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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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True secular ethos has arrived in Sikkim: CM



**SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 16 DEC:**

Chief Minister PS Tamang on Wednesday attended the state-level Losoong/ Namsong celebration at Kewzing under Barfung constituency in South Sikkim.

Addressing the gathering at the Kewzing playground, the CM commended the organizers for having put together a grand celebration despite challenges of the pandemic and commented that the presence of representatives from all communities and faiths at the event despite Losoong/ Namsong essentially being a festival of the Bhutia and Lepcha communities was evidence of the genuinely secular environment created in the State by the SKM Government.

The people and their community organizations were now free to celebrate their festivals and express their culture

without any political pressure, the CM stressed.

"This is because the SKM Government has brought true secular ethos to Sikkim," he said.

He alleged that under the SDF Government, even festivals and cultural events were bounden to political directives and control with only people aligned to the party in government allowed to be part of organizing committees.

"The SKM Government will not stand for such interference," he said, while pointing out that even today's celebration included the area MLA who, even though he does not wear SKM colours in the Assembly, is listened to and included in developmental plans for the constituency.

As for the previous, SDF Government, he alleged that it was constantly playing one community against the other by endorsing a culture of "kirtey parchas" [anonymous pamphlets]

and inflammatory posts and posters by fake accounts.

While stressing that these are not possible without the indulgence of the State Government, he pointed out that kirtey parchas have now gone out of circulation and none have been seen while SKM has been office.

In contrast, people using fake accounts on social media to sow paranoia, disrespect and ill-will have been traced down by the police and are being processed by law, he stated.

The focus now is to unite the people, he said.

The Chief Minister was also felicitated by the Losoong/ Namsong celebration committee today.

Earlier, president of Kewzing Losoong-Namsong Celebration Committee, Daniel Bhutia, put on record: "This is a historic moment for Kewzing. In my last 35

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PETITION CHALLENGES LOSS OF SIKKIMESE IDENTITY OF WOMEN MARRIED TO NON-LOCALS

'Daughters of Sikkim' demand right to bequeath property to their children

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 DEC:**

The tying of a local woman's identity as a Sikkimese to a male - her father till she is unmarried and then to her husband - has been challenged in the High Court of Sikkim.

The Court has taken cognizance of the matter and after hearing the senior counsel of the petitioners, Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, in an order passed on 14 December, stated that she was of the prima facie opinion that the matter required examination of the Court.

Accordingly, notices have been issued to the state respondents and the matter listed for its next hearing on 31 March, 2021.

The petitioners are all Sikkimese women [holding either Sikkim Subject Certificates or Certificates of Identification] married to non-Sikkimese men, a decision which has left them shorn of their Sikkimese identity and all the rights and privileges which come with it.

They argue that Sikkimese women, especially those married to non-Sikkimese, are "discriminated against" in comparison to Sikkimese men who marry non-Sikkimese women.

The petitioners point out that

while the rights of Sikkimese men and their children are not affected by marriage to outsiders, Sikkimese women who make the same choice are "lose their identity" as Sikkimese.

They highlight that such women are refused the right to apply for Government employment in Sikkim or claim any other state largesse including State Sponsored Welfare Schemes, Scholarship and educational support.

What has also hurt the petitioners is to see that their children also lose their rights to inheritance in Sikkim.

In this regard, they have drawn attention to a notification issued in June 2018 by the then State Government declaring that upon the death of a Sikkimese woman married to a non-Sikkimese, the immovable property left by her shall not be transferred to her off-springs.

At the root of this practice is the Married Women's Property Regulations of Sikkim of 1962, which lays these conditions. While in practice, attempts have been made to allow partial relaxation to this rule, in that Sikkimese women married to non-Sikkimese can continue to acquire

property in Sikkim, the refusal to allow them the right to bequeath such property to their children remains unresolved.

More than 100 petitioners have come together to move the High Court against this notification issued by the Land Revenue & Disaster Management Department, which, while allowing registration of property in the name of a Sikkimese woman married to a non-Sikkimese, also spells out that on their death, ownership of the property shall be governed as per the existing rule and regulation prevailing in the state [which denies their children inheritance].

This is not the first time that Daughters of Sikkim have taken their issues to the Court, and their battle continues.

They are protesting the classification of Sikkimese women into three categories by the State Government - Sikkimese Women married to Sikkimese, Sikkimese women married to Non-Sikkimese and Unmarried Sikkimese Women - and have contended that such differentiation and having separate rights and rules for Sikkimese women was in gross violation of fundamental, legal and human rights of women in the State.

Sikkim loses two more to COVID, toll reaches 121

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 DEC:**

Sikkim's death toll due to COVID-19 climbed to 121 on Wednesday with two more deaths being reported in the State in the last 24 hours. Both the fatalities were in their sixties and had underlying conditions and are thus being recorded as COVID-deaths with co-morbidities. In the daily health bulletin on Wednesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia informed that a 62-year-old lady from Lingding in East District passed away at around 5:06 PM Tuesday evening due to cardio respiratory failure at STNM Hospital.

She had tested positive for COVID-19 at Central Referral Hospital on Tuesday itself and was then admitted to STNM Hospital where she passed away shortly after. She had co-morbidities of diabetes, hypertension and hyperthyroidism, it is informed. The second COVID-death of the day was of a



64-year-old male from Rongneck in East District.

The patient was reportedly brought to the emergency ward of STNM Hospital with some complications and after he tested positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing, he was admitted into the Covid wing of hospital. The patient had co-morbid conditions of renal problem, arthritis, liver and kidney problems. He passed away at around 11 PM Tuesday.

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Previous Govt had no intention of retaining you, CM to OFOJ appointees

"SKM AND BJP IN GOVERNMENT IN SIKKIM TOGETHER"

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 DEC:**

Chief Minister PS Tamang today contended that the previous government which rushed the appointment of more than 17,000 youth under the One Family-One Job scheme in an election year in 2019 had no intentions of retaining the services of the appointees after the elections.

Speaking at the Losoong/ Namsong celebrations at Kewzing in South Sikkim on

Wednesday, the CM argued that the SDF Government did not follow due process and did not do anything to ensure that the OFOJ jobs were administratively sound and legally legitimate.

His reference was clearly to the Public Interest Litigation filed in the High Court of Sikkim earlier this week challenging the OFOJ scheme and appointments made under it. [read SummitTimes edition dated 15 Dec, 2020, for details of the case]

The CM, it may be recalled, had referred to the case on

Tuesday as well and made similar observations.

In his concluding remarks in today's address, the CM explained that his party did not oppose the OFOJ appointments in 2019 even though SDF, he alleged, had "stolen" what was originally SKM's idea.

"We did not oppose the appointments since it was still Sikkimese youth who were getting government employment," he said.

He added that the SDF

Government's intentions were not honorable since its conduct and lack of follow-up proves that it had only the elections in mind and not the future of the youth.

He claimed that neither were funds set aside for the salaries nor the required paperwork completed to ensure that the appointments held up to a legal challenge, both of which shortcomings are being resolved by his government.

...turn Pg3



GRACE INTER REHAB FUTSAL TOURNAMENT

DATE : 19th DEC TO 20th DEC 2020
VENUE : PALJOR STADIUM

TOWARDS TOGETHERNESS

<p>RECOVERING FELLOW BROTHERS JAGRITI FC SERENITY HOME GRACE DETOXIFICATION CENTRE BLESSSED FOUNDATION (JAIGOAN) RUN- II JEEWAN MARG SOCIETY SANJEEVINI FC FREEDOM FACILITY</p>	<p>MUKTI FOUNDATION (SILIGURI) ANUGRAH REHAB GRACE FOUNDATION (SILIGURI) ANONYMOUS GROUP GOODWILL UNITED (SILIGURI) NEW LIFE REHAB (SILIGURI) SIKKIM REHAB (SRDS) RUN - I UNITED FELLOWSHIP (SILIGURI)</p>
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Play a Part Together









The Heart of Sikkim Trek

EMZANG TENZING

When we were asked by Tshering Gyatso of Lum to help them map a new trek route in Dzongu, we jumped at the chance to enjoy a few days of freedom in the wilds. Our planned route would climb up from Lum, follow the ridge/skyline west of Mangan thence onwards into the high mountains at the base of Narsing and Paki Chu and down to Sakyong, the Westernmost and remotest of the villages of Dzongu.

We, three resource persons, Mingdup, Wangchuk and myself set off one rainy morning in a taxi from Mangan. We crossed the Damsite of the Teesta Stage V and drove up to Lum Village to meet our colourful host and group leader, Tshering Lum (2900') is a prosperous, bustling village at the centre of the Southernmost GPU in Dzongu.

From the road head at Lum, we climbed up to Lingtyang, a sparsely populated village at about 5000' altitude. I am told Lingtyang used to be the main village in this area but most of the villagers, including Tshering's family, have migrated since to Lum, Pheedang and other areas. We spend the night in one of the few houses in Lingtyang with our trekking companions, consisting of a motley group of sixteen men and five women, the youngest of whom was fourteen year old girl called Abcel and the oldest was an experienced woodsman called Aku Kaila. From the house, Tshering points out a flat piece of land with one or two pine trees and tells me that an English lady had married a local person and settled down there many generations back. Sherap Lepcha, one of our trekking companions, is one of the descendants of that eccentric and nameless matriarch.

Lingtyang has another English connection. Hooker, in 1849, camped at Leithang (Lingtyang) (Himalayan Journals), on his way up to Yumthang and the Gurudongmar plateau. Like Hooker a full hundred and seventy years ago, the next morning we catch a magnificent view of the Teesta snaking southwards on its mythical journey to meet the Rangeet. We then start climbing upwards through abandoned cardamom fields and foundations of old homesteads. The loss of cardamom as an economic anchor has made the youngsters abandon their villages in droves and head for work to Gangtok, Dikchu and Mangan. Tshering talks about his plans to start a community cattle farm and home-stays in Lingtyang with his cousins and other villagers to revive his ancestral village.

Hooker describes the profusion and beauty of orchids in the area but, unfortunately, we are not here during the flowering season. We part ways with Hooker, who headed Northwards towards Ghor and thence towards Singtam (Singhik). We climb steadily upwards. We

camp for the night at PheungKung Dhe (Bamboo Grove Pond) at about 8000'. The boys in our group rustle out at night to catch a few Peura (Hill Partridges).

Next morning, we climb on, following the ridge Westwards from Lingtyang. It is hot and there is no water along the way. Hacking through the thickets of bamboo carrying our supplies on our back is hard work. The youngsters in the group start complaining. We stop for the night at 9000' at a spot we aptly name Ung Dhon Lho ("The ridge where we searched for water"). Some of the boys go hunting for water and find it some distance away. On a full stomach and with our thirst quenched, our spirits rise. A verbal jousting starts between the boys and the three pugnacious football loving girls in our group. The girls get the better of the boys.

The next day, we continue our journey upwards through thickets of bamboo and rhododendron, stopping for lunch at a dried up pond. The water we strain out after digging holes in the slime still stinks of rotting matter after boiling but we cook lunch with it and fill our water bottles with the unholy stuff. "Tastes like bear's piss" someone quips. The subsequent climb is cooler and prettier with rhododendron and pretty maple trees replacing the bamboo thickets. We set camp in Masong Dang at an altitude of 9800'.

