



**WORLD'S LARGEST
CONCERT PIANO STRIKES
CHORD IN LATVIA**

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**SELLING SEX: WONDER WOMAN
AND THE ANCIENT FANTASY
OF HOT LADY WARRIORS**

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KNIGHT IN FRAY FOR 'VENOM'
SEQUEL DIRECTING JOB**

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Centre rushes 10,000 troops to Kashmir

NEW DELHI, JUL 27 (PTI): The Centre has ordered rushing of about 10,000 central forces personnel to the Kashmir valley in order to strengthen counter-insurgency operations and law and order duties there, officials said Saturday.

They said the Union home ministry has ordered the deployment of 100 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) on July 25 on an "immediate" basis.

Officials said that 100 more companies are expected to be sent to the valley. One CAPF company comprises about 100 personnel.

The latest units will be drawn from the CRPF (50 companies), SSB (30) and ITBP and BSF will contribute 10 each, they said. The ministry has said that these personnel will be deployed to strengthen the counter-insurgency grid and law and order duties in the Kashmir Valley, they said. They are being air lifted and sent by trains, officials said.

It is understood that the new units will reinforce the strength of the security forces already present in the valley who are conducting the annual Amarnath Yatra and carrying out counter-terrorism operations daily, they added.

The troops will be addition to about 65 regular battalions of the Central Reserve Police Force in the valley and over 20 other battalions of other forces deployed to conduct the yatra that will end on August 15.

One CAPF battalion has about 1,000 personnel. The new strength of the troops will also help in the conduct of the assembly polls in the state that are expected to be held in some time, they said.

Bihar flood situation grim, 85 lakh affected

PATNA, JUL 27 (PTI): The flood situation in Bihar remained grim with 85.60 lakh people in 1,253 panchayats being under the grip of the deluge, even as the toll stayed at 127 with no fresh deaths being reported on Saturday, officials said.

Among the 13 districts affected by the deluge, Sitamarhi and Madhubani were the worst-affected with 37 and 30 deaths respectively.

The number of flood-hit panchayats rose from 1,243 on Friday to 1,253 on Saturday. The number of blocks affected by the floods also rose by five taking the figure 111 on Saturday, the state disaster management department said.

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CM UNDERLINES PARTY'S ONE MAN-ONE POST POLICY

Will remain either CM or party president after budget session: Golay

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 JUL:

Chief Minister, PS Tamang [Golay] today indicated that he might be resigning from the post of Chief Minister or the post of party president since the party believes in 'one man one post'. He also said that this year the occasion is being celebrated under the banner of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and from next year onwards Chaalak Diwas will be celebrated by the state government.

The Chaalak Diwas programme was organized today by the Drivers front of SKM at Singhihang Ground, Namchi in South Sikkim.

Addressing the gathering, Mr Tamang said that after the Budget session, the central executive committee of the party will hold a meeting to decide his fate.

The Budget session of the State Legislative Assembly is scheduled to begin from 29 July.



On the opposition Sikkim Democratic Front's claim that the SKM Government cannot pass the Budget since it is a minority government, Mr Tamang challenged the opposition to stop the SKM

Government from passing the state budget.

He said that SKM with its 15 MLAs has more than 50% of total number of 29 MLAs.

Mentioning that SKM's position on issues will not change from

what it says here in the State to what it will pursue with the Centre, the CM said that SKM had promised support to BJP at the national level regardless of who forms the government at the Centre. "SDF used to rename

centrally sponsored schemes to make it appear like a state scheme. We will not do that," said the CM.

Regarding drivers, the CM said that the government will educate 2 children of every driver, as promised in the SKM manifesto.

"In Feb 2013 we gave the title 'Guruji' to drivers because they are an integral part of the society. Everyone needs them. In order to honour the hard work of drivers we had decided to celebrate Chaalak Diwas," he said.

SKM spokesperson, Jacob Khaling said that the opposition is trying to instigate the public and create communal tension by saying that SKM is going to make a Bhutia or Lepcha Chief Minister. Any Sikkimese from any community who is capable of serving the public and has the people's trust can be the CM, he added.

Sikkim's 4 shuttlers to train at Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 JUL:

Four shuttlers from Sikkim have been selected for a fortnight-long National Level Summer Badminton Coaching Camp at the renowned Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy, Bengaluru. The camp is being organised by Badminton

Association of India from 01 to 16 Aug. 2019.

It is informed that Badminton Association of Sikkim [BAS] had conducted selection camps at all four districts to send players from Sikkim to the camp.

After the selection camps, BAS is finally sending Topzang Lep-

cha and Navin Pradhan in U-13 category and Asim Chettri and Brinda Gadaily in U-15 category to this national coaching camp.

They will be escorted by BAS chief coordinator, David G Lingdong to the camp. The shuttlers are scheduled to leave on 30 July.

1,050 passengers on Mahalaxmi Express rescued amid rain fury near Mumbai

MUMBAI, JUL 27 (PTI): In a multi-agency operation involving the NDRF, Navy, Air Force and Army, all 1,050 passengers on board the Mahalaxmi Express were rescued on Saturday, 17 hours after it got marooned due to floodwaters near Mumbai amid heavy downpour.

Central Railway officials said all the passengers, including nine pregnant women and a one-month-old girl, had been rescued by 3 pm.

The train left Mumbai for Kolhapur in western Maharashtra on Friday night, but could not travel beyond Wangani in Thane district, around 65 km from Mumbai, where it

reached in the wee hours of Saturday. Heavy rains since Friday had caused a flood-like situation in Badlapur and Wangani in Thane district. The Ulhas river near Badlapur breached its banks, leading to water-logging in many areas.

After the train was held up between Badlapur and Wangani, two teams each of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) were rushed from Mumbai and Pune with nine boats, an official release said.

The teams reached the spot about 9.40 am even as personnel of the Navy and Indian Air

Force were also drafted in for the rescue operation.

Specialist divers of the Navy and two Mi-17 helicopters of the IAF were also pressed into ser-



vice. Two columns of Army with 130 trained staff carrying food packages, water and rescue material were also deployed.

turn to pg02

CM visits Maniram Peri Gumpa and Sai Mandir



NAMCHI, 27 JUL (IPR):

Chief Minister, PS Tamang (Golay) visited Maniram Peri Gumpa at Maniram Bhanjyang today. The Chief Minister offered his prayers and sought blessings. Thereafter, the Chief Minister also interacted with the public of the locality.

Present amongst others were managing committee of the Gumpa headed by Sonam Tshering Lama (Head Loben) along with Tulku Tenzing Lungto Phelge, members of Sai Samiti and local gentry.

Cabinet Ministers, Sonam Lama, LN Sharma,

MN Sherpa, Karma Loday Bhutia, Bhim Hang Limboo, MLAs, Advisors and other dignitaries also offered their obeisance.

The CM also visited Shirdi Sai Baba temple at Assangthang wherein he extended his prayers and interacted with the Mandir committee. He also visited Assangthang Secondary School and inaugurated school level football tournament for upcoming 73rd Independence Day celebration. During his brief halt at the school he inspected, met and had an interactive session with the teachers and students.

Hunger relief group to send relief material to flood-hit Assam

BENGALURU, JUL 27 (PTI): An international hunger relief organisation will send 10,000 dry uncooked meals, 100 family kits, including hygiene supplies and 300 packets of millet nutria bars, to help the flood-affected people of Assam.

Flooding in Assam has killed 80 people. Around 27.15 lakh people in 2,078 villages of 17 districts have been affected by the deluge.

The Rise Against Hunger India (RAHI) has said Assam's Dhubri and Barpeta districts are the worst affected with over 22 lakh people losing everything.

"These families have to be supported so that

they have immediate succour and also essential items to sustain themselves until normalcy is restored," it said.

The RAHI said there is a great need for relief material in the state, especially in Barpeta.

After an initial assessment, the organisation has decided to send 10,000 dry uncooked meals, 100 family kits (containing essential items and hygiene supplies) and 300 packets of millet nutria bars, said Dola Mohapatra, Executive Director, the RAHI.

"While villages closer to major roads have been benefitted by assistance from various sources,

turn to pg02

AIIMS doctors wear black badges to work in protest against NMC Bill

NEW DELHI, JUL 27 (PTI): Resident doctors and students at the AIIMS here wore black badges to work on Saturday in a symbolic protest against the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill which, they alleged, was “anti-poor”.

Doctors and medical students across the country have been opposing the Bill, which was introduced in Lok Sabha on July 22 by Health and Family Welfare Minister Harsh Vardhan.

Residents doctors of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) were seen wearing black badges in ICUs, emergency block, wards and operation theatres on Saturday.

Protests were being organised in various parts of the country against the Bill on the call of the Indian Medical Association (IMA).

As part of the protest action, copies of the proposed legislation were burnt outside the IMA headquarters in Delhi and its 1,700 branch offices on July 25, while students in many medical colleges observed hunger strike.

The IMA will hold a “Delhi Andolan” on July 29, which includes a march by the medical fraternity from Nirman Bhavan to Jantar Mantar, to demonstrate the imperative need for amendments in the Bill.

The march will culminate in a Chhatra Sansad (students’ parliament), IMA national president Santanu Sen said earlier.

The association has said the government failed to address concerns raised by the medical fraternity.

The Bill, if passed in its present form, will only legalise quackery by empowering the community health providers to practice medicine, endangering the lives of people, it has alleged.

It claimed that under the new legislation medical education in the country will become expensive, placing the lower socio-economic groups in great disadvantage.

The Bill provides for setting up of a National Medical Commission (NMC) in place of the Medical Council of India (MCI) and repeal of the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956.

The Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA) has also threatened to launch a nationwide indefinite stir in protest against the Bill.

It has written to President Ram Nath Kovind urging him to advise the central government to withdraw the “black law”.

NPS wins ARCEIS Inter-School Football Tourney

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 27 JUL:

Namchi Public School boys’ team has won the ARCEIS (Association of Roman Catholic Educational Institutions in Sikkim) Inter-School ‘CD’ Division Football Tournament, a press release informs. This year’s tournament was organized by NPS at its football ground. The NPS team remained unbeaten throughout the tournament.

The independent panel of referees chose NPS team’s Adith Rai as the Most Valuable Player of the tournament. Don Bosco School, Malbasey, was the First Runner-up and St Mary’s Convent School, Gyalshing, was the Second Runner-up.

The other team in the



tournament was St Xavier’s School, Pakyong. In the first semifinal, NPS defeated SMS, Gyalshing, by three goals to nil and in the other semi final, DBS defeated SXS by two goals to nil.

In the finals, NPS beat

DBS by three goals to one.

NPS Principal, Rev Fr Stany Sequeira, welcomed and thanked the players, coaches, managers and the School Principals, for making this tournament a great success. The Director of NPS, Rev Fr George

A D’Souza, gave away the trophies to the winners.

NPS had won the ‘AB’ Division a fortnight back. Many budding players from NPS have been selected by different football teams across India and one of them, Master Justinma-

ni L Rai, has been selected to play in U-12 Singa Cup 2019, to be held in November in Singapore. He happens to be the only player from the entire Northeast to get selected for this prestigious international football tournament.

Athing Rai Bahadur & TD Densapa Memorial football tourney



SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 27 JUL:

The 24th Athing Rai Bahadur & TD Densapa Memorial Independence Open Football Tournament kicked off at Bermiok Tokal Senior Secondary School playground under Temi-Namphing constituency in South Sikkim on Friday.

