

**WHEN SARA ALI KHAN CONSIDERED
FAKING A CARDIAC ARREST
TO EXIT A FILM NARRATION**
pg 08

**KASHMIR: WHY TRUMP'S
OFFER OF INTERNATIONAL
MEDIATION IS A GOOD IDEA**
04

**TAAPSEE PANNU AND TAHIR RAJ
BHASIN TO CO-STAR IN THE HINDI
ADAPTATION OF RUN LOLA RUN**
pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Pages 8 | ₹ 5

EC makes fresh push for electoral reforms with Law Min

NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI):

The Election Commission on Tuesday made a fresh push for electoral reforms with the government, including making paid news and false affidavits electoral offences.

In a meeting with Legislative Secretary G Narayan Raju, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora and fellow Commissioners Ashok Lavasa and Sushil Chandra also discussed linking of voters list or electoral roll with Aadhaar numbers to clean up duplicate entries, a poll panel statement said.

In a letter to the Law Ministry, the commission recently proposed that provisions of the Representation of the People Act be amended to allow EC to seek Aadhaar numbers of those applying to be voters and those who are already part of the electoral rolls, sources in the poll panel explained.

Accepting the proposal to give it legal backing to collect Aadhaar data, the Law Ministry is learnt to have asked the poll panel to ensure that the data is protected at multiple levels.

The EC recently listed out steps to protect the data from possible leaks.

The poll panel also pitched for having more than one qualification date in a year for a person to become a voter the statement said.

At present, January 1 is the only date every year for a person to qualify as a voter. The EC wants multiple dates so that more people turning 18 years of age can apply to become voters throughout the year.

A statement by the Election Commission said Arora reminded the Law Ministry brass that there are more than 40 different proposals of electoral reforms which are 'pending since long'.

Another proposal that the EC pressed for on Tuesday is making electoral law gender neutral for armed forces personnel, the statement said.

As of now, an armyman's wife is entitled to be enrolled as a service voter, but a woman army officer's husband is not, according to the provisions in the electoral law.

A bill which lapsed following the dissolution of the previous Lok Sabha proposes to replace the term 'wife' with 'spouse', thus making the provision gender neutral.

Members of the armed forces, central armed police forces, personnel of state police forces posted outside their state and employees of the Centre posted

turn to pg 02

MGNREGA employees grateful for regularization promise, look forward to official orders

**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Temporary employees hired under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act [MGNREGA] with Rural Development Department have thanked Chief Minister PS Tamang for his recent announcement promising regularization of MGNREGA employees.

They are now hoping to their regularization orders at the earliest.

"We came to know that the concerned department has already moved a file for regularization. We would like to also thank the RDD Min-

ister and the department for such quick action," they expressed.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, MGNREGA employees from different districts thanked the State government and the CM for initiating the regularization process.

They informed that there were 220 MGNREGA employees in the State of whom 170 have already qualified for regularization [as per criteria enumerated in a recent government notification] having completed continuous service of five years as on 31 December 2018.

"MGNREGA employees have been working at every GPU and the seniormost MGNREGA employee has already completed 12 years of continuous service. The file for our regularization was moved in the previous government as well but nothing happened of it. We are very happy with the new government for having immediately taken this initiative in the interest of MGNREGA employees and their families," they said.

They further reiterated their hope to receive the regularization orders at the earliest.



Sikkim Film Policy to be launched during 1st Global Cinema Festival Sikkim



GANGTOK, 18 FEB: Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Sikkim, will be launching the Sikkim Film Policy on the inaugural day of the 1st Global Cinema Festival Sikkim 2020, an IPR press release informs.

This was informed by IPR Secretary, Namrata Thapa during a review meeting for the upcoming film festival which was held at the conference hall of Soochna Bhawan, IPR Department today.

The meeting was

chaired by IPR Secretary, Namrata Thapa, in the presence of Director IPR, Benu Gurung, Special Secretary, Mrinalini Shrivastava, C&I, and Director ACFC, T Dorjee, Tourism Department along with a host of media and film personalities including film directors, producers, promoters, etc.

The meeting was conducted to discuss and prepare ideas and create necessary action plans for the upcoming 1st Global Cinema Film Festival

turn to pg 02

Tibet wins 3rd Kanchenjunga Basketball Invitational Cup



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 18 FEB:

The third edition of the Kanchenjunga Basketball Invitational Cup was organized by the Sikkim Students Association, Delhi, from 17-18 Feb, a press release informs.

The tournament was held at the Thyagraj Stadium, New Delhi, and saw a total of 8 teams namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tibet, Mizoram, Nagaland, D.U.T.S.A, and the host team Sikkim competing for the trophy.

In the finals, Tibet defeated Sikkim to win the tournament. Dorjee Wangchok of Sikkim was declared the most

valuable player of the tournament.

The final match was attended by Dr. Sunil Pradhan, Assistant Professor, Centre for North-east Studies and Policy, Jamia Millia Islamia University, who is also advisor to the Sikkim Students Association as the chief guest.

Over 50 pc of Indian birds at long-term risk: Report

GANDHINAGAR, FEB 18 (PTI): A report on Indian birds has claimed that over 50 per cent of the 867 species studied exhibit a population decline in the long term, while 146 are at great risk in the short term.

The study - 'State of Indias Birds 2020' - states raptors, migratory seabirds and habitat specialist birds were most affected in past decades.

The research was released Monday at the ongoing United Nations 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species here.

"This assessment of nearly 867 Indian species makes it very clear that our birds are in overall decline, in some cases catastrophically so," states the report.

For the long-term, over 25 years, the data found that 52 per cent of 261 species were projected to decline, while for the short-term, almost 80 per cent of 146 species were on a decline.

The number of birds in the Western Ghats, considered one of the worlds foremost biodiversity hotspots, declined by almost 75 per cent since 2000, the report said.

On the positive front, the study said Indian Peafowl, the national bird, has shown

a dramatic increase in both abundance and distribution across the country.

The number of house sparrows has also stabilised nationwide, although there is still a marked decline in their population in cities, it said.

Using data uploaded by birdwatchers on the online platform eBird, the analysis indicates that 48 per cent of species have remained stable or are increasing in the long-term (over 25 plus years), while 79 per cent show a decline in the last five years, the report said.

Of the 146 species for which current annual trends could be estimated, nearly 80 per cent are declining, with almost 50 per cent declining strongly, it said.

The report relies on over 10 million observations contributed by over 15,500 birdwatchers. The report is a result of collaboration between 10 research and conservation organisations, including the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment, Bombay Natural History Society, Wildlife Institute of India, World Wide Fund for Nature India, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History and Wetlands International South Asia.

Martam GPU felicitates senior citizens and retired officials

Govt committed towards welfare of senior citizens: LN Sharma

GYALSHING, 18 FEB (IPR): Senior citizens and Retired officials of Martam Gram Panchayat Unit under Gyalshing Bermiok constituency were felicitated and honoured in a special felicitation programme organised at Martam Gram Panchayat Unit today.

Minister-cum-Area MLA, Lok Nath Sharma was the chief guest of the day. Also present were ADC (Dev) RDD Gyalshing, Milan Subba and Block Development Officer Hee Martam, Pavitra Tamang.

During the programme, Minister Sharma acknowledged their contributions and handed over felicitation letter along with a shawl to the retired officials including former secretaries, KFO Kuwar and TR Poudyal, DB, Kharka Bdr Gurung, SE, KS Gautam, Headmasters, teachers, ANM, Bishnu Maya Chettri, Supervisor, Laxmi Prashad Sharma, officials from police department.

Minister Sharma presented shawl and felicitated all the Se-



nior Citizens from Ghaiyabari, Martam, Junga, Rathong, Sherpa Gaon, Arithang Daragaon and received blessings from the elderly citizens.

Addressing the occasion, Minister Sharma expressed his happiness on being part of the programme to honour Senior Citizens and Retired Officials. He mentioned that senior citizens have dedicated their lives and guided generations to transform society to new heights of progress and development.

He informed that the state government is committed to initiate welfare schemes for elderly citizens and will enhance Old

Age Pension from the financial year 2020-21.

He also informed that long pending demand of Bermiok Gyalshing road connectivity with the construction of Bridge via Rungdu has been completed successfully within eight months of the new government formation. Bermiok Sr Secondary School is all set to begin Science stream from new academic session, he added.

Minister Sharma also underlined the future roadmap of developmental work in his constituency and urged for their support and cooperation to transform Gyalshing Bermiok into a

model constituency in the state.

He also shared the innovations in dairy farming and agriculture by farmers in Kerala and Tamil Nadu and informed about the provision of subsidized loan in the State to encourage farmers towards Agro-entrepreneurship.

Minister Sharma also extended congratulations to the Senior Citizens and Retired Officials on behalf of the Chief Minister of Sikkim.

ADC Development/RDD Gyalshing, Milan Subba, shed light on 'Jal Jiban Mission' and its objectives to ensure water

turn to pg 02

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History beckons FC Goa in ISL match against Jamshedpur

JAMSHEDPUR, FEB 18 (PTI): History beckons FC Goa when they take on Jamshedpur FC in an Indian Super League match here on Wednesday as a win or a draw will make them the first club from the country to play in the AFC Champions League.

FC Goa, who are three points clear at the top of the table, need just a point to clinch the top spot in the Indian Super League. If they manage to do that, FC Goa will become the first club from India to play in the continent's top league.

However, if they lose this match, ATK will have a chance of stealing the top spot by winning their final game against Bengaluru FC.

Clifford Miranda's team have scored a massive 41 goals in 17 matches. If they can find two more goals, they will better their own league-stage record of 2017-18 season when they scored 42 goals.

"From the beginning, the club had some objectives and one of them was to top the league. If we get a result from tomorrow's (Wednesday) game, one of our objectives will be achieved - to top the league and play in the AFC Champions League," said Miranda.

Despite the exit of Sergio Lobera, FC Goa have not lost their focus and have won both their games since. They will be supremely confident of another victory against a struggling Jamshedpur FC.

Ferran Corominas and Hugo Boumous have been integral to FC Goa's march to the top. The Spaniard has 13 goals to his name and will be looking to add more to his tally while Boumous has been the creative head. The French star has contributed seven assists along with nine goals and has set the league on fire.

Stopping the duo will be hard work for Jamshedpur FC's struggling defence which last kept a clean sheet 12 matches ago.

"Obviously it was the worst season. We have had problems. Football is about making fast decisions and fixing things. Hopefully, the learnings from this season will help the club to prepare better for the next season. Everyone must take responsibility and think for the betterment of the club," said Jamshedpur coach Antonio Iriondo.

The Spaniard's charges are on a five-game winless run and are placed in the eighth position with just 18 points from 17 games. The 'Men of Steel' will be desperate to end the season on a positive note with a win.

The likes of Sergio Castel and Noe Acosta have to be on top of their game upfront while the defence will have the onus of stopping a pacy Goa attack.

In what might come as a relief for Jamshedpur, midfielder Brandon Fernandes and right-back Seriton Fernandes are both suspended. Iriondo will hope to make the most of the absence of two key players and recreate the defeat (1-0) they inflicted on FC Goa in their earlier meeting.

Tokyo marathon cancels mass race over coronavirus scare

SEAN INGLE

TOKYO, 18 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: The mass participation race at the Tokyo marathon, which was expected to have 38,000 people taking part, has become the latest sporting casualty of the coronavirus. In a statement organisers confirmed the event on 1 March will now be limited to the elite field of 176 athletes and 30 wheelchair athletes.

"We have been preparing for the Tokyo marathon 2020 while implementing preventive safety measures, however, now that a case of Covid-19 [coronavirus] has been confirmed within Tokyo, we cannot continue to launch the event within the scale we originally anticipated," they said.

Organisers said that all registered runners would be allowed to defer their entry until next year. But they would have to pay again and would also not get their money back from this year's race. One British runner who had entered the race told the Guardian that she understood the decision but from a personal and financial perspective it was hard to take 13 days before the race.

"My husband Max and I had been planning



to run the Tokyo marathon for over two years so to hear this news is gutting," said Sarah Dudgeon, who had been hoping to run the race in under three hours.

