We don't want it.' We just wanted to play football, we just wanted to stay on the pitch longer. It is difficult to describe it: the best feeling ever"

Now the bigger journey begins, the rebuilding of their lives. Those supporting them have launched a fundraiser to help their resettlement. Importantly, the players do not want the women left behind to be forgotten.

"Someone has to make sacrifices to make change happen and that's what the women of Afghanistan are doing," says Nowrozi. "We will do our part outside of Afghanistan to continue fighting with them and supporting them. We did it when we were in our country and we will continue to do it after."

Hamilton and Verstappen's gripping duel in Abu Dhabi represents F1's peak

RICHARD WILLIAMS

LONDON, 11 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: No one goes to a motor race hoping to see a crash, or so they used to say. It may be less true this weekend, when the promise of mayhem between Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen in the final round of the 2021 Formula One world championship promises to attract a vast worldwide television audience.

As they prepare for Sunday's showdown, Verstappen hoping to become champion for the first time and Hamilton in line to surpass Michael Schumacher with a record eighth title, not just individual career landmarks rest on the outcome. It feels as though much more – perhaps nothing less than the entire culture of the sport – is at stake here.

This is not the first season in which the title has gone down to the final race. It is not even the first in which the two remaining contenders have gone to the starting grid at the last round with an equal number of points against their names. But no race in the long history of Formula One has been awaited with such a mixture of excitement and apprehension.

The two contenders, level on points at the top of the drivers' standings, have been crashing into each other since the middle of the season, when the reigning champion arrived at Silverstone having decided that he was not going to allow his young Dutch rival to get away with carving him up any longer. Hamilton may be a streetwise racer, but he has always been a clean competitor and to see him answer Verstappen's intimidatory tactics with some of his own was an indication of how far the rivalry has gone.

If the decision was intended to make

his opponent reconsider his approach, it was never likely to work. At 24, Verstappen believes he has waited too long to become world champion. He is already a year older than the age at which, in 2008, Hamilton won the first of his seven titles. Through his style of racing, the Dutchman has made it plain that he follows Ayrton Senna and Schumacher in the belief that nothing and no one should be permitted to stand in the way of his success.

Although they stand level on points after 21 rounds, Hamilton starts with the handicap of knowing that if neither of them finishes this one, Verstappen will be crowned champion by virtue of his nine race wins to eight, raising the possibility of the contest being ended by a collision of which only the Dutchman could be the beneficiary. This week the F1 race director, Michael Masi, stressed that such incidents could be punished by the kind of penalties that might affect championship standings.

Temperatures are certainly running high. Racing drivers of the past have had their armies of supporters, but their allegiance was never expressed with the sustained mutual animosity shown by the fans of Hamilton and Verstappen on social media or the partisan fervour displayed at circuits around the world.

A thick haze of orange smoke is now as common a sight at a grand prix as it has long been at football matches involving the Netherlands or at "Dutch corner" on the Alpe d'Huez. Both drivers are accustomed to hearing boos as they emerge from their cars to be interviewed before making their way to the podium.

The duels between Senna and Alain

Prost or Schumacher and Damon Hill produced wrecked cars and angry words, but they were conducted with nothing like the ferocity among F1 fans that is reaching its peak this weekend. That will come as a particular delight to the makers of Formula 1: Drive to Survive, the Netflix documentary series that has attracted a new audience to the sport – particularly in the US – through an emphasis on character-driven narratives, lurid crashes and heightened emotions. Its fourth season is likely to raise the pitch of melodrama to new levels.

If Verstappen wins out, by whatever means, he may become the standard bearer for a new generation of drivers who, moulded by the video games and simulators in which aggressive tactics can be rehearsed and refined without the possibility of physical consequences, no longer play by the old rules.

Drivers of Hamilton's generation were still partially influenced by the memory of older codes of etiquette, when behaviour on the circuit was regulated not by lines painted on concrete or stewards imposing stop-and-go penalties but by trackside stone walls, trees and ditches. There was also a sense of comradeship among the drivers that crossed the borders of team loyalty and involved a willingness to risk their own lives but not, if they could avoid it, the lives of those with whom they might have shared a hotel breakfast table that morning.

