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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CRPF plans to enhance annual leaves for jawans on Army lines in combat zones

NEW DELHI, FEB 21

(PTI): On the lines of the Army, the CRPF is mulling to enhance the number of leaves given to its combat personnel, as part of a renewed push to provide enhanced rest and recuperation to its troops deployed extensively for anti-terrorism and anti-Naxal operations in the country, officials said Thursday.

The force is planning to enhance by seven days the number of casual leaves given in an year to its jawans and officials, up to the rank of Commanding Officer (CO), they said.

At present, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) troops, up to the CO rank, get 60 days of EL (earned leave) and 15 days of casual leave (CL) while being in an operationally active area like Jammu and Kashmir, Left Wing Extremism deployment or counter-insurgency duties in the north-east.

It is now planning to enhance the CL to 28 days.

In the Army, all the officials -- from a se-poy to the Army chief -- get 60 days of EL and 28 days of CL whether they are deployed in a peace station or the operations grid. This system helps a jawan to plan his off-duty activities and vacations better, they said.

The proposal was much favoured by the troops and officers of the force after CRPF Director General (DG) R R Bhatnagar visited his formations for two days in the Kashmir valley post the February 14 Pulwama attack, they said.

Forty CRPF personnel were killed while five others were injured after a suicide bomber triggered a deadly explosion next to a force bus plying on the Jammu-Srinagar highway as part of a convoy.

The official said all field commanders of the over 3-lakh personnel strong force have been asked to firm up their views after which the CRPF will move the Ministry of Home Affairs seeking its sanction to the proposal.

"The move will greatly benefit the troops in planning their time when they are off duty.

SDF Govt has provided dignity and peace to all communities: CM

SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 21 FEB:

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling today reiterated that Sikkim has become the most secure State for the business community under the SDF government of the past 25 years. He highlighted that through these years, there have been no incidents of extortion, suppression or injustice meted out to the business community even as these were common incidents during earlier regimes.

He was speaking as the chief guest at a meeting of the All Sikkim Democratic Trader's Front of the ruling SDF party at Singtam Bazaar on Thursday.

Addressing the business community, the CM mentioned that business community of Sikkim was ignored on three watershed moments through history-- first when the Sikkim Subject Regulation was promul-



gated then when the Tri-partite agreement was signed and also when the leftout families were included in the Sikkim Subjects register in 1989.

While sharing that

the government cannot give Sikkim Subject Certificates any more even if it desires, he mentioned that the SDF government has instead made a law

to give residential certifi-

icates to the left-out people with 26 April 1975 as the cut-off date to give protection and rights to old settlers.

He added that anyone can take out the residen-

tial certificate on production of supporting documents of proof.

Mr Chamling mentioned that opposition parties have been making an issue out of a

non-issue on the residential certificates to mislead the people.

He stated that those who arrived in Sikkim after 1975 and have trade licenses will also get the

rights at par with residential certificate holders of the State.

He announced that now residential certificate and trade licence holders will get enlistment, StartUp loans and government benefits and grants in bazaar areas.

The CM also announced to regularise the services of harijans in bazaar areas who have been working for more than 5 years and asked them to submit the required documents. He also announced construction of smart parking in every bazaar.

He mentioned that the government has been constructing multi-storied buildings under social housing to provide houses in urban areas. He also spoke about the various initiatives and welfare measures taken by the SDF government in the interest of the business community

Mr Chamling stressed

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Elephant protects little girl from others in herd

JALPAIGURI (WB), FEB 21

(PTI): An elephant stood guard to protect a four-year-old girl, who had fallen down from a scooter, from other members of the herd in Jalpaiguri district Thursday, forest officials said.

The incident occurred on National Highway 31 near Garumara forest when a family of three was returning to Lataguri after offering puja at a temple inside the forest.

The highway divides the forest into two parts.

On the way home, businessman Nitu Ghosh, who was with his wife Tilti and daughter Ahana, stopped the two-wheeler after seeing that a herd of elephants was crossing the road.

After a while, the elephants went into the other side of the jungle and Ghosh resumed his journey, officials said.

However, some other members of the herd that were still inside the jungle appeared on the road and the scooter almost ran into them.

Ghosh applied the break suddenly and all the three fell down.

One of the jumbos

came forward and stood still keeping the girl in the space between its legs, while other members of the group continued their journey. A tourist was killed and several others were injured by elephants during the past few months in this area.

Sensing the trouble the family was in, a truck driver who was waiting behind Ghosh's scooter rushed to their rescue hooting the horn of his vehicle madly to scare away the tuskers.

The elephants then quickly left the spot and Ahana was back on her mother's arms.

The truck driver took the family to Lataguri.

Ghosh and his wife were injured and were admitted to a nursing home in Jalpaiguri. Doctors in the private facility said the girl suffered no external injury but was traumatised.

Ranger of Garumara South, Ayan Chakraborty, said elephants sometimes keep standing on the highway while moving from one part of the forest to the other.

If informed, forest department personnel used fire crackers to scare them away, he said.

CM inaugurates market cum parking facility at Singtam



GANGTOK, 21 FEB

(IPR): Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling today inaugurated the Vegetable Market (Livelihood)-Cum-Parking with Allied Facilities at Singtam, East Sikkim.

MP Lok Sabha, PD

Rai, UD&HD Minister, NK Subba, Tourism and Aviation Department Minister, Ugyen Gyatso, Food Security Agriculture Department Minister, Somnath Poudyal along with other dignitaries and officials

were present in the inauguration.

The market will serve as a hub exclusively for organic vegetables and fruit traders adding another feather to the developmental works of the state government.

Orientation workshop for media and MCMCs on elections

GANGTOK, 21 FEB [IPR]:

An orientation workshop for media-persons and state-level and district-level Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) teams for the upcoming General Election 2019 was conducted at the conference hall of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer at Baluwakhani today.

The workshop, organised by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, had the presence of CEO R Telang, DPO, EDZP, Yadav Sharma, as resource person, officials from IPR department and Election Department and media-persons from all districts.

The workshop was

turn to pg02

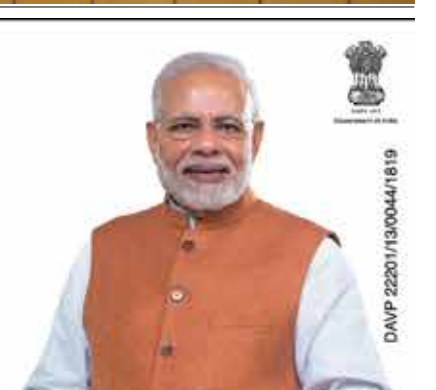


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NAMUMKIN AB MUMKIN HAI



DVP 22201/130044/1619

SC to hear PIL seeking protection of Kashmiri students

NEW DELHI, FEB 21 (PTI): The Supreme Court has agreed to hear on Friday a PIL seeking direction to authorities to protect Kashmiri students who are allegedly being attacked in various parts of the country following the Pulwama terror strike.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justices L N Rao and Sanjiv Khanna on Thursday took note of senior advocate Colin Gonsalves' submission that the plea needed to be heard urgently as it relates to the safety and security of students.

The bench, which refused to list the plea for hearing on Thursday, however, assured Gonsalves that it will be listed for consideration on Friday.

The petitioners Tariq Adeeba and Olivia Bang alleged in their plea that students from Kashmir Valley are being attacked at different educational institutions across the country after the Pulwama terror attack and authorities concerned should be directed to take actions to stop such assaults.

"Order directing the Centre to direct the heads of all institutions particularly, but not restricted to, educational institutions, to take immediate steps to protect the lives and dignities of minorities and Kashmiris facing discrimination and attacks," the plea said.

The petition, filed through advocate Satya Mitra, sought direction to the Centre for taking steps to prevent "threats, assaults, violent attacks, social boycotts, ostracism, evictions and other coercive acts" committed by groups and mobs against "Kashmiris and other minorities".

The plea sought a direction to the Centre and other authorities for prosecuting people engaging in hate speech and appointment of a nodal officer in every state and union territory, including politically-sensitive districts to prevent any acts of violence, discrimination and vigilantism.

It also sought direction to the Centre and other authorities to immediately set up a nationwide helpline number and to establish a web site containing the contact details of the nodal officers appointed in politically-sensitive districts who are responsible for maintaining law and order.

"There is a sudden rise in the incidents of crimes against Muslims and Kashmiris after the Pulwama terrorist attack on February 14 in which over 40 soldiers were killed... Immediately after the attack, mobs and vigilante groups engaged in vitriolic hate speech and began attacking, and threatening Muslims and Kashmiris throughout the country, said the petition.

"These incidents are a part of organized hate campaign against the Muslims and Kashmiri, most cases which are fabricated and the hysteria that now surrounds India has been engineered to gain political mileage.

Centre for Cambridge English Exams set up at SRM Univ

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 FEB:

Cambridge Assessment English (part of the University of Cambridge) has launched a new Cambridge English Exam Centre at SRM University Sikkim, 5th Mile Tadong on 21 Feb 2019, a press release informs.

The launch ceremony was attended by Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, G.P. Upadhyaya as the chief guest. He commended the endeavor and encouraged to bring forward more initiatives as the government is ready to facilitate quality education in Sikkim.

Vice Chancellor of Sikkim State University, Prof Gopal Kumar Niraula was also present as the guest of honour. The Vice Chancellor enlightened the members on global relevance of language.

Vice Chancellor (i/c)



of SRM University Sikkim, Prof. Ch. Satish Kumar stated that this venture is "committed to nurture young generation and provide best platform for enhancing skills of our students." He also added that SRM would create an opportunity for academic discussions to widen our intellectual horizon.

Manish Puri – Busi-

ness Head – South Asia, Cambridge Assessment English said, "We are happy to be associated with SRM University, Sikkim and look forward to a very fruitful partnership ahead. We laud their initiative to provide a platform to help students in developing their language and communication skills and gain in-

ternational certification."

The program witnessed the presence of Director, Higher Education, HRDD, Govt of Sikkim, DK Pradhan and Director SCERT, Govt of Sikkim, Rabin Chettri.

Other guests for the program were the principals of N B Bhandari Degree College, Tadong, Sikkim Government College Burtuk,

Sikkim Govt. Law College.

With a Cambridge English Certificate, the student will be able to prove his/her English language skills to universities, employers and governments around the world, the release mentions. Cambridge Assessment English is a part of the University of Cambridge, a not-for-profit organization involved in developing and producing the most valuable range of qualifications for learners as well as teachers of English, worldwide. Over 5 million Cambridge English exams are taken each year in more than 130 countries and more than 20,000 universities, employers, government ministries and other organizations rely on Cambridge English exams and qualifications as proof of English language ability.

For more details:www.cambridgeenglish.org/in/

Nepal scholars visit Lingi Payong School



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 FEB:

Research scholars from School for International Training, Development and Social Change, Kathmandu, Nepal paid a visit to Lingi Payong Secondary School on Thursday, a press release informs. They were led by Ward Panchayat and SMC Vice Chairperson, Kailash Kumar Adhikari. An ice breaking session of rock-paper-scissors game was held among students, teachers and

the visiting guests.

The scholars also interacted with students and teachers and discussed about farming practices and agricultural system in Sikkim and USA.

"The students were very responsive and we really enjoyed interacting with them," said Academic Director, SIT, Suman Pant. The team of scholars are on a visit to Sikkim as part of their study, the release mentions.

Erratic power supply in Singtam

YOGEN THATAL

SINGTAM, 21 FEB:

Singtam bazaar has been suffering from erratic power supply for the past few days hampering studies of those preparing for board exams.

"We run a little shop which is the only source of incomes for us. Our

parents could not go to school but have done all they can to get us educated. They are now worried that the power cuts will affect our studies," said one student.

Besides studies, power cuts are also hampering businesses like hotels, shops, etc.