"We understand and respect the decision but you can't helping feeling the personal ramifications. We had trained hard through the winter and were hoping this would be the running holiday of a lifetime. As things stand, we don't know whether the £3,000 we have paid for flights and hotels will be refunded if we decide to run the race next year."

Last week organisers had sounded confident the event would go ahead, announcing plans to distribute surgical masks to runners and volunteers as part

of preventive safety measures against the virus. They had also told the 1,800 runners from China they could defer their entry until 2021 without any penalty.

However, the continuing spread of the virus meant on Monday they had little choice but to take the drastic step of limiting the race - which doubles up as an Olympic trial for Japanese marathon runners - to just over 200 participants.

The news is bound to raise more concerns about whether the virus could disrupt the Olympic Games in Tokyo, which are due to start on 24 July. So far there have been more than 70,000 cases in China, with 1,770 deaths. Last week senior officials at

the International Olympic Committee insisted there was no plan B to reschedule the Games.

"There's no case for any contingency plans or cancelling the Games or moving the Games," John Coates, the head of an IOC inspection team, said. He added the World Health Organisation had advised him that a back-up plan was not necessary and that the Games remain "on track".

Other experts have warned that the coronavirus-related health risks to Japan are hard to predict. "There is no guarantee that the outbreak will come to an end before the Olympics because we have no scientific basis to be able to say that," said Shigeru Omi, a former regional

director of the WHO.

The Tokyo marathon is the biggest sporting event to be affected by the coronavirus. In the past month the World Indoor Championships, due to take place in Nanjing, China in March, were cancelled along with the Shanghai Formula One Grand Prix.

Other sporting events to have been called off or postponed in recent months because of the virus include the Hong Kong Sevens international rugby tournament, the annual Singapore Yacht Show and almost all sports in China.

The London marathon said the situation for the race in April remained unchanged. Hugh Brasher, the event director, said: "We, along with the rest of the world, are monitoring closely the developments relating to the spread of coronavirus and noting the updates and advice given by the UK government, the World Health Organisation and other public bodies. With more than two months to go before the event on Sunday 26 April, we will continue to monitor the situation. We will keep our deferment policy under review as the situation evolves."

Aligarh SP leader's son shot dead in 'road rage' case



ALIGARH (UP), FEB 18 (PTI) A Samajwadi Party leader's son was shot dead during a violent clash that broke out here after a "road rage" incident involving them and a local BJP politician's son, police said on Tuesday.

They said 20-year-old Sachin, son of a district-level SP leader Purnanmal Prajapati, was killed Monday night in Palasahibabad locality in Sasni Gate area as the argument following the collision between two motorcycles led to stone-pelting and firing.

At least six people, including the deceased's younger brother and a

policeman, were injured in the clash, the police said. They said the incident happened when Prajapati and his another son -- Narendra -- were going to attend a function related to backward classes.

They were on a motorcycle which collided with the two-wheeler of Amit, son of Ishwar Chand Upadhyay, a BJP leader who was previously an office-bearer in the party's district unit, the police said.

The incident led to a heated argument between them which escalated into stone-pelting and gunshot firing as the two sides were joined by

their supporters, the police said, adding the mob set Amit's motorcycle ablaze.

Sachin also arrived at the scene and was hit by a bullet, they said, adding he died at a hospital later.

Three people have been arrested but the main suspects have managed to escape, they said.

SP (Crime) Arvind Kumar said it was a case of "road rage".

He also said the police are questioning some people to ascertain if the two sides had any enmity between them, as claimed by local residents.

The two families live in nearby localities.

'Cyanide' Mohan gets lifer in 19th murder case

MANGALURU, FEB 18 (PTI): Notorious serial killer 'Cyanide' Mohan has been sentenced to life imprisonment by a court here for the murder of a 23-year old woman from Kasaragod district of Kerala in 2006, the 19th of the 20 murder cases slapped against him.

Sixth additional district and sessions court judge Sayeedunnisa on Monday sentenced Mohan to life and imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 on him.

The sentence shall commence after he serves the sentence of imprisonment in the other cases, the judge said.

This is the 19th case out of the 20 murder cases registered against the criminal, who has killed several women using the deadly cyanide after befriending and raping them.

Earlier, he had been awarded death sentence in five cases and life imprisonment in three cases. Two of the death penalties were later commuted to life imprisonment.

According to the charge sheet in the latest case, Mohan met the woman while she was coming to work at a unit of CAMPCO here.

After befriending and offering to marry her, on January 3 in 2006, he took her to Mysuru and stayed in a lodge near the bus stand.

Like in all other cases, the next morning, Mohan asked the woman to remove her ornaments. The two went to the KSRTC bus stand where he asked her to consume a pill convincing her that it was a contraceptive. However, it was laced with cyanide.

The woman, who consumed the pill in the washroom, collapsed and declared brought dead at a hospital where she was rushed by those in the room. As in previous cases, Mohan went back to the lodge and left the place along with her ornaments.

He was arrested later from Bantwal in 2009, after which he admitted to killing 20 women.

IN THE COURT OF SUB-DIVISIONAL MAGISTRATE, WEST DISTRICT, GYALSHING

I Purna Bahadur Gurung, son of Late Harka Bahadur Gurung, resident of Lower Arithang, Police station Gyalshing, West Sikkim do hereby affirm and declare my oath as under:

1. That my son's actual name is Sonam Wangchuk Gurung as recorded in his all academic records.
2. That, my son's name has been inadvertently recorded as Madan kumar Gurung in his Aadhaar card and Electoral Identity card.
3. That, the purpose of this affidavit is to declare that Sonam Wangchuk Gurung and Madan Kumar Gurung is the names of the same and single person i.e. my son.
4. That, this affidavit is made bona fide.
5. Whatsoever declare by me are true to the best of my knowledge and belief and no information has been concealed. I have signed this affidavit in the court of sub-divisional Magistrate, West District, Gyalshing on 11th September, 2018 in the presence of the below mentioned witness.

Deponent.

Sikkim Film...

Sikkim 2020 scheduled to be held from 28 Feb to 01 Mar, 2020.

The main objective for organising the upcoming Global Cinema Festival Sikkim 2020 is to provide a platform and create a warm, non-competitive and visitor-friendly atmosphere for films, filmmakers, volunteers, guests and audience.

Various ideas and plans were discussed for the extensive promotion and marketing of the festival including logistics, advertisements and transportation.

Mrinalini Shrivastava shared her views and insights and provided necessary details related to the event. She also shared the floor plan of the venue on the inaugural day of the event.

Further, she provided in-depth analysis on significant deliverables of the action plan to be adopted for the smooth success of the event.

She also highlighted that the department is prepared for the upcoming event and added that the concerned departments like Power and Education will be working in close coordination and providing all possible help to make this event a grand success.

She further informed that skillful individuals will be invited to attend the technical sessions and skill development workshops under the aegis of NFDC and Film Industry during the course of the festival.

She also discussed ways to make the Global Film Festival website more user-friendly and further informed that a pre event press conference will be held on 25th February 2020 for wider publicity and dissemination of news and information regarding the festival.

The meeting concluded with the Secretary, IPR Department extending her best wishes for the grand success of the festival.

Martam GPU...

connectivity throughout the targeted area. He also informed about the guidelines and said that the public need to bear 5% of the total expenditure with a motive to develop sense of ownership amongst beneficiaries that can be paid through cash or kind.

During the programme, ADC Development, Milan Subba, BDO Hee Martam BAC, Pavitra Tamang, Dy Director Tourism, GP Sharma and other officials and social activists were also acknowledged for their contributions towards the GPU.

Earlier, Minister Sharma inspected the starting point of the new road from Central Martam to 15th Mile, Martam via Lepcha Gaon/ Rafong. He also expressed gratitude to the land donor and instructed the contractor to complete the awarded work within the stipulated time.

He also visited Central Martam Secondary School and interacted with the school staff and the students. Minister Sharma extended his best wishes and assured to reward the students of Class X for securing 85% marks and above. The Minister also assured to address the requirements of the schools at the earliest.

EC makes...

outside India are eligible to be enrolled as service voters.

Sources in the poll panel pointed out that other proposals pending with the government include making filing of false declaration a ground for disqualification and putting a cap on expenditure by candidates in legislative council polls in the coming days.

The EC has also asked the government to make bribery during poll period a cognisable offence.

While the Law Ministry is the administrative ministry for the EC, the Legislative Department is the nodal unit for issues related to the poll panel.

Referring to the issue of filing false declaration, the sources said, as of now, it attracts six months' jail term, but the EC wants to make it an "electoral offence".

Conviction in an electoral offence is a ground for disqualification. "Jail term of six months does not instil fear, disqualification will," another official explained.

As of now, candidates contesting legislative council elections don't have a bar on campaigning expenses, which, the EC wants to put a cap on.

The expenditure should be half of what is allowed for candidates contesting assembly polls. Every state has a different expenditure limit based on its size, number of voters and assembly seats.

As of today, bribery in elections is a non-cognisable offence where an investigation cannot take place without a magistrate's permission. The EC wants to make it a cognisable offence and bring in the category of "serious" crimes like murder, dowry, death, and rape.

The legislative secretary assured that the ministry is already examining these proposals, the statement said.

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GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College. Flat Land no cutting required. Price 27 Lakhs (negotiable).

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

LAND FOR SALE

An area measuring 1 acre at Sadam South Sikkim near Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact: 78640-04501, 62970-03235, 98320-48410

SIC probing irregularities in APSSB examination: Khandu

ITANAGAR, FEB 18 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday said a special investigation cell (SIC) is probing the alleged irregularities in the examination conducted by the Arunachal Pradesh Staff Selection Board (APSSB).

Khandu said those involved in the APSSB fiasco will not be spared and the guilty will be punished.

“Within a day of investigation, the SIC has got several leads and I assure the people that soon the guilty will be in the dragnet of law,” he said.

Speaking at a function here, Khandu said, “For the last three years I have been repeating ... that corruption in any form will not be tolerated and those found guilty, irrespective of power and position, will not be spared. I am surprised that despite repeated warnings people still have the courage to do



corruption.”

The APSSB came under public criticism after purported optical mark recognition (OMR) sheet went viral on social media, soon after the results of the examination for lower divisional clerk (LDC), junior secretariat assistant (JSA) and other posts were published on its website on February 14.

Several candidates

who appeared in the examination on Monday launched a protest march here, demanding immediate suspension of APSSB chairman VC Verma and controller of examinations SK Jain for their alleged failure to conduct the exams properly.

The chief minister said the APSSB was constituted to provide transparent, fair and

equal playing ground for the unemployed youths of the state to join government jobs at the lower levels.

He said the APSSB was his vision to root out corruption in recruitment of lower-level jobs, which was prevalent when recruitments were done by the departments.

“It breaks my heart to see my vision being shat-

tered by a few individuals. I reiterate anybody found involved, will be not spared,” he reiterated.

Khandu appealed to government officials to stick to rules and discharge their duties in a fair, transparent and impartial manner.

He regretted that despite wholehearted efforts ‘leakages’ are still happening in the system and urged the government employees to change the system from within.

Khandu said his government got an absolute mandate in the last Assembly election as the people have confidence and trust on his government.

“In return of the confidence, people have lots of expectations from us. I will not think twice to take action against those found tinkering with peoples expectations,” Khandu added.

Sunil reaches second successive final at Asian Wrestling

NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI):

India’s Sunil Kumar reached the final of the 87kg category with a brilliant come-from-behind victory over Azamat Kustubayev at the Asian Wrestling Championships here on Tuesday.

Kumar was down 1-8 in his semi-final bout against his Kazakh opponent but made a great comeback, winning 11 points on the trot to finish the bout at 12-8. In 2019 also, Kumar had made it to the final and ended with a silver medal.

In the 87kg final, Rome Ranking Series silver medallist Sunil will play against Azat Salidinov from Kyrgyzstan.

Earlier in the day, Arjun Halakurki (55kg) lost

his semi-final bout from a winning position. He lost 7-8 against Iran’s Pouya Mohammad Naserpour.

Arjun will now be up against Korea’s Donghyeok Won in the bronze medal playoff.

Mehar Singh also lost his last four bout.

Up against Minseok Kim of Korea, Mehar went down tamely to the Korean by a 1-9 margin.

