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SummitTIMES

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O N T O P O F T H E N E W S

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AAP MP Sanjay Singh wants AG to be summoned in RS over govt's Rafale submission

NEW DELHI, DEC 15 (PTI): Rajya Sabha MP and AAP leader Sanjay Singh Saturday requested the Upper House chairman to summon the Attorney General to explain why "incorrect facts" were placed before the Supreme court in the Rafale deal case.

Singh alleged that in the case, the government presented "incorrect facts" before the apex court that Friday rejected multiple pleas seeking probe into the fighter jet deal.

"Considering seriousness of the matter, you are requested to summon the Attorney General (K K Venugopal) in the House so that the House could have correct information in the matter," Singh wrote in a letter to Rajya Sabha chairman and Vice President Venkaiah Naidu.

In the Friday judgement, the apex court had noted that the pricing

details of the deal have been shared with the CAG, and the report of the CAG has been examined by the PAC.

The issue of CAG and PAC is mentioned in para 25 of the judgement of the top court which had held that there were no irregularities in the procurement of 36 Rafale jets from France.

The judgement said the material placed before the court shows that the Centre did not disclose in Parliament the pricing details of the Rafale fighter jet, but revealed it to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Singh said Public Accounts Committee chairman Mallikarjun Kharge has revealed that he did not see any CAG report on the Rafale deal.

"As an MP, I can assure you no CAG report on Rafale was tabled in the Parliament," he wrote in the letter.

Shiva Panchayan Mandir on Sikkim-Nepal border hopes to attract devotees from both countries



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 DEC:

Shiva Panchayan Mandir near Chewa Bhanjyang on the Indo-Nepal border is on the verge of completion. It is hoped that the temple will attract devotees from both India and Nepal.

The construction of the temple at Sopakha under Maneybong-Dentam constituency in West Sikkim has been underway on a war-footing. The temple is situated at a height of 8,500 feet at Sopakha just below Chewa Bhanjyang on the Sikkim-Nepal border and around 35 KMs from Dentam Bazaar in West Sikkim.

Sopakha is already blessed with natural beauty and now this temple is all set to become another attraction of the area.



The upcoming road connecting Sikkim and Nepal from Chewa Bhanjyang could further encourage visitors, especially those from Taplejung, Pheedim, Ilam and Bhojpur on the Nepal side.

The construction of this Shiva Panchayan Mandir was started on the active initiative of the State Government and Maneybong-Dentam MLA, UD&HD Minister NK Subba, and concerned departmental officials have been actively involved in the early completion of the temple, it is informed.

The temple will house statues of Shiva, Surya Narayan, Ganpati, Durga and Shani, sculpted by artisans from Odisha.

Architect of the temple, Kiran Rasaily, informs that the construction of Shiva Panchayan

Mandir was being done for Sanatan devotees of India and Nepal.

He added that the temple on the international border of Indo-Nepal would boost pilgrimage tourism.

The temple will be another attraction on this world famous trekking trail of Chewa Bhanjyang, Phoktey and Kalpokhari, he points out.

A tourism stakeholder, Lodey Bhutia from Uttarey in West Sikkim, said that earlier Sopakha was accessible only on yaks but with the road project under Border Road Development Project, Sopakha and Bhanjyang can be easily accessed.

Mr Bhutia has been working to promote Sopakha, Chewa Bhanjyang and Uttarey as tourism destinations.

158 of 199 Rajasthan MLAs are crorepatitis: ADR report

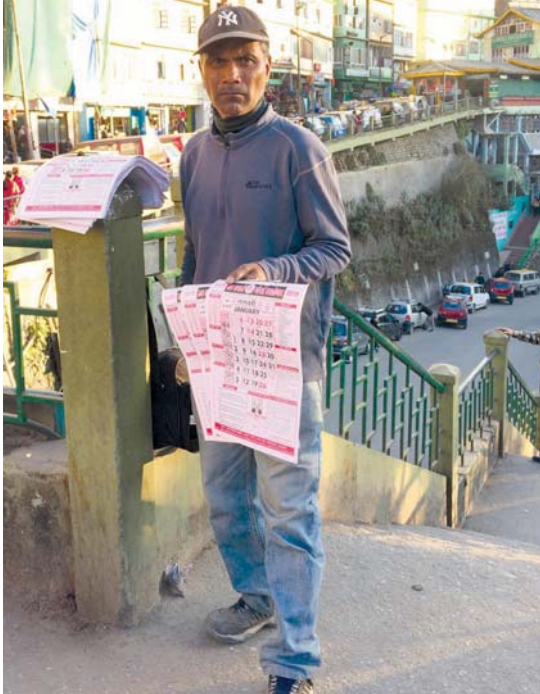
Jaipur, Dec 15 (PTI): Out of the 199 newly elected MLAs for the 15th Rajasthan Assembly, 158 are crorepatitis compared to 145 MLAs in the 2013 assembly elections, says a report.

A total of 82 out of 99 MLAs from the Congress, 58 of 73 MLAs from the BJP, 11 of 13 Independent MLAs and five of six BSP MLAs have declared their assets worth over Rs 1 crore, as per the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report.

Among the richest MLAs who have declared their total assets in IT returns are Congress leaders Parasram Mordia (172 crore) and Udai Lal Anjana (107 crore), and Ramkesh Meena (39 crore), an Independent. The candidates elected having fewer assets include youngest MLA Rajkumar Roat, Mukesh Kumar Bhakar and Ramniwas Gawriya.

As per the report, 59 MLAs have declared their educational qualification to be between 5th pass and 12th pass while 129 MLAs have declared having an educational qualification of graduate or above.

2019 Nepali calendars on sale



REBYNA RANA GANGTOK, 15 DEC:

With the New Year approaching, Kisan Biswakarma from Lumsey makes brisk business selling Nepali calendars on the Lall Bazaar flyover. Each calendar costs Rs 20.

Govt lied to SC on Rafale; committed contempt of court, perjury: Cong

Mumbai, Dec 15 (PTI): The Congress on Saturday alleged that the BJP-led government at the Centre had misled the Supreme Court over the Rafale deal and committed contempt of court and perjury.

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed petitions seeking a direction to the CBI to register an FIR for alleged irregularities in the multi-billion dollar deal between India and France for procurement of 36 Rafale jets.

It said there was no occasion to "really doubt the decision making process" warranting setting aside of the contract.

Speaking to mediapersons here, Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi said the basis of the court ruling was a re-

port by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) which has not been seen by anyone, nor has it been shared with Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

The apex court said it was ill-equipped to conduct judicial review of issues related to pricing, and this has been the Congress' stand. Hence, the party is demanding a probe by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), he said.

"The BJP has hoodwinked the nation and cheated the people. Now it has the guts to do the same to mislead the apex court. There is serious misrepresentation of vital, significant facts to the apex court. This amounts to contempt (of court), (breach of) privilege as well as perjury," he claimed.

'Modi' now stands for 'Misleading Of Democratic Institutions', he quipped.

The government has now moved an application before the SC, seeking correction of reference to CAG report, the Congress leader said.

"If this is true, it means a clear admission by the government that what is reported in para 25 of the judgement is a misrepresentation of facts...the government is saving its skin. How can the SC imagine a CAG report and its vetting by Public Accounts Committee on its own?" Singhvi asked.

He also contested a mention in the SC judgement that relations between Dassault, the manufacturer of Rafale, and Reliance dated back to 2012.



NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender invited from the interested firm/ individual for the Auction of the Vehicle belonging to Sikkim Tourism Development Department Corporation bearing the following description :-

Particulars of the Vehicle			
1	Make / Model	Toyota Innova	Year of Manufacture
	Engine No-	2KD 6401834	Nov-09
	Chassis No	MBJ11JV4007194845	
	Life of the Vehicle	09 Years	
	Vehicle Registered No	SK-01-Z-0048	
Offset value as vaulted by SNT Division Transport Deptt, Govt of Sikkim:-Rs 2,10,000/-			
3	Make / Model	Toyota Innova	Year of Manufacture
	Engine No-	2KD 6402065	Nov-09
	Chassis No	MBJ11JV4007195018	
	Life of the Vehicle	09 Years	
	Vehicle Registered No	SK-01-Z-0051	
Offset value as vaulted by SNT Division Transport Deptt, Govt of Sikkim:-Rs 2,10,000/-			
2	Make / Model	Toyota Innova	Year of Manufacture
	Engine No-	2KD 6403743	Nov-09
	Chassis No	MBJ11JV40071954567	
	Life of the Vehicle	09 Years	
	Vehicle Registered No	SK-01-Z-0049	
Offset value as vaulted by SNT Division Transport Deptt, Govt of Sikkim:-Rs 2,10,000/-			

On" as in where is basis" Lowest amount of the tender should not be below then Rs 2,10,000/- (Two Lakh Ten Thousand Only) /- . Sealed tender should reach to the Office of Chief Executive Officer, Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation, Hotel Mayur, P.S.Road, Gangtok.

Duly accompanied by the earnest money in the form of TDR of Rs10,000/- (Rupees Ten Thousand Only) drawn in favour of Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation as on 19th December 2018.

The tender will be opened on the next day (i.e. 20th Dec 2018) between 15.00 hrs -16.00 hrs in the presence of Tender Committee and interested parties at Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation, Head Office, Hotel Mayur, P.S.Road, Gangtok

The Vehicle can be inspected at Burtuk Helipad with the permission of the Assistant Manager, Burtuk Helipad during working hour between 10.00 hrs to 15.00 hrs. Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation reserves the right to reject any or all tender without assigning any reason thereof.

Tender forms could be collected by paying Rs 1000/- (Non Refundable) from below mentioned addresses/ (During working hour between 10.00 hrs to 15.00 hrs.)

- Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation, Head Office, Hotel Mayur, P.S.Road, Gangtok
- STDC, Travel Division Office, M.G.Marg, Gangtok
- STDC Burtuk Helipad

Sd/-
Chief Executive Officer,
Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation
Hotel Mayur, 1st Floor
P.S. Road, Gangtok

Gangtok on Saturday, 16Dec

Temp: 15°C/06°C

Forecast: Sunny to partly cloudy with a little rain in the evening, then a shower in spots

Sunrise: 06:05 AM

Sunset: 04:42 PM

Singtam ready for Christmas shopping



YOGEN THATAL
SINGTAM, 15 DEC:

Shops and stalls in Singtam bazaar get ready for Christmas celebration as they stock up on items like Christmas trees, stars, lights, etc.

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 DEC:

The valedictory function of the three-month Skill Development program on "Greenhouse Technology in NEH region" was held at ATIC conference room at 12.30 p.m. today. The three-month program was organized by Dr. D. Jhajharia (Course Director) and Dr. Kh. Lily Devi (Course Coordinator) with funds from PFC Ltd. New Delhi from 17 Sept to 15 Dec, informs a press release.

Prof. P. P. Dabral, Dean (CAEPHT) was the chief guest of the valedictory function. Three participants each from Mizoram and Darjeeling, one participant each from Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur along with 31 remaining participants from Sikkim took part in the Skill Development Training program being organized first time at CAEPHT

(CAU), Ranipool.