Thirty years ago, those protocols began to break down. The Prost-Senna rivalry saw cynical collisions determine the outcome of the championship in 1989 and 1990. Schumacher won his first title in

1994 after barging into Hill. Three years later he failed in an even more blatant attempt, doing more damage to his own car than to that of Jacques Villeneuve.

These tactics were made possible by the knowledge that cars and circuits had been made much safer in response to the fatalities of the preceding decades. Young drivers trained in karts were introducing the previously unthinkable idea of Formula One as a semi-contact sport. And whereas significant change in motor racing had usually been confined to the technical side, now it was also behavioural.

This season has presented the sport with perhaps its greatest challenge, placing a heavy burden on the shoulders of a rotating cast of stewards whose disciplinary decisions often seem inconsistent and even contradictory. For all the availability of onboard data, they have the task of reading the drivers' minds and assessing their intentions, a task highlighted last Sunday when Verstappen slowed, ostensibly in response to a demand to let Hamilton overtake, but in such a way that it was impossible to come up with a definitive interpretation of both the initial action and Hamilton's response.

The questionable state of the disciplinary processes was also exposed in Jeddah when Masi was overheard seeking the approval of the Red Bull team for Verstappen's grid position at the second restart, a hint of weakness that would never have occurred under his respected predecessor, the late Charlie Whiting.

But as the world watched Hamilton and Verstappen haring away from the rest of the 20-car field last weekend, there was no doubt that here were the two finest drivers of their era. At Interlagos last

month Hamilton demonstrated that time has not dimmed his gifts as he fought his way from 10th to first with a concentrated fury that reminded historians of Juan Manuel Fangio's legendary fightback against the Ferraris at the Nürburgring in 1957.

Verstappen's brilliance was evident from the moment of his arrival in F1. In Jeddah last Sunday, as a chaotic race was restarted for the second time, he glimpsed an opening at the first corner and sliced past Esteban Ocon's Alpine and Hamilton's Mercedes like a shark gobbling shrimps. Also evident, however, were the less widely admired aspects of his deportment on and off the track.

His air of arrogance and entitlement is inherited from his father, Jos, whose achievements as an F1 driver never remotely matched his own estimation of his abilities. An equally powerful role in Verstappen's career has been played by Dr Helmut Marko, an Austrian whose own highly promising career was cut short when he lost an eye in a grand prix accident in 1972 and who has since fashioned the Red Bull driver training programme into the most unsparingly effective scheme of its kind since the Spartans left male babies out on a hillside to see which of them would survive to be trained as warriors.

Christian Horner, the Red Bull team principal, has proved willing to defend Verstappen's behaviour in all circumstances. This week's claim that his driver is fighting an opponent in a superior machine looks disingenuous when considered alongside the revision of the current technical regulations which favoured the basic design concept of the Red Bull against that of the Mercedes.

Capitol attack panel obtains PowerPoint that set out plan for Trump to stage coup

NEW YORK, 11 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Capitol attack panel obtains PowerPoint that set out plan for Trump to stage coup

The fact that Meadows was in possession of a PowerPoint the day before the Capitol attack that detailed ways to stage a coup suggests he was at least aware of efforts by Trump and his allies to stop Joe Biden's certification from taking place on 6 January.

The PowerPoint, titled "Election Fraud, Foreign Interference & Options for 6 Jan", made several recommendations for Trump to pursue in order to retain the presidency for a second term on the basis of lies and debunked conspiracies about widespread election fraud.

Meadows turned over a version of the PowerPoint presentation that he received in an email and spanned 38 pages, according to a source familiar with the matter.

The Guardian reviewed a second, 36-page version of the PowerPoint marked for dissemination with 5 January metadata, which had some differences with what the select committee received. But the title of the PowerPoint and its recommendations remained the same, the source said.

Senators and members of Congress should first be briefed about foreign interference, the PowerPoint said, at which point Trump could declare a national emergency, declare all electronic voting invalid, and ask Congress to agree on a constitutionally acceptable remedy.



The PowerPoint also outlined three options for then vice-president Mike Pence to abuse his largely ceremonial role at the joint session of Congress on 6 January, when Biden was to be certified president, and unilaterally return Trump to the White House.

Pence could pursue one of three options, the PowerPoint said: seat Trump slates of electors over the objections of Democrats in key states, reject the Biden slates of electors, or delay the certification to allow for a "vetting" and counting of only "legal paper ballots".

