



JOHN ABRAHAM ON USING HIS PHYSICALITY IN 'SUBVERSIVE' WAY

pg 08

Hong Kong protests and Brexit could both end up benefiting financial elites

pg 03

JOSS WHEDON'S 'THE NEVERS' ANNOUNCES NEW ADDITIONS TO CAST

pg 08



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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Organisation of women's power tackles litter around Kyongsa Ground



SUMMIT REPORT GYALSHING, 18 AUG: Naari Shakti Samuha, a local non-governmental organization of Lingchom in West Sikkim, carried out a cleanliness drive today around Kyongsa Ground near the bazaar area. Led by their president, Laxmi Gurung, members of the organization took part in the cleanliness drive on the theme 'waste

free Sikkim'. The Kyongsa Ground hosts public functions and sporting activities throughout the year and this expectedly creates maintenance challenges given the people's proclivity to litter. With Independence Day celebrations hosted their recently, the area was in desperate need for a cleanliness drive. The ladies collected

many sacks of litter and waste and dispatched the collected waste for disposal. Ms Gurung informs that the cleanliness drive was part of Naari Shakti Samuha's sanitation mission at villages across the district. She shared that the NGO was also working on other social issues such as women's health and sanitation, trafficking etc.

Kerala landslides: Ground Penetrating Radars being used to locate bodies; toll now 116

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG 18 (PTI): Ground Penetrating Radars were put into use on Sunday to locate bodies at Kavalappara in Malappuram and Puthumala in Wayanad, where massive landslides had wiped out two villages, even as the toll in rain battered Kerala climbed to 116 with the retrieval of more bodies. A team of experts from Hyderabad started the search operations at the two villages with GPR, which will help detect bodies buried under mounds of earth. A state wide calamity report issued by the government said 116 people have lost their lives in Kerala in the second spell of the South West monsoon rains since August 8 and that 83,043 people are still in 519 relief camps. As per the update, 53 people have so far lost their lives in Malappuram, 12 in Wayanad and 17 in Kozhikode, theth-

ree northern districts, where 26 people are still missing. The report also said that 1,204 houses were fully damaged in the monsoon. Meanwhile, over one lakh volunteers have enrolled for cleaning work in flood-hit villages in the northern districts. Kerala's all-women self-help group Kudumbashree has engaged over 50,000 members for the purpose. "Volunteers from various organisations have identified over 15,000 spots in Wayanad. They are moving in batches and have started the cleaning mission. They will remove the mud and slush from the houses, clean wells and the locality," an official told PTI. The volunteers will clean the wells using "super chlorination" method and the state Suchitwa Mission has arranged material and equipment for the

purposes, the official said. State minister-Kadannappalli Ramachandran and T P Ramakrishnan are coordinating the cleaning mission. Thousands of students, from the Students' Federation of India (SFI), National Cadets Corps (NCC) and National Service Scheme (NSS) have joined the cleaning initiative. A health department official said vaccines have been provided for volunteers to prevent leptospirosis, also known as rat fever. "We have provided the volunteers gumboots and gloves," the official said. As the rains receded, people have started returning to their homes after cleaning the accumulated mud and filth. Good samaritans from neighbouring districts are also lending a helping hand in the clean up operations.

EC wants legal backing to seek Aadhaar numbers to clean up voters list

NEW DELHI, AUG 18 (PTI): The Election Commission has asked the government to give it statutory backing to collect Aadhaar numbers of new applicants and existing voters to check multiple entries in electoral rolls. In a letter to the Law Ministry, the commission has proposed that provisions of the Representation of the People Act be amended to allow the EC to seek Aadhaar numbers of those applying to be voters and those who are already part of voters list. According to the EC proposal sent earlier

this month, the electoral law should be amended to empower electoral registration officer to seek Aadhaar numbers of the existing voters as well as of those applying to the voters list. In August 2015, a Supreme Court order on Aadhaar card has put brakes on the Election Commission's project to link Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) (Aadhaar) numbers with voters' electoral data to check multiple entries in electoral rolls. The poll panel was then collecting Aadhaar numbers as part

of its National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme (NERPAP). Seeking to check multiple entries in electoral rolls and to make them error-free, the Election Commission had embarked on an ambitious project to link Aadhaar numbers with voters' electoral data. "Since the Supreme Court order makes it clear that sanction of law is required to collect Aadhaar number, the commission has proposed changes in the electoral law," a functionary explained.

Rally in Gangtok wants defectors to resign

SPYF MARSHALS SUPPORT FOR PROTEST AGAINST SDF DEFECTIONS, MOCKERY OF MANDATE

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 18 AUG: Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum, under the banner of Citizens' Forum of Sikkim, took out a protest rally here today against the 12 Sikkim Democratic Front MLAs who, within two months of the election results, bailed from the party on whose ticket they won and divvied into Bharatiya Janata Party and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha.

The rally condemned the crossovers as a mockery of the people's mandate and demanded that the 12 MLAs resign from the Legislative Assembly on moral grounds. SPYF's Shankar Sharma, the forum does not have a heirarchy of office-bearers, while addressing the media at the start of the rally, stated that they would not have any objections if the MLAs who have defected resigned and won the resulting by-elections as candidates of the parties they now belong to.

Today's rally started from Amdo Golai at Indira Bypass and culminat-



ed at the District Administrative Centre at Sichey. The marchers carried banners proclaiming their condemnation and demands and were joined by Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee president, Bharat Basnet, Sikkim Subjects Committee's Nawin Kiran and representatives from other NGOs and social organisations.

SPYF had sent out an appeal to all stakeholders of democracy to join the rally. The turnout was not as huge as the buzz on social media projected, but they made their point and registered in public what a sizeable

number of the people here are privately feeling. The organizers also commented today that response to their call for support would be a reflection of the democratic credentials of the people who otherwise vent with fury in their claims to support democracy. They must have been let down because while the police turned up in large numbers, attracting the comment of "police state" from SPYF members, attendance was slim. The organisation also announced today that if their demand for resignations remains ignored, they will continue their

protest in other forms. While the organisation had wanted to take out the rally through the highway from Deorali to Titanic, the police authorities after dithering over their request for permission, eventually granted permission along with the request that they take the alternate route taken today. As per SPYF, the police cited "internal security problem" as the reason. It may be recalled that 10 SDF legislators joined the BJP in New Delhi on 14 August and a day later, the MLAs who had gone against the party decision to boycott assembly

proceedings, now freed of attracting disqualification under anti-defection laws joined the SKM. SDF, which had been awarded 15 constituencies by voters here, is now left with only one MLA in the SDF party president Pawan Chamlung. Expectedly, SKM supporters stayed away from today's rally since their party too has gained two MLAs from the SDF defections, but it was the silence from SDF camp which has raised eyebrows. The ten former SDF MLAs are reportedly still camped in New Delhi and given BJP's track-record with such moves, speculations are rife on how the political scene in Sikkim could get further muddled. Meanwhile, SPYF has become the first non-political outfit to call out the latest development and it remains to be seen whether their stand gains any traction or how the organization negotiates the turbulence which is bound to result from the currently very fluid politics of Sikkim.

Restrictions reimposed in parts of Srinagar after incidents of violence

SRINAGAR, AUG 18 (PTI): Restrictions were tightened in some parts of the city on Sunday following incidents of violence a day earlier, even as the first batch of Haj pilgrims returned to Kashmir from Saudi Arabia, officials said. They added restrictions continued in many parts of the Valley for the 14th day on Sunday. Restrictions were reimposed in certain areas which witnessed trouble on Saturday after the curbs were eased in several areas of the city and elsewhere in the valley, the officials said. They said protests took place at around a dozen places in which several protesters were injured. However, the exact number of injuries was not available, they added.

The officials said the flights carrying around 300 pilgrims landed at the Srinagar airport in the morning. Elaborate arrangements have been made for the smooth movement of pilgrims to their respective destinations, they said. "Only one family member is allowed at the airport to receive the Hajjis. A fleet of the State Road Transport Corporation (SRTC) buses has been deployed to facilitate the movement of Hajjis and their

NRC authority mulls action against official for irregularities in checking documents: sources

GUWAHATI, AUG 18 (PTI): The NRC authority is considering recommending strong action against a senior Assam government official for alleged irregularities in checking documents of people from Chamaria and some nearby areas in Kamrup district after which re-verification had to be done, sources close to the development said. Kamrup Deputy Commissioner Kamal Kumar Baishya has sent a report to the NRC State Coordinator Prateek Hajela about two months back on the alleged irregularities by a former Circle Officer of Chamaria under his district which came to light in 2018. The report noted how the then Circle Officer allegedly made all the affected people Original Inhabitants (OI) only to reduce his workload, the sources claimed.

He had allegedly ticked the OI column for all the people, including Hindus and Muslims, in the verification list, which lessened his burden for cross-checking the documents as well as the tedious process of finding out the family tree of the applicants, they said. "It is not a corruption-related case. The DC's enquiry has found out that the official's quality of verification was very poor and he was not sincere about his duties," a source said. The sources told PTI that the irregularities were initially detected around September 2018, after which the Kamrup district administration swung into action and found that it was affecting the entire Chamaria revenue circle. The NRC (National Register of Citizens)

authority was then informed about the development and after much deliberations, it was decided to hold re-verification in these areas. "It was a good proactive decision by the NRC authority to hold the re-verification process. This shows that they are serious about bringing out an error-free NRC within the deadline," a source close to the development said. The NRC authority has taken the report very seriously and is likely to recommend strong action against the erring bureaucrat, who is an Assam Civil Services official, the sources confirmed. No official comment could be obtained from the NRC Office as the Supreme Court had barred them from talking to the media. The deadline to pub-

lish the final NRC is August 31. The errant official was transferred from Chamaria early last year. A new Circle Officer was appointed in Chamaria, but he left the place within months seeking a voluntary transfer. In the second half of 2018, the current Circle Officer was appointed. She along with the deputy commissioner informed the NRC authority about the irregularities and started the process of re-verification. Calls made to the Kamrup Deputy Commissioner remained unanswered. From August 3 afternoon, notices for re-verification were served across the south of Kamrup district to about 33,000 people, asking them to appear within 48 hours in NRC Seva Kendras

Bhutan's message to humanity is happiness: PM Modi

THIMPHU, AUG 18 (PTI): Bhutan has understood the essence of happiness and it is not a surprise that the Himalayan nation has become synonymous in the world for its concept of Gross National Happiness, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Sunday. Addressing the students of the Royal University of Bhutan, Prime Minister Modi said the world had a lot to learn from Bhutan where development, environment and culture are not at loggerheads but in syn-

ergy. "In any part of the world, if we ask the question what do you associate with Bhutan, the answer will be the concept of Gross National Happiness. I am not surprised. Bhutan has understood the essence of happiness," he said. "Bhutan has understood the spirit of harmony, togetherness and compassion. This very spirit radiates from the adorable children who lined the streets to welcome me yesterday. I will always remember their

smiles," Modi said. Modi arrived in Bhutan on Saturday on a two-day state visit. This is his second visit to the country and the first since his re-election. Gross National Happiness is a term coined by the fourth King of Bhutan Jigme Singye Wangchuck in 1972. The concept implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing. "Bhutan's message to humanity is happi-

ness. Happiness which springs from harmony. The world can do with a lot more happiness. Happiness, which shall prevail over mindless hate. If people are happy, there will be harmony, where there is harmony, there will be peace. And it is peace that will help societies achieve progress through sustainable development," Modi said. He said in a time where development is often seen in conflict with traditions and the environment, the world has much to learn from Bhutan.

turn to pg02

Weather improves in south Bengal; rain likely in western parts

KOLKATA, AUG 18 (PTI): Weather in large parts of south Bengal, including the metropolis, improved on Sunday after two days of torrential rain that led to waterlogging in many areas and snapped road links at several places.