We've been trying to follow an old route demarcated on some old maps. Half a century ago, people from South Sikkim (Sada and Phantam) and further West used to use this track to walk to Pheedang and Dikchu and from there to Gangtok. I am told that villagers in Lingtyang used to reach West Sikkim in a single day using this route. But now there is no sign of the route and we have to hack out a new path through overgrown jungle. We've already spent three days in the initial climb upwards on the ridge above Lingtyang.

Next morning, we climb for an hour and reach the great North South running ridge that runs like a spine through the centre of Sikkim. We are officially on the great divide between the catchment area of the Teesta and the Rangeet. We are also on the boundary between North and South Sikkim. A well-worn track used by shepherds from Sada Phantam heads Northwards along the ridge. We follow this route towards our first destination of Kanhit Kursong. Open skies, a well-worn path and beautiful landscape all round reinvigorates everyone.

Kanhit Kursong ("Where the first and last sun rays fall") are twin peaks sacred to the Lepchas. While Tshering is offering prayers to the local deities, we admire the unparalleled 360 degree view of Sikkim. Kanhit Kursong is at the geographic centre of Sikkim. We mused that a King of old could have stood here and admired his entire Kingdom lying sprawled below him.

Mangan, Gangtok, Pelling and Tashinging and the North ridge of Darjeeling can be discerned from here. North West of us is a snow clad peak (Narsing) with attendant snowless needle peaks (Paki Chu and other peaks). Behind these, the summits of Kangchenjunga and Simvo jut out but Siniolchu and Lama Anden can be clearly seen unimpeded. Further back, we see the tops of a few peaks peeking out which we surmise are Chomiomo, Kangchengahyao, and the Gurudongmar Range. The Chola Range garlanding the Eastern boundary culminates in Pauhunri at its Northern end.

From Kursong, we head on Northwards along the sheep track.

Geologically, we are on the ridge of what's left of the "Teesta dome", where, in a dynamic interplay of forces over millions of years, tens of kilometres of rock above us have been eroded away to expose the underlying rocks of the Lesser Himalayas. On both sides parallel to the ridge, we can see the Teesta and the Rangeet almost 4 kilometres below us, eating into the landscape to balance the forces of uplift.

The ridge is covered with rhododendron and azalea bushes. During the flowering season, the entire area must be a study in red, white, purple and pink. Mingdup, our mountain expert, is mentally taking notes and tells me that he can see four varieties of rhododendron on the ridge. By the end of the trek, he has noted twenty four varieties of rhododendron, including Rhododendron niveum, our state tree and the rare rhododendron pumilum (dwarf rhododendron), the latter two along the slopes of the Paki Chu. Both are listed as critically endangered.

To cover time lost in the initial climb from Lum, we trekked through the evening and early part of the night using flashlights. Sometime in the night, we left the North South running ridge and headed North West towards Paki Chu. Exhausted, we camped in the open in the rhododendron forest without dinner. Early morning, we set out and soon after reached a meadow with a little running water. We called this place Safyu Dang after the wild onions (Safyu) found here. After brunch here, we headed upwards along a ridge. This ridge, and its continuation into the Eastern face of Narsing seems to be the source of Rangeet. The rocks underfoot have changed in character and are gneissic.

We camp in small terrace (13000') near a water source on the Eastern slope of the first of a series of North South running impressive parallel cliffs and troughs. Our primary destination (Chumilung and attendant lakes) is in the first trough beyond the first cliff. Shepherds from Sada, South Sikkim, who use these slopes as summer and monsoon grazing grounds, have recently left this area with their flocks of sheep and headed home. The sheep pasture upto 15,000' beyond

the lake area and also at the base of Paki Chu.

After setting up camp, we scout round and disturb a Monal Pheasant near the camp. We find plenty of signs of the snow pigeon but the ubiquitous rosefinches are absent at this time of the year. Hunters may also frequent these areas because we find many traps laid out in the North facing slopes some distance from camp. We discover a female blood pheasant in one of the traps.

Next morning, we leave camp and hike upto the lakes. We negotiate the cliffs through a series of rock strewn clefts and reach the lakes, called Paanch Pokhri by the shepherds, after a two hour hike. Tshering offers prayers to the local deities at the main lake called Chumilung (Mirror Of the Mountains). Beautiful Siniolchu, across the Rukel Gorge, is reflected on the clear waters of the lake. This lake is part of a system of at least six cirque lakes, the topmost of which is already dried up at this time of the year.

We split into two groups. One group sets out to scout a path to Paki Dhe (Lake) and beyond for a possible path to Sakyong. Rest of us head back to camp. Most of us are eager to head home and want to return via the "easier" route down to Lingdem/Leven. The scouts return and inform us that there is a path to the base of Paki Chu and that we can follow a ridge or trough down to Rukel River and try and reach the old track from Sakyong to Forest Bungalow at the entrance of KNP. We reluctantly agree.

Next day, we pack up and again cross Chumilung Lake complex and then climb over a pass (14,300') and reach Paki Dhe, where Pakimo clan of the Lepchas is said to have originated from. A sickle shaped lake adjacent to Paki Dhe is beautiful but partially dry. Giant rocks are broken and strewn about in surrealistic shapes and arrangements by the forces of ice and gravity, creating a landscape of otherworldly beauty. We cross over another snow strewn pass at the base of Paki Chu (mountain). Paki Chu is seen as a snow-free barren shard-like rock group about 2000 feet above us. Our mountain expert Mingdup opines that we could easily tackle the peak with some very basic ropes and equipment. We mentally place it in our bucket list for the next trip. We head downhill through rock strewn debris and snow via a trough which is the source of the Ringhim stream which ultimately meets the Rukel River at Sangnok.

Far below us, we see what seems to be a frozen lake. The frozen lake turns out to be a small mini glacier about the size of half a football field. The frozen surface is sloping at an angle of 20 to 30 degrees and is about 5 feet thick at its outlet. This seems to be a cirque glacier at a very low altitude of about 12000' or so. We keep moving downhill till we reach the edge of the

debris mass which is crumbling and falling into the Ringhim stream hundreds of feet below. We climb up the cliff to the right to avoid the landslide and move downhill along the brow of the cliff. Rhododendron thickets make the progress very slow and we finally camp for the night in the middle of the rhododendron forest at 10700'.

The next day, we decided to leave this ridge and cross the trough of the Ringhim and move along the left ridge of the trough. We saw many tracks of animals on the river bank. We made rapid progress downhill till we reached a flat terrace of land with some cardamom plants growing there. Mingdup surmised that we were very close to the Forest Bungalow which he has visited on his trek up from Mangan to Talung Glacier, Goechela and West Sikkim a few years previously. As it was getting late, we camped there while a recce group went out to find any traces of the old route.

Since the previous night's search proved unfruitful, two groups left early in the morning to look for the road to Sakyong. By noon, the second group returned and informed that they had found the bridge and the path. We first gingerly crossed a sixty foot, old, rickety hybrid suspension bridge (bamboo and cable) over the gorge of the Ringhim one at a time. Then, we walked on for a few kilometres hacking our way through the vegetation at upper edge of a very large terrace of land on the right bank of the Rukel Chu. Hundreds of hectares of cardamom field lay abandoned. Nature abhors a vacuum and bears seem to have taken over this place called Sangnok, the original location of Sakyong Village. We seem to have disturbed at least 10 bears at this stretch. A hundred and thirty years ago, John Claude White describes the joy of his Lepcha porters on reaching Sangnok and cultivation around here during his epic journey down from Goechela. We felt no less joy on seeing the cardamom plantations and the first signs of a travelled footpath on the outskirts of Sakyong.

We stopped for the night in some houses adjacent to Sakyong School. Sakyong's abandoned school building and overgrown playground is a sad reflection of the fact that many residents have abandoned the village to live in or close to Mangan. Pentong, seemingly a stone throw's away across the mighty Rukel Gorge, looks picturesque in its location in what seems a dried up cirque. The brutal beauty of the area suggests nature rather than man is dominant here. Tourists would find it attractive.

On the eleventh day, after walking from the Southernmost village of North Sikkim to the westernmost village of North Sikkim and covering the entire length of Dzongu in a first on record, we left Sakyong and finally headed back to base at Mangan and Lum.

Chief Justices of Sikkim and Andhra Pradesh to exchange offices

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 DEC:

The Supreme Court collegium has recommended the transfer of Chief Justice

of Sikkim, Arup Kumar Goswami, to Andhra Pradesh High Court as

Chief Justice there while the AP Chief Justice JK Maheshwari will take

charge of Sikkim High Court Chief.

The collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India SA Bobde, made the recommendation on Tuesday.

GPU-level men's open football tournament begins in Kamrang

BIKAS CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 16 DEC:

The first day of GPU Level Men's Open Football Tournament as part of Mamley/Kamrang Christmas Festive Meet, 2020 was held at the Kamrang Secondary School playground today.

Chairperson, Skill Development Department, Satish Chandra Rai, attended the first day as the chief guest accompanied by Lakpa Tamang as special guest along with the SKM office bearers, panchayat members and church leaders of local churches.

The special guest of the programme, Lakpa Tamang (Captain Jojo) told the organizing committee about extending the venue (playground) after the six days football



tournament ends.

The chief guest of the program, Satish Chandra Rai said that the Christmas Festive Meet, 2020 is to surmise the annual Christmas Carnival organized in Namchi every year. It is also to be mentioned that the Christmas Carnival is going to be celebrated in smaller scale indoor this year.

The teams that took participation in today's match are 1) Mamley-Kamrang versus Salghari which ended up with the scores of 6-1 and 2) Tinik-Chisopani versus Wok-Omchu which ended up with the scores of 5-0; making Mamley-Kamrang and Tinik-Chisopani as the winning teams to move forward.

Rules will be framed for effective loan recovery by SBS: CM

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 DEC:

Speaking on media persons on the sidelines of the Losoong/Namsoon celebrations at Kewzing, South Sikkim, Chief Minister PS Tamang, said that rules will be framed soon to allow State Bank of

Sikkim to recover loans from defaulters through mortgage.

He informed that the existing rules at SBS do not allow for it to make such recoveries from properties mortgaged with it by people taking loans.

The bank, it may be

recalled, is straddled with bad loans which have been making headlines of late, including threats of the names of the defaulters being made public.

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister inaugurated a State

Bank of Sikkim branch at Kewzing and invited the people to support the bank since it has been on the forefront when it comes to supporting the people and Sikkim.

Commenting on recent headlines regarding SBS and its list of bad loans, he also

stressed that people need to develop a better sense of banking and repayment of loans since that will have a snowball effect and make SBS more robust and more capable of supporting Sikkimese economy and its requirements.

Time for our AVGC experts to work for Indian films: Javadekar

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

(PIB): Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Prakash Javadekar today addressed the CII Big Picture Summit.

In a message to the audience, the Minister complimented CII for organizing the Big Picture Summit. He added that "we are a country where growth of communication technology is phenomenal. This presents a tremendous scope for entertainment and media industry". The Minister remarked "AVGC (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comic) is a sunrise sector and our experts are providing backend support to top filmmakers of the world". He added that it was time that these professionals started doing more of this for our own films so that

the use of animation and graphics in Indian films grows manifolds.

Mr Javadekar announced that the Government is forming a Center of Excellence in cooperation with Indian Institute of Bombay where courses in AVGC will be provided. Moreover, he said, the Center will undertake initiatives to promote entrepreneurship and encourage start-ups in the sector.