The final option for Pence is similar to an option that was simultaneously being advanced on 4 and 5 January by Trump lieutenants - led by lawyers Rudy Giuliani and John Eastman, as well as Trump strategist Steve Bannon - working from the Willard hotel in Washington DC.

The Guardian revealed last week that sometime between the late evening of 5 January and the early hours of 6 January, after Pence declined to go ahead with such plans, Trump then pressed his lieutenants about how to stop Biden's certification from taking place entirely.

The recommendations in the PowerPoint for both Trump and Pence were based on wild and unsubstantiated claims of election fraud, including that "the Chinese systematically gained control over our election system" in eight key battleground states.

The then acting attorney general, Jeff Rosen, and his predecessor, Bill Barr, who had both been appointed by Trump, by 5 January had already determined that there was no evidence of voter fraud sufficient to change the outcome of the 2020 election. House investi-

gators said that they became aware of the PowerPoint after it surfaced in more than 6,000 documents Meadows turned over to the select committee. The PowerPoint was to be presented "on the Hill", a reference to Congress, the panel said.

The powerpoint was presented on 4 January to a number of Republican senators and members of Congress, the source said. Trump's lawyers working at the Willard hotel were not shown the presentation, according to a source familiar with the matter.

But the select committee said they did find in the materials turned over by Meadows, his text messages with a member of Congress, who told Meadows about a "highly controversial" plan to send slates of electors for Trump to the joint session of Congress.

Meadows replied: "I love it."

Trump's former White House chief of staff had turned over the materials to the select committee until the cooperation deal broke down on Tuesday, when Meadows' attorney, Terwilliger, abruptly told House investigators that Meadows would no longer help the investigation.

The select committee announced on Wednesday that in response, it would refer Meadows for criminal prosecution for defying a subpoena. The chairman of the select committee, Bennie Thompson, said the vote to hold Meadows in contempt of Congress would come next week.

"The select committee will meet next week to advance a report recommending that the House cite Mr Meadows for contempt of Congress and refer him to the Department of Justice for prosecution," Thompson said in a statement.

Recently uncovered software flaw 'most critical vulnerability of the last decade'

LONDON, 11 DEC [AP]: A critical vulnerability in a widely used software tool - one quickly exploited in the online game Minecraft - is rapidly emerging as a major threat to organizations around the world.

"The internet's on fire right now," said Adam Meyers, senior vice-president of intelligence at the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. "People are scrambling to patch", he said, "and all kinds of people scrambling to exploit it." He said on Friday morning that in the 12 hours since the bug's existence was disclosed, it had been "fully weaponized", meaning malefactors had developed and distributed tools to exploit it.

The flaw, dubbed "Log4Shell", may be the worst computer vulnerability discovered in years. It was uncovered in an open-source logging tool that is ubiquitous in cloud servers and enterprise software used across the industry and the government. Unless it is fixed, it grants criminals, spies and programming novices alike, easy access to internal networks where they can loot valuable data, plant malware, erase crucial information and much more.

"I'd be hard-pressed to think of a company that's not at risk," said Joe Sullivan, chief security officer for Cloudflare,

whose online infrastructure protects websites from malicious actors. Untold millions of servers have it installed and experts said the fallout would not be known for several days.

Amit Yoran, CEO of the cybersecurity firm Tenable, called it "the single biggest, most critical vulnerability of the last decade" - and possibly the biggest in the history of modern computing.

The vulnerability was rated 10 on a scale of one to 10 by the Apache Software Foundation, which oversees development of the software. Anyone with the exploit can obtain full access to an unpatched computer that uses the software.

Experts said the extreme ease with which the vulnerability lets an attacker access a web server - no password required - is what makes it so dangerous.

New Zealand's computer emergency response team was among the first to report that the flaw was being "actively exploited in the wild" just hours after it was publicly reported on Thursday and a patch released.

The vulnerability, located in open-source Apache software used to run websites and other web services, was reported to the foundation on 24 November by the Chinese tech giant Alibaba, it said. It took two weeks to develop and release a fix.

Microsoft said it had issued a software update for Minecraft users. "Customers who apply the fix are protected," it said.