A group of farmers from Nessa Tashiding (West Sikkim district) also attended today's valedictory training program. This group is supported by the CAEPHT in form of aquaculture (Grass Carp fish) in the 250 GSM plastic lined dugout ponds.

Speaking during the concluding session, Prof. P. P. Dabral, Dean (CAEPHT) stressed on self-employment opportunities in organic cultivation of vegetable crops and floriculture in view of the declaration of Sikkim as first organic state of country. Prof. P. P. Dabral has also assured the 40 participants, mostly unemployed rural youth from northeast India, of all help like technical support to start any kind of small-business related with greenhouse technology in near future also.

3-month Skill Development Training on Greenhouse Technology concludes



Dr. D. Jhajharia presented a brief report on the Skill Development Training program. He informed that one bamboo-based naturally-ventilated polyhouse in the field of one of the participants has been completed by the participants in Soureni village, East Sikkim district during the training program.

One Hi-tech polyhouse (made of polycarbonate sheets) is almost complete at Vanvashi Kalyan Asham, which is built by the partici-

pants with the help of staff members of the AI-CRP-ET and welder/fitter of the College Workshop during the training program. Two poly-tunnels in the fields of local participants were also constructed by the participants during the program, the release mentions.

Participants also visited ICAR-NOFRI and have underwent practical training in the ICAR field in the subject area of Pest management/disease control for cole-

and solanaceae vegetable crops, Kiwi-cultivation/tuber crop cultivation in NEH, Cattle-farming, poultry and piggery in northeast India, etc.

Faculty and Scientists from CAEPHT, Sikkim University and ICAR Spice Research Institute covered lectures/practical in various fields, such as, study of types of greenhouses, design and construction of natural-ventilated polyhouse, electrification in Hi-Tech polyhouse, construction of retaining wall near

polyhouse construction area, study of tools used carpentry/welding workshop, practical pertaining to welding and carpentry (T or half-lap joint), laying of pond-liners, solar-dryers, mushroom cultivation, soil health, nursery-raising techniques, project proposal, high-value vegetable cultivation in tunnels, portable manual plastic mulch, large cardamom cultivation, etc.

Dr. Kh. Lily Devi also shared her experience during the 90 days Skill

Tripura University panel to probe into Rs 10 cr e-book fraud

AGARTALA, DEC 15 (PTI): The Tripura University has detected an anomaly amounting to Rs 10 crore in procuring of e-books and has formed a committee to investigate into the matter, a top official said Saturday.

The anomaly came to light during the tenure of former Vice Chancellor Anjan Kumar Ghosh, who retired in July this year.

"I have appointed a committee to review the e-book scam. Operation has

started and law will take its own course.

Everything will be clean," Vice Chancellor of Tripura University Vijaykumar Laxmikantrao Dharurkar said at a press conference here.

In March this year, the Ministry of Human Resource Development ordered a visitatorial inquiry against former Tripura University V-C Anjan Kumar Ghosh for alleged financial misappropriation of nearly Rs 10 crore

in procuring e-books.

Dharurkar said the committee would examine how the resources were misused and work on certain lapses and irregularities.

"I have already declared that no e-book will be purchased in the next five years. We are fixing all the mistakes committed (till now)," he added.

Dharurkar also said Tripura University is facing a fund crunch and his efforts has helped save Rs 10 crore during

the last six months.

He said the institution has taken initiatives to open 11 new courses in disciplines like archaeology and ancient Indian culture, tourism administration, liberal arts, social work for tribal development, entrepreneurship development, hospital management, nanotechnology, biotechnology, textile industry, bamboo craft etc to develop Tripura University into a centre of excellence.

Rajapaksa resigns as Sri Lanka's PM, Wickremesinghe to be reinstated

COLOMBO, DEC 15 (PTI): Ending the power tussle in Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was appointed as Prime Minister by President Maithripala Sirisena in a controversial move, resigned Saturday and Ranil Wickremesinghe is likely to take oath as the island nation's Premier on Sunday.

Rajapaksa resigned after two crucial Supreme Court decisions made the embattled former strongman's efforts to cling to premiership untenable.

Pro-Rajapaksa lawmaker Shehan Semsinghe told reporters that the former President signed his resignation letter in a ceremony held in his house in Wijerama in Colombo.

"Rajapaksa informed the lawmakers of United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) that he has resigned from the post," MP Semsinghe said.

Rajapaksa was appointed as Prime Minister on October 26 by President Sirisena in a controversial move after sacking Wickremesinghe, which plunged the country into an unprecedented constitutional crisis.

The Supreme Court on Thursday unanimously declared that the dissolution of Parliament by



Sirisena was "illegal".

The apex court on Friday refused to stay a court order restraining Rajapaksa, 73, from holding the office of Prime Minister until it fully heard the case next month.

Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) on Saturday said that Sirisena has agreed to reinstate him in the post after a discussion with him over the phone on Friday.

"We have heard from the presidential secretariat that our leader will be sworn in as the Prime Minister tomorrow morning," UNP general secretary Akila Viraj Kariyawasam said.

The unprecedented political and constitutional stand off which began on October 26 with the sacking of Wickremesinghe appears to end tomorrow with his reinstatement.

Parliamentarian Lakshman Yapa Abeywardena on Friday said Rajapaksa, who had ruled Sri Lanka for nearly a decade, decided to step down "in the best interest of the country".

He claimed Rajapaksa can hold office without resigning but that will only further drag the political turmoil in the country. So the former president decided to step down after the court ruling given on Friday and on Thursday.

The Supreme Court on Friday decided that a Court of Appeal order issued against the appointment of Rajapaksa as Prime Minister and against his Cabinet from holding office will stand.

The appeal filed by Rajapaksa will be taken up for hearing on January 16, 17 and 18.

The apex court asked all parties to provide written submissions

within three weeks.

According to media reports, a new Cabinet will be sworn in on Monday. The Cabinet will consist of 30 members and include six Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) parliamentarians.

After his appointment as prime minister, Rajapaksa had sought to secure a majority in the 225-member Parliament but failed. Sirisena then dissolved Parliament and called snap elections on January 5.

However, the Supreme Court overturned his decision and halted the preparations for snap polls.

Most of the countries had not recognised Rajapaksa's government. The global credit rating agencies -- the Fitch, the Standard & Poor's and the Moody's -- had also downgraded Sri Lanka's rating owing to the current political crisis.

Indian-origin con woman jailed for faking cancer in UK

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, DEC 15 (PTI): An Indian-origin woman who admitted to lying to her family and friends about suffering from terminal brain cancer to con them out of over 250,000 pounds was sentenced to four years of imprisonment by a UK court on Friday.

In 2013, Jasmin Mistry told her then husband, Vijay Katechia, that she had cancer, along with a supporting WhatsApp message what he thought was her doctor.

Investigations later revealed that the message had been sent by her using a different SIM card.

At the end of December 2014, she told her ex-husband that her severe brain cancer meant she had just six months to live, with further messages from another fictitious doctor suggesting that it could be treated in America - at a cost of around 500,000 pounds.

Katechia, his family and members of the public went on to be conned out of money over a two-year period between 2015-2017 in the form of donations they thought she needed for life-saving treatments.

Mistry's ex-husband became suspicious when a friend of his saw a picture of a brain scan she had said was taken at one

of her consultations.

The plot was finally unravelled after her ex-husband showed a "scan" to a doctor friend, who told him it had been lifted from Google.

Katechia also discovered SIM cards Mistry used to send messages pretending to be other people, and when confronting her she admitted that she had lied.

Police were contacted in November 2017, and Mistry was arrested.

During interviews, she confirmed to officers that she was not terminally ill, and that she did not know why she had lied, according to Met Police reports.

It was found that 20 members of her extended

family and eight others were found to have given her money. The total fraud amount was calculated as 253,122 pounds.

The 36-year-old had pleaded guilty to the crime after her arrest last year.

Mistry, a medical secretary from Loughborough town in the Midlands region of England, was convicted of fraud by false representation and jailed for four years at Snaresbrook Crown Court this week.

Mistry, described in court as a "pathological liar", created a fake online account of a fictitious doctor to message her husband and also posted "Stand up to cancer" messages on social media.



Chai Chun to launch store at Mayfair Gangtok

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 15 DEC:**

Chai Chun has announced the launch of its twelfth Tea Boutique and the third, in collaboration with Mayfair, at Mayfair, Gangtok. Following the success of its existing stores at Mayfair Himalayan Spa Resort, Kalimpong and Mayfair resorts Darjeeling, the new store offers a complete range of Teas with more than 165 varieties along with an exhaustive collection of Tea

Accessories and Corporate Gift Packs, a press release mentions.

The categories that will be introduced for the customers in Gangtok, will include the entire range of Teas – Chai Chun's Classy, vibrant and Healthy line for the generations. The range offers Black Tea, Green Tea, White Tea, Oolong Tea and Blue Tea as well, the release mentions.

The Accessory section boasts of beautifully crafted items in varied

styles for the kitchen, and dining hall while the store will also have Corporate Gift Section. The store will host wide range of Gifts for every occasion.

Chai Chun launched its 1st store in Mayfair Himalayan Spa resort, Kalimpong and the 2nd one in Mayfair Darjeeling. Chai Chun is present in 7 cities and has 11 more outlets across the country. Announcing the launch, MR. Rajeev Baid, M.D Chai Chun said,

"We are very happy to launch our 3rd store in collaboration with Mayfair Group. It has been our Endeavour to enhance customer experience across the globe at our stores with the great support of Mayfair Group. Superior Quality Teas, service and the overall international shopping ambience is the commitment from Chai Chun. The launch of Chai Chun's this store in Gangtok is a significant achievement for us."

Didn't say anything against secularism, says Meghalaya HC judge on controversial order

SHILLONG, DEC 15 (PTI): Facing flak over his recent controversial order, Meghalaya High Court judge S R Sen on Friday issued a "clarification", saying neither was his judgment politically motivated nor did he say anything against secularism and that his order had been "misinterpreted".

In the 'clarification from the bench' posted on the high court website, Justice Sen said he does not belong to any political party and does not dream of getting a political berth after retirement. He said he had written the judgement based on truth, history and ground reality "to save the citizens of India, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or language".

The judge's observations in the December 10 judgement that India should have been a Hindu country after independence just as Pakistan became an Islamic country and that nobody should try to make India into an Islamic country had stoked a controversy.

The CPI(M) had urged Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi to remove him from his judicial duties and had alleged that his utterances were against the basic structure of the Constitution.

Justice Sen, in the judgement passed on Monday while disposing of a petition of a man

who was denied domicile certificate by Meghalaya, had also observed that he was confident that only this government under Narendra Modi will understand the gravity.

However, Justice Sen said on Friday that when he mentioned the government under Modi, it was inclusive of the ministers and members of both houses of Parliament and his request was to policymakers and lawmakers of the country.

"Secondly, I would clarify here that in my judgement nowhere have I said anything against secularism and my judgement makes references to history and one cannot change the history," he said

He also asserted that "I am not a religious fanatic rather I respect all the religions because to me God is one".

In his order, Justice Sen had urged the Centre to bring a law to allow Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, Christians and Khasis, Jaintias and Garos tribals who are presently residing in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan to live in this country peacefully and with full dignity, without marking any cut-off year.