With the low pressure that led to the high precipitation in the southern districts of the state having moved towards the West Bengal-Jharkhand border,

the Met department predicted heavy to very heavy rain in the western parts of the state.

Heavy to very heavy rain has been forecast in the districts of Bankura, Purulia, West Midnapore and Jhargram bordering Jharkhand, while the other districts of south Bengal are likely to receive light to moderate rain till Monday morning.

The seaside resort town of Digha on Bay

of Bengal coast recorded the highest rainfall in 24 hours till Sunday morning at 121 mm, while port town Haldia received 105 mm precipitation during the same period, the Met said.

Kolkata received 62 mm rainfall, while the NSC Bose International Airport recorded 51 mm rain, it said.

Some other towns in south Bengal which received heavy rain

during the said period are Kalaikunda (80 mm), Midnapore (70 mm), Contai (71 mm), Barrackpore (55 mm) and Canning (50 mm), the weatherman said.

With no precipitation since Sunday morning, rain water receded from the main thoroughfares of Kolkata, but some low-lying areas of the city and suburbs continued to remain waterlogged.

AITA on sticky wicket ahead of talks with ITF security consultants

AMANPREET SINGH
NEW DELHI, AUG 18 (PTI): India's tennis federation will look to convince world body ITF into changing the venue of their Davis Cup tie against Pakistan in Islamabad with team captain Mahesh Bhupathi likely to play a key role in the tele-consultation on Monday.

The tie has become a matter of speculation ever since Pakistan downgraded diplomatic ties with India citing the revocation of the special status enjoyed by the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

India had named a full-strength team for the September 14-15 tie in Islamabad.

But after Jammu and Kashmir was turned into a union territory, Pakistan asked the Indian ambassador to leave their country, halted a goodwill train service and tried to kick up an international row by continuously issuing aggressive statements against India.

Despite the escalating tension, India's Sports Ministry made it clear that it won't interfere since it is not a bilateral series.

The All India Tennis Association (AITA) nonetheless has a tough job at hand to convince the ITF to provide a neutral venue since the World Governing body still feels that current circumstances do not demand a change in venue.

"Safety and security are the ITF's highest priority. We are working closely with the host nation and independent expert security advisors,



and the ITF is satisfied with their current security assessment of the site and the security plan in place," ITF said in a statement to PTI.

"The overall security risk rating for Pakistan has not changed, but we will continue to monitor the situation closely with our advisors," added the statement.

ITF though has agreed to address AITA's concern and will ensure that its security consultants speak with them. Bhupathi will also be part of the tele-conference, scheduled for Monday.

According to the Davis Cup rules and regulations a tie can be moved out of a Nation only in a few circumstances.

"A Nation with Choice of Ground may lose its choice at any time if the Davis Cup Committee considers that it is not possible or practicable for the opposing Nation to reach or play at the venue chosen for the Tie, due to (for example) an incident such as war, political unrest, terrorism or natural disaster," reads the rule 30.2.5.

In this case, India is not at war with Pakistan even though the diplomatic tensions have been

high owing to Pakistan's aggressive stance.

The security apprehensions remain and the players are jittery about travelling to Pakistan.

However, withdrawing from the tie will affect the AITA as well as Indian Davis Cup team.

Forfeiting the tie would mean that Indian team will be automatically relegated to the Asia/Oceania Group II. It means India won't reach the World Group Qualifiers before 2022, getting pegged back by at least two years.

It will have to compete in Group II in 2020 to earn promotion back to Group I and again spend 2021 in Group I to be able to compete in Qualifiers in 2022.

Whereas, if the Indian team travels to Pakistan next month and beat the hosts, it will be eligible to compete in the Qualifiers in 2020.

"We are not interested in forfeiting the tie. We look forward to working with the ITF to find a solution that guarantees the safety of all the players," Bhupathi told PTI.

For AITA, it's about financial losses as well.

According to the rule 62.1.2, a defaulting na-

tion, "will be liable for all reasonable expenses incurred by the ITF, or the Final Week Organiser and the other Nation(s) participating in the Tie/Event up to the date when notice of default was received by the ITF.

Rule 62.1.3 states, it may, on application by the ITF, be subject to a fine imposed by the ITF Internal Adjudication Panel.

So, it is not going to be an easy call to make if the ITF Consultants persist that the Indian team must travel to Pakistan.

AITA Life President Anil Khanna is ITF Vice President and also on the ITF Board of Directors.

However, an AITA Executive member felt that Khanna is not in a position to help India's case here. "There are people from different nations on the ITF Board and if everyone starts bringing their respective nations' issues, the Board won't be able to entertain all requests," the member, who did not wish to be named, said.

There is another school of thought according to which Khanna would not want to antagonise Pakistan since ITF President elections are approaching.

Branded 'witch', woman force-fed human excreta in Nepal

SHIRISH B PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, AUG 18 (PTI): A 35-year-old woman in Nepal was allegedly thrashed and forced to eat human faeces by a group of villagers in the latest attack linked to accusations of witchcraft,

police said on Sunday.

A group of five women beat the victim and force-fed her human excreta at Birta village of Bhangaha area in Mahottari district on Monday, they said.

The accused have been identified as Sabita

Devi, Poshila Danuwar, Indra Devi Singh Danuwar, Sukeshwori Devi and Rajeshree Anuwar, Superintendent of Police Shyam Krishna Adhikari said. Sukeshwori and Rajashree have been taken into police custody, he

said, adding that they have initiated an investigation into the matter.

The practice of accusing women of being witches and assaulting or killing them is still common in some parts of Nepal, although it is illegal.

NRC authority mulls...

(NSKs), almost 400-500 km away from their place of residence, in several upper Assam districts.

The sources said that as NRC process is time-bound and the final document has to be published by August 31, all the reverification work has to be completed as soon as possible.

"The NSKs in entire lower Assam were already loaded with their scheduled reverification process. As there were fewer claims and objections in upper Assam, so the NSKs there were relatively less occupied.

"That is why the authorities decided to hold the reverification of these unscheduled cases in upper Assam districts.

"The only thing is that the notices should have been served to the people by giving them some more time," they added.

Many poor people in the south of Kamrup area, with no money to fund their travel at such a short notice, had to pledge their valuables, including gold, cattle or sell their harvested crops at throwaway price.

People rushed to the NSKs in Jorhat, Sivasagar, Golaghat and Charaideo districts cramming into overloaded and overpriced buses.

In July last year, 40,07,707 people were excluded from the complete draft of the NRC, which contained the names of 2,89,83,677 eligible persons out of a total 3,29,91,384 applicants.

An additional 1,02,462 persons were included last month in the list of excluded persons, taking the total number of ineligible persons to 41,10,169 in the complete draft document.

Assam, which had faced an influx of people from Bangladesh since the early 20th Century, is the only state having an NRC that was first prepared in 1951.

Absence of legal awareness root cause of rights' deprivation: CJI

NAGPUR, AUG 18 (PTI): Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi on Sunday said the absence of legal awareness was the "root cause" of "deception, exploitation and deprivation" of the rights and benefits of the masses.

He also observed that "awareness" about ones' rights and the means of securing them are the "powerful instruments" to bring social and economic progress.

Addressing the valedictory function of the 17th All India Meet of State Legal Services Authority (SLSA) in Nagpur, the CJI said legal services must be constituted to "achieve distributed justice, effective implementation of welfare benefits and elimination of social and structural discrimination against the poor".

In his speech, he also underlined the importance of "legal literacy", "technology and access" and the "impact and accountability" for delivering the quality legal services.

Justice Gogoi also said the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and State Legal Services Authorities are the "crucial vehicles" for discharging the Constitutional mandate of justice to all on the basis of equal opportunities.

"These bodies have to ensure through their methods that justice reaches the remotest corners of the country and the last person," said

the CJI.

Emphasising the need for "legal literacy", Justice Gogoi said, "awareness of ones' rights and means of securing those rights are powerful instruments for bringing about social and economic progress. Absence of legal awareness is a root cause of deception, exploitation and deprivation of rights and benefits of the masses. Legal literacy and legal awareness go hand in hand".

Justice Gogoi said the "legal aid movement" cannot achieve its goal until people are aware about their legal rights so as their basic rights.

He said "greater awareness" translates into better and broader access.

The CJI observed that contemporary legal education is limited to universities training future lawyers and that it should go beyond awareness.

"Though education on legal topics is in school and college curriculum. It should go beyond awareness. What instead required is movement from near awareness to engagement," the CJI said.

Justice Gogoi further underlined the need to implement legal knowledge for the overall good.

"Efforts must be made to secure concerted engagement of young minds in understanding and utilising that knowledge for the benefit of

the society. Not only law colleges but the students of schools and colleges must be included in the outreach programme. Students and young persons have the potential to become the ambassadors of justice," said Justice Gogoi.

He also emphasised the need to focus on "Technology and Access" and the need for customised legal services as per the needs of the people.

"Technology and innovation should be embraced in all aspects of functions on the professionally-managed rendering of legal services at all the levels. It should ensure (delivery of) timely and effective legal services to the needy," said the CJI.

"Let us use technology to provide greater information about legal aid through mobile apps, provide vital information to those seeking legal aid about status of their cases and applications," he said.

The CJI also underlined the importance of "impact and accountability", saying in fact there is no better "mirage" than statistics.

"Right to legal aid means the right to quality legal aid. Commitment to quality must be there in the whole organisation," he said.

To ensure quality, the CJI suggested a rigorous selection process for empanelment of lawyers.

"If need be there se-

lection be made on the lines of the process followed for the selection of public prosecutors.

This would go all the way in addressing the complaints of lack of quality," the CJI said.

"This step, to a large extent, (can) also be achieved in addressing the concerns of adequate economic incentives.

Currently, it is often told to us that good lawyers keep away because of untimely payment of honorarium," said the CJI.

He added: "Building committed cadres selected through transparent and rigorous process to form away persuasive argument and to enhance and ensure timely payment of honorarium. Regular training should be provided to building capacity among panel lawyers and para-legals".

"To provide quality training, the state legal services authorities must partner with state judicial academies or national law universities and other universities to evolve a comprehensive, innovative and pragmatic training programme," said the CJI.

Quoting Mahatma Gandhi that "the first step to achieve justice is to make injustice visible", the CJI said, "Pursuit of justice must involve elimination of injustice, and it is unjust that anyone is denied the opportunity of pursuing their right owing to poverty".

CBI books Ratul Puri in Rs 354-crore bank fraud case

NEW DELHI, AUG 18 (PTI): The CBI has booked Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath's nephew Ratul Puri, the then former executive director of Moser Baer, and others in connection with a Rs-354 crore bank fraud case filed by Central Bank of India, officials said on Sunday.

Besides Ratul and the company, his father and Managing Director Deepak Puri, Directors Nita Puri (Ratul's mother and Kamal Nath's sister), Sanjay Jain and Vineet Sharma have also been booked by the agency for alleged criminal conspiracy, cheating, forgery and corruption.

Ratul had resigned from the post of executive director in 2012, while his parents continue to be on the board, the bank said in a statement.

The agency has carried out searches at six locations including the residences and offices of the accused directors Sunday,

they said.

The company is involved in the manufacture of optical storage media like compact discs, DVDs, solid state storage devices.

The case has been registered based on a complaint from Central Bank of India.

The company was taking loans from various banks since 2009 and went for debt restructuring a number of times, the bank has alleged in the complaint which is now part of the CBI FIR.

When it was unable to pay the debt, a forensic audit was done and the account was declared as "fraud" by the Central Bank of India on April 20, 2019, it has alleged.