Researchers reported finding evidence the vulnerability could be exploited in servers run by companies such as Apple, Amazon, Twitter and Cloudflare.

Cloudflare's Sullivan said there was no indication his company's servers had been compromised. Apple, Amazon and Twitter did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

But patching systems around the world could be a complicated task. While most organizations and cloud providers such as Amazon Web Services should be able to update their web servers easily, the same Apache software is also often embedded in third-party programs, which can only be updated by their owners.

Yoran said organizations needed to presume they'd been compromised and act quickly.

The first obvious signs of the flaw's exploitation appeared in Minecraft, an online game hugely popular with kids and owned by Microsoft. Meyers and the security expert Marcus Hutchins said Minecraft users were already using it to execute programs on the computers of other users by pasting a short message in a chat box.

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Cloudflare's Sullivan said there was no indication his company's servers had been compromised. Apple, Amazon and Twitter did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Iran and world powers try to bridge gaps in ongoing Vienna talks

TEHRAN, 11 DEC [ALJAZEERA]: Talks are continuing in Vienna to restore Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, but a final agreement still appears elusive as Iran and the West have varying views on the path forward.

After a week-long pause, representatives of Iran, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and Germany reconvened in the Austrian capital to resume their seventh round of talks on Thursday.

Robert Malley, the top representative of the United States - which unilaterally abandoned the accord in 2018, imposing sanctions on Iran - is expected to lead a delegation in Vienna this weekend.

Iran still refuses to meet the US directly since its withdrawal from the deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), even as President Joe Biden says he wants it restored.

A breakthrough in the talks does not yet appear in sight as differences remain on two texts Iran proposed last week - one on lifting the sanctions and the other on the steps Iran needs to take

to scale back its nuclear programme that has significantly advanced since 2019.

The European signatories to the deal and the US said the Iranian demands - which build on a text agreed upon by the conclusion of the sixth round of talks on June 20 - are maximalist and show the country is not serious about returning to the accord.

The previous text was negotiated under the administration of moderate President Hassan Rouhani, but the conservative President Ebrahim Raisi's government wants - as the European Union envoy's put it last week - its "new political sensibilities" considered, as well. In a meeting with Iran's ambassadors to neighbouring countries on Saturday, Raisi said strengthening ties with neighbours to fight sanctions is a "strategic move" for Iran, but he added the country is also "serious" in the Vienna negotiations.

"If the other side has the will to lift the sanctions, a good deal will be made and we are certainly after this good deal," he said.

Iran, which seeks the full lifting of all US

sanctions imposed since 2018, has signalled in recent days its proposed texts have not changed since last week.

The country previously said it has also prepared a third document, detailing its expectations on a period to verify the lifting of sanctions and guarantees that the US will not renege on the deal again. It said it would present this document once there was an agreement on the initial two texts.

"I felt the other side [European representatives] has found a more serious will to enter effective and result-oriented talks," Iran's chief negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, told reporters after Thursday's Joint Commission meeting.

Bagheri and Iran's foreign ministry also condemned the US for piling on its existing sanctions while the talks are continuing as the Biden administration on Tuesday announced new sanctions against two Iranian security organisations and several officials linked to them.

According to a Wall Street Journal report, the US will also soon send a delegation to the United Arab Emirates

to discourage transactions with Iran that are "not compliant" with its sanctions. The report also said the US is working closely with financial firms in Japan and South Korea to stop "illicit" Iranian trade.

Meanwhile, US representative Malley told Al Jazeera before heading to Vienna that the Biden administration is "privileging the path of diplomacy" with Iran, but is also ready to consider all other options available to it. This comes as the US has also been trying to appease Israeli concerns that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett sent his Defence Minister Benny Gantz and the new head of Mossad, David Barnea, to Washington this week amid renewed Israeli threats of a military strike against Iranian nuclear sites.

Iran maintains that it will never seek a nuclear weapon, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has confirmed that Iran is not enriching uranium to the 90 percent purity required for a bomb.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, however, IAEA chief Rafael Grossi said

Iran needs to grant more access to his inspectors in order to establish trust as the Vienna talks continue. A centrifuge parts production facility in Karaj is of particular concern to the agency as it has had no cameras there since June when a sabotage attack struck that Iran has blamed on Israel. The nuclear watchdog has "categorically" denied the possibility of its cameras being taken advantage of to aid the attack. "The agency and Iran are trying to come to an agreement basically on two things: one is the ability of the agency to return to one specific facility in Iran where we need to reinstall cameras that need to be there, and it has been difficult to do this. We have been talking about this," Grossi told Al Jazeera.