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Orientation workshop...

aimed at familiarising media-persons including the State Level and District Level Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) teams with various facets regarding media's role in the upcoming general election and monitoring of advertisement materials, certifications, role of the MCMC etc.

Resource person Mr Sharma briefed the gathering on Election Planning, use of Information and Communication Technology in the electoral process, menace of paid and fake news etc.

He also highlighted the crucial role and functions of the media-persons and State and District MCMCs for the upcoming election.

The CEO, in his address, urged media-persons to deliver the best possible service to the people and ensure a smooth and successful election in the state. He sought the cooperation of media representatives in making it a smooth and fair election.

EPFO hikes EPF interest rate to 8.65pc

NEW DELHI, FEB 21 (PTI):

Ahead of general elections, retirement fund body EPFO Thursday raised the interest rate on EPF to 8.65 per cent for 2018-19, the first increase in three years.

The interest on Employees Provident Fund (EPF) was hiked to 8.65 per cent for this fiscal from 8.55 per cent provided in 2017-18. The EPFO had earlier reduced the interest rate in 2016-17 to 8.65 per cent from 8.8 per cent in 2015-16.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation's (EPFO) apex decision making body Central Board of Trustees deferred a decision on doubling the minimum monthly pension to Rs 2,000 to its next meeting to be held in March.

"We have decided to provide 8.65 per cent rate of interest on employees' provident fund (EPF) for 2018-19. The decision was taken with the consent of all members (trustees)," Labour Minister Santosh Gangwar said after the CBT meeting here.

Gangwar who also chaired the meeting said, "All members of the CBT at the meeting here agreed to give a higher interest for subscribers for the current fiscal. The

proposal would now go to the Finance Ministry for approval. We will also convince them to provide this rate of interest."

The minister also told reporters that providing 8.65 per cent rate of interest for this fiscal on EPF would leave a surplus of Rs 151.67 crore and that is why it decided to provide a higher rate this fiscal compared to 2017-18. According to the EPFO income projections, providing 8.7 per cent rate of interest in EPF would have resulted in a deficit of Rs 158 crore. Earlier, highly placed sources had indicated that the interest on EPF deposits for this fiscal could be more than 8.55 per cent in view of impending general elections.

Once approved by the CBT, the proposal to provide interest rate for a particular fiscal requires the concurrence of the Finance Ministry. The interest rate is credited into the subscribers account after the Finance Ministry's approval.

The EPFO had provided a five-year low rate of interest of 8.55 per cent to its subscribers for 2017-18. The body had kept the interest rate at 8.65 per cent in 2016-17 and 8.8 per cent in 2015-16. It provided 8.75 per cent interest for 2013-14

as well as 2014-15. The rate of interest was 8.5 per cent in 2012-13.

An EPFO trustee P J Banasure said that the proposal to double the minimum monthly pension to Rs 2,000 has been deferred till next meeting in March.

According to the proposal, doubling the minimum monthly pension would require addition outgo of Rs 3,000 crore. Thus the decision can be taken only after a go ahead by the Finance Ministry.

Now the government is in a fix to double minimum monthly pension because government has already provided for assured monthly pension of Rs 3,000 to informal sector workers under Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan Pension Yojana (PMSYM) announced in Interim Budget earlier this month.

The PMSYM has been opened for subscription from February 15, 2019.

Commenting on the minimum pension, Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) General Secretary Virjesh Upadhyay said, "There should be one minimum pension across all social security schemes run by government. Therefore, we have demanded for Rs 3,000 minimum monthly pension for the EPFO sub-

scribers." Asked about the EPFO investments in the crisis-hit Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS), its Central Provident Fund Commission said, "We are watching over it. But we have received regular returns from these investment so far."

The EPFO has reportedly invested Rs 570 crore in IL&FS. It invested Rs 1,500 crore recently in Bharat ETF.

The CBT also ratified the amendment in EPF Scheme 1952, to enable accounting of Investment in Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) (Equity & Related Investment).

The CBT also approved continuation of C-DAC as a consultant to carry out the second phase of Computerisation Project. The Board also gave extension to Standard Chartered Bank as custodian of the the EPFO securities on the existing terms and conditions of agreement for the period upto March 31, 2019.

The CBT approved revised estimate for 2018-19 and budget estimates for 2019-20. The Board gave consent to have performance review of the Portfolio Managers from a separate agency in addition to review by CRISIL Ltd.

Number of MLAs absent in Assam Assembly, 8 questions left out

GUWAHATI, FEB 21 (PTI):

Assam Assembly Thursday witnessed an embarrassing situation because of huge number of absentee MLAs with as many as eight questions had to be left out and quorum bell was rung thrice to invite members into the House.

Speaker Hitendra Nath Goswami expressed his dissatisfaction over such a huge number of MLAs from all political parties absent during the ongoing Budget Session of the state Assembly.

During the Question Hour, eight questions were jumped because of absence of the members, who had asked those. This included four from Congress and two each from ruling BJP and opposition AIUDF.

The Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia had also asked a question, but he was absent. "What is the use (of the questions)? You give questions and then you are not present. It is not a good sign," Goswami said.

With one after another questions were jumped, the Speaker said it would be a record in the Assembly's history. "Why are all absent today? There is no event or occasion also during the day!" Goswami said while expressing his displeasure. MLAs.

SDF Govt has...

that the SDF government has provided equal protection, respect and political rights to the business community of Sikkim and added that the SDF party has made Mayors, Deputy Mayors and councillors from the business community of Sikkim.

He mentioned that some political parties from Sikkim and outside have been trying to instigate the business community of Sikkim. On the same, he urged members of business community not to fall for misinformation and false assurances.

He urged them to see and evaluate the works of the SDF Government in providing equal rights and protection to them in Sikkim instead.

Mr Chamling mentioned that business

needs peace, security, opportunities and a suitable environment to prosper. In this context, he added that business in Sikkim has increased manifold due to the good governance, peace, security and development ensured by his government.

He alleged that opposition parties have been trying to terrorise and threaten the business community of Sikkim and asserted that unrest in Sikkim will first affect people in transportation and then hoteliers and businesses.

He urged the people of Sikkim to come forward to maintain peace and security.

While mentioning that to live a life of peace and respect was the biggest contribution of the SDF Government for the people.

On the Limboo-Tamang seat reservation issue, the CM mentioned that the SDF government has provided tribal status to Limboos and Tamangs of Sikkim and it has been working tirelessly to reserve seats for them as well.

He added that the State government has provided a 40-seat formula to the Centre to reserve seats for LTs in the State Assembly and the government of India has also agreed in principle.

Mr Chamling stated that the opposition does not have any formula for seat reservation and has been demanding that five seats for LTs be given from the existing 32 seats but has never explained how this would be fair on the 60% of the population which is neither ST nor SC nor belonging

to the Sangha which will be left with only 12 seats. He added that it was totally unconstitutional and undemocratic and not justifiy for majority community of Sikkim.

He alleged that the opposition parties were running after power. On the same, he urged the people to try and understand the powers behind the opposition in Sikkim.

Mr Chamling mentioned that the delay in reserving LT seats was to due to Opposition leaders and their letters to the Centre.

He added that the "masters" of SKM party and Hamro Sikkim Party were responsible for the delay in seat reservation with the letters to Central ministries and case in the Supreme Court.

He also commented that doctors, contractors,

businessmen and retired employees have become leaders in a party just near the elections exposing their opportunism.

He added that after losing the 2014 elections they went back to their respective professions and now are returning to politics for the upcoming 2019 election.

Mr Chamling stressed that the politics needs sacrifices and dedication and it was not a 5-year business.

"I have been in the active politics for the last 40 years and has been working as a legislator for 35 years in the interest of Sikkim and its people," he said. On the same, he asked the people to see the track record of a leader in chronological order.

Speaking on the newly inaugurated in-

frastructures and facilities at Singtam, the CM stressed that the people of Singtam have to take the full responsibility for these and take the full benefits. He also assured to fulfil all demands and issue placed by the people in the meeting.

Earlier in his welcome address, area MLA, Agriculture Minister Sonmnaath Poudyal stated that Sikkim has witnessed huge development and progress in 25 years of SDF government and added that the SDF party has established the democracy in the true sense in the State.

He added that Sikkim has enjoyed inclusive and sustainable development due to the effective leadership provided by the CM which has been appreciated and recognised all over the world.

Mr Poudyal stated that opposition parties have been doing seasonal politics, becoming active around elections and trying to mislead the people. He expressed confidence that SDF will win all 32 seats in the upcoming elections as the people of Sikkim have been standing firm with the party.

The meeting was also addressed by AS-DTF general secretary, Manoj Gupta and Bharati Sharma. On the occasion, Khamdong-Singtam constituency, Singtam Nagar Panchayat and different organisations also felicitated the CM.

Earlier, the CM inaugurated the newly constructed vegetable market-cum-parking, Shiloh Christian Church of Sikkim and Deputy Regional Transport Office at Singtam.

Children’s Film Festival begins at Manan Kendra

GANGTOK, 21 FEB (IPR): The inauguration ceremony of Children’s Film Festival was held at Manan Kendra today. The film festival which is being held from 21 - 23 Feb, 2019 is organized by Children Film Society, India in collaboration with Cultural Affairs & Heritage Department. The Film Festival is to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

The chief guest of the event was Secretary (CA&HD), Ambika Prad-



han, guest of honour was Secretary Ecclesiastical Affairs Department, Sam-

ten Dolma, Spl Secretary (CA&HD), Vidya Subba and other officials.

The Secretary (CA&HD), Ambika Prad-han in her speech appre-

ciated the coordinator and the technical team and said that the screening was to celebrate Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th birth anniversary as his love for children was deep and abiding. She also informed that the three day Children’s Film Festival was entry free and that anyone could come for the screening.

She stated that the programme was to showcase Gandhiji’s love for children as to him a child’s love was very precious.

International Mother Language Day celebrated at Sikkim University

GANGTOK, 21 FEB [PIB]: The Centre for Endangered Languages, Sikkim University organized a programme to celebrate International Mother Language Day on 21 Feb 2019. The inaugural session of the programme was held at the Cauveri hall of the University which was chaired by the Vice-Chancellor Prof. Avinash Khare.

The guest of honour, C.B. Bhujel spoke on the importance of conserving the languages like Bhujel, Magar, Gurung

and Sherpa that are facing the risk of extinction. The Centre for Endangered Languages of the University is funded by the University Grants Commission to compliment national and international endeavours with respect to endangered languages. It is currently working on Bhujel, Gurung, Magar, Sherpa and Rai-Rokdung in collaboration with the respective communities of Sikkim and North Bengal.

At the inaugural session a web page of the Centre

for Endangered Languages was launched by the Vice- Chancellor, Prof. Avinash Khare along with the dictionary application for android phones and draft version of the dictionary and grammar on Bhujel and Magar languages.