"...The MBIL has committed fraud and cheated the complainant bank thereby making a wrongful gain to themselves and a wrongful loss to the lender bank which is a custodian of public money," the complaint to the CBI said.

Primary security of the bank consisting of stock of finished goods, semi finished goods and raw material have also been dishonestly and fraudulently removed by the company and its directors in order to prevent the distribution amongst the creditor banks to satisfy the debt, the bank has alleged.

"The funds granted by the banks have been misused and misappropriated by MBIL and its directors for their own personal use, MBIL and its Directors and promoters have also committed fraud in respect of reporting book debts, which were also one of the primary securities of the bank," it said.

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Restrictions reimposed...

relatives with the coordination of all district administrations," the officials said.

The security forces, they said, have been directed to allow passage of pilgrims and their relatives, who have already been issued passes, through the areas where restrictions are in place.

Government spokesman Rohit Kansal had on Saturday said the restrictions were eased in 35 police station areas of the valley. However, several places witnessed clashes between groups of youth and security forces, leading to reimposition of the curbs.

On Saturday evening, Kansal said protests took place at six places in the valley in which eight persons suffered injuries.

Landline telephone services have been restored in several areas of the city as the process to bring more areas on the telecom map was going on, the officials said.

Some private vehicles were seen plying in the civil lines areas of the city and the other district headquarters of the valley, they said. Some shops were also open in those areas, they added.

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Govt BEd College wins Ignite inter-college fest

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 AUG:

Govt BEd College, Soreong, emerged the top contingent at Ignite, an inter-college fest organised by Inner Wheel Club, Gangtok, on Saturday. This was the fourth edition of the fest and attracted a massive participation of around 250 students representing 22 colleges.

Nar Bahadur Bhan-

dari Degree College, Tadong, came in first runner-up, and CCCT, Chisopani, second runner-up at the fest hosted at College of Agricultural Engineering & Post Harvest Technology at Ranipool.

Competitions were held in eight categories ranging from extempore to couples prop dance to sudoku etc.

Chief Secretary AK

Srivastava was present as chief guest accompanied by Professor PP Dabral, Dean, CAEPHT, as the guest of honour, a press release informs.

In his address, the CS lauded the spirit and power of the ladies of Sikkim. He also emphasized the need to create something which has a lasting influence and durability.

For the youth his

message was, "A big No-No to mobile phones, drugs, liquor, cigarettes and fast food. He also emphasized the importance of hand washing and awareness about illness, and consuming nutritious food."

IWC-Gangtok president, Asha Kiran, spoke about other projects being undertaken by the Club while the chairperson of the event, Dr

Neeti Nepal, shared that over the past four years, Ignite has grown into an important event on the college calendar.

"It is Sikkim's only multievent scholastic competition which involves all the government and private college in the state. The aim of the event is not only to provide a platform to Sikkim's youth but also to foster greater bond-

ing between students of various colleges," she detailed.

The different events were judged by a panel comprising of Mitali Dutta, Puja Sharma, Chandrika Chettri, Suraj Mallick, Mira Oberoi, Sagar Subba, Karishma Pradhan, Mohanlal Sarda, Gyurmila Bhutia, Pranita Ghimirey, Dilliram Dulal, and Rustam Lepcha.

Google Maps reunites father with daughter after 4 months

NEW DELHI, AUG 18 (PTI): Google Maps helped police reunite a father with his 12-year-old daughter who had gone missing over four months ago in Delhi, officials said.

The girl had taken an e-rickshaw near the Kirti Nagar furniture market in Holi on March 21, according to the police.

When the minor did not get down at the metro station, the e-rickshaw driver asked her where she wanted to go, but she did not give any reply. He took her to the Kirti Nagar police station at 8.33 pm, a senior officer said.

During an initial inquiry, the girl could not remember her house and just said she was from "Khurja" village and her father's name was Jeetan, the officer said.

Police searched Khajuri Khas and Khureji areas of Delhi since their names are similar to the word 'Khurja', but could not find any records of missing complaints being filed. They took the girl to the nearby JJ colony, but no one could identify her.

The girl, who is mentally-challenged, also said that she had travelled to Delhi by a train a couple of days ago with an uncle named 'Pintu'. He took off her clothes in the train's washroom and left her there when she started crying, police said.

On March 22, her medical examination was conducted and no sign of sexual assault was found. A case was registered under Section 354A (sexual harassment) of the Indian Penal Code and relevant sections of the POCSO acts. She was handed over to an NGO named Nirmal Chhaya, the police said.

The 12-year-old was taken to Khurja village in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district by a police team on four different occasions, but they did not get any clue about her family, Deputy Commissioner

of Police (West) Monika Bhardwaj said.

"We kept trying to trace her family but could not get any lead. She was not being able to say the name of her village properly," Bhardwaj said. "The police team had gone to Khurja several times, but no one could recognise her there."

When a police team was taking the girl to Khurja again on July 31, a senior officer asked her the names of nearby areas of her village. She said Sonbarsa was her mother's village and there was a place called Sakapar near her village.

Thereafter, with the help of Google Maps, the police got to know that in Uttar Pradesh's Siddharthnagar district, there are villages with the name of Sakapar, Sonbarsa and "Kurja".

Later, her family was also traced by the police. On August 1, her father Jeetan, a native of Kurja village, came to Delhi from Gorakhpur, the police said.

Jeetan said he brought his daughter to the capital for treatment at the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS). The girl went missing on Holi from his sister's house at JJ colony in Kirti Nagar, but he did not file any missing complaint, the police said.

Jeetan, who works at a scrap factory in Delhi, said his wife, who lives at her parent's house in Sonbarsa, was mentally-challenged and she had also gone to some random place around one-and-a-half years ago, according to the police. "Around three-four months later, she was traced in Ludhiana, Punjab. Similarly, he thought that police will find his daughter also."

Jeetan, who also has a son and another daughter, said there was no uncle by the name of Pintu, following which the case of sexual harassment was dropped, the police said.

CBI to probe phone tapping charges in Karnataka: CM Yediyurappa

BENGALURU, AUG 18 (PTI): Days after charges of phone tapping during the previous coalition government headed by JD(S) surfaced, Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Sunday said he will order a CBI probe into the allegations citing demands by several political leaders including Congress.

While former Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy, who headed the coalition government said he was ready for a probe by even an "international agency", his alliance partner the Congress, however, seemed to be a divided house.

"On the telephone tapping issue. Several leaders, including Congress Legislature Party leader Siddaramaiah, have said it should be probed and truth should come out, so I have decided to order a CBI probe. Tomorrow itself I will order the probe," Yediyurappa told reporters here.

He also said it was the expectation of the people of the state that a detailed inquiry should be made and the culprits punished.

Yediyurappa's announcement comes amid signs that the scandal was gaining political steam ever since disqualified JD(S) MLA A H Vishwanath, who served as JD(S) state president and turned rebel later, last week dropped the political bomb, accusing the H D Kumaraswamy government of tapping phones and spying on more than 300 people, including him.

Congress leaders, including Siddaramaiah, M Mallikarjuna Kharge and home minister in the alliance government M B Patil, had sought a probe while another key party leader and former minister D K Shivakumar has rejected the snooping charges and appeared to side with Kumaraswamy.

According to reports, phones of those close to Siddaramaiah, who was



the then coalition coordination committee chief, too had come under the watch.

Several BJP leaders, including former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar, have directly accused Kumaraswamy of being behind the episode which was then rocked by dissidence within.

The coalition government ultimately collapsed last month with Kumaraswamy losing the trust vote in the assembly.

Reacting to the Chief Minister announcing a CBI probe, Kumaraswamy, who has already denied the charges, said "Let them do any inquiry, whether it is a CBI inquiry or any other agency of international standard, or let them talk to Trump (US President Donald Trump) and get it inquired through some one from his side."

He also hit out at the electronic media for its coverage on the issue, saying no one can do anything to him and alleged that their intention and attempts were to keep him away from people of the state.

Stating that he was not aware as to why his name was linked to the phone tapping case, he stressed, "If I was involved I would have panicked, I'm open.... There is not even an iota... to point fingers at me."

The JD(S) leader also asked Yediyurappa to bring BJP's previous tenure in the government and also that of Siddara-

maiah under the ambit of the CBI probe.

While Congress Legislature Party leader Siddaramaiah has welcomed the CBI probe, hoping that the BJP does not use the central investigating agency for "political vendetta," Congress on its official Twitter handle has said that telephone tapping "was a bundle of lies" and a conspiracy for hate politics.

"I welcome the decision of @BSYBJP to hand over the phone tapping case to CBI.

But in the past @BJP4India has used CBI as its puppet to unleash its venomous political vendetta.

Hope @BJP4Karnataka leaders does not have similar intentions this time," Siddaramaiah tweeted on Sunday following announcement of probe by the chief minister. Asserting that allegations of 'Operation Kamala' being done in Karnataka are as serious as charges of phone tapping, he said in another tweet "I urge @BSYBJP to order CBI investigation into alleged Operation Kamala also.

I heard they acted on my advice in phone tapping case & I hope they act on this issue as well."

However, the state Congress in a tweet termed phone tapping as "lies" and a conspiracy for hate politics.

Alleging that Yediyurappa was behaving like an "underground criminal" after becoming

the chief minister in an "immoral" way by "Operation Kamala" through the backdoor, the party in a tweet said, "In Modi administration CBI was working as a frontal unit of the BJP.

Phone tapping was a (bundle of) lies and a conspiracy for hate politics."

Hitting out at the Congress, senior BJP leader R Ashoka expressed surprise over differences of opinion on the phone tapping probe within the grand old party.

Pointing out that several Congress leaders, including Siddaramaiah, had demanded a probe, he said, "Before handing over the probe they demanded an inquiry... now they are blaming the chief minister, it is not right." "Without even knowing who was behind the tapping, they are accusing us of indulging in vendetta politics. None of us know who is behind it, it should come out through the probe," Ashoka added.

Vishwanath too hit out at the Congress for its confusing stand on the CBI probe into the scandal and said the party was a divided house now, with several groups within.

Without naming Kumaraswamy, he once again alleged that the then Chief Minister should be aware of tapping as intelligence directly comes under him.

"Let's see who are all involved," he said.

Credit demand subdued, economy needs stimulus: SBI Chairman

KOLKATA, AUG 18 (PTI): State Bank of India (SBI) Chairman Rajnish Kumar on Sunday said credit demand remains subdued and there is a need for stimulus in the economy.

Though lack of credit demand exists in the economy, there is no supply-side constraint as the public sector banks are more or less well-capitalised, he said.

Kumar hoped that monsoon will have a positive impact. Increased spending by the government and the upcoming festival season would boost demand, Kumar added.

He was in the city to attend the multi-level consultation programme with the branch managers of SBI in the region.

"There is no supply-side constraint. More or less, the public sector banks are well capitalised and bank rates also moderated," he said.

Kumar hoped that monsoon will have a positive impact.

Increased spending by the government and the upcoming festival season would boost demand, Kumar added.

I will run govt for full term: Nepal PM Oli

SHIRISH B PRADHAN KATHMANDU, AUG 18 (PTI): Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli on Sunday said he will continue for full five-year term and warned his detractors not to "day dream about toppling" his government.

His statement came days before the completion of his two-and-half-year term at the office.

In February 2018, Oli became prime minister for the second time, over two months after his Left alliance comprising his party CPN-UML and Nepal Communist Party (NCP) led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' swept the country's historic parliamentary and local polls.

According to media reports, there was a power sharing agreement between the CPN-UML and the NCP under which Oli, after completing his two-and-half-year term at

the office, will hand over the premiership to Prachanda for the rest of the tenure of the five-year government.

"Don't worry, I will remain as the Prime Minister of the country till the next election," Oli said addressing the Parliament.

