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Summit **T**IMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Controversies plaguing SC since last year presser by 4 judges

NEW DELHI, APR 25 (PTI): Controversies plaguing the apex court since last year's unprecedented press conference by four senior most judges came to fore once again with the Supreme Court on Thursday observing, "truth of last year has not come out till now, people of the country need to know the truth".

On January 12, 2018, the then four senior most judges -- Justices J Chelameswar, Ranjan Gogoi, M B Lokur and Kurian Joseph of the apex court -- had mounted a virtual revolt against the then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra by holding a press conference to list a litany of allegations including the assigning of cases in the top court and saying that there were certain issues afflicting the country's highest court.

A lawyer, who was present during the hearing Thursday but wished not to be named, said that a remark by Justice Arun Mishra that the Supreme Court cannot be remote controlled by anyone reminded of the reported statement by Justice Kurian after his retirement that then CJI Dipak Misra was being remote controlled from outside.

The advocate was referring to the statement made by Justice Mishra during the hearing in which he said: "It is not only our institution but your institution also. The way this institution is being treated in last few years we must say that we will not survive if this will happen. "If the institution is targeted you will also not survive. Do the rich and powerful of this country think that they can remote control the Supreme Court. We don't think that Supreme Court can be remote controlled by anything on earth, whether money power or political power."

Among the allegations, the four judges had also raised the issue of allocating the matter related to the death of Judge BH Loya to a bench headed by junior judge.

A special bench, also comprising Justices R F Nariman and Deepak Gupta, which ordered probe by one man panel of former apex court judge Justice A K Patnaik to look into the sensational claims by a lawyer that there was a larger conspiracy to frame Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi in sexual harassment allegations, expressed "anguish" over the systematic attack on judiciary.

The bench said, "The way this institution is treated in last few years turn to pg02

SDF to form Shanti Suraksha Committee in all constituencies

Party to have fewer office bearers, more autonomy

SAGAR CHHETRI GANGTOK, 25 APR:

A high-level meeting of Sikkim Democratic Front party held today decided to form constituency level Shanti Suraksha Committees with the aim to maintain peace and security in the State. The party also decided to give more autonomy and powers to its office bearers while also deciding to bring down the number of vice presidents and general secretaries.

The meeting held here at the party Headquarter at Indira Bypass Road was chaired by SDF



president and Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling.

Speaking to media persons after the meeting, SDF spokesperson, KT Gyaltzen mentioned that the meeting was held after a long time due to the election process and the main purpose of the meeting was to pass the amended constitution of the party. He informed that a committee was formed to bring about various amend-

ments and changes in the constitution of the party.

"So the CEC meeting was called and various amendments were placed before the meeting which were adopted and passed by the CEC of the party," he informed.

Speaking on the amendments made in the constitution of the party, Mr Gyaltzen informed that there will be fewer vice-presidents and general secretaries in the party from

now on and more power will be given to them.

"The objective is to make the constitution of the party so strong that in coming days when we form the government, it will run based on the party's ideologies," he informed.

Mr Gyaltzen stated that the meeting also decided to give more responsibilities to members of the party and to ensure more involvement of younger generation in the party.

On the Shanti-Suraksha Committee, he mentioned that the main purpose of members of this committee is to maintain peace and security even after the election process and to ensure that the people do not face any problem.

Tibetans march out from Gangtok seeking Panchen Lama's immediate release



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 25 APR:

A peace march to mark the 30th birthday of the 11th Panchen Lama, Gendun Choekyi Nyima, whose whereabouts remain unknown ever since he was abducted by the Chinese authorities, was taken out here today. The march started from Chokasum hall at Namnang with around 250 members of the Tibetan community who have resolved to walk to Salugara in Siliguri, West Bengal, to register their love for the Panchen Lama and protest the Chinese action.

This peace march has been

called by the Tibetan Women's Association [TWA] across the country and similar rallies began simultaneously at four zones - from Dharamsala to Chandigarh, Dehradun to New Delhi, Nagpur to Chhattisgarh and Mysore to Bangalore.

The 11th Panchen Lama was abducted by Chinese government at the age of six and remains untraced to this day. TWA has launched this nation-wide peace march to commemorate his 30th birthday with a demand seeking his immediate release.

The rally is scheduled to cover at least 25 kilometres every day

and will reach Salugara on the fifth day of the march. It is informed that a special ceremony will be held at Salugara when they arrive there.

TWA general secretary, Tshering Choezum, informs that rally has been organised to convey a message to the world about the injustice meted out to the Panchen Lama and the entire Tibetan community by the Chinese government.

She also called upon Indians and the Indian government to exert pressure on the Chinese government for the release of the Panchen Lama.

Tribeny Rai bags film grant at FIFF



REBYNA RANA GANGTOK, 25 APR:

The Talent Campus series of 2019 Fajr International Film Festival at Tehran, Iran came to a close in a special ceremony at Tehran's Negarstan Garden on 24 April. This year, 60 participants from Iran and 20 other countries attended the seven days of internationally acclaimed workshops and stimulating discussions about cinema.

Independent filmmaker from Sikkim, Tribeny Rai who hails from Nandok has many award winning short films to her credit and is a product of the prestigious Satyajit Ray Film

and Television Institute, Kolkata. She and Ruman Hamdani from Kashmir are the only two participants from India to attend the Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF) in Tehran.

At the FIFF, Head of Talent Campus, Maziar Miri awarded to five students of this year's workshops with certificates and diplomas.

Tribeny Rai was handed over the second prize for the best short film idea. She had been selected by Naghme Samini and Meharan Kashani, both distinguished Iranian scriptwriters of Iran amongst the top ten students to pitch their short film ideas.

While half of the stu-

dents worked around the theme of immigration, Tribeny chose to work on the concept of family. She then pitched the idea of her short film to a German producer and representative of FIFF festival in an elevator in just three minutes.

She will receive a grant from the festival to make her short film titled "A house full of women".

Iran's largest film festival, Fajr International Film Festival is an event that celebrates cultural exchange, displays creative achievements of highly acclaimed cineastes and pays tribute to quality local and international films.

Karkare's ex-colleague contesting against Pragma in Bhopal

BHOPAL, APR 25 (PTI): Saying he was hurt by BJP candidate Pragma Singh Thakur's remark against Hemant Karkare, a former colleague of the slain chief of Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad is contesting the election against her from Bhopal Lok Sabha constituency.

Riyazuddin Ghayasuddin Deshmukh (60), who had worked under Karkare, has filed nomination as independent candidate. Deshmukh, who is from Aurangabad, told PTI Thursday that he was "deeply hurt and devastated" by Thakur's remark against his for-

mer boss. Thakur, out on bail in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, had said that Karkare died in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack because she had "cursed" him for "torturing" her during the blast probe.

She withdrew the statement later.

"Seconds after she called Karkare sahab anti-national, I decided to contest the election against her," said Deshmukh, who retired as Assistant Commissioner of Police in 2016.

"I had worked as a sub-inspector under Karkare when he was the Superintendent of Police

in Akola. He was my boss. He was brave, co-operative, encouraging and a gem of a person. He liked me very much and I respected him immensely," he added. Deshmukh said he filed his nomination on April 23. "I am not going to withdraw it at any cost," he said.

The election in Bhopal, where the main contest is between Thakur and Congress veteran Digvijay Singh, will be held on May 12.

Thakur is facing trial under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the Malegaon blast case.

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Nepal marks quake anniversary as rebuilding continues

KATHMANDU, APR 25 (AFP): Nepal on Thursday marked the fourth anniversary of a massive earthquake that killed almost 9,000 people and left millions homeless, some of whom are still living in temporary shelters.

Nepal's prime minister KP Sharma Oli joined locals and civil servants at a memorial in the Kathmandu Durbar Square, a UNESCO world heritage site being rebuilt after it was badly damaged in the April 2015 quake.

"I would like to offer my condolences to those all who lost their lives," Oli said.

"We are here remembering the pain of that day... and it is also important to examine how much work we have been able to do in the last four years to restore and rebuild what we lost."

A minute's silence was observed around 11:56 am -- the time the

7.8-magnitude quake hit, triggering avalanches and landslides across the Himalayan nation and destroying schools and hospitals.