Mehar had made the Indian team at the last minute. Just three days before the tournament, India’s number one in 130 kg, Naveen, pulled out of the event due to injury.

Mehar replaced Naveen and won his opening bout against Daler Rakhmatov of Uz-

bekistan.

In the first qualification bout of the day, Sajan, who was one of India’s big medal hopes lost in a disappointing manner.

He was pitted against under-23 Asian champion Renat Iliazuulu of Kyrgyzstan in the first round. The Indian wrestler could not match the initial onslaught of Iliazuulu and lost 6-9.

Sachin Rana (63kg) faced a massive defeat against Elmurat Tasmuradov by a margin of 8-0.

He was then pitted against Yernur Fidakmetov of Kazakhstan where he could not put up much of a challenge and went down 6-3 in his Repechage bout.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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RSS holds closed door meeting with 70 columnists

NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI):

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is holding a daylong meeting with 70 columnists from across India on Tuesday in an effort to clear misconceptions about the organisation, sources said.

RSS chief Bhagwat, who last year met representatives of international media organisations posted in India, is expect-

ed to deliver a keynote address that will be followed by a free-flowing conversation, they said.

The 70 columnists attending Tuesday’s meeting write in different languages.

The meeting, in Chhattarpur in New Delhi, is a closed-door meeting and the proceedings are “strictly confidential”, the sources said.

52 Red Pills: A 52-week hyper-learning adventure

NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI):

In 2018, corporate couple Eika and Siddharth Banerjee embarked on an exciting and a unique hyper-learning adventure: meet experts and specialists from various fields over 52 weeks to explore topics that help one enrich lives from all perspectives.

The result is 52 Red Pills , a book written as a practical guide that aims at helping people introspect and make them eager to know more about the different walks of life.

The primary motive of the exercise, the authors say, was for us to learn and grow, and to use our learnings to become better versions of ourselves .

Another objective was to spend blocked-off time as a couple on topics and conversations of mutual interest .

The book, with a subtitle that says A New-Age Playbook to become Healthy, Wealthy and Wise , has interactive exercises and suggestions towards the end of every week that helps the readers write about their experiences and challenges.

The topics the authors chose were diverse as well as fascinating, covering a vast gamut of ideas and themes: from the art of making fine coffee to mind maps, from how billionaires think to how pro-marathoners train, from mindfulness to muay-thai, and from ancient medicine practices to cutting-edge

haematology.

This accelerated self-learning was a three-step process. The Banerjees would speak to experts and hack into their life-journeys and learnings. They would then scan and absorb exciting literature on the subjects, thus building up an information database. Finally, the couple would debate and discuss these concepts in great details between themselves to understand them.

For 52 weeks of 2018, Eika and Siddharth explored and researched 52 topics that helped them enrich their lives from all perspectives, be it health, spiritual, professional or even leisure.

Their journey included topics of all kinds that are both intense and enjoyable. If one week, the authors learn about biohacking, the other they enjoy the different malts of whiskeys.

Our journey was intense and hectic, covering a host of topics that would hopefully help us become healthy, wealthy, and wise’, as we integrated learnings from ancient wisdom along with modern-day expertise, the say in the book, published by Pan.

To give themselves a breather from some of the more intense themes, they incorporated some lighter weeks in between, where they concentrated on experimental topics like whiskey, coffee, etc.

Preacher Indurikar Maharaj apologises for remarks

AURANGABAD, FEB 18 (PTI):

Marathi ‘kirtan-kaar’ (preacher) Nivrutti Maharaj Indurikar on Tuesday tendered an apology over his remarks on the timing of intercourse and gender of child, seeking to end a controversy on the issue.

His apology came after state minister Bachchu Kadu has said Maharashtra government will not file a case against him over the remarks.

During his kirtan (sermon) at a hamlet in Ahmednagar district recently, the preacher reportedly said intercourse by a couple on an even date would beget a male child, while on an odd date would result in the birth of a girl.

The Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti, a voluntary organisation working to eradicate supersti-

tious beliefs, had sought a police case against Indurikar Maharaj, alleging that his comments violated provisions of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act.

In a statement, Indurikar Maharaj said he was tendering an apology if anyone’s sentiments were hurt by his remarks.

“In the last 26 years of my delivering kirtans, I had stressed on fighting superstition and other social ills... If my remarks hurt anyone’s sentiments, I apologise for it,” he said. Earlier, the minister had said the state government will not file a case against the preacher.

“Indurikar Maharaj is working to enlighten people through his kirtan. If he goes wrong, law will take its own course,

but that doesn’t mean a crime will be registered against him. We need to check his intention while making those remarks,” Kadu told reporters in Osmanabad on Monday.

If a notice is served, it does not mean he will be booked, the minister of state for water resources said.

“Law is same for everyone. If anyone commits a mistake, he or she will be punished. But if a word uttered by mistake is played up, then it’s not right. If the same thing happens with me, then media shows it as breaking news which is not correct,” he said.

Indurikar Maharaj on Monday said some people unhappy with his work for society and the Warkari community were trying to create trouble for him by demanding filing of cases over his remark.

Prashant Kishor questions Nitish Kumar’s development in Bihar

PATNA, FEB 18 (PTI):

Election strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor on Tuesday questioned the Nitish Kumar government’s development model, even as he sneered at the chief minister for making ideological compromises to stay in an alliance with the BJP.

Kishor, who has been vocal about his opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), said Kumar needs to spell out whether he is with the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi or those who support Nathu Ram Godse.

Speaking at a press conference here, he said, “Nitish ji has always said that he cannot leave the ideals of Gandhi, JP and Lohiya... At the same time, how can he be with the people who support the ideology of Godse. Both cannot go together. If you want to stay with the BJP, I don’t have any problem with it but you cannot be on both sides.”

“There has been a lot of discussion between me and Nitish ji on this. He has his thought process and I have mine. There have been differences between him and me that the ideologies of Godse and Gandhi cannot stand together. As the leader of the party you have to say which side you are on,” he added.

In a direct assault on Kumar’s model of governance, Kishor said Bihar was the poorest state in 2005 and continues to be so.

“There has been development in Bihar during the last 15 years, but the pace has not been as it should have,” the former JD(U) leader said.

He challenged Kumar to a debate with him in an open forum on data points pertaining to the state’s development.

“People are asking what has Kumar done for Bihar’s development and what will he do if his JD(U) wins the upcoming state polls,” he said.

Kishor, the architect of several successful

political campaigns, announced the ‘Baat Bihar ki’ programme, aimed at making Bihar one of the 10 best states in the country. It will be launched on February 20.

He said he will work towards developing young leaders in the state.

In January, the JD(U) had expelled Kishor from the party, saying his conduct in recent past has made it clear that he does not want to abide by the party’s discipline.

The party had also accused Kishor of using “insulting words” against the Bihar chief minister.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

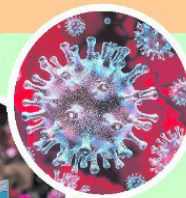
The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

Symptoms of nCoV

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccinations available as of now.
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.



Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome, and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

If you seek help, you may call :
-Toll free no. 104
District surveillance Officer
EAST : 7029372100
WEST : 9593297809
NORTH : 9641957468
SOUTH : 7407691463
New STNM
AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Curtailing Corruption

Read, notice, realize and demand accountability

In the year 2017, the Legislative Assembly was informed that a total of 515 corruption cases had been registered by the Vigilance Police in Sikkim in the past 23 years. This works out to an average of around 22 Vigilance “cases” every year. That works out to two per month with a December off. But averages can be misleading and it would be more interesting to also find out how these cases are spread out over the years, when they record a slump or when they surge. Meanwhile, something like 259 government servants and 256 private citizens have been implicated in these cases and chargesheets have been drawn up in 183 instances. Now, with the Vigilance Police bringing in contract investigators with CBI experience, expect more cases to be filed, more raids and social media convictions. But can this be expected to have any real effect on corruption? Unlikely, because crackdowns have for far too long been about settling scores than establishing accountability. But we get ahead of the story.

Corruption cannot be tackled by government agencies instituted directly to combat this problem, the noise about CBI in Sikkim is thus just that, noise. After all, these agencies, whether the CBI or the Vigilance, with their charter to investigate corruption, become convenient weapons of mass political destruction. In the hands of politicians, as we see often with CBI and almost always with Vigilance, this arsenal gets aimed at reputations and does not target the faulty system itself. The system, after all, outlives reputations and political coteries and everyone in the political rat-race will want the system sustained in its murky existence so that it can be oiled to serve their needs when they command it. This explains why such agencies make raids, file FIRs and draw up chargesheets into major media events, but downplay the actual trial and verdicts or even the processing of such cases.

Even when earnestly implemented and enforced without bias, this approach addresses only one end of the corruption chain. A more effective option would be for those who feed this monster to decide otherwise. Corruption would get automatically contained. But that is easier said than done and would require a ground swell of civil activism, even the tremors of which not yet in the making; at least not in Sikkim yet.

Does that mean that corruption cannot be contained? What would life be without some optimism? Of course corruption can be contained; by deploying guerrilla tactics that seem to serve every de-prioritised issue so well. Instead of knocking on doors of anti-corruption agencies, the people should start studying documents produced by the non-aggressive arms of the executive like the CAG reports and the even the annual reports of respective departments with more interest. These documents encapsulate findings and claims and each links up with accountability. It is because people continue to ignore the importance of fixing accountability and demanding it that the system continues to corrode. The voters have to demand of their elected representatives to hold departments and its officials accountable. The leaders need votes and if the voters lay the condition of accountability in exchange for support, then their representatives will deliver them accountability. Once the message gets through that transgressions in handling of public accounts will no longer be excused with merely “don’t do it again” advise, things will start falling into line. Corruption would have been curtailed to a significant extent.

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Kashmir: Why Trump's Offer of International Mediation is a Good Idea

SALONI KAPUR
theconversation.com

Before a recent meeting in Davos with Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan, Donald Trump reiterated his offer to help mediate over the issue of Kashmir.

It's been six months since India revoked the special constitutional status for the disputed territory of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir and put the state on lockdown. While internet restrictions have eased, connectivity remains patchy and prominent local politicians are still in detention.

Khan's administration objected to the revocation on the grounds that Jammu and Kashmir is internationally recognised as a disputed territory. It argued that India's unilateral decision contravened UN resolutions on the conflict, the Geneva Conventions, and India's own constitution and supreme court. Pakistan also expressed concerns about ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Since then, the Indian government of prime minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly refused to accept mediation over Kashmir, something Khan says he is open to. The question of mediation is likely to come up at a forthcoming visit to India by Trump in late February.

My ongoing doctoral research suggests that mediation by the world's great powers – such as the US, UK, Russia, China or Turkey – to resolve the festering conflict over Kashmir could pave the way for greater security cooperation in the Pakistan-India-Afghanistan triangle.

The disputes over the line of control that separates Indian- and Pakistani-administered Jammu and Kashmir, and the Durand Line separating Pakistan and Afghanistan, are remnants of the decolonisation process. These disputes have complicated security relations in South Asia and led to lingering instability, hindering regional cooperation and integration.

Since 1989, India has deployed between 600,000 and 700,000 soldiers to Jammu and Kashmir. Alleged human rights abuses on the part of

the Indian security forces have included rape, torture, extrajudicial killings, custodial disappearances, and the violent suppression of protests – one of the fundamental rights of citizens in a democracy. These have been documented in reports by the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. In the summer of 2016, 17,000 demonstrators were injured in a brutal security crackdown. This has fuelled a further sense of marginalisation among local Kashmiris.

A SHARED HISTORY

I'm looking at the Kashmir issue from the perspective of the English school of international relations, a theoretical approach to international affairs that emphasises countries' pursuit of shared interests and values through common institutions, human rights and diplomacy. This theory argues that the great powers have a special responsibility to maintain security and stability in the world.

In the Pakistan-India-Afghanistan triangle, despite deep-seated conflicts, all three countries have repeatedly turned to the institutions and norms of international society to seek to resolve disputes and defuse tensions. For example, Pakistan and India have repeatedly attempted to engage in a bilateral dialogue and to share intelligence on terrorism. Afghanistan's inclusion in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is another example of this desire to use international institutions to defuse tensions. Such regional cooperation is a foundation upon which to build a more cooperative trilateral relationship – if the countries choose to do so.