The judge in his clarification said such people were coming to India due to religious persecution and they may get a right to live in India but the process for this had to be determined by the au-

thorities and by due process of law.

"We should remember that whatever we call influx or foreigner, that is due to unwanted partition and without proper referendum and wrong boundary demarcation and mainly on religious persecution," Justice Sen said.

He added all states should embrace such people and no particular state or region should take the burden of influx. He added that it was only his suggestion and "totally depends upon the polity and lawmakers of the country."

At the same time he noted that the Constitution allows every citizen to settle in any part of the country.

"I do not belong to any political party nor have I got any dream to get any political berth after my retirement and neither is my judgment politically motivated or influenced by any party," said Justice Sen who is due to retire in March.

Although the Centre's Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 also seeks to make Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from the three countries eligible for Indian citizenship after a stay of six years, there was no mention of the bill in the court order.

Noting that secularism is one of the basic structures of the Consti-

tution, Justice Sen said, "It (India) should not further be divided on the basis of religion, caste, creed, community or language."

He had in his judgement said the National Register of Citizens exercise in Assam is "defective" as many foreigners "became Indians" due to the exercise and "original Indians are left out".

"Nobody should try to make India another Islamic country otherwise it will be a doomsday...", Justice Sen had said.

The judge was, however, quick to add in his order that he was not against "my Muslim brothers and sisters" who are residing in India for generations and abiding Indian laws.

"They should also be allowed to live peacefully".

AIMIM leader and MP Asaduddin Owaisi had reacted sharply to the court order. "This is a wrong judgment. We do not accept it. You cannot give such a judgement... India is and will remain a plural, secular country. What kind of judgement is this...will the government take note."

Union Minister Giriraj Singh, however, had welcomed the judge's order saying his observations are in line with public sentiments.

"What he has said is also the voice of crores of people of India," the BJP leader had said.

Seven civilians among 11 killed in encounter, protest in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, DEC 15 (PTI): Seven civilians died Saturday when security forces opened fire at an unruly mob that thronged the site of an encounter in south Kashmir's Pulwama district in which three terrorists and an army man were killed, police said.

The militants killed included army deserter Zahoor Ahmad Thoker, who belonged to Simoo village where the gunfight took place.

The Army laid siege around an isolated house in the middle of an orchard following an intelligence input about the presence of the militants.

After the initial contact with the militants, the security forces completed the operation in 90 minutes, killing all three.

The soldiers were taken by surprise as people started marching towards the encounter site from all directions with some of them trying to seize their weapons, police said.

A police spokesman said while the operation was going on, security forces had to resort to firing at the crowd that came dangerously close from different parts to the encounter site.

Those injured in the firing were rushed to

hospital, where seven civilians "unfortunately" succumbed to their injuries, the spokesman said.

Unconfirmed reports put the number of civilians killed at eight.

Among those killed was a young Kashmiri man, who had recently travelled back to his hometown with his Indonesian wife and a three-month baby. The youth was also a part of the stone-throwing mob, police said.

About five more people have bullet injuries. Others who were admitted in the hospital are stated to be stable," the spokesman said.

Police again issued a general advisory, asking people to stay away from the encounter site and said there was significant danger to life there.

Political parties in Kashmir condemned the killings, saying Governor Satya Pal Malik-led administration has "failed" to secure people's lives.

Authorities suspended mobile internet services in most parts of Kashmir, including Srinagar, to prevent escalation in tension following the deaths.

Thoker had gone missing from an Army unit in north Kashmir's Baramulla district in July last year. He had de-

camped with his service rifle and three magazines, and joined the militant ranks.

Security forces said Thoker was involved in several killings in Pulwama district, including the abduction and murder of Rifleman Aurangzeb of 44 Rashtriya Rifles.

Aurangzeb was on his way back home on June 14 to celebrate Eid when terrorists abducted him.

Hours later, his bullet-riddled body was found at Gussu village, about 10 km from Kalampora in Pulwama district.

The identities of two other militants killed in Saturday's encounter were being ascertained.

"No probe enough to bring back the dead innocent civilians," Peoples Democratic Party president and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti tweeted.

South Kashmir has been reeling under fear for the last 6 months. Is this what was expected from Gov rule?" she said, adding "no country can win a war by killing its own people."

National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah questioned the way the operation was carried out.

"Any way you look at it this was a badly exe-

cuted encounter. Protests around encounter sites are now the norm not the exception. Why are we unable to learn how to handle them better?" he tweeted.

"Another blood soaked weekend in Kashmir," he said, tallying the deaths of protesters, militants and the jawan.

The administration of Governor Malik has one task and one task only - to focus on the security of the people of JK and restore peace to a troubled valley. Sadly it appears that's the only thing the administration is not doing," he tweeted.

Separatist-turned-politician and former minister Sajad Lone said the administration needs to "seriously evaluate" the costs of such anti-militancy operations.

"If you end up killing 7 civilians in order to kill 3 militants. It is time for heads to roll. We can't afford a state of impunity," he tweeted.

He expressed hope that the administration will abandon "its Rambo mindset".

Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) president G A Mir described the killings as "very unfortunate, sad and highly condemnable".

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2. Study Materials provided according to the standards of the board.
3. Mock Test and Pre Board examinations for the students
4. Revision notes for the students to make them much more effective
5. Doubt clearing Sessions held by respective teachers
6. Separate hostel facilities for boys and girls.

OUR COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To give clear concept of the chapters
2. To give the students proper guidance to excel in their examinations
3. To Prepare and deliver answers effectively and efficiently
4. Greater emphasis would be to excel.
5. Last minute suggestion tips as per board requirements

For further details please contact: 9002163719, 7319565616, 7432036651
Address: P.N.G Road, Opp. City press, Gangtok

VVIP chopper case: CBI custody of Christian Michel extended by four days

NEW DELHI, DEC 15 (PTI): A Delhi court on Saturday extended by four days the CBI custody of Christian Michel, alleged middleman charge-sheeted and arrested in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper case. The 57-year-old British national was produced before Special Judge Arvind Kumar. The probe agency told the judge that Michel needs to be confronted with various documents in the case and had sought further custody for five days.

It also said that the accused was required to be taken to the premises of Pawan Hans India Ltd in Mumbai to verify his version of his alleged attempted negotiations to buy back WG-30 helicopters, to identify the shipper and to confront the officials of Pawan Hans India.

The agency said that voluminous documents have been received from

various countries pursuant to the 'Letter of Requests' and the accused was yet to be confronted with a number of them.

The defence counsel opposed the CBI application for further remand saying already enough time was granted to the agency and nothing incriminating was found against accused.

"Keeping in view the facts and circumstances, submissions mad by the parties, I deem it fit to grant further four days PC remand of the accused. Accordingly, the accused is remanded to PC for four days," the judge said.

Michel was arrested in the UAE and extradited to India on December 4.

The next day, he was produced in the court which allowed his five-day custodial interrogation by the CBI which was later extended by five more days.

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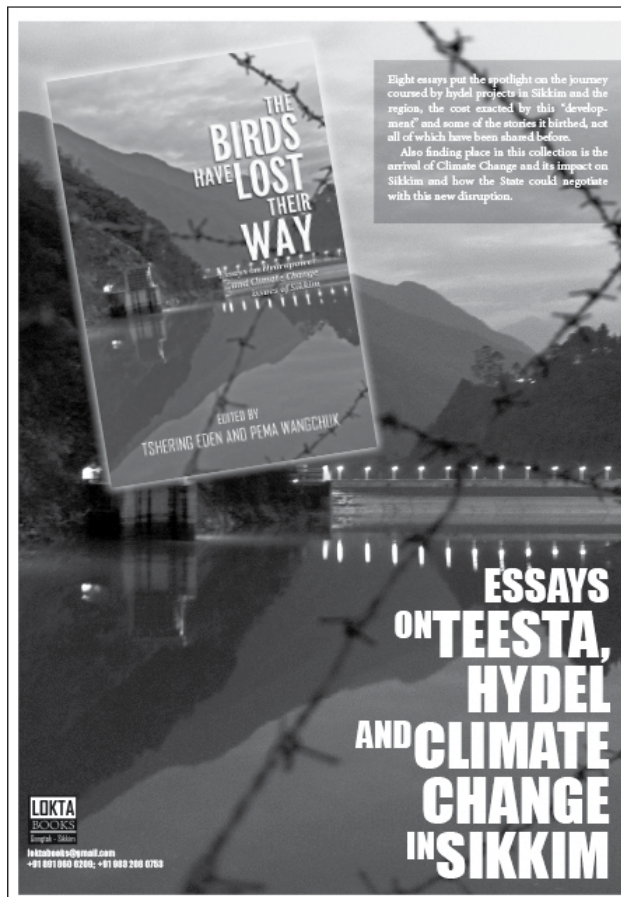
LAND FOR SALE

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KUTSE SHEGU

The Kutse Shegu of Late Namgyal Dolma who left for her heavenly abode on 03 Nov falls on 21 Dec. All well-wishers, friends and family are invited to attend the prayers at our residence, Tumin Kothi, Tumin, East Sikkim. We also take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us in our time of bereavement and regret our inability to do so individually.

**Karma Tenzing Namgyal [son] and family
9933441234**



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SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Meet the Others

Insularity is unfortunately a national malaise. Address it

Identity, as in the perceptions of the outside, is a touchy issue among the marginalized communities. The ill-informed clichés, the pedantic, and almost always offensive generalizations remain sore points for the offended communities, and we live in a region that has lived with such broad-brush impoliteness for ever since we started interacting with the plains. And the brush paints both ways, one may add here.

While it is easy to take affront and fine to draft fresh introductions to correct the offending perceptions, it is definitely not okay to allow the chip on the shoulder to burden any heavier than is healthy. The more this perceived slight is allowed to fester, the more it diverts energy from pursuits that take communities forward. One refers to a “perceived slight” here because the clichés that hurt are products of ignorance and one should not really allow ignorance of others to justify withdrawals into cocoons by the othered. And defensive shells are not the best habitations from which to plan ahead because they keep thoughts and ideas rooted in a past that has lost its relevance for everyone except those who swoon in its fermented confusion. Also, while so enclosed, one fails to recognize changes elsewhere.

That said, it is important that the ignorance which has degenerated into disdain, mutual suspicion and distasteful stereotyping is lifted. One could argue that perceived slights are by nature pointless obsessions since they are born out of, well, perceptions which cannot really be tackled because, well again, they rest in perceptions and those are more difficult to address than actual instances of discrimination. They do, however, become worries when the perceptions start manifesting as actual attacks, like ones which triggered the exodus of NE people from the metros or the lynching which occurred in Nagaland a few years ago. And then there is the continuing parochialism everywhere else in the country and the reprehensible attempts at justifying such targeted attacks born out of Hate seeded in prejudices and stereotypes. These will repeat unless this country makes some earnest efforts at celebrating its much-vaunted diversity. 70 years as one nation and the citizens still don't behave as One People! This obviously needs to change, and the Supreme Court recently cracked the whip with its slew of directions, including the setting up of a three-member panel to “enhance the sense of security and inclusion of the people from the north-eastern states who faced violence and hate crimes”. The SC directive is the first step, an acceptance of sorts of a problem that exists. For it to be of any real consequence, wider, more collaborative initiatives will need to be taken.