The disaster also reduced more than a hundred monuments to rubble, including centuries-old temples and royal palaces in the Kathmandu valley that attracted visitors from around the world.

The National Reconstruction Authority, the government body overseeing rebuilding, says that half of the families left homeless in the quake have already completed reconstruction and started living in their new homes. Another 30 percent are currently building new homes. Families were given about 3000



in government grants over three instalments to rebuild.

"We still have a lot to do and we will complete it in the next 20 months," said Sushil Gyawali, chief of

the authority, whose five-year mandate ends at the end of 2020.

But a USD 9 billion reconstruction effort has been plagued by political infighting, bureaucracy and con-

fusion among quake victims over how to obtain the grants.

The government also faces an estimated USD 4 billion shortfall in reconstruction funds. Experts also fear that a rush to rebuild has put pressure on quake survivors to take out expensive loans and build homes that may be too small to be functional for families. "We are now sharing a three-roomed flat. Even this was built with a loan. Quake victims need more support from the government," said Sri Ram Shrestha, 48, who lost his two-storey house in the quake. Nepal rests on a major fault line between two tectonic plates.

On the eve of the anniversary, the country was hit with three tremors, the strongest of which was 5.2 magnitude.

Politics beyond elections, Chamling advises party leaders

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 25 APR:

Sikkim Democratic Front president and Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling today said that it is high time for leaders to take politics seriously and not be limited to politics only during polls. Politics is about leading society towards the right direction, he added.

Mr Chamling was speaking during the party's central executive committee meeting held today at the party head-

quarter at Indira Bye Pass Road.

Stressing on the need for the right kind of leadership and party, Mr Chamling accused opposition parties of indulging in deception and negativity. He urged his party workers to openly condemn such acts of the opposition.

He also directed the party workers to keep an eye on the opposition's attempts at disturbing peace and development in Sikkim.

Giriraj Singh booked for violating model code of conduct

BEGUSARAI (BIHAR), APR 25 (PTI):

Union minister Giriraj Singh was on Thursday booked for violating model code of conduct by making controversial remarks against the Muslim community at a rally here a day ago where BJP national president Amit Shah, among others, was present. According to District Magistrate, Begusarai, Rahul Kumar, the FIR was lodged at Town police station under relevant sections of the Representation of People Act and the Indian Penal Code taking suo motu cognizance of the "controversial" remarks made by Singh at Wednesdays rally.

Besides Shah, the rally was attended by a number of other BJP leaders, including Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi.

Singh is contesting from Begusarai Lok Sabha as the NDA candidate and he is engaged in a three-cornered fight with CPis Kanhaiya Kumar and RJDs Tanveer Hassan.

Video footage of Singh's brief address at the rally was telecast on news channels wherein he can be heard saying, "I would like to say, Giriraj

Singh's ancestors died and were cremated. You need a yard of land even after you die, for burial of your mortal remains. If you say you cannot chant Vande Mataram, this nation will never forget you". "There are many people who are trying to spread communal passions. We will not allow that to happen anywhere in Bihar including Begusarai. The RJD candidate in Darbhanga recently said he had problems with reciting Vande Mataram", Singh said referring to Abdul Bari Siddiqui's comments on Sunday last.

"In Begusarai too, many can be seen spewing venom wearing bade bhai ka kurta and chhotte bhai ka pyjama", he said referring to the long shirts and short trousers that are usually associated with devout muslims.

The firebrand BJP leader has courted controversy on a number of occasions on account of his hyper-nationalistic outbursts which also underscore his Hindutva hardline. His comment ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha polls that those opposed to Narendra Modi deserved to be deported to Pakistan has led to much lampooning.

Controversies plaguing...

we must say that we will not survive if this will happen. There is a systematic attack, systematic game to malign this institution."

These observation were made by the bench while hearing claims made by lawyer Utsav Singh Bains that there was a larger conspiracy to frame the CJJ.

"There are lot of allegations floating in the air in this country. These allegations needed to be investigated ... What happens to the truth. The truth of even last year has not come out. People of this country need to know the truth. This is going on and this has to stop," the bench said in an apparent reference to the January 12, 2018 press conference by the judges of the apex court at the residence of Justice (ret'd) Chelameswar.

Besides journalists, senior advocate Indira Jaising, who argued on Thursday, was also present during that press conference and she had also asked questions with the four judges, three of whom are now retired.

Later in the day on January 12, 2018, footage by TV news channels showed CPI leader D Raja coming out after meeting Justice Chelameswar.

Justice Mishra on Thursday said that he was not commenting on any particular issue but the time has come when bar and judges rise to the occasion and tell the rich and powerful that they cannot control the judiciary as it amounted to "playing with fire".

"The time has come when we have to rise and tell the rich and powerful that you can't do this. You are playing with fire. We don't want to take names but letters are written in pending matters and books are printed. These are people for whom senior advocates are appearing. Whenever big persons are involved, this happens in this court", said Justice Mishra.

The bench said that money power is being used to influence the registry and "when we take action...you malign us and the institution".

After the allegations of sexual harassment cropped up against Justice Gogoi, who also sat on the bench with Justices Mishra and Sanjiv Khanna, an attempt was made to solicit the comments of Justices Chelameswar, Lokur and Kurian Joseph.

However, all three refused to make any comments on the allegations of sexual harassment against the CJJ, who himself constituted the bench on April 20 and heard the submission before opting himself out midway of the hearing.

The order on April 20 was signed by Justices Mishra and Khanna.

Governor concludes two-day tour of West Sikkim

GYALSHING, 25 APR (IPR):

Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad on the second day of his tour to West Sikkim visited the SSB Camp at Uttarey where he planted tree saplings prior to the short interactions with the SSB Jawans, Sikkim Sisters NGO, members of the Pawan Dristi Girls home and locals of the area.

In his address to the gathering present at the SSB Camp, he expressed his gratitude to the SSB Jawans, the girls from home and officials for the program prepared by them. He mentioned that the country is proud of the SSB Jawans duties and how they have kept the country's borders safe. He further congratulated the Sikkim Sisters NGOs for their contribution towards the 'Beti bachao, Beti padhao' campaign of the Prime Minister and raising the kids in a safe environment.

The Governor then distributed sweets and blankets to children of Pawan Dristi Girls home. Similarly, sweets and



khadas were offered by the Governor to the Jawans as a form of gratitude for their services to the country.

He then visited Rainbow Trout Breeding cum Demonstration Farm Uttarey where he was briefed by the Director, Fisheries. Followed by his brief visit and interaction with the Students and teaching faculty of Dentam Sr Sec School. He stated that he was filled with gratitude and awe to see so many students of Dentam Senior Sec-

ondary School doing well in academics and extra-curricular activities.

He mentioned in his brief address that the students are the future of a state and are 'lumps of clay' which needs to be molded and shaped in the best shape possible to keep the name of the state and society high.

He also acknowledged the role of the teachers who are the tool to build the future if the state through their impartation skills of how well moral values and

knowledge are stilled in the children by them. They are indeed the pushing factor which can help the students in the process of state and nation building.

During his two-day tour to West Sikkim the Governor released grants of Rs 50,000 to Pawan Dristi Girls Home. Similarly, a sum of Rs 25,000 from Raj Bhawan fund and Rs 25,000 personally by the Governor was given to the Dentam Senior Secondary School Library.

Lingi Payong School holds coordination meet

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 25 APR:

The first coordination meeting among school family, SMCs, parents, guardians and other stakeholders of Lingi Payong School was held today at the school premises. The chairperson of the day was former Headmaster of the school, TR Adhikari while SMC chairperson, Yogesh Bhandari was the special guest. The main objective of the meeting was to discuss various academic and non-academic issues of the school for the year 2019-20.

There was an open



discussion on the agendas placed and consensus drawn by the house. Literary activities Community Reading competition and Quiz was held on the occasion.

The school family felicitated the community and SMC members for

their various contributions to the school. The main attraction of the programme was multi ethnic dance by students showcasing the unity in diversity concept. Members from SMC and parents also shared their views on

school activities and suggested necessary actions to be taken in future.