The tournament has 26 teams from different parts of Sikkim and North Bengal and carries cash prize of Rs 1 lakh to the winner and Rs 60,000

to the runners-up.

Minister of Roads & Bridges Department, Samdup Lepcha was present as the chief guest of the inaugural match. In the inaugural match, JVC Singtam outplayed Reshyap Boys 5-1.

In his inaugural address, the Minister stressed that the young generation should engage in sports to live a healthy and productive life.

Mr Lepcha urged them to take inspiration from the pride of Sikkim

and the country, Bhaichung Bhutia to achieve success. He also assured to work on the demands placed by the people of the area.

Likewise, the Chief Patron of Independence Day Celebration Committee, TN Densapa mentioned that this annual Independence Day football tournament in memory of his beloved father was started with an aim to promote local talents and football in the region.

Bengal Cong divided over Mamata call on return to ballots



KOLKATA, JUL 27 (PTI): The Congress in West Bengal is divided on the issue of whether to support Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s call to return to ballot papers in panchayat and municipal polls with one section apprehensive that the ruling TMC might rig the elections.

A majority of the state Congress leadership including MLAs has openly expressed its opposition on the issue.

However, the section which is in minority feels that the party should side with the TMC on the issue to corner BJP in the state.

The central Congress leadership has time and again raised questions over the functioning of EVMs during polls.

“The most important thing in Bengal is free and fair elections. Since the TMC came to power,

elections in Bengal have never been held in a free and fair manner. The TMC has never allowed polls to be held properly. If ballot papers are now used, the TMC would rig the entire elections as it did during the panchayat polls,” state Congress president Somen Mitra said on Saturday.

On the issue of EVMs, he said there have been apprehensions about their functioning.

“But it does not mean that we would want to return to ballots entirely in the days to come.

“At first, the state government should ensure free and fair elections and then talk about returning to ballot papers,” he said.

Leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha Adhir Chowdhury criticised Banerjee and said Bengal has not forgotten what

the TMC has done during last Lok Sabha polls.

“We have not forgotten that she (Mamata Banerjee) had rigged the last panchayat polls in the state and more than 35 per cent seats were won uncontested,” he told PTI.

Chowdhury was referring to the 2018 panchayat polls in the state, which witnessed widespread violence and allegations of malpractice.

The view of the Congress was echoed by CPI(M) which too felt the return of ballots would only help the TMC to “loot” the elections.

“The return of ballots would only help TMC to loot the polls in the days to come. We want elections to be held in a free and fair manner,” CPI(M) central committee member Sujana Chakraborty said.

IAF gets first batch of 4 Apache attack helicopters from US

NEW DELHI, JUL 27 (PTI): US aerospace major Boeing on Saturday handed over the first four of the 22 Apache attack helicopters to the Indian Air Force while another batch of four choppers will be delivered next week. The delivery of the first batch of the AH-64E Apache helicopters to the IAF at the Hindan air base came nearly four years after a multi-billion dollar deal for the choppers was sealed.

Boeing said the first batch of the Apaches arrived in India and an additional four choppers will be delivered to the IAF next week. “The eight choppers will then move to the Pathankot Air Force station for their formal induction by the IAF, in September,” it said.

The AH-64E Apache is one of the world’s most advanced multi-role combat helicopters, and is flown by the US Army.

The IAF had signed a

multi-billion dollar contract with the US government and Boeing Ltd in September 2015 for 22 Apache helicopters.

Additionally, the Defence Ministry in 2017 approved the procurement of six Apache helicopters along with weapons systems from Boeing at a cost of Rs 4,168 crore for the Army. This will be its first fleet of attack choppers. Senior IAF officials said the addition the Apache fleet will significantly enhance the force’s combat capabilities as the chopper has been customised to suit IAF’s future requirements.

“The arrival of the Apaches, ahead-of-schedule, validates Boeing’s commitment to delivering on its promise of modernising India’s defence forces. Boeing has ensured high rate of mission readiness and increased operational capabilities through its current partnerships with the IAF,” Boeing said in a statement.

Repair of old bridge at Singtam resumes



YOGEN THATAL
SINGTAM, 27 JUL:

Repair work on the old

metal bridge at Singtam has resumed after being halted due to the elections.

Awareness for parents about MR vaccination



WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 27 JUL:

A meeting was convened with parents today regarding the measles-rubella (MR) vaccination campaign to be held at Springdale School, Dikchu in East Sikkim. The MR vaccination campaign will be held under Primary Health Centre, Dikchu.

The meeting started with the welcome address delivered by Vice

Principal of the School, Mercy Tamang while teacher of the school, Nima Choden Lepcha highlighted the importance of vaccination and its advantages.

It may be mentioned that the consent of parents is necessary before administering vaccination as skepticism among parents regarding the vaccine has been a major hurdle in some schools.

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Hunger relief...

people in the remote villages of Barpeta are suffering as they are out of immediate sight,” he said.

“In Assam, Dhubri and Barpeta are the worst affected with 742 and 660 villages being submerged in the waters respectively and over 22 lakhs people losing everything,” Mohapatra added.

Bihar flood...

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar reviewed the floods situation in north Bihar and the drought-like situation elsewhere with his deputy Sushil Kumar Modi and other cabinet colleagues besides top administrative officials.

Interacting with the district magistrates concerned through video conferencing, the chief minister told them to assess the damage to property and crops in the flood-affected areas and provide relief to the people.

The government is providing ex gratia of Rs 4 lakh to the next of the kin of each of the deceased and all flood-affected families are getting an assistance of Rs 6,000 through direct cash transfer system.

As many as 885 community kitchens are being run by the state government in the flood-hit areas and over 6,000 people have taken shelter in eight relief camps, the disaster management department said, adding food, medicines and other relief material are being distributed in marooned areas.

Two IAF helicopters have been pressed into service for air-dropping of relief materials in inaccessible areas, the department said.

However, there were reports of people staging protests against inadequate distribution of relief.

In Muzaffarpur district, women from Jamalpur Kodayat panchayat picketed the office of the Circle Officer of Gaighat to protest against unavailability of boats, sources said.

Six rivers originating in Nepal have been flowing above the danger mark in Bihar for nearly three weeks ever since catchment areas in the adjoining country witnessed torrential rainfall.

1,050 passengers...

Many passengers were rescued through inflatable boats of the NDRF, while others were carried on the shoulders of the rescue personnel. Some waded across the flooded tracks on their own.

Passengers held on to hope even as lights had gone out in the train and there was no communication from the railways initially. Mobile phone batteries had died, or poor network made them useless, some passengers said.

Union Minister for Home Affairs Amit Shah and Minister of State Nityanand Rai closely monitored the situation, a central government release said.

“Teams of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Navy, Air Force, Army, Railways and state administration rescued all the passengers,” Shah tweeted. “Kudos to the rescue teams for their exemplary effort,” he said.

Chief spokesperson of the Central Railway Sunil Udasi said a special train with 19 coaches will leave from Kalyan to Kolhapur, carrying passengers of the stranded train.

Officials involved in the rescue operation said nine pregnant women and a one-month-old baby girl among the passengers were also safe.

Local villagers also helped in the rescue effort, said Additional Commissioner of Police, Kalyan, Datta Karale.

**~ SummitTIMES ~
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GENERAL INFORMATION

This is for general information of all concerned that Hotel Parasol Residency, Panihouse, Deorali East Sikkim shall remain closed for a period of six months for carrying out necessary repairs. All concerned tour operators and clients are requested to refrain from booking or deal with any sort with regard to Hotel Parasol Residency, Panihouse, Deorali, East Sikkim.

**Mr. Subash Lama
Proprietor
Hotel Parasol Residency,
Panihouse, Deorali, East Sikkim**

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Nagaland govt forms panel to frame modalities RIIN modalities

KOHIMA, JUL 27 (PTI): The Nagaland government on Saturday constituted a commission to frame the modalities of creating the Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN), officials said.

The RIIN, a register of all the indigenous inhabitants of the state, is required to prevent issuance of indigenous inhabitant certificates to ineligible persons, officials said.

A notification on setting up of the panel to develop the modalities was issued on Saturday, after the administration held meetings with tribal bodies, civil societies and non-Naga communities of the state. It was decided at the meetings that the policies and modalities of preparing the RIIN would be framed and made public before the actual enumeration begins.

The notification said the Commission would recommend the eligibility criteria to be an indigenous inhabitant, the documents to be acceptable as proof for being an indigenous inhabitant, the manner in which the exercise is to be carried out and any other issue relating to implementation of the RIIN.

The panel would submit its report within three months. The Commission would be headed by retired chief secretary Banuo Z Jamir as chairman and T Kiheto Sema and S Chingwang Konyak as members. Justice (Retd) Zelde Angami will function as the advisor to the Commission. The home commissioner and commissioner Nagaland will be ex-officio members of the panel. The Nagaland government began the process of preparing the RIIN on July 10.

The RIIN would provide protection to genuine citizens who are permanent settlers of Nagaland and non-Nagas will not be harassed during preparation of the list of indigenous citizens, Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio had said.

304 shuttlers rally it out at 30th State Badminton C'ship

SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 27 JUL:

A total of 304 shuttlers are competing in the 30th edition of Sikkim State Badminton Championship 2019 here at the Indoor Gymnasium Hall of Paljor Stadium Complex.

The six-day long championship is being organised by the Badminton Association of Sikkim and while it got underway on 25 July, the official inaugural ceremony was held on Saturday with Secretary, Animal Husbandry Department, Dr RK Tamang, as the Chief Guest.

The opening ceremony was also attended by Sikkim Olympic Association president, BK Roka, and BAS president, C Zangpo, among other dignitaries.

In his inaugural address, the chief guest conveyed his best wishes



es to all the players and appreciated the efforts of BAS in continuously organising the state championship and other activities to promote local players at higher levels.

The chief guest and other guests also handed over medals, certificates and cash prizes to winners of the day in the U-11, U-13 and U-15 categories.

BAS general secretary, Sukanta Das, informs that 304 shuttlers from all four districts and 50 schools are participating in the championship.

The championship has a total of 27 events from U-11 to Veterans [60 plus] categories and carries a total cash prize Rs 2.5 lakh along with medals, trophies

and certificates.

He mentioned that the selection committee of BAS will also select players from this tournament to represent Sikkim at the upcoming North East Zonal and other national level tournaments.

Dr Das mentioned that BAS was also preparing to host the North East Zonal Badminton

Championship from 16 to 19 September. Sikkim will be hosting this championship for the fourth time. It has been eight years since the State last hosted the event.

Speaking on some new initiatives of BAS, he informed that the association has started State-ranking tournaments.

Kunzang excited about upcoming Goa Pro-League season

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 26 JUL:

Sikkimese footballer Kunzang Norbu Lachungpa is all set to play in the Goa Pro League 2019-20 scheduled to be held from 22 August 2019 to January 2020. The league is being organised by the Goa Football Association.

A 25 year old Kunzang uses his towering height well playing as a goalkeeper for Goa-based Churchill Brothers.

While speaking to SummitTimes, Kunzang shared his excitement over getting a chance to play in the Goa league as he looks forward to his team's first match scheduled for 22 August.

Kunzang started playing in earnest in 2003 from Enchey school ground and became part of Enchey School's under-14 team in 2004. He made it to the Sikkim state squad in 2007



and was taken under the Sports Authority of India wings in 2008 and coached in Namchi.

He is grateful for the nurture received under his coach there at the time, Puspa Gurung.