The students provide the best opportunity to build the bridges which can span the chasms of mutual ignorance which feeds insularity among us. A simple and easily achieved course would be for the community/ state representative organisations of the students to become mediums which link communities, not strive to make them self-ensconced unit of self conscious groups. Take the freshers' welcome parties for instance. Instead of each community, each state or region hosting a welcome party for its own kind, they should use the funds to introduce the freshers to 'others' in the student community. Host the parties for 'your own' but invite guests from all other groups. Make celebrations the medium to proffer more congenial introductions and strike new friendships. Use the organisations to speak more often about the concerns of other groups and engage more earnestly in issues and challenges which face other communities. This openness is possible only with the idealism of youth, but is currently being stifled because student groups remain obsessively insular.

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

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Debate: The ‘gilets jaunes’ movement is not a Facebook revolution

JEN SCHRADIE
theconversation.com

In less than a month, France's gilets jaunes (yellow vests) have gone from being a celebrated example of Facebook's ability to power a spontaneous revolution to a cautionary tale of how social networks can be manipulated by outsiders to provoke outrage and sow dissent. But in both of these extreme scenarios, the central actors lie outside France, whether it's the platforms based in Silicon Valley or the suspected propagandists in Russia.

Because the gilets jaunes phenomenon couldn't be connected to one particular trade union, political party or any other national organization, many looked to the role of the Internet to explain the emergence and diffusion of the protest movement, symbolized by the yellow safety vests that activists wear. The French are accustomed to protests that are scheduled well in advance. There's even an app called “C'est la grève” that announces strikes, be they with the railways, schools or elsewhere.

There's an orderly fashion to so-called disruptive manifestations (as protests are referred to in French), but the gilets jaunes movement hasn't followed the rules. So who exactly broke the rules? An easy answer has been the Internet.

BREAKING THE RULES

In many ways, that's the point of the gilets jaunes: they're breaking the rules. Not only did they bypass traditional organizations, but they have accused the Parisian establishment, particularly President Emmanuel Macron, of being elitist and out of touch with the economic struggles of working-class people, particularly those in rural areas. They are not anti-tax in principle or even anti-government intervention, but they are against the type of decision-makers who supported an increase in the tax on diesel fuel without understanding how challenging it has been for people in the countryside to survive – they're struggling because they have to drive farther and farther to get to fewer and fewer jobs, with wages that have not kept up with the costs of living.

And since existing institutions weren't responding to these everyday needs, the protests that erupted in November have expanded to broader economic and political demands. But how did this movement happen? If it wasn't existing organizations, many have said, it must be the Internet. A common example of this argument stems from the viral Facebook videos by Jaeline Mouraud, a digitally savvy musician who lives in north-western France and early on encouraged people to protest. **THE REVOLUTIONARY POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA IS WISHPFUL THINKING**

Both scholars and journalists have argued that digital technology, rather than organizations, drive modern social movements. A decade ago, commentators dubbed the Iranian Green Movement in 2009 a “Twitter Revolution”. Soon after, many suggested that a “Facebook Revolution” drove protests in Egypt. Scholars also claimed that the Internet was key to the 2011 anti-austerity movement

in Spain and the American “Occupy Wall Street” movement.

More recently, with the Women's March against Trump in 2017 or the gilets jaunes in 2018, the same argument is put forth. As a sociologist who researches social media, social movements and social class, I was not surprised at the overblown credit given to Facebook with these latest movements. Still, le sigh. Again?

Yet over the past two years, this celebration over digital technology's role in political participation took a dark turn. From Trump's toxic tweets to Brexit's online cesspool, the role of far-right outfits like Cambridge Analytica and Facebook itself came to light in fomenting far-right movements. And the French foreign minister recently announced an investigation into fake news and Russian manipulation of the gilets jaunes. What was once a horizontal digital army of white knights out to save the day was all of a sudden a horde of bots and hacks orchestrated by authoritarian institutions. Yet many still want to put faith in the Internet over institutions.

But both of these views, whether digital utopianism or dystopianism, fail to acknowledge people on the ground and their existing networks, as well as the fact that populist movements that seem to arise out of nowhere are not new to the digital era.

JUST A TOOL

Without a doubt, the spread of information during a time of upheaval is certainly faster with the Internet. And the gilets jaunes are no exception. But do we call the French Revolution a “letter” movement? The American civil rights movement a “mimeograph” revolution? The Internet is a communications tool. An efficient one, but it's still a tool.

Every radical movement has had their communication tools, such as radio with the French Resistance, yet those coded messages in the 1940s needed a network on the ground to make sense of them and respond. Many of the gilets jaunes protests at traffic circles (ronds-points, as they're called in France) were organized by people who were already connected on Facebook through other ties or who work and live together in the same small towns.

Populist movements like the gilets jaunes often have spikes of initial protest without necessarily having formal organizations that link people together, or what scholars like to call “weak ties”.

Yet existing institutions and networks, from the connections made by France's Nuit debout movement to traditional unions of teachers and transport workers, were inspired to spread the news of the gilets jaunes during the emergence period of this movement. And the word “inspired” is the operating word here, as the gilets jaunes movement has motivated these organizations to not only participate in the protests but to take bolder stands on their own issues, such as the current teacher strikes and school occupations over the high school reforms.

And what is often forgotten is the still-critical role that traditional mainstream media play in disseminating information, such as the conservative French newspaper Le Figaro, which has run

sweeping coverage of the protests since their inception. And French nightly television news has run non-stop footage and analyses of the protests. **BEHIND THE HASHTAGS ARE COMMUNITY TIES AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES** But how can the gilets jaunes movement sustain itself? From the analysis and research presented in my upcoming book, *The Revolution That Wasn't: How Digital Activism Favors Conservatives* (Harvard University Press), I found that over time, movements that have resources and infrastructure are more likely to harness the power of the Internet, and conservatives tend to have an advantage in this regard. Over the long run, it takes focused time and expertise to maintain on-line participation for social movements. Hierarchical, not horizontal, groups are more likely to be able to do this. Simply, more, not less, organization is required for digital activism to endure in a movement.

Yet I am not arguing that the gilets jaunes was sparked by a conservative organizational bureaucracy. Quite the contrary. It is an organic popular movement that wants the government to be more, not less, involved in improving the lives of the working-class. Yet we can already see how institutions, such as Jean-Luc Melenchon's left-leaning La France Insoumise movement, have tried to fill the vacuum of this so-called leaderless movement. In the absence of a strong grassroots organization, others will take over, including orchestrated dis-information digital campaigns.

But nor is propaganda new to political movements. The problem with the pendulum swing of “Hooray, the Internet connects!” to “Boo, the Internet deceives!” is that neither explanation for protest takes into account the community ties before the protests began but more importantly, the broader structural crisis that brought people together in the first place.

This is a movement that is linked to power and economic differences – not just people feeling a financial squeeze at the end of the month but also eyeing the growing inequality between the elites and the working class all over France. And they're not spending valuable time at protests or risking arrest because they are dupes to fake news. They are embedded in a societal context that drives their participation.

When I first moved to France in 2014 after studying populist movements in the United States – from Occupy Wall Street to the Tea Party – I was curious why there hadn't been a strong left-wing populist movement in France like in Spain, the US or much of the western world in 2011.

I soon began to understand that despite the emergence of movements like Nuit debout and other protests against the “Loi travail” (a law that loosened worker protections), France's social system was able to weather the storm of the economic recession that had plagued other countries. So even though digital activism was alive and well in 2011, a strong movement against neo-liberal policies had not yet emerged. Simply put, a popular movement drives Internet use. Not the other way around.

[the writer is Assistant Professor, Observatoire sociologique du changement, Axa Research Fund Fellow, Sciences Po – USPC]

Cheap oil is blocking progress on climate change

SCOTT L. MONTGOMERY
theconversation.com

The relationship between supply and demand, a fundamental economic concept, holds that when the price of something rises, people use less of it. Similarly, when prices fall, they use more.

And it may seem logical that low oil prices benefit consumers, countries, even the world. When consumers save money on gas, they can spend it elsewhere.

Yet, I argue that climate change makes this view obsolete.

That's because cheap oil has two big downsides along with its short-term gains. It erodes the advantages of vehicles that get more miles to the gallon, making consumers less apt to do their share to reduce emissions by buying vehicles that use less fuel – or none at all. It also makes the case for energy innovation seem less urgent to policymakers and the automotive industry.

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

Burning fossil fuels, the main source of manmade carbon dioxide, is the biggest cause of climate change. In the U.S. and other wealthy countries, oil is the single largest source of these emissions.

But relatively low prices are boosting petroleum sales worldwide. Consumption is climbing particularly in Asia, where a sustained economic boom has lifted billions out of poverty and put millions more people behind steering wheels.

Those new middle-class and wealthy consumers and the industries spawned by meteoric economic growth are burning millions of barrels of petroleum every day. This includes transport of goods by road, rail, water and air. But it is passenger vehicles that dominate global mobility, and they are consuming the greatest volume of fuel in the U.S., China and everywhere else.

To be sure, petroleum is the raw material for a great many products besides gasoline, diesel and other fuels – from lipstick to asphalt. The economic benefits of cheap oil can be widely distributed, bolstering growth and keeping inflation down. President Donald Trump, expressed this view when he likened low oil prices to “a big tax cut for America and the world” in a tweet.

GUZZLING MORE GAS

But cheap oil has other effects as well. After improvements in fuel economy during the 1970s and early 80s, two decades of low gasoline prices reversed this trend, causing average miles per gallon to actually decrease a little in some years. Only in 2004, when prices rose, did fuel economy again become an issue.

After years of hovering around and even topping US\$100 per barrel, aside from a brief peak during the Great Recession, oil prices collapsed. They fell to less than \$50 by the end of 2014 and sank even lower in early 2015.

Oil prices are still nowhere near \$100 a barrel.

Americans responded as economists would expect them to: by driving more. The lower prices fell, the less it cost to fill their tanks. Summertime gas consumption hit an all-time high.

Unsurprisingly, U.S. emissions from transportation rose by 10 percent between 2014 and 2017, even as they fell for electricity generation and other sectors.

In addition, drivers bought bigger vehicles. Sales of SUVs, minivans and small pickups soared, while passenger car sales plummeted.

By 2018, Americans were buying two SUVs or pickups for every sedan. The trend, also present in Europe, is a core reason why emissions have risen from advanced nations for the first time in five years.

Automakers are responding by phasing out passenger car production and manufacturing more SUVs and trucks in a trend that reaches beyond U.S. borders. SUV sales are surging around the world.

Partly due to the extra miles driven and the size of the vehicles involved, carbon dioxide emissions from wealthy nations rose by 0.5 percent in 2018, following five years of decline.

NO ONE CALLS THE SHOTS

But who controls oil prices? As an energy scholar and former petroleum geoscientist, I believe that it's clear that no one does.

Governments can establish climate policies, such as carbon pricing, stiff fuel taxes and other measures, that raise gasoline prices. But, as the recent French protests and two defeats in a row in Washington state for a carbon fee or tax have shown, there are limits to how far or fast they can go, even in rich countries.