The chief guest also spoke at length about the initiatives of the school and praised the work of the school family. Panchayat president also appreciated the gathering about various initiatives that are being undertaken by the GPU for development of the school.

The programme was coordinated and conducted by teachers CR Khatiwara and Arjun Koirala. The vote of thanks was offered by Chongzat Lepcha.

Are you overtesting Democracy?

JIWAN RAI

'Is Sikkim becoming relatively unsafe?' or 'Are we beginning to feel unsafe?' are questions that are being dealt with by never being asked. So far as these thorny questions go, our otherwise compulsively uproarious social media is as silent as a grave. Nothing is more reflective of the increasing danger on the streets as the angry posts on social media and yet there is hardly any commentary on this unfortunate trend that is gripping Sikkim tighter by the day. Is it really true that the Sikkimese minds that can be so disturbed by overflowing Gangtok roads during rains, blocked toilets in the new STNM hospital due to a lack of civic sense, etc. are not really concerned about the increasing hostility, incivility and even in some ways brutality that seem so pervasive in the state in the name of politics? Why is nobody commenting on the diminishing sense of safety? The indisposition to raise the issue could well be symptomatic of an underlying fear of being singled out!

The much expected post-poll normalcy did not return after 11 April. The political hostility has not abated. The hatred, anger, conflict and their ilk continue to eclipse common sense. By the looks of it, the wait is going to be long and the residual impacts of it all will be here to stay much longer than one would expect. The Sikkim that we are missing today will not be back for some time.

Phew! We witnessed a lot and a few posts will leave a lasting mark on public memory for years to come. The videos of associate professor Mukund Giri and some students being publicly interrogated sent shivers down my spine. As silly as their survey may have been, if not technically at least practically, given the heightened sensitivity of some to any election related matter, how

they have been handled raises some serious questions about citizen safety. That those graphic videos showing the 'surveyors-party workers conflict' hardly attracted any public condemnation worries me more than the subject of the videos in question. Former minister, GM Gurung being shamed and even terrorized by a young IRB boy in Delhi seemed to confirm my worst fears. An angry boy flanked by a few other colleagues said right to the minister's face with the video camera capturing the event, "This is not Sikkim. This is Delhi and we rule here!" Who would not have cringed at a video such as this! Times are changing and these are dangerous times indeed. I desperately want my premonition to fall flat.

The teachers and students guilty of conducting a post-poll survey should not be defended if their actions and intentions were wrong. However, until the matter is investigated and final results are out, nobody has the right to humiliate and threaten them. It is high time that Sikkim step back and give a good thought as to how such unrestrained public outrage can be avoided. Make no mistake about it - law and order is on the verge of being completely overturned. No matter how gross the crime is, in a democratic set up people have no business torturing convicted criminals, let alone someone who has simply been accused of committing a crime. There is a prescribed procedure of judging a legal matter, issuing a verdict and sentencing a convict or acquitting him/her. The law must take its course.

Mukund Giri and these students were put through a virtual kangaroo court separately. Every bone in my body resented the manner in which these beleaguered individuals were treated. In the case of the mob questioning of the professor, an angry male voice

threatened him, "Ma ta budo manchhey bhandina hai" (I will not spare you just because you are old). There was an apparent advancement towards him and Jacob Khaling intervened. Then later in the process, a female voice piped up from the back of the crowd, "You are supposed to be a professor? You are supposed to 'profess', not do all these illegal things with girls. What are you doing with girls? Why are you walking around with girls...?" Her tone had rudeness and anger written all over it. Regardless of what the matter is, an angry mob can never substitute law even though human instincts often support the former.

These are frustrations accruing from those who think that they can fix any problem in their own capacity by bypassing the law or freezing it temporarily. This is a pernicious illusion. The danger it poses to society is enormous simply because it will eventually replace the law with violence. That the cinematic protagonist (filmy heropanti) is inapplicable to reality is a no brainer. When every supposed victim is allowed to retaliate against an alleged perpetrator, life becomes mayhem and the earth a madhouse. If one cannot see the abnormality of this, they will have to wait until the shoe is on the other foot.

Ridiculing the human dignity of anyone just because he is alleged to have done something wrong is primitive and crude. How close is 'mob questioning of a victim' to 'mob lynching of a victim'? It is naive to self-soothe, thinking that the tiger that ate my neighbour will spare me. Violence in any form is dangerous not only because it hurts but also because it spreads.

The 'views and likes' on social media seem to be egging 'other-directed people' on to do whatever appeals to themselves. The increasing popularity

Month-long training for newly recruited Agriculture officials

GANGTOK, 25 APR (PIB): ICAR-National Organic Farming Research Institute (NOFRI), Tadong started a 30-day Training Program on 'Organic Farming' for the 23 newly recruited Agriculture Development Officers (ADO), Horticulture Development Officers (HDO) and Watershed Development Officers (WDO), Govt. of Sikkim from 24 Apr to 24 May, 2019 in order to update them with latest organic production technologies.

A total of 21 officers from all four districts of Sikkim are participating in the training program. The program is sponsored by ATMA, Govt. of Sikkim.

Principal Director, Horticulture and Cash Crop Development Department, Govt. of Sikkim, Dawa Lhamu Lama, was the chief guest in the inaugural function on 24 Apr, 2019. In her address, she appreciated the Joint Director and Scientists of ICAR-NOFRI for their sincere efforts in organizing the 30-day long training program for the newly recruited officers.

She said that Sikkim state is dependent on ICAR for organic production technologies and this kind of training for officers shall help them to learn the available technologies before going in to the field. She also briefed about the journey of Organic farming in Sikkim and role of Horticulture and Cash Crop Development Department, Govt. of Sikkim in implementation of various programs. She also motivated the trainees to actively interact with the scientist of ICAR-NOFRI during the training program.

Director Agriculture, Asha Lama, SAMETI and Nodal Officer Training, Govt. of Sikkim also participated as guest of honour. In her address, she appreciated ICAR-NOFRI efforts in Research and Development and rapid transfer of technologies through various training programs. She mentioned that there is big gap between production and supply of organic seeds and need to be given special emphasis during the training program.

Earlier, Joint Director, Dr RK Avasthe, ICAR-NOFRI in his address highlighted the relevance of this training program for newly recruited officers. He mentioned that ICAR-NOFRI has developed many improved production technologies for different crops and most of them are reaching the farmers field. He emphasized that in Sikkim there is 25-55% yield gap and to bridge this gap there is need to identify right person for the transfer of right technologies. He also motivated the trainees to work with dedication and discipline for success in their career and achieving departmental goals.

Senior Scientist (Horticulture), Dr Ashish Yadav coordinated the program and welcomed all the dignitaries and briefed about the various talks and activities to be undertaken during 30-day training program. Senior Scientist (Agronomy), Dr Raghavendra Singh proposed the vote of thanks. SM Kandwal (Sr Technical Officer) moderated the program. Rajeni Pradhan, Bandhan Chettri, Ezekeil Khawas and Topden Tshering Bhutia assisted actively in organizing the program.

gained by social media activism is indicative of a public impatience to wait and a general idleness to investigate. We are a society where people gather in hundreds just to watch the road-roller paving the road. A friend of mine aptly told me that social media activism has now evolved into vigilantism. The vigilantism is carried out by other-directed personalities and our insatiable hunger to see and hear something new is helping feed the fires of vigilantism to spread faster than it can be controlled. In our vulnerability, we have forgotten the need to be analytical, mature and patient. The line of distinction between rumour and facts, idiocy and intelligence, rabble rousing and sound public discourse, leaders and rabble-rousers and instigation and enlightenment has blurred.

The tension between 'what a party supporter is compelled to believe because of his party affiliation' and 'a genuine quest to find out the truth' has been conveniently ignored. We have been showered with allegation after allegation in the public domain. Verification is not forthcoming. If these unverified speculations expressed in the angriest manner possible are proven to be mere lies, who will take the responsibility of healing public indigestion caused due to heavy doses of restrained lies in the name of politics? How costly will it be for a young Sikkim to face an increasing recalcitrant attitude?