Kunzang has moved through many clubs, growing in experience and confidence over the years and thanks his family, especially his parents, for their constant support and indulgence.

As trial moves at snail's pace, four turtles await release



RAJNANDGAON, JUL 27 (PTI): Thanks to the turtle-like pace of the criminal justice system, four turtles are living in watery imprisonment in Chhattisgarh's Rajnandgaon district for the last four years.

These amphibians, who form evidence in a case under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, are in the custody of the forest department since 2015.

Six persons were arrested and turtles were recovered from their possession in Basantpur police station limits in the district in 2015.

Rajesh Sahu, Station

House Officer, Basantpur, said under the Wildlife Protection Act, capture, possession, consumption or trade of turtles is illegal. The accused were going to use the turtles for black magic rituals as they are believed to bring good luck and wealth, he said.

After a charge sheet was filed, the court directed that the forest department should take care of the turtles till the trial is over as they form evidence, Sahu said.

The accused were later released on bail.

"The turtles have been kept in an aquarium in a forest depot at

Rajnandgaon," said Divisional Forest Officer Pan-kaj Rajput.

"As soon as we get permission from the court, they will be released into their natural habitat," he added. Mansoor Khan, a Bilaspur-based wildlife activist, questioned the decision to restrict their freedom so that the law could take its own course.

"The forest department should seek the court's permission to release the turtles in their natural habitat. It does not make sense to keep them in captivity when the accused are roaming free," he said.

Golay reduced sporting event to political meet: SDF

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 JUL:

Sikkim Democratic Front has pulled up Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] for the extremely political speech he delivered at Khamdong yesterday, reducing a sports event into a party meeting. Mr Tamang, it may be recalled, was present as chief guest for the second day of the State Boxing Championship at Sonamati Memorial Senior Secondary School playground at Khamdong yesterday.

An SDF press release issued by its spokesperson, JB Darnal, then goes on to contest statements and assurances made by the CM in his address

The announcement that salary arrears of government employees will be released in a single installment after the budget session, the release highlights, sought to convey that it was a favour the CM was dispensing when, in fact, the arrears were the right of govt employees.

The release regrets that the CM touched

neither upon boxing nor shared any specifics about the state government's policy on sports and states that this saddened all sports-lovers.

The CM's speech has proven that the SKM government does not have any programme for sports and sportspersons, the release states.

In his 30 minute long speech, the CM did not address people's issue but spent the entire time accusing the opposition party and about himself, the release adds.

The release goes on to state that except announcing a holiday for every Saturday, the CM has not fulfilled any other promise made in the election manifesto.

The release also scoffs at the new government's claims on austerity measures by question the austerity in purchasing a fleet of new Scorpios in the name of austerity and undertaking extensive repairs and renovations at Circuit House by refusing to reside in Mintokgang, the official residence of CMs.

Mamata calls meeting of TMC MLAs, functionaries to discuss 2021 assembly poll strategy

KOLKATA, JULY 27 (PTI):

In a bid to revamp the party organisation ahead of the 2021 assembly polls in West Bengal and discuss its strategy for it, the Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee has called a meeting of party MLAs and functionaries here early next week, a senior party leader said on Saturday.

"Our party supremo has called a meeting of party MLAs on July 29 where she will give us a roadmap for 2021 state assembly polls," a senior TMC MLA said.

Suggestions of the poll strategist Prashant Kishor and his team for

regaining lost ground would also be discussed at the meeting, the leader said.

According to TMC sources, efforts to be taken to plug the loopholes both in the party and the government would be discussed.

The BJP has scripted a spectacular rise in West Bengal in the Lok Sabha polls clinching 18 of the state's 42 seats, just four less than TMC.

Miffed over party's dismal performance, the TMC had approached Kishor for suggestions for a turnaround in the next assembly polls in the state.

67 pc votes cast in Tripura panchayat polls, oppn parties cry foul

AGARTALA, JUL 26 (PTI): An estimated 67.16 per cent votes were till 3 pm cast in the three-tier panchayat elections in Tripura, which passed off peacefully on Saturday, an election department official said. Polls were held in only 15 per cent of the total seats as 85 per cent seats have already been won by the ruling BJP unopposed.

Opposition parties said BJP workers intimidated their voters from Friday night and did not allow them to exercise their franchise, a charge denied by the saffron party.

"Elections passed off peacefully and 67.16 per cent votes were recorded till 3 pm. Since ballot papers were used, it would take some more time to get the final percentage," State Election Commissioner G K Rao said.

Polls were held in 833 gram panchayat seats, 82 panchayat samiti seats and 79 zilla parishad seats, SEC Secretary Prasenjit Bhattacharya said. There are a total of 6,111 gram panchayat seats, 419 panchayat samiti seats and 116 zilla parishad seats in Tripura.

The SEC official said the BJP has won 5,652 seats of the total 6,646 gram panchayat, panchayat samity and zilla parishad seats unopposed.

Additional Inspector General of Police (Law and order), Subrata Chakraborty, said elections were peaceful and no major incident of violence

was reported from any part of the state during the polls. However, the opposition Congress has alleged that the rural poll was reduced to a farce by the BJP activists and their party sponsored goons. "From Friday evening the BJP sponsored goons started intimidating our supporters. They also did not allow our supporters to cast their votes. The election was reduced to a farce," state Congress vice-president Tapas Dey claimed.

The BJP won 85 per cent seats uncontested because its workers did not allow to file nomination to the opposition party nominees, he alleged.

CPI(M) state committee member Pabitra Kar alleged that the BJP workers intimidated the voters from the previous night and did not allow a large section of voters to go the polling stations for casting votes. "I didn't find any long queue of voters before the booths. They started threatening our supporters with dire consequences from last evening if they turned up in the booths to vote," he claimed. "We are compiling the data of the incidents of intimidation and attacks and shall lodge complaints to police," Kar told reporters. BJP spokesperson Nabendu Bhattacharya denied the charges saying the people came out to vote with enthusiasm.

Candidates of the opposition parties did not file nomination as they have 'lost their support base', he said.

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TENDER NOTICE

Tender No: 117/CHSO

Date: 24/7/19

Online tenders are invited from eligible manufacturers/ authorized dealers for the supply of Generic Drugs, Medicines & Consumables to the Central Health Stores Organization, Government of Sikkim, for the financial year 2019-20.

The Bid should be submitted online in the website <https://www.sikkimtender.gov.in> for which, the bidder should have the necessary portal enrollment with his/ her own Digital Signature Certificate (DSC).

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Additional Director
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dt. 24.7.2019

Migrating People

Understand why rural Sikkim wants to move to urban settings. And plan for it

There has been frequent talk of rural-urban migration in Sikkim and efforts, on the lips and on paper, have been underway for a while now to contain it. It would be wonderful if disruptions or cessations of traditional ways of life could be stopped and people allowed environments in to pursue their ambitions and dreams in surroundings they are familiar with; but that, anyone will attest, is an impossible task. Things change, and even when the change is for the “better”, it requires adjustments and sacrifices, with migration being one of the options that many have to take.

Any effort to contain rural-to-urban migration would obviously require a clearer understanding of the causes. It is common to find poverty held up as the main reason prompting people to migrate to cities, a notion transmitted through the caricature renditions of the plight of the poor in mass-entertainment products. It is a believable explanation, but latest data available on migration in India does not hold up this belief. The poor are invariably temporary migrants, shipping out for temporary jobs and as seasonal labour; the more permanent migration in pursuit of opportunities is a luxury which only the better heeled and the more educated enjoy. In most cases, this is human resource which “leaves home” to study and train does so because it can afford to, and, on many occasions, never returns. And then there is the eye-opening data contained in the report released by the National Sample Survey Office suggesting that a third of all Indians are migrants in their present place of residence! Though one in every three Indians is a migrant, they are not all products of rural-urban migration. Most are not escaping the “drudgery” of rural India, but are, in almost all cases, pursuing gainful employment. There is a difference. Within these are of course those who migrate for marriage [found to be the case in most ‘non-local’ women], or because they have been forced out either by natural disasters or “developmental” projects.

If Sikkim is serious about working on rural-urban migration, it should first understand the exact, and not generalised, reasons for it. Urban amenities might be desired, but cannot by themselves be taken as reasons why people abandon villages. Chasing employment could be a reason, but migration is relatively permanent and that requires complementing opportunities and not just desires to keep rural folk in urban addresses. A data that the country prefers not to unravel, but Sikkim could do well to study and understand, is migration triggered by changes in rural settings. In many instances, land - a people’s mooring to the place - is lost, and with this anchor lifted, moving away becomes an easier decision to contemplate. The loss of land could as much be due to acquisition for projects as it could be because of change in landuse patterns. If farms are no longer of a size which make them sustainable, or when the traditional crops no longer harvest on a scale that makes economic sense, a shift is necessitated. Of course, there is also the general desire of every parent to provide better education and opportunities for children if they can afford it, and these opportunities continue to be available almost exclusively in urban setting even in Sikkim. It would be desirable if these facilities could reach the villages too, but that does appear to be happening any time soon, so the pull of the urban areas will remain strong.

Urban planning will hence have to factor these realities into its projections for future years and this will require cross-disciplinary and inter-departmental coordination and planning on a scale that the State has not displayed an aptitude for thus far. Very soon, Sikkim, as the rest of the world, will also be looking at migrations forced by climate change as well and it will be advisable for the State to try and begin the processes to project possible scenarios and start adequate preparations for it. It is important to bear in mind that not all rural-urban migration can be stopped, but what can definitely be achieved is for the urban spaces to be planned better to not only accommodate ‘influx’, but also provide them with better basic facilities and more respectable opportunities.

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Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence.

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Selling sex: Wonder Woman and the Ancient Fantasy of Hot Lady Warriors

CHRISTIAN-GEORGES SCHWENTZEL
theconversation.com

When the film Wonder Woman is released in early June, it will surely join the blockbuster ranks of other recent comic book-inspired film franchises, including Batman, Superman, Spiderman, and X-Men. But that’s not just because it features a sword-wielding Gal Gadot in knee-high boots and a metal bodice.

Wonder Woman has long been a bestselling creation, originally imagined in 1941 by the psychologist William Moulton Marston, and the film follows some of the main plot lines developed in the comic books.

Wonder Woman is a superheroine known as Diana, princess of the Amazons, who is trained to be an unconquerable warrior. When an American pilot, Steve Trevor, crashes on the shores of her sheltered island paradise and tells tales of a massive conflict raging elsewhere, Diana leaves her home, convinced she can stop the threat.

Though Wonder Woman was portrayed as a feminist icon in the 1940s, she is also a highly sexual character.

We can only wonder – no pun intended! – about the reasons for this imagined link between war and female sexuality. As a sexy but fierce lady warrior, Wonder Woman is hardly alone. Throughout history, cultures across the globe have envisioned and revered the femme fatale, from feline killers to sensual goddesses to sassy spelunkers.

THE SUMERIAN “WONDER WOMAN”

In 3000 BC, in the ancient Sumerian city of Uruk in Mesopotamia, the first kings of human history ruled over the south of modern-day Iraq, protected by Ishtar, a great goddess of war and love often associated with lions.

Ishtar would reveal the kings’ enemies and accompany them to the battlefield. It was said that she fought like an unleashed lioness protecting her young – in this case, the Sumerian people. Like Wonder Woman, Ishtar’s sacred duty was to defend the world.