And low-income nations view such measures as damaging and intrusive. Raising fuel prices has inspired massive resistance, even riots, in nations as diverse as India, Iran, Mexico and Haiti.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries has teamed up with Russia to create an oil-exporting alliance known as OPEC+. Those countries can cut supplies to increase prices, as they agreed to do in December 2018. They can also increase output, should they wish to lower prices.

Yet that doesn't mean that exporters have the power to call all the shots. For example, if China – the world's largest oil importer – were to have a big recession, Saudi Arabia and Russia would probably have trouble finding buyers for all of the oil they want to export. Overproduction in that scenario would make oil prices sink.

There is another reason the group can't dominate. They must compete against the world's largest oil producer and most rapidly growing crude exporter: the U.S.

ELECTRIFYING SOLUTIONS

Advances in drilling technology have made it easier than ever to produce petroleum at a time when humanity should use less of it for the planet's sake.

Until and unless electric vehicles become dominant, it will prove extremely hard to wean the world off of oil.

I believe that governments and automakers should for this reason be working together for the long term. By providing strong incentives for consumers and industries to make the jump, they can stop letting cheap oil stymie climate action.

Otherwise, as hundreds of millions more people become drivers in coming decades, the laws governing supply and demand could steer all of us down a road to devastating degrees of global warming.

[the writer is Lecturer, Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington]

WB allocated over Rs 1,000cr for tea garden workers since 2011



KOLKATA, DEC 15 (PTI): The West Bengal government has allocated over Rs 1,000 crore for the welfare of tea garden workers in the state since 2011, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Saturday.

Banerjee, in a Twitter post on International Tea Day, said her government has

also been providing 35 kg of rice at Rs 2 per kg to the tea garden workers.

"Today is International Tea Day. In #Bangla, we have allocated more than Rs 1,000 crore for the welfare of tea garden workers since 2011.

"We give 35 kg rice at Rs 2 per kg, electricity, and water supply

for free to tea gardens," she tweeted.

The state government is considering the prospects of tea tourism as well, the CM added.

The International Tea Day is observed since 2005 in tea-producing nations, including India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Vietnam and Indonesia, among others.

Narlikar calls for inculcating scientific spirit among kids

KOLKATA, DEC 15 (PTI): Renowned scientist Jayant Vishnu Narlikar on Saturday advocated inculcating scientific spirit among school children, saying their interests should be created in science by changing the teaching method.

Narlikar, a renowned astro-physicist, also called for building up a science movement across the country to help in moulding a scientific temperament which can only take the fruits of new scientific discoveries to the people.

The Padma Vibhushan recipient was addressing a national conference, "Integrating

Science with Society" at Jadavpur University.

More than 30 scientists of international reputation from various institutes of the country are attending the conference organised by 'Breakthrough Science Society', a voluntary body committed to propagate science and scientific outlook.

Jadavpur University Vice-Chancellor Prof Suranjan Das in his inaugural address of the meet said scientific reasoning-based education can help the country come out of the present crisis.

Das referred to "the dialectics between science and society" and called for extending the

fruits of science and technology for the welfare of people and not for destruction of society.

He called upon social scientists, science researchers and academicians to work in tandem for building scientific temperament among the greater society and not merely confining among students and teachers.

Science education and policy should be people-centric, the academician said.

Speakers Prof SG Dani, Prof G Nagarjuna and Dr Liaquat Ali delivered lectures on various topics in the first session of the two-day conference.

Arms smugglers arrested near Indo-Bangladesh border

KOLKATA, DEC 15 (PTI): Two arms smugglers were arrested with weapons and ammunition near the Indo-Bangladesh border at Krishnanagar in Nadia district, a Border Security Force (BSF) official said Saturday.

Twelve air guns, 470 washers, 22 country-made pistols, 61 live rounds and 18 magazines were recovered from their possession on Friday night, the official said.

Acting on a tip-off re-

Pakistan in the 1971 war and birth of Bangladesh, said.

A freedom struggle by the Bengali-speaking majority in East Pakistan against the atrocities committed by Pakistan forces had started in March 1971.

The war between India and Pakistan, that commenced on December 3, 1971, ended within two weeks with Lt Gen AAK Niazi, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GoC-in-C) East Pakistan Army, signing the instrument of surrender on December 16.

"The Rohingyas came to Bangladesh, we gave them food and shelter, but you gave us more during our struggle," she said while describing how two crore refugees who fled the Pakistani atrocities in which lakhs of Bengali-speaking people were killed and thou-

sands of women raped, were given shelter, food and security in India.

"We had no money and used to go to shops in the streets of Kolkata seeking medicines and dry food for the Mukti-joddhas (freedom fighters) who were fighting for our freedom and they whole-heartedly supported us with the provisions," an emotional Rosy said.

Several other 'Mukti-joddhas', who are part of the delegation along with



officers of Bangladesh Armed Forces, are here to participate in the celebrations to mark India's win against Pakistan in the 1971 war and birth of Bangladesh.

Former Army Chief General Shankar Roychowdhury, while recounting his experiences of the 1971 military operations, said that for mutual security interests and a secure future, the two countries must remain the best of friends.

Former Army Chief General Shankar Roychowdhury, while recounting his experiences of the 1971 military operations, said that for mutual security interests and a secure future, the two countries must remain the best of friends.

MNF not to leave NDA and NEDA : Zoramthanga

AIZAWL, DEC 15 (PTI): The new Mizoram chief minister, Zoramthanga, on Saturday said that his party the Mizo National Front(MNF) has no intention of leaving the BJP-led NDA and North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA).

He said combating alcoholism and drug addiction would be one of the top priorities of his government and it would take up development projects from day one.

"There is no intention at this juncture to leave the NDA and NEDA", he told reporters at Raj Bhavan here after taking oath as the new chief minister of the state.

This is his third stint as Mizoram chief minister.

Although facing criticism from certain sections in the Christian-dominated state for joining hands with the BJP, Zoramthanga said the MNF's ties with the NDA and NEDA will continue.

He said that the



main thrust of his government would be economic development.

"With vast lands available for cultivation, we hope to increase the per capita income so that it is among the highest in the country," he said.

"Combating alcoholism and drug addiction would be one of the top priorities of the MNF ministry," Zoramthanga said, adding that rehabilitation facilities would be established for those suffering from drug and alcohol addiction.

He emphasized the need for good roads saying that efforts would be

made to repair the highways while sports and information technology would be accorded priority to benefit the youths.

He announced that Hnahthial, Khawzawl and Saitual would be made separate districts as declared by the previous MNF government in 2008.

The Congress government did not implement the decision taken by the MNF ministry.

Construction of elevated roads and parking lots would be taken up to make the capital Aizawl a traffic jam-free city, he added.

Portfolios allotted to new Mizoram ministers

AIZAWL, DEC 15 (PTI): Portfolios were allotted to the 12 members of the Mizoram council of ministers on Saturday.

Chief Minister Zoramthanga will hold charge of finance, political and cabinet, planning and program implementation, general administration, vigilance, public works and horticulture departments, a government notification here said.

Deputy Chief Minister Tawnluia was allotted public health engineering, urban development and poverty alleviation, animal husbandry and veterinary and department of personnel and administrative reforms.

R Lalhangliana was allocated health and family welfare, higher and technical education and commerce and industries departments, the notification said.

Former speaker Lalchamliana was given home, taxation and disaster management and rehabilitation departments while R Lalzirliana was allotted power and electricity, art and culture, land resources, soil and water conservation and district council affairs departments, it said.

C Lalrinsanga was allocated agriculture, irrigation and water resources and cooperation departments.

Other than the five cabinet ministers, six ministers of state were also sworn-in.

K Lalrinliana was given

en food, civil supplies and consumer affairs, local administration and fisheries departments while Lalchhandama Ralte was allocated school education, labour, employment and skill development, entrepreneurship and printing and stationery departments, the notification said.

Lalruatkima was given rural development, land revenue and settlement and information and public relations and K Beichhua got social welfare, excise and narcotics and sericulture departments.

T J Lalnuntluanga, a first time legislator and advocate who defeated former chief minister Lal Thanhawla in Champhai South seat, was allotted law and judicial, parliamentary affairs, transport and environment and forests departments, it said.

Robert Romawia Royte, another first-timer and president of the Aizawl Football Club (ACF) which bagged the prestigious I-League trophy in 2016, was allocated sports and youth services, tourism and information and communication departments, the notification said.

Election to the 40-member Mizoram assembly had taken place on November 28 and Mizo National Front had won 26 seats. The Congress, which had been in power for the past two terms, was routed in the state, winning just five seats.

Man awarded death penalty for 'waging war against country'

BONGAON (WB), DEC 15 (PTI): A district court on Saturday sentenced Sheikh Abdullah Nayeem alias Sk Samir, who had links with terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba, to death for "waging war against the country".

Additional district sessions judge of Bongaon fast track court, Binoy Kumar Pathak, passed the death sentence after finding Samir guilty of the charges against him.

In April 2007, BSF had apprehended four persons, including Samir, on suspicion of being members of a terror outfit and handed them over

to the local police.

The West Bengal CID, which took over the probe, had charged them with waging war against the country and procuring arms and explosives, apart from other charges.

The three others -- Mohd Younis, Sk Abdullah and Muzaffar Ahmed Rathore -- had been sentenced to death in 2017 by the same court.

Samir had escaped police custody in 2014 during transit when being taken to Mumbai in connection with the trial in a different case in Maharashtra.

He was again arrest-



ed in 2017 by NIA from Delhi and was handed over to the West Bengal CID.

The court, which declared Samir guilty on Tuesday, was scheduled to announce quantum of sentence on Saturday.

Apart from the death sentence, the court also imposed a penalty of Rs 50,000 on Samir.

Statue of Bhupen Hazarika unveiled at his birth place

BOLUNG (ARUNACHAL PRADESH), DEC 15 (PTI): A statue of Assamese music icon Dr Bhupen Hazarika, who brought the Northeastern region to the rest of the country through his songs, was unveiled here in Arunachal Pradesh.

Bolung in Lower Dibang Valley district is the birth place of the legendary singer, composer, and film maker of Assam.

Unveiling the 10.5 feet tall bronze cast statue, Arunachal Chief Minister Pema Khandu said, "Hazarika served as a bridge in uniting all the sister states of the North East and even patronised to spread the unique culture of the region to the outside world."

He composed songs on each tribal communities of the state, the chief minister said.

During the Chinese aggression of 1962, Dr Hazarika visited the war front at Kameng sector and wrote a song to boost the morale of the soldiers, Khandu said.

Terming Hazarika as a bridge for cultural integration, he said the state government would propose to introduce Assamese as the third language in the schools of the state.

"During the NEFA days, most of the people used to obtain education in Assamese medium due to lack of schools and Hazarika made the language popular through his songs which are still being sung by people in the state, Khandu said.

The North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was a political division in British India, which later became the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

"Hazarika can be considered as an encyclopaedia of the Northeast as

through his songs people can understand the rich cultural legacy of each state of the region," Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein said at the programme where Hazarika's family members were also present.