Pakistan, India and Afghanistan have a shared history going back to the Mauryan Empire of the fourth century BC. Ethnic and religious identities spill over borders and the common cultural heritage is rich, spanning music, food, cinema, poetry, language and spirituality.

The security threats plaguing this region are shared too. Violent extremist groups are a concern not only for India, but for Afghanistan and Pakistan too. While India repeatedly blames Pakistan for

attacks in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India perpetrated by the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba militant groups, Pakistan believes that India supports the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which has caused tremendous insecurity in Pakistan over the past two decades.

It also accuses India of supporting secessionism in the province of Balochistan, which threatens the economic corridor between China and Pakistan. Afghanistan has been destabilised by the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network and regularly blames Pakistan for backing them.

This cycle of allegations and counter-allegations hides the fact that these terrorist groups are non-state actors who work across borders. A comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy requires security and intelligence cooperation, alongside an approach that addresses the political, social, economic and psychological factors underlying terrorism.

BREAKING THE DEADLOCK

A first step towards unravelling the knotty security dynamic in this region could be a positive response to the American offer to mediate on Kashmir. In the absence of bilateral headway in the peace process, third-party mediation is a reasonable way of attempting to break the deadlock. The successful settlement of the dispute over Kashmir could open the way to negotiations on the other core and interlinked issue of transnational terrorism.

The Pakistan-India, Pakistan-Afghanistan, and India-China territorial disputes are legacies of colonisation. The mistrust between Pakistan and India has hampered efforts to forge cooperation in the wider South Asian region, as shown by the cancellation of the 19th SAARC summit in 2016.

If India wants to be a great power in the emerging world order, it must first achieve a peaceful and stable neighbourhood. Accepting Trump's offer would be a step in this direction.

[the writer is Assistant Professor, International Studies at FLAME University and PhD Candidate in International Relations, Lancaster University]

Caroline Flack's death is yet another reason to be angry at the way the media treats women

BETH JOHNSON
theconversation.com

In October 2019, a few days after World Mental Health Day, Caroline Flack, renowned television presenter and, until recently, host of ITV's flagship show Love Island, took to Instagram to write about the pressure she felt under:

This warning shot, directed toward traditional media, trolls and fans alike, wasn't heeded by all. When Flack and her boyfriend, Lewis Burton, were allegedly involved in a physical fight at her home on Thursday December 12, she was arrested and charged with assault. The tabloid furore that followed can only be described as gleeful.

The Daily Mail published close-up photographs of blood-spots on Flack's pink front door, alongside a list entitled "A History of Flack's Toyboy Lovers". Painting Flack as a "cougar", the implication was that she was somehow unbalanced, and that her charge of assault was an inevitable outcome of her unruly behaviour. Her penance.

It is of course impossible to know what happened, but the media's treatment of Flack is sadly familiar and emblematic of a broader trend of treatment of female celebrities in and by the media. Over the years my work has focused closely on the media's portrayal of gender. I've seen countless instances of the way that women – who have both talent and youth on their side and dare to date, dress glamorously and speak their

minds – have been seen as a threat by the popular press.

Kathleen Rowe, an American former newspaper reporter and editor turned academic, wrote about "unruly women" back in the 1990s as women who "use humour and excess to undermine patriarchal norms and authority", citing examples from Mae West to Roseanne Arnold. But contemporary unruly women arguably look and perform differently. As recent studies on celebrity suggest, modern-day celebrities are widely interpreted as images rather than as real people.

And this is particularly the case with women. In their study of the forms and functions of female celebrity, academics Su Holmes and Diane Negra identified a "gendered dynamic" in the contemporary treatment of celebrities, conveyed clearly through the "popular interest and pleasure in the misfortunes of female celebrities". Citing comparative research undertaken by reporter Alex Williams and published in The New York Times, they noted his finding that parallel incidents involving drug use, attempted suicide, relationship breakdowns and mental health issues demonstrated a clear, gendered disparity. Williams concluded that:

"Men who fall from grace are treated with gravity and distance, while women in similar circumstances are objects of derision, titillation and black comedy."

CELEBRITY AS COMMODITY

While the notion that stories and images can injure is well-trodden ground, it is easy to forget that news is not neutral on this score. High-pro-

file women whose job, like Flack's, is to "perform", or to "front" shows, are particularly exposed to the risks of press intrusion and vilification. The media's role in "taking them down a peg or two" isn't new either, but speaks to a long history of women's abuse by the media, tapping into and regurgitating the Madonna/whore dichotomy. Simply put, women are either chaste and maternal or bad, mad and promiscuous.

Of course, such a simplistic rendering of women works to benefit a society in which male power and control is retained. And many women beyond Flack have experienced similar treatment recently – from Amy Winehouse to Megan Markle.

This group of women isn't homogeneous – but the pattern of their treatment is. Like all women, Flack's life was undoubtedly complex, but was flattened for the benefit of a providing a known narrative, and driving sensational headlines.

Mental health is an important facet of the conversations that have come out in the press after the tragic news that Flack took her own life on February 15. While much of the news coverage has been empathetic, highlighting her talent and kindness toward others, there is still a sense in some stories that her struggles with mental health prove that she wasn't a worthy woman after all. The Daily Mail couldn't help reprising Flack's "turbulent love life", while The Sun – although sympathetic – speculated in some detail about Flack's mental health.

It's important to note that Flack

herself hadn't had an opportunity to speak about what had happened. In the months following her arrest, she was silenced, apart from a rare Instagram post in which she hinted at the pressure she was under.

Whether a legal silencing strategy or a PR-related one, what's known is that Flack didn't tell her story, at least not publicly. And considering the level of toxic trolling that high-profile women are frequently subjected to online, it's not a surprise. Jesy Nelson from the girl-band Little Mix is just one recent example of a celebrity who reported that online trolling drove her to attempt to take her own life.

Much needs to change. The treatment of high-profile women in the press and online affects all women because it's so visible, so palpable – from MPs, to celebrities, to teenage girls trying to navigate everyday life. But it also affects the whole of society. And we deserve better. The media is not however a hypodermic syringe, injecting us with a message that is directly and wholly received. We are not passive consumers.

But as British academic Rosalind Gill has argued, the media doesn't just reflect society and gender norms, it shapes them. These representations and narratives about women are inauthentic – but, more than that, they are damaging. Change can happen but it needs to be structural and collective and kind. Imagine if we could all get behind that.

[the writer is Associate Professor in Film and Media, University of Leeds]

Affidavit case: SC reserves verdict on plea of Fadnavis to review order asking him to face trial

NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI): The Supreme Court on Tuesday reserved its verdict on former Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis' plea seeking review of its 2019 judgement asking the BJP leader to face trial for allegedly failing to furnish details of pending criminal cases against him in his 2014 poll affidavit.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, representing Fadnavis, told a bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra the issue will have very far reaching consequences for other candidates fighting elections and the top court needs to re-examine its October 1, 2019 decision. In its judgment last year, the apex court had set aside the Bombay High Court order which gave a clean chit to Fadnavis and held that he did not deserve to be tried for the alleged offence under the Representation of Peoples Act (RPA).

During arguments, Rohatgi said a candidate can be criminally prosecuted for violating the two conditions



of not disclosing cases where charges have been framed and where he or she has been convicted.

"This will seal my fate. It is an important question as it affects Article 21. This is a matter which requires a re-look," Rohatgi told the bench, also comprising justices Deepak Gupta and Aniruddha Bose.

The apex court's verdict had come on an appeal by one Satish Ukey,

who had challenged the high court's order.

On July 23, 2019 the top court, while reserving the verdict on Ukey's plea, had said that the alleged "omission" by Fadnavis of not disclosing information about two criminal cases in his election affidavit may be decided in the trial.

The apex court had said that it was concerned with a limited issue whether prima facie

Section 125A of the RP Act is attracted or not.

The provision deals with the penalty for "filing false affidavit" and says that if a candidate or his proposer fails to furnish or gives false or conceals any information in his nomination paper on issues like pending criminal cases then the person may be awarded six months jail term or fine or both. Ukey had contended the BJP leader

filed a false affidavit by not disclosing two criminal matters and yet the trial court and the high court held that no prima facie case was made out for prosecution of the chief minister.

He had said that a candidate was under mandatory legal obligation to disclose details of all cases, in which either charges have been framed or the trial court had taken cognizance, in nomination papers.

The petitioner had alleged that Fadnavis, in his election affidavit filed in 2014, had failed to disclose the pendency of two criminal cases against him.

It was contended that the chief minister did not disclose the information as required of him under the election law and the non-disclosure of these two pending criminal cases was in violation of Section 125A of the RP Act and constituted an offence in itself.

The two cases of alleged cheating and forgery were filed against Fadnavis in 1996 and 1998 but charges were not framed.

Computer Sci & Geography Lab inaugurated at Siliguri school



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

A new Computer Science and Geography Lab was inaugurated today at Siliguri Hindi High School for Girls located at Mangtaram Road, Khalpara, in Siliguri, a press release informs.

The lab is specially for students of Class V-XII

and was inaugurated by District Inspector, Rajiv Pramanik, Administrator, A Roy and State general secretary of Vipra Foundation, Sanjay Sharma.

Rajiv Pramanik inaugurated the Computer Lab while Sanjay Sharma inaugurated the Geography Lab.

Addressing the pro-

gram, Mr Pramanik appreciated the work done by the school management and assured support for making the school a model school.

Mr Sharma appreciated the developmental journey of the school and appreciated the tireless efforts of all the teachers including Principal, Sita Raut.

Activist seeks thorough probe in CBI judge Loya's death

MUMBAI, FEB 18 (PTI): A group of citizens on Tuesday demanded a thorough inquiry into the death of special CBI judge Brijgopal Harkishan Loya in 2014.

The group has written a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, seeking a time-bound probe into the death of Loya.

Loya, who was hearing the high-profile Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case of Gujarat, died of a cardiac arrest in Nagpur on December 1, 2014, when he had gone to attend the wedding of a colleague's daughter.

Social activist Ashok Pai, addressing a press conference on behalf of the group, also demand-

ed proper compensation for the judge's family, saying he was on an "official" tour.

Pai said on Tuesday he met NCP president Sharad Pawar, whose party is a key constituent of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra, and raised these demands with him.

Pawar assured to look into the demands, he said at the press conference at the Mumbai Marathi Patrak Sangh.

"We have handed over a letter to Maharashtra Assembly speaker Nana Patole and dispatched a copy of the letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray (seeking a probe into Loya's death)," Pai said.

As the matter relates to "mysterious" death of a sitting judge of the CBI, all facts about it must be made public after a detailed and time-bound probe, Pai said.

The Loya death case had reached the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court had held that Loya had died of "natural causes" and had rejected PILs seeking an SIT probe into the death, questioning their motive.

The SC had held that petitions were moved by political rivals to settle scores which was a serious attempt to scandalise the judiciary and obstruct the course of justice through a "frontal attack" on its independence.

Arunachal CM hands over PEL to Vedanta Limited

ITANAGAR, FEB 18 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday handed over the Petroleum Exploration Licenses (PEL) to Vedanta Limited for exploration of hydrocarbon resources in three exploration blocks in the state.

The three blocks are spread across 74.4 sq km of area in the districts of Changlang, Tirap and West Siang.

The exploration in these blocks consists of two phases initial exploration phase and subsequent exploration phase and the exploration period of each phase is of

three years with a provision for an additional one-year extension, sources at the CMO said.

The grant of licenses for the blocks would lead to an increase in the exploration activities in the hydrocarbon sector in Arunachal Pradesh.

In course of time, these exploration activities would reveal the potential of hydrocarbon reservoir of the state, which in turn would benefit the state in terms of revenue, employment and infrastructure development through CSR activities, the sources added.

At 93, CI Subramanian finishes his masters from IGNOU

NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI): "Family responsibilities kept me from pursuing my passion for studies, but at 87, finally, that opportunity knocked on my door," said 93-year-old CI Sivasubramanian who was the oldest student at the IGNOU convocation on Monday. Sivasubramanian received his masters' degree in public administration at the convocation and his zest for knowledge was praised by HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' who called him a 90-year-old "youngster".