She could also be sensual. More than merely worship the goddess, the Kings of Uruk claimed to be Ishtar’s lovers, who, according to royal hymns of the

era, would enter her bed and “plow the divine vulva”.

For the king, receiving sexual and military favours from a goddess served his political agenda, legitimised his reign and made him into an exceptional hero for his people. In the Wonder Woman film, this role is filled by the American pilot.

References to divine lovemaking are also found among ancient Palestinians, Babylonians, though scholars can’t confirm what was really going on in those temples.

CAT GIRLS FROM SEKHMET

What’s more sexy than a powerful woman? Taming her, of course.

In ancient Egypt, the most fearsome goddess was named Sekhmet. Like Ishtar, she had two sides – fierce beast and loving companion.

Sekhmet was often portrayed as a terrible lioness, the butcher of the Pharaoh’s enemies. At times, though, she would transform into an adorable cat named Bastet.

Today, the feline is still symbolic of female sexuality. Catwoman, another comic book heroine, was born a few months before Wonder Woman (not that a lady reveals her age) and is the most contemporary avatar of a feline woman.

With her curves and her bondage fetish, Catwoman has always been hypersexual, though some critics regret that her sexuality – not her intelligence – has become her greatest asset these days.

AMAZONS, THE LONELY SAILORS’ DREAMS

Warrior women with sexual natures are also found among the ancient Greeks.

Their myth of the Amazons tells of a Mediterranean kingdom in which it was women who fought and governed, while the men were relegated to domestic duties. Marston’s Wonder Woman comic invokes the Amazons’ city, Themiscyra, and the name of their queen, Hippolyta.

He embellished his ancient Amazonian setting with details from the legend of the women of Lemnos, in the Aegean Sea, adopting the isolated island idea as Wonder Woman’s home.

According to the Greek story, the women of Lemnos had revolted and massacred all the men on the island, young and old. Living in a forced sexual abstinence, the ladies were delighted when sailors unexpectedly landed on a local beach. They immediately set upon the Argonauts, a team of beauti-

ful and famous mythological heroes that included Hercules and Theseus, compelling them into long orgiastic intercourse.

The sex-starved but unattached women theme is another favourite male fantasy, offering imaginary satisfaction of sexual scenarios that may be difficult to realise in real life.

By the late 20th century, Lara Croft came along to update the idea of the Amazons and the ladies of Lemnos. Croft, an English archeologist-adventurer who started life as a character in the 1990s video game Tomb Raider, was the ultimate virtual-reality dream girl: she is an expert in martial arts, great with a gun and super smart.

Plus, she always leaves the guys wanting more. Reincarnated on the big screen in 2001 by actress Angelina Jolie, Croft often gave the cold shoulder to her male counterparts. Later sequels featuring Alicia Vikander continued to pitch Croft as a sex symbol while bolstering her feminist credentials.

WOMEN AND WEAPONS, THE ULTIMATE FANTASY?

The new Wonder Woman film seems to have made a careful choice of actress, looking beyond just a pretty face and a remarkable body. Gal Gadot has both of those, but she’s a lot like the heroine in other ways, too.

Voted Miss Israel in 2004, Gadot was also a sports coach in the Israeli army. In a August 2015 interview with Fashion magazine the actress, who was then 30, affirmed that her military experience prepared her well for a Hollywood career.

On screen and off, the ancient link between femininity, sexual attraction and the military, seems to still be going strong today. Everything from Wonder Woman and the Instagram account of Israeli soldier-cum-amateur model Maria Domark to the rise of a new sub-genre of lady warriors in Asian cinema and, of course, American weapons catalogues, confirms the old masculine fantasy associating pretty faces with guns.

The new Wonder Woman film channels all this history. Pop culture attempts to showcase the heroine as a feminist cannot counteract thousands of years of global sexual fantasy. But you can bet it’ll be a hit at the box office.

[the writer is Professeur d’histoire ancienne, Université de Lorraine]



Heatwave: Think it’s hot in Europe? The human body is already close to thermal limits elsewhere

TOM MATTHEWS
theconversation.com

I am a scientist who researches climate hazards. This week I have published research on the potential for a catastrophic cyclone-heatwave combo in the global south. Yet over the past few days I have been approached by various media outlets to talk not about that hazard, but about the unfolding UK heatwave and climate change. It is always satisfying to respond to public interest around weather extremes, but there is a danger that key messages about extreme heat globally are not receiving enough airtime.

It is by now very well established that hot extremes are more likely in the changed climate we are living in. Yet there is a seemingly unquenchable thirst for this story to be retold every time the UK sweats. Narratives around such acute, local events detract from critical messages about the global challenges from extreme heat.

Make no mistake, maximum temperatures of 35°C or more are hot by UK standards, but such conditions are familiar to around 80% of the world’s population. The headline-grabbing 46°C recently experienced by Britain’s neighbours in France is indeed unusual, but still falls short of the 50°C recorded in India earlier this summer, and is somewhat temperate relative to the 54°C confirmed for both Pakistan (in 2017) and Kuwait (in 2016). People in these hotter climates are better at coping with high temperatures, yet such heat still kills.

Deadly heatwaves are, of course, no stranger to Europeans. The infamous 2003 event claimed as many as 70,000 lives, and 2010 saw more than 50,000 fatalities in western Russia. Fortunately, lessons were learned and authorities are now much better prepared when heat-health alerts are issued.

But spare a thought for less fortunate communities who are routinely experiencing extraordinary temperatures. In places like South Asia and the Persian Gulf, the human body, despite all its remarkable thermal efficiencies, is often operating close to its limits.

And yes, there is a limit.

When the air temperature exceeds 35°C, the body relies on the evaporation of water – mainly through sweating – to keep core temperature at a safe level. This system works until the “wetbulb” temperature reaches 35°C. The wetbulb temperature includes the cooling effect of water evaporating from the thermometer, and so is normally much lower than the normal (“drybulb”) temperature reported in weather forecasts.

Once this wetbulb temperature threshold is crossed, the air is so full of water vapour that sweat no longer evaporates. Without the means to dissipate heat, our core temperature rises, irrespective of how much water we drink, how much shade we seek, or how much rest we take. Without respite, death follows – soonest for the very young, elderly or those with pre-existing medical conditions.

Wetbulb temperatures of 35°C

have not yet been widely reported, but there is some evidence that they are starting to occur in Southwest Asia. Climate change then offers the prospect that some of the most densely populated regions on Earth could pass this threshold by the end of the century, with the Persian Gulf, South Asia, and most recently the North China Plain on the front line. These regions are, together, home to billions of people.

As the climate warms in places like the UK, people can take sensible precautions against heat – slowing down, drinking more water, and seeking cool refuges. Air conditioning is one of the last lines of defence but comes with its own problems such as very high energy demands. By 2050, cooling systems are expected to increase electricity demand by an amount equivalent to the present capacity of the US, EU, and Japan combined.

Provided that electricity supplies can be maintained, living in chronically heat-stressed climates of the future may be viable. But with such dependence on this life-support system, a sustained power outage could be catastrophic.

DEADLY COMBINATION

So what would happen if we combined massive blackouts with extreme heat? Two colleagues and I recently investigated the possibility of such a “grey swan” event – foreseeable but not yet fully experienced – in a global study of storms and heat, published in the journal Nature Climate Change.

We looked at tropical cyclones, which have already caused the biggest blackouts on Earth, with the months-long power failure in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria among the most serious. We found that as the climate warms it becomes ever more likely that these powerful cyclones would be followed by dangerous heat, and that such compound hazards would be expected every year if global warming reaches 4°C. During the emergency response to a tropical cyclone, keeping people cool would have to be as much a priority as providing clean drinking water.

The UK is moving into new territory when it comes to managing extreme heat. But the places that are already heat stressed will see the largest absolute increases in humid-heat with the smallest safety margin before reaching physical limits, and they are often least-equipped to adapt to the hazard. It is therefore hardly surprising that extreme heat drives migration. Such mass displacement makes extreme heat a worldwide issue. Little Britain will feel the consequence of conditions far away from its temperate shores.

The challenges ahead are stark. Adaptation has its limits. We must therefore maintain our global perspective on heat and pursue a global response, slashing greenhouse gas emissions to keep to the Paris warming limits. In this way, we have the greatest chance of averting deadly heat – home and abroad.

[the writer is Lecturer in Climate Science, Loughborough University]

600 people killed, over 25 mn affected by flooding in India, Bangladesh, Nepal & Myanmar: UN

YOSHITA SINGH

UNITED NATIONS, JUL 27 (PTI): At least 600 people have been killed and over 25 million others affected by flooding due to the torrential monsoon rains in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Myanmar, the UN has said.

More than half-a-million of them have been displaced, Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said.

At that 600 people have reportedly been killed in monsoon-related incidents, he said.

Haq said that according to the UN's humanitarian personnel, "more than 25 million people have been affected by flooding due to the torrential monsoon rains in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Myanmar, with more than half a million people displaced, our humanitarian colleagues tell us".

In India, UNICEF is working with the state governments to provide multi-sectoral planning and coordination support in the three worst-affected states of Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The UN agency said that while many areas remain inaccessible due to damage to roads, bridges and railways, the most urgent needs for children are clean water, hygiene supplies to prevent the



spread of disease, food supplies and safe places in evacuation centres for children to play. In India, more than 10 million people have been affected across Assam, Bihar, parts of UP and other north-eastern states, including more than 4.3 million children. As the situation develops, these numbers are only likely to increase.

In Assam alone, almost 2,000 schools have been damaged by floodwaters. While parts of India have been suffering from heavy rainfall and flooding, other parts are still reeling from the aftermath of severe heat and water deficit, affect-

ing almost half of the country. In Bangladesh, it is estimated that over four million people have been affected and the UN is helping to assess needs to determine the necessary response and is also supporting the government in the areas of water and sanitation as well as health.

In Myanmar, waters in some areas have receded, allowing some of those who had been uprooted to return home, but over 40,000 people remain displaced.

"The governments in all four countries are leading the response with support from the UN, aid agencies and the

private sector," Haq said.

Last week, the UN children's agency UNICEF said heavy rainfall, flooding and landslides across Nepal, India and Bangladesh have killed at least 93 children, and put the lives of millions more at risk.

UNICEF estimated that more than 12 million people, including about five million children, have been affected.

"Millions of children have seen their lives turned upside down by the torrential rainfall, flooding and landslides," UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia Jean Gough said. In Nepal, an estimated 68,666 people are temporarily dis-

placed, including 28,702 children. A total of 88 people have died, including 47 children (15 girls and 32 boys).

In Bangladesh, monsoon rains continue to affect most of the country, particularly the central-northern and south-east regions.

Over two million people have been affected by flooding, including around 700,510 children. An estimated 367,341 houses have been damaged or destroyed and 1,866 primary and community schools have been damaged by floodwaters. Cox's Bazar home to more than a million Rohingya refugees - has

been hit by excessive rain this month. "Across the region, we are seeing the devastating impact of extreme weather events on children and families. As weather events become more extreme, unpredictable and erratic, it is children who are paying the heaviest price," said Gough.

UNICEF warned that while individual extreme weather events cannot specifically be attributed to climate change, the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather - including recent high temperatures, intense rains and slow-moving weather fronts - are in line with

predictions of how human activities are affecting the global climate.

"Such events can cause death and devastation and can also contribute to the increased spread of major killers of children, such as malnutrition, malaria and diarrhoea.