Assam minister Tapan Gogoi, who represented the government of the neighbouring state, said a cultural integration centre in the name of Hazarika would be set up near the Dhola-Sadia Bridge in Assam's Tinsukia district.

"Our government has already acquired a land measuring 200 bigha to set up the Bhupen Hazarika Cultural Integration Centre to connect people of both the states culturally," Gogoi, Minister of State for Power, said, in me in a function at Tezu in Lohit district.

Rampok Yiram, the seniormost village head of Bolung village, said.

Poachers kill rhino in Kaziranga, escape with horn



KAZIRANGA, DEC 15 (PTI): The carcass of an adult male rhino with its horn removed was spotted by a tourist group at Kaziranga National Park (KNP) in upper Assam on Saturday, a senior forest department official said.

The tourist group spotted the carcass at the Bhulukajan forest camp area under the Bagori range in KNP, he said.

Following the recovery, the number of rhinos killed this year rose to six.

According to Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of KNP, Rohoni

Ballav Saikia, the visitors spotted the carcass of the pachyderm on the tourist route to Bagori range, while they were visiting the the World Heritage Site in a jeep safari.

Gunshots were heard on Friday night but were thought to be sounds of firecrackers from a marriage nearby, Saikia said.

Earlier on May 11, a bullet-riddled carcass of another adult male rhino with its horn missing was recovered from Chirakhowa anti-poaching camp area near the banks of the Brahmaputra river.

On March 3, a female adult rhino was killed outside the KNP area at Lohore Chapori in the state's Majuli district.

Its horn was also taken away by poachers.

Another rhino was killed at Polokata Tapu near Sitamari under the jurisdiction of Lahorijan forest camp on the mid-night of February 11.

The first case of rhino poaching happened at Daflang camp area of KNP's Bagori Range on January 14, but the poachers could not take away its horn.

1984 anti-Sikh riots: HC to pronounce verdict on Monday

NEW DELHI, DEC 15 (PTI): The Delhi High Court is likely to pronounce on Monday its verdict on the appeals challenging a trial court's judgement in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case in which Congress leader Sajjan Kumar was acquitted.

A bench of Justices S Muralidhar and Vinod Goel had on October 29 concluded hearing arguments on the appeals filed by the CBI, riots victims and the convicts, and reserved the judgement.

Former Congress councillor Balwan Khokhar, retired naval officer Captain Bhagmal, Girdhari Lal and two others were held guilty in the case relating to the murder of five members of a family in Raj Nagar area of Delhi Cantonment on November 1, 1984 after the assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi.

The trial court had acquitted Sajjan Kumar in the case, but awarded life term to Khokhar, Bhagmal and Lal, and a three-year jail term to

two others - former MLA Mahender Yadav and Kishan Khokhar.

The convicts had challenged their conviction and sentencing by the trial court in May 2013.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had also filed an appeal, alleging they were engaged in "a planned communal riot" and "religious cleansing". The agency and the victims have also appealed against the acquittal of Kumar.

The high court had on March 29 last year issued show cause notices to 11 accused, including Khokhar and Yadav, in five 1984 anti-Sikh riots cases which were earlier closed. The matter is being heard by another division bench.

The accused, who were acquitted of the charges, were asked as to why should the court not order reinvestigation and retrial against them as they faced allegations of "horrifying crimes against humanity".

Belgium maul England 6-0 to make maiden WC final

SAUMOJYOTI S CHOUDHURY

BHUBANESWAR, DEC 15 (PTI): Olympic silver medallist Belgium created history by making their maiden appearance in the men's hockey World Cup summit clash, thrashing England 6-0 in a lopsided first semi-final here Saturday.

Alexander Hendrickx (45th, 50th minutes) converted two penalty corners, while Tom Boon (8th), Simon Gougnard (19th), Cedric Charlier (42nd) and Sebastien Dockier (53rd) were the other goal scorers for the world number three at the Kalinga Stadium.

Prior to this, the Red Lions' best performance in the World Cup was a fifth-place finish in the last edition of the tournament at The Hague, Netherlands in 2014.

The Belgium players, who wore black armbands to pay respect to their teammate

Gougnard whose father passed away before the match, dominated possession in the first two quarters and created a couple of promising chances, two of which resulted in goals.

It didn't take long for Belgium to take the lead as Boon deflected in Florent van Aubel's measured cross from the left in the eighth minute.

Just seconds from the end of first quarter, Boon again came close but his deflection from a long ball hit the post.

Belgium doubled their lead in the 19th minute through Gougnard, who scored from a rebound after Hendrickx's flick from their first penalty corner was saved by England captain and goalkeeper George Pinner.

The Red Lions missed a sitter three minutes from half time when an unmarked Dockier pushed wide Van Aubel's pass, with only Pinner to beat.



Just a minute after the change of ends, England secured their first penalty corner, but the world number seven failed to capitalise on the opportunity.

Belgium extended their lead in the 42nd minute through Charlier, who scored with a fierce shot from a close range.

Minutes later, England earned another penalty corner but Belgium goalkeeper Vincent Vanasch was up to the task, and thwarted the danger with a fine save.

Seconds from the end of the third quarter, Belgium made it 4-0 when Hendrickx found the back of the English net

from his team's second penalty corner.

Belgium continued to toy with the English defence and pumped in two more goals in the fourth and final quarter to make the last-four contest a thoroughly one-sided affair.

Another penalty corner resulted in another

goal through Hendrickx, in the 50th minute, before Dockier scored from a field effort three minutes later to complete the rout.

Towards the end of the match, England secured two more penalty corners but lack of execution let them down, as they rounded off a disappointing outing.

HC declines to entertain plea against censor board cuts in Tamil film

CHENNAI, DEC 15 (PTI): The Madras High Court has declined to entertain a Tamil film producer's plea challenging the censor board's order for cuts and change of title and names of two main characters, which bore resemblance to names of two MPs from Tamil Nadu, in his yet-to-be released movie.

Directing petitioner Vaarahi to approach the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FACT) within two weeks, Justice M Subramaniam held that bypassing the tribunal in a routine manner was impermissible and the statutory body created under the Cinematograph Act must be respected by constitutional courts.

Vaarahi, who has produced the film "Siva

Manasula Pushpa", moved the court challenging the order of the Central Board of Film Certification directing 15 cuts and change of the names of two main characters in the film and also the title for grant of certification.

The judge said the tribunal shall adjudicate the plea on merits and in accordance with law by affording an opportunity to the petitioner and dispose it within four weeks.

He concurred with the submissions of the CBFC counsel that the petitioner had not exhausted all legal remedies available to him and instead prematurely filed the writ petition.

"This court cannot adjudicate such complex facts under Article 226 of the Constitution. The disputed facts and circum-

stances of the case with reference to the story of the feature film is to be adjudicated only before the competent authorities," he said in his order recently.

All authorities and tribunals constituted under the statute must be allowed to exercise their power in accordance with the provisions of law by scrutinising the documents and by providing an opportunity to the parties concerned, he added.

In its counter, the CBFC had contended that both the Examining Committee and the Revising Committee had asked the producer to replace the names of the characters Siva and Pushpa as these names were used by the producer "with ulterior

motives and to gain publicity from the current happenings."

As per the guidelines under the Cinematograph Act, visuals or words involving defamation of an individual or contempt of court cannot be permitted in films.

The committees were also of the opinion that the content and treatment of the film may make the viewers to correlate recent happenings, the CBFC said, apparently referring to a controversy surrounding expelled AIADMK MP Sasikala Pushpa and DMK MP Tiruchi Siva in 2016.

Pushpa had claimed she slapped Siva as he allegedly made offensive remarks against then chief minister Jayalalithaa in August 2016.

On no balls, Ishant takes jibe at Australian media



PERTH, DEC 15 (PTI): Indian pacer Ishant Sharma Saturday took a jibe at the Australian media when discussions turned to front-foot no balls, following the second day's play in the second Test here.

Ishant was guilty of bowling a few no balls in the first Test which escaped the on-field umpires' attention. While his propensity to overstep denied India wickets on two occasions, the poor policing of front-foot slip-ups attracted the ire of the host nation.

"Maybe Australian media should answer the question. Not me. I have been playing cricket for so long. And these things happen. Because you are a human, you are bound to make a mistake. I was not worried about it at all," Ishant said during a press conference.

He said that the counter attack from Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane was vital as India ended the day at 172 for three in reply to Australia's 326 all out.

"Whenever Virat is batting we feel confident. We finished the day in a strong position. Hopefully they will both continue. The game is in the balance right now. Hopefully we will dominate the first session tomorrow," Ishant said.

Kohli's unbeaten

82 coupled with Ajinkya Rahane's counterattacking 51 helped India overcome the cheap dismissals of Murali Vijay (0) and K L Rahul (2).

"Rahane added quickfire 20-30 runs and they were really needed at that time. If they had played defence then Australia would have stayed on their plans and it was important for him to counter attack to force them to change plans," he added.

Earlier, Kohli added 74 runs for the third wicket with Cheteshwar Pujara after the Indian openers had been dismissed cheaply.

"When Pujara defends, the ball doesn't go past the square. I have played against him and I know how difficult it is to bowl at him. He makes the bowlers tired. I knew if he stays he can do wonders. It was unfortunate the way he got out. We don't get those wickets that easily, going down leg and caught behind.

"Then, Jinx and Virat played pretty good shots which shifted momentum in our side and we ended the day pretty well," he said.

Sharma recovered from a poor spell, especially in the morning session on day one, to finish with 4-41 as Australia only added 49 to their overnight score of

277-6.

"I think the wicket was really slow at that time. It wasn't as up and down as it was after lunch when there was something there for the bowlers. The first hour was the best time to bat on at that wicket. As a senior bowler, a responsibility has been added.

"Whenever there is tough situation I like to bowl and take wickets. I have seen senior bowlers put up their hand in tough situations in the past and at that time I didn't know much about it. But now in tough situations, I want to do the same," he said.

India lead the four-match series 1-0 following their 31-run win at Adelaide and they entered the second game high on confidence.

"On day one, we need to be patient otherwise if you think there is going to be lot of bounce and I will bounce them out, it will not work. Bowling to good areas is really important on these kind of wickets.

"That's why we kept bowling in the right areas, and keep on hitting those good lengths. The aim is to find out what the good length is, speak among each other, and then it becomes easier for everybody to find those lengths and bowl," he added.

Praising Jasprit

Bumrah, who was the stand-out Indian bowler in the first innings, Sharma said, "I don't think he is improving. When he made his debut he had already improved (from a white-ball cricketer). That is why he was picked. The good thing about him is he gives his heart out and you only need to support him.

"Maybe he was beating the bat couple of times but he was bowling 140 every single time. He never gives up, which is the best sign for any fast bowler."

India have no spinner in this match and R Ashwin's absence also means that their tail begins at number eight with Sharma himself. The pacer said that it was a matter of time before the runs came from lower order.

"It was not my decision who plays. I am happy to join the team and do well.

"Yes maybe abroad, we are not scoring as many as we can but no other teams are doing too. If Australia comes to India, their tail doesn't score many runs. So it's about the home team.