The Minister invited the attendees to participate in the 51st IFFI in Goa in January 2021. The Minister announced that India will set up a special pavilion at Cannes in 2022 as Cannes Film Festival celebrates 75 years. He also announced that India will host a Global Media and Film Summit next year.

Speaking on the occasion, Secretary, Ministry of I&B, Amit Khare opened his remarks by referring to amendment in Allocation of Business rules in November saying the idea behind the change, was to bring content at one place i.e. Min of I&B while keeping platforms at another place i.e. Min of Electronics and IT. Speaking on the role played by Min of I&B, Sh Khare said the role of Government in this sector is that of a facilitator. He remarked that the Ministry of I&B has the largest influence among all Ministries and that influence comes only through the private sector, adding that almost all the film making in the country was done by private sector, all the channels except Prasar Bharti were

private and the OTT sector was entirely private.

Mr Khare also said that the Media and Entertainment industry has grown and we must facilitate the industry. This pandemic, he said, has opened new avenues like educational technologies and Indian gaming which also have an export potential.

With the year 2022 being the 75th year of India's independence, celebrations of which will take place within the country and outside, the Secretary invited the industry to help project India's soft power through media and entertainment. Mr Khare also cordially invited the participants of the Summit to 51st IFFI which will be celebrated in a hybrid mode.

CEO, Prasar Bharti, Shashi Shekhar Vempati

speaking on the occasion, said various channels under the public broadcaster created content to generate mass awareness during the COVID pandemic. The efforts reflected in Doordarshan's standing among the top social advertisers during the period. Through the airing of serials like Ramayan and Mahabharat, Doordarshan has highlighted that there is still an audience for wholesome family content. Mr Vempati emphasized that efforts like DD Free Dish are trendsetting initiatives across the world. On the same note, emerging technologies like 5G provide an opportunity to take broadcasting to smartphones and this opportunity is being tapped by startups in India.

Training held on soil health management through soil testing and vermicomposting

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 DEC:

A 2-day farmers' training on "Soil Health Management through Soil Testing and Vermicomposting" was organized on 15 and 16 December by Prof D Jhaharia, PI of the All India Coordinated Research Project on Plastic Engineering in Agriculture Structure and Environment Management (CAEPHT), Gangtok centre, and Dr

Ch Birendrajit, Assistant Professor (Soil Science) of the Department of Basic Engineering and Applied Sciences, CAEPHT, Ludhiana (Punjab), under the SCSP scheme of AICRP-PEASEM (Gangtok centre), a press release informs.

25 farmers from Setipul, Soureni, Marchak and Assam Lingzey in East Sikkim and from Nessa Tashiding in West Sikkim attended the training.



Pragati Sangh undertakes cleanliness drive

SUMMIT REPORT
RANGPO, 16 DEC:

Pragati Sangh carried out a cleanliness drive at Athing Rai Bahadur TD Densapa Memorial Government Senior Secondary School playground at Bermiok and its surrounding areas. The drive was undertaken to weed the overgrown playground and litter from the area. Pragati Sangh is a group of volunteers students



working under the guidance of primary school teacher, Nevika Kafley and social activist, Devi Basnet.

Rape conviction rate remains abysmal in India

AAKANSHA KHAJURIA

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC:

Eight years after the Nirbhaya case of gang-rape and murder of a physiotherapy student shook the conscience of the nation and led to hanging of four rapists earlier this year, the conviction rate in rape cases still remains abysmal despite stringent anti-rape laws in place.

As per the recent National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, the conviction rate for rape cases remained at 27.8 per cent in 2019. Out of a total of 1,62,741 rape cases which went to trial in 2019, the court convicted people in only 4,640 cases.

In 2018, however, the rate was 27.2 per cent, down from 32.2

per cent in 2017 and 23.9 per cent the year before that. According to legal experts, one of the reasons why criminals do not get convicted is poor investigation by the police, family pressure on victims, hostility of witnesses and complainants, absence of forensic labs and fast-track courts.

Advocate Aparna Bhatt, former member of Delhi's rape crisis cell, said that the conviction rate will go up only when a support system is created for complainants. "They should be able to complain in a proper way. Thereafter, support should be given through a medical examination and in the court," she emphasised.

Advocate Geeta Luthra, however, said,

"It is low because the investigation is very poorly conducted without any scientific tools, forensic and medical evidence of the victim or the accused. As a result, because of the risk of false implication in cases where the investigation is not being done with scientific tools, the rate of conviction in all cases in India gets lower."

The United Nations Children's Fund on Monday revealed that Dalit girls and women face multiple barriers to justice in India, with conviction rate for rapes against Dalit women being under two per cent as compared to a much higher conviction rate in rape cases against all women.

The Nirbhaya case is

one such case in which not only were the culprits convicted but were also hanged by the noose. Condemned convicts — Vinay, Akshay, Pawan and Mukesh were executed on March 20 at 5:30 a.m., over seven years after the crime took place in the national capital.

The case pertains to the gruesome rape of a 23-year-old physiotherapy student, later dubbed 'Nirbhaya', by six men in a moving bus on December 16, 2012. She had succumbed to her injuries 13 days later.

The attackers inserted rods inside her vagina and ripped her intestines apart. The brutality of the crime shook the nation to the core, leading to

widespread protests and a drastic change in the country's rape laws.

After the Nirbhaya incident, Justice J.S. Verma Committee formed the basis of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 to set the maximum punishment for rape as death penalty rather than life imprisonment.

In 2013, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2013 was promulgated by then President Pranab Mukherjee which provided for the death penalty in cases of rape. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 was also passed, allowing for juveniles in conflict with law, involved in heinous offences, to be tried as adults.

NIFAA meets in Namthang to prepare for Savedna



SUMMIT REPORT
SINGTAM, 16 DEC:

The Sikkim unit of National Integrated Forum of Artists and Activists (NIFAA), held its first coordination meeting for 'Samvedna' at Namthang, South Sikkim, on 15 December. Samvedna is an International blood and plasma donation awareness campaign launched by NIFAA.

The Namthang meeting was attended by the organisation's

chief coordinator Sikkim, Bikash Pradhan, president Praveen Pradhan, general secretary Krishna Chettri, and members Kishore Baniya, Srijana Chetti and others.

The Samvedna campaign is scheduled to begin 23 March in 28 states and 8 Union Territories of India.

More than 90,000 units of blood are expected to be collected from 1,500 venues across the country.

The campaign is also an attempt at securing a Guinness Book of World Record, Bikash Pradhan informed while adding that the event will commemorate the 90th anniversary of the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru.

The meeting decided to launch Samvedna on 29 December at Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Namthang, with the Lok Sabha MP, Ministers and other dignitaries in attendance.

Imposter cheats man of Rs one crore, arrested

BENGALURU, DEC 16

(PTI): A man was arrested on Wednesday for allegedly cheating another to the tune of Rs one crore by posing as an influential politician, police said.

The house of the accused was raided and Rs 26 lakh in cash and cheques for Rs 91 crore were seized, the police said.

Yuvaraj got himself photographed with

important people to convince the victims that he was a well connected politico, they said.

Showing the photographs, he allegedly duped many people by promising them government jobs and getting government work done, the police said.

On a complaint from one of the victims, Yuvaraj was arrested, they added.

Previous Govt had no intention

The OFOJ jobs were saved because SKM formed the government last year, he said.

"Sikkim is lucky that SDF did not return to government because it had no intentions to retain the services of these appointees. They would all have been removed under one pretext or the other if they had won the elections. We had however promised regularisation of these services and are still committed to it," he said, while assuring the youth that the government will defend the case with all its might.

As for the PIL, he alleged that it is being engineered by the former Chief Minister, and just like the appointments were politically motivated in January 2019, so is the challenge to it now, he said.

Clearing up another political query in many people's minds, the CM put on record that SKM and BJP were together in government in Sikkim.

It is significant that he was speaking as the chief guest in a constituency which had voted the SDF candidate to the legislative assembly in 2019 and who has since switched to BJP. The MLA was also on the stage with the CM today.

The CM explained that SKM was a part of NDA in Parliament right from the start and that its Lok Sabha MP had been invited as an NDA member to a meeting in Delhi shortly after the elections. Now, the two parties were together in Sikkim as well.

"Let there be no confusion on the issue," he said.

True secular ethos has arrived in Sikkim.....

years, I've never seen the presence of a single minister in this area. I call upon the youth to support the chief minister in establishing a new Sikkim."

Similarly, SIBLAC convenor, Tseten Tashi Bhutia, who also addressed the gathering, said, "It is surely a change in Sikkim as I'm being allowed to speak in public after more than a decade now."

Also today, the area MLA, TT Bhutia, submitted a detailed list of demands for the area.

Sikkim loses two more

Meanwhile, 33 new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in the last 24 hours, taking Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 5,398 on Wednesday. While 20 of the new cases were reported from East District, one came from West District and 12 from South Sikkim.

On the other hand, the number of discharged Covid patients further improved to 4,877. There are now 306 active cases in the State, of whom three are currently in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

The 33 new cases were picked up from testing of 287 samples on Tuesday - 28 cases detected in RT-PCR testing of 240 samples and five via rapid antigen testing of 30 samples. None of the 17 samples screened by TruNat returned positive.

Among the new cases are a person from Upper Tareything, Pakyong and two from Near Soureni School, Assam Lingzey in East District. A staff member of Samman Bhawan has also tested positive but could not be contacted over phone.

Likewise, new cases reported from in and around the capital include three persons from Development Area, two from Upper Shyari, two from 6th Mile-Tadong, one from near Tamang Gumpa in Sichey, one from Tibet Road, another also from Tibet Road but presently stationed at Siliguri, one from the DPH area, one from Tathangchen and one from helipad road in Lower Burtuk.

Among the ten persons who tested positive in South District are three from Namchi, five from Namchi Jail, two from Pipaley, one from Sorok, one from Rong and one from Sangmu Gangla, while one person from Tashiding and one from Simlick Soreng have tested positive in West Sikkim.

Similarly, one person from near Loop Garden, Kabi in North District has also tested positive but the testing was done in East District.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

<p>Symptoms of nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever • Difficulty in breathing • Dry Cough • Severe acute respiratory syndrome • Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<p>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often with soap. • Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer • Observe good personal hygiene. • Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. • Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. • Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. • Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. • Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome, and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. • No vaccinations available as of now. • Visit Doctor in case symptomatic detected. 	<p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Toll free no. 104 District surveillance Officer EAST : 7028372100 WEST : 9583297809 NORTH : 9641957488 SOUTH : 7407681463 New STNM AHS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

The Incongruity of Temp Terms for Permanent Requirements

Adhocism is a reality, but should not be so for teaching

Comments on the worries and insecurities of government personnel hired on adhoc terms have been in conversations here for a while now. Opposition parties have found a convenient and ever present situation to gripe about in this practice. But parties in the Opposition, because they are prone to exaggerations, much like the ruling party at the other end of the spectrum, are rarely taken very seriously especially since they are also prone to inconsistent pursuit of issues. Now, even after the position-opposition equation has flipped, the observation still holds. From teachers to specialists to a favoured few to products of all too common nepotism, there is just too much hiring on casual terms for periods extending for much longer than can be intelligently accepted as adhoc or temporary.

Recently, adhoc teachers whose terms would have ended in December were offered an extension in service till March. This was clearly required because the academic session has been upset by Covid. That said, the woes of teachers hired on adhoc basis are not worries that can be dismissed too lightly. To begin with, the hiring of teachers on temporary basis for clearly permanent requirements [education is hopefully here to stay permanently] is unfortunate and wrong on many levels.