"And the other thing is how to address a number of issues, which need to be clarified. The agency found traces of nuclear material in places that have not been declared before."

As the Vienna talks resumed, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) also dispatched a delegation to hold talks with the IAEA about the outstanding issues.

The Trump administration took unprecedented steps to support Israel's government, including dropping objec-

tions to its settlements in the occupied West Bank and recognizing Jerusalem as the country's capital. After proposing a Mideast plan that was adamantly rejected by the Palestinians, the administration brokered normalization agreements between Israel and four Arab states.

"Nobody did more for Bibi. I liked Bibi. I still like Bibi. But I also like loyalty," he said.

Ravid writes that Trump was unhappy that Netanyahu did not help him remain in office.

Netanyahu responded to the Axios story in a statement on Friday.

"I highly appreciate President Trump's big contribution to Israel and its security," he said.

"I also appreciate the importance of the strong alliance between Israel and the US and therefore, it was important for me to congratulate the incoming president."

Netanyahu was replaced as prime minister last summer after he was unable to form a governing majority in the wake of four hard-fought elections in less than two years.

Both former leaders could return to power.

Trump is keeping the option of running for president in 2024 open. Netanyahu is currently leader of the opposition in Israel's Knesset.

Trump launched profane tirade about Netanyahu in interview - report

NEW YORK, 11 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Donald Trump spat an expletive about his old ally, Israel's ex-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for congratulating Joe Biden on his election, according to a new book.

Trump lashed out in an interview for a book on US-Israel relations during his presidency, the author Barak Ravid wrote on the Axios website on Friday. Trump's remarks were also published by the English-language website of Israel's Yediot Aharonot newspaper.

"Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu were the closest of political allies during the four years they overlapped in office, at least in public. Not any more," Ravid wrote.

"I haven't spoken to him since," Trump told Ravid in an interview. "Fuck him."

Ravid said that he interviewed Trump in April and July for his forthcoming book, Trump's Peace: The Abraham Accords and the Reshaping of the Middle East.

He said Trump, who appeared close to Netanyahu while president from 2017 to 2021, was repeatedly critical of him in the interviews.

"The final straw for Trump was when Netanyahu congratulated

President-elect Biden for his election victory while Trump was still disputing the result," Ravid wrote.

Netanyahu had congratulated Biden more than 12 hours after the election was called. He did not refer to Biden as president-elect in the tweet and followed it up with a post praising Trump.

Trump appeared to be particularly incensed by a video released by Netanyahu on 20 January, the day Biden was inaugurated, in which Netanyahu said he and Biden had a "warm personal friendship going back many decades".

Trump has never conceded the election, falsely claiming that Biden won by voter fraud.

Other foreign leaders congratulated Biden earlier than the Israeli leader, but for Trump, Netanyahu stood out.

"The first person that congratulated [Biden] was Bibi Netanyahu, the man that I did more for than any other person I dealt with," Trump said, according to Ravid.

"Bibi could have stayed quiet. He has made a terrible mistake," Trump said, using Netanyahu's nickname.

The Trump administration took unprecedented steps to support Israel's government, including dropping objec-

Big Little Book awards for S Sivadas, Deepa Balsavar

Sivadas, whose work has stood out in the children's literature field in Malayalam, has been named winner of the Big Little Book Award while the illustrator's prize has gone to Deepa Balsavar.

The Big Little Book Awards are presented by Tata Trusts' Parag initiative for significant contribution to children's literature in Indian languages.

This year marked the sixth edition of the award and 490 entries were received during the nomination period from May to June. Malayalam was the chosen language this year for the author category, while the illustration category accepted nominations in any language.

In the previous years, the award considered children's literature in Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Kannada and English.

Winners were selected for their contribution to Indian children's literature with stories that talk to young readers about who they are and help them navigate a multicultural and multilingual environment, the organisers said.

Sivadas, based out of Kottayam, has over 200 books to his name.

"This, I believe, is a new beginning in my career as a children's writer and communicator," he said about the recognition.