"Ridiculing the human dignity of anyone just because he is alleged to have done something wrong is primitive and crude. How close is 'mob questioning of a victim' to 'mob lynching of a victim'? It is naive to self-soothe, thinking that the tiger that ate my neighbour will spare me. Violence in any form is dangerous not only because it hurts but also because it spreads."

US-led 2017 blitz on Syria's Raqa killed 1,600 civilians: Report

BEIRUT, APR 25 (AFP): Intensive US-led coalition bombardment on the Syrian city of Raqa killed more than 1,600 civilians over four months in 2017, according to a report released on Thursday.

The findings were compiled after months of field research and extensive data analysis, including via a project that saw 3,000 digital activists scan satellite imagery online.

In mid-2017, Raqa had been the de facto Syria capital of the Islamic State group's cross-border "caliphate" for three years and the US-led coalition launched a military campaign to crush the jihadists in their main remaining hub.

The unprecedented investigation, carried out by Amnesty International and the Airwars monitoring group, urged top coalition members to show more transparency and accountability.

"Many of the air bombardments were inaccurate and tens of thousands of artillery strikes were indiscriminate," said Donatella Rovera, crisis response advisor at Amnesty.

The civilian death toll for the coalition campaign, which supported Kurdish-led ground forces in their successful advance against IS, stands at more than 1,600, according to the report.

The coalition has admitted to around 10 percent of those deaths, it said.

"Coalition forces razed Raqa, but they cannot erase the truth," Rovera said.

"Amnesty International and Airwars call upon the Coalition forces to end their denial about the shocking scale of civilian deaths and destruction caused by their offensive in Raqa."

Rovera said a number of reasons explained the high casualty toll among civilians, including failing intelligence and surveillance, and the use of inappropriate weaponry.

In many cases, buildings in Raqa were targeted following insufficient remote surveillance, Rovera said, killing entire families that were still living or sheltering in them. "If there had been adequate surveillance of these buildings... a civilian pattern of life would have been very detectable," she told AFP.

Rovera, who spent months going to strike sites in Raqa since it was captured by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in October 2017, also said the coalition's choice of weapons was a problem.

"It may have to do with money," Rovera said. "There are, more expensive, smaller impact-radius missiles, but the coalition often used... old MK-type bombs that take out entire buildings. Those are much cheaper," she said.

Amnesty also criticised the extensive use of artillery in the battle of Raqa, which one US military official boasted was the US's highest since the Vietnam war.



Free homeopathic check-up at Pakyong

GANGTOK, 25 APR: A homeopathic health check-up and awareness program was held today at the Pakyong Bazar ICDS. 48 patients were attended to and provided free homeopathic medicines, a press release informs. Dr VK Prasad checked on the patients.

Max voters in North West Delhi; highest women electorate count in West Delhi

NEW DELHI, APR 25 (PTI): The North West Delhi constituency has over 23 lakh electors, the maximum among all seven Lok Sabha constituencies in the national capital, according to data shared by the Delhi CEO Office on Thursday.

Over 1.43 crore voters are eligible to vote in the Delhi polls due on May 12.

The total number of male and female electorates in Delhi till date is -- 78,73,022 and 64,42,762, respectively, it said.

As per the data shared by the office of the Delhi's Chief Electoral Officer, North West Delhi has 23,77,604 electors in the constituency -- 13,04,555 (men); 10,72,891 (women) and 158 (third gender).

The total size of the electorate in Delhi till date is 1,43,16,453 out of which 669 belong to the third gender, according to the data.

The number of electors in some of the other constituencies are -- West Delhi (23,67,509); North East Delhi (22,89,493); South Delhi (20,65,755).

While North West Delhi has maximum number of total electorate and male voters among all constituencies in Delhi, West Delhi has the highest number of female voters (10,90,797), according to the data.

The CEO office also said as many as 182 FIRs and daily diary (DD) entries were filed against political parties and others here for violation of the model code of conduct, till date.

The statistics surveillance team of Delhi's Chief Electoral Office constituted to keep an eye on the expenses of political parties, has seized Rs 3.01 crore in cash and 1,406 kg of narcotics and drugs.

"A total of 182 FIRs or DD entries have been lodged till date in connection with the violation of the model code of conduct," the office of the Delhi CEO said in the statement. "Out of these, 21 are against the Aam Aadmi Party (13 FIRs and eight DD entries), 28 against the Bhartiya Janata Party (14 FIRs and 14 DD entries), nine against the Congress (three FIRs and six DD entries), one against the Bahujan Samaj Party (an FIR), Samajwadi Party (one DD entry), four against CPI (M) (two FIRs and two DD entries) and 118 (114 FIRs and four DD entries) are against others or non-political (entities)," it said.

The office of the Delhi CEO said over 3.31 lakh posters, banners and hoardings have been removed since March 10, when the poll code came into force.

Photography exhibition held at The People's Studio

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 25 APR: A screening of works by photographers who participated in the Visual Storytelling Workshop held recently in Kalimpong, will take place in The People's Studio at Artem at 4pm on 25 Apr, 2019, a press release informs. Nine photographers

participated in the workshop led by Sagar Chettri and Bunu Dhungana, photographers and mentors from Photo Circle, Kathmandu. Nine series of visual storytelling ranging in topics from the Gorkhaland agitation to mother and syndicate will be screened.

The photographers are Aberer Ganguly, Andrew

Lepcha, Neel Bhatta, Pal-sang Lama, Prawesh Rai, Prayash Chettri, Shweta Jangir, Sradha Lama and Yogya Pradhan.

The People's Studio is a space for the showcase of art and creative works of artists in the 8 northeastern states. The studio is located at Kazi Road, below Golden Tips. The event is open to all.

Entrepreneurship Awareness Workshop and Business Hackathon



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 25 APR: A two-day 'Entrepreneurship Awareness Workshop and Business Hackathon' is being organized by AIC- SMU Technology Business Incubation Foundation on 27 and 28 of April at SMT, a press release informs.

With participants from across the country, the event will have Founder of iShippo, Demi, MeGoYo, Niko, Karma Bhutia and Founder of LaDesign,

Sonam T Gyalsten as the keynote speakers.

Karma L Bhutia, NetSpeq Solns. Pvt. Ltd, would be joining as a panelist for the Hackathon.

The event is supported by NITI AAYOG, Govt. of India and Atal Innovation Mission. Apart from the awareness workshop wherein the participants shall have a chance to interact with successful entrepreneurs and also obtain insights on innovation, business strat-

egies, etc, the Business Hackathon will provide a platform to the participants to present their ideas. The winners of the Hackathon shall be given incubation opportunities for their ideas along with attractive prizes.

Prof. (Dr) Tejbanta S Chingtham, CEO, SMUTBI informed that it is an open-event which is beneficial not only for budding entrepreneurs but for the students as well and encouraged more youths to be a part of it.

SRM Univ invites schools to Spellbound

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 25 APR: SRM University Sikkim's Department of English has announced plans to hold a spelling-bee competition - 'Spellbound' 19 - on 30 April at the university's science block.

A press communiqué received from the HOD, Department of English, Dr Sonal Sharma, informs that the objective of Spellbound is to encourage students to explore and study

the English language and its roots and enrich their word power.

It also aims to inspire them to strive for excellence in all of their academic pursuits, the release adds.

The competition will feature participation of students from classes 10 and 12. Schools interested in participating can contact the HOD, Department of English for further details.

Wheelchair donated to Rangpo resident



REBYNA RANA GANGTOK, 25 APRIL: Journalist, Ajay Agarwal from Gangtok and Rangyok resident, Karma Tashi Bhutia have come forward to support a person in need of a wheelchair.

Krishna Chettri of Lower Bazaar, Rangpo had recently lost his right leg due to a disease. His right leg had been amputated from above the knee and he needed a wheelchair to move around. Since he was not able to purchase a wheelchair, his situation was flashed in a WhatsApp group which was noticed by Ajay Agarwal on 23 April.

"I went to Gangtok medicine stores to know about the cost of a wheel-

chair yesterday. Later, I came in contact with Karma Tashi Bhutia of Rangyok who came forward to donate a brand new wheelchair after hearing the story about Krishna Chettri," shared Mr Agarwal.

Today Mr Agarwal went to Rangpo and presented the wheelchair to Mr Chettri on behalf of the donor. Mr Agarwal also provided some financial assistance to Mr Chettri.