"And as these extreme climate events increase in frequency and magnitude, the risks to children will likely outpace global capacity to mitigate them as well as to provide humanitarian response," it said, adding that floods threaten children's survival and development, with direct impacts including injuries and

death by drowning.

Meanwhile, health-focused relief and development organisation Americares said its chapter in India, Americares India, is organising medical teams to treat survivors of the monsoon rains that have inundated South Asia.

Beginning next week, Americares India will organise medical teams in three districts in Assam and two districts in Bihar, where continuous rains and contaminated water have heightened health concerns.

The teams, operated in partnership with local health care organisations, will provide medical care and dispense medications as needed. Americares also plans to deliver hygiene kits.

"With homes and roads submerged in several feet of standing water, we expect to see an increase in infections. Our medical teams will focus on providing primary care and basic first aid for the most vulnerable survivors, including pregnant women, children and the elderly," said Americares India Managing Director Shripad Desai. Americares India, based in Mumbai, provides emergency medical and humanitarian aid in response to floods, cyclones, earthquakes and other disasters.

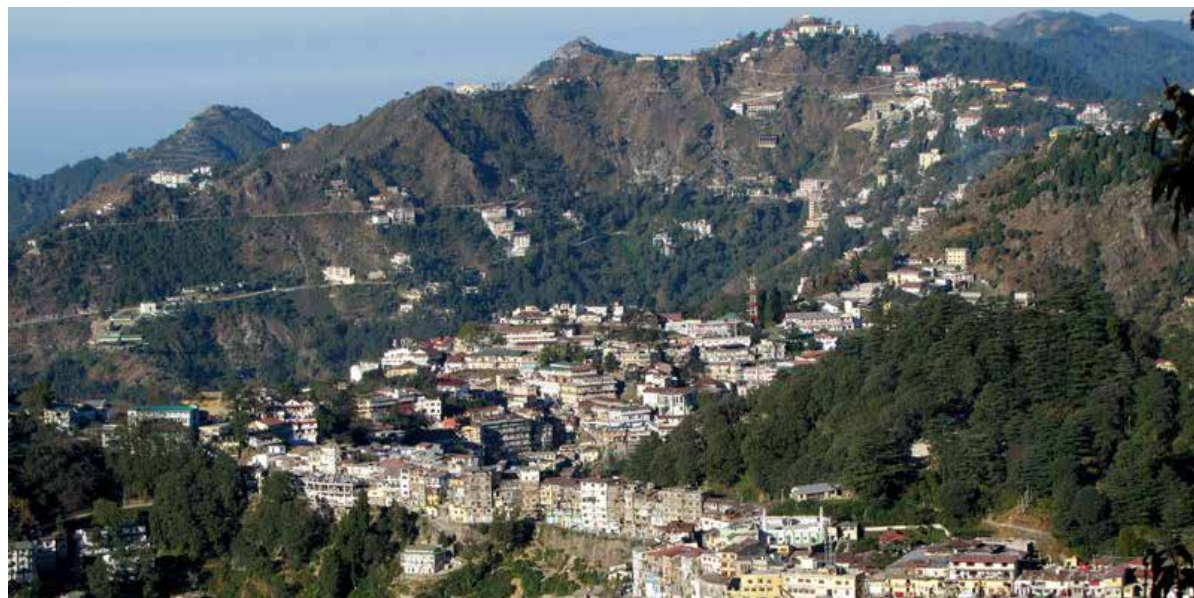
Himalayan conclave to be held in Mussoorie on Sunday

DEHRADUN, JUL 27 (PTI):

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, chief ministers of nine Himalayan states and a host of other dignitaries like Niti Ayog vice chairman Rajeev Kumar are likely to attend a one-day Himalayan conclave to be held in Mussoorie on Sunday.

The conclave will pass a Mussoorie resolution and deliberate on issues like the conservation of Himalayan ecology, bio-diversity and cultural heritage. The deliberations will focus on sustainable development of the Himalayan states, rivers, glaciers and water resources located in the region, disaster management, eco-system services, tourism and wellness potential and special incentives to the Himalayan states.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat's principal agenda for the conclave will be water conservation with focus on conserving the rivers, glaciers, lakes and water



bodies besides reviving water resources which have dried up over the years.

"Most of the rivers in the country originate from the Himalayas. So the Himalayan states have to play the most significant role in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's water conservation initiative. The conclave will deliberate on how the 11 Himalayan states can make their contribution to the Centre's water

conservation campaign. Pradesh BJP president and Nainital MP Ajay Bhatt extended a warm welcome to the dignitaries coming to participate in the event, terming the meet a milestone in the development of the Himalayan states.

"The conclave will be historic as a development roadmap for the Himalayan states will emerge from it," Bhatt said and congratulated Rawat for

making a commendable effort like this to bring the Himalayan states on a common platform. Apart from Sitharaman, chief ministers Trivendra Singh Rawat (Uttarakhand), Pema Khandu (Arunachal Pradesh), Jai Ram Thakur (Himachal Pradesh), Nongthombam Biren Singh (Manipur), Conrad Kongkal Sangma (Meghalaya), Zoramthanga (Mizoram), Neiphiu Rio (Nagaland), Prem Singh

Tamang (Sikkim) and Biplab Kumar Deb (Tripura) are likely to attend the conclave, according to an official release. Other dignitaries to attend the event include K K Sharma, the advisor to the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Vice Chairperson NITI Ayog Rajeev Kumar, Additional Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister P K Mishra and Parameshwaran Iyer, the Secretary, Water and Sanitation.

Uttarakhand govt donates Rs 5 cr for Assam flood relief



DEHRADUN, JUL 27 (PTI): Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat announced on Saturday the state government will contribute Rs 5 crore to help the flood-affected people of Assam.

Expressing grief over the loss of life and property due to the floods in Assam, Chief Minis-

ter Rawat said, "We are aware of the hardships being faced by people in Assam due to recent floods. We can feel their pain."

Uttarakhand stands with the people of Assam at this hour of crisis, he said, adding that Rs 5 crore is being sent to the government of the north-eastern state for flood re-

lief measures. Floods in Assam claimed five more lives on Friday, taking the toll in the state to 80 even as water levels in all the affected districts receded further, an official report said.

Around 27.15 lakh people in 2,078 villages of 17 districts have been affected by the deluge.

Nadeem takes another five-wicket haul, puts India A on course for big win

NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA), JULY 27 (PTI):

Left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem took a five-wicket haul for the second time in the match to put India A on the cusp of a big win over West Indies A in the first unofficial Test.

Nadeem's effort of five for 47 in 21 overs helped India A bowl out the hosts for 180 in their second innings after they were comfortably placed at 159 for three on day three of the four-day game here on Friday. Pacer Mohammad Siraj ran through the lower-order with a three-wicket burst.

Chasing a meagre 97 for victory, India A were 29 for one in their second innings with Priyank Panchal (5) the batsman to be dismissed. Abhimanyu Easwaran was batting on 23 off 32 balls at the other end with India A needing another 68 runs for the win.

India A, who resumed the day at 299 for eight in their first innings, went on to make 312 in 104.3 overs with wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha (66) the last man to get out, marking a suc-

cessful return with both bat and gloves following a long injury layoff.

West Indies A, who conceded an 84-run first innings lead, were steady in their second essay after the loss of openers Montcin Hodge (36) and Jeremy Solozano (11) at 51 for two.

Captain Shamarh Brooks (53) and Roston Chase (32) shared a 79-run stand for the third wicket but the collapse began with the fall of the skipper at 159 for four. The batsmen struggled to cope up with the guile and accuracy of Nadeem who have been knocking on the doors of the Indian Test team with consistent performances in domestic cricket over the years.

The Jharkhand spinner had also taken five wickets in the first innings, taking his match tally to 10 for 109.

Brief Scores:

West Indies A: 228 all out and 180 all out in 77 overs (Brooks 53; Nadeem 5/47).

India A: 312 (Dube 71, Saha 66; Cummins 4/40) and 29/1 in 10.3 overs.

Man who snatched cop's rifle in Meghalaya nabbed

Tura (Meghalaya), Jul 26 (PTI):

A differently-abled man, who had allegedly snatched a rifle from a police officer in South West Garo Hills district earlier this week, was arrested on Friday.

The 35-year-old man was hiding behind a government school from where he was apprehended, SP Rituraj Ravi said.

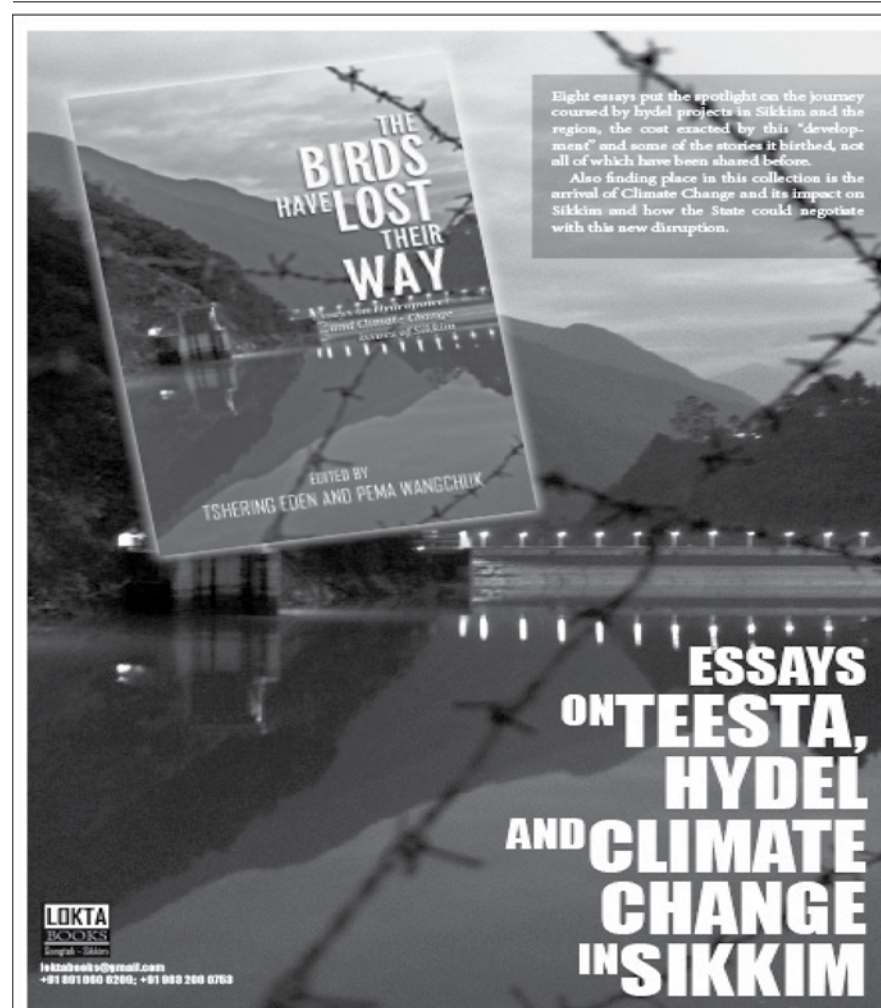
"The man had attacked people on a road near Nandichar on July 21. When police inter-

vened, he attacked them with a machete. Police-men fired in the air to scare him but he fled away with a rifle," the SP said. Earlier, rumours of him being shot dead by police following the snatching incident had sparked an attack on a police station by a mob of over 400 on July 21.