The jury that included M M Basheer, Paul Zacharia, Sherylene Rafeeqe and Suneetha Balakrishnan

said Sivadas "exemplifies a rare commitment to both the art and craft of writing for children" and this is "evident in the sheer range of genres and subjects he has covered in his body of work spanning over the last 50 years".

He stands tall as a pioneer of scientific knowledge in children's literature, it said.

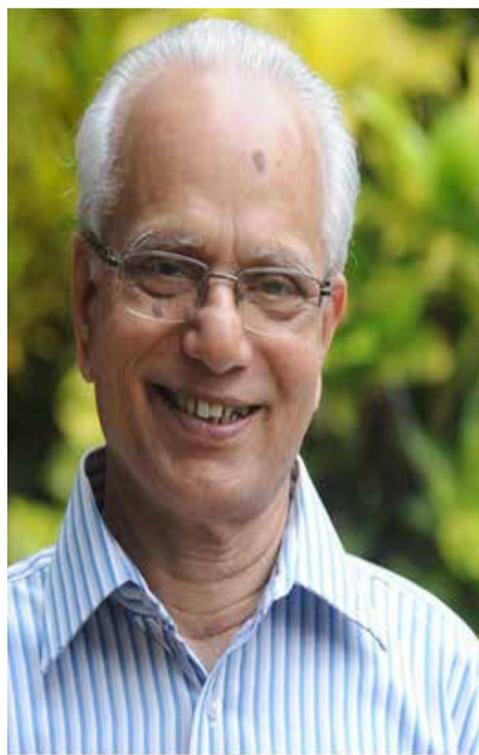
Mumbai-born artist Balsavar said her work is both a privilege and a huge responsibility and the award gives her courage and hope to continue doing what she does.

"When we get children to read and think, we give them the tools to take charge of their lives and change their worlds," she said.

Speaking about the winning illustrator, the jury that included Aashti Mudnani, Proiti Roy, Rani Dhariker, Sunandini Banerjee and Thejaswi Shivanan, said Balsavar's works "represent diversity, compassion and sensitivity without losing the playfulness and charm that appeal to children and adults effortlessly".

According to Amrita Patwardhan, head (education) at Tata Trusts, "Original, engaging, quality children's literature in Indian languages is critical for developing a reading culture and meeting educational goals" and this edition of the awards is "our way to celebrate outstanding contribution by committed artists who have made a difference to this important sector".

Previous winners (authors) are Madhuri Purandare (Marathi), Nabaneeta Dev Sen (Bengali), Nagesh Hegde (Kannada), Prabhat (Hindi) and Subhadra Sen Gupta (English). Illustrators to win the award are Ata-



nu Roy, Proiti Roy, Nina Sabnani, Priya Kuriyan and Rajiv Eipe.

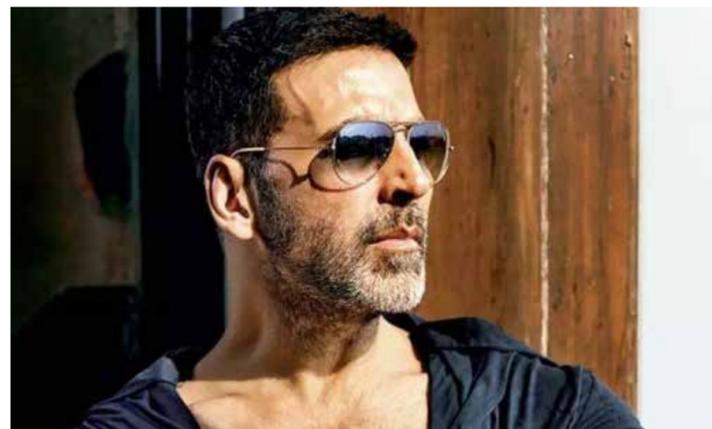
I like rawness of Aanand L Rai's cinema: Akshay Kumar

Superstar Akshay Kumar says filmmaker Aanand L Rai was initially hesitant to approach him for "Atrangi Re" as the film belongs to Sara Ali Khan and Dhanush's characters. Kumar, who recently delivered a box office hit with cop drama "Sooryavanshi", said he was sold to the unique and extraordinary story that Rai was trying to present with "Atrangi Re".