"After finishing my school in 1940s, I wanted to go to college but that meant either shifting to Trichy or Chennai. Meanwhile, both my parents fell ill and my relatives advised me against going because I had to take care of them. So, I got a job and started working," he told PTI.

Later, the family shifted to Delhi, and he got a job as a clerk in the Ministry of Commerce in 1940s. Over the years, he kept rising through the ranks, after appearing for various departmental exams, to finally retire as a director from the ministry in 1986 at the age of 58, but his one dream re-

mained unfulfilled-- that of becoming a graduate.

"In fact, I was offered an opportunity to be part of a programme in the United Nations. But since I was not a graduate, I could not go.

"During my tenure at the ministry, I even enquired about the correspondence courses available at Delhi University but then I was transferred and could not pursue them," he said.

The nonagenarian wanted to pursue studies after his retirement but then family responsibilities and ensuring that his children got the best education meant that his dream was put on the backburner. He has three daughters and a son, all of whom have retired from prestigious positions. "My grandchildren have finished their studies and some of them are married. One of my granddaughters is studying medicine in the US," he said.

"I taught my children English and Maths when they were in school, but I myself could not pursue graduation then," he said.

However, an unlikely turn of events ended up steering him in the direction of his dream.

Bengali actor and former MP Tapas Paul dead



KOLKATA, FEB 18 (PTI): Veteran Bengali actor and former Trinamool Congress MP Tapas Paul died of a cardiac arrest in a Mumbai hospital early Tuesday, his wife said. He was 61.

Paul, who had a long history of heart problems, was admitted to a private hospital in Mumbai, where he had gone to meet his daughter in January.

The two-term former MP from Krishnanagar, who moved away from both cinema and active politics after the CBI arrested him in the Rose Valley chit-fund scam in December 2016, is survived by his daughter Sohini and wife Nandini.

According to Nandini Paul, the actor was rushed to hospital on February 1 after he fell ill at the Mumbai airport on his way to the United States for treatment.

The actor-politician, known for films such as "Saheb" and "Amar Bandhan", was on the ventilator till February 6.

"He was taken off the ventilator and was recovering, but suddenly his condition worsened and he died of cardiac arrest around 3.30 am on Tuesday," Nandini Paul told PTI.

Paul had been suffering from heart ailments and been in and out of hospitals for treatment during the past two years.

He was born in Chandannagar in Hooghly district and graduated from

Hooghly Mohsin College in bioscience.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said in her condolence message that Paul's death had left a deep void in films and politics.

"Saddened and shocked to hear about the demise of Tapas Paul. He was a superstar of Bengali cinema who was a member of the Trinamool family. Tapas served the people as a two-term MP and MLA. We will miss him dearly. My condolences to his wife Nandini, daughter Sohini and his many fans," Banerjee tweeted.

A romantic hero, having endeared himself to the Bengali audience since his debut film "Dadar Kirti" in 1980, Paul became a household name with his leading roles in "Parabat Priya" (1984), "Bhalobasa Bhalobasa" (1985), "Anurager Choyan" and "Amar Bandhan" (1986).

He made his Bollywood debut in Hiren Nag's "Abodh" (1984) opposite Madhuri Dixit Nene.

"The loss of Tapas Paul who was one of the very first actors, I have worked with is felt by many. May God bless and comfort his family during this difficult period," Madhuri wrote on Twitter.

He was awarded the Filmfare Award for "Saheb" (1981).

In a career spanning over three decades, Paul had worked with veteran

actors Prosenjit Chatterjee, Soumitra Chatterjee, Ranjit Mallick and Raakhee Gulzar.

Some of his last appearances were in films such as "Khiladi" and "Aat ta Aater Bongaon Local".

Actor Ranjit Mallick described Paul's death as "untimely".

"I am yet to come to terms with the news. He was like my younger brother. He was not keeping well for some time," Mallick said.

Paul's colleagues in films and politics, actors Debasree Roy and Chiranjee Chakraborty, both TMC MLAs, said they had lost a dear friend and the film industry a brilliant actor.

Paul, inspired by Banerjee and her fight against the Left Front regime, joined the Trinamool Congress in 2000 two years after it was formed.

He was elected as the MLA from Alipore Assembly seat in 2001. Paul was elected as the MP from Krishnanagar Lok Sabha seat for two consecutive terms from 2009.

After his arrest in the Rose Valley chit-fund scam, Paul's family members had time and again alleged that the party did not bother to enquire about him. He was arrested and given bail after 13 months.

After his release from prison in 2018, Paul withdrew from active politics and communicated to the TMC his unwillingness to contest elections.

CPI(M) slams cases against social media users in J-K

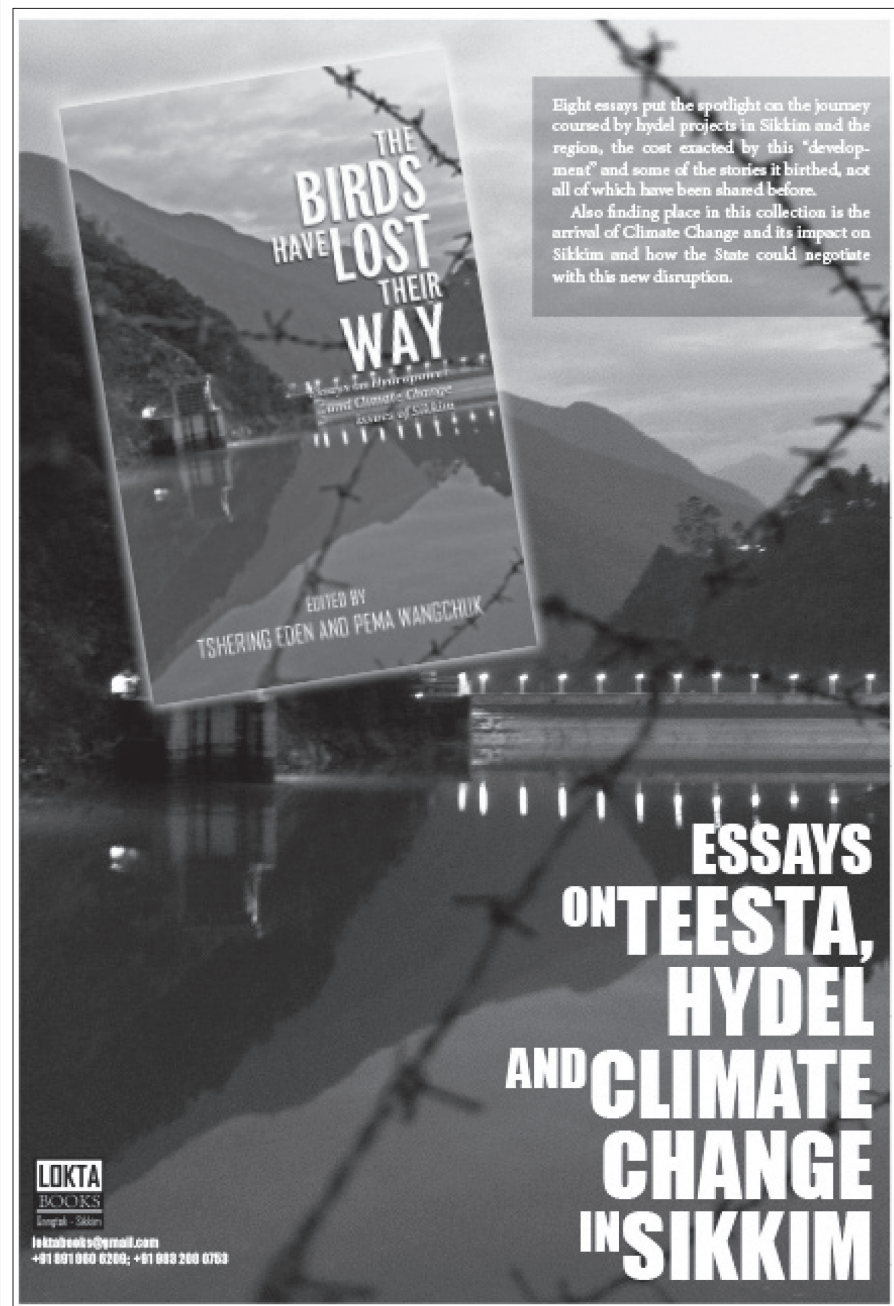
NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI): The CPI(M) on Tuesday slammed the government over FIRs being registered against social media users in Jammu and Kashmir and said that while it was "touting normalcy" in the union territory, it was charging people who used the Internet which was their basic right.

The Jammu and Kash-

mir Police on Monday registered a case against various people for defying government orders on use of social media. The union territory's administration on January 14 had issued an order banning all social media sites to curb their misuse by miscreants for propagating false information and rumours.

In a tweet, CPI(M)

General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said, "Government takes selected foreigners on guided tours of Kashmir, touting normalcy there. But Indian leaders are stopped and locals charged under terror laws for using social media, when Internet is a basic right of all Indian citizens. Shame on the govt and its thinking".



Messi, Hamilton share Laureus World Sportsman of Year honour; Biles gets third award

AMANPREET SINGH
BERLIN, FEB 18 (PTI): British F1 ace Lewis Hamilton and Lionel Messi, arguably the world's greatest footballer, were declared the joint winners of the prestigious Laureus World Sportsman of the year award here.

The duo received the same number of votes, a first in the 20-year history of the awards with the jury unable to split Hamilton and Messi.

Messi, the six-time FIFA World Player of the year, is the first team-player to bag the award. He though was not present to receive the award on Monday and sent a video message.

They pipped golfing great Tiger Woods, Kenyan marathoner Eliud Kipchoge, tennis legend Rafael Nadal and MotoGP champion Marc Marquez.

American gymnast Simone Biles, who won five gold medals at the 2019 World Championships, grabbed the World Sportswoman of the year award, her third in four years after winning it in 2017 and 2019.

She beat a strong challenge from Jamaican



sprinting great Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who missed out on the honour for the fifth time. She was nominated in 2010, 2013, 2014 and 2016 also but did not win it.

The most decorated gymnast also beat competition from American footballer Megan Rapinoe, Japanese tennis sensation Naomi Osaka, American track and field athlete Allyson Felix and skier Mikaela Shiffrin.

The awards ceremony was hosted by actor Hugh Grant. A tribute was paid to American basket-

ball legend Kobe Bryant, who recently died in a helicopter crash.

Snowboarding sensation Chloe Kim won the World Action Sportsperson honour, her second straight in the same category.

In the Sportsperson of the year with a disability category, Oksana Masters, born with limb impairments caused by radiation from Chernobyl and adopted by an American single parent, was recognised for an outstanding year in 2019. She won five gold

medals and a silver at the World Para Nordic Skiing Championships.

South Bronx United (SBU), a football programme based in New York, was honoured with the Sport for Good Award. The programme uses football to achieve educational outcomes for young people from underserved communities.

The 2019 Rugby World Cup winners South Africa won their second Laureus World Team of the Year Award, beating Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool and the US

Women's Football Team, among others.

For the 2020 Laureus World Comeback of the Year, Germany's gritty F3 driver Sophia Florschütz was the winner.

Travelling at 276km per hour, she had lost control of her car at the Macau circuit, crashing through safety barriers and leaving her with a spinal fracture which required an 11-hour surgery and months of rehabilitation.

In November 2019, a year on from her accident, the 18-year-old Sophia was back in the cockpit, racing once again in the Macau Grand Prix.

Egan Bernal, who became the youngest rider to win the Tour de France at 22, grabbed the World Breakthrough of the Year award.

German basketball great Dirk Nowitzki was recognised at the Ceremony with the Laureus Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to the sport of basketball.

Spanish Basketball Federation got the Exceptional Achievement Award.

PSG are better placed than ever to satisfy European obsession

ADAM WHITE & ERIC DEVIN
PARIS, 18 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: PSG's dumbfounding defeat to Manchester United in the last-16 of the Champions League last season was among the worst moments in the club's 50-year history. There is fierce recent competition for that accolade, however, with the 6-1 defeat at Camp Nou in 2017 perhaps even more difficult to stomach. Things are looking better this time around though. As the club look forward to a last-16 tie with Borussia Dortmund, they are better placed than ever before to reach the promised land.