The SP said the rifle, which the man claimed to have thrown into flood waters, is untraceable.

Further investigation into the matter is on.

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Bale set for '1 million pounds a week' Jiangsu Suning move - reports

PARIS, JULY 27 (AFP): Real Madrid forward Gareth Bale was Friday on the verge of signing a "1 million pounds a week" deal with Chinese Super League outfit Jiangsu Suning, reports claimed.

The 30-year-old Welshman has already been told by Real coach Zinedine Zidane that he does not form part of his future plans at the Spanish giants.

Spanish daily Marca claimed that Bale, who has been at Real since 2013 since signing from Tottenham, will earn 22 million euros per season in China and that the deal is almost finalised.

However, later reports by Sky Sports in England suggested the player's representatives were negotiating a mind-boggling 1 million pounds a week contract before the Chinese transfer window shuts on Wednesday.

Real boss Zidane said last weekend he thought it would be "best for everyone" if Bale's departure could be arranged quickly -- comments Bale's agent branded "disrespectful" of a player who helped the side to a Spanish league title and four Champions Leagues since arriving from Tottenham six years ago.

Zidane then insisted Monday he meant no disrespect before Bale came on as a substitute in a midweek 3-2 friendly win over Arsenal in the United States.

"He had a good game and I'm happy for him," Zidane said. "I do not know what's going to happen, for now he's with us. It did not change anything."

Bale's agent Jonathan Barnett has already insisted that any deal which sees the Welshman leave the Bernabeu would have to be a permanent one and not one that sees him shipped out on loan. "There will be no makeshift deals to get him out of the club," said Barnett.

BRYAN ARMEN GRAHAM theGuardian

There are no easy answers for the tragedies that have rocked professional boxing over the past week. The Argentinian junior welterweight Hugo Alfredo Santillan died on Thursday from injuries suffered during last Saturday's fight against Uruguay's Eduardo Javier Abreu in the Buenos Aires, becoming the second fatality in four days after Russia's Maxim Dadashev succumbed to injuries suffered last Friday's in Maryland.

The double horror is a chilling reminder of the danger at hand any time a fighter climbs through the ropes into the squared circle, the only venue in society, with the exception of war, where a person can be killed but not legally murdered. It has also prompted renewed calls from at least one British charity for the sport to be permanently banned.

While the head trauma inherent to other sports such as American football, rugby and ice hockey has come increasingly under the microscope in recent years, only in boxing are dangers such as concussions not by-products but the



very objective.

The spectre of death has loomed over the prize ring throughout history: from its recorded origins as a popular spectator sport in ancient Greece and Rome (until it was abolished by Theodoric in AD 500), during its bare-knuckle resurgence in England during the 1600s and modernization with the Marquess of Queensberry Rules in 1884 through to the present day.

The mere threat of it frightens and titillates the spectators who are party to the contest, sat-

isfying a latent bloodlust common with those who attend hockey games for the fights or watch NASCAR for the spark-flying wrecks.

Death in the ring is statistically rare but there is no question boxing is the most dangerous pastime despite a perception as the tamer alternative to the often grisly spectacle of mixed martial arts and the head-to-toe violence it purveys to a generally younger demographic.

MMA fighters wear smaller four-ounce gloves that are less con-

ducive to defense and more prone to causing cuts, though what many do not realize is the extra padding on boxing gloves exists not to protect the face but the fist, allowing fighters to throw punches with full force at their opponent's heads without fear of breaking the bones in their hands.

The prolonged punishment and longer fights invite a higher rate of head trauma, unconsciousness, facial injuries and broken bones. There have been no fatalities in the history of the Ultimate Fighting Champi-

onship, despite its widespread reputation for brutality, since MMA's leading promotion was launched in 1993. Thirty boxers have died in the same span.

Hundreds more boxers died in the years before -- Ring magazine reported 22 deaths in 1953 -- with many coming in high-profile world championship bouts. Jimmy Doyle died of brain injuries after being knocked out by Sugar Ray Robinson in a welterweight title fight. The same with Benny Paret after a loss to Emile Griffith a decade

and a half later in a fight for the 147lb title. Davey Moore died after collapsing in his dressing room following a loss to Sugar Ramos for the feather-weight championship.

Only after the death of the South Korean lightweight Duk-koo Kim following a 1982 fight with Ray Mancini was widespread reform sparked, including the reduction of the number of rounds in championship fights from 15 to 12.

Not long after, the American Medical Association passed a resolution for the sport to be banned that, predictably, fell on deaf ears. You cannot eradicate a compulsion that is innate in us, whether middle-class moralizers want to admit it or not. To get rid of it would simply drive it underground to a place with no government oversight requiring qualified referees, ringside physicians and emergency medical staff on call.

Boxing is here to stay. Putting aside the exhibitions of extreme physical and psychological intensity, the sport has long been a sport of the underclass, credited with changing the lives of the disenfranchised and impoverished. There are

no barriers to entry. It is, as George Foreman says, the sport to which all other sports aspire.

Rather than fruitless calls for abolition, better to honor Santillan and Dadashev by calling for reform from within. Will the promoters who profited off their blood and sweat be there to offer financial support for their families after the outrage fades? Will they pay for their medical and funeral expenses since insurance companies do not underwrite life insurance policies for fighters because of the inherent danger of their trade? Will there be counseling for those left behind: the "victorious" fighters, the corner men, the family members whose lives will never be the same?

Perhaps the sport's power brokers can honor them by coming together to organize a long-overdue health and pension plan for retired fighters.

The life-threatening realities of this strange, primitive trade cannot be managed or contained any more than the tragedies of yesterday can be undone, but maybe those who derive their fortunes from the courage of the crazy-brave can do their part to make a better tomorrow.

Delhi HC adjourns archery hearing to August 2

KOLKATA, JULY 27 (PTI): The Delhi High Court has adjourned the hearing regarding the dual elections conducted by two warring factions of the Archery Association of India to August 2.

The deadline set by the world body to take a call on suspension was July 31.

Hearing a PIL in the Rahul Mehra versus Union of India & Ors, a Delhi HC Special Bench comprising Justice S Murlidhar and Najmi Waziri on Friday fixed the matter for arguments



to next Friday, Mehra tweeted.

"They will adjudicate on the dual elections conducted by two warring factions within AAI, beside setting aside last election of IOA for violation of Sports Code, and directing Ministry of

Sports to place final version of redrafted Sports Code ASAP," Mehra wrote on his tweeter handle.

A response is awaited from the World Archery which had earlier de-listed AAI as a member and threatened to suspend and not allow Indian ar-

chers to compete in international competitions if the court does not give an order by July 31.

In June, World Archery had sent its vice-president, Kazi Uddin Ahmed Chapal as mediator, but all the talks to bring the two

factions together failed as both groups went ahead with separate but simultaneous elections in New Delhi and Chandigarh on June 9 to elect two presidents -- Union Minister Arjun Munda and retired IAS officer BVP Rao.

With less than a year to go for the Olympics, the fancied Indian women's team is yet to book a quota place for Tokyo 2020, while the men have secured qualification at the World Championships in Netherlands last month.

She's 14, Disabled From a Bomb Blast and One of Iraq's Top Table Tennis Players

ALISSA J RUBIN THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Iraqi teenager does not look like a traditional athlete: Her right leg is amputated at the thigh, her left at the knee, and her right arm ends at the biceps. But when Najla Imad Lafta, 14, plays table tennis, her torso turns as smoothly as a dancer's to meet the ball and she returns it so fast her opponents are hard put to send it back. She just brought home her fourth silver and her fourth bronze medal from an international sporting tournament for the disabled in Egypt in June.

"In fourth grade, I realized I was different from the other girls," said Najla as she sat in a narrow wheelchair in her family's home on the outskirts of Baquba, a provincial capital in Iraq. She lives on an unpaved street where no one has indoor plumbing and the electricity is erratic. "I saw my friends were running at school, walking and playing, and they were thinking about what they would do in the future," she said. "And all I could do was sit in my wheelchair and think that I wanted to run like them." Najla was 3 when a bomb magnetically attached beneath her father's car went off. The sabotage was likely the work of Al Qaeda in Iraq, which targeted her father because he worked at the local military base with American soldiers.

In a matter of seconds she became one of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis seriously wounded in the civil war that followed the American invasion in 2003. Civilians young and old were caught in the crossfire, crippling them physically and psychologically. Not all became amputees. Many have less visible scars: back injuries

that make it impossible to walk and carry anything; hearing loss; or a missing eye from flying shrapnel. Some families, with their top wage earners unable to work, ended up homeless and many more now live diminished lives. Each struggles to find a way to cope, and Najla is one of a growing number of Iraqi athletes who are competing in sports at a high level after losing one or more limbs. Since 2003, there has been an approximately 70 percent increase in the number of Iraqis participating in the Paralympic Games whose injuries are terrorism related, according to Mohammed Abbas al-Salami, the deputy head of the Iraqi Paralympic Committee.

Players injured in the war are extraordinarily driven and talented, said Mr. al-Salami. But they struggle more emotionally because they remember the time before their injuries. That emotional struggle is part of Najla's story, too.

One of eight children born to a close-knit family, Najla was an active child and every day would run to meet her father's car as he returned from his work at a joint Iraqi-American army base. "It was April 19, 2008, and as I drove up to the house, Najla ran towards me, holding out her arms and smiling," recalled her father, Imad Lafta, 56, who worked at the time on communications technology for the Iraqi Army. "I got out of the car to help her get into the passenger seat, but as she pulled open the door, the sticky bomb exploded," he said, looking away from his daughter as he recalled the moment.

"You know, I was so careful. I never parked in the base because I was afraid of my car being seen coming and going and

being targeted, but someone must have seen me." When the bomb exploded, Najla said she felt "a huge blow; it was like a fire was in my body and I saw my arm fly into the air to near to our neighbor's house."

She could not feel her legs. Her father rushed her to the hospital, but she was losing so much blood the doctors were not sure they could save her.

"I was at the hospital three months and once I realized I had lost my legs and arms I cried and cried and became angry because I knew I had lost everything," she said. It was this depression, in part, that brought Najla to table tennis.

Five years ago, sad that she could not run like her classmates, she bought a table tennis paddle to give herself something to do when she finished her homework. But it quickly proved frustrating. She had begun life as a right-handed person but with that hand gone and no prostheses, she struggled to learn to use her left, hitting the ball over and over against the wall of her family house.

She kept thinking that if she could just have legs, she could run to the ball instead of having to reach and hope it would not fly too high or too low.

Her father went to a hospital in Baghdad and implored the staff members to give prostheses to his daughter.

Eventually they did, but they were poorly made and hurt so much she could not walk in them. Then her father heard that there might be better prostheses in another province. After scrimping together the cash to pay for them, he brought the new ones home, only to find that these too were a poor fit. A third and fourth attempt

also failed to get her prostheses that did not hurt. "The quality matters," he said. "The best are from England."

But a prosthetic leg from Britain can cost \$15,000 and one fitted for an athlete costs much more. Najla needed three limbs and with her father's retirement income of \$400 a month, even one prosthetic limb was beyond the family's reach.

Dejected over his inability to help his daughter, Mr. Lafta asked a friend who coached table tennis and scouted for Iraq's Paralympic team to stop by and give her some lessons. Najla remembers the day Hossam Hussein al-Bayat came to the family's house — a traditional Iraqi compound with individual rooms built around a common courtyard with an outdoor toilet and water from a communal well down the street. "He said to me, 'I want you to take that paddle and start training daily,'" she recalled. She took him at his word and began to work one to two hours a day on her strokes.