Mr Chettri expressed his happiness and thanked Mr Agarwal and Mr Bhutia for helping him. "This wheelchair will help me move around in a safe manner. It was very difficult for me till now to move around," he said.

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Maruti to pull the plug on diesel cars from April next year

NEW DELHI, APR 25 (PTI): India's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) will discontinue sale of diesel cars in the country from April next year, coinciding with the transition of the automobile industry to stricter BS VI emission norms, a top company official said Thursday. The auto major currently gets 23 per cent of its total sales in the domestic market from diesel cars. It sold a total of 4.63 lakh diesel units last fiscal.



Some of the company's models like Vitara Brezza and S-Cross currently come with a diesel engine option only. Others like Swift, Baleno, Dzire, Ciaz and Ertiga also have petrol versions in addition to the diesel trims. MSI has also decided to pull the plug on the diesel version of its light

commercial vehicle Super Carry from next year. It would be only available in petrol/CNG version going ahead.

"From April 1, 2020, we will not be selling diesel cars," MSI Chairman RC Bhargava told reporters here when asked to comment on the company's plans regarding the diesel vehicles. He, however, added that if there is a demand

for BS VI diesel cars the company might go ahead and develop a model to cater to that demand.

"From April 1, 2020, we will have no diesel car on sale. Depending on how customers react to BS VI diesel cars if we find there is a market of BS VI diesel cars we will develop such a car within a reasonable period of time," Bhargava said.

The company recently launched its mid-sized sedan Ciaz with in-house developed BS IV compliant 1,500 cc diesel engine. Its other cars are powered by 1.3-litre diesel engine sourced from Fiat. Bhargava said the company would not go below 1,500 cc diesel engine going ahead.

"The only area which looks in our range of products possible is somewhere around 1,500 cc engine. So

if we come back in diesel it will be that range and not lower than that because the price difference factor will make that model unaffordable," he added.

Small diesel cars would see the maximum impact in terms of pricing with the coming of BS VI compliant engines.

"Ever since the BS VI compliant engines have come (in Europe) diesel vehicle sales have been de-growing even there because the price difference between petrol and diesel has become much bigger. I don't think the Indian market would be any different, here the buyers are even more price conscious," Bhargava noted.

He added that the current year is the best period to buy diesel cars as from next year such models are going to get much costlier.

SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Get Involved, or Live With the 'Politics'

Politics is not inherently 'bad', but politics in everything is unhealthy

It is ironic that people will continually foist leadership roles in even social and cultural organizations on politicians, and then complain that the leaders are playing politics. When politicians get involved things are bound to be 'politicised.' While there is nothing wrong in career-politicians taking up social, cultural or environmental causes, it is also true that political presence in such initiatives compromises the core issue since the debates invariably digress to personal attacks and arguments eventually get adjusted to consolidate vote-banks. One has seen such approaches in the clash of ideas between pro and anti hydel groups in North Sikkim, the organizing of cultural or tourism events, community organizations and even sport bodies; ask around the organizing committees and they will attest that while a politician heading the group opens doors for funds and assistance, his/ her political position also shuts down some options for purely political reasons.

Does that mean that politicians be distanced from concerns of the society? They cannot, because it is the people that politicians represent and their involvement should ideally be automatic and spontaneous. But involvement should not immediately translate to influence. Maybe a conscious decision should be taken to not have them head apolitical organizations or efforts, especially so in a Sikkim where, unfortunately, political positions are too straitjacketed. Those who raise an issue might have no political affiliations, but the only response they receive is from political circles. As mentioned earlier, there is per se nothing wrong with political presence, what disturbs is that this invariably is the only involvement that stakeholders receive. This is not only about protests, even required social interventions await political patronage to reach deliverance. What people sacrifice when they invite a politician to head, say a Bhanu Jayanti organizing committee, is the opportunity to felicitate fiery writers who have captured not just the mood of the people but also their readership with their incisive literary skills sharpened in the whetstone of anti-establishment sentiments. You invite a politician to get involved in aid and relief and of course political affinities will influence beneficiary lists. Get them to head social movements and you cannot complain if the debate targets people instead of ideas and arguments.

Why, really, should environmental concerns be the preserve of only the affected people receiving outside support from Opposition parties who will attach themselves to anything challenging the establishment? Why should ways and means to improve the quality of education [we talk of solutions here, not criticism] be deliberated only in seminars and workshops initiated by the State Government? Or, why should the proper functioning of cooperatives or promotion of organic farming be an obsession only of the establishment?

Those who rue the 'over politicization' of the affairs of the State need to also recognize that 'politics' is merely occupying the vacuum created by the absence of a coherent Civil Society. In an almost instinctive reaction, Sikkim looks towards the Government [and the very thinly separated ruling party] to deliver not only development, but also to engineer social reforms, and the Opposition to lend weight to dissenting voices. This is a common situation across the country, but most parts of the nation also have a reasonably mature civil society which moderates the voices and issues in the public domain. This civil society is sorely missed in Sikkim. In its absence come inferred fears and postured stands, both rather unhealthy trends. Surely, there must be many individual members of the Sikkimese society who notice the absence of a community feeling/ response at times. Is the State, or even the capital, anywhere near getting itself a Civil Society? A Civil Society is not an organised body that one can register and elect office bearers to; it is a level where individuals start thinking of more issues than just those that their immediate circles experience. It is a state where the society's reaction to issues and developments is spontaneous and free of prejudices. Simply put, it is a society that cares and is willing to get involved. Till Sikkim can do that, it will have to live with 'politicization' of all its affairs; not something that is inherently wrong or evil, but still something that leaves the public space incomplete and the people only partially represented.

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Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

In India, WhatsApp is a weapon of antisocial hatred

ROHIT CHOPRA
theconversation.com

A general election in India, the world's most populous democracy, seems a theoretical impossibility. Collecting the votes of nearly a billion people across a staggeringly diverse subcontinent has for more than half a century faced challenges of logistics, politics, economics, violence and law.

This year, a new challenge has arisen in the form of social media – specifically the text messaging app WhatsApp, owned by Facebook. Hate speech, disinformation and scary rumors on the platform are already responsible for violence and deaths in India.

I have been studying the impact of the internet on Indian political, cultural and social life for the better part of two decades. Under the strict protocols of the Election Commission of India, voting has proved one of the more robust signs of Indian democracy. Voters turn out in large numbers, particularly the poorer segments of the electorate, making the process and its results a fascinating study and experiment in Indian politics.

The 2019 parliamentary elections, now underway, will show how social media affects Indian democratic life. They will also provide additional information about the nature of technological threats to democracy in general.

INDIAN SOCIAL MEDIA IN 2014

Two years before Russian troll farms infiltrated Facebook in an attempt to tilt the 2016 U.S. presidential election, social media played a critical role in Indian politics. It helped the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and its hard-line candidate for prime minister, Narendra Modi, come to power, though in a different way than the U.S. experienced.

In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party ran a formidable social media campaign on Facebook and, to a lesser extent, Twitter. The party's online efforts complemented and supplemented its equally well-orchestrated campaign on the ground. The Bharatiya Janata Party's trained social media

teams, and a veritable army of enthusiastic volunteers, ensured that the party's online presence was much more active than its rivals.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's information technology group, as well as the party's supporters, exploited the political power of social media. They unleashed an often abusive barrage of criticism at the Congress Party, then-incumbent Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other Bharatiya Janata Party opponents.

In the lead-up to the 2019 election, social media is being used in a far uglier and more dangerous fashion. The Bharatiya Janata Party even has its own official app, which is rife with disinformation and inflammatory propaganda about non-Hindus, posted by party members and supporters. More broadly, WhatsApp is being used to disseminate rumors and disinformation to spark fear among the populace, particularly about people who are perceived as outsiders.

This connects with the Bharatiya Janata Party's main message that Hindus should have first claim over India and that India should be a culturally Hindu nation, rather than a secular state governed by a diverse range of voices. The chief opposition, the Congress Party, seems to lack the Bharatiya Janata Party's level of reach and skills at weaponizing social media.