For all the excuses that the department might proffer, none can justify how and why such a large number of teachers continue to be hired by the academic session for such a long time on such exploitative terms. The present lot of adhoc teachers are posted to schools when an academic session begins and draw a consolidated salary once they join their duties, and they stop receiving pay from the day the school closes for the winter break [which has been deferred this year]; and then the wait begins for the next academic session. Such an arrangement should be allowed only when the Education Department has to fill a sudden, unforeseen vacancy. When a teaching post falls vacant mid-term and students need to be attended to, a temporary appointment can be considered. But the Department has been resorting to such hiring for too many years now. It is clear that the practice continues because the insecure pool of the unemployed seize even these clearly inconsiderate terms in the hope that it will eventually lead to regularization of service and the more than handsome emoluments that accrue from such employment.

There have been ample instances when rules have been bent to absorb adhoc employees into permanent service to inspire the adhoc teachers to make such demands off and on and expect them to be met. Theirs, however, is a different kind of service and is governed by more specific set of conditions on qualifications and service and processes of hiring.

Be that as it may, it needs to be recognized that it is about time that the State's unemployed, before they begin demanding government employment, insist that clearer terms of reference were set for temporary hiring and the process overseen properly to ensure accountability, and then a policy decision taken to employ people only in regular service. Even the unemployed need to recognize that when temporary services are regularized as a matter of practice and not exception, it is tantamount to double denial of opportunities to the other unemployed people. The hiring rules for adhoc/temporary employment are lax and open to abuse and/or compromise. To then regularize services which were not appointed under the strictest and most transparent hiring processes can be seen as a second denial of opportunities to others who could have bid for the job but were not considered for a host of reasons.

Better planning, a codified procedure, clear communication to hired temp employees and faster processing of files could go a long way towards ensuring that classrooms, offices, project sites and hospitals, even when staffed by adhoc employees have personnel who have fewer worries on their minds to focus better on the charges under their care. What needs to be addressed more deeply is why permanent requirements continue to be filled on temporary basis allowing for uncertainty to prevail, unfair service terms to be imposed, unclear demands to be raised and unmerited aspirations voiced.

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John Le Carré: Authentic Spy Fiction That Wrote the Wrongs of Post-War British Intelligence

CHRISTOPHER J. MURPHY
THECONVERSATION.COM

Britain's top spy, MI6 chief Richard Moore, has paid tribute to John Le Carré, tweeting that the novelist had "left his mark on #MI6 through his evocative and brilliant novels". Moore's tweet, which conveyed the condolences of "all at the #RiverHouse" – the name Le Carré gave the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) headquarters on the banks of the Thames, even blew Le Carré's cover, referring to the writer by his real name, David Cornwell.

Moore's words of comfort were a far cry from the attitude of his predecessor at MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove, who last year complained about the "corrosive" nature of Le Carré's novels, that he said were "exclusively about betrayal", a criticism also levelled at his work by former SIS officer Baroness Daphne Park.

Le Carré's 25 novels have always come with the added cachet of being written by someone who once worked for the intelligence services. Yet as the writer himself explained in 2013, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, the 1963 novel that made him a household name, was only considered acceptable for publication by MI6 – for whom he was working at the time – because they had "concluded, rightly if reluctantly, that the book was sheer fiction from start to finish, uninformed by personal experience, and that accordingly it constituted no breach of security".

The association with the reality of intelligence was one which Le Carré himself was keen to downplay. He expressed his desire to shake off the association in an interview with Melvyn Bragg in 1976:

If you write a story about street girls in London you aren't immediately accused of running a brothel, but if you write a spy story, the more credible, the more authentic, the more plausible it is, the less credit you get for an act of imagination.



Imaginative it may have been, but Le Carré's work is certainly not devoid of realism – the shadow of Cambridge Spy Kim Philby can be seen in both the "mole" in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and in the career of Magnus Pym, the protagonist of *A Perfect Spy*, which was partly based on Le Carré's own unhappy childhood. But credibility and authenticity do not necessarily equate to reality – anyone looking for true stories with the names changed would be disappointed.

Despite being products of his imagination, the credibility and authenticity that permeated Le Carré's work served to educate the general public about intelligence work at a time when very little was said officially about the agencies themselves. MI5 was not placed on a statutory basis – that is to say, it did not formally exist – until 1989, followed by MI6 five years later.

But ten years before that, when the BBC adaptation of his novel *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* was first broadcast, an audience of over 8 million which tuned in each week (according to his biographer, Adam Sisman) learned all about the danger of "moles" – long-term sleeper agents

who burrow their way into the intelligence machinery of the "other side".

It was a timely education – in a pure coincidence of TV scheduling, within weeks of the broadcast, the public learned of the existence of a real-life, high-level mole. Sir Anthony Blunt, a former surveyor of the Queen's pictures and wartime MI5 officer, was revealed to have been one of the Cambridge Five spy ring who were recruited before the second world war and who spied for decades for the Soviet Union from the heart of the British establishment.

HONEYTRAPS AND SCALPHUNTERS

Le Carré's novels dramatically changed the way the British public, fed on a diet of James Bond and Len Deighton, perceived the world of intelligence. They also provided welcome fodder for newspapers. A story about former MI6 chief John Scarlett's post-intelligence career published in the *i*-paper in November 2015 was given the headline: "The spy who came into a fortune". *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* is also regularly evoked in the press: "Now it's tinker, tailor, soldier, Booker judge", wrote Richard Brookes in the *Sunday Times* when it was announced that former

director general of MI5, Dame Stella Rimington, had been appointed to the judging panel for the literary award.

But as well as influencing public perceptions, Le Carré's intelligence jargon – "honeytraps", "lamplighters", "scalphunters", "mothers", "babysitters" and the like – had a corresponding influence on the spies themselves. As Sisman notes in his biography of Le Carré, some of his terms were "subsequently adopted by intelligence professionals".

There's long been a strong connection between literary fiction and the world of espionage. Le Carré's distinguished predecessors, including the likes of Graham Greene, W. Somerset Maugham, Arthur Ransome and Ian Fleming had blazed that trail before. But it was Le Carré, primarily, who took Britain's spies out of sharp suits, fancy cars and the moral certainty of "my country right or wrong". Instead he gave us books populated by people, like himself, who are: "Born to lying, bred to it, trained to it by an industry that lies for a living." No wonder some of the real spies didn't always love his work.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Intelligence Studies, University of Salford]

Will Going Out in the Cold Give You a Cold?



Libby Richards
theconversation.com

Many of us have heard: "Don't go outside without a coat; you'll catch a cold."

That's not exactly true. As with many things, the reality is more complicated. Here's the distinction: Being cold isn't why you get a cold. But it is true that cold weather makes it easier to get the cold or flu. It is still too early to tell how weather impacts the COVID-19 virus, but scientists are starting to think it behaves differently than cold and flu viruses.

As an associate professor of nursing with a background in public health, I'm asked about this all the time. So here's a look at what actually happens.

Many viruses, including rhinovirus – the usual culprit in the common cold – and influenza, remain infectious longer and replicate faster in colder temperatures. That's why these viruses spread more easily in winter. Wearing a heavy coat won't necessarily make a difference.

VIRUS TRANSMISSION IS EASIER WHEN IT'S COLD

More specifically, cold weather can change the outer membrane of the influenza virus; it makes the membrane more solid and rubbery. Scientists believe that the rubbery coating makes person-to-person transmission of the virus easier.

It's not just cold winter air that causes a problem. Air that is dry in addition to cold has been linked to flu outbreaks. A National Institutes of Health study suggests that dry winter air further helps the influenza virus to remain infectious longer.

How your immune system responds during cold weather also matters a great deal. Inhaling cold air may adversely affect the immune response in your respiratory tract, which makes it easier for viruses to take hold. That's why wearing a scarf over your nose and mouth may help.

Also, most people get less sunlight in the winter. That is a problem because the Sun is a major source of vitamin D, which is essential for immune system health. Physical activity, another factor, also tends to drop during the winter. People are three times more likely to delay exercise in snowy or icy conditions.

Instead, people spend more time indoors. That usually means more close contact with others, which leads to disease spread. Respiratory viruses generally spread within a six-foot radius of an infected person. When you are indoors, it is very likely that you are closer together than six feet.

In addition, cold weather dries out your eyes and the mucous membranes in your nose and

throat. Because viruses that cause colds and flu are typically inhaled, the virus can attach more easily to these impaired, dried-out passages.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

While the bottom line is that being wet and cold doesn't make you sick, there are strategies to help prevent illness all year long.

- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid touching your face, something people do between nine and 23 times an hour.
- Stay hydrated; eight glasses a day of water is a good goal, but that could be more or less depending on lifestyle and the size of the person.
- Eat a well-balanced diet. Dark green, leafy vegetables are rich in immune system-supporting vitamins; eggs, fortified milk, salmon and tuna have vitamin D.
- Stay physically active, even during the winter.
- Clean the hard, high-touch surfaces in your home often.
- If your nose or throat gets dry in the winter, consider using a humidifier.
- Get the flu vaccine.

And one more important thing this year: When it's your turn, make sure you get the COVID-19 vaccine.

[the writer is Associate Professor of Nursing, Purdue University]

Behmai massacre witness and plaintiff dies at 85 waiting for justice

KANPUR, 16 DEC: Rajaram Singh, the main witness in the 1981 Behmai massacre and the plaintiff in the case, died after prolonged illness in his native village Behmai in Kanpur Dehat district. He was suffering from chronic liver disease. Rajaram Singh was 85.

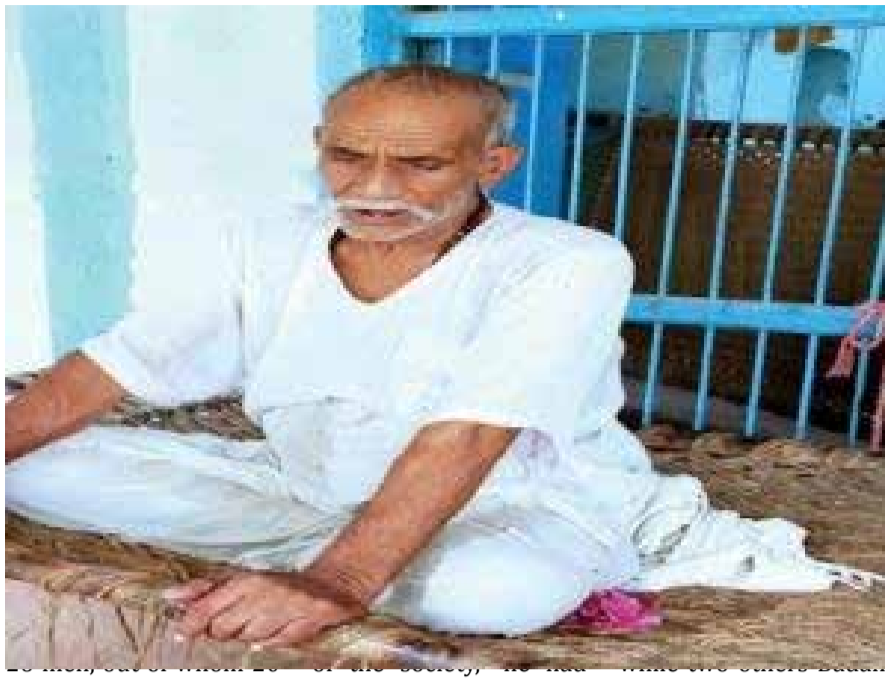
In the Behmai massacre, 20 men, including 17 Thakurs, one Muslim, one Dalit and one OBC, were killed on February 14, 1981 by bandit queen Phoolan Devi and her gang as revenge for the sexual violence perpetrated on her by men of the Thakur caste.