The Vice-Chancellor appreciated the efforts put in by the Centre for Endangered Languages on its pursuit towards conserving the indigenous languages of the region and the exemplary work done in this field.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
ROADS & BRIDGES DEPARTMENT
SORENG, WEST SIKKIM

Memo No:150/GQS/SD/R&B/18-19/367(Soreng)

Dated: 15/02/2019

For and on behalf of the Governor of Sikkim, Assistant Engineer(Soreng), Roads & Bridges Department Government of Sikkim, invites sealed tenders under single bid system from the eligible contractors of Class IV Grade enlisted with Sikkim Public Works Department vide Notification No.515/R&B/PWD/Secy. Dated: 12/06/2018,556/R&B/PWD/Secy. Dated: 26/08/2018 and 584/R&B/PWD/Secy. Dated: 08/10/2018 for the Construction of fair weather roads through competitive bidding within the territorial jurisdiction of **concerned ward of the GPU/ULB where the work is to be executed.**

Sl.No	Name of Work	Cost put to Tender(Rs)	Earnest Money @2.5%(Rs)	Cost of tender form(Rs)	Completion Time
1	Construction of road from Anku PWD road to Lower Segyang PHSC (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
2	Construction of road from Anku PWD road to Lower Segyang PHSC (Km1.00 to 2.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
3	Construction of road from Anku PWD road to Lower Segyang PHSC (Km 2.00 to 3.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
4	Construction of road from Anku PWD road to Lower Segyang PHSC (Km 3.00 to 4.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
5	Construction of road from PWD road Gairigaon to Mabong JHS (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
6	Construction of road from PWD road Gairigaon to Mabong JHS (Km 1.00 to 2.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
7	Construction of road from GhumauneyGairiGaon to Middle Doksing via Sirisey-Dara (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
8	Construction of road from GhumauneyGairiGaon to Middle Doksing via Sirisey-Dara (Km 1.00 to 2.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
9	Construction of road from GhumauneyGairiGaon to Middle Doksing via Sirisey-Dara (Km 2.00 to 3.30)	5510045.00	137751.00	5000.00	12 Months
10	Construction of road from AmalayDara PWD road to Simbolay busty (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
11.	Construction of road to Deythang Play Ground (Km 0.00 to 1.10)	4662345.00	116559.00	1500.00	09 Months
12	Construction of road Samagaon to Boompul via LepchaGaon ward No 2 (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
13	Construction of road Samagaon to Boompul via LepchaGaon ward No 2 (Km 1.00 to 2.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
14	Construction of road Samagaon to Boompul via LepchaGaon ward No 2 (Km 2.00 to 3.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
15	Construction of road Samagaon to Boompul via LepchaGaon ward No 2 (Km 3.00 to 3.90)	3814646.00	95366.00	1500.00	09 Months
16	Construction of road from NDP road to Malidang (Km 0.00 to 1.70)	7205443.00	180136.00	5000.00	12 Months
17	Construction of road from BudangMalbasey road to HukpagaonBudang GPU Pakkigaon (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
18	Construction of road from BudangMalbasey road to HukpagaonBudang GPU Pakkigaon (Km 1.00 to 2.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
19	Construction of road from Chumbong to Kerabari (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
20	Construction of road from Chumbong to Kerabari (Km 1.00 to 2.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
21	Construction of road from Chotasamdong PWD road to PhucharGaon (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
22	Construction of road from Chotasamdong PWD road to PhucharGaon (Km 1.00 to 2.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
23	Construction of road from Suntalay PWD road to TamangGaon (Km 0.00 to 1.50)	6357744.00	158943.00	5000.00	12 Months
24	Construction of road from LB Tamang house at Suntalay to BB GurungMarg(Kamling-Khaniserbong road) (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
25	Construction of road from LB Tamang house at Suntalay to BB GurungMarg(Kamling-Khaniserbong road) (Km 1.00 to 2.50)	6357744.00	158943.00	5000.00	12 Months

26	Construction of road from Hoorgaon PWD road to PMGSY road Upper Hoorgaon (Km 0.00 to 1.00)	4238496.00	105962.00	1500.00	09 Months
27	Construction of road from Hoorgaon PWD road to PMGSY road Upper Hoorgaon (Km 1.00 to 2.50)	6357744.00	158943.00	5000.00	12 Months

Date, Timing and Vanue details of Tender are as follows:

Sl.No	Name of Constituency	Date of Submission of application with bank receipt for issue of Tender documents(Excluding tender form)	Date of issue of tender form on submission of TDR(as Earnest money)	Last date of submission of Tender form	Date & Time of opening of Tender	Tender Vanue
1	Zoom Shalghari (Sl.No 01 to 09) Rinchenpong Constituency(Sl.No 10 to 15)	27/02/2019(10:00 am to 4:00pm)	28/02/2019(10:00 am to 4:00pm)	01/03/2019 (10:00 am to 12:00 Noon)	01/03/2019 Sl.No – 01 to 09 (12:30 Pm to 1:30 Pm) Sl.No 10(1:30 pm to 2:00 pm) and Sl.no 11 to 15 (2:30 pm to 3:30 pm)	1. MabongSegyang GPK(Sl.No 01 to 09) 2. Kamling GPK (Sl. No 10) 3. Deythang GPK (Sl.No 11 to 15)
2	Soreng- Chakung Constituency (Sl.No 16 to 22) Rinchenpong Constituency (Sl.23 to 27)	06/03/2019(10:00 am to 4:00pm)	07/03/2019(10:00 am to 4:00pm)	08/03/2019 (10:00 am to 12:00 Noon)	08/03/2019 Sl.No – 16 to 18 (12:30 Pm to 1:30 Pm) Sl.No 19 to 20(1:30 pm to 2:30 pm) and Sl.no 21 to 22 (2:30 pm to 3:30 pm) Sl.No 24 to 28 (3:30 pm to 4:30 pm)	1. BudangPakkigaon GPK(Sl.No 16 to 18) 2. Chumbong GPK (Sl.No19 to 20) 3. Chotasamdong GPK (Sl.No 21 to 22) 4. Khaniserbong GPK (Sl.No 23 to 27)

CONDITIONS OF CONTRACT:

- Tender is open only to the eligible Contractor/Firms of appropriate Class/Concerned ward of the GPU and ULB Area.
- The intending tenders/Contractors should apply in writing for issue of tender documents. The application would be invariably be signed by the contractor himself/herself. The tender documents will not be issued to any person other than the INTENDING TENDER. The application shall be submitted initially for each work listed above with all required documents.
- The applicants should enclosed attested copies of the a) **Validated/Updated Contractor Enlistment Certificate along with the application along with theattested copy of COI,Adhar card,Voter card and residential certificate of the Panchayats of the Concerned GPU, b) GST Clearance certificate. It is mandatory to produce the Original validated/Updated Enlistment Certificate during sale/issue of the Tender documents for verification.**
- The prescribed Non Transferable Tender Documents (excluding the Tender form) can be obtained during the period specified in (from the Assistant Engineer,Roads & Bridges Department Soreng) on production of requisite bank deposit slip in favour of the concerned GPU.
- Earnest money deposit @ 2.5% in State Bank of Sikkim shall be in the form of deposit receipt of schedule bank which includes deposits in the form of temporary deposit receipt (TDR) in favour of Sr. Accounts Officer, Roads & Bridges Department Galyshing west Sikkim. Tender form shall be issued only on production of toward deposit receipts of 2.5% earnest money.
- The tender documents including the Tender Form with quoted offer should be placed in a sealed cover with the name of the tenderer and the name of the work superscripted on it ,supporting documents listed at Sl.No 3(a&b) along with other relevant documents be enclosed with the offer.
- Sealed tenders may be deposited in the Tender box in the Gram Prasashan Kendra office of the concerned GPU where the work is to be executed on the date and within time indicated above.
- Tender shall be opened by the Tender Opening Committee as prescribed by the Government in the presence of the tenderers on the date and time indicated above.
- The tenderer should sign on every page of the tender documents as acceptance of the general direction and condition of the Contract and other laid down norms. The rate quoted should be both in figures and words and should be inclusive of GST and all other applicable Taxes and Levies. Over writing and correction should be avoided and if made should be authenticated. In complete/Conditional tenders shall be rejected forthwith.
- In case of any discrepancy in rate(s) printed in the Schedule of Rates and Quantities issued with the tender documents,rates as per approved Schedule of Rates will be taken as correct. For items outside the SOR, the rates shall be as per the technically checked estimate/analysis. Decision of the Principal Chief Engineer cum Secretary or Head of the Department will be final in this regard.
- The work value,scope and quantum of work are subject to change, the contractor shall execute the work as per the directives of the department. No claim on this account is entertained whatsoever. If any claim is made, it shall be as per the agreement rates.
- The Department reserve the rights to hold payments to the contractor unless test certificates are not produced by the contractor when called upon to do so.
- Avoidable damages due to negligence of the contractor shall be at his own risk and cost. The department shall not be liable for payment of such damages (if any),including accidents to labours at site.
- The offer shall remain valid for a period of 90 days. The work should commence within 15 days from the issue of the work order.
- All the conditions as mentioned in the NIT shall be deemed to a part of the agreement to be entered with the contractor. Security deposit shall be collected by deductions from the running bills of the contractor @ 5% of the value of work done.
- The department reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reasons thereof.
- The recoveries of royalties on Forest produce shall be as per the rates notified by the Government from time to time and applicable on the date of payment. In no case, claim of any contractor for deduction as per rates incorporated in the analysis of rates or Schedule of Rates on the date of tender shall be acceptable.
- Subletting of contract work is against the norms and if it comes to notice, the original contract shall be cancelled and appropriate action shall be initiated as per the rules.
- The Department also reserves the right to increase,decrease,alter or modify the item of works as indicated in the NIT without assigning any reason thereof.
- I case the man powers employed by the contractors are from outside the State or neighbouring countries, it shall be the responsibility of the contractors to get them registered with the labour department,Government of Sikkim as per the relevant Labour Laws.
- Use of explosives shall be regulated as under:-
 - Transportation,handling,storage and use of Explosives(if necessary) shall be in accordance with the provisions of the India Explosive Act and General guidelines, Circular issued by the department and other **competent** authorities on the subject from time to time.
 - The rules and regulations issued by the Sikkim Public Works Department or any other competent authority shall strictly be adhered to with regard to transportation, storage; handling and use of explosives shall be maintained by the contractor.
- The contractor shall also make arrangement to have photographs of the works taken at least at three stages of the construction period i.e.beginning, middle and completion stage.
- Damage to properties in and around the work site must be avoided at all cost. The contractor shall be held responsible for any acts of negligence and shall be made to make good the damages.
- It is accepted to the tenderer to have inspected the site before submitting his/her bid. There may be possible site difficulties for which the tenderer should have their own correct assessment before submitting the bid.
- The cost of stock materials supplied from the Department store will be deducted from the contractor’s bill as per rules.
- The bidders shall produce a **Certificate of Residence from the concerned Gram Panchayat Unit where the work is to be executed.**

Sd/-
Assistant Engineer
Roads & Bridges Department
Soreng Sub Division

R.O. No. 720/IPR/Pub/Classi./18-19
Date:21.02.2019

SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

To Defeat Insular Designs, Get Communal for Real

It is wrong to confuse belonging to a community with being sectarian

In our country, the word “communal” has too many negative connotations associated with and nothing illustrates the short-sightedness of the society and politicians more than this calumny. The word has been misrepresented from its definition of “belonging to a community” to being understood as “sectarian” and even its larger connotations of being a “shared” experience have been completely lost.

Misrepresentation is one thing, but what is worse is that as a people we have become increasingly compartmentalised. At a time when the world talks of a global village, it is sad that what occupies our collective imagination is an obsession with parochial divisions on caste, community, ethnic and geographical lines. And now, even political leanings. While this shortsightedness serves hateful politicians and their politics rather well, it causes too much damage to traditional relationships and co-dependence between communities. It goes without saying that these divisions need to be ended, but since calls for amity and mutual respect seem to be falling on deaf ears, may be the word communal needs to be returned to its original definition and in the resultant confusion then, perhaps, the sectarian bhakts will begin to flounder.

Yes, if the trend is to be reversed, the word needs to be understood afresh. If one were to keep an open mind, then there is nothing wrong with being ‘communal’, sans the paranoia of course. To continue with the argument in support of being communal, it is an urgent necessity if the communities are interested in preserving their distinct identities in the face of modernisation and its growing pressure for homogeneity. Into the mix has now arrived the impositions of majoritarian politics.

What one can’t ignore is that the preservation of cultures [or for that matter, even political rights] need not necessarily involve confrontation. Communalism, as in the collective experience that we concern ourselves with here, and not the lynch mobs and statue-smashing hordes that the word connotes for most, is about sharing and looking inwards and preserving. It is not about mere posturing, and should have never been allowed to grow beyond the bounds of individual communities because then would become a societal concern and not a communal issue. The point being made here it that people should remain communal till the time it concerns only their community, and the moment it attracts liabilities on others, the representation and voices should become societal and more encompassing.