Neymar's birthday is probably circled in bold red pen on every PSG fan's calendar. Every year since he arrived at the club his birthday party has been quite the event. The lavish, 300-guest, late-night affair – which usually arrives in the middle of a busy run of games – provides an opportunity for the often fragile relationships between PSG players, coaches and officials to become ever more strained, while also attracting criticism and unwanted attention.

This year, coach Thomas Tuchel, sporting director Leonardo and president Nasser Al-Khelaifi declined to attend given that PSG were playing Nantes in the league less than 48 hours after the soirée began. "It gives the impression that we are not 100% focused and professional," Tuchel explained.

However, this year's party became a positive story for PSG. Around midnight Neymar reportedly delivered a speech, saying: "For the first time, I am entirely happy in Paris," and that he wants to "do everything I can alongside my teammates to win everything this year". After the transfer tug-of-war between PSG and Barcelona last summer, when Neymar agitated for a move, the sighs of relief were practically audible outside the Parc des Princes.

Neymar's newfound contentment has been obvious on the pitch for some time. Despite an utterly ridiculous booking following an exchange of words with an official during PSG's 5-0 win over Montpellier earlier this month, he has quietly (by his standards) gone about hitting his best and most consistent form since arriving in France in 2017.

While Ángel Di María remains the hugely underappreciated creator-in-chief and Kylian Mbappé continues to attract his own headlines, Neymar, when fully fit, has been unstoppable. He has 11 goals and eight assists in his last 11 games and it is clear that genuine chemistry is developing between the "fab four" of Neymar, Mbappé, Di María and Mauro Icardi.

The squad remains cliquey but Tuchel deserves credit for keeping his team together, both sportingly and socially. PSG are a far more tactically versatile, fluid and streetwise unit under the German than they ever were under Laurent Blanc or Unai Emery, who were both far less successful in asserting their authority over an unruly group.

Leonardo – who returned as sporting director last summer – has played his part in achieving some relative calm. His remit extends well beyond recruitment and he has acted as something of a bad cop for Tuchel in issues of discipline, refusing to accept the previously rampant double standards, while also drawing media attention away from the coach and his squad.

"I am going to speak to you in

French. If some of you don't understand me, all you have to do is take lessons." Leonardo told the squad in July before publicly criticising Neymar for his late return to pre-season. "He was supposed to turn up and didn't," Leonardo told Le Parisien. "We are going to look at the measures we can take, like we would have done for all employees." His deft handling of the Neymar-to-Barcelona saga was also crucial; he played hardball with both the player and the Catalan club, while giving honest assessments of the ongoing situation in the press. Meanwhile, Neymar's relationship with Tuchel and the rest of the squad remained intact, helping his eventual repatriation.

Leonardo had left the same role back in 2013 under something of a cloud after a lengthy touchline ban following an altercation with a match official. After that PSG lost any semblance of a holistic approach to recruitment. Patrick Kluijvert was a disaster as director of football – infamously not even recognising new signing Thomas Meunier when they shared a taxi together – and his successor, Antero Henrique, had a discordant relationship with Tuchel. Expensive transfer failures have been common. Grzegorz Krychowiak (€25m), Gonçalo Guedes (€30m), Thilo Kehrer (€37m), Jesé (€25m) Julian Draxler (up to €45m) and Leandro Paredes (€40m) have all flopped to varying degrees.

Leonardo oversaw much of PSG's initial rise under QSI ownership, with Thiago Silva and Zlatan Ibrahimovic being two of many marquee additions during his first spell. He is playing his part again this season. Leonardo has listened to Tuchel's concerns about the balance of the squad and filled key gaps in defence and midfield. Abdou Diallo arrived from Borussia Dortmund to bolster the centre-back position; Pablo Sarabia (10 goals in his last 13 games) joined from Sevilla and added versatility; Keylor Navas is the experienced and consistent elite level goalkeeper the club have long needed; and Idrissa Gueye has finally replaced Blaise Matuidi as a dynamic midfield presence.

Borussia Dortmund – Tuchel's former club – will give PSG a stringent examination on Tuesday night but, with the three Spanish giants, Manchester City, Bayern Munich and even Juventus all below par domestically this campaign, PSG will be quietly confident about their prospects in the Champions League. Nevertheless, problems remain. Neymar has missed PSG's last four games with injury and his coach says he "may not be 100%" on Tuesday. Marquinhos, Juan Bernat and Marco Verratti are returning from injury and Mauro Icardi's stream of goals has evaporated, with just one in his last eight games.

Improvements and problems aside, PSG are still PSG. The mental frailty that has characterised previous Champions League exits still lurks in the background and, as Mbappé's touchline toy-throwing against Montpellier underlined, things still are not perfect. However, since the Manchester United defeat, Tuchel and Leonardo have quietly begun to mould a well-rounded, astute, harmonious and more committed squad, who are now better placed than ever to satisfy the club's European obsession. Things might finally be coming together in Paris. Even Neymar is happy.

Won't rule out playing 2023 World Cup, says Taylor

WELLINGTON, FEB 18 (PTI): Veteran New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor doesn't rule out playing the 2023 ODI World Cup but says his form, fitness and motivation level at the end of next year will decide whether he actually manages a place in the squad.

The 35-year-old will become the first cricketer in the world to complete 100 games across three international formats when he steps out for the first Test against India at Basin Reserve on February 21.

"I haven't ruled it (2023 World Cup) out but I still think it's a long way away. First and foremost I want to get to next year – the Twenty20 World Cup and

then the home summer – and then I'll have a good idea on how I'm placed at the end of next summer," Taylor was quoted as saying by 'stuff.co.nz'.

"Whether there is still a drive, whether I'm good enough, whether I'm fit enough, and whether I deserve my spot in the side. If I can tick all those, then definitely 2023 is an option."

The big-hitting batsman said despite his desire to continue, he won't out himself under too much pressure.

"You always want to do well and first and foremost the game is more important. At the same time you can put extra pressure on yourself. You've just got to

go out and enjoy it and take it as another game. Hopefully I can contribute in any way I can," he said.

Taylor will be joining Stephen Fleming, Daniel Vettori and Brendon McCullum in the New Zealand Test 100-club and he credited his mentor the late Martin Crowe for motivating him.

"He (Crowe) saw something in me that I never did. I was pretty happy to play one Test; to play 100 Tests is pretty special," he said.

"There's still a game to play and contribute to, but at the same time you've got to acknowledge the achievement and the fact a lot of people helped you out along the way.

Few wrestlers wear masks at Asian C'ships, say just a precautionary measure

NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI): They are aware that novel coronavirus is not a threat in India but a few grapplers from countries such as Japan, Korea and Chinese Taipei were seen wearing masks during the Asian Wrestling Championships here on Tuesday as a "precautionary measure".

Ahead of the championships, wrestlers from China were declined visas due to the outbreak of novel coronavirus there. The deadly disease has infected more than 72,000 people and killed nearly 1,900 so far.

"We have a contingent of around 28 and just a few of the wrestlers and officials are wearing masks. Although we know there is no virus here and it

is safe but why to take a chance," Seyeon Lee, part of medical staff of Korea, told PTI. The virus is believed to have originated in Wuhan late last year. That city is under a lock-down to prevent the virus from spreading.

The athletes competing here were unanimous in saying that mask was just a precautionary measure.

Bakour Florian, a Digital Project Manager at the world governing body United World Wrestling (UWW), was seen sporting a mask too.

"My family is concerned as the virus is spreading in Asian countries. We know there is no virus here as China has also been denied visa but it is more of a precautionary measure,"

he said. The air quality in the national capital is also a concern for many.

"The air quality is still unhealthy in Delhi and there is naturally an overall concern about this virus as we all know some of the Asian countries have been affected," said a member of the Japanese team.

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) said the masks were being used by participants due to their concerns about Delhi's air quality.

"Some wrestlers from Korea, Thailand and Japan are wearing masks which is common because they always have apprehensions about Delhi's pollution levels," a WFI official said on condition of anonymity.

"There is nothing

Horror crash mars end of Daytona 500

MIAMI, FEB 18 (AFP): Denny Hamlin sealed back-to-back victories in an incident-packed Daytona 500, winning a photo finish in a race marred by a horrific crash that left veteran driver Ryan Newman seriously injured.

Joe Gibbs Racing driver Hamlin followed up his victory in 2019 with his third career win at Daytona, becoming the first racer to win the opening leg of the NASCAR season since Sterling Marlin in 1995. However, Hamlin's celebrations were muted by a last-lap crash that left Roush Fenway Racing's Newman hospitalized on Monday.

The 42-year-old Newman's Ford Mustang had led on the final lap but spun out of control, hit the wall and flipped onto its roof before bursting into flames at the Daytona International Speedway. Newman's car was also sent flying into the air after being struck by Go Fas Racing's Corey LaJoie.

Several ambulances sped onto the circuit



to attend to Newman's stricken vehicle following the crash.

Black screens were erected around the site of Newman's car as workers extracted the driver from the wreck. NASCAR executive vice president Steve O'Donnell later told reporters that Newman was in serious condition at a local area hospital, but his injuries were deemed non-life-threatening.

"He's in a serious condition, but doctors have indicated his injuries are non-life-threatening," a statement from Roush Racing read out by O'Donnell said. "We

appreciate the thoughts and prayers and ask that you respect the privacy of Ryan and his family at this time," O'Donnell added.

Newman's fellow competitors had earlier voiced concern over the plight of the driver following the race.

"I knew it was bad," race-winner Hamlin said. "I knew him crossing the track there was a bad scenario in the first place. It's a weird balance of excitement and happiness for yourself, but obviously someone's health and their family is bigger than any win in any sport. "We're just hoping for the best."

Hamlin's team boss Joe Gibbs meanwhile apologised for celebrating the win in the immediate aftermath of the chequered flag when Newman's car was still being tended to on the track.

"I was focusing on our car, and everybody started celebrating around us," Gibbs said.

"Some people may have saw us and said, 'Well, these guys are celebrating when there's a serious issue going on.'"

"So hopefully I apologize to everybody, but we really didn't know. We got in the winner's circle, and then that's when people told us.

Japan completes virus testing for quarantined ship

TOKYO, FEB 18 (AFP): All passengers and crew on board a ship quarantined off Japan have now been tested for the new coronavirus, the government said Tuesday, as more countries moved to evacuate citizens from the boat.

South Korea became the latest to announce it would remove its citizens from the Diamond Princess, where more than 400 people have tested positive for COVID-19.

Japan has faced criticism for its handling of the situation, with dozens of new infections detected almost daily since the ship arrived in early February.

But it has defended its approach and health minister Katsunobu Kato insisted again Tuesday that passengers who test negative will be allowed to leave the ship from Wednesday.

"We have done tests for everyone (on the ship)," he told reporters.

"Some results have already come out... and for those whose test results are already clear, we are working to prepare disembarkation from the 19th," he said. Kato said the process would last two or three days. But those who had close contact with people who have tested positive will have their quarantine reset to the date of their last contact with an infected person.

Crew are also expected to remain to observe another quarantine period after the last passengers leave the ship.

So far, the United States, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong and now South Korea have said they will evacuate their citizens from the ship.

South Korea will send a presidential aircraft on Tuesday to fly back four nationals and one Japanese spouse, an official told reporters. There are 14 South Koreans on board in total, but the other ten have declined to be evacuated from the ship because they live in Japan, the Yonhap news agency reported.

Early Monday, more than 300 Americans were evacuated from the ship, among them over a dozen who have tested positive for the virus.

The Americans, like citizens from other countries being evacuated from ship, will have to undergo another 14-day quarantine. Canada said Tuesday it had "secured a chartered flight to repatriate Canadians on board the Diamond Princess" but gave no details on when the process would take place.

There were 256 Canadians on board the ship, with 32 so far testing positive for the virus.

While foreign governments have couched their decision to remove citizens as an attempt to reduce the burden on Japanese authorities, many have interpreted the evacuations as criticism of Tokyo's handling of the situation.