Warning those wishing for his departure, he said, "Don't day dream about toppling my government. There are people who have been saying that the prime minister is shivering as his tenure is nearing end...I am not going to quit anytime soon," he said.

Oli also asked the Opposition not to accuse his government of trying to impose authoritarian rule. "Question is being raised on my government's commitment to democracy, which is unnecessary," he said.

The prime minister returned to Kathmandu last week after a health check up in Singapore.

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MR. SIKKIM MANHUNT

For Education

Figure out why, and the how will then follow

The definition of literacy in India is grossly under-achieving. Anyone with an elementary knowledge to read and write is counted as literate; at times, even just being able to write and read their names is considered enough, and that is hardly what literacy should be about. If this were the yardstick to measure literacy, then handing over smart-phones to the unlettered will get the job done. It is after all not rare to find preschool toddlers who have figured out how the play and pause commands on video games look different and work their way around it.

So, aiming for literacy is really aiming too low.

The aim has to be to deliver learning even if it does not include reading and writing so that the quality of human resource is improved. Governments choose the easier option of literacy when the more productive and necessary approach should be to create better educated citizens. Do that, and one need not even worry too much about employable skills, because if education does its job well, it will infuse an inquisitiveness and a confidence which will make the "educated" ready for every job and every challenge. And this has to be approach with which the education policy is approached. Sikkim is thankfully on track since there are deep meditations and consultations already underway to understand what is missing from its schools, what works and what needs to be done to inject quality into the school system here.

Education has been held up as a thrust area of governmental engagement, with 'quality' as the watch word. It is heartening for Sikkim to learn that education is receiving a relook. The density of schools in Sikkim leaves no room for complaint and the free textbooks and uniform scheme of the government ensure that at least the tools required to remain in school are in place. Schemes like the mid-day meal are pegged as incentives to keep students in school, but the only effective incentive long-term will be the quality of education that is imparted in the classrooms, not the quality of food served during breaks or the quality of uniforms. That said, enrolment is handsome in Sikkim's schools and kids here can complete education if they so desire. But what also needs to be accepted that nowadays, most kids are in school because their parents don't know what else to do with them... because sending children to school is the done thing.

Worryingly, most enroll in colleges for much the same reason (or rather, the lack of one). Not too many of us have really figured out why we send children to school. There are vague notions of "a better future" and employment, but come on, we should not be signing off the first two decades or more of our lives for pursuits without any clear idea of why. Hence, the first task for any enquiry into how schools can be improved should be to build consensus on why we have schools, and let's scratch employment from the reasons because imparting "employable skills" does not require such a long time - you can prepare people for most jobs with a basic 3-month course and the rest they can learn on the job. Once Sikkim has figured out "why", the how will be easy to work out.

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Hong Kong protests and Brexit could both end up benefiting financial elites

PHILIP ROSCOE
theconversation.com

Protests in Hong Kong have captured the world's attention in recent weeks, with demonstrators closing streets and the airport, and Chinese forces amassing near the border with a none too subtle threat of violent reprisal. The protests began in response to a new extradition law, but have spilled over into a general unease about the future of Hong Kong's special administrative status.

This special status sets Hong Kong apart from mainland China in a number of ways. As well as enjoying various social and political freedoms, it has a free market economy and is one of the world's biggest financial centres. Global finance has attracted a number of Chinese elites but has not benefited a large chunk of Hong Kong society.

But if Hong Kong's protesters succeed in pushing back against the oversight of Beijing, it would serve to reinforce the benefits the elites already enjoy from Hong Kong's economic arrangements. This parallels the situation in the UK, where financial elites could soon embrace a low-tax, low-regulation future following a no-deal Brexit driven by populist concerns about immigration and inequality.

LONGSTANDING FINANCIAL CENTRES

Hong Kong and London share a common history and since the 1960s have flourished as offshore financial centres, acting in many ways as secrecy jurisdictions or tax havens.

Hong Kong's financial sector was a creation of the British, who used it as a route into Chinese markets. It boomed following the opening of the Chinese economy. When, in 1997, Hong Kong returned to China, it preserved some of this offshore status as a special administrative zone. The beneficiaries this time were Chinese.

Hong Kong stores great reserves of capital in comparative secrecy, channels global investment into China - also in secrecy - and is a crucial part of China's long-term plan to establish the Renminbi as a global reserve currency through offshore markets. The local "dim sum bond market", issuing RMB denominated debt, has been a remarkable success, with the equivalent of more than US\$100 billion of capital circulating.

Hong Kong has been implicated in shadier dealing. Investigative journalist Nicholas Shaxton puts it bluntly: "Hong Kong is where most of the corruption in China is accomplished." Other scholars see Hong Kong as an amalgam of onshore and offshore finance, with a strong legal system, tax treaties, and a robust financial market.

London's success as a global financial centre has also been driven by its status as a hub for offshore financial services, a position greatly supported by its strong connections throughout Britain's former empire. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, London became home for the "eurodollar" markets. These were lending markets operating in US dollars, located in London but considered to be



beyond the purview of the UK's legislation.

London-based lenders could charge higher rates than the national currency controls of the time allowed. The United States benefited as the depth and liquidity of eurodollar markets supported the dollar's reserve currency status; international banks arrived in droves and the City, London's financial district, thrived. Regulators on both side of the Atlantic turned a blind eye, quietly admitting the economic benefits the markets bestowed. Even the Soviets invested.

MASTERS OF REINVENTION

Both London and Hong Kong are centres of perpetual reinvention. Following the financial crisis, the City's innovations have included managing the wealth of the global super-rich and an arrangement with the Chinese government to develop the offshore trading of the RMB.

In the same way that Hong Kong's protesters fear Chinese control, a number of Brexiters claim the EU comes with too much red tape. Interviewing financiers for research into London-based markets, I found overwhelming support for Brexit, largely driven by a distaste for increasing layers of regulation.

It is certainly the case that Europe has never been comfortable with London's activities as a conduit for international funds. No one expects the EU to maintain the City's "passporting rights" which allow firms based in the UK to trade freely across the EU. And the mundane but profitable business of settling euro trans-

actions is likely to be pulled within the bloc.

But there is much more to financial markets than regulation. The City's remarkable talent for reinvention flows from the nature of financial markets themselves.

History shows they are fluid entities constantly reshaping in response to political happenstance and technological or economic advances. Markets put down roots in the shape of dense social networks shaped by bonds of trust and expertise, and in the material infrastructures - from wires, phones and screens to upscale offices, restaurants and hotels - without which they cannot function. Advantages of status and connection become embedded. When new financial frontiers open up it's those well-placed who benefit.

Here's the irony. Hong Kong's protesters seek political freedom, but whatever happens in politics, it is likely that the economic advantages of the elite will be preserved through the social and material architectures of its markets.

Brexit, meanwhile, has been driven by concerns over immigration and inequality, but the no-deal on the horizon offers something else. If the new prime minister's rhetoric of "boosterism" and "freeports" is to be believed, the City will be entirely unencumbered by regulation, free to roam the high seas of international currency flows. Here too, only the financial elites will benefit.

[the writer is Reader in Management, University of St Andrews]

Silicon Valley wants to read your mind - here's why you should be worried

GARFIELD BENJAMIN

Not content with monitoring almost everything you do online, Facebook now wants to read your mind as well. The social media giant recently announced a breakthrough in its plan to create a device that reads people's brainwaves to allow them to type just by thinking. And Elon Musk wants to go even further. One of the Tesla boss's other companies, Neuralink, is developing a brain implant to connect people's minds directly to a computer.

Musk admits that he takes inspiration from science fiction, and that he wants to make sure humans can "keep up" with artificial intelligence. He seems to have missed the part of sci-fi that acts as a warning for the implications of technology.

These mind-reading systems could affect our privacy, security, identity, equality and personal safety. Do we really want all that left to companies with philosophies such as that of Facebook's former mantra, "move fast and break things"?

Though they sound futuristic, the technologies needed to make brainwave-reading devices are not that dissimilar to the standard MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and EEG (electroencephalography) neuroscience tools used in hospitals all over the world. You can already buy a kit to control a drone with your mind, so using one to type out words is, in some ways, not that much of a leap. The advance will likely be due to the use of machine learning to sift through huge quantities of data collected from our brains and find the patterns in neuron activity that link thoughts to specific words.

A brain implant is likely to take a lot longer to develop, and it's important to separate out the actual achievements of Neuralink from media hype and promotion. But Neuralink has made simultaneous improvements in materials for electrodes and robot-assisted surgery to implant them, packaging the technology neatly so it can be read via USB.

Facebook and Neuralink's plans may build on established medical practice. But when companies are collecting thoughts directly from our brains, the ethical issues are very different.

Any system that could collect data directly



from our brains has clear privacy risks. Privacy is about consent. But it is very difficult to give proper consent if someone is tapping directly into our thoughts. Silicon Valley companies (and governments) already surreptitiously gather as much data on us as they can and use it in ways we'd rather they didn't. How sure can we be that our random and personal thoughts won't be captured and studied alongside the instructions we want to give the technology?

DISCRIMINATION AND MANIPULATION

One of the existing ethical issues with data gathering is discrimination based on attributes such as gender or race that can be discerned from the data. Providing a window into people's minds could make it easier to determine other things that might form the basis of prejudice, such as sexuality or political ideology, or even different ways of thinking that might include things like autism.

With a system that taps directly into your brain, not only could your thoughts be stolen, but it's also possible they could be manipulated as well. Brain stimulation is already being developed to help treat PTSD and reduce violence. There are even sensational claims that it can be used to upload knowledge directly just like in the film *The Matrix*.

A predictable step would be to combine the "in" and "out" technologies for a two-way brain-computer interface. The potential for governments to make us more compliant, for employers to force us to work harder, or for companies to make us want more of their products underlines just how seriously we should take this technology.

If mind-reading devices become the normal way to interact with computers, we may end up with little choice but to use them in order to keep up with more productive colleagues. (Imagine someone today applying for an office job but refusing to use email.) And if Neuralink-style implants become the norm, this could also lead to greater inequality determined by what level of kit you could afford to have installed.

Elon Musk has stated that the enormous loan required to afford Neuralink surgery would be offset by potential earnings for the "enhanced". The idea of people feeling pressured to take on huge debts to have surgery just to keep their job comes straight from a sci-fi dystopia.

On top of all this is the more direct physical threat of having systems physically intruding on our brains. While some people may want to modify their brain with a computer interface (there are already plenty of experimental biohackers), to roll this out on a large scale would require massive and thorough testing.

Given Silicon Valley's reputation (and penchant) for breaking things rather than stopping to think them through, these systems will need close regulation and ethical review even before testing begins. Otherwise it risks creating mutilated human guinea pigs.

For all this, there could be huge advantages to continuing research in this area, particularly for those suffering from paralysis or sensory impairment. But Silicon Valley should not be able to dictate the way these technologies are developed and deployed. If they do, it may radically reshape the way we identify as human.

[the writer is Postdoctoral Researcher, School of Media Arts and Technology, Solent University]

Five new fish species discovered in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, AUG 18 (PTI): Researchers of the Rajiv Gandhi University here have recently discovered five new fish species in various districts of the state.

The scientific names of the newly-discovered fish species are *Mystus prabini*, found in Sinkin and Dibang rivers in Lower Dibang Valley district and *Exostoma kottelati*, found in Ranga river in Lower Subansiri district, a release by the university said.

Other discovered species are *Creteuchiloglanis tawangensis*, found in the Tawangchu river in Tawang district, *Garra ranganensis*, found in Ranga river and *Physoschistura harkishorei*, found in Dibang and Lohit rivers in Lower Dibang Valley district, it said.

The team was led by Prof DN Das of the fisheries and aquatic ecology research wing of the Zoology department of the university.