In the Sikkim context, the cries alleging evil designs attempting to divide the Sikkimese society on caste and community lines can be expected to become hoarser as the elections draw closer, but what one forgets is that society has always been segregated on these lines and will remain so for some time to come. While this might be an uncomfortable truth, it cannot be denied. Where Sikkim has delivered well is that it has never allowed these ‘designs’ to actually tear the people apart. Of course, the rhetoric will continue as groups seek to tease the natural differences and traditional prejudices into deeper fault lines. The people have not fallen for these designs yet, but that is thanks to the inherent pragmatism of the people. Unfortunately, in the absence of debates on important issues in the public domain, the field remains open for posturing to slip in a victory some day. Many a leader has managed to incite passions with half-truths, selective amnesia and blinkered projections. These have succeeded essentially among closed groups, but as mentioned, since clear defences have not been erected, the suspicions could spread. The best defences will come from deeper enquiry into issues of identity and history and sharper debates on received wisdoms and ground realities. The young need to approach these issues more keenly because they will be inheriting the load of unresolved issues and little understood legacies.

In the meanwhile, it should be a communal face that Sikkim presents to the Centre – a people communal as Sikkimese and not as Sikkimese BLs and Sikkimese Nepalese or Sikkimese Byaparis. The State’s hands are already tied given its small size and further segregation will only make the Sikkimese voice even more feeble and incoherent in Delhi. Let’s accept it, a lot that needs to be done in and for Sikkim needs to make its way from Delhi. If anyone is to take Sikkim seriously, everyone here needs to speak in the same voice. This will require Sikkim to not only shed its prejudices and take everyone into confidence, but also compare notes and speak more earnestly for each other.

That digression aside, it is important that people belong to a community with pride – something that come only with security and confidence – instead of being divided by fear. When we become communal on these lines, the hate of sectarian divisiveness will find no takers.

Shamima Begum: How Europe toughened its stance on women returning from Islamic State

ELIZABETH PEARSON
theconversation.com

Just days after Shamima Begum called for public sympathy for her return to the UK, another young woman was jailed in Baghdad for her role with the so-called Islamic State. Linda Wenzel is German and, like Begum, was 15 years old when she joined Islamic State in 2016. Wenzel has also asked to return to Europe to serve her sentence. There are no signs this will be allowed.

In 2016 I was in Germany, trying to understand young women like Wenzel, for a five-country study on the gender dynamics of violent extremism with my colleague Emily Winterbotham, a senior research fellow at the RUSI think tank. We talked to communities and families affected by radicalisation in the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Canada.

These countries had diverse approaches to radicalisation. France produced counter-radicalisation strategies after the Paris attacks of 2015, while the UK and Netherlands have worked on policy to counter violent extremism since the mid-2000s. Both the Netherlands and UK permit deprivation of citizenship without criminal conviction – which is what has now happened to Begum.

We heard stories of people prevented from travel by police, as well as of both women and men who left for Syria and Iraq. Across the five countries we noted differences in how men and women were recruited, such as more cases of online approaches to women. We also saw how Muslim community anger was often reserved for the young men who fled to join Islamic State. Focus groups within Muslim communities often

told us women were “naïve”, lacking in self-esteem, “tricked” by “lover-boys” they met online. They were seen as victims.

Back in 2015-6 this sentiment was mirrored in government policy. France, Germany and the Netherlands tended to treat women jihadists as “victims” of Islamic State. Recent research on returning foreign fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands noted that back then women were “treated with more clemency” and routinely not prosecuted.

That position has changed, with toughening measures for both men and women across Europe. Countries including the UK, Netherlands, Germany and France now investigate and risk-assess both men and women returners. From a position where women and their agency in joining Islamic State were not recognised, the pendulum swung firmly in the other direction.

HARDENING ATTITUDES

The first reason why this shift happened was numbers. Countries have had to evolve to catch up with events on the ground. From the Islamic State’s announcement of a “caliphate” in 2014, Europe saw a significant minority of women travel – and women made up around 16-17% of the approximately 6,000 people who left Europe to join the caliphate.

In the case of France, which was new to counter-radicalisation strategies at home and where women made up around 28% of its returners, the shift in policy meant sharp changes to the law and procedures. Canada, which had fewer fighters, adopted a liberal response with few prosecutions of returners – both fighters and others. This prompted accusations from Canada’s opposi-

tion Conservative Party of a policy of “group hug sessions”.

A second reason for the hardening of attitudes to women who joined IS was increased knowledge of women’s role in Islamic State. Women were active propagandists, recruiters, ideologues, supporters of current warriors and producers of the next generation. They were involved in the abuse of other women, whether enslaved Yazidis, or in the al-Khansaa brigade, which policed women. Both Begum and Wenzel suggested they were only housewives. But for Islamic State, the wife is the key to the endurance – or baqiya – of both ideology and “caliphate”.

The perception of women’s threat was also explicitly influenced by cases involving women and a seemingly new phenomenon: the all-female jihadist cell. In 2016, three women were arrested in France after a failed attack near Notre Dame. This proved a game-changer for both public opinion and policy regarding returners, despite the fact that these women were radicalised in France. In the UK, another all-female plot was uncovered in 2017.

An increase in threat levels linked to male returners also had an influence on how women were viewed. In 2015, male returners were involved in the Paris attacks and the following year in attacks in Brussels. While women have not yet returned in large numbers, the fear is that women, newly recognised as ideologically committed, might also carry out an attack.

THE GENDER DIMENSION

Both policy and public opinion are shifting from ignoring women in jihadist movements, to “adding” them in to counter-extremism strategies,

and increasingly treating the threat they pose as equal to men. There is now an increased assumption in France, the Netherlands and Germany of parity in male and female potential for violence. However, it’s not enough to just to “add women” into existing strategies – governments must recognise the ways in which terrorist groups understand men and women differently.

This means acknowledging two important facts related to power. First, compared to men, instances of women perpetrators of jihadist violence are rare, not because women are “naturally” less violent, or do not support jihad, but because patriarchal jihadi ideology judges female violence highly transgressive. The second relates to the power imbalances in women’s radicalisation. Islamic State ran a systemised online recruitment campaign targeting women, with parallels to child sexual exploitation and grooming. Often older men sought out teenage girls. Women desperate to return emphasise their own victimhood. Some women radicalised to join Islamic State report experiences of sexual abuse, domestic or honour-based violence.

This doesn’t deny women agency or excuse them from complicity in Islamic State atrocities, but recognises the context within which their choices were made. It is more important now, in the current chaos of the end of the caliphate when many women may return to their countries of origin, including within Europe and North America, to recognise the complexity of what it meant to be involved in Islamic State.

[the writer is Lecturer at the Cyber Threats Research Centre, Swansea University]

Iraq’s brutal crackdown on suspected Islamic State supporters could trigger civil war

ERIC KEELS & ANGELA D. NICHOLS
theconversation.com

Large portions of the Islamic State in Iraq have been either killed, captured or forced underground over the past three years.

Eleven years after the U.S. invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, triggering a war between Islamic State militants and the U.S.-backed Iraqi government, Iraq has finally achieved some measure of stability.

But the Iraqi government isn’t taking any chances that this terrorist organization, commonly known as “IS,” could regroup.

Over 19,000 Iraqis suspected of collaborating with IS have been detained in Iraq since the beginning of 2013, according to Human Rights Watch. Most of them are Sunni Muslims, according to reporting by Ben Taub of the New Yorker. Sunnis are members of the sect of Islam from which IS predominantly recruits.

Suspected terrorists are often tortured into offering confessions that justify death sentences at trial. According to Amnesty International, common forms of torture include “beatings on the head and body with metal rods and cables, suspension in stress positions by the arms or legs, electric shocks, and threats of rape of female relatives.”

The government’s crackdown on Sunnis – even those with no evidence of ties with Islamic militants – sends a troubling signal about Iraq’s prospects for peace.

Our research into conflict zones shows that when post-war governments use violence against citizens, it greatly increases the risk of renewed civil war.

REPRESSION FOLLOWING CIVIL WARS

The period after an armed conflict is fragile.

Citizens traumatized by violence wish fervently for peace. Defeated armed factions may have their sights set on revenge.

The post-war government’s priority, meanwhile, is to consolidate its control over the country. Sometimes, leaders use violent repression to ensure their grip on power.

It is a risky strategy.

We studied 63 countries where civil war occurred between 1976 and 2005, including El Salvador, Sierra Leone and Sudan. The results, which were published in the academic journal Conflict, Security and Development in January, show a 95 percent increase of another civil war in places where governments engaged in the kind of torture, political imprisonment, killings and disappearances that Iraq’s government is now undertaking.

Civil war is most likely to break out in former conflict zones if civilians believe they will be targeted by the state regardless of whether or not they actually support an insurgency.

Often, our results show, people respond to indiscriminate clampdowns by arming themselves. That is easy to do in conflict zones, which are home to many former rebels with extensive battlefield training and access to weapons, including both

active militant groups and the remnants of vanquished insurgencies.

ASSESSING THE RISK OF RENEWED WAR IN IRAQ

Sadly, Iraq has been down this road before.

In 2007, the U.S. military surge sent more than

Many Sunnis took up arms against their own government not because they supported IS’s goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate across the Middle East but because they hated al-Maliki’s administration.

By June 2014, the Islamic State had captured



20,000 additional American troops into combat in Iraq to help the government of Nuri al-Maliki – which came to power after Hussein’s demise – fight Al-Qaida and other Islamic militants.

The U.S. enlisted Sunni insurgents to help them find, capture or kill Al-Qaida operatives during this period of the Iraq war, which is often called “the surge.”

That decision inflamed the centuries-old sectarian divide between Iraq’s two dominant religious groups, Sunni and Shia Muslims.

During former Iraqi President Hussein’s rule, Sunni Muslims controlled the country, and his government actively repressed Shia citizens. Since Hussein’s ouster, however, Iraq’s government has been run by Shia Muslims.

After the U.S. withdrew its troops in 2011, the U.S.-backed al-Maliki government began a brutal campaign to consolidate its authority. From 2012 to 2013, he expelled all Sunni officials from Iraq’s government and silenced opponents using torture, political imprisonment, killings and disappearances.

At the time, our study of renewed fighting in conflict zones had just begun. The preliminary findings made us concerned that al-Maliki’s use of violence to assert control over Iraq could restart the civil war by pushing angry Sunnis into the arms of militant groups.

Unfortunately, we were right.

Starting in 2014, the Islamic State began moving swiftly from Syria – where it was based – to conquer major cities across neighboring western Iraq.

Iraqi Sunnis, who were excluded from politics after Hussein’s overthrow and fearful of government repression, did little to stop the incursion. Islamic militants increased their recruitment among Iraqi Sunnis by promising a return to Sunni dominance in Iraq.

Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, just 250 miles north of Baghdad. It took three years of fighting and the combined force of Iraqi, U.S. and Kurdish troops, as well as Iranian-backed militias, to rid the country of this terrorist organization.

In September 2017, Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Abadi claimed victory over IS in Iraq. The international community turned its focus toward Syria, where Islamic militants were continuing their war on citizens and the government.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR IRAQ

Still, the Islamic State remains a persistent and legitimate threat to both Syria and Iraq, with some 30,000 active fighters in the region. Its commanders have reportedly buried large stockpiles of munitions in Iraq in preparation for renewed war.

American intelligence officials have warned against President Donald Trump’s plan to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, saying it will give IS more freedom to regroup there and in Iraq.

The Iraqi government’s crackdown on Sunnis is, in part, an effort to eliminate this threat, since IS could draw renewed support from disaffected Sunni Iraqis across the border.

But many observers think Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi is also exacting revenge on Sunnis for previously joining IS in armed warfare against Iraq’s government.