"We are not used to that kind of bounce and pace and that kind of thing. Yes we are working on our batting skills as well so slowly we will get used to it. Maybe some day our bowlers will score a 50 too," he signed off.

India coach Harendra irks FIH for raising questions on umpiring

BHUBANESWAR, DEC 15 (PTI): Harendra Singh's outburst against umpiring after India's quarterfinal loss to Netherlands in the ongoing World Cup didn't go down well with the world body (FIH) and its President Narinder Batra Saturday hinted at a strict action against the coach for his indecent behaviour.

Eying to rewrite history after a hiatus of 43 years, India lost 1-2 to Netherlands in the fourth and last quarterfinal to crash out of the tournament in front of a packed Kalinga Stadium here on Thursday.

Soon after the defeat, Harendra blamed poor umpiring for his side's unexpected early ouster, saying FIH seriously need to address the issue as his side has been on the receiving end of poor on-field decisions twice this year.

But the India coach's vitriolic outburst came back to haunt him as the FIH chief said a team should be graceful in defeat and questioning umpires is against the spirit of the game.

"Being the FIH President I have to follow certain protocols and I have

my strong reservations against this kind of behaviour. A sport has to be played in the right spirit," Batra said in a press conference also attended by FIH CEO Thierry Wiel here on Saturday.

"One should be graceful whether you win or lose. Finding a fault is very easy. You should rather appreciate and respect. They (umpires) have only two eyes. They are doing a job, a thankless job. They will get criticised by anybody who loses," he added.

Harendra's job has been under the scanned ever since India failed to defend its Asian Games title in Jakarta and the World Cup was his last opportunity to save his skin.

It seems the India coach is set to lose his job with Hockey India mulling to take a drastic decision on the matter after the conclusion of the World Cup.

A former chief of Hockey India, Batra, who has considerable influence on the national federation, further indicated that some radical changes are on the offing in Indian hockey. "I am here till the



17th December and then I will return to Delhi. After 17th I will give my statement on the issue as NOC (National Olympic Committee) President," said Batra, who also heads the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

"You are being unfair to people on the grounds, sometimes umpires themselves ask for referrals. Other games have also adopted (video referrals)."

FIH CEO Weil, who came on board in March this year, too felt it was not wise to blame umpires after a defeat.

"I think the beauty of sports in principle is that you have a winner and a loser. The day you win, you are happy. The day you lose, you are sad, which I understand. Even Argentina team cried on

the bench," he said.

"Respect in fair play is such a nice thing. When you lose, what you have to do? You have to look forward to play better and win next time. To blame umpires is not the hockey style.

"I would just recommend (that) and definitely say umpires have a tough job, decision to be made within seconds. It (questioning umpires) is not acceptable."

The FIH CEO said the world body is no mood to review any umpiring decisions.

"We will not review anything. We will review the teams who have made such complaints made against the umpires. That is not acceptable. If you lose, you have to accept it and look forward," Weil said.

Pak court acquits 2 prime suspects in Sarabjit's murder case

M Zulqernain

LAHORE, DEC 15 (PTI): A Pakistani court on Saturday acquitted two prime suspects in the murder case of Indian national Sarabjit Singh in 2013 in the Kot Lakhpat jail here, citing "lack of evidence" against them.

The Lahore Sessions Court announced its verdict in the case which was pending for more than five years.

According to a court official, Lahore's additional district and sessions judge Muhammad Moin Khokhar acquitted the main suspects - Amir Tamba and Mudassar after all witnesses turned hostile.

"Not a single witness testified in the court against both the suspects. The court acquitted them for lack of evidence against them," the official said.

He said both suspects made their presence in the court through a video link from the Kot Lakhpat jail because of security concerns. Amir and Mudassar, two Pakistani death row prisoners, attacked Singh, 49, in Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail in 2013 resulting in his death. In previous hearings, the judge had expressed his anger as the prosecution failed to bring forth prosecuting witnesses to record their statement.

One witness in the previous hearing told the court that Singh was brought to the Services Hospital in a critical condition.

"I wanted to record Singh's statement but the doctors stopped him, terming his condition very serious," the official quoted the witnesses.

Singh died before recording his statement before the doctors. A one-man judicial commission of Justice Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi of Lahore high court had initially investigated Singh's murder case before the trial kicked off in the Sessions court.

Naqvi recorded the statements of some 40 witnesses in the case and submitted its report to the government which is yet to make its findings public.

The one-man commission had also issued notices to Singh's relatives through the foreign ministry to record their statements and produce any evidence they had regarding his death.

France's 'yellow vest' protesters gather on decisive weekend

Paris, Dec 15 (AFP): "Yellow vest" demonstrators began gathering on the Champs-Elysees in Paris on Saturday morning for a fifth weekend of protests in defiance of calls by the French government to stay home.

President Emmanuel Macron, facing the biggest crisis of his presidency, announced a series of concessions on Monday to defuse the explosive "yellow vest" movement which sprang up in rural and small-town France last month. He is hoping the package of tax and minimum wage measures, coupled with a terror attack on Tuesday night in Strasbourg and bitter winter weather, will help end a month of violent clashes and disruption.

The last three Saturdays have been marked by violent demonstrations, with burning barricades, pillaging and clashes with police in cities across France.

"Last time, we were here for taxes," a 28-year-old called Jeremy told AFP as he joined others gathering in freezing cold on the Champs-Elysees shortly after 8:00 am (0700 GMT).

"This is for the institutions: we want more direct democracy," he said, adding that people needed to "shout to make themselves heard."

The "yellow vests" have made dozens of

demands of the government but have no agreed programme or nominated leaders, making the task of negotiating with them difficult.

Until now, a clear majority of French people had backed the protests, which sprung up initially over tax hikes on transport fuel before snowballing into wide opposition to Macron's pro-business agenda and style of governing.

But two polls published on Tuesday -- in the wake of Macron's concessions -- found the country was now split broadly 50-50 on whether the protests should continue.

"We expect slightly less people (in the streets) but individuals who are slightly more determined," junior interior minister Laurent Nunez said late Friday.

Around 8,000 police will be on duty in Paris on Saturday, the same number as last weekend, backed up by 14 armoured vehicles, water cannons and horses which are used for crowd control.

Around 90,000 security forces were mobilised last Saturday across France and 2,000 people were detained, around half of them in Paris.

"That people demonstrate, no problem, but the vandalism is appalling," Maria, who manages the Le Vin Coeur restaur-



rant near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris told AFP on Saturday morning.

Like thousands of other business and restaurant owners across the capital, she was apprehensive and ready to pull down her shutters and close at the first whiff of teargas.

Many of the "yellow vest" figureheads, along with leaders of the far-left Unbowed France party, have urged protesters to turn out on Saturday to pressure the government into making further concessions.

Others have suggested that the mostly small town and rural protesters should show resolve by rallying in the regions rather than heading for the capital.

France "needs calm, order and to go back to its normal functioning," Macron said Friday.

On Thursday, government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux had called on protesters to stay put.

"It would be better if everyone could go about their business calmly on Saturday, before the year-end celebrations with their families, instead of demonstrating and putting our security forces to work once again," he said.

He was speaking in the wake of an attack Tuesday in the eastern city of Strasbourg, which left four dead and 12 wounded.

Interior minister Christophe Castaner also criticised attacks on the police at a time when the terror threat remains high in France after a string of atrocities since 2015.

"I find it inadmissible that today we are applauding our police

and then tomorrow some people think it's okay to go and throw stones at them," Castaner said on Friday morning after the gunman in the Strasbourg attack was found and shot dead.

In a bid to end the protests, Macron announced a package of measures estimated by economists to cost up to 15 billion euros (USD 17 billion) on Monday.

He cancelled the planned fuel tax hikes, offered a rise in the minimum wage, tax relief for pensioners and tax-free overtime for workers in 2019.

Images of road blocks, massive traffic jams and mobs rioting on the streets of Paris have dented France's image, as well as Macron's hopes of forcing through more business-friendly reforms, analysts say.

Afghanistan hosts Pakistan, China for wide-ranging talks



KABUL, DEC 15 (AP): Afghanistan, Pakistan and China are meeting in the Afghan capital to discuss trade, development and ending the region's relentless conflicts.

Shahussain Murtazawi, the deputy spokesman for the Afghan president, says envoys meeting Saturday will discuss everything from regional

economic development to counterterrorism. It is the second such meeting of the three neighboring countries.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi is attending the meeting on his second visit to Kabul since assuming office. Pakistan and Afghanistan have long accused each other

of failing to combat the Taliban and other militant groups that operate along their porous border.

China has lent tens of billions of dollars to Pakistan and the two have forged close economic ties as part of Beijing's "One Belt, One Road" policy of expanding trade links across Asia.

Palestinians slam Australia's move on Jerusalem

RAMALLAH (PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES), DEC 15 (AFP): The Palestinian leadership on Saturday described as "irresponsible" Australia's recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel's capital, saying it violated international law.

The country became one of just a few to follow US President Donald Trump's lead and recognise the contested city as Israel's capital, saying.

Australia said it would open a defence and trade office in the west of the holy city and Prime Minister Scott Morrison also committed to recognising a future state of Palestine with east Jeru-

salem as its capital.

Both Israelis and Palestinians claim Jerusalem as their capital.

Most foreign nations avoided moving embassies there to prevent inflaming peace talks on the city's final status -- until Trump unilaterally moved the US embassy there earlier this year.

Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat said in a statement that the Australian decision to open a trade office in the city violated a United

Dissident Pakistanis gather in US to chalk future course of action



LALIT K JHA WASHINGTON, DEC 15 (PTI): Several prominent Pakistani dissidents currently living in various countries have gathered here at a conference to discuss ways of ensuring greater support for pluralist ideas, human rights, and democracy in Pakistan, organisers of the event said Saturday.

The two-day deliberative conference titled 'Pakistan After The Elections' was opened by former Pakistan ambassador to the United States Husain Haqqani and will end on Sunday with an event to be addressed by US Congressman Brad Sherman, Chairman Emeritus of the Asia subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, a statement said.

"Terrorism and international isolation, not dissent, are the real threats to Pakistan but unfortunately Pakistan's establishment refuses to recognise that reality," said Haqqani.

He said the heavy-handed suppression of diverse views in Pakistan would not end the country's economic crisis nor would it help the government's stated purpose of projecting a positive image for the country.

"The best way to have a positive image is to build a positive reality, one that is free of the taint of terrorism, external dependence, and lack of democracy," he said.

Attended by scholars, journalists, bloggers and social media activists, many of whom now live in exile, the conference is the third to be organised by South Asians Against Terrorism and for Human Rights (SAATH), a group of prodemocracy Pakistanis and is co-hosted by Haqqani and US-based columnist Mohammad Taqi.

Earlier, the SAATH conferences were held

in London in 2016 and 2017. This year, organisers scaled down the conference's size as some of the forum's Pakistani participants were legally barred or intimidated by authorities from participating.

Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) member of the National Assembly Mohsin Dawar was detained at Peshawar airport as he was leaving Pakistan a few days ago.

He informed the conference organisers that the government had unlawfully stopped him from attending the meeting, according to a SAATH statement.