"This film basically belongs to Dhanush and Sara, they are the main leads. I have a special appearance in the movie. Rai was earlier confident that I will say no to the movie as it was a small role.

"But I loved the story, it really is an atrangi (extraordinary) story. I never imagined that someone could tell a love story in this way. So when I said yes to this, Rai was taken aback. He thought there was only one per cent chance that I would agree to do the movie and that's what happened," the 54-year-old actor told PTI in an interview.

"Atrangi Re", which marks Kumar's first collaboration with Rai, is being



touted as a twisted and complex love triangle.

The actor said he always liked the rawness of Rai's cinema and that's why he was also looking forward to working with the director, known for movies such as "Tanu Weds Manu", "Raanjhanaa" and "Zero".

"He makes films which are rooted in

reality. His focus is never on the beauty of his characters, be it male or female. He tries to show the raw emotions of the characters and how close they are to real people," Kumar added.

He believes that if "Atrangi Re" is able to click with the audiences, then the credit only belongs to Khan and Dhanush.

Kim Kardashian files to be legally single and drop "West" last name

Kim Kardashian is ready to move on. The mother of four filed to change her marital status amid her ongoing divorce from Kanye "Ye" West on Friday, Dec. 10, a source confirms to E! News.

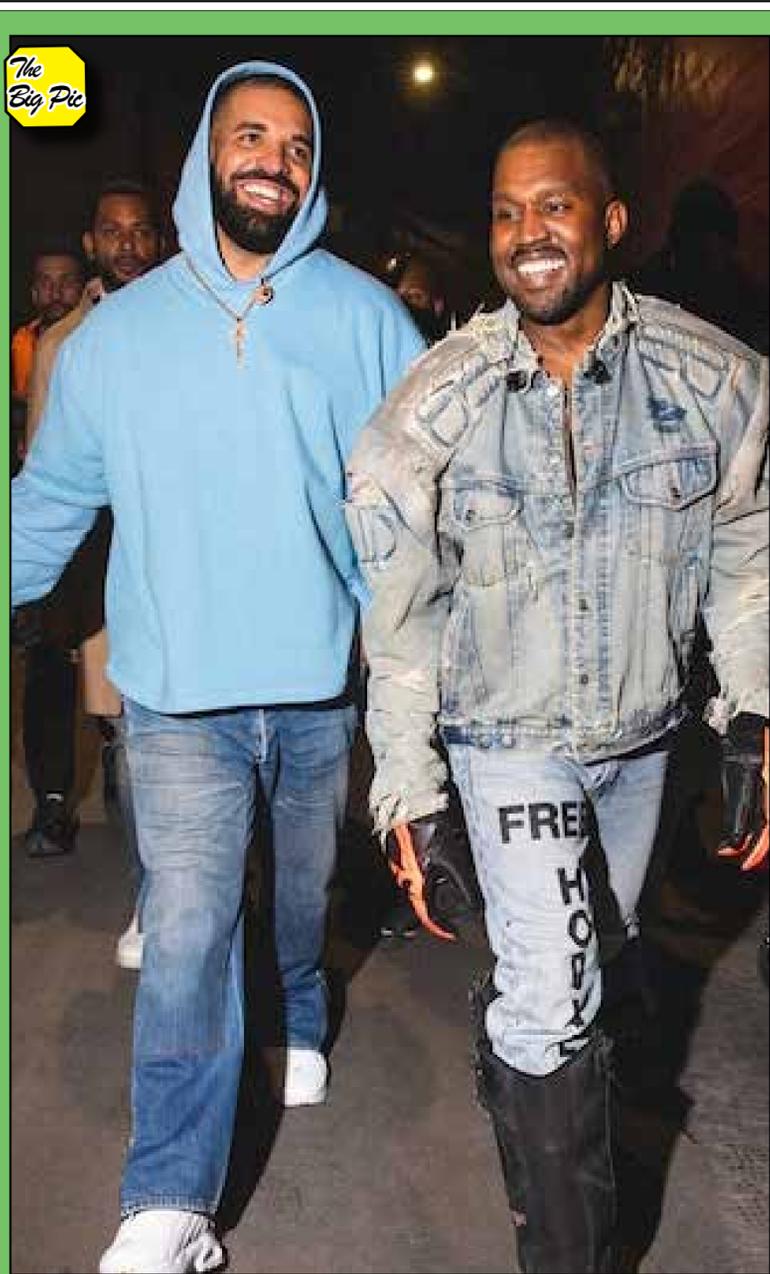
According to TMZ, the documents state that Kim wants to become legally single while she and the rapper continue to iron out details pertaining to child custody and property division.