After watching her and seeing her improvement in a short time, his assessment was that because of her drive, "she has the potential to be very good," Mr. al-Bayat said. Once a week he would bring her to his house to practice, coaching her until she was ready to compete against disabled players from other provinces.

She was only 12 when she won a place on the country's Paralympic team. The key for her success, she said, was not to look at the other players — table tennis is a game where players routinely use psychological tricks to disarm their opponents.

"I was a little scared," she recalled. "I was talking to myself, saying 'just focus on

the ball, just focus on myself, if I focus on her, I will be afraid,'" she said referring to her opponent. When Najla plays, her eye is always on the ball — it is her friend and her enemy; its speed, spin and arc are her sole concern. "What amazed me in Najla is that she is from a very poor family and lives in a neighborhood where squatters live and she has only one arm and she is the champion of Iraq and took the golden medal in the Iraqi championship and took the silver medal in Asia," said Aqil Hameed, the head of Iraq's Paralympic Committee. "Really I consider this a miracle and the persistence and the effort and the hope that Najla has must be a big lesson for us and for all of the Iraqis," Mr. Hameed added. Najla practices two or three hours a day at home — her family bought a playing table that takes up almost all the space in one of the compound's rooms — barely leaving enough space for her to practice with her sisters.

She is closest with an older sister, Zainab Emad Lafta, 17. "I am with her in everything," said Zainab. "We go to school together and we read together and go out together and we go to the markets together to buy clothes." Once a week Najla travels to Baghdad to practice at the Paralympic team's training center with Jamal Jalal Hussein, a former member of Iraq's national table tennis team and the coach of the country's Paralympic team.

The atmosphere at the center lifts her spirits, Najla said, as she trains with other disabled athletes of all ages. The Paralympics committee recently bought prostheses for Najla, and these are far better than the ones she had before but they are still not the kind made for athletes.

Hong Kongers defy police ban with mass ‘anti-triad’ rally



HONG KONG, JUL 27 (AFP): Thousands of Hong Kong protesters defied a police ban on Saturday and marched through a town near the Chinese border to rally against suspected triad gangs who beat up pro-democracy demonstrators there last weekend.

Public anger has been raging since last Sunday when a gang of men in white t-shirts, armed with poles and batons, set upon anti-government protesters and bystanders in Yuen Long station, leaving at least 45 people needing hospital treatment.

The brazen assault was the latest escalation in seven weeks of unprecedented political violence that shows little sign of abating as the city's pro-Beijing leaders refuse to budge.

Hong Kong has been plunged into its worst crisis in recent history after millions of demonstrators took to the streets -- and sporadic violent confronta-

tions erupted between police and pockets of hardcore protesters.

The demonstrations were triggered by a controversial bill which would have allowed extraditions to mainland China, but have evolved into a call for wider democratic reforms and a halt to sliding freedoms.

Police have been heavily criticised for being too slow to respond to Sunday's violence, fueling accusations of collusion or turning a blind eye to the pro-government mob -- allegations the force has denied.

In a rare move, police banned Saturday's rally saying they feared reprisal attacks against villagers from protesters.

Social messaging channels used to organise the largely leaderless movement quickly filled up with vows from people to join in.

Some suggested holding a "shopping spree" in Yuen Long, others for a mass gathering of Pokemon Go, a popular

mobile phone game.

Huge crowds spilled out of Yuen Long's main station on Saturday afternoon and into surrounding streets where police maintained a large presence but kept their distance. Many shops were shuttered.

"Everyone of us came here on our own initiation," a 25-year-old medical worker surnamed Ng, told AFP. "So I don't think this is an illegal assembly, I've just come here as an individual to tell people my thoughts."

Another woman, surnamed Cheung, said she wanted to show "we are not afraid and that Hong Kongers won't cower in fear".

"The police and (the government) are together suppressing people's freedom to express their views," she added.

Large plastic barriers filled with water surrounded the local police station which was shuttered. The most common chant outside was "hak ging" -- black cops

-- a pun on the a phrase to describe triads: black societies. Yuen Long is in Hong Kong's New Territories, a rural area where many of the surrounding villages are known for triad connections and their staunch support for the pro-Beijing establishment. Police say they have arrested 12 people so far in connection with Sunday's violence, nine of whom have known triad links. Rumours have swirled that protesters might target the ancestral halls and graves of a village close to the Yuen Long's station where the white shirt mob ran into after their attack and later left without police making any arrests despite a large presence of officers.

Earlier this week the graves of Junius Ho's parents were vandalised. An ardent pro-Beijing lawmaker, Ho was seen shaking hands with the white-shirted men before Sunday's attack. He also threatened a pro-democracy lawmaker in an

online video earlier this week. That lawmaker, Eddie Chu, who also hails from the New Territories, said many villagers abhorred Sunday's attack but were afraid to speak out, calling on demonstrators not to harm graves and halls.

An AFP photographer saw protesters putting up signs encouraging others not to venture into the nearby villages.

Weeks of unprecedented protests with huge turnouts -- as well as frequent clashes and the sacking of parliament -- have had little luck persuading Beijing or Hong Kong's leaders. Beijing has issued increasingly shrill condemnations in the last fortnight, but has left it to the city's semi-autonomous government to deal with the situation.

City leader Carrie Lam has shown no sign of backing down beyond agreeing to suspend the extradition bill.

On Friday thousands held a 10-hour protest at the airport arrival hall in a bid to "educate" visitors about their movement -- especially those on the Chinese mainland where news is heavily censored.

The protest was peaceful and there was no disruption to flights.

Protesters also plan to march on Sunday through a district where riot police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at projectile-hurling protesters the week before.

Police have allowed a rally to take place, but denied protesters permission to march, raising the likelihood of further confrontations.

Australia says diplomats must respect free speech after HK protest



SYDNEY, JUL 27 (AFP): Australia on Saturday warned foreign officials in the country against undermining the right to free speech, following a confrontation between students backing Beijing and pro-Hong Kong democracy activists at a university rally.

The warning comes after a Chinese consul-general in Australia reportedly praised the pro-Beijing students for their "patriotic be-

haviour". Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne said Canberra expected all foreign diplomats to respect the protected right to free speech and lawful protest, "even on contentious and sensitive issues".

"The Government would be particularly concerned if any foreign diplomatic mission were to act in ways that could undermine such rights, including by encouraging disruptive or potentially

violent behaviour," she said in a statement.

The clashes took place on Wednesday at a pro-Hong Kong democracy rally at the University of Queensland after a group of Beijing-supporting students arrived.

Video of the event shows a tense standoff between dozens of students at the university in northeast Australia, with several scuffles breaking out. Following the event, Chinese consul-general in Brisbane Xu Jie praised the "spontaneous patriotic behaviour of Chinese students" for confronting "anti-China separatist" protesters, The Australian newspaper reported.

The consul-general said the consulate "opposes the use of these events to create the opposition between Chinese and Hong Kong students and incite anti-China sentiment", the newspaper said.

Colombians take to streets to protest activist slayings



BOGOTA, JUL 27 (AP): Thousands of Colombians took to the streets Friday night to call for an end to an alarming wave of killings of leftist activists in the wake of the nation's peace deal.

In major cities and small towns, demonstrators dressed in white and held signs that read: "Without leaders there can be no peace" and "No more bloodshed."

The slayings have left a dark stain on Colombia's efforts to put a half century of bloody armed conflict behind it.

At least 462 activists have been killed since the government's signing in 2016 of a peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the nation's largest rebel group, according to Colombia's ombudsman's office.

Hundreds more have received death threats, and in a nation long beset by impunity only a small fraction of the perpetrators have been identified or apprehended.

The vast majority of victims hail from traditionally neglected rural areas where drug traffickers, wildcat miners

and illegal armed groups including dissident vestiges of the FARC and rebels from the National Liberation Army run rampant with little interference from the state.

President Iv n Duque decided at the last minute to support the demonstrations against the wishes of some in his conservative Democratic Center Party, which opposed the peace deal. "We all are the echoes of a single voice because we all reject violence against social leaders," Duque said in a speech from the coastal city of Cartagena.

According to the United Nations, at least 51 activists were killed in the first four months of 2019, putting the country on track to surpass the 115 assassinations registered last year.

Secretary-General Ant nio Guterres said in a recent report that he regrets the "polarization and division" in Colombia over elements of the peace deal.

The U.N. chief also expressed "deep concern" that the U.N. mission in Colombia has verified 123 killings of former combatants since the peace deal's signing.

Thousands protest in Colombia against killings of activists

BOGOTA, JUL 27 (AFP): Thousands rallied across Colombia Friday to protest the killing of hundreds of human rights activists since the signing of a historic peace deal with FARC guerrillas.

Demonstrators gathered in major cities under the slogan "defending the peace" to denounce the deaths. 462 campaigners have been killed since 2016, according to the country's ombudsman.

"They are killing us but seeds of life and dignity are being born," Luis Acosta said as he walked toward Bolivar square in the capital Bogota, which was packed with protesters. Colombian president Ivan Duque joined a rally in the port city of Cartagena but was jeered by parts of the crowd, videos posted on social networks showed.

"Today we are united in a fight against violence and drug trafficking, which has fueled the organized armed groups that have attacked social leaders in the country," Duque said earlier.

The rallies were called after the killing of activist Maria del Pilar Hurtado last month, in northern Colombia. A video of her son crying next to her body was widely shared in the country.

Taliban vows future Afghanistan won't be terrorists' hotbed

WASHINGTON, JUL 27 (AP): America's longest war has come full circle. The United States began bombing Afghanistan after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, to root out al-Qaida fighters harbored by the Taliban.

Now, more than 18 years later, preventing Afghanistan from being a launching pad for more attacks on America is at the heart of ongoing US talks with the Taliban.

President Donald Trump's envoy at the negotiating table says he's satisfied with the Taliban's commitment to prevent international terrorist organizations from using Afghanistan as a base to plot global attacks. There's even talk that a negotiated settlement might result in the Taliban joining the U.S. to fight Islamic State militants, rivals whose footprint is growing in mountainous northern Afghanistan. "The world needs to be sure that Afghanistan will not be a threat to the international community," said the envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, who was born in Afghanistan and is a former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan.

"We are satisfied with the commitment that we have received (from the Taliban) on counterterrorism." Not everyone is convinced. Some Afghans worry that Trump's desire to pull American troops from Afghanistan will override doubts about the Taliban's sincerity. Early in the talks, Hamdullah Mohib, national security adviser to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, said counting on the Taliban to control other militants could be like "having cats guard the milk."

Rep. Michael Waltz, who did multiple combat tours in Afghanistan as a U.S. special forces officer, said he's happy to see the Taliban are negotiating but does not see

how Afghanistan can keep from becoming a hotbed for terrorists wanting to strike the United States.

"I have my doubts about the Taliban's sincerity No. 1," said Waltz, R-Fla. "But even if you buy into that ... how does the Taliban have the capability to enforce what a 300,000-man Afghan army, the United States forces and a coalition of armies around the world are continuing to struggle to do?" Much is at stake.

The conflict in Afghanistan has cost more than 2,300 American lives and hundreds of billions in taxpayer dollars. The Taliban control roughly half the country, although not the cities. About 14,000 U.S. troops plus other NATO-led forces are still there.

Senior intelligence officials have warned that a withdrawal could return Afghanistan to a time when the Taliban ruled a country that was an al-Qaida stronghold.