Rather than prevent more fighting, our research suggests, Iraq’s clampdown on Sunnis may spark another civil war.

[Eric Keels is Research Associate at One Earth Future Foundation & Research Fellow at the Howard H. Baker Center for Public Policy, University of Tennessee; Angela D. Nichols is Assistant Professor, Florida Atlantic University]

Sterling winner caps late Man City comeback at Schalke

GELSENKIRCHEN (GERMANY), FEB 21 (AFP): Raheem Sterling sealed a dramatic 3-2 Champions League win for 10-man Manchester City at Schalke on Wednesday as the English champions scored twice in the last five minutes.

Sterling tucked away the winner at the Veltins Arena in the 90th minute just after substitute Leroy Sane fired home a stunning free-kick for the Premier League leaders against his former club in the last 16, first leg.

"I waited for my chance and wanted to shoot from there as I had previously scored from that position and it restored our confidence," a delighted Sane told broadcaster DAZN after his equaliser. Schalke led 2-1 at half-time as the video assistant referee (VAR) twice intervened to award penalties, both converted by Nabil Bentaleb, cancelling out Sergio Aguero's opener in Gelsenkirchen.

City were in real trouble with 22 minutes left when Nicolas Otamendi, who gave away the controversial first penalty, was sent off for a second yellow card before Sane's moment of brilliance and Sterling's winner.

"We will not go far in this competition unless we improve," said City manager Pep Guardiola.

"At the end of the quality of Sane and Sterling made the difference." However, City still have some work to do in the return leg on March 12 with Fernandinho, who was booked when conceding the second spot-kick, and Otamendi both suspended. Schalke are just above the Bundesliga's relegation places and winless in their last four league games, yet they gave Premier League leaders City an almighty scare.

The hosts initially struggled to get out of their half as Man City dominated the opening 30 minutes, until the game swung dramatically Schalke's way with the two penalty decisions.

Schalke shot themselves in the foot for City's opening goal on 18 minutes when a lazy pass from goalkeeper Ralf Faehrmann to Salif Sane was snapped up by David Silva.

The Spaniard drew Faehrmann and selflessly served up a simple tap-in for Aguero to claim his 10th goal in his last seven City appearances.

- SCHALKE SPARKED INTO LIFE -

However, falling behind sparked life into Schalke. Striker Mark Uth fired wide, then ex-Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Bentaleb got the better of Ilkay Gundogan in midfield.

Likewise, a cheer went up when US international Weston McKennie nicked the ball off Kevin De Bruyne.

Schalke drew level after Daniel Caligiuri fired in a speculative shot which clipped Otamendi's arm. There was a delay of nearly three minutes for a VAR review, which Sky reported was caused by a technical problem as referee Carlos del Cerro Grande could not view the replay.

Nepal social media bill sparks freedom of speech concerns

KATHMANDU, FEB 20 (AFP): Nepal's government on Wednesday tabled draft legislation that would impose harsh penalties for "improper" social media posts, igniting concerns it could be used to suppress freedom of speech and stifle dissent.

Under the proposed law, the government would have the power to block social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube unless they register in Nepal.

And social media posts deemed defamatory or against national sovereignty could be punished with up to five years in jail and a fine of 1.5 million Nepalese rupees (USD 13,000).

No timetable was given for passing the bill, but activists have described it as an attempt to shackle criticism of the powerful communist government, which has a two-thirds majority in parliament. "The bill is



against the freedom of expression and justice as it criminalises online expression," Tara Nath Dahal of Freedom Forum, a media freedom organisation, told AFP.

The government has defended the bill, saying it is needed to ensure data and internet security. "The bill was regis-

tered to manage social networking sites because the challenges caused by such sites are increasing," information minister Gokul Prasad Baskota told parliament.

Under the proposed law, the government can also instruct social network site operators to remove posts. Failure

to do so could lead to a three-year jail term and a 30,000-rupee fine.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has called on the government to address concerns raised by rights groups.

"The proposed law put forward by the Nepal government is a

blatant attempt to control and muzzle freedom of expression on social media," it said in a statement.

"Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the Nepal constitution, and this must be respected and protected by the government." The ruling party has shown increasing intolerance for dissent since its landslide victory in 2017.

Another law barring civil servants from criticising government policies on social media was tabled earlier this month.

A popular folk singer was forced to take down a satirical anti-corruption song from YouTube last week after pressure from ruling party cadres.

Nepal, with a population of about 30 million, has an internet penetration of 57 per cent.

Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have millions of users in the South Asian nation.

Bandh hits normal life in Itanagar, 21 detained

ITANAGAR, FEB 21 (PTI): Normal life was hit in Itanagar Thursday as several students' bodies and civil societies called for a 48-hour bandh, seeking changes in the proposals made by a government-appointed panel on the issue of granting permanent residence certificate (PRC) to non-Arunachalees.

The Joint High Power Committee, after holding parleys with the stakeholders, has recommended granting PRC to six communities, who are not natives of Arunachal Pradesh but has been living in Namsai and Changlang districts for decades.

The proposal has evoked resentment among several community-based groups and students' organisations, who claimed that the rights and the interests of indigenous people will be compromised if the state government accepts it. A

senior officer said that the agitators, on the first day of the two-day bandh, hit the streets in the state capital and pelted stones at government vehicles, prompting the police to detain 21 of them.

They demanded that the government reconsider the JHPC recommendations, which is set to be tabled in the Assembly during the ongoing interim budget session, he said.

All business establishments remained closed Thursday and public vehicles stayed off the roads, Superintendent of Police M Harsh Vardhan said.

"Apart from a few stray incidents, no untoward incident was reported from any part of Itanagar," the SP said, adding that the administration has made elaborate arrangements to ensure security of people during the bandh.

Citizenship bill in focus as budget session of Nagaland assembly begins



KOHIMA, FEB 21 (PTI): The contentious citizenship bill will be in focus in the budget session of the Nagaland assembly that begins from Thursday, with the state government set to adopt a resolution against the proposed legislation.

Minister for Planning and Coordination, Neiba Kronu, said the Nagaland government would table a resolution against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, on February 23.

The bill was passed by the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session on January 8, but could not be tabled in the Rajya Sabha, meaning it has now lapsed. The legisla-

tion proposes to accord Indian citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan after seven years of residence in India instead of 12 years, which is the norm currently, even if they do not possess any document.

Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, who also holds the finance portfolio, will present the full budget for the fiscal 2019-20 on February 25.

The state government is also scheduled to table the supplementary demands for grants for the fiscal 2018-19 in the budget session that concludes on February 26.

Sons of the soil will continue to rule Assam: Sonowal



JONAI (ASSAM), FEB 21 (PTI): Assam is for indigenous people and the sons of the soil will continue to rule the state in future, Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said.

Sonowal was speaking at a festival of the

Mishing tribe in Dhemaji district on Wednesday.

"No outsider can take the upper hand here undermining the locals... The sons of the soil will continue to rule the state in the future as well," he said. Youths of the Mish-

ing community must take the responsibility to firmly establish the state on the world stage, the CM said.

"Mishing tribe is one of the most hardworking and culturally rich tribes of the state," Sonowal said. He said a 'sanskritik kshetra'

(cultural arena) would be set up at Jonai for preserving the cultural heritage of the community.

Sonowal added that the Assam government has decided to give land patta (deed) to one lakh indigenous people this year.

Perpetrators of terror acts must be brought swiftly to justice: UN chief

YOSHITA SINGH UNITED NATIONS, FEB 21 (PTI): UN chief Antonio Guterres has said it is essential that there must be accountability under international law and the perpetrators of terrorist acts be brought swiftly to justice, as he reiterated his strong condemnation of the Pulwama terror strike by Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed.

The UN Secretary-General also "urgently" appealed to the governments of both India and Pakistan to exercise "maximum restraint" to ensure the situation does not further deteriorate.

"The Secretary-General has been following with great concern the situation in South Asia. He reiterates his strong condemnation of the terrorist attack against Indian security forces in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir on February 14 and the "subsequent violence", a statement issued Wednesday by his spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

He said it is essential that there be accountability under international law and the perpetrators of terrorist acts be brought swiftly to justice.

It is the belief of the Secretary-General that all difficult challenges can be resolved peacefully and satisfactorily through meaningful mutual engagement, the statement added.

When asked at the daily press briefing that Pakistan has asked for the Secretary-General himself to get involved in the process to encourage dialogue between India and Pakistan and if he is going to take on that role, Dujarric said, As a matter of principle the Secretary-General believes that all difficult challenges can be resolved through peacefully and satisfactorily through meaningful mutual engagement.

He reiterated that both parties need to request for the Secretary-General's good offices, no matter where you look at them.

On Tuesday, Dujarric had said that the UN chief is "deeply concerned" at the increasing tensions between India and Pakistan in the wake of the Pulwama terror attack that killed 40 CRPF personnel, stressing on the need for both to exercise maximum restraint.

Looking at the situation in general between India and Pakistan, we're deeply concerned at the

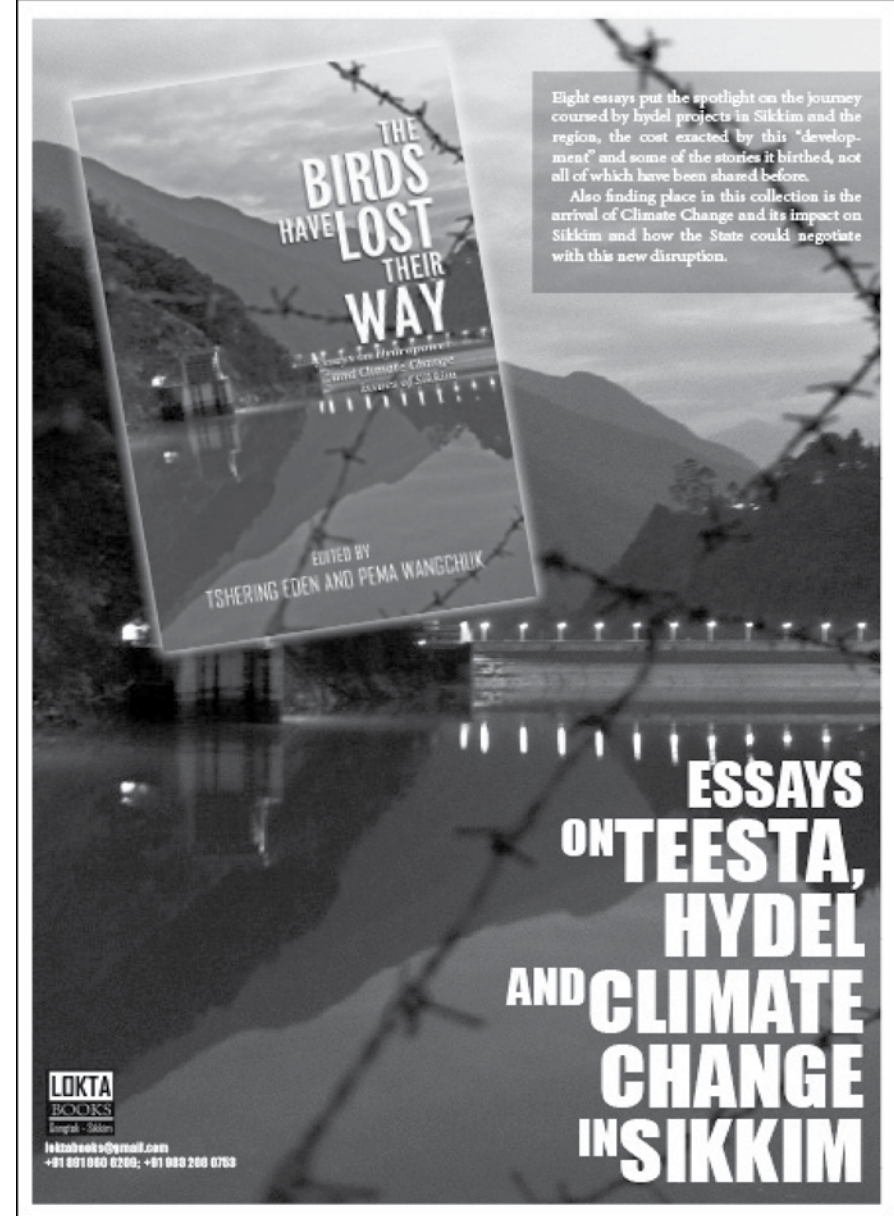
increase in tensions between the two countries in the wake of the February 14 attack, Dujarric had told reporters.