"Majority of the water bodies in remote areas of the state are still not easily accessible to the researchers due to a difficult terrain that includes rain forests, steep hills besides communication problems," Das said.

He, however, said his research team is optimistic that meticulous exploration may result in more discoveries of new fish species from the state in the future.

India, Bhutan are 'natural partners': PM Modi tell Bhutan's new generation



THIMPHU, AUG 18 (PTI): No two countries in the world understand each other so well or share so much as India and Bhutan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday as he emphasised that New Delhi and Thimphu are such "natural partners" in bringing prosperity to their peoples.

Addressing the students of the prestigious Royal University of Bhutan here, Modi said it is natural that the people of Bhutan and India experience great attachment to each other. After all, they are close not just due to their geography. Their history, culture and spiritual traditions have created unique and deep bonds between our peoples and nations, he said.

"India is fortunate to be the land where Prince Siddhartha became Gautam Buddha. And from where the light of his spiritual message, the light of Buddhism, spread all over the world. Generations of monks, spiritual leaders, scholars and seekers have burnt that flame bright in Bhutan. They have also nurtured the special bond between India and Bhutan," the prime minister said in the majority Buddhist country.

"As a result, our shared values have shaped a common worldview," Modi said in the presence of Bhutan Prime Minister Lotay Tshering.

"And as people, we are fortunate to be the

living vehicle of this great legacy. No other two countries in the world understand each other so well or share so much. And no two countries are such natural partners in bringing prosperity to their peoples, he said.

Anyone visiting Bhutan is struck as much by its natural beauty as by the warmth, compassion and simplicity of its people, the prime minister said.

"During this visit, I have had the opportunity to interact closely with the present leadership of Bhutan. I once again received their guidance for the India-Bhutan relationship, which has always benefitted from their close and personal attention," said Modi, who is here on his second visit to Bhutan and the first since his re-election in May this year.

"Now, today, I am here, with the future of Bhutan. I can see the dynamism, and feel the energy. I am confident that these will shape the future of this great nation and its citizens. Whether I look at Bhutan's past, present or future, the common and constant threads are - deep spirituality, and youthful vigour. These are also the strengths of our bilateral relationship," he said.

"Today, I stand here among the best and brightest youth of Bhutan. His Majesty (Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck) told me yesterday that he interacts with you regularly and

had addressed the last convocation. It is from you all that Bhutan's future leaders, innovators, business persons, sports persons, artists and scientists will emerge," Modi said.

"India-Bhutan cooperation in hydro-power and energy is exemplary. But the real source of power and energy of this relationship are our people," he said.

So, it is people first, and people will always be at the centre of this relationship. This spirit is clearly seen in the outcomes of this visit, he said.

Going beyond the traditional sectors of co-operation, the two countries are seeking to cooperate extensively in new frontiers, from schools to space, digital payments to disaster management, he said.

"Our cooperation in all these sectors will have a direct impact on young friends like you, the prime minister said.

"Democracy and education both aim to set us free. Neither can be complete without the other. And both help us to achieve our fullest potential, and be the best we can," he said.

"As Bhutan soars high in these endeavours, your 1.3 billion Indian friends will not only just look on and cheer you with pride and happiness. But also they will partner you, share with you and learn from you," the prime minister added.

Odisha Lokayukta has received 216 complaints

BERHAMPUR (ODISHA), AUG 18 (PTI): Anti-corruption ombudsman Lokayukta in Odisha has received 216 complaints against public servants since it started functioning around five months ago.

The state Lokayukta started functioning from March 20, 2019 after Ajit Singh joined as its chairperson.

"At present, a total of 108 complaints are pending before the Board of Lokayukta for

disposal," Singh told reporters here during a visit on Saturday.

Most of the complaints pending before the Lokayukta are petty. "We hope complaints of corruption against high-profile people will be received in future," Singh said.

Since no special format has been prepared for lodging complaints, people can file complaints with the Lokayukta in plain paper, he said.

Singh asked people to

come out against corruption by anyone, including high profile officers, ministers or lawmakers and lodge complaint before the Lokayukta.

"Lokayukta has been formed to eliminate corruption and make Odisha corruption-free," he added.

Other members of the Lokayukta including B K Nayak, member (judicial) and R P Sharma were also present.

On receipt of the complaint, the Lokayukta

Assam Accord polluted state's politics, spawned insurgency: Book

NEW DELHI, AUG 18 (PTI): The Assam Accord of 1985 didn't bring permanent peace to the state and seemed to have delivered only discord and divisions, says a new book.

Signed between the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and the leaders of the Assam Movement, the Accord polluted the politics of the state and spawned insurgency, claims Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty in her book 'Assam: The Accord, The Discord'.

"The common people were caught in a bind; they didn't know who was the enemy, who a friend - the state or non-state actors," she says.

According to her, Assam's is an old story, where each player, in the course of time, has become both a victim and a perpetrator in each other's eyes.

"Each player is wounded, exhausted, bitter."

People have right to know about Netaji's disappearance: Mamata

KOLKATA, AUG 18 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday asserted that people have the right to know what happened to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, while remembering the "son of the soil" on the day he reportedly went missing 74 years ago.

She said the whereabouts of Netaji after he "disappeared" on August 18, 1945 were still not known.

"On this day, in 1945, Netaji went on a flight from Taihoku Airport in Taiwan, only to disappear forever. We still do not know what happened to him. People have a right to know about the great son of the soil," Banerjee tweeted.

Several reports have claimed that Netaji had boarded a plane from Taihoku Airport in Taiwan, which crashed leading to the death of the great leader. There is, however, no confirmation on his death as experts came up

with different theories about his disappearance. The Centre from time to time had constituted panels -- Shah Nawaz Committee in 1956, the Khosla Commission in 1970, the Mukherjee Commission in 2005 -- to shed light on the mysteries surrounding the death or the disappearance of Netaji, but none could render any answer.

On September 1, 2016, the Narendra Modi government declassified investigative reports of the Japanese government which concluded that Bose died in a plane crash in Taiwan.

Many, however, continue to believe that Netaji survived the plane crash and lived in hiding.

She says she has tried to "present as many facts as possible in order to help the interested reader figure out the complexities of the Assam story".

Pisharoty rues that the mainstream narrative in India rarely includes Assam, especially when it speaks of the two milestones that have defined the making of the modern Indian polity - the Partition and the Emergency.

"Both events had a bigger role to play than acknowledged in shaping the people and the politics of Assam. Perhaps it would not be entirely wrong to call the Assam Movement an offshoot of the politics that emerged from the Emergency," she asserts.

"Yet another point to consider is the impact of the Bangladesh Liberation War on the border state. The country rejoiced at the creation of Bangladesh; it became

a jewel on the crown of prime minister Indira Gandhi, but the exodus of refugees from across the border evoked old historical fears and triggered widespread unrest in Assam that went unrecorded, unheeded, in mainstream India.

"In course of time, it festered and let loose a tide that is yet to subside," she writes in the book, published by Penguin Random House.

A six-year agitation demanding identification and deportation of illegal immigrants was launched by the influential students' organisation AASU in 1979. It culminated with the signing of the Assam Accord on August 15, 1985, in the presence of Rajiv Gandhi.

On December 24, 1985, for the first time in the state's post-independent history, a regional party - the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) - assumed office

at the Janata Bhawan, the state's administrative headquarters. AASU president Prafulla Mahanta, as president of the newly formed party, became chief minister.

The subsequent years also the rise of the militant group ULFA, the state in turmoil and split in the AGP, then unification and again dissidence.

The book also discusses topics like language movement, NRC and citizenship bill and the surge of the BJP in Assam and its subsequent accession to power in 2016.

She says it was pertinent to set the Assam Movement against the conundrum that the state finds itself in currently - the controversial updating exercise of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), 1951, and the vehement public opposition to insert an amendment to the Citizen-

ship Act, 1955, by the Narendra Modi-led NDA government.

She says that the biggest challenge the indigenous communities of Assam is staring at is whether to remain an Assamese, or a 'khilonjia' (indigenous) first, or bow to a rising wave prominently emanating since 2016 in the state to be a Hindu first.

"The BJP's push for the citizenship bill livened up that question in people's mind like never before. It led several among the Assamese Muslim community too to ponder where would they figure in such an eventuality.

"If the majority of the people opt for the latter in the bargain for a solution to the festering Assam problem, certain vital compromises would have to be made concerning the very veins of the Assamese/'khilonjia' identity," she writes.

Houses cave in as tidal waves lash Odisha's Ganjam district

BERHAMPUR (ODISHA), AUG 18 (PTI): As many as 27 houses have caved in at Ramayapatna village in Odisha's Ganjam district in the past one week due to coastal erosion, officials said here on Sunday.

Around a dozen more are on the verge of collapse as high tidal waves continue to lash the fishermen's village in Chikiti block of the district, they said.

Hara Prasad Bhoi, the tehsildar of Chikiti, said the district collector's attention has been drawn to the situation and measures were being taken to deal with the situation.

According to the officials, Berhampur

Sub-Collector S D Bhausaheb, who visited the village on Saturday, has asked the fishermen to shift to new houses constructed under the Odisha Disaster Recovery Project (ODRP).

A villager, however, said many people were reluctant to move to their new houses as it was easier to go fishing from Ramayapatna.

Moreover, not all of them have been allotted houses under the scheme, L Bhagi Raju explained.

"People here are in the grip of fear... Several houses close to the sea are on the verge of collapse," Raju, who is also the member of a village

committee, said.

Girija Bhusan Mallick, the revenue inspector of Sonapur, said people living in thatched houses in the village have been provided with pucca houses at Chandrabedha, about one-and-a-half km from their village.

"In all, 331 families got houses under the scheme. The village has around 500 families. The government has decided to construct a one-metre-long guard wall near the beach to protect the village from erosion," he said.

Sources said a number of houses on the beach are just hanging with the sand beneath exposed to rapid erosion.

Contact SummitTIMES at 9832556698, 9832369520 news@summit-times.com advertse@summittimes.com summittimes16@gmail.com

Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey coursed by hydel projects in Sikkim and the region, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before. Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

ESSAYS ON TEESTA, HYDEL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SIKKIM

LOKTA BOOKS
Bengal - Sikkim
In kolkata@summittimes.com
+91 881060 6200; +91 888 200 6763

Djokovic dumped as Medvedev sets up Cincy final with Goffin

CINCINNATI, AUG 18 (AFP): World number one Novak Djokovic wilted under pressure from Daniil Medvedev, falling 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 to the ninth-seeded Russian in the Cincinnati Masters semi-finals.

Medvedev's upset win on Saturday sent him into a title showdown with another unexpected finalist, 16th-seeded Belgian David Goffin, who defeated France's Richard Gasquet 6-3, 6-4 to reach his first ATP Masters 1000 final.

A fuming Djokovic, who looked to have control of the contest in the early going, was caught out when Medvedev stepped things up in the second set.

"I don't know how I turned it around, I was so tired after the first set

and I thought I might not be able to keep up the intensity," said Medvedev, who has competed in 15 hardcourt matches since July 30.

"But I had a momentum chance in the second set and the crowd gave me energy," added the Russian, who will be playing his second Masters series final in eight days, after falling to Rafael Nadal in Montreal last Sunday.

"Novak had been destroying me on second serve, so I just went for it," Medvedev said.

"It's a great feeling to win and beat the number one. That shows I deserve to be in this final. "I played an unbelievable match, I'm very happy."

Medvedev also beat Djokovic in their last



meeting, on clay at Monte Carlo in April.

Djokovic, the defending champion who was playing his first tour-

namment since his Wimbledon triumph in July, shouldered his bag and left the grounds within moments of his defeat.