Rajaram's two younger brothers, Banwari Singh and Himmat Singh, cousin Naresh Singh, nephews

Dev Singh, Hukum Singh and Dashrath Singh were among those killed by the Phoolan Devi gang.

Earlier this month, in an interview to a newspaper, Rajaram had said, "I wish to see the accused of the Behmai massacre hanged for their crime. They had killed our innocent family members. But God only knows whether I would be able to get justice as I am suffering from chronic liver ailment. I will get peace only when the killers are punished in my lifetime."

Rajaram, the key complainant and witness, had recalled that he was 46 when the massacre took place but memories of



succumbed," he had said.

Behmai, once known as the village of Thakurs, was transformed into a village of mourners with 17 young widows within

years after the massacre.

Out of the 23 accused in this case, 16, including Phoolan Devi, are already dead.

Charges were framed against the four surviving accused, while the court issued a non-bailable warrant against three absconders, including Maan Singh, Ramkesh and Vishwanath.

A special court (dacoity) had fixed a date for pronouncing the verdict in the case in January 2020, but it was adjourned several times as the original case diary was reported missing from court records and a probe was ordered.

Phoolan Devi was shot dead on July 26, 2001 by three masked gunmen outside her residence in Delhi.

Meghalaya's SSA teachers send postcards to PM seeking pending salaries

SHILLONG, DEC 15 [SHILLONGTIMES]: Thousands of school teachers from Meghalaya on Tuesday sent postcards to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking his intervention into the delay of their salaries under Centre's Samagra Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) Mission, which have been pending for five months so far.

The postcard campaign was launched in protest against the alleged delay by the central government in releasing their salaries.

The Meghalaya SSA Schools Association (MSSASA) Central Body president, Aristotle Rymbai, said, "We are sending a clear message to the Union Education Ministry that it should release the first instalment so that the state government can release the pending salary".

A total of 12,541 elementary teachers

were recruited under the SSA in 2,907 lower primary and 2,232 upper primary schools across the state, Rymbai said.

Meanwhile, Education Minister, Lahkmen Rymbui, has expressed hope that the Centre would release funds for clearing the pending salaries of SSA teachers before Christmas.

The state government has contacted the central government in this regard, he told reporters.

The education minister said that the central government's delay in releasing funds has also affected other activities of the SSA programme in Meghalaya.

In 2018, the central government launched the SSA programme which incorporated three schemes, viz. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and Teacher Education.

Cong alleges extortion from coal trucks by Meghalaya CM's relatives

SHILLONG, DEC 15 [SHILLONGTIMES]: The Opposition Congress on Tuesday claimed that the chief minister's family and his close relatives were allegedly involved in illegal collection of toll from coal-laden trucks in Garo Hills.

Addressing a press conference here, Congress Spokesperson Zenith Sangma accused Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma's brother-in-law, Sanjay A Sangma, of indulging in extortion from coal-laden trucks plying through National Highway 62.

Sangma recalled that Sanjay A Sangma had fought the 2018 Assembly elections as an NPP candidate

from Mahendraganj constituency.

Giving details about the alleged case, Zenith said that the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) had arbitrarily issued an order in the pretext of collecting monopoly tax from the coal trucks plying through NH-62.

The order issued by the Secretary to the Executive Committee of GHADC on October 16 states that "The EC is pleased to settle Wageasi coal market with Sanjay A Sangma of Tura Hawakhana, P.O. Tura for Rs 3 lakh from November 1, 2020 to March 31, 2022, on the following terms and conditions..."



"My question is under which provision or rule of the GHADC, this kind of order was issued whereas the GHADC is getting its share of royalty through the state government. It is highly illegal," he said.

Zenith said the signboard put up at the gate mentions "Office of the GHADC - coal monopoly Wageasi, North Garo Hills" which means that GHADC authorities should also be present.

"But only the lessee is collecting the money. From the first day Rs 500 was collected from each truck but from yesterday onward the amount has gone up to Rs 1,000," he said.

In view of this,

Zenith said some of the responsible citizens of North Garo Hills District have made complaints before the deputy commissioner, who has endorsed it to the SP concerned to take necessary action.

"After the complaint was received, these people have now begun collecting money from coal trucks illegally under police protection. Such is the state of affairs in Meghalaya," Zenith said.

The Congress leader warned that if the government continues to remain adamant on the matter, the Opposition may be compelled to knock the doors of the Judiciary.

Meghalaya Deputy CM allays fears of permanent residents

SHILLONG, DEC 15 [SHILLONGTIMES]: Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong has allayed the fears that genuine residents about facing harassment at the entry-exit gate. He told reporters here today that the genuine residents of the state should not worry at all about the new system being put in place from December 21.

"Our permanent residents, be it tribal or non-tribal, should not panic at all," he said categorically.

When asked about

the process of going and coming back to the state for genuine residents, Tynsong said that an EPIC or a Permanent Residential Certificate (PRC) issued by the respective deputy commissioners is good enough for genuine residents to produce at the entry-exit gate.

As far as the tourists are concerned, Tynsong said they would have to provide details like their address and their place of stay, EPIC and other details about their destination and duration of the stay in the state.

The proposed entry-exit point would have 3-4 counters and it will have a designated counter for COVID-19, one for the tourists to be manned by the Tourism department and even the Ri Bhoi district administration will have one for the residents to produce at the entry-exit gate.

When asked about the jibe of the Opposition Congress that the proposed infrastructure is merely a COVID-19 check gate and not an entry-exit point per se, Tynsong expressed optimism that the Governor would soon

give his assent to the Meghalaya Residents' Safety and Security (Amendment) Act, 2019 and added that the proposed entry-exit point would serve a variety of purpose, be it COVID-19 or tourism.

"By setting up the entry-exit point, we don't mean to discourage people from coming to Meghalaya, rather we want to encourage people to come here for business investment or tourism purposes," he said.

When asked about the demands of the

pressure groups to make other entry and points in the state functional, he said that land has been acquired in some place and the entry-exit point at Bajengdoba and Ratacherra is likely to be constructed by 2021

or 2022.

It may be recalled that the idea of setting up entry-exit point in the state was conceived way back in 2014-15 when the state was witnessing aggressive pro-ILP agitation.

17 new cases take Arunachal's COVID-19 tally to 16,553

ITANAGAR, DEC 16 (PTI): At least 17 more people, including four security personnel, tested positive for COVID-19 in Arunachal Pradesh, pushing the tally in the state to 16,553, a health department official said on Wednesday.

Of the fresh cases, five were reported from Tawang and three each from Changlang and East Siang and one each from Siang, Lohit, West Kameng, Papumpare, Upper Siang

and Tirap districts, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

"Three Assam Rifles personnel and an army jawan are among the new patients," he said.

All the fresh infections were detected through rapid antigen tests, the SSO said, adding that all the new patients, barring eight, were asymptomatic.

Twenty-one people were cured of the

disease on Tuesday, taking the total number of recoveries to 16,264, Jampa said.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state stands at 98.25 per cent, he said.

Arunachal Pradesh now has 234 active cases, and the death toll remained at 55 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported.

The COVID-19 fatality ratio in the state is currently at 0.33 per

cent.

The Capital Complex region, comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas, has the highest number of active cases at 100, followed by Changlang (26), East Siang (23) and West Kameng (22).

The state has so far tested 3,70,128 samples for COVID-19, including 588 on Tuesday, he said.

The positivity rate now stands at 1.75 per cent.



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Jacinda Barclay was our 'rockstar' but she deserved so much more

Rebecca Beeson
SYDNEY, 16 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: AFLW pre-season has rolled around again, appearing from the shadows of a long off-season cast by Covid-19 and the death of my teammate Jacinda Barclay.

Our team is sitting around the changeroom while members of the leadership group take it in turns to reflect on how we move forward from here. A few eyes dart around the room to gauge how others are feeling, some prefer to keep their eyes fixed on the floor. With the mention of her name some turn their heads to look at the untouched locker in the corner of the room. The locker belonging to Cinda.

We have been encouraged to speak about Cinda, to celebrate her life and laugh about the moments she drove us up the wall, then would say something incredibly funny and cheeky that made you giggle and think "oh that's just our Cinda".

What I've noticed in the weeks since Cinda's death is that speaking about suicide and mental health is not something that human beings are very good at. I've watched on as we dance around the subject, our language softening to reflect the discomfort we feel within ourselves and others, unsure about the correct way to navigate the topic. But for all who knew Jacinda Barclay, you would know she preferred to live outside the lines of correctness.

Her ability to stand proudly in front of a room and speak her mind with no reservation and without a hint of care for what anyone else was thinking made it obvious

to all that she wasn't the type to dance around an issue.

Cinda went into a discussion full of vigour and with her heart firmly on her sleeve. If there was an elephant in the room, you would know about it. She would stare it in the eyes then project its presence from the rooftops. To sit in silence was not her way of doing things; until it came to her mental health.

As her teammate, I only knew of the seriousness of her struggle with mental health after her death. Cinda had very few people with whom she chose to share the extent of her mental health struggles, and asking how she was travelling was often met with "life is good, chicka". She put on a brave face, showing much more interest in my life and my issues, rather than her own.

Did she feel weighed by the expectations on elite athletes to toughen up in the face of adversity and the "don't be soft" narrative that plagues elite sport culture? Was there an element of shame she felt as a result of the stigma attached to mental health? Maybe she wasn't equipped with the knowledge to understand what she was battling?

There will never be clear answers to these questions, and there are multiple factors that contribute to Cinda's complex mental state.

Much has been reported in the media of Cinda's wonderful achievements and her one-of-a-kind personality. However, what has not been spoken about was her struggles living as a female athlete.

Like Cinda,



many AFLW players are stuck in limbo between community and professional sport. We are neither amateur athletes, with the freedom to live a seemingly normal life, nor we are fully professional athletes financially supported with a full-time salary. What often goes unseen by the spectator is the dedication and time commitment required to be elite. Gender doesn't change this.

What female athletes must do to be at the top of our game is equal to that of our male counterparts, despite only being paid for 15 hours of training commitments a week under the current AFLW collective bargaining agreement. I will not gloss over the difficulty of juggling the lifestyle of an elite athlete, with our other career and commitments. Especially when considering the means for supporting ourselves financially is often reliant on the latter.

In 2019, a matter of weeks before the start of the season, Cinda flew out of Sydney to work on an oil rig in the middle of the Indian Ocean. She missed the crucial few weeks of preseason training in the lead up to the season and

missed our round one match, not because she wanted to, but because she had to. AFLW media published a feature piece on Cinda's remarkable working life, detailing how she worked three jobs to make ends meet and support her lifestyle as a female athlete. The question posed by the title of the piece: how do you train for the AFLW while working on an oil rig?

It is a question that asks you to consider the nonsensical lengths some players must go to play a game that does not financially support their lives.