Responding to a question that Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has said the UN must step in to defuse tensions and whether the Secretary-General will take that role, Dujarric had said the good offices of the UN chief are available only if both sides ask for it.

The Secretary-General stresses the importance for both sides to exercise maximum restraint and take immediate steps to de-escalation, and his good offices are always available should both sides ask, Dujarric said.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet had also strongly condemned the attack against Indian security forces in Pulwama and called on authorities to bring those responsible to justice.

The already sour relations between India and Pakistan have worsened over the past week as New Delhi blamed Islamabad for the Pulwama attack. Both countries have called back their envoys for "consultations."



Formidable Atletico stun Ronaldo and Juventus

MADRID, FEB 21 (AFP): Cristiano Ronaldo's Champions League mission with Juventus stalled on Wednesday as Atletico Madrid secured a deserved 2-0 victory from a thrilling first leg at the Wanda Metropolitano.

Ronaldo returned to the Spanish capital, where he enjoyed unprecedented success in this tournament with Real, but it was their rivals celebrating at the final whistle as goals from Jose Gimenez and Diego Godin put Atletico within sight of the quarter-finals.

"We are not through yet," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said. "There is another match to play and we know we will have to suffer." "Fortunately we didn't concede a third," said Juventus boss Massimiliano Allegri.

"Because 2-0 is a result that can be turned around. We're not dead

yet." But this was a victory that Simeone's side fully deserved. Antoine Griezmann had hit the crossbar while VAR twice intervened, correctly, in Juve's favour, cancelling a penalty for a foul on Diego Costa and then ruling out an Alvaro Morata header just before Gimenez struck.

While Juventus tried to preserve the stalemate, Atletico were bold. Simeone introduced Morata, Thomas Lemar and Angel Correa, all around the hour-mark, and his darling paid off. "I showed balls," Simeone said.

Juve are certainly not dead and buried, particularly given Costa and Thomas Partey will both be suspended for the return in Turin after each picked up yellow cards.

But the failure to score an away goal, and their clear inferiority in the second half does not bode well for any hopes of a comeback.



"They don't give you chances," said Allegri. "They make you play badly." Defeat in the last 16 for either team would be unthinkable, for Atletico, who know the final will be played

here, at their own stadium, on June 1, the perfect chance to wrestle the trophy off Real in the very city they share.

- RONALDO SUBDUED - And for Juventus, whose wait for Europe's

premier prize has now entered its 23rd year, when expectations are higher than ever given they now boast the tournament's most prolific ever player.

Ronaldo, though,

endured a disappointing night, suffocated from the outset by a typically relentless Atletico backline.

Perhaps it was frustration that made him wave five fingers in the

direction of the baiting Atletico crowd, presumably to signify his five Champions League triumphs.

His best contribution was an early, driven free-kick from 30 yards, that had to be pushed over by Jan Oblak, and the dummy-shot before it, that exposed Costa as encroaching, for which he received his yellow card.

Costa was his bristling self and almost won a penalty when referee Felix Zwayer thought he was tripped by Mattia de Sciglio. But VAR showed he had not only exaggerated the contact but also extended his run into the area.

The rest of the half was tighter but Atletico had two golden opportunities early in the second. First, Griezmann volleyed Costa in behind but the Spaniard sidefooted wide with only Wojciech Szczesny to beat.

Then, it was Griezmann's turn, this

time Szczesny intervening, tipping the Frenchman's lob onto the crossbar before Giorgio Chiellini stopped Costa from reaching the rebound.

Atletico were pushing and it was Morata, on for Costa, who made the difference. He powered in a brilliant header only to see it chalked off for a push but he was not deterred, and when Juve failed to clear his knock-down at a corner, Gimenez was perfectly placed.

Juve were rattled and their failure to rally could cost them dear. Atletico scored again as Godin rose to head in at the near post, only to turn and find Mario Mandzukic had cleared the ball to his feet. The angle was tight but the net was open.

Juve might have snatched an away goal late on but Oblak pushed over Federico Bernardeschi's shot. They have it all to do.

England post record chase to beat Windies in series opener



BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS), FEB 21 (AFP): Contrasting centuries by Jason Roy and Joe Root paced England to a comfortable six-wicket victory over the West Indies with their record one-day international run chase in a high-scoring opening game of a five-match series in Barbados on Wednesday.

Set what looked a daunting target after Chris Gayle's 24th ODI hundred anchored the home side to 360-8, Roy blazed 123 off 85 balls at the top of the order while Root cruised to a comparatively sedate 102 off 97 deliveries to take help the tourists reach their target with eight balls to spare.

In achieving the highest-ever ODI run chase in the Caribbean and the third-highest overall, England underlined their status as the top-ranked team in this format of the game and will be brimful of batting confidence heading into the second match at the same venue on Friday.

Fresh from a hundred in the lone warm-up match at the weekend, Roy was at his most ruthless against the hosts who missed key fast bowler Kemar Roach.

The 'man of the series' with 18 wickets as the West Indies surprised England 2-1 to reclaim the Wisden Trophy in the preceding Test duel, Roach has been ruled out of the entire ODI series due to early signs of what could develop into a stress fracture of the lower back.

Roy set the pace in

racing to a hundred off just 65 balls -- the fastest-ever in ODIs in the Caribbean -- and dominated an opening stand of 91 with Jonny Bairstow.

He maintained the charge through a 114-run second-wicket partnership with Root and by the time he fell in the 27th over to leg-spinner Devendra Bishoo, England were well on course.

Root, the Test captain who finally came good with a hundred in the last innings of the three-match series in St Lucia just over a week earlier, also got to three figures against the University of the West Indies Vice-Chancellor's XI last Sunday and tapped into that rich vein of form once more.

He put on 116 for the third wicket in 16 overs with Eoin Morgan and although the ODI skipper departed to fast bowler Oshane Thomas with victory in sight, there would be no serious alarms for England on the way to victory, although Root fell with the scores level attempting the winning hit off West Indies captain Jason Holder.

"I was particularly happy with the calm way we went about all aspects of this match," Morgan said.

"Our bowlers did very well at the end of the West Indies innings when it looked as if they would get up to 380, and when we batted, you really can't look past that start we got. It made the job so much easier."

DAYLE DELIGHTS HOME CROWD

Earlier, Gayle lit up

the Kensington Oval with another display of power-hitting.

Playing his first ODI since the home series against Bangladesh last July and having announced that the upcoming World Cup will be his international farewell in the format, the big-hitting left-hander signalled his intentions for a lengthy grand finale with an innings of 135 off 129 balls with 12 sixes and three fours.

His tally of maximums dominated an innings in which 23 sixes were struck, a new record for an ODI innings.

Despite conceding 34 runs off his final two overs, leg-spinner Rashid played an important role together with Stokes in limiting the West Indies progress over the final 15 overs.

Stokes returned the best figures of three for 37, including the important wicket of Gayle in the 47th over, dragging a full-length delivery onto his stumps.

Rashid claimed three for 74, making important breakthroughs at the other end when the West Indies needed to press on the accelerator.

England paid dearly for Roy dropping Gayle at point off seamer Liam Plunkett when the former West Indies captain was on just nine.

"We made life very difficult for ourselves, and especially our bowlers, by missing too many chances," said Holder.

"You can't give quality players so many opportunities and expect to be competing at the end.

Stiff lower back rules Hardik Pandya out of Australia series, Jadeja named replacement

NEW DELHI, FEB 21 (PTI): India all-rounder Hardik Pandya was on Thursday ruled out of the upcoming T20 and ODI series against Australia due to "lower back stiffness" with Ravindra Jadeja replacing him in the 50-over squad.

It is a minor setback for the team and Pandya, who returned to action during the limited-overs series in New Zealand after being handed a provisional suspension for his loose talk on women on a TV show. The BCCI also lifted the interim suspension on batsman K L Rahul, who was on the same chat show.

"The BCCI Medical team decided to rest the all-rounder and let him undergo strength and conditioning work for his lower back at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru. Mr. Pandya will begin his strength work from next week," said the BCCI in a statement. "The T20I squad will now consist of 14 members. Mr. Ravindra Jadeja has been named replacement for Hardik Pandya for the 5 ODIs," it added.

Both Pandya and Rahul still face an inquiry for their controversial comments. While an out-of-form Rahul was sent back to play at the India A level, Pandya made instant impact in his comeback game, proving how crucial his presence is for the balance of the side.

The 25-year-old has so far played 11 Tests, 45 ODIs and 38 T20s. His absence from the ODI squad gives Jadeja another opportunity to stake his claim in the squad for the World Cup to be played in the UK in May-July. India will host Australia for two T20s and five ODIs, starting Saturday in Visakhapatnam. The second T20 will be played in Bengaluru on February 27.

The five ODIs will be staged in Hyderabad (March 2), Nagpur (March 5), Ranchi (March 8), Mohali (March 10) and Delhi (March 13).

India eves look to dominate England after success in NZ



MUMBAI, FEB 21 (PTI): Indian women will plunge into the three-game ODI rubber against England eves here on Friday with their confidence bolstered by their recent 2-1 series victory against New Zealand in the latter's backyard.

With it being a short series, the outfit that wins the opening game, will be at a big advantage going into the next two clashes with all of them to be played at the Wankhede Stadium as part of the ICC Championship.

The hosts cannot afford to take England lightly, as the visiting team boasts of some big names in women's cricket. Opener Smriti Mandhana, who amassed 196 runs including a hundred and a 90 in New Zealand, will be a key player with the bat for the Indian women's team.

There are others too such as the experienced captain Mithali Raj, the first woman cricketer to appear in 200 ODIs.

However, the hosts will miss the aggressive Harmanpreet Kaur, who was ruled out of the entire series with an ankle injury and has been replaced by Harleen Deol. Then there is also the young Jemimah Rodrigues to shore up the home teams batting.

It would be interesting to see whether Rodrigues or Punam Raut, who played her last ODI against Sri Lanka in September 2018, gets a look in. The Mithali Raj-led team has had middle-order issues in the past and newly-appointed coach W V Raman would be keen to sort them as quickly as possible.

But the hosts would not have an easy outing facing the English attack.

The Indian bowling has an all-round look with the pace attack be-

ing led by veteran Jhulan Goswami and also comprising the likes of Shikha Pandey and Mansi Joshi.

With spin being a key element on Indian wickets, the role of slow bowlers Deepti Sharma, Ekta Bisht and Poonam Yadav in the middle overs would be crucial.

England eves, on the other hand, are a force to reckon with in the 50-over format. They have experienced campaigners in the top-order such as Danni Wyatt (746 runs in 61 matches) and 28-year-old Heather Knight.

Heather, with 2,331 runs to her credit in 86 ODIs, displayed good form in the practice game against the Board Presidents XI and showed her anchoring capabilities.

With all-rounders like Sophie Ecclestone, experienced pacer Anya Shrubsole and accurate

medium pacer Nat Sciver in the reckoning, England has the bowling attack to trouble the hosts.

Anya would also take confidence from her four wicket haul in the warm-up game.

Teams (From): Mithali Raj (Captain), Jhulan Goswami, Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues, Deepti Sharma, Taniya Bhatia (wicket-keeper), R Kalpana (wicket-keeper), Mona Meshram, Ekta Bisht, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Poonam Yadav, Shikha Pandey, Mansi Joshi, Punam Raut, Harleen Deol.