The US and Australia have told citizens that if they decline repatriation and an additional 14-day quarantine, they will not be allowed home for at least two weeks, suggesting they do not believe the ship-based quarantine has worked.

Dutch court upholds shareholder appeal in \$50 bn Yukos case

A Dutch court Tuesday upheld an appeal by shareholders of the dismantled oil giant Yukos in a landmark ruling, boosting their fight in a \$50 billion case for compensation.

The ruling overturns a lower Dutch court's decision in favour of Russia, which had contested an original decision by the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration that awarded shareholders billions of dollars after Yukos was dismantled in the mid-2000s.

"The Appeals Court in The Hague decided today that a previous ruling in favour of the Russian Federation was incorrect," the court said in a statement, adding an original \$50 billion award by the PCA -- an international arbitral tribunal -- "is in force again".

Russia said it would appeal.

The long-awaited ruling comes almost 14 years after the once powerful company filed for bankruptcy and follows a controversial 2014 ruling that ordered Russia to pay out billions of dollars in compensation to its former shareholders.

The PCA that year ruled that Russia had forced Yukos

into bankruptcy with excessive tax claims and then sold off its assets to state-owned companies. It based its ruling on the provisions of a multilateral 1994 accord, the Energy Charter Treaty, which aimed to promote energy security.

It then ordered Moscow to pay more than \$50 billion to the former shareholders -- a record award for the arbitration tribunal.

- Shock turnaround -

In a shock turnaround a local Dutch court in 2016 annulled the PCA's decision, saying it was "not competent" to rule in the case, based on the treaty.

But appeals judges disagreed with the lower court's findings, saying "Russia was under an obligation to enforce the treaty unless it was in breach of Russian law."

"This court finds that there was no breach of Russian law," Yukos' main shareholder GML hailed the ruling.

"This is a victory for the rule of law. The independent courts of a democracy have shown their integrity and served justice. a Brutal kleptocracy has been held to account," chief executive Tim



Osborne said in a statement.

Tuesday's decision however may not be the end of the saga: the parties may still fight the decision at the Dutch Supreme Court, officials said.

Moscow "will continue to defend its legitimate interests and, in an appeal, contest the verdict", Russia's justice ministry said in a statement.

Yukos, once Russia's biggest post-Soviet oil company, was broken up after its former owner, Kremlin critic and ex-tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was arrested in 2003. His arrest came after

Russian President Vladimir Putin had warned the nation's growing class of oligarchs against meddling in politics.

Yukos was sold off in opaque auctions to state companies led by Rosneft between 2004 and 2006. State-owned Rosneft was then small, but has since become a leading player among the world's biggest listed oil companies by production volume.

The claimants have since sought to win compensation for what they say are their losses caused by the breakup of Yukos.

- 'Not political' -

The question "relates to the circumstances of the Yukos takeover by the Russian oligarchs during its privatisation in 1995 and 1996," Russian government lawyer Andrea Pinna told AFP ahead of the ruling.

As the former Soviet Union crumbled in the early 1990s, unscrupulous businessmen amassed immense fortunes and influential empires by scooping up former Soviet assets -- particularly in raw materials -- at bargain-basement prices.

"Russia considers that the acquisition of Yukos was only possible through corruption and other illegal acts," Pinna said.

This was "not a political case but purely a legal one in which \$50 billion is at stake," the lawyer insisted.

But Emmanuel Gaillard, representing former shareholders, told AFP that "Russia is making considerable diplomatic efforts to try and discredit the players in this case."

"Their strategy is to distort everything, to complicate everything, to make people forget about the greatest expropriation of the 21st century," Gaillard said.

Khodorkovsky, who is no longer a stakeholder, spent a decade in prison on charges of tax evasion, fraud and embezzlement which he and his supporters say were trumped up in revenge for his political ambitions.

He was suddenly pardoned by Putin in 2013 and flown out of the country.

His business partner Platon Lebedev spent more than 10 years in jail for fraud, tax evasion and money laundering after a trial denounced by human rights activists.

Apple to miss revenue forecast as iPhone supply hit by coronavirus

Apple announced Monday it would miss its March quarter revenue forecast and global iPhone supplies would fall because of the deadly coronavirus epidemic, triggering a fall in Asian stock markets.

The COVID-19 death toll now exceeds 1,800 in China, where it has infected more than 72,000 after emerging in the central province of Hubei in December.

The virus has sparked global economic jitters, with travel bans and mass quarantines inside China forcing factories to suspend operations and shops to close.

Apple, which depends on components from Chinese suppliers and has a big market in China, has been hammered on both fronts.

"We are experiencing a slower return to normal conditions than we had anticipated," Apple said in a statement.

"As a result, we do not expect to meet the revenue guidance we provided for the March quarter."

Apple had forecast revenue of \$63 billion to \$67 billion for the second quarter to March.

The US tech giant did not disclose how much it expected the outbreak to shave off its revenues.

But it said that worldwide iPhone supply would be "temporarily constrained" as its manufacturing partners in China were only slowly ramping up work after being closed because of the travel restrictions.

Consumer demand in the crucial Chinese market had also been dampened after all Apple stores were shut. "Stores that are (now)

open have been operating at reduced hours and with very low customer traffic," the company said. "We are gradually reopening our retail stores and will continue to do so as steadily and safely as we can."

Apple analyst and Loup Ventures co-founder Gene Munster told Bloomberg that the company was feeling the hit from its dependence on Chinese consumers.

"This is the double-edged sword of being in China," he said.

"They're the only big (US tech) company with China exposure, so they are working through the pain of what has largely been a success for the company over the past decade."

Other Silicon Valley behemoths -- such as Facebook, Amazon and Google parent company Alphabet -- either have limited access to the market or are blocked outright by China's internet firewall.

However supply chains of global firms such as Apple supplier Foxconn and auto giant Toyota have also been disrupted with production facilities in China temporarily closed.

Sportswear giants Nike and Adidas also shuttered hundreds of stores in the country this month and warned of a negative impact on their earnings.

- Stock market contagion -

Apple suppliers suffered in Tuesday trade after the forecast.

Sony, which provides Apple with key imaging components, lost 2.5 percent, while electronic parts maker Murata Manufactur-

ing plunged more than three percent on the Tokyo bourse. "Traders were downhearted about Apple's announcement," Chibagin Asset Management's Yoshihiro Okumura told AFP.

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 index closed down 1.4 percent -- its fourth straight session in the red, while Hong Kong's main market was down 1.3 percent.

Monday marked the second time in as many years that Apple cut earnings forecasts due to setbacks in the Chinese market. It followed a downgrade for the 2019-20 financial year due to a lag in iPhone sales, which the company blamed on the US-China trade war.

International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva has said there could be a cut of up to 0.2 percentage points to global growth because of the virus.

Outside of hardest-hit Hubei, which has been effectively locked down to try to contain the virus, the number of new cases has been slowing and China's national health authority has said the outbreak is under control.

However, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that the trend "must be interpreted very cautiously".

Further moves by China's central bank on Monday to cushion the world's second-largest economy against the health crisis appear to have done little to allay concerns.

State media said China may postpone its annual parliamentary session, which has been held in March for the past 35 years.

Jaishankar meets EU leaders; holds talks on economic, social issues

BRUSSELS, FEB 18 (PTI):

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met top leaders of the European Union and held wide-ranging talks on issues, including economic cooperation, climate change and capacity building, that would "benefit both India and EU".

Jaishankar, who was in Germany during the weekend for the Munich Security Conference, arrived here on Monday to prepare the ground for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned visit for the India-EU summit here next month.

The foreign minister met EU Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen and the two leaders discussed experiences in capacity building and development partnerships. "Coordination on these issues would be to the benefit of both India and EU," Jaishankar tweeted.

The minister also held "positive and productive" parleys at the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU.

"Thank the attending Foreign Ministers, Ambassadors & senior officials and most of all HR (High Representative) @JosepBorrellF. Looking



forward to working together to strengthen this key partnership," he said.

Jaishankar also met EU Commissioner for Trade Phil Hogan and "exchanged views on the prospects for India-EU economic cooperation."

He appreciated President of the European Council

Charles Michel for his vision for the EU and Eu-India relations and expressed confident that "his (Michel) leadership can translate that into substantive outcomes."

Jaishankar held a very "engaging" conversation with Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal Frans Timmermans and the two leaders discussed experiences on sustainability, climate change, environment and innovation.

Jaishankar also had an open discussion with members of the European Parliament

representing a broad spectrum of politics and member states.

"The interaction covered political, economic and social issues. Noted their deep interest in India and our relations with the EU," he tweeted.

Jaishankar's visit comes weeks after the European Parliament postponed until March a vote on a joint motion, combining five different resolutions tabled by its members against India's Citizenship Amendment Act, which was debated at its Plenary session in Brussels.

During the debate, Helena Dalli, the Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, had said the Commission was looking forward to Prime Minister Modi's visit to Brussels in March for the 15th India-EU Summit.

Wuhan hospital director dies of coronavirus

BEIJING, FEB 18 (AFP):

A hospital director at the epicentre of China's virus epidemic died Tuesday, state media said, the latest medical worker to fall victim to the coronavirus which has spread across the country.

The COVID-19 virus, which is believed to have originated in Wuhan late last year, has spread to more than 72,000 people and killed 1,900 in China.

Liu Zhiming, the director of Wuchang Hospital in Wuhan, died Tuesday morning after

"all-out rescue efforts failed," state broadcaster CCTV reported. He is the first known hospital director to have died from the coronavirus.

At least six other medical workers have died from the virus, while 1,716 have been infected, according to official figures.

Liu's death was initially reported by Chinese media and bloggers shortly after midnight on Tuesday -- but the stories were later deleted and replaced with reports that doctors were still at-

tempting to save him.

The hospital director's death has echoes of the death of Wuhan ophthalmologist Li Wenliang, who had been punished by authorities for sounding the alarm about the virus in late December.

Li's death prompted a national outpouring of grief as well as anger against the authorities, who were accused of mishandling the crisis.

People took to social media once more to mourn Liu on Tuesday, with many users on the

Twitter-like Weibo platform drawing comparisons between Liu's death and Li's, which was also initially reported by state media and then denied hours before being finally confirmed again.

Doctors in Wuhan face shortages of masks and protective bodysuits, with some even wearing makeshift hazmat suits and continuing to work despite showing respiratory symptoms, because of a lack of medical staff, health workers have told AFP.

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Taapsee Pannu And Tahir Raj Bhasin To Co-Star In The Hindi Adaptation Of Run Lola Run

Taapsee Pannu and Tahir Raj Bhasin are all set to co-star in the Hindi adaptation of the 1998 German hit Run Lola Run. The film, titled Looop Lapeta, will be directed by Aakash Bhatia, who has also directed TV series Inside

Edge. Announcing her new project with Tahir Raj Bhasin, with whom Taapsee has not shared screen space yet, the actress wrote: "I'm greedy for good scripts, here's one more. Sony Pictures India and Ellipsis Entertainment's Looop Lapeta, thriller-comedy with Tahir Raj Bhasin." While Taapsee Pannu will step into the shoes of the film's lead actress Franka Potente, Tahir will play the role of her boyfriend, originally portrayed by Moritz Bleibtreu in Run Lola Run. Looop Lapeta is slated to release on January 29 next year.

Run Lola Run is a crime thriller directed by Tom Tykwer. Released in 1998, the film received critical acclaim for its cinematography, editing and soundtracks. The film revolves around the story of Lola (Franka Potente), who desperately tries to find 100,000 Deutsche marks (German currency) to save her boyfriend Manni's (Moritz Bleibtreu) life. Run Lola

Run tells the same story of Lola and Manni in three alternate and parallel timelines. The film received several accolades, including the BAFTA Award for the Best Film Not in the English Language. It was also Germany's entry

ed for the Indian milieu without losing its edge. More excitingly, it's been laced with amazingly cheeky straight-faced humour. It's cool in the truest sense of the word and as bold thematically as it is stylistically. I can't wait to get started."



for the Oscars in the Best Foreign Language category in 1999.