Cinda was a star pitcher for the Australian national baseball team - playing in multiple World Cups - the best quarterback in the Legends Football League in the US and a key forward for the GWS Giants. If she had of been a man, she would have been one of the richest, most famous sport stars in the country. In the words of my coach, Alan McConnell, she would have been a "rockstar". Cinda dedicated her life to sport, and despite all her athletic talent and charisma, she did not have the means to financially support herself in a meaningful

way. At times she was unable to meet what is considered as normal weekly financial requirements. To Cinda, pay parity was a sign of respect. She fought hard for better pay, better working conditions, more resources and greater acknowledgment of our struggles and successes. She was an embodiment of her own battles as an exceptional athlete who struggled in the confines of being merely semi-professional.

The ability to earn a living is a great source of angst for a number of AFLW players. In Cinda's case, this financial stress contributed to her struggle with mental health. However, it went predominately unspoken. When considering social norms, a person heading into their 30s is expected to be laying the financial foundations for a comfortable life and have a secure and settled job - a norm that many AFLW players, like Cinda, do not fit into.

Although Cinda's financial stress was not the sole cause of her mental health struggle, it forms a significant part of the story that she felt undervalued for what she had to offer to

society.

Despite the pitfalls of her AFLW wage, Cinda loved her footy and she loved the Giants. She wanted us to know this. She took great pride in her team, often wearing Giants apparel as she went about her day-to-day activities. She dedicated her life to sport, to football and to the Giants. But in doing so, it left her financially insecure at the age of 29 and unable to support herself when she needed it the most. Her level of passion was not reciprocated with pay, and the daily battle for Cinda to put food on the table, pay rent or buy a plane ticket home to Western Australia to see her family was real.

This is the heartbreaking truth of one of the most talented female athletes in this country. A true reflection of Cinda's incredible passion for sport but a poignant reminder of how far elite female competitions, such as the AFLW, still have to go.

Indeed, Cinda was a rockstar, who wanted more for herself, her teammates and all the girls who will follow her footsteps into the AFLW in the future.

So although football is just a game, it's important to recognise how much this game meant to her. AFLW players don't have it easy, but what we do is important and we should receive monetary respect from the game we dedicate our lives to - a message Jacinda Barclay fiercely championed.

[The writer is an AFLW player and former GWS Giants teammate of Jacinda Barclay. This article was written with the full support of the Barclay family]

Liverpool's Jürgen Klopp praises José Mourinho's Tottenham revival

ANDY HUNTER
LONDON, 16 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: José Mourinho has turned Tottenham into "a proper package" by adapting to the players around him and not by altering his managerial style, according to Jürgen Klopp, who believes his rival's only reinvention is on Instagram.

Wednesday marks the second anniversary of Mourinho's final game in charge of Manchester United, a 3-1 defeat at Liverpool that signalled the end of a turbulent two-and-a-half-year reign and accusations the game had moved on without him.

He returns to Anfield with Spurs thriving in the Premier League, and Klopp attributes Mourinho's recovery to time and experience rather than any drastic change from the two-time Champions League-winning coach.

The Liverpool manager said: "I don't think you can compare the last game with Man United with the way they are playing now. That is obviously, from a confidence level, completely different for both teams. José Mourinho has been successful for a very long time in the football business and he has played pretty much all different systems and different styles."

"As a coach you have to adapt to the quality you have and the idea you have and that is one of the best skills of José

Mourinho. In the end it is all about getting the results and that is the best skill of José because in the decisive moments he is not bothered about style, it is just about the result and that makes him the most successful manager around at the moment.

"I respect him a lot. Has he reinvented himself? I don't know. It looks a little bit like that when you see him on Instagram, or at least that part of him, but I think he is just so experienced and smart that he knows what he has to do. He asked at the beginning for time and I think that has paid off."

Klopp, who has not discounted Joël Matip from his plans despite the defender's back spasm at Fulham on Sunday, claimed Liverpool must nullify the best counterattacking team in the league to take top spot.

"Tottenham has the quality of the top teams 100% and when they have the ball they show that," he said. "They also defend like a top team and have, at the moment, the best counterattacking movements out there. They only need two or three passes to be on one-on-one with the goalkeeper."

"It is not that they just play a little bit of football and are not bothered about defending, they are a proper package at the moment, but that doesn't cost me confidence when I think about my team."

Opener issues as India series begins under Adelaide lights

NICK MULVENNEY
SYDNEY (REUTERS) - India, having claimed a first series triumph on their last trip Down Under, will again look to break new ground when they lock horns with the Australians on Thursday in the opening test under the lights of Adelaide Oval.

Australia have featured in half of the 14 day-night matches played in test cricket and won all seven by comfortable margins, five of them at the picturesque ground by the River Torrens.

India also won their only day-night test but the Bangladesh pace attack at Eden Gardens last year probably did not present as much of a threat in the evening sessions as Australia's will.

Australia's pace battalion have flourished with the pink ball and India's fine array of batsmen will have to be at their best if they are to hand their hosts a first test defeat under the lights.

Skipper Tim Paine said over the last few days Australia had also enjoyed a decent refresher course to prepare for the match, which will be played in front of a restricted crowd of 21,000.

"We've managed to get three nights on the centre wicket at the Adelaide Oval, which I think is going to be a huge advantage to our team," he told reporters

on Wednesday. "The hardest thing about a pink ball test is you normally get it once a year and so you are learning on the job in conditions that are just so foreign to us."

India's pace attack was a key factor in their series win two years ago and the tourists are confident they still have enough firepower even without the injured Ishant Sharma.

It is at the top of both batting orders that the biggest questions remain, with Australia missing David Warner for the first test at least and India without Rohit Sharma until he completes 14 days of quarantine.

While India look likely to stick with an out-of-form Prithvi Shaw to partner Mayank Agarwal, Australia's plans were thrown into disarray when a concussion ruled out potential debutant Will Pucovski.

Add to that a form slump for Warner's incumbent partner Joe Burns and Australia's opening partnership could have very much an ad hoc look to it.

Paine was talking up Burns's pedigree on Wednesday, however, and with young all-rounder Cameron Green set to make his debut lower down the order, it looks like Australia will move a middle order batsman up to open.

Manchester City held to home draw by lowly West Brom

MANCHESTER, 16 DEC [REUTERS]: Manchester City's hopes of closing the gap on the Premier League pacesetters were frustrated as they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to lowly West Bromwich Albion on Tuesday.

City took the lead on the half hour when Raheem Sterling did well to work his way to the byline and pull the ball back to Ilkay Gundogan who expertly side-footed home.

But West Brom, second bottom of the league, drew level two minutes before the break when a shot on the turn from Semi Ajayi hit City defender Ruben Dias and deflected past wrong-footed goalkeeper Ederson.

The hosts camped in West Brom's half

throughout most of the second period but Slaven Bilic's side showed tremendous determination and defensive solidity.

City had late chances though -- Kevin De Bruyne went close with a free kick that West Brom keeper Sam Johnstone did well to reach while Sergio Aguero blasted wide from a good position.

Johnstone did well again in stoppage time to keep out a close-range Gundogan header and denied another great opportunity for Sterling who headed straight at the keeper.

After 12 games Pep Guardiola's City are in sixth place, five points behind leaders Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool who



both have 25 points and face each other at Anfield on Wednesday.

"It is not about the points (off the top), you have to win games like this," said Guardiola.

"We know it, we drop points. These are the

ones you have to win. It's not far away to the top of the league but you have to beat West Brom at home," he added.

"You don't have to be so clever to see the gap between this year and previous years

(in our results). It is not confidence, Sergio Aguero is injured for four months, but we create chances, we are there we just can't score."

Bilic was proud of the way his team stuck

at their task for 90 minutes.

"The team was working hard, a great defensive performance. We are playing against great players, we knew we are not going to see much of the ball. We defended brilliantly, it's a great point, but more than that, it shows we know what we have to do in every game," said the Croat.

"We are defending for our lives, ready to die for each other on the pitch and that's all I can ask."

"Sam Johnstone made some great saves at the end, the two headers. I said before the season we will need a great goalkeeper and he is doing that for us. Every time we need him he is there. And we need him."

Women behind huge increase in running and cycling in 2020

SEAN INGLE
LONDON, 16 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Women led an unlikely global fitness boom in 2020 with large increases in the numbers running, cycling and walking during the pandemic, according to the world's biggest online fitness platform.

Strava, which tracked more than 1.1bn activities uploaded by its 72m users over the past year, found the number of uploaded runs and cycle rides nearly doubled compared with the same period in 2019, while the number of walks recorded tripled year on

year. While some of this growth could be attributed to new users, Strava's director of international marketing Simon Klima said the increase "was nothing like we've seen before and far surpassed our projections based on historical trends". Much of it, he added, was down to women being more active.

"We've seen a real boost from women in terms of overall activity levels during the pandemic year," he said. "There could be several reasons for that but in the past our research has found that one of the biggest blocks for women to cycling is a perceived safety risk. But during

the pandemic women perhaps felt safer to take to their bicycles, thanks to some temporary infrastructure improvements and quieter roads."

Globally, the median number of activities uploaded by women to the platform rose by 45% year on year among those aged 18-29 and around 25% in other age categories. For men the rise was closer to just 10%.

The growth in women's activity was particularly notable in Britain. According to Strava, which has nine million UK users - around 13% of the population

- there was a 108% rise in the median number of activities by women in the 18-29 age group, and rises of between 52% and 65% in other age categories.

"As well as cycling, there's also been a greater adoption of running, perhaps partly as an alternative to gym classes," said Klima. "But working from home also gives some people freedom to be active during the day as they spend less time commuting to an office. It has allowed people to take control of their calendars a little bit more and to find more time for being active."

China prepares for return of lunar probe with moon samples

BEIJING (AP): Chinese ground crews are standing by for the return of a lunar probe bringing back the first fresh samples of rock and debris from the moon in more than 45 years.

The Chang'e probe is expected to land in the Siziwang district of the vast Inner Mongolia region late Wednesday or early Thursday. It fired its engines early Wednesday to put it on course before the orbiter separates from the return vehicle, with all systems functioning as expected, the China National Space Administration said.

Recovery of the return vehicle will be complicated by its small size, darkness and heavy snow, state media reported. Plans call for it to perform an initial bounce off the Earth's atmosphere to reduce its speed before passing through and floating down on parachutes, making it difficult to precisely calculate where it will land, the official Xinhua News Agency

quoted Bian Hancheng, a leader of the recovery crew, as saying.

State broadcaster CCTV showed four military helicopters standing by Wednesday morning at a base on the snow-covered grasslands. Crews in vehicles on the ground will also seek to hone in on signals. While sprawling in size, the area is relatively familiar because of its use as a landing site for China's Shenzhou crewed spaceships.

Chang'e 5 set down on the moon on Dec. 1 and collected about 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of samples by scooping them from the surface, and by drilling 2 meters (about 6 feet) into the moon's crust. The samples were deposited in a sealed container that was carried back to the return module by an ascent vehicle.

Flying a Chinese flag, the lander ceased functioning soon after it was used as a launching pad for the ascender,

which was ejected from the orbiter after transferring the samples and came to rest on the moon's surface.

The spacecraft's return will mark the first time scientists have obtained fresh samples of lunar rocks since the former Soviet Union's Luna 24 robot probe in 1976.

Chang'e 5 blasted off from a launch base in China's southern island province of Hainan on Nov. 23 on a mission expected to last 23 days.

It marks China's third successful lunar landing but the only one to lift off again from the moon. Its predecessor, Chang'e 4, became the first probe to land on the moon's little-explored far side and continues to send back data on conditions that could affect a future extended stay by humans on the moon.