England women: Tammy Beaumont, Katherine Brunt, Kate Cross, Sophia Dunkley, Sophie Ecclestone, Georgia Elwiss, Alex Hartley, Amy Jones, Heather Knight, Laura Marsh, Nat Sciver, Anya Shrubsole, Sarah Taylor (wicketkeeper), Lauren Winfield and Danni Wyatt.

Taiwan unveils long-awaited gay marriage bill

TAIPEI, FEB 21 (AFP): Taiwan's ruling party unveiled its latest attempt to create Asia's first gay marriage law on Thursday, a bill offering same-sex couples "permanent unions" as well as limited adoption rights, despite stiff opposition from conservatives.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has had a stuttering and troubled journey towards delivering on their 2016 election promise to

grant same-sex couples equal marriage rights.

In November, conservatives won a referendum against revising the island's Civil Code to allow gay marriage, in a blow to President Tsai Ing-wen's party and a stark illustration of the social divide caused by the issue.

The referendum came after Taiwan's Constitutional Court voted to legalise gay marriage in 2017 -- the first place in

Asia to do so -- arguing that denying same-sex couples marriage rights was unconstitutional.

The court ordered the government to amend the law by May 24, 2019 but did not specify how it wanted gay marriage to be brought in.

The bill published Thursday by the cabinet is the Tsai administration's attempt to square that circle -- a new law that meets the court's demands while trying to

respect the referendum result by not altering the Civil Code which currently defines marriage as between a man and a woman. The draft law released by the justice ministry proposes allowing "two persons of the same sex to create a permanent union of intimate and exclusive nature for the committed purpose of managing a life together to realise the equal protection of the freedom of marriage".

‘Concrete measures’ on sex abuse needed, Pope tells Vatican summit



VATICAN CITY, FEB 21 (AFP): Pope Francis opened Thursday a landmark summit at the Vatican on fighting child sex abuse, saying that the world expected “concrete measures” on tackling paedophilia in the Catholic Church.

The pontiff will dedicate the next three and a half days to discussing the Church’s response to child abuse by members of the clergy with bishops from around the world.

“The Holy people of God are watching and waiting not for simple and obvious condemnations but concrete and efficient measures,” he said as the summit opened, the first of its kind.

“Let us listen to the cry of the young ones

who ask us for justice,” he said.

The pope is aiming to tackle the continuing scandal, which again hit the Church in 2018 in countries across the globe, including Chile, Germany and the United States.

The 82-year-old hopes to raise awareness about abuse through prayers, speeches, working groups and testimonies from victims.

“I ask the Holy Spirit to support us in the following days and help us to transform this evil into an opportunity for awareness and purification,” Francis said.

“May the Virgin Mary enlighten us to try to cure the serious wounds caused by the scandal of paedophilia

both in children and in believers,” he added.

The summit aims to educate 114 top bishops who will then return home with clear ideas on how to spot and deal with abuse and paedophilia.

The task is made difficult by the fact that some churches, in Asia and Africa in particular, deny the problem exists.

“My hope would be that people see this as a turning point,” said American Cardinal Blase Cupich, one of the pope’s trusted allies in the United States and one of the summit’s four organisers. The US Catholic Church has been shaken by one of the gravest crises in its history, with the defrocking last week by Pope Francis of a for-

mer cardinal -- American Theodore McCarrick -- over accusations he sexually abused a teenager 50 years ago.

“It’s not the end game, no one can ever say that... (but) we’re going to do everything possible so people are held responsible, accountable and that there is going to be transparency,” Cupich told journalists ahead of the meeting.

Three themes -- responsibility, accountability and transparency -- form the backbone of the summit and will provide its participants with the keys to ensuring child safety, he said. There are reforms in the pipeline, such as the “tweaking” of certain canon laws, according to another of the organisers, Maltese Arch-

bishop Charles Scicluna.

But the suggestion that Church laws need only fine-tuning has angered many, including Anne Barrett Doyle, the co-director of BishopAccountability.org, a public database that documents cases of proven or suspected cleric sex crimes.

“Canon law has to be changed: not tweaked, not modified, but fundamentally changed, so that it stops prioritising the priesthood... over the lives of children, and vulnerable adults who are sexually assaulted by them,” she said.

Scicluna insists that summoning Church leaders from all continents to Rome “is in itself a very important message”.

The Maltese spent 10 years as the Vatican’s top prosecutor on paedophilia cases, and was picked by Francis to travel to Chile last year to hear from victims whose voices had previously been silenced by an internal Church cover-up.

Scicluna has called for an end to the code of silence and culture of denial within the beleaguered centuries-old institution.

“Silence is a no-go, whether you call it omer-ta or simply a state of denial,” he said this week.

“We have to face facts because only the truth of the matter, and confronting the facts, will make us free,” he added.

70 killed as massive fire breaks out in chemical warehouses in Dhaka



ANISUR RAHMAN DHAKA, FEB 21 (PTI): A fast-moving fire swept through apartment buildings and chemical warehouses in a historic part of the Bangladesh capital Dhaka, killing at least 70 people and injuring over 50 others, the latest such deadly blaze in the country.

Officials said the fire broke out at a chemical warehouse on the ground floor of a five-storey building named Hazi Wahed Mansion behind a mosque in Old Dhaka’s congested Chawkbazar area on Wednesday night and the flames then quickly spread through four other buildings nearby, including a community centre where a wedding party was on.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) officials said the fire spread rapidly due to the multiple chemical godowns that were situated in the area.

The death toll in the massive blaze rose to 70, fire officials said, warning that the toll could rise further as dozens of people were trapped in the buildings and the fire fighters were yet to enter into the main spot where the fire broke out.

“Most of the bodies were retrieved from the houses around that building while fire fighters now prepare to enter into the building, the main spot in search of more bodies,” a police official at the scene said.

Bangladesh’s fire service chief Ali Ahmed said the blaze may have started with a gas cylinder before quickly spreading through the

building where chemicals were stored.

“The flames raced through four adjoining buildings, which were also used as chemical warehouses. There was a traffic jam when the fire broke out. It spread so quickly that people could not escape,” he said.

TV images showed the main gate of one of the buildings was locked, leaving its residents trapped, unable to escape the blaze as it swept through its five storeys.

Witnesses said the victims also included passersby, some people who were eating food at a nearby restaurants and some members of a wedding party.

Over 50 people, including women and children, were also injured and admitted to nearby hospitals, including Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital.

Some of the residents were injured after they jumped off the building.

The officials said 37 fire fighting units were rushed to the scene but narrow lanes made it difficult for the fire engines to reach the spot. The fire fighters used helicopters and long hose pipes to set off the blaze.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her shock over the tragedy and conveyed condolences to those affected.

The blaze is under control but not completely doused because of flammable chemicals that were being stored in several of the buildings, AKM Shakil Newaz, director of Fire Service

Singapore Airlines denies snooping with seatback cameras

SINGAPORE, FEB 21 (AFP): Singapore Airlines insisted Thursday that cameras on its planes’ entertainment systems had been disabled after an outcry online from worried passengers who spotted the tiny lenses peering at them.

Travellers took to Twitter and other social media to raise the alarm over the cameras at the bottom of seatback screens on a number of the Singapore flag carrier’s newer aircraft.

India’s coal power plants “unhealthiest” in world: Study



GENEVA, FEB 21 (PTI): China and the US may be the largest producers of coal power, but power plants in India take the highest toll in the world when it comes to health, a global study claims.

Coal-fired power plants produce more than just carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming, said researchers from ETH Zurich in Switzerland.

Coal burning also releases particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury -- thus damaging the health of many people around the world, they said.

To estimate where action is most urgently required, the researchers modelled and calculated the undesired side effects of coal power for each of the 7,861 power plant units in the world.

The results, published in the journal Nature Sustainability, show that China and the US are the two largest producers of coal power, but power plants in India

take the highest toll in the world when it comes to health.

Central Europe, North America and China all have modern power plants, but Eastern Europe, Russia and India still have many older power plants equipped with insufficient flue gas treatment, said Stefanie Hellweg from ETH Zurich’s Institute of Environmental Engineering, who led the study.

As a result, these power plants only remove a fraction of the pollutants -- while also often burning coal of inferior quality.

“More than half of the health effects can be traced back to just one-tenth of the power plants. These power plants should be upgraded or shut down as quickly as possible,” said Christopher Oberschelp, the lead author of the study.

The global picture of coal power production shows that the gap between privileged and disadvantaged regions

is widening. This is happening for two reasons.

Firstly, wealthy countries -- such as in Europe -- import high-quality coal with a high calorific value and low emissions of harmful sulphur dioxide.

The poorer coal-exporting countries such as Indonesia, Colombia and South Africa are left with low-quality coal, which they often burn in outdated power plants without modern flue gas treatment to remove the sulphur dioxide.

“In Europe, we contribute to global warming with our own power plants, which has a global impact. However, the local health damage caused by particulate matter, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide occurs mainly in Asia, where coal power is used to manufacture a large proportion of our consumer products,” said Oberschelp.

“Global coal resources will last for several hundred years, so the harmful emissions need to be limited politically. It is particularly important

to leave coal that is high in mercury and sulphur content in the ground,” said Oberschelp.

Researchers said reducing the negative health effects of coal power generation should be a global priority.

“But further industrialisation, especially in China and India, poses the risk of aggravating the situation instead,” they said.

The initial investment costs for the construction of a coal power plant are high, but the subsequent operating costs are low. Power plant operators thus have an economic interest in keeping their plants running for a long time, according to researchers.

“The best option is therefore to not build any new coal power plants. From a health and environment perspective, we should move away from coal and towards natural gas -- and in the long term, towards renewable energy sources,” said Oberschelp.



How Jackie Shroff, Bachchan helped Vijay Varma shape his character in 'Gully Boy'

JUSTIN RAO

MUMBAI, FEB 21 (PTI): Actor Vijay Varma says he has been quietly “waiting in the wings” for his big moment in the spotlight, which has finally arrived with Zoya Akhtar’s “Gully Boy”.

Though Vijay, 34, has appeared in films like “Chit-tagong”, “Pink” and “Monsoon Shootout”, his acting in the Zoya Akhtar-directed film is winning has brought him a lot critical acclaim.

In the film, Vijay plays Moeen, a brother-figure to Ranveer Singh’s Murad, a mechanic who moonlights as a carjacker by the night.

“When you are doing theatre and a play is happening, you are waiting in the wings for your entry. You enter and do your bit. I was in the wings, ready, with my costume on, knowing that now I will enter (the play). But sometimes I didn’t get that entry. With ‘Gully Boy’, it feels like this is the time I am entering the stage and doing my bit,” Vijay told PTI an interview.

Written by Zoya and Reema Kagti, with dialogues by Vijay Maurya, the film traces the journey of a Mumbai rapper’s rise against all odds.

For Vijay, playing Moeen meant looking for references from his life experiences and borrowing certain character traits from the actors he looks up to -- Jackie Shroff and Amitabh Bachchan.