Medvedev won 12 of the last 14 points in the second set to square the match against Djokovic, then ran up a 3-1 lead in

the third on the way to victory on his first match point.

He's 1-1 against Goffin, with both of their matches played this season -- at the Australian Open and Wimbledon.

- KUZNETSOVA BEATS BARTY -

There was an upset in the women's draw as well, as Russian veteran Svetlana Kuznetsova defeated top-seeded Australian Ashleigh Barty 6-2, 6-4.

Kuznetsova, a two-time Grand Slam champion who has been hindered lately by injury, will be in search of her 19th WTA title -- and her first in more than a year -- when she takes on American Madison Keys in the final.

Keys, the 2017 US Open runner-up, de-

feated compatriot Sofia Kenin 7-5, 6-4.

Kuznetsova denied Barty a chance to reclaim the world number one ranking, which the Australian would have done by reaching the final.

Instead the triumph by 34-year-old Kuznetsova leaves injured Naomi Osaka atop the rankings with the US Open starting a week from Monday.

Barty, who had rallied from a set down in each of her previous two matches, was off the boil against Kuznetsova, who is back on form after several seasons of injuries, including a wrist problem. "This was a week that I battled through," Barty said.

"At times I played some good stuff. At times I played some pretty awful stuff.

"I've learned a lot from this week, and there are nothing but positives going into New York."

Keys booked her finals spot as she won an all-American match littered with 12 breaks of serve.

She earned match points with a flick volley winner angled steeply cross-court and amazed herself with the get.

"I looked at my box in shock," she admitted.

"I'm really feeling great about my tennis.

"When I was down break points in the second set, I was just thinking that I knew I could break back, that was my biggest thought.

"I'm super-happy to be in my first final here. I love getting matches under my belt before a Grand Slam.

Indian women's hockey team holds Australia to 2-2 draw in Olympic Test Event



TOKYO, AUG 18 (PTI): The Indian women's hockey team came back twice from a goal deficit to hold world number 2 side Australia 2-2 in a hard-fought round-robin league match of the Olympic Test Event here on Sunday.

Vandana Katariya (36th) and Gurjit Kaur (59th) scored for India to cancel out strikes from Kaitlin Nobbs (14th) and Grace Stewart (43rd) in their second match of the tournament. India had beaten hosts Japan 2-1 in their first match on Saturday.

World number 10 India began the match aggressively, matching Australia's attacking hockey with their own brand which saw both teams earn penalty corners. However, neither side managed to score.

But in the 14th minute, Australia were awarded a penalty stroke after an Indian defender blocked a shot at goal. Nobbs made no mistake in converting from the spot to give Australia a 1-0 advantage.

The world number 2 side dominated the second quarter completely, putting the Indian team

under intense pressure through multiple attacks and penalty corners. But India's defence held firm and goalkeeper Savita made a couple of great saves to deny Australia who were 1-0 up at the half-time break.

The third quarter again saw Australia dominate possession and create a couple of goal-scoring opportunities through penalty corners. However, Savita again made fine saves to deny the Australians.

India struck on the break as Vandana Katariya finished off a superb move to equalise in the

36th minute. But the lead did not last long as Australia started to look for their second goal.

It was in the 43rd minute that Australia found their second goal through some exquisite team work, which saw Grace Stewart also registering her name on the score-sheet to give Australia a 2-1 lead.

It was a tough ask for the Indian team as Australia did not give them enough space inside the striking circle. However, the Indians showed determination as they kept looking for the equal-

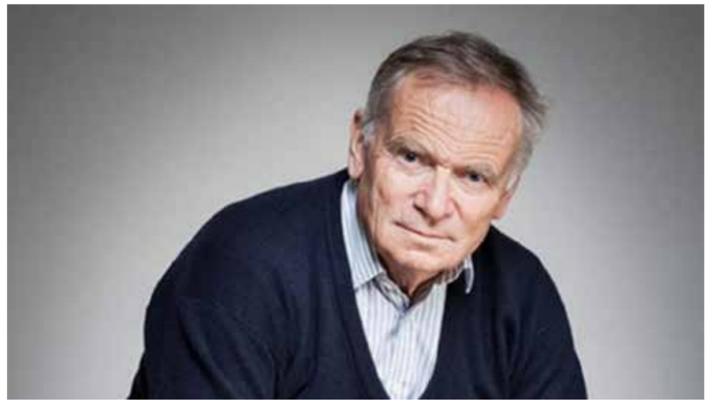
iser in the last quarter.

With moves breaking down, and chances going waste, it looked like Australia would hold onto their 2-1 lead, but with just a couple of minutes remaining on the clock, India won a crucial penalty corner in the 59th minute.

And, prolific drag-flicker Gurjit Kaur stepped up and struck a sweet blow into the back of the net to earn India a well-deserved draw.

The Indian women's team will face China on Tuesday in their third and last round-robin match of the tournament.

Jeffrey Archer back with new series



NEW DELHI, AUG 18 (PTI): Jeffrey Archer is back, this time not with a detective story but a tale of a detective.

"Nothing Ventured" is the first book of the new William Warwick Series in the style of Archer's bestselling "The Clifton Chronicles".

William is a family man and a detective who will battle throughout his career against a powerful criminal nemesis.

William always wanted to be a detective. Much to his father Sir Julian Warwick QC's dismay, he decides not to become a barrister like him and his sister Grace but join London's Metropolitan Police Force.

After graduating from university, William begins a career that will define his life: from his early months on the beat under the watchful eye of his first mentor, Constable Fred Yates, to his first high-stakes case as a fledgling detective in Scotland Yard's arts and antiques squad.

Investigating the theft of a priceless Rembrandt painting from the Fitzmolean Museum, he meets Beth Rainsford, a research assistant at the gallery who he falls hopelessly in love with, even as Beth guards a secret of her own that she's terrified will come to light.

While William follows the trail of the

missing masterpiece, he comes up against suave art collector Miles Faulkner and his lawyer, Booth Watson QC, who are willing to bend the law to breaking point to stay one step ahead of William.

Meanwhile, Faulkner's wife, Christina, befriends William, but whose side is she really on? "Nothing Ventured", published by Pan Macmillan, seeks to answer that. The book will be out on September 5.

Archer, whose novels and short stories include "Kane and Abel" and "Cat O' Nine Tales" besides the "Clifton Chronicles", was a member of the House of Lords for over a quarter of a century.

Mahabharata or Sci-fi? Amish keeps readers guessing on his next series

ROMIT BHATTACHARYA

KOLKATA, AUG 18 (PTI):

A heady cocktail of time travel, gaming and alien life or perhaps a fresh take on the epic war of Mahabharata, best-selling author Amish says he has "too many ideas" to delve in for his next series. The man behind the smash hit 'Shiva Trilogy' will take a call on whether he will stick to his tried-and-tested mythology genre or make a splash in sci-fi, after concluding the 'Ram Chandra' series.

"My problem is I have too many ideas, but not the time to write on them," a beaming Amish said, when asked what could fans expect from him in the coming days.

"Mahabharata is perhaps my next work after the 'Ram Chandra' series. It will be a very long series, as there is a deeper concept in the Mahabharata... The war isn't what you think it is, there's actually a much deeper conflict,

which is what the story will cover," he told PTI in an interview.

Amish said he will focus on the epic battle in his take on the Mahabharata, as he feels it wasn't a mere war between two groups of cousins.

"If it was just so, the assumption is that it could have been averted. I think there was no way the war could have been stopped," he said.

The 44-year-old author is simultaneously harping on a "very interesting" idea, which he might as well put to words before the Mahabharata series.

"... I could take up something that is set in the modern day. The idea has captured my mind. The story will include elements of time travel, gaming, and some form of extraterrestrial life," Amish said.

The popular novelist was in the city recently to promote his latest

book 'Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta', the third instalment in the 'Ram Chandra' series.

On why he chose to write on Raavan at a time when the 'Jai Shri Ram' chant is stoking a controversy, Amish said his version of the demon king is nuanced and balanced.

"It's not that faith and belief in Lord Ram is anything new in India. I won't comment on the politics... Lord Ram, Lord Shiva are part of our bones, our genes. There isn't any fear of backlash because I am neither eulogising Raavan nor demonising him. My take on Raavan is nuanced, closer to the ancient versions of the Ramayana," he said.

The banker-turned-author, widely credited to have revived interest in Hindu mythology, especially among the youth, said publishers had, in fact, unanimously turned him down for 'Immortals of Meluha', his first novel.

Lucas Moura earns Spurs draw at Manchester City as VAR history repeats

DANIEL TAYLOR

THE GUARDIAN

MANCHESTER, 17 AUG:

It was an extraordinary finale and, amid all the drama and utter confusion, spare a thought perhaps for those Manchester City supporters who had happily left the stadium, believing they had just seen their team score a dramatic and joyous stoppage-time winner.

What they had not accounted for was VAR concluding, after what felt like an age, that the shot from Gabriel Jesus had been preceded by a handball from Aymeric Laporte. Jesus had danced in front of the supporters, wriggling his hips, samba-style. Pep Guardiola and Sergio Agüero, who had fallen out so publicly earlier in the second half, had made up with a touchline embrace. The scoreboard had pronounced it was 3-2. And the Spurs players had all retreated before the signal came that the goal could not stand.

And, suddenly, there was a tinny roar from the away end.

For City, that was an excruciating moment of déjà vu bearing in mind the influence of VAR when these sides met in April's Champions League quarter-final. The shot-count in their latest encounter was 30-3 in favour of the home team and, in corners, 11-2. Guardiola described it as one of the more illuminating performances of his three-year reign. What City could not do, ultimately, was make the game safe after Raheem Sterling and Agüero had put them in front, twice.

Spurs duly nabbed a point courtesy of equalising goals from Érik Lamela and the substitute Lucas Moura, only 19 seconds after coming on, as well as some splendid goalkeeping from Hugo Lloris and various moments of fortune when City, inspired by the brilliance of Kevin De Bruyne and Bernardo Silva, threatened to overwhelm them.

Nobody should be too harsh on City because they had played stylishly and fully warranted Guardiola's compliments. That, however, made it an even more painful occasion for the champions because, if there is one lesson to be had from last season, it is that a draw these days is a bad result for a team with title aspirations.

This one ended a 15-match winning sequence, going back to January, and the spat between Guardiola and Agüero was probably a measure of their frustrations. It was not the first time the two have clashed and, for an uncomfortable amount of time, Guardiola could be seen flapping his arms and covering his mouth so nobody, bar Agüero, could make out the precise words. Suffice to say, it didn't look like a "well done".

For Spurs, it was a tough, obdurate performance, albeit one that must have reminded them they are still a considerable distance behind City

in terms of pure skill. Not that they should worry too much about that after ending a run of six successive away defeats. If that had extended to seven, it would have equalled their worst run since August to December 2000, when George Graham was in charge.

To make matters worse for City, they could legitimately argue they ought to have been awarded a penalty in the first half because of Lamela's manhandling of Rodri at a corner. The referee, Michael Oliver, evidently did not think a player being grappled to the floor was worthy of being penalised. Neither did the VAR officials, which was mysterious when this was precisely the sort of oversight they should be trying to put right.

Amid all this controversy, it also now transpires that Sterling is capable of scoring the kind of expertly placed header that has never previously been listed among

the skills of a player who stands at 5ft 6in. Though it helps when De Bruyne is capable of swinging over the kind of beautifully weighted delivery that led to the opening goal.

The cross was sumptuous, spinning high in the air before arcing towards the back post. Sterling had turned his body position so when the ball connected with his forehead it went back across Lloris before nestling just inside the side-netting. It was placed to perfection. And, in that precise moment, the television cameras caught Guardiola looking at his coaching staff as if he was a little surprised, too.