THREATS OF VIOLENCE

Online, the Bharatiya Janata Party's volunteer army of internet trolls blurs lines between troublemakers, genuine supporters and party officials. Their collective intensity, especially about Hindu nationalism, has put everyone on edge about violence – including social media platforms, law enforcement officials and ordinary citizens.

The danger is real. By one count, the use – or misuse – of WhatsApp has already resulted in 30 deaths in India. Many of these are not political events, but rather because of fear of outsiders spread through WhatsApp messages carrying fabricated warnings about strangers allegedly coming to rural communities to kidnap children.

It's not clear yet whether WhatsApp's remedial measures, such as blocking users from forwarding any single message more than five times, will effectively counter the dissemination of dangerous and fake information. Earlier restrictions – including limiting forwarding to 20 times – did not.

GETTING BENEFITS BUT AVOIDING RESPONSIBILITY

Of course, media technologies do not make anything happen by themselves. Their effects depend on how they're used. In the Indian context, Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government and its digital allies have legitimized an unusually high degree of bigotry and virulence against minorities, particularly Muslims and the members of the lowest caste, called Dalits.

As a result, it's easy for party members and social media volunteers to use digital platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook to inflame sectarian sentiments. In the run-up to the election, they have created a climate of general distrust, fear and paranoia in which disinformation cannot be distinguished from credible facts.

My own research, explained in my forthcoming book, suggests that the decentralized nature of online networks has allowed the Bharatiya Janata Party government to benefit from hateful and violent messages sent out by other hardline Hindu nationalist groups, while being able to avoid accountability or responsibility for those messages. It also enables the Bharatiya Janata Party to benefit politically from religious violence while at the same time diverting blame to WhatsApp or Facebook.

These developments in India raise deeper questions about the nature of social media communications. In particular, these abuses of social media may cause people to rethink the relationship between free speech – including forwarding messages from others – and violence. The outcome of the Indian election will be just one signal of how one society is beginning to wrestle with how new technologies are letting people reshape their lives.

[the writer is Associate Professor of Communication, Santa Clara University]



How much do sedentary people really need to move? It's less than you think

EMMANUEL STAMATAKIS,
JOANNE GALE & MELODY DING
theconversation.com

People who spend much of their day sitting may need to move around less than we thought to counteract their sedentary lifestyle, new research shows.

Our research, published today in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, found about 20-40 minutes of physical activity a day seems to eliminate most health risks associated with sitting.

That's substantially lower than the one hour a day a previous study has found.

We spend almost all our waking day sitting, standing, or moving. The health impact of each one of these can be complex.

For example, too much standing can lead to lower back problems and even a higher risk of heart disease. But sitting for too long and not moving enough can harm our health.

Then there are people who sit for many hours and also get in reasonable amounts of physical activity. For example, someone who has an office job but walks to and from work for 20 minutes each way and runs two to three times a week easily meets the recommended level of physical activity.

While we know moving is better than sitting, what is far less clear is how much of a good thing (moving) can offset the harms of a bad thing (sitting).

That's what we wanted to find out in our study of almost 150,000 Aus-

tralian middle-aged and older adults.

We followed people enrolled in the 45 and Up Study for nearly nine years. We looked at links between sitting and physical activity with deaths from any cause, and deaths from cardiovascular disease such as heart disease and stroke, over that time. We then estimated what level of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity might offset the health risks of sitting.

This kind of activity is strenuous enough to get you at least slightly out of breath if sustained for a few minutes. It includes brisk walking, cycling, playing sports or running.

WHAT WE FOUND

People who did no physical activity and sat for more than eight hours a day had more than twice (107%) the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease compared to people who did at least one hour of physical activity and sat less than four hours a day (the "optimal group").

But it wasn't enough just to sit less. People who did less than 150 minutes of physical activity a week and sat less than four hours a day still had a 44-60% higher risk of dying from cardiovascular disease than the optimal group.

We also calculated the effect of replacing one hour of sitting with standing, walking, and moderate and vigorous physical activity.

Among people who sit a lot (more than six hours a day) replacing one hour of sitting with equal amounts of moderate physical activity like strenuous gardening and housework, but not standing, was associated with a

20% reduction in dying from cardiovascular disease.

Replacing one hour of sitting with one hour of vigorous activity such as swimming, aerobics and tennis, the benefits were much greater, with a 64% reduction in the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

The great news for people who sit a lot, including sedentary office workers, is that the amount of physical activity needed to offset the health risks of sitting risks was substantially lower than the one hour a day a previous study found.

Even around 20-40 minutes of physical activity a day – the equivalent of meeting the physical activity guidelines of 150 to 300 minutes a week – seemed to eliminate most risks associated with sitting.

For people who sat a lot, replacing sitting with vigorous physical activity was better than replacing it with moderate activity; and replacing sitting with moderate activity or walking was better than replacing it with standing.

WHAT'S THE TAKE-HOME MESSAGE?

Our study supports the idea that sitting and exercise are two sides of the same health "coin". In other words, enough physical activity can offset the health risks of sitting.

Should we worry about sitting too much? Yes, because sitting takes up valuable time we could spend moving. So too much sitting is an important part of the physical inactivity problem.

offset the risks of sitting.

For those who sit a lot, finding ways to reduce sitting would be a good start but it is not enough. The most important lifestyle change would be to look for or create opportunities to include physical activity into our daily routine whenever possible.

HOW TO WIDEN OUR ACTIVITY 'MENU'

Not everyone has a supportive environment and the capacity to create opportunities to be active. For example, lack of time and physical activity being low on people's list of priorities are the main reasons why inactive adults don't exercise. Also, many do not have the motivation to power through a strenuous workout when they are juggling many other life challenges.

There are no known remedies to a lack of time or low motivation. So, perhaps we need to add new approaches, beyond exercising and playing sport for leisure, to the "menu" of physical activity options.

Incidental physical activity like active transportation – think walking fast or cycling part or all of the way to work – or taking stairs are great ways to become or stay active without taking much extra time.

[Emmanuel Stamatakis is Professor of Physical Activity, Lifestyle, and Population Health, University of Sydney; Joanne Gale is Research Fellow Biostatistician, University of Sydney; Melody Ding is Senior Research Fellow of Public Health, University of Sydney]

SC irked over Assam's response on illegal foreigners, threatens Chief Secy with contempt action

NEW DELHI, APR 25 (PTI): The Supreme Court was irked Thursday over unsatisfactory response of the Assam government on deportation and conditional release of illegal foreigners and cautioned the state's Chief Secretary, saying that it would issue a contempt notice against him.

The top court, on April 9, had asked state's Chief Secretary Alok Kumar to apprise it of the measures which could be adopted for release of detainees, who are now lodged in detention centres for a long period, after a "full and complete discussion with concerned authorities" of the state and the Central Government.

A bench of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justices Deepak Gupta and Sanjiv Khanna, after perusing the affidavit, was critical of the fact that out of over one lakh persons who have been declared foreigners by tribunals in Assam, only four have been deported so far and above 900 are lodged in detention centres.

"You (state government) have failed to catch illegal migrants in

the state as more than one lakh foreigners are living in the state but the government has managed to detain only over 900 of them," the bench said.

These foreigners have "mixed with the local population and they might have voted in the Lok Sabha elections. You have kept 900 people in the detention centre... this is how your government has been functioning," the bench said.

The apex court took serious objection to the averments made in the state government's affidavit on details of proposed conditions on which foreigners would be released and that the state government was not bound by the order of the tribunals declaring a person an illegal foreigner.

"You (Chief Secretary) have no right to remain in the office and we will issue contempt notice to you for making slanderous statement against the law and the Constitution of the country," the bench said.

The court then asked the top officer of the state as to whether there was any meeting between the state government and

the Centre on the issue.

"Yes, two meetings have taken place," the Chief Secretary replied.

The bench then asked the officer to provide the minutes of those two meetings and got irked when the top officer said that he did not have them at the moment and other officer would come to the court with the papers.

Ask the officer to come to the court by 3 PM otherwise we would issue contempt against you, the bench cautioned.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Assam government, attempted to defend the Chief Secretary and said that he would ensure deletion of paragraphs containing some inadvertent mistakes.