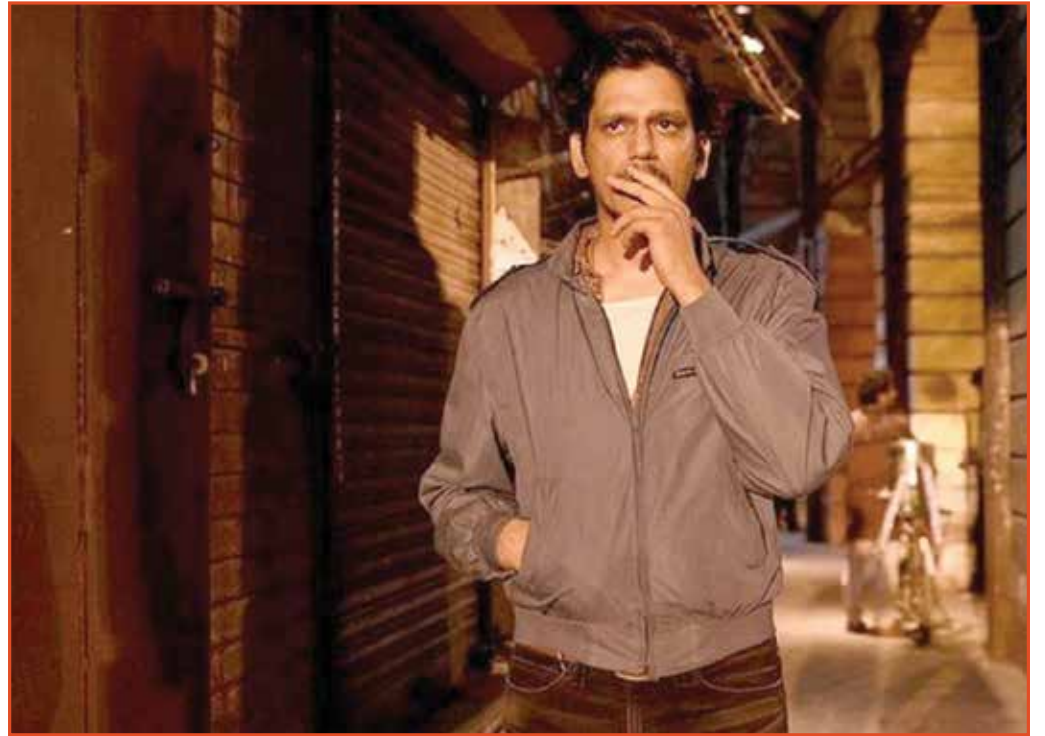
“I have hung around Jackie Shroff a lot and he is a great guy to chat with. The large heartedness of Moeen comes from ‘Bhidu’ (as Shroff is fondly called by fans), because he is so giving. He always looks after everyone. I used him as a reference point,” Vijay says.

“The swag comes from my love for Mr Bachchan. I don’t think it was in my or even Zoya’s mind. It was probably a very subconscious love for him and the movies at large.”

Vijay says he took “a lot of time” to figure out his character as there were nuances to Moeen, who oscillates between being a negative character as a drug dealer and carjacker to someone trying to get by against all odds.

“There were some qualities I could resonate with. He is a fun guy, who doesn’t carry the baggage of a tough life he might have definitely had. He has a lot of optimism, which even I do.”

To prepare for his role, Vijay met the rappers as it was important to understand the lingo.



about it. These little things came together.”

One of the most poignant sequences of “Gully Boy” involves Moeen and Murad having a conversation while the former is behind bars. Vijay says the scene has resonated with people across.

“I get messages asking, ‘Bail hua kya Moeen bhai ka? Main dega bail aapka!’”

The actor says the sequence was so powerful that the energy on the set was “emotionally-charged.”

“If there were no bars, we would probably be holding each other. I am glad there was a distance because Moeen wouldn’t like to expose his vulnerable side. I got emotional. He (Ranveer) was genuinely in tears, being empathetic to Moeen but Moeen is not used to that kind of affection towards him because he doesn’t have anyone in his life.”

“Gully Boy” has given Vijay a wider recognition and he hopes to continue doing good work even in his next projects, a web series written and produced by Imtiaz Ali and a film “Bamfaad”, which is presented by Anurag Kashyap.

Asked about the future of Moeen, Vijay has an interesting take.

“He will do the running around while he is young. But with age he might become someone like Murad’s father (played by Vijay Raaz).”

Will hand the movie back to the fans: Jason Reitman on his 'Ghostbuster' film

Los Angeles, Feb 21 (PTI): Director Jason Reitman has kicked up a social media storm after he said that he plans to hand over the reins of “Ghostbusters” franchise to its fans.

Reitman, whose directorial credits includes movies such as “Juno”, “Up in the Air” and most recently the political drama “The Front Runner”, had confirmed that he will be directing the latest installment of the famed franchise.

His 72-year-old father, Ivan Reitman, had directed the original “Ghostbuster” films which featured Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis as parapsychology professors who hunts ghosts. According to The Playlist, Reitman shared his vision about the project while appearing on the most recent episode of Bill Burr’s Monday Morning Podcast.

“I’m not making the ‘Juno’ of ‘Ghostbusters’ movies. We are in every way trying to go back to original technique and hand the movie back to the fans,” the director

said. Reitman said his take on the beloved franchise will be a love letter to the fans of “Ghostbusters”.

“I love this franchise. I grew up watching



it. I consider myself the first ‘Ghostbusters’ fan. I was like seven years old when that movie came out and I love it. I want to make a movie for my fellow ‘Ghostbusters’ fans.” He said he went into minute details of the original movies when he made the teaser for his upcoming film that released in January.

“We went back and found the original physical vinyl letters that they used to create

the Ghostbusters poster in 1984, (and) res-canned them, then our titles guys reprinted them and we filmed the titles. We shot physical titles with a light-and-smoke effect ‘cause that’s how they would have done it back in the day,” Reitman added. On social media, the 41-year-old director’s comments were seen as a potshot on the 2016 all-female Ghostbusters reboot that featured Melissa McCarthy, Leslie Jones, Kristen Wiig, Kate McKinnon, and Chris Hemsworth.

After backlash, Reitman tweeted an apology. “Wo, that came out wrong! I have nothing but admiration for Paul and Leslie and Kate and Melissa and Kristen and

the bravery with which they made ‘Ghostbusters’ 2016. They expanded the universe and made an amazing movie!” he wrote on the microblogging site. Reitman’s “Ghostbusters” film will hit the screens on July 10 next year. He is currently writing the screenplay for his film in collaboration with Gil Kenan. The director plans to start filming this summer and has begun the casting process for young names.



SASSY SALMA! The Drunk Parents actress, Salma Hayek, looks fabulous while attending the Gucci show during Milan Fashion Week.

Chris Hemsworth to play Hulk Hogan in new Netflix film

LOS ANGELES, FEB 21 (PTI): Actor Chris Hemsworth is all set to portray wrestling legend Hulk Hogan in a biographical drama for Netflix.

The film will be directed by “Hang-over” maker Todd Phillips, who is currently shooting for Joaquin Phoenix-starrer DC project “Joker”.

The script will be written by “8 Mile” scribe Scott Silver alongside John Pollo-nio, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

The film is expected to look into Hogan’s rise from the Florida wrestling circuit to becoming the face of the World Wrestling Federation in the 1980s where he squared off with villain Andre the Giant.

At his peak, Hogan graced the covers of magazines and headlined a Saturday morning cartoon. The term “Hulkamania” was coined in 1984, with Hogan referring to his legions of fans as “Hulkamaniacs” during in-

terviews. The film, however, will not delve into the legal battle between Hogan; Gawker Media and its founder, Nick Denton, over a sex tape that the online media company

published featuring the former WWE star.

The lawsuit had resulted in a USD 140 million judgment against Gawker and led to the outlet’s subsequent bankruptcy.

The project will be produced by Michael Sugar through his Sugar23’s first-look

Netflix deal along with Joint Efforts’ Phillips and Bradley Cooper, Eric Bischoff, and Hemsworth.

Hogan will also executive produce along with Sugar23’s Ashley Zalta. Steve Desmond and Michael Sherman will serve as co-producers. Hemsworth is currently awaiting the release of his Marvel tentpole “Avengers: Endgame”. The actor will also feature “Men in Black” reboot, titled “Men in Black: International”.



ARIES: Today may find you at a crossroads, Ram: You could be obsessing on a past wrong, OR you might finally feel ready to let it go. While the second choice sounds like the quicker fix, make sure you’re not bolting out of frustration. A standoff between the moon and “wounded healer” Chiron could reveal some not-so-deeply buried feelings! **TAURUS:** Has the stress been getting to you, Taurus? Your stalwart sign is usually cool under pressure, but lately tension may have been creeping toward an untenable level. Before you lose your temper or get sick, take action on the self-care front. Today’s stars signal the need to limit interaction with toxic people—colleagues AND friends—and to load up on antioxidant vitamins and immune-boosting herbs to stay strong.

GEMINI: Things getting a little too samey at work? Your quicksilver sign needs variety to stay stimulated, but if no one else is mixing it up, it may fall to you to start the conga line. Go ahead, Gemini, disrupt the status quo and introduce a possible new direction for a project—or maybe an app that can im-

prove everyone’s workflow.

CANCER: What goes around comes around, and if you’ve been dishing out advice, you could get a taste of your own medicine. Today’s face-off between your ruler, the moon, and the healing comet Chiron holds up a mirror. What you see might make you a little uncomfortable at first. Should someone decide to give you a piece of their mind, don’t reflexively retreat into your protective shell.

LEO: Don’t jump to conclusions today, Leo, or you could wind up with egg on your mane. Things are not what they seem thanks to an opposition of the shadowy moon and Chiron, the healing comet, in your expansive and candid ninth house. People may actually be going to great lengths to disguise their motives or cover their tracks, so your best sleuthing efforts could be in vain.

VIRGO: The day is off to an energetic start with the moon beaming in Virgo. Take advantage of this momentum to get a project off the ground or to catch up with favorite people you’ve been too busy to see. And

thanks to a boost from Venus, you’ll be in your creative and flirtatious element. Turn up the heat on any simmering chemistry and see what “lab notes” this experiment yields. **LIBRA:** If you feel like you’re forcing yourself to be productive, just stop and take a breather. With the moon in your sleepy twelfth house, your time is best spent tying up loose ends, not initiating new projects. Revel in the company of people who understand comfortable silence—and maybe listen to some meditative music while working so you don’t reflexively start chatting while you’re all whirling away on tasks. Keep your schedule as light as possible and plan to head directly home to Chateau Libra for some chilling “me time.”

SCORPIO: Making time for friends isn’t “blowing off work,” Scorpio; it’s actually part of your success strategy. So if you thought you might tuck away to play catch-up, rethink that plan. A convivial mashup of the moon and Venus puts you in your social element. You’d be far better off joining your coworkers for a lunch break or going to see a friend’s show to-

night. You never know who will be in attendance—and honestly, maybe you just need to give your brain a little rest. Rule of the day: Prioritize people over paperwork! **SAGITTARIUS:** You’re in your charismatic element today, Sagittarius, as the moon and convivial Venus blend their energies on your behalf. On the average day, it’s easy for you to capture the leading edge with your broad-minded ideas and natural enthusiasm. But today, what will really “sell” people is your keep-it-real personality. That means you can drop the agenda and save the pitch for next week—phew! All you have to do is get to know people for who they really are!

CAPRICORN: With vivacious Venus in your sign since February 3, you’ve been acquiring greater fluency in the language of love. Today, you can start practicing a few of those phrases (spoken and unspoken) as the Virgo moon chimes in from your worldly ninth house. Whether you’re waiting at the office elevator bank or out meeting friends for a drink, you could get weak in the knees

for a cutie from a different culture. Coupled Capricorns, a change of scenery will be the perfect backdrop for romance.

AQUARIUS: If you’ve fallen out of touch with a close friend, don’t let any more time pass before reaching out. Maybe it’s true that they “owe” you a phone call. But keeping score is probably keeping you away from someone you truly cherish. Today’s sentimental moon-Venus trine helps you shed a layer of your protective barrier.

PISCES: Even if you’re feeling like the thirstiest person on the planet, Pisces, play it cool. You may feel an urgency to say—or do—something a little forward, but the timing is off. One of your most charming assets is your ability to fall in love with people’s potential. But as a result, you can also project qualities onto these “promising prospects” that don’t actually exist. Today, you’re better off giving yourself a reality check before getting further involved. Ask yourself this: If nothing were to change with this person or situation, could I still be happy? If the answer is yes, begin exploring...slowly.