Their lead lasted three minutes before Lamela strode through the middle to place a left-footed shot past Ederson. Laporte had committed the classic defensive error of turning his back as his opponent shaped to shoot. Twenty yards out, Lamela curled a low effort into the bottom corner.

British MPs press Johnson to recall parliament over Brexit

LONDON, AUG 18 (AFP): British Prime Minister Boris Johnson came under pressure on Sunday to immediately recall lawmakers from their summer holiday so parliament can debate Brexit.

More than 100 MPs have written to Johnson to urge him to reconvene and let them sit permanently until October 31 -- the date Britain is due to leave the European Union.

MPs are not due to return until September 3. "Our country is on the brink of an economic crisis, as we career towards a no-deal Brexit," said the letter, signed by MPs and opposition party leaders who want to halt Britain's departure from the EU.

"We face a national emergency, and parliament must be recalled now." Parliament is set to break up again shortly after it returns, with the main parties holding their annual conferences during the September break.

Johnson -- whose government commands a one-seat majority -- insists Britain must leave the EU on October 31, with or without a divorce deal with Brussels.

Labour main opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn wants to call a vote of no confidence in Johnson's government after parliament returns.

He hopes to take over as a temporary prime minister, seek an extension to Britain's EU departure date to stop a no-deal Brexit, and then call a general election.

"What we need is a government that is prepared to negotiate with the European Union so we don't have a crash-out on the 31st," Corbyn said Saturday.

"This government clearly doesn't want to do that." However, a YouGov survey found that a majority would rather see a no-deal Brexit than the veteran leftist taking over and staging another referendum.

Lankan presidential hopeful claims threat to his life

COLOMBO, AUG 18 (PTI): Sri Lanka's presidential hopeful Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who played a key role defeating the LTTE to end the country's brutal civil war, has claimed that a terrorist group in the North is planning to harm him during the election campaign, according to a media report.

Gotabhaya, 70, the brother of former strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa, complained to President Maithripala Sirisena that his intelligence officers have informed him that there is an attempt to use a sniper rifle and a special type of gun imported from Malaysia for this attack.

He asked the president to investigate the matter and take appropriate action, Sri Lanka Mirror reported.

The former defence secretary told the media that according to information he has received, not only him but Douglas Devananda, a Sri Lankan Tamil politician, and Karuna Amman, a politician and a former rebel, are also at risk.

Some 48 per cent said they would rather Britain left the EU without a Brexit deal, with Jeremy Corbyn remaining in opposition.

Some 35 per cent said they would prefer Corbyn became prime minister, and held a second referendum on Britain's EU membership.

Asked about leaving the EU without a deal, 49 per cent said they would consider it an unacceptable outcome, while 38 per cent said it would be acceptable.

Britain could face food, fuel and medicine shortages and chaos at its ports in a no-deal Brexit, The Sunday Times newspaper reported, citing a leaked government planning document.

There would likely be some form of hard border imposed on the island of Ireland, the document implied.

Rather than worst-case scenarios, the leaked document, compiled this month by the Cabinet Office ministry, spells out the likely ramifications of a no-deal Brexit, the broadsheet claimed.

The document said logjams could affect fuel distribution, while up to 85 per cent of trucks using the main ports to continental Europe might not be ready for French customs.

The availability of fresh food would be diminished and prices would go up, said the newspaper.

Meanwhile Johnson's girlfriend Carrie Symonds will accompany him when he goes to stay with Queen Elizabeth II at her private Scottish retreat.

The public relations expert will join Johnson at Balmoral next month, the domestic Press Association news agency reported, citing sources.

The monarch traditionally hosts the prime minister for a weekend in September.

It is thought Symonds will be the first unmarried partner of a sitting PM to stay at Balmoral.

The report said that the president has ordered the Director of Police Terrorism Investigation to investigate into the matter.

Presidential elections in Sri Lanka are due before the end of the year.

Gotabhaya's volunteer security unit has stayed on guard when he visited the Temple of Tooth Relic in Kandy recently.

The unit has provided heavy protection allowing no civilian to come near him.

Gotabhaya was a powerful bureaucrat under his brother's government, which defeated the Tamil Tiger rebels' 26-year revolt in 2009.

As secretary of defence, Gotabhaya played a key role in ending the Tamil Tigers' campaign for an independent state for ethnic minority Tamils. But he was accused of using extra-legal methods and cracking down on those who criticised his style.

According to a United Nations report, some 45,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the last months of the war alone.

Tens of thousands flood Hong Kong park for latest rally

HONG KONG, AUG 18 (AP): Heavy rain fell on tens of thousands of umbrella-toting protesters Sunday as they marched from a packed park and filled a major road in Hong Kong, where mass pro-democracy demonstrations have become a regular weekend activity this summer.

Organisers said they hoped the assembly would be peaceful, which would make for a rare calm weekend in a months-long movement that has been marked by violent clashes with police.

"We hope that there will not be any chaotic situations today," said organizer Bonnie Leung. "We hope we can show the world that Hong Kong people can be totally peaceful."

Leung's group, the Civil Human Rights Front, has organised three massive marches in Hong Kong since June. The protest movement, however, has been increasingly marked by clashes with police as demonstrators vent their frustrations over what they perceive to be the government's blatant refusal to respond to their demands.

"Peace is the No. 1 priority today," said Kiki Ma, a 28-year-old ac-



countant participating in the march. "We want to show that we aren't like the government." While police had granted approval for the rally, they didn't approve an accompanying march. Demonstrators nevertheless fanned out and filled the streets, as there was not enough space at the designated assembly area.

Public transit trains did not stop at stations near the assembly because of overcrowding.

In Beijing, You Wenzhe, a spokesman for China's ceremonial legislature, condemned statements from US lawmakers sup-

portive of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement.

You called the lawmakers' comments "a gross violation of the rule of law, a blatant double standard and a gross interference in China's internal affairs."

He said that Hong Kong's 7.5 million people and the Chinese population as a whole rejected the actions of a "very small group of violent protesters" as well as "any interference of foreign forces."

You did not mention any specific lawmaker,

but numerous US senators and Congress members, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have affirmed the US commitment to human rights and urged Hong Kong's government to end the standoff.

Congress also has the power to pass legislation affecting Hong Kong's relationship with the US in ways that could further erode the territory's reputation for stability and rule of law.

That includes the recent re-introduction of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act in Congress, which

would among its other provisions require the secretary of state to issue an annual certification of Hong Kong's autonomy to justify special treatment afforded to the city.

More directly, President Donald Trump could simply issue an executive order suspending Hong Kong's special trading status with the US, a move that could have a devastating effect on the local economy at a time when Beijing and Washington are engaged in a bitter trade war.

A former British colony, Hong Kong was returned to Beijing in

1997 under the framework of "one country, two systems," which promised residents certain democratic rights not afforded to people in mainland China. But some Hong Kongers have accused the Communist Party-ruled central government of eroding their freedoms in recent years.

The protest movement's demands include Lam's resignation, democratic elections and an independent investigation into police use of force.

Harley Ho, a 20-year-old social work student who attended Sunday's rally, said protesters were undeterred by the rain and would not rest until their demands were met.

"We will stand here, we will take action until they respond to us," she said. "In the rain, our spirit becomes stronger."

Members of China's paramilitary People's Armed Police force have been training for days across the border in Shenzhen, including on Sunday morning, fueling speculation that they could be sent in to suppress the protests.

The Hong Kong police, however, have said they are capable of handling the protests.

63 killed, 182 wounded in Kabul wedding blast: official

KABUL, AUG 18 (AFP): More than 60 people were killed and scores wounded in an explosion targeting a wedding in the Afghan capital, authorities said Sunday, the deadliest attack in Kabul in recent months.

The blast, which took place late Saturday in the city's west, came as Washington and the Taliban are in the final stages of a deal to reduce the US military presence in Afghanistan.

The Taliban denied any involvement in the attack.

Interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said at least 63 people had been killed and 182 wounded.

"Among the wounded are women and children," Rahimi said.

Afghan weddings are epic and vibrant affairs,

with hundreds or often thousands of guests celebrating for hours inside industrial-scale wedding halls where the men are usually segregated from the women and children.

In the aftermath of Saturday's attack images from inside the hall showed blood-stained bodies on the ground along with pieces of flesh and torn clothes, hats, sandals and bottles of mineral water.

The wedding was believed to be a Shia gathering. Shia Muslims are frequently targeted in Sunni-majority Afghanistan, particularly by the so-called Islamic State group, which is also active in Kabul but did not immediately issue any claim of responsibility.

Mohammad Farhag, who had been at the wedding, told AFP he



had been in the women's section when he heard a huge blast in the men's area.

"Everyone ran outside shouting and crying," he said.

"For about 20 minutes the hall was full of smoke. Almost everyone in the men's section is either dead or wounded."

Two hours after the

blast, he said bodies were still being removed from the hall.

Insurgents have periodically struck Afghan weddings, which are seen as easy targets because they frequently lack rigorous security precautions.

On July 12, at least six people were killed when a suicide bomb-

er attacked a wedding ceremony in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar.

IS, which has a growing footprint in the region, claimed the blast.

Expectations are rising for a deal in which the United States would start withdrawing its approximately 14,000 soldiers from Afghanistan after a

two-decade war that has turned into a stalemate.

In return, the Taliban would commit to various security guarantees, including that the Islamist hardliners who long harboured Al-Qaeda would not allow Afghanistan to once again become a jihadist safe haven.

Many Afghans fear the deal could see the Taliban return to some form of power, eroding hard-won rights for women in particular, or the country descend further into a brutal civil war.

On Friday, Ahmadullah Azkhandzada, brother of Afghan Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, was among four people killed in a blast at a mosque in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan, a senior official with the provincial government said.

Delhi's Sunday air quality best of the year so far

NEW DELHI, AUG 18 (PTI): Delhiites on Sunday breathed the cleanest air of the year so far, thanks to widespread rainfall in the National Capital Region over the past few days, officials said.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board, the air quality index in the city on Sunday was recorded at 47, which falls in the 'good' category.

The AQI improved from 49 on Saturday, the CPCB said. An AQI between 0 to 50 is considered 'good' air quality.

"Sunday's was the best AQI this year so far," an official said, adding the air quality will remain in the 'good' category for the next three days. For major part of the year, the city witnesses poor air quality.

The Centre-run System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting (SAFAR) attributed the improved air quality to widespread rainfall in and around the NCR.

"Increased west to North rainfall activity in association with the interaction between western disturbance and monsoon low is ensuring longest spell of best air quality of the year.

"It will continue for today also. Fairly widespread to widespread rainfall and isolated heavy rainfalls are also expected. Delhi Air quality is predicted to be in good category for next three days," it said. The Delhi-NCR has received widespread intermittent rainfall over the past few days. Delhi received 1.4 mm rainfall from 8.30 am to 5.30 pm on Saturday, while in 24 hours ending 8.30 am on Saturday it received 7.3 mm rainfall. Some parts of the city received rains on Friday and Thursday as well.

An AQI between 51 and 100 is considered 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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SILIGURI:
Mr. Mani Rai, M/s. Space Ads, B.R. Ambedkar Building, Room No.7, 1st floor, Opp. Ganga Hotel, Hill Cart Road, Siliguri - 03. Ph. +91-9832318644/ 9800682989/9153035100 or mail at mani_siliguri@yahoo.co.in.

KOLKATA OFFICE:
Irshad Ali/Imteyaz Synapse, 6, Madan Street, Mezzine - 2, 2nd floor, Kolkata - 700072. Ph. 033-22124348/ fax 033-22124337/ mob. +91-9830547774/ +91-983108397. E-mail: contact.synapse@gmail.com/irshad_ali23@rediffmail.com

Phone
03592-208698
+91-9832556698
+91-9832080753

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John Abraham on using his physicality in 'subversive' way

MUMBAI, AUG 18 (PTI): Over the years, actor John Abraham has mastered the trick to use his physicality in films by combining it with interesting characters and good stories.