The moon has been a particular focus of the Chinese space program, which says it plans to land humans there and possibly construct a

permanent base. No timeline or other details have been announced.

China also has joined the effort to explore Mars. In July, it launched the Tianwen 1 probe, which was carrying a lander and a robot rover to search for water.

China's space program has proceeded more cautiously than the U.S.-Soviet space race of the 1960s, which was marked by fatalities and launch failures.

In 2003, China became the third country to send an astronaut into orbit on its own after the Soviet Union and the United States.

The latest flight includes collaboration with the European Space Agency, which is helping to monitor the mission. Amid concerns over the Chinese space program's secrecy and close military connections, the U.S. forbids cooperation between NASA and the CNSA unless Congress gives its approval. That has prevented China from taking part in the

International Space Station, something it has sought to compensate for with the launching of an experimental space station and plans to complete a permanent orbiting outpost within the next two years.

The rocks and debris brought back by Chang'e 5 are thought to be billions of years younger than those obtained by the U.S. and former Soviet Union, offering new insights into the history of the moon and other bodies in the solar system.

They come from a part of the moon known as the Oceanus Procellarum, or Ocean of Storms, near a site called the Mons Rumker that was believed to have been volcanic in ancient times.

As with the 382 kilograms (842 pounds) of lunar samples brought back by U.S. astronauts from 1969 to 1972, they will be analyzed for age and composition and likely shared with other countries.

Germany enters harder lockdown as virus deaths hit new high

BERLIN (AP): Germany hit a new record level of coronavirus deaths as it entered a harder lockdown Wednesday, closing shops and schools to try to bring down stubbornly high new cases.

The country recorded 179.8 deaths of new infections per 100,000 residents over the last seven days, a new high and significantly more than the 149 per 100,000 reported a week ago by the Robert Koch Institute, the country's disease control center.

It also blew past its previous daily total, with Germany's 16 states reporting 952 people had died of the virus, the agency said. That was far greater than the previous daily record set Friday of 598 deaths, although included two days of figures from the hard-hit eastern state of Saxony, which did not report Tuesday. It brought the country's overall pandemic death toll to 23,427.

Faced with exponentially increasing cases in October, Germany implemented a "lockdown light" at

the start of November, which closed bars and restaurants but left shops open. The measures succeeded in leveling off the numbers of new daily infections, but didn't bring them down, prompting the new stricter restrictions.

In addition to closing shops and moving children to remote learning for the few days before the Christmas holidays, private gatherings are being limited to two households with a maximum of five people, among other things.

The measures are expected to be in place until at least Jan. 10 and enjoy wide support, with the latest polls showing more than 80% of Germans approve of the lockdown restrictions or think they should be stricter.

Germany was widely praised for slowing the spread of its outbreak in the spring, but as people grew lax with distancing and mask rules over the summer the numbers of cases started to climb again.

While daily new cases peaked at about 6,000

in March, they are now more than four times that level, with 27,728 new cases reported Wednesday by the Robert Koch Institute.

The number of new infections per 100,000 residents over the last seven days hit a record high of 179.8, the agency reported.

German officials have pressed the European Union's regulatory agency hard to speed up its approval of a coronavirus vaccine, and the European Medicines Agency has scheduled a meeting on that for Monday. With vaccinations expected to start before year's end, German officials have urged people to stay patient and respect the regulations over the holidays.

Health Minister Jens Spahn said Germany was ready to start rolling out the vaccine and could begin vaccinations within two to four days of European approval.

"By summer we'll be able to return to normal, step by step," he said on RTL television Wednesday.

Israeli court backs extradition in Australia child sex case

JERUSALEM (AP): Israel's Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected an appeal challenging the extradition of a former teacher wanted in Australia on charges of child sex abuse, clearing the way for her to stand trial after a six-year legal saga.

Malka Leifer, a former educator accused of sexually abusing several former students at a Jewish school in Melbourne, has been fighting extradition from Israel since 2014. Leifer maintains her innocence and the six-year legal battle surrounding her extradition has strained relations between Israel and Australia.

The Supreme Court justices said that the ruling finalizes "the decision of the appellant as extraditable" to stand trial in Australia.

The Justice Ministry said in a statement that the ruling "brings us one significant step closer to Malka Leifer's extradition to Australia" and that the ministry "will continue to make every effort to expedite Malka Leifer's extradition to Australia so that she may stand trial for the crimes she is accused of committing."

Israeli Justice

Minister Avi Nissenkorn praised the court's decision and said he would be signing the extradition order immediately.

"After long and tormenting years, the time has come to do justice with Leifer's victims," he wrote on Twitter.

Critics, including Leifer's alleged victims, have accused Israeli authorities of dragging out the legal process for far too long.

In September, a Jerusalem court approved Leifer's extradition to Australia after the country's highest court had upheld a ruling that she was mentally fit to stand trial.

Earlier this year an Israeli psychiatric panel determined that Leifer lied about suffering a mental condition that allegedly made her unfit to stand trial. As a result of the findings, Israel's Justice Ministry said it would move to expedite her extradition to face 74 charges of child sex abuse.

Three sisters — Dassi Erlich, Nicole Meyer and Elly Sapper — have accused Leifer of abusing them while they were students at a Melbourne

ultra-Orthodox school. There are said to be other victims.

"We have a very long journey ahead of us, a journey that truthfully should have begun nine years ago," Meyer said. "If I could give a message to all survivors, it's reach out, find support, share your story and let's get these abusers off the street."

The Associated Press does not usually identify alleged victims of sexual abuse, but the sisters have spoken publicly about their allegations against Leifer.

Australian Attorney-General Christian Porter welcomed the court decision and Nissenkorn's commitment to extradite Leifer.

"The allegations against Ms. Leifer are very serious and the Australian government remains strongly committed to ensuring that justice is served in this case, so that Ms. Leifer is extradited to Australia in order to stand trial on the 74 counts of child sexual abuse against her," Porters said in a statement.

Porter said he traveled to Israel last

year to make his case to the Israeli government.

"Although this latest development is a significant step forward -- possibly the most positive steps thus far in what has been a long process -- there are still steps to be undertaken in Israel," Porter said.

As accusations began surfacing in 2008, Israeli-born Leifer left the school and returned to Israel, where she has lived since.

Her attorney, Nick Kaufman, appeared to acknowledge his client has exhausted her legal options in fighting the extradition but expressed hope that, should she be convicted, she might be able to serve her prison sentence in Israel.

Kaufman said the court noted Leifer's "unique nature of her religious way of life" as an ultra-Orthodox Jew and acknowledged it would "present considerable difficulties for her in an Australian prison."

"Should Malka Leifer be convicted and sentenced to a custodial sentence, we hope that the relevant authorities will accede to a future request that she serve such a sentence in Israel," he said.

UK still plans to ease restrictions on holiday gatherings

LONDON (AP): Britain's easing of restrictions for family gatherings over Christmas looks like it's still on despite a sharp spike in new coronavirus infections that's raised fears of another wave of cases and deaths in the new year.

Britain's communities secretary, Robert Jenrick, said further discussions will take place on Wednesday between leaders from the four nations of the U.K. about the planned relaxation. However, he gave no indication that a change would be announced, beyond urging people to think harder about their holiday plans.

"It could be counterproductive to produce overly restrictive rules rather than providing very clear and sober guidance and ask people to think carefully and come to their informed judgment," he told BBC radio.

Criticism of the planned five-day easing of restrictions, which would allow three households to form a holiday bubble, have ratcheted higher in recent days. With new infections rising in many places, concerns are growing that the

relaxation will only escalate infections and deaths and put too much pressure on the already-stressed National Health Service.

Michael Gove, a senior member of Britain's Conservative government, which sets public health policy for England, has met with leaders from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the U.K.'s Christmas plans, and the group will meet again Wednesday. They agreed last month to allow a maximum of three households to mix between Dec. 23 and Dec. 27, regardless of what local restrictions are in place.

On Wednesday, London and nearby areas entered the highest level of local restrictions in England — Tier 3 — in which pubs and restaurants had to close again apart from takeout, and more curbs were placed on different households meeting up. Other areas in England, including the cities of Manchester and Birmingham, are finding out later Wednesday

whether they will be moved down to Tier 2 restrictions.

Jenrick said the rollout of the coronavirus vaccine developed by America's Pfizer and the German company BioNTech had changed the narrative since the Christmas bubble decision was made. The U.K. on Dec. 8 became the first country in the world to use the vaccine, which has a high efficacy rate of around 95%.

"It's given hope that early in the new year, if not before, those people can be vaccinated. So why not wait a few weeks or months to get family together when you can do so safely in 2021?" he said.

Britain's new vaccines minister, Nadhim Zahawi, said Wednesday that 137,897 people had received a vaccination shot since inoculations began. All those people must return in three weeks for a follow-up shot.

"A really good start to the vaccination program," he said in a tweet.

The government, which is providing the vaccine free of charge mainly at hospitals so far, is first targeting nursing home workers and elderly people over 80. Nursing home residents are now being vaccinated as well after issues relating to the transportation of the vaccine, which needs to be kept at super-cold temperatures, were addressed.

Despite the update, questions remain over how many people can be inoculated on any given day, and what proportion of people being offered the vaccine are agreeing to get a shot.

To date, 800,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine are known to be in the U.K. and 5 million more are expected to arrive this year, half of the original expectation.

Other vaccines from American biotechnology firm Moderna and one developed by the University of Oxford and British pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca are currently being assessed by British regulators.

Virus shuts many UK theaters but online the show goes on

LONDON (AP): When Andrew Lincoln steps onstage at London's Old Vic Theatre as Ebenezer Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol," he looks out on an empty auditorium.

The spectators are beyond the theater walls, in houses and apartments, staring at screens. In this pandemic year, the Old Vic's seasonal production of Charles Dickens' classic is being livestreamed nightly until Dec. 24, with ticket-holders around the world tuning in over Zoom.

"It's a very strange experience, doing something theatrical on a

stage and then not feeling the reverberation of an audience," said Lincoln, the British actor who starred for nine seasons in AMC zombie drama "The Walking Dead."

But that is the reality of London's West End this holiday season. The Old Vic is among theaters trying to keep the flame alive. But owners and producers warn that nine months of coronavirus-related curbs have left Britain's performing arts on the brink — and a decision to shut theaters in the capital starting Wednesday may push them over.

Christmas is normally a golden time for British

theaters. Families flock to see pantomimes — raucous seasonal shows combining fairy-tale plots with songs, satire and slapstick — and festive classics such as "A Christmas Carol." Holiday-season revenue can carry venues through the rest of the year.

This year, more than half the U.K. population is under tight restrictions that have forced theaters, concert halls, art galleries, museums and cinemas to shut their doors.

That includes London, where theaters had just begun to reopen after a four-week national lockdown ended Dec. 2.