Despite nearly two decades of war, militant groups remain.

A U.N. Security Council report in April 2018 said al-Qaida was "closely allied with and embedded within the Taliban." The report said the Taliban, which have no history of conducting attacks outside Afghanistan, provide operating space for about 20 terrorist groups with thousands of fighters.

Bill Roggio, editor of the Long War Journal at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a conservative think tank in Washington, cites a video al-Qaida released in May that highlights its alliance with the Taliban and shows an image of militants fighting together under both al-Qaida and Taliban flags. "The Taliban has not renounced al-Qaida nor is it likely to do so,"

Roggio said. "The two remain close allies. The Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden after 9/11 and was willing to sacrifice its control of the country.

The Taliban has the upper hand now. There are no incentives to denounce its closest ally." A U.S. intelligence official based in Kabul, the Afghan capital, told The Associated Press that the Islamic State group is an even bigger threat. The official, who discussed terrorist threats only on condition of anonymity, said recent IS attacks in Kabul are "practice runs" for more substantial ones in the future.

The official said "one of the hopes of a negotiated settlement is that it will bring the Taliban into the government and into the fight against IS." The Islamic State group has expanded into eastern Kunar Province, where the U.S. was forced to withdraw after several punishing attacks from the Taliban. That's one reason the U.S. wants to co-opt the Taliban: They clearly know the terrain and can take the fight to Islamic State forces.

Such an alignment is hardly unheard of. During the 1980s, the U.S. backed Islamic insurgents in Afghanistan as they battled to end the occupation of the former Soviet Union. Khalilzad hasn't specifically said why he's satisfied with the Taliban's guarantee that it will prevent attacks from being plotted on Afghan soil. He says only that the "U.S. military withdrawal will be linked to the commitments the Taliban are making." Suhail Shaheen, spokesman for the Taliban's political office in Doha, Qatar, said such guarantees will be written into law once U.S. and NATO troops leave the country.



World's largest concert piano strikes chord in Latvia

VENTSPILS (LATVIA), JUL 27 (AFP): Soaring to new musical heights, a German-born innovator has crafted what is believed to be the world's largest grand piano.

It is without question one of a kind: attached high on the wall of a concert hall in Latvia, the steel-framed vertical grand piano hangs as if in mid-air some three storeys above the audience.

To play it, pianists must climb a steep flight of steel stairs to a balcony.

Although the Guinness Book of World Records has not yet measured the new instrument, it was made by David Klavins whose Model 370 piano unveiled in 1987 is currently regarded as being among the world's largest.

Klavins' standard new model, the 450i Vertical Concert Grand piano, is 4.5 metres high, making it one metre taller than its predecessor.

The custom-built 450i piano installed at a new concert hall in the Baltic seaside port and resort town of Ventspils is even larger; its imposing navy blue-painted steel frame is six metres high.

With some strings measuring almost five metres, the instrument emits bold, sonorous music.

"The most suitable music for this instrument would be all the very expressive works, for example Rachmaninoff, Scriabin but also Beethoven's sonatas would sound totally different on this instrument," Klavins told AFP.

The innovator, who has Latvian roots, has worked on pianos nearly all his life, driven by a desire to push the boundaries of the instrument first created by Italian Bartolomeo Cristofori around the year 1700.

"Since I was 16 years old and dropped out of school to become a piano restoration apprentice, I have been trying to explore new designs and prin-

ciples, which deviate from the 140-year-old construction of the traditional grand piano," Klavins, now 65, told AFP while sitting at the 450i.

He crafted his first vertical piano in 1985. Now at his workshop, the Klavins Piano Manufaktura based in the town of Vac just north of the Hungarian capital Budapest, he dreams up his signature vertical designs.

It is not just his new instrument's mammoth size that makes it stand out; having no wooden casing means that audiences seated in the concert hall can

length of strings do not set records for a record's sake: the idea is to create the best imaginable sound for all the performers and listeners who come to this particular hall," he added.

On display to the public for the first time on Friday, the instrument has already created a buzz among piano enthusiasts.

"Composers and performers from all around are interested in playing the new Klavins piano, which will open new avenues of artistic expression for them," said Miks Magone, the creative head of



BUSINESS READY! The model, Kate Upton steps out with a big smile before a meeting in Beverly Hills.

Padma Lakshmi to star in new food show at Hulu

LOS ANGELES, JUL 27 (PTI): Hulu has ordered a new food show, to be headlined by "Top Chef" judge Padma Lakshmi.

The streaming service has given a 10-episode order to untitled series, which is designed to serve as a "living cookbook, made up more from people and culture than recipes", according to The Hollywood Reporter.

Hulu made the announcement at Television Critics Association summer press tour.

"Each 30-minute episode will start with a single dish that represents and connects a community's history and traditions, and explores the evolution of that community through that cuisine. The show, filmed around the country, will showcase everything from street food to high-end restaurants

"In the hands of different families and waves of immigration, an organic evolution emerges between traditional recipes and new approaches, different perspectives and emotions, all captured thru Padma's eyes," read a statement from the streamer.

Lakshmi, 48, also shared the news on Twitter.

"If you know me, you know creating this show with @hulu is my dream come true. I get to meet so many inspiring immigrants from around the country and explore their



cultural/personal narratives through their food. #weareallimmigrants" she wrote on the microblogging site.

The food show will be produced by Part2 Pictures and Lakshmi's Delicious Entertainment, Inc.

Andy Serkis, Travis Knight in fray for 'Venom' sequel directing job



LOS ANGELES, JUL 27 (PTI): Andy Serkis is among the top contenders for the directing job of "Venom 2", the the sequel to Sony's 2018 antihero blockbuster.

According to Variety, Ruben Fleischer, who directed the first part, has chosen not to return as he is currently busy with the post production of "Zombieland: Double Tap".

Besides Serkis, who has directed films such as "Breathe" and "Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle", the studio is also in talks with "Bumblebee" director Travis Knight and Rupert Wyatt.

Starring Tom Hardy in the title role, "Venom" was a global hit for Sony, earning over USD 850 million in worldwide gross. The film also featured Michelle Williams and Riz Ahmed in pivotal characters.

Hardy is expected to return for the sequel, which has a script from Kelly Marcel. The studio hopes to start shooting the project later this year.

Mahershala Ali to make guest appearance in Hulu comedy 'Ramy'



LOS ANGELES, JUL 27 (PTI): Two-time Academy Award winner Mahershala Ali will guest star in the second season of Hulu comedy "Ramy".

The show, created by Ramy Youssef, Ari Katcher and Ryan Welch, is about a first-generation American Muslim who is on a spiritual journey in his politically divided New Jersey neighbourhood.

Youssef also plays the lead role in the series, which explores the challenges of what it is like being caught between an Egyptian com-

munity that thinks life is a moral test, and a Millennial generation that thinks life has no consequences.

According to Variety, Ali will have a "special guest star role" in the second season, which is expected to premiere in 2020. The actor is a "huge fan" of the series.

The 45-year-old actor, who most recently starred in the third season of "True Detective", was last week announced as the lead star for a new "Blade" movie by the Marvel Studios.

ARIES: Ah, endings! And the subsequent pain that continues to haunt us. There is no escaping the circle of life and death, Aries. Understanding this will liberate you from the trauma. Without glorifying toxic positivity, find one thing that is a source of joy in your existence. Turning your attention to the blessings could be the secret to raising your vibrations.

Tip: Find a healthier way to deal with the drama. **TAURUS:** Take a good look at your reality. Are you surrounded by the kind of people who nurture you and look out for you, or do you constantly find yourself questioning their motives? A cosmic cleanse is in order, Taurus. Let go of those you disrespect you or keep you from vibrating higher. Some of you may be awakening to your toxic patterns in romantic relationships. Remember, awareness is the first step to eliminating that which is not in alignment with your higher self.

Tip: A cosmic cleanse is in order.

GEMINI: Not every war can be won by violence and aggression. Let love be your secret weapon this time around. Soften your heart and meet the person where they are. Your in-

tuitive abilities are heightened at this point. Turning inwards will give you the direction you need to move forward. For some of you, creative blocks could pose as a challenge. Instead of working on autopilot, change things up for yourself. An afternoon of free writing could help you access genius ideas.

Tip: Meet the person where they are.

CANCER: It's all fun and games until somebody gets hurt. For the sake of your heart, stay away from the non-committal types. Walk away from those who already have other tabs open. There's nothing wrong with their life choices.

Tip: You deserve that perfect romance.

LEO: The honeymoon is not over unless you want it to be. Swap your bucket list with the beloved and find a dream destination that works for the both of you. Whether you are thinking about the sunny beaches of Santorini or the spice markets of Greece, there couldn't be a better time to start planning your next vacation. For some of you, the move could be permanent. In this case, start getting your documents in order.

Tip: Revisit that bucket list.

VIRGO: "Understanding someone's suffering is the best gift you can give another person. Understanding is love's other name. If you don't understand, you can't love." Let Thich Nhất Hạnh treatise open your heart, wild one. What this phase of your relationship calls for: a greater degree of kindness, compassion and empathy. If you find that your partner is most charming version of himself today, know that the love you put into the cosmos is being returned to you in abundance.

Tip: Let kindness, compassion and empathy be your super powers.

LIBRA: On the cards for you today: deception and drama. Sounds like the recipe for a perfect soap opera, Libra. Remember, you're far too wise to get involved in dirty politics. Stay detached and watch the show.

Tip: A certain of detachment will help you cut the unhealthy cords.

SCORPIO: Love, romance, and commitment continue to be on the cards for you this weekend. No more playing games, Scorpio. If you like it, put a ring on it. Let your true feelings be known. A Brené Brown quote to inspire you

to open that space in your heart: "Waking up every day and loving someone who may or may not love us back, whose safety we can't ensure, who may stay in our lives or may leave without a moment's notice, who may be loyal to the day they die or betray us tomorrow—that's vulnerability."

Tip: Allow yourself to be vulnerable in love.

SAGITTARIUS: Don't wait for them to write to you or initiate plans. You go first, Sagittarius. If the connection you share is real, trust that you feel will be reciprocated. Your revelations in the process: vulnerability is not such a bad thing after all. With your intuition especially heightened, you'll feel like your messages are reaching others before you verbalise them.

Tip: Be the one to initiate the conversation.

CAPRICORN: The texting game is getting old, Capricorn. Pick up the phone and initiate plans. There's nothing a heart-to-heart with your loved ones cannot solve. Skip the party of the season for an evening of sipping chai and narrating stories from your lives though. Create an atmosphere that emanates warmth

so everybody can be themselves.

Tip: Nurturing your soul ties is on the cards.

AQUARIUS: The relationship you share with your partner is both spiritual and soulful. Send a prayer of gratitude into the cosmos. But it's not just your romantic life that's awakening you to the light within. Be aware of the friends and loved ones who are stepping in to remind you of the importance of living life conscientiously and fulfilling your sacred purpose. Some of you could even chance upon a mentor who gives you the strength you need to make positive life changes.

Tip: You are attracting the kind of people who are awakening you to the light within.

PISCES: The root of all suffering is either hanging on to a past you need to let go of, or projecting your worries onto the blank canvas of the future. Be aware of what your present is offering you, Pisces. Don't let your fears be the reason you walk your blessings out the exit door. In the realm of love and relationships, this is a time of movement.

Tip: Your fears could be blocking the blessings that are on their way to you.