Additionally, the KKW Cosmetics guru wants to drop the surname West

and revert to her maiden name.

Kim initially filed for divorce citing "irreconcilable differences" on Feb. 19.

The exes were seemingly making progress on their separation, with Kim buying their shared Hidden Hills, Calif. home for \$23 million in October. However, by November, Kanye was saying that he still considers her his "wife," remarking on Revolt TV's Drink Champs that there "ain't no paperwork" stating otherwise.



DREAM TEAM! Rappers Drake & Kanye West are spotted backstage at their "Free Larry Hoover" benefit concert in Los Angeles.

ARIES:

The day ahead looks promising. Your energy is gradually returning, and you're beginning to feel more enterprising about your domestic life. No doubt today you'll be called on to settle some financial questions related to your domestic needs. While a substantial gift of money or raise would be welcome, you begin to see other ways of making the cash flow rather than trickle.

TAURUS:

Try to imagine that you're in your creative workshop and you've given up using all your usual tools in order to find new ways to give form to your inspiration. Another completely different creative style will emerge. Your admirers may be surprised, but no one will be more astonished than you.

GEMINI:

Your private life is probably in the throes of great change. This change is likely related to profound transformations that

are taking place in your behavior, in particular your nervousness. If your daily or family life seems stifling to you, there's no need to take your frustrations out on loved ones. Look for answers inside.

CANCER:

It wouldn't be surprising if you enrolled in a class that's very different from your normal activities. For example, a surfer may get a sudden urge to learn about computers, or a technology guru might take up flower arranging. Those who think they have you all figured out will be taken off guard by your new spontaneity and sense of adventure.

LEO:

Some of the planetary movements are currently helping you understand that the best place to discover treasure isn't always where other people tell you to look. If people are urging you to get interested in activities that don't interest most people, including you, pay them no heed. You'll discover treasure all on your own provid-

ed you follow your own calling.

VIRGO:

No one's more forward thinking than you now. You're in tune with new inventions and trends, and you may have an irresistible desire to join an avant-garde group. The old way of doing things seems old, and you no longer want any part of it. You can't stand working according to the old principles any more. You're in a heated frame of mind. Be careful about stirring conflict.

LIBRA:

You couldn't be in a better position in your personal life. The time is ripe to thumb your nose at your demons for the last time. Complexes, guilt, and fears of all kinds are gone. It could even be that the radical "housecleaning" you'll undertake will affect your professional career as you become aware of how much you've been underestimating yourself.

SCORPIO:

Today's forecast is excellent for you. The celestial bodies can't help but smile on the

tempestuous energy of your character. You would be advised to act on your strong intuition. But be prudent in the execution of your actions lest your impulsive spirit stop you from taking recommended precautions.

SAGITTARIUS:

Devote your energies to human psychology today. It's a good day to try to sell your ideas. Concentrate your efforts on those whose help you need. If you have faith in your originality, your sales efforts are likely to pay off. In fact, there is some chance you'll meet an especially dynamic person who can lead you into some fascinating, unexplored territory.

CAPRICORN:

There is some likelihood that you'll have an electrifying emotional encounter today. Some of life's more mundane details may trigger arguments that, although violent, are cathartic and short. You've been thinking that it's time for more intensity in your life. Whether you know it or not, you're

rethinking all manner of human relationships.

AQUARIUS:

The current astral configuration could be described as a crisis phase, although today's events won't be unhappy. Communication proves difficult for you. For a long time you've been banking on others noticing and appreciating your talent, but you're beginning to feel like a sucker for being so patient. This would be a good day to confront the powers that stand in your way.

PISCES:

You have a pleasant day ahead. Optimism and creativity prevail. You can avail yourself of all the freedom necessary to encounter happiness. Indeed, that newfound happiness may come in the form of a new person who makes your heart beat faster. Don't fall in love too quickly! There are plenty of opportunities now. A deep and fulfilling commitment will take time to build.