"Pro-democracy Pakistanis, including liberals and Baloch, Sindhi, Pashtun, Seraiki, and Muhajir nationalists see the appointment of Imran Khan as Prime Minister as a virtual military takeover, with a very poor civilian facade," SAATH said in a statement.

"In our discussions, we hope to address questions such as where Pakistan stands in the aftermath of the 2018 elections, what are the consequences to Pakistan of mainstreaming terrorists and terror groups, and how might the weakening voices for reform and a liberal vision be strengthened," it said.

Taqi said the freedom-loving Pakistanis needed to join hands "to create space for intellectual and political discourse".

"The Pakistani press remains in chains, electronic media is being coerced into submission, journalists are being hounded by the deep state, and the political parties have been tamed into submission," he observed, adding that "resistance would continue to the Pakistani establishment's totalitarian project".

Myanmar's president praises Rakhine state for 'auspicious' year

YANGON, DEC 15 (AFP): Myanmar's president said Saturday it had been an "auspicious" year for Rakhine state, the violence-scarred territory and epicentre of the Rohingya crisis.

More than 720,000 Rohingya have fled the western state since August 2017 after the military conducted "clearance operations," sending a stream of refugees to neighbouring Bangladesh with accounts of rape, arson and mass killings -- acts that UN investigators say amounts to "genocide" by the military generals.

Another 120,000 of the stateless minority, who are largely reviled by ethnic Rakhine and have garnered little sym-

pathy among the Myanmar public, have been forced to live in displacement camps in the region with bleak conditions and a dire lack of food.

But Myanmar President Win Myint painted a different reality in a statement Saturday when he congratulated the "ethnic brothers and sisters" on the 44th anniversary of the Rakhine State Day.

With no natural disasters, "we can say that 2018 has been an auspicious year", he wrote in Myanmar's state-run newspaper.

Rakhine, one of the poorest states in the country, is also the site of planned economic zones, he said, and the government is working to provide "24 hour electricity"

to certain townships.

He also praised a pact signed between Myanmar and Bangladesh to repatriate the Rohingya refugees and the arrangements made to receive "those displaced people who have gone over to the Bangladesh side".

The process which was repeatedly delayed was supposed to finally commence last month but it fell flat when not a single Rohingya took up the offer of repatriation, with many on the returnee list going into hiding.

The refugees fear returning home without guarantees of protection, citizenship or rights from the government and the powerful military. Rights groups have criticised re-



patriation as premature and "reckless".

As for those with in the camps in Rakhine state, many have attempted to leave by boats to Malaysia and Indonesia since the monsoon season ended last month, enduring a perilous journey to escape what rights groups call "open-air prisons".

"I wish to urge all Rakhine ethnic nationals

and citizens to participate... (in the) transformation of Rakhine State into a beautiful and happy state," Win Myint said at the end of his statement.

Win Myint was appointed to his position by Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has faced international condemnation for her handling of the Rohingya crisis.



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Benicio del Toro to voice villain in 'Dora the Explorer'

LOS ANGELES, DEC 15 (PTI):

Actor Benicio del Toro is set to voice the villain in Paramount's live-action feature "Dora the Explorer".

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the 51-year-old Oscar winner will voice Swiper, the villainous fox, in the film, to be directed by James Bobin.

Actor Isabela Moner, who recently worked with del Toro in "Sicario: Day of the Soldado", is playing Dora in the movie version of the hit cartoon series.

The movie will centre on Dora as a teenager moving to the city and dealing with high school. She finds herself leading Boots (her best friend, a monkey), and a rag tag group of teens on an adventure to save her parents and solve the impossible mystery behind a lost Inca civilization.

The film's voice cast also include Eva Longoria, Michael Pena, Eugenio Derbez, Adriana Barraza and Temuera Morrison.

The animated "Dora the Explorer" television series ran on Nickelodeon from 2000-2014 for eight seasons. It followed a young Latina girl who went on adventures around the world.

Kristin Burr is producing the project, which has been in the works since 2015.

Paramount has set August 2, 2019 release date for the film.



I follow certain directors, says Nicole Kidman on working with James Wan

LOS ANGELES, DEC 15 (PTI): Actor Nicole Kidman has shared her experience of working with director James Wan, saying that she has been following his work ever since he started making films.

The 51-year-old actor is playing Queen Atlanta in the director's "Aquaman". Her character is the mother of Jason Momoa's Arthur Curry aka Aquaman.

According to Variety, the Oscar winner said she wanted to work with Wan, especially after watching his low-budget horror films.

"I knew James Wan was going to do something really interesting and really fun and I've wanted to work with him since he started out in Australia in low-budget



horror, and I've followed his career," Kidman said.

"I do this with directors, I follow certain directors. So I've been following James. And then he showed me some of the drawings (he was) doing, and he said, See this is why you have to be in the movie, because I've drawn her to look like you," she added.

"Aquaman", also featuring Willem Dafoe, Patrick Wilson and Amber Heard, released in India on Friday.

Ali Abbas Zafar to shoot the last schedule of "Bharat" next year

MUMBAI, DEC 15 (PTI):

Filmmaker Ali Abbas Zafar on Saturday said the last schedule of his upcoming directorial venture "Bharat", featuring Salman Khan, will be filmed after the New Year.

The film, also starring Katrina Kaif and Disha Patani, is an official remake of 2014 South Korean film, "Ode to My Father". Zafar took to Twitter to announce that they have completed the Delhi and Punjab schedule.

"Finished with Delhi and Punjab schedules of @Bharat_TheFilm, last schedule will start in new year..bhai ke birthday wale month mein kaun kaam karta hai... par hum edit mein lage hue hain (who works in the the birthday month of bhai but I we are busy with editing)," he wrote.

The director was referring to Salman's birthday on December 27. The superstar will turn 53 this year.

Salman has earlier worked with Zafar in 2016's blockbuster "Sultan" and "Tiger Zinda Hai".

Produced by Atul Agnihotri's Reel Life Production Pvt Ltd and Bhushan Kumar's T- series, "Bharat" releases on Eid next year.



Cops call out Sonam over 'stunt' video, she says it isn't what it seems

Mumbai police and Bollywood actor Sonam Kapoor Ahuja were engaged in small twitter row Friday after the cops, wrongly, criticised the actor's co-star Dulquer Salmaan for "trying stunt while driving".

Sonam had posted a video clip from a film shoot on Twittershowing Salmaan in the driver's seat of a car. His hands are seen fiddling with a mobile phone as the car seems to be moving.

Sonam is heard calling him "weirdo" Mumbai Police posted the clip on their Twitter handle and wrote, "We agree with you @sonamakapoor! Quite a 'weirdo' to try such stunts while driving and putting the lives of fellow drivers at risk too! We don't quite approve of these even in 'reel' life.

This drew much flak for the actors from twitterati.

Sonam then stepped in to clarify

that Salmaan was not actually driving the car.

"We weren't driving we were rigged on a truck... but I'm glad you guys are concerned," she tweeted.

"I hope and I know you show the same interest in regular folk as well! Thanks for taking care! #Reelsreal," she added tagging her co-star.

The police responded by saying, "For us, No Mumbaikar is 'regular' they are all 'special'! And we are equally concerned about them all. Glad to know your safety wasn't 'rigged'."

Dulquer Salmaan also clarified that it was not a stunt. "Would appreciate it if you had checked some facts before tweeting this. In fact @MumbaiPolice helped us with permissions and traffic management during the shoot and were present the whole time," he tweeted.



"We appreciate that you weren't indulging in any irresponsible violation. A good example for all your fans @dulquer," police



HAPPY HAILEE! Actress Hailee Steinfeld is all smiles during a press conference for her new movie Bumblebee in Beijing, China.

ARIES: Connect with the person sitting next to you on the bus, Aries, or the one behind you in line at the store. He or she may have a piece of wisdom to share that will change your life forever. Know that you, too, could be that person who changes someone else's life with a single thought or piece of wisdom. Communication is the key to expanding your world in many ways.

TAURUS: Your self-esteem may be challenged by a fast-paced talker or unpleasant situation, Taurus. Don't accept things as they appear at first glance. There's a much deeper meaning brewing below the surface, and you'd be foolish not to recognize this when it comes around. Stick to your guns and stay grounded. Newfangled devices and big promises may not be all they're advertised to be.

GEMINI: Jump on board the fast train and see how far it takes you, Gemini. You will be surprised how far you can go with minimal effort. Your grace and polite manners will help you navigate to

where you need to be. You're your own ship and there is a large gust of wind filling your sails. Make the most of this energy by shooting for the top and not resting until you get there.

CANCER: Flexibility is important today, Cancer. Take the relaxed, laid-back approach. Trying to ram your ideas through isn't the best tactic. Having tunnel vision will restrict you in many ways. Keep an open mind and be receptive to other people's ideas and opinions. You have a great deal of power at your fingertips. It would be a shame to waste it by not having the breadth of vision to see all your options.

LEO : Things coming at you from all sides are forcing you to make a move, Leo. Try not to feel pressured into something you don't want to do. A nervous restlessness is apt to take over your being and urge you to act. Don't let other people's energies dictate your actions. Secure your position and be strong. Don't be lured into situations you know are bad for you.

VIRGO: Lock into the practical, grounding force that is not only realistic but also flexible. Attend to details and organize yourself, Virgo. Be aware that you may need to alter your course in order to fit with the group energy. Try to work together with those around you to achieve a common goal. Initiating the help of others is easier than you think as long as you stay focused and motivated.

LIBRA : Today is one of those days in which prosperity is much closer than you think, Libra. You will find what you seek, but it's up to you to take the first step to going after it. More than likely, you're looking for solid answers to your deep and probing questions. Don't let your inquisitive mind rest until you find the answers that ring true for you.

SCORPIO: Indecision may leave you helpless at a crossroads today, Scorpio. Others around you could be just as undecided regarding their direction. At the same time, you may feel pressured to

take immediate action and you're tired of waiting for others to make the first move. Find answers in simple solutions. There's more than one correct way to go. Your choice is the right one if you believe it.

SAGITTARIUS: Latch on to the expansiveness that comes when you connect with others in the social arena, Sagittarius. Communication is a key part of the day. You will find that if you go with the flow, you will land exactly where you need to be. Take the adventurous route and feel free to skip around from one thing to another. There's no need to pin yourself down to only one way of doing something.

CAPRICORN: Connect with the stable, grounding energy of the day, Capricorn, but beware that tension may come in the form of fast talk and misguided information. People might be fickle and frantic. Wait for the dust to settle before you pick which road to take. Impulsive decisions are apt to lead you down paths that might

not be the best choice for you now. Try not to think too much!

AQUARIUS: The expansive feeling you might be experiencing is apt to be squelched today as you get the feeling that you've lost touch with reality. Make sure you connect with real life, Aquarius, and do a bit of planning to balance your whimsical nature. Things that you haven't accounted for might crop up and hit you, serving as a reminder that you need to deal with the here and now.

PISCES : Walk to the beat of your own drum, Pisces. If you try to latch on to the glib, fast-paced information of the day, you might lose your voice in the crowd. On the other hand, if you plant your feet firmly and try to plan in too much detail, you might deprive yourself of spontaneous events that prove fulfilling. Chart your own course, and don't be afraid if no one else comes along.