"No, Mr Solicitor General. The Chief Secretary has filed the affidavit. He will have to explain the slanderous statements..."

"Stop advocacy. Let us understand English. This man does not understand as to what he has done. He has signed the affidavit on dotted lines without even at-

tempting to read as to what he was filing," the anguished bench said.

The Chief Secretary then tendered unconditional apology saying, "My Lords, my sincere apology for the language used in the affidavit".

The bench asked him to sit down and asked a lawyer to give his chair to the officer.

The state government, in its affidavit, has proposed that it would set up a five-member committee headed by Additional Chief Secretary of Assam to consider petitions of detained foreigners, who have completed five years in detention centres, for their conditional release.

"The committee shall recommend conditional release on the basis of length of detention, conduct of the detainees, existence of criminal proceedings," the affidavit said, adding that priority for conditional release would be given to old, infirm, women and children up to the age of 14 years of age.

It said that the detainees will have to furnish two Indian sureties and a bond of Rs one

lakhs each as one of the conditions of release.

The illegal foreigners will have to provide details, including biometric data and will have to report to the local police station, it said.

The bench was hearing a PIL filed by activist Harsh Mander, through advocate Prashant Bhusan, on the plight of foreign detainees in Assam.

The court adjourned the hearing saying that it was not receiving proper assistance in the case.

Earlier, the apex court had directed the Assam government to apprise it of "ways and means" that can be adopted to release illegal foreigners languishing in the state's detention centres for almost a decade.

The PIL has alleged that prisoners are kept in detention indefinitely because they are not Indians and are treated as "illegal aliens".

The top court on April 1 had expressed unhappiness over declared foreign nationals absconding and amalgamating with local population in Assam, and had summoned the state's chief secretary.

BJP men assaulted polling agents, alleges ally IPFT



AGARTALA, APR 24 (PTI): The Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), an ally of ruling BJP in the state, on Wednesday alleged that goons of the saffron party have assaulted its two polling agents during the polling in Dhalai district Tuesday.

The IPFT also put up a road blockade in the district to protest the alleged assault, which was denied by the BJP.

Polling for the East Tripura (ST) constituency was held on Tuesday. Though the voting in the seat was supposed to be

held on April 18, the EC had deferred it to April 23 in view of law and order situation.

"Election agents of the IPFT were attacked by BJP backed goons at a polling booth at Raimavalley assembly segment. They are injured and hospitalised. Local IPFT leaders put up a road blockade at Gandacherra today in protest," IPFT spokesperson Mangal Debbarma said.

Officer-in-charge of Gandacherra police station, K K Uchoi said they blocked the road at 2 pm

and it continued for several hours.

The IPFT is demanding immediate arrest of the accused, he said adding that BJP supporters also held road blockade on Tuesday night.

When contacted, BJP spokesperson Ashoke Sinha said the IPFT's allegation was baseless and no BJP supporter or activist attacked any IPFT worker.

"Now the law and order is under the EC. I think the state government has nothing to do with it now," he added.

Cong names candidates for 3 West Bengal assembly seats



NEW DELHI, APR 25 (PTI): The Congress on Thursday named three candidates for three assembly seats in West Bengal where bypoll will be held on May 19.

The Congress has fielded Alhaj Muzaffar Hussain from Islampur, Rejina Murmu from Habibpur (ST) and Khwaja Ahmed Hussain from Bhatpara.

Bypoll to five assem-

bly constituencies of West Bengal will be held on May 19 and votes there will be counted along with those of all Lok Sabha seats, the Election Commission had said.

The five assembly seats - Darjeeling, Islampur, Kandi, Habibpur (ST) and Bhatpara - fell vacant after the sitting MLAs resigned following their nomination to contest Lok Sabha elections.

Manhunt launched to nab absconding BJP candidate in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, APR 25 (PTI): A manhunt has been launched to nab Om Prakash Mishra, the BJP candidate for Satyabadi assembly constituency, who along with his supporters allegedly destroyed EVMs and tore poll documents in a booth during the third phase of polling in Odisha on April 23, police said.

"The BJP candidate is absconding since then," Puri Superintendent of Police, Umashankar Dash, told reporters.

Three police teams have raided Mishra's residence at Hansapal in Bhubaneswar but could not find him, the SP said.

The police action came on the basis of a complaint lodged by the Presiding Officer, Shivaram Mohapatra.

Mishra and his supporters allegedly entered a polling booth at Birakishorepur village under Kanas block on April 23 and vandalised the EVMs,



the presiding officer said in the complaint.

They also allegedly tore important documents related to the polling process, Mohapatra said.

"One of them also tried to fire from his pistol, but it slipped from his hand," said Mohapatra.

The BJP candidate and his supporters fled from the booth in the face of protests by voters.

Meanwhile, two persons identified as Manas Samantaray and Akshaya Kumar Biswal have been arrested for their alleged involvement in the incident.

Both are supporters

of Om Prakash Mishra, the police official said.

Earlier, a BJP candidate for Sorada assembly seat, Nilamani Bisoi, was arrested on charge of breaking an EVM and preventing polling officials from discharging their duty.

BJD candidate and sitting MLA from Pipili assembly segment, Pradeep Maharathy, has also been arrested on the charge of attacking a magistrate of the EC's flying squad in Puri district.

Assembly and Lok Sabha elections are being held simultaneously in Odisha.

TMC candidates for WB assembly by-poll announced

SURI (WB), APR 25 (PTI): In a rehabilitation of Saradha scam accused Madan Mitra, a former West Bengal minister, Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee Thursday named him as the party's candidate for the by-election to Bhatpara assembly seat.

Banerjee also announced the names of Amal Kishku and Abdul Karim Chowdhury as TMC candidates for Habibpur and Islampur assembly constituencies respectively for the upcoming by-elections.

The by-polls to the four assembly seats will be held on May 19, the date for the last phase of election to the Lok Sabha.

By-polls to these seats have been necessitated owing to resignations of sitting MLAs who are contesting the Lok Sabha elections.

Mitra will contest the Bhatpara seat in North 24 Parganas district,

where sitting TMC MLA Arjun Singh has resigned and is contesting as a BJP candidate from the Barrackpore Lok Sabha constituency.

Mitra, a former transport minister of the state and a powerful TMC leader, appeared to have lost his place of importance in the party since his release from custody on bail in September 2016 after spending over 21 months in jail in connection with the multi-crore Saradha chitfund scam.

The announcement of his candidature is seen as Mitra's rehabilitation in the party.

Banerjee also said that TMC will support Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) leader Binay Tamang in Darjeeling assembly seat, which was vacated by Amar Singh Rai to contest from Darjeeling Lok Sabha constituency as a TMC-GJM candidate.

Rai was a GJM MLA in the Assembly.

Envoy for more bonhomie between Chinese provinces, Indian states

KOLKATA, APR 25 (PTI): Consul general of China in Kolkata, Zha Liyou on Thursday called for more bonhomie between Indian states and Chinese provinces, which he said would augur well for bilateral ties between the two countries.

"Both Kolkata and Kunming are twin sister cities. But the relation between the two is not active. The potential is not fully utilised. There is a need for greater collaboration between them," he said at an interactive session organised by the MCCI here.

Citing an instance, the envoy said such ties among twin cities between China and other countries are much higher -- Japan (250), US (over 200), Russia (140) and Germany (40).

Talking about eastern India, he said the region occupies an important place in the context of China, as it is the land of Lord Buddha.

Zha said there was also need to create awareness about Bengali culture among the Chinese, particularly films and personalities like Satyajit Ray.

Systematic attack to malign judiciary, nobody can remote control us: SC

NEW DELHI, APR 25 (PTI): Anguished over "systematic attack" to malign the judiciary, the Supreme Court Thursday said time has come to send a message to the country that the top court was "not vulnerable" and nobody can "remote control" it either by money or political power.

The apex court, during the hearing on a lawyer's affidavit claiming "larger conspiracy" to frame Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi on sexual harassment allegations and fixing of benches in the top court, warned that if such attempts were not stopped the institution "will die".

Observing that the apex court cannot be run by money or political power, a three-judge special bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra said that the day has come for them to rise and tell the

country's rich and powerful that they are "playing with fire".