When John started out his career in the mid-2000s, he became the poster boy for gym enthusiasts.

Over the course of his 15-year-long career, John did take up roles which required him to flex his muscles, but off late the actor is seen playing characters which involve him doing a lot more: saving the nation, developing nuclear weapons and going undercover.

"There is a physicality that I have that exists, there's a certain way people perceive the way I look, that is going to stay. I am not shying away from that," John told PTI.

"You use physicality in a subversive way. 'Batla House' isn't a physical film but my cop is throwing a guy in the cupboard. This cop has an 8-pack abs but it isn't jarring you. If you use your physicality smartly, it is good, not overtly. I am not here to use my physicality overtly," he added.

John said if actors want to sustain in the film industry they should believe in their gut.

"It is very important not to have that misstep. We cannot afford it. You can have the fastest 100 million views, the biggest opening but the biggest misstep is still the film not being appreciated because that many millions have seen a bad film. The right step is to follow your gut and be committed to the kind of content you want to create."

The 46-year-old actor, whose latest release "Batla House" has opened to positive reviews, is overwhelmed with the response the Nikkhil Advani-directed movie has received.

"In my career I've never seen such a large wave of appre-



ciation from the audience and the critics unanimously for the film, my performance, Nikkhil's direction. It has been overwhelming. Through this film, we are part of something really special which cannot be translated it manifested by the numbers we are getting for it."

"This is beyond that. We have made something that's archival enough to stay on for a long time. The numbers are very good and encouraging for us and I'm so thrilled and happy with the response," he added.

Martin Freeman confirms 'Black Panther' return

LOS ANGELES, AUG 17 (PTI): Marvel Studios may not have made any formal announcements about "Black Panther" sequel, but actor Martin Freeman has confirmed his involvement in the project.

Freeman, who played CIA Agent Everett Ross in the Chadwick Boseman-fronted 2018 film, said he is not sure when the much-anticipated sequel will get into production.

"As far as I know, I will be (returning). As far as I know, I will be in another Black Panther. That's my understanding. As to when that will happen, I don't know," Freeman told Collider when asked about his return to Marvel Cinematic Universe.

"Black Panther 2" was not announced during Marvel Studios' San Diego Comic-Con, but Ryan Coogler is expected to return as the director of the new film.

Feige, however, later on hinted that a Black Panther movie can be a part of the studio's fifth phase.

Apart from being a global blockbuster with USD 1.3 billion worldwide, "Black Panther" also became the first Marvel superhero film to earn a best picture Oscar nod.

Joaquin Phoenix on how he cracked Joker's signature laugh



LOS ANGELES, AUG 18 (PTI): Joaquin Phoenix says he based the signature laughter of iconic DC villain The Joker on a neurological disorder known as Pathological Laughter and Crying (PLC).

The condition is characterised by inappropriate and involuntary laughing and crying due to a nervous system disorder. Phoenix, who is set to star as the Clown Prince of Crime in the eponymous film, said he watched videos of people suffering from the condition as part of his preparation.

"I started (with the laugh). I watched videos of people suffering from pathological laughter, a neurological disorder that makes individuals laugh uncontrollably," the actor told Italian magazine *Il Venerdì*.

Phoenix follows the likes of Jack Nicholson, Mark Hamill, Heath Ledger and Jared Leto with his portrayal of the Joker in the Todd Phillips-directed movie.

Also featuring Zazie Beetz, Robert De Niro and Marc Maron, "Joker" will have its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival later this month. It releases worldwide in October.

I still root for the underdog: Brad Pitt



LONDON, AUG 18 (PTI): Brad Pitt says he likes a good "underdog" story as it resonates with his own career graph in Hollywood.

The "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood" star recalled starting out as an extra in showbiz and slowly gaining his base in the movies.

"I think it's easy to forget I came from Oklahoma and Missouri - places where the film industry is not on the vocational list, so I started as an extra and slowly learned about the industry. I still root for an underdog," Pitt, 55, told *Ok!* magazine.

He said the fame he has achieved over the years, sometimes feels like a double-edged sword.

"It can be both, it's a trade-off. It's liberating in the opportunities it provides but, on the other hand, it can be very confining.

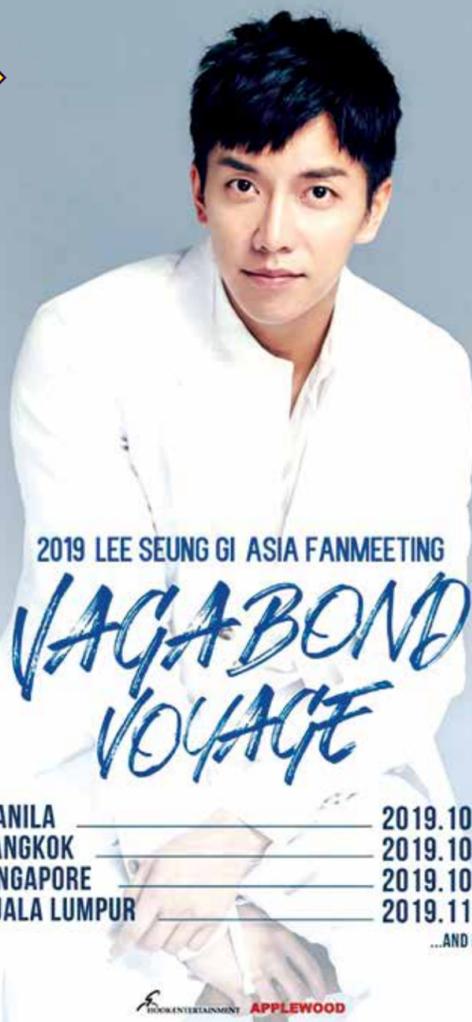
"I haven't seen a hotel lobby in 15 years because I've got to go up the a** end of a hotel and out the same way. We get our moments, but it's good and bad," Pitt explained.

The actor will be next seen in James Gray's space epic "Ad Astra".

The film will have its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival later this month, before its worldwide release in September.

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2019 LEE SEUNG GI ASIA FANMEETING

VAGABOND VOYAGE

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BANGKOK	2019.10.19
SINGAPORE	2019.10.26
KUALA LUMPUR	2019.11.30

...AND MORE

LEE SEUNG-GI AND SUZY BAE'S VAGABOND: The upcoming blockbuster action drama, *Vagabond*, has finally confirmed their official premiere date. The spy-based drama stars 32-year-old top actor, Lee Seung-gi and 24-year-old singer turned actress, Suzy Bae and is set to premiere on 20 September 2019 on local Korean broadcast channel SBS, and globally via Netflix.

Joss Whedon's 'The Nevers' announces new additions to cast



LOS ANGELES, AUG 18 (PTI): Joss Whedon's HBO series "The Nevers" is adding more names to its cast with Kiran Sonia Sawar, Elizabeth Berrington and Ella Smith set to join the show.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Viola Prettejohn, Anna Devlin and Martyn Ford are also a part of the drama.

"The Nevers" is billed as an epic sci-fi drama which revolves around a gang of Victorian women who find themselves with unusual abilities, relentless enemies, and a mission that might change the world.

The project received straight-to-series order last July.

With the addition of the six actors, the sci-fi show now counts to 18 regulars and one re-

curring castmember in its massive ensemble. Whedon is attached to write, direct, executive produce, and showrun.

Jane Espenson and Doug Petrie will write and executive produce, with Bernie Caulfield also executive producing.



Aries:

If you don't tell them, somebody else will. Come clean, Aries. Discuss the many skeletons you have tucked away in the closet. This phase of your life calls for a greater degree of truth, honesty and integrity. Mastered the art of spring cleaning? Chances are, somebody close to you is keeping a secret. Brace yourself, wild one. Your entire life is about to be shaken up for better or worse.

Tip: The skeletons find their way out of the closet.

Taurus:

It's okay to feel too many things at one time. It's okay to experience sadness, loneliness, grief and melancholy. You don't need anybody else to validate your feelings. What this phase of your life requires you to embrace: the duality that is synonymous with the human existence. The only thing you want to be mindful of is isolating yourself. Get your best friend on the phone or reach out to a therapist.

Gemini:

The Universe is always speaking to us in signs and symbols. The real question is: are you paying attention? Make time to tune in,

Gemini. Make time to listen to your higher wisdom. This will help you in your journey of self-awareness. Some of you may be drawn towards the occult at this point. The gates of mystery are now open. Allow yourself to walk in.

Cancer:

Sometimes you just have to light a candle, call upon your spirits team for guidance, and allow yourself to traverse within. Soul cleansing is on the cards, Cancer. Allow yourself to feel everything you have been suppressing in its entirety. There's only one way to let higher wisdom prevail. For some of you, the world of myths and mysteries is becoming more alluring that it has ever been before. Allow yourself to delve in under the guidance of a trusted teacher.

Tip: The gates of mystery are now open.

Leo:

Words of wisdom courtesy Osho: "Meditativeness is simply a deep receptivity, a readiness, an open door." Leo, what you're being asked to do today: embrace the power of mindfulness. You'll find the answers you are seeking when you allow yourself to go into

yin mode. For some, this could be a time of delving deeper into spirituality, practicing mediumship, and embracing the divine arts.

Virgo:

This is the season to swipe right, Virgo. Who knows? You might just find somebody who is as geeky as you on the inside. Make an effort to meet them offline to find out. As such the virtual world promises to be a major blessing this weekend. Are you and your beloved playing the long-distance game at the moment? Perhaps, you and the bestie across the world need a heart-to-heart session. Set up a face-time date right this minute.

Libra:

Let 'thank you, next' be your mantra when somebody doesn't give you the love and respect you deserve, Libra. You deserve a lover who makes magic, not excuses. What you want to turn your attention to instead: your own empire, which is growing at a rapid pace. Your creativity provides you with the satisfaction you desire at the moment.

Scorpio:

Scorpio, the 'on again, off again' game is get-

ting a little old. Make stance clear. It's either a yes or a no. If you answered in the negative, it's time for you to draw boundaries pronto. Some of you could be experiencing a case of #ThrowbackThursday. Have they really cleaned up like they say they have? Do they deserve a space in your sacred circle? Tread cautiously, wild one. You don't want to repeat the same mistakes again.

Sagittarius:

Slow down, Sagittarius. The fire that's messing with the chemical composition in your brain could just as easily die out. Find a pace that works for the both of you if you want the relationship to sustain. On the upside, you're redefining fitness goals and working on a body that would put the Kardashians to shame. Change things up a little for yourself. Experiment with a workout that will push your limits.

Capricorn:

Throwback to your weekly horoscope: You can be whoever you want to be. This is the season to rise from your own ashes. You are in the process of reinventing yourself. The shift you are undergoing internally is likely to have

an effect on your outer reality too. Thinking about redefining the rules of a certain relationship? The time is now.

Aquarius:

When a connection is this strong, you'll know it in your bones, Aquarius. Stop pushing people away. Stop building barriers where boundaries are enough. This time, allow yourself to open your heart even if you run the risk of getting hurt. The cards are also reminding you of the importance of silence and solitude. It is by going within that you will have clarity on the patterns that need to be broken in the now.

Pisces:

Look at you transforming the negative thought patterns, standing in your truth, and showing your circumstances who is in charge. This is the season to rise from your own ashes and look like an absolute stunner as you do. But that doesn't mean the fears don't show up every once in awhile, or that your insecurities don't threaten to bring you down. A Sophia Bush favourite to help you embrace the weaknesses: "You are allowed to be both a masterpiece and a work in progress at the same time."