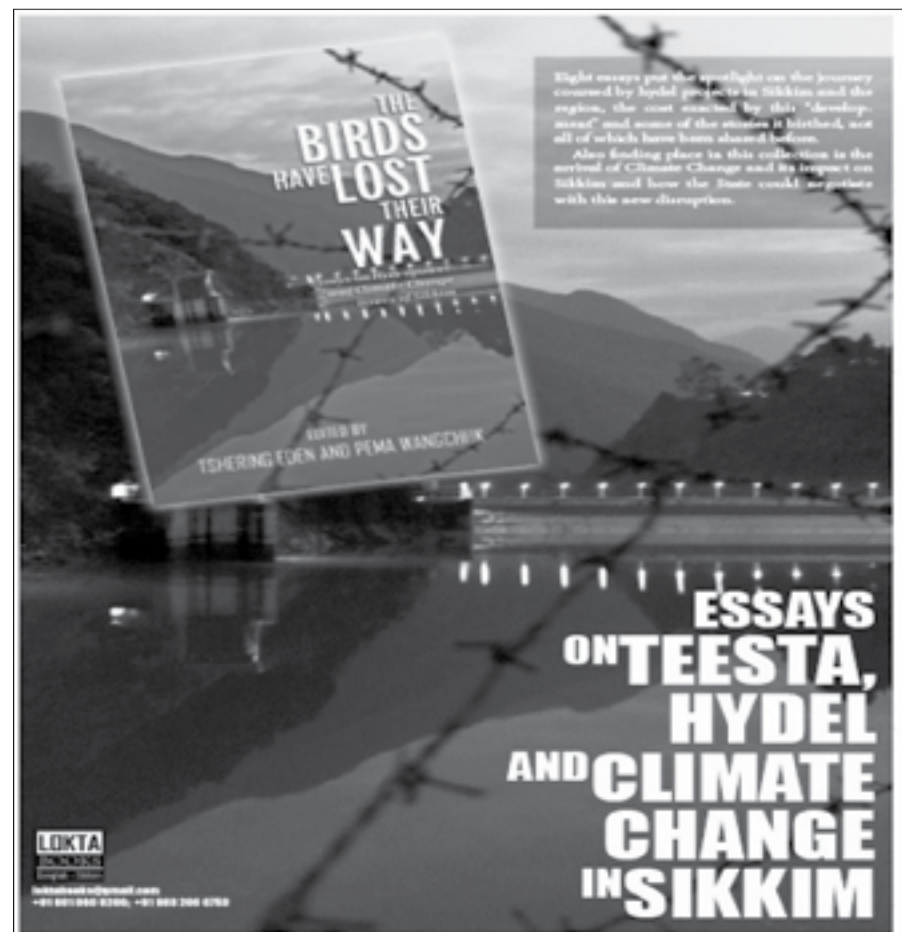
Then, on Monday, the government slapped toughened restrictions on the capital because of a surge in infections.

Julian Bird, chief executive of industry groups the Society of London Theatre and U.K. Theatre, said the decision would cause "catastrophic financial difficulties for venues, producers and thousands of industry workers — especially the freelancers who make up 70% of the theater workforce."

Ever since Britain went into its first lockdown in March, theaters have found ingenious ways to

keep working. The Old Vic has mounted an "In Camera" season of plays performed on its stage and broadcast online. Other venues had begun to reopen to limited, face mask-wearing audiences, with social distancing measures in place.

Producers say there have been no virus outbreaks linked to theaters, and wonder why they have to close when large stores can stay open. Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber said it seemed "arbitrary and unfair" to ban theater performances while letting shopping continue.



J. Lo, Billy Porter to perform at 'New Year's Rockin' Eve' : Jay-Z's Roc Nation forms book publisher with Random House

NEW YORK (AP): Jennifer Lopez will help bring in the New Year with a headlining performance in New York's Time Square for "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest 2021."

ABC and Dick Clark Productions announced Tuesday that the pop star will perform live before the iconic ball drop on Dec. 31. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the event will be closed to the public.

Other performers include Cyndi Lauper, Billy Porter and Jimmie Allen. Lauper and Porter collaborated



on the Broadway musical "Kinky Boots" and they will join forces for a special performance during the TV special, which will air on ABC at 8 p.m. Eastern. "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest 2021" will run until 2 a.m. Eastern on Jan. 1. Seacrest is returning to host the event for a 16th year, and he will be joined by Porter and Lucy Hale in New York. Ciara will host from Los Angeles.



NEW YORK (AP): A decade after publishing his memoir "Decoded," Jay-Z is forming a more lasting partnership with the book industry.

Roc Nation, the entertainment company founded by the rapper, is starting an imprint with Random House called Roc Lit 101. In a joint announcement Tuesday, Random House and Roc Nation promised "books at the dynamic intersection of entertainment and genre-defying literature." Among the initial releases for next summer: "Till the End," a memoir by the retired pitching star CC Sabathia; and music journalist Danyel Smith's "Shine Bright," a story of Black women in music that combines memoir, criticism and

biography.

Future releases will include a book by Meek Mill on "criminal justice and survival," memoirs by rappers Yo Gotti and Fat Joe and fantasy fiction from rapper Lil Uzi Vert, along with everything from cookbooks to children's stories.

Roc Lit 101 will be led by Chris Jackson, the publisher and editor-in-chief of the Random House imprint One World and a recent recipient of a lifetime achievement award from the Center for Fiction; and Jana Fleishman, executive vice president of Roc Nation.

"Our aspiration for the imprint is to create books that draw from the best of pop culture— its most imaginative and talented storytellers, innovators,

and literary chroniclers — to create beautifully written and produced works that will entertain and enthrall readers, but also illuminate critical issues," Jackson, who published "Decoded" and has worked with Ta-Nehisi Coates and Ibram X. Kendi among others, said in a statement.

Fleishman said in a statement that "There are so many untold stories and we consider it a true privilege to be able to amplify diverse voices while exploring the uncharted worlds that are about to open to us."

Random House declined comment when asked if Jay-Z himself might publish a book through Roc Lit 101, or if Beyoncé might publish through the new imprint.

Zayn Malik Rocks Bold New Look in First Sighting Since Gigi Hadid Gave Birth to Their Baby Girl

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The former One Direction

member was recently spotted out and about for the first time since he and Gigi Hadid welcomed their baby girl in September. However, the 27-year-old singer wasn't rocking his natural Brunette hair color.

During his outing in New York City, the "Better" singer looked unrecognizable with his platinum blonde 'do. And no, your eyes aren't playing tricks on you.

The new dad showed off his major transformation, which not only entailed a daring hair color but a new hairstyle as well. He appeared to cut his locks into a mini-mohawk. Although it's unknown when Zayn decided to make this change, it's safe to assume it was a recent makeover.

On Halloween, Gigi shared her first family photo with the English singer and

their newborn daughter. At the time, Zayn showed off his Harry Potter-inspired costume as he cradled his little one. And like Harry Potter, the star had his signature dark brown hair.

This isn't the first time Zayn has rocked blonde hair. Back in March 2018, just one week after he and Gigi split, the "Pillowtalk" singer debuted the platinum shade. At the time, he was spotted taking a break from a video shoot in Miami, Fla.

It's unclear what sparked his new 'do, and seeing that both Gigi and Zayn are notoriously private about their personal life, fans might not get an answer.

However, if there's one thing people know about the singer, it's that he's enjoying his dad duties.

"Zayn was very emotional when their baby girl was

born. It was an emotional and special moment for him," a source previously told E! News about his first few days as a father. "He expressed that he is forever changed and would never disappoint her or Gigi. He wants to be the best father possible and is so excited."

The insider explained the supermodel was just as overjoyed about motherhood. As the source put it, "Gigi is on a high and can't believe they created an angel. She's truly so in love and has had many emotional moments while holding her baby girl."

In the last few months, the couple has slowly shared more details about their little one. In late November, the first-time mom posted never-before-seen pregnancy photos with an all too relatable caption.



GLAMOROUS! The actress, Sutton Foster shines in an all sequin dress and gold heels on the set of Younger in NYC.

ARIES:

We've all had our share of drama in the past—a lot of which is coming to the surface as a result of the eclipse. But, you have a greater perspective now, which in turn is helping you release the victim mentality. Things transpired in a certain way because they were supposed to help you learn significant life lessons and become the person you are today. When in doubt, remember the cliché, "What doesn't break you, makes you stronger." Aries, you've got this!

TAURUS:

How much importance are you giving to other people's opinions of you, and in what manner is the weight of their words weighing you down? Looks like you have created a prison for your own self, Taurus, a prison that is now becoming the bane of your existence. The cards are urging you to look beyond. There is another reality available to you—right now and in this moment. The Universe is giving you the opportunity to choose the freedom that has always been yours.

GEMINI:

You didn't think you could get here, yet you did. Your life has turned out to be a real blessing despite all the unexpected twists and turns. But, don't make the mistake of convincing yourself that there is a cap on the blessings, or that this is as good as it gets. There is a parallel reality available to you—a whole new world, if you may—and it requires you to tap into the power of

CO-CREATION.

CANCER:

There comes a point in every journey where the roadblocks make you question if you were in your right mind when you made this decision. Here's the thing, though: you have dealt with bigger challenges. You already know your way around this storm. Besides, the Universe has a way of testing our resolve, especially when we're *this* close to the realization of our goals. So give yourself the pep talk you need to, and motivate yourself to move forward. You'll be glad you did!

LEO:

There comes a point in every journey where you can continue to do what you're best known for, or reinvent yourself completely. The former is a safe bet. There is very little risk involved in giving your audience what you have been giving them for so long now. Changing the game around, on the other hand, may or may not guarantee success. In fact, the change may be met with resistance initially. Should that stop you from being playful? Anything but, Leo. The time to sing your own song has finally come.

VIRGO:

It's easy to portray yourself as the victim of your story. To repeat the 'terrible things happen to me' narrative. But you are so loved and so supported, Virgo. You have an entire spirit team watching over you. So call upon their assistance to help you look at your circumstances from

a higher perspective. In moments of silence, you will be able to raise the question, "What are my circumstances teaching me?"

LIBRA:

The energy of the eclipse has been all kinds of electrifying. Libra. You are more in alignment with your dreams and desires than you have ever been before, and are feeling inspired to take the right action. As your co-weaving partner, Spirit is helping you give your ideas a tangible form. When in doubt, remind yourself that the help you need will always be made available to you.

SCORPIO:

What is the story you're telling yourself, Scorpio? Are you the victim in this narrative or the one who stands up for themselves *and* takes the prize home? The cards are reminding you of the ancient saying, "As within, so without". So, take charge of your inner alignment. Work through the self-worth issues that have been weighing you down, and know that no force in the world can shake you when you believe in your own power.

SAGITTARIUS:

Hello, and welcome to the new moon party! This is your personal new moon, Sagittarius, and so the potential of what you can create is infinite. Word for the wise: get cracking. You don't want to waste a single minute. Remember, it's not just existing projects that will get a boost as a result of this lunation. Ideas you've never had before will come your way as well. Two words: inspired action.

CAPRICORN:

We're always worrying about the future and what it might bring. On other occasions, we're obsessing over what went wrong in the past and how we'd like to fix those things. What if we change the approach a little? What if we embrace our inner Zen master and make love to this moment? Be here now, Capricorn. The more present you are, the more dominion you will have over your life.

AQUARIUS:

Do you really believe in yourself like you say you do? Do you really believe you have the power to manifest the dreams that you have been chasing? The energy of this eclipse is about to rest your resolve, Aquarius. So work through the self-worth issues that have been posing a roadblock as you reinstate your faith in yourself. Remember, this is the last leg of the war. You don't want to give up now.

PISCES:

We waste too much time worrying about 'the hows' and 'the whys'. We spend too much time imagining parallel realities in which our dreams fall apart before our own eyes. What if we chose to redirect all of this energy towards the realization of our goals instead? Today, you're being encouraged to embrace your inner optimist and chase away the grey clouds. Spirit wants you to know that you are supported in every way, and that the resources you require will be made available to you.