Talking about her new project, Taapsee told Mumbai Mirror that she "can't wait" to start shooting the film. She said: "Savi is a quirky, insane addition to my repertoire. I love how an iconic film like Run Lola Run has been adapt-

Meanwhile, Taapsee Pannu is busy promoting her upcoming film Thapad, which is set to hit the screens on February 28. The film also stars Pavail Gulati, Dia Mirza, Ram Kapoor, Tanvi Azmi, Kumud Mishra and Manav Kaul. Taapsee also has Haseen Dillruba in her kitty.



FASHION DUNKED! The famous trio, Kim Kardashian, Kanye West made a fashionable appearance alongside rapper J Cole at the 69th NBA All-Star Game in Chicago.

Tom Hardy Gives A First Look At Woody Harrelson's Newly Styled 'Venom 2' Villain

In the most gruesome box-office battle of 2018, an antihero rose over the voice of an angel. Venom topped A Star Is Born to eventually reap over \$213 million at domestic theaters (and \$856 million worldwide). Naturally, that meant that Sony immediately launched into more Spider-Man spinoffs with a Tom Hardy-starring sequel first on the priority list. Well, Hardy's beginning the week by following up on a post-credits scene that showcased the upcoming primary villain, Cletus Kasady, a.k.a., "Carnage."

Last time we caught up with these guys, Sony was aggressively lining up Carnage to spread mayhem in a direct sequel. We saw Woody Harrelson as Cletus, a psychotic San Quentin State Prison inmate (serial killer) with a giant, bushy red hairdo. Harrelson was rocking that wig, and Cletus had personally requested that Hardy's Eddie Brock interview him. And Cletus not-so-subtly declared,

"When I get outta here ... there's gonna be ... carnage." Well, it looks like Cletus is out, and even though he's got a different look, he's keeping the wild color schemes alive.

Hardy posted this first look with a mere "Hello Cletus" and a flame emoji.

Even a purposely dark and gloomy background can't hide that shirt, which is really something. Venom didn't make the history of Eddie and Cletus explicit, but they're former cellmates. The comics also revealed that the Venom symbiote fused with Kasady, so those CGI effects should be fun to witness, and even more bizarre than this look.

We haven't yet heard who will play the sequel's other villain, Shriek (who can send sonic energy blasts and stir up violent emotions in folks), yet, although Variety reported that Naomie Harris is in the running. Michelle Williams will return as Anne Weying, and Andy Serkis is directing this installment.

Venom 2 licks its way into theaters on October 2.



Adele plans to release next album in September

LOS ANGELES, FEB 18 (PTI): Singer Adele says her new album is coming out in September.

According to video footage posted on social media from a wedding that she officiated over the weekend, Adele told the guests to "expect my album in September".

The Grammy-winning artiste officiated a wedding between friend Laura Dockrill and former Maccabees member Hugo White, as per multiple media reports.

After the ceremony, Adele also performed

a surprise set which included "Rolling in the Deep", along with covers like the Spice Girls' "Spice Up Your Life", Candi Staton's "Young Hearts Run Free" and Beyonce's "Crazy in Love" and "Single Ladies".

Details about the new LP are scarce and when contacted, a representative for the singer had no comment. Reports of a new album arriving in 2020 have been swirling for the several months now.

Adele's last album, "25", was released in 2015.

Ozzy Osbourne calls off 2020 North American tour amid health problems

LOS ANGELES, FEB 18 (PTI): Rocker Ozzy Osbourne has cancelled the North American trek of his "No More Tours 2" amid a series of health problems.

The news comes almost a month after the musician revealed his Parkinson's diagnosis. Last year, Osbourne, 71, suffered a fall that required surgery.

In a statement shared on Twitter on Monday, the singer-songwriter said he is pulling out from the shows to undergo medical treatment in Switzerland in April.

"I'm so thankful that everyone has been patient because I've had a s**t year. Unfortunately, I won't be able to get to Switzerland for treatment until April and

the treatment takes six-eight weeks. "I don't want to start a tour and then cancel shows at the last minute, as it's just not fair to the fans. I'd rather they get a refund now and when I do the North American tour down the road, everyone who bought a ticket for these shows will be the first ones in line to purchase tickets at that time," he said.

According to Osbourne's official website, refunds are available at the original point of purchase. And, ticketholders who purchased the "No More Tours 2" tickets will have early access to tickets when the next tour is announced.

His new album "Ordinary Man" will be released on February 21.

Robert Pattinson is perfect for the role of Batman: Zoe Kravitz

LOS ANGELES, FEB 18 (PTI): Zoe Kravitz, who is set to play Catwoman in Matt Reeves' "The Batman", says she is excited to work with Robert Pattinson as the actor perfectly suits the part of the DC superhero.

Pattinson was announced as the new Batman last year and his casting has been a topic of debate among fans. Kravitz said she is happy to have the British actor on board as her "partner in crime".

"I've never worked with him before, but we've been together for the last few

weeks. I had to camera test with him and now we've been training together and rehearsing together and he's just a delightful person and such a wonderful, thoughtful actor.

"I think he's perfect for the role and it's going to be such an adventure. I'm excited to have him as my partner in crime and to be there to support each other, because it's intense. It's going to be a long shoot and there's a lot of pressure, and I know he has my back and I have his," Kravitz said in an interview with Variety.

Narrating the incident, Sara Ali Khan said, "I went to the restroom with my phone, three hours in, and I told my mother (Amrita Singh), 'Mom, I know that we

When Sara Ali Khan Considered Faking A Cardiac Arrest To Exit A Film Narration



Sara Ali Khan, who recently featured in Imtiaz Ali's Love Aaj Kal, revealed that she wanted to "pretend to have a cardiac arrest" in order to skip a movie narration in an interview with East India Comedy. In the web talk show 'EIC vs Bollywood,' which featured four comedians along with Sara Ali Khan, questioned her about the number of narrations she has heard till date. She giggled and answered, "Well, five worthy of remembering, because I am doing five films." Sara Ali Khan has featured in three films and has two projects in line. Talking about a "weird, funny narration," Sara said, "There was this one time," she paused, sighed and added, "I'm not going to say much, because he said so much." The 24-year-old actress disclosed that the narrator was a man and said, "That's all, those are the only leads."

Sara Ali Khan said, "I went to the restroom with my phone, three hours in, and I told my mother (Amrita Singh), 'Mom, I know that we

are all professional and we should be thankful for these opportunities and thank god and wow, I'm a good girl, but can I pretend to have a cardiac arrest? Is that allowed?" She said 'no, you cannot' so I said, 'Should I faint? Should I throw up? What do I do? Can you say something?' and then she told me that I have to go back with professionalism and continue till the end."

Sara added, "Anyways, five and a half hours later, I'm at my home, and I told my mother, 'I really just hate you, I don't want to talk, I don't want to hear anything. I just want to sleep.'" The Kedar-nath actress did not reveal the name of the director or if that particular film went on floors or not.

Sara Ali Khan, who made her debut in Bollywood with 2018 film Kedarnath, has featured in two more films - Simmba and Love Aaj Kal. She will now be seen in Coolie No 1 starring opposite Varun Dhawan. The actress also has Aanand L Rai's Atrangi Re, co-starring Akshay Kumar and Dhanush, in the pipeline.

ARIES: The process of yin or non-doing is just as important as the yang aspects of creation. No great work of art can be created without re-treating into 'shunya' or the womb space. Understand the importance of decluttering your schedule so divine inspiration can strike, Aries. This will help you take your work to a whole new level. Like what you're working on but feeling weighed down by your creative blocks? Step away for a hot second. There's nothing perspective cannot solve. Tip: Allow yourself to retreat into the space of nothingness.

TAURUS: Taurus, think of yourself as an alchemist. A master manifestor, if you may! Rules to help you reclaim your reins: 1) Tell the Universe exactly what you want; 2) Be specific. Visualise the details; 3) Trust in your power; 4) Take the required action and; 5) Express gratitude for the many blessings that are pouring in. What's beautiful about this phase of your life is that you're not weighed down by past failures. You trust that what is meant to be yours will make its way into your existence. Tip: Exercise your power of manifestation.

GEMINI: "This is a good sign, having a broken heart. It means we have tried something new." An Eat Pray Love quote to help you stay woke through the testing times. Be grateful for the

darkness you are experiencing. It is helping you break the old patterns and move closer to the light. Your self-love is also being awakened at the moment. Give yourself the kindness and compassion you deserve, Gemini. Tip: The old pain is being triggered so you can love yourself on a deeper level.

CANCER: You are not defined by where you come from, where you grew up or where you choose to live now. What a wonderful feeling to be able to step out of the matrix and see yourself in a brand new light. This is a period of metamorphosis for you, Cancer, and it is bringing you closer to your true self. One of the most profound revelations you have had along the way is one about judgements. People are always going to have an opinion on everything, your life story included. But not everything has the permission to enter into your sacred space. Tip: You are moving closer to your true self.

LEO: Let 2020 be a year of big manifestations. A year when you make your wildest dreams come true. But changes do not take place overnight, do they? It takes commitment to your goals and consistent effort. Let your inner boss babe reclaim the reins, Leo. A Robin Sharma quote that promises to motivate you: "Greatness comes by doing a few small and smart things each and every day. It comes from

taking little steps, consistently. It comes from making a few small chips against everything in your professional and personal life that is ordinary, so that a day eventually arrives when all that's left is the extraordinary."

Tip: Let 2020 be a year of major manifestations. **VIRGO:** Love at first sight is overrated. The greatest romances develop over a period of time. What's magical about this phase is that you are getting to know each other on a deeper level and uncovering new layers in the process. Virgos in the market for love, we see you've been giving them 'the look' from across the corridor. What if they are just as shy as you are? Strike up a conversation when they are standing by the coffee machine and see where it goes. Tip: Let your inner romantic come to the fore.

LIBRA: The Universe is under no obligation to ensure that your life is always comfortable. Comfort equals stagnation and stagnation is the enemy of growth. So where do you want to vibrate at, Libra? Do you want to resist the changes or take this opportunity to make a drastic shift and move towards the light? Remember, you are more courageous than you give yourself credit for. Word for the wise: be grateful for the chaos. It's helping you say goodbye to the things that are no longer in alignment. Tip: Here's to chaos that leads to cosmos.

SCORPIO: If you grew up in a society that shamed you for your feelings and validated you on the basis of 'acceptable' behaviour, chances are you learned to suppress your most authentic self. But there is no reason for you to play out the old narrative or operate from a space of fear, guilt or shame. This chapter of your life requires you to be exactly who you are minus the filters you have adopted over a period of time. Trust that your interpersonal relationships will undergo a shift as you do. PS: The gift of vulnerability is precious. Tip: Allow yourself to be open and vulnerable. **SAGITTARIUS:** Sometimes we get so caught up in fulfilling our dreams that we forget to notice when they come to fruition. Sagittarius, take a moment to observe and appreciate the life you have created. Your hard work is paying off, magical one. Let the harvest inspire you to keep putting in the work and create the wealth and abundance you desire. Remember, you were born to live a life of greatness. So don't get complacent with your dreams and desires. Tip: Strive for excellence.

CAPRICORN: "Don't get angry, get money. Choose yourself, focus on improving your life and get committed to your goals. You are in control here." Let these words give you the perspective you need to readjust your sails. Don't fret the small stuff, Capricorn. You are a vision-

ary with big dreams. This chapter of your life requires you to realign with the long-term vision. What you need to keep in mind as you climb the ladder: you can't do everything on your own even if you want to. Hire the right people. Tip: Focus on the big vision.

AQUARIUS: Pick your battles, Aquarius. You are not always right, despite what your ego will have you believe. For a change, practice 'active listening'. Give the other person a chance to share their perspective. This way, you might actually end up learning something new in the bargain. PS: Don't let a trivial argument come in the way of the bright future you are co-creating right now. Tip: Give the other person a chance to share their perspective.

PISCES: The Universe is giving you a gold star for confronting your darkest fears and opening yourself to love again. The process has been anything but easy. You pushed through and got to the other side anyway. Know that you are allowed to be both strong and vulnerable at the same time. For some of you, this may be a time of admitting your feelings to the one you love, or moving closer to that happily-ever-after. The fear of being rejected that once held you back is now being transmuted. Tip: Express your love.