The bench, also comprising Justices R F Nariman and Deepak Gupta, said people are trying to fix the court registry by money power and when somebody try to improve these things, he is "killed" or "maligned".

"Do not think that the Supreme Court can be remote controlled by anything on the earth, whether money power or political power," the bench said.

"We are anguished with the way this institution is being treated in the last three-four years and we must say that it will die and it will not survive if this will happen. There is systematic attack, systematic game to malign this great institution," the court said.

The bench said letters were being written and books were being print-

ed in matters pending in the court and this practice has to be stopped.

"Do the rich and powerful of this country think that they can remote control the Supreme Court," the bench said.

The hard hitting observations by the bench came after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said there should be a probe by a special investigation team (SIT) on the allegations levelled by advocate Utsav Singh Bains in his affidavit as he has claimed a larger conspiracy which concerns the administration of justice.

"You (Mehta) are provoking us to speak. We are not inclined to say but now listen. So many things are going on. There are serious allegations that need to be probed. The Supreme Court cannot be run by money power or political power," Justice Mishra said.

Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey
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 ment" and some of the stories it hitherto, not
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**THE BIRDS
 HAVE
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Pogba odd man out in PFA team of the year

LONDON, APR 25 (AFP): Manchester United's Paul Pogba is the only non-Manchester City or Liverpool player to be named in the Professional Footballers' Association's Premier League team of the year on Thursday.

The 26-year-old French World Cup-winning midfielder's inclusion is a surprise after an indifferent season, although he hit a purple patch after Ole Gunnar Solskjaer arrived at Old Trafford as interim manager.

City and Liverpool have been locked in an enthralling duel for the title, with Guardiola's City going top again on Wednesday after beating United 2-0 at Old Trafford, with Pogba unable to inspire his side to a much-needed win.

City provide six of the 11 players -- goalkeeper Ederson, centre-half Aymeric Laporte, midfielders Bernardo Silva and Fernandinho and forwards Sergio Aguero and Raheem Sterling.

The remaining four places are filled by Liverpool players -- full-backs Andrew Robertson and Trent-Alexander Arnold, central defender Virgil van Dijk and forward Sadio Mane.

Van Dijk and Sterling are believed to be in the running for the player of the year award.

There is no place, though, for Liverpool's Egyptian star Mo Salah, who has scored 19 Premier League goals this season, Spurs pair Harry Kane and Son Heung-min or Chelsea playmaker Eden Hazard.

The PFA Team of the Year is voted for by members of the Professional Footballers' Association.

Manchester City had five players in the 2017/18 side but only Argentine star Aguero retains his place from the team of 12 months ago.

Start playing like Manchester United, pleads Rashford

Manchester, Apr 25 (AFP): Marcus Rashford has called on Manchester United players to "be real with each other" after Manchester City condemned them to a seventh defeat in nine games on Wednesday.

Bernardo Silva and Leroy Sane struck for the visitors in 12 second-half minutes at Old Trafford to seal a 2-0 win over United, who remain three points adrift of the top four. "Today we didn't play like Manchester United," Rashford told Sky Sports.

"It's not right. The bare minimum is to work hard and give all for the badge, the supporters, the club and yourself.

"It has been a tough road to get to where we are, to get there and not be putting up the same performances as we were in January is disappointing. We know what's been going wrong -- it's mentality and willingness to run for your team. "Forget the league and top four, you don't lose this game. It's that simple as a Manchester United fan. We never call each other out but we have to be real with each other. It's a matter of trying to improve each other.

Hamilton wary of rivals' street smarts in Baku

BAKU, APR 25 (AFP): Championship leader Lewis Hamilton is expecting his main rivals to give him a tough time on the demanding streets of Baku at this weekend's Azerbaijan Grand Prix.

The five-time world champion, who heads the embryonic 2019 title race by six points after three races, has struggled to master the Baku circuit in the past and won last year only after Mercedes' team-mate Valtteri Bottas had a puncture when leading with three laps remaining.

That disappointment was a body blow for Bottas who did not fully recover and failed to claim a win as Hamilton romped to his fifth drivers' crown. This time, Hamilton expects him, and Ferrari, to respond.

"I was fortunate to get the win here last year," admitted Hamilton, who has developed a habit of turning unpromising rac-



es into valuable podium finishes or wins.

"I wasn't quick enough really, right through the weekend so it will be interesting this time.

"I'm expecting Valtteri to be quick and I expect the Ferraris to be particularly quick. It will be interesting. I'm going

with a mind-set that I've got to improve on my previous performances."

Victory last year was Hamilton's first at the tricky track made up of the season's longest -- and very fast -- straight and tight corners, some with little run-off and walls.

A reinvigorated

Bottas, winner of the season-opener in Melbourne, but beaten twice since then by Hamilton, has often relished such conditions.

"I'm disappointed that I didn't win from pole in China and I know that was all about the start," he said. "It's all about details and learn-

ing from them.

"That's life. It's how it goes sometimes. I know I can turn this around so that's my goal now. I would prefer to be leading."

- 'SAME LEVEL AS SENNA'

After three outings, Mercedes have proved they are in form with

three straight one-two finishes, the first team to do so since 1992 when Williams, now struggling, were the dominant force.

Hamilton, however, has warned his team needs to be wary of Ferrari, wounded by their disappointing start after shining in pre-season testing.

Already adrift by 57 points in the constructors' contest, they will be extra-keen to bounce back and end Mercedes' run.

New boy Charles Leclerc, in particular, could be a major threat to Hamilton and Bottas as he is a slick street track specialist, won the Baku F2 race from pole in 2017, following his father's death, and is keen to prove Ferrari wrong to use team orders in favour of four-time champion Sebastian Vettel.

"I love racing at Baku and scored my first F1 points there last year," said the 21-year-old

Monegasque.

"I always go well there."

Hamilton, who spoke in support of an under-fire Vettel earlier this season, was this week hailed by former Ferrari driver Gerhard Berger as the only man "on the same level" as his ex-McLaren team-mate Ayrton Senna.

Berger's praise made clear that he saw nobody on the grid to equal Hamilton, an assessment sure to add vigour to Vettel's need for success.

Ferrari fans may hope to see the raw power of their car's engines give them a speed advantage on the long Baku straights, but team chief Mattia Binotto was reluctant to encourage the tifosi's dream.

"Let's wait -- Mercedes were very strong in China and Baku is a very difficult circuit," he said, hinting at the track's reputation for creating chaos and the unexpected.

CSK look to consolidate position at top against MI



C SHYAM SUNDAR CHENNAI, APR 25 (PTI): They might have already reached the cut-off limit of 16 points needed for the play-offs, but Chennai Super Kings would like to consolidate their position at the top when they take on an inconsistent Mumbai Indians in an IPL match here on Friday.

The MS Dhoni-led side roared back to form after two losses, with a six-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Tuesday night, riding on Shane Watson's big hitting.

Come tomorrow, the hosts would be looking to continue the momentum.

The visitors, currently in third spot with 12 points from 10 games, are coming off a defeat against Rajasthan Royals and will be keen to keep themselves in the hunt for the playoffs.

While CSK's must have welcomed Watson's return to form, the team would be hoping for Suresh Raina, Ambati Rayudu and Kedar Jadhav to get going ahead of the knockout phase.

It is important for

Jadhav to get his touch back with the World Cup looming.

The bowlers have played a big role in CSK's success so far, especially at home, on sluggish tracks. The much-improved Deepak Chahar will be key in the matches to come with his intelligent bowling at the start and at the death.

Though Imran Tahir, who is the second highest wicket-taker with 16, went wicketless in the SRH match, the South African veteran will be expected to stymie the powerful Mumbai Indians batting line-up along with fellow spinners Ravindra Jadeja and Harbhajan Singh.

Mumbai have had a roller coaster season so far and they now need to be at their best in the last lap of the preliminary phase.

In Rohit Sharma, they have a shrewd captain who leads from the front, and a solid batting unit that includes Quinton de Kock, Kieron Pollard and the Pandya brothers -- Hardik & Krunal.

Jasprit Bumrah & Co. will be wary of CSK's batting with Watson having

found his mojo again and the ever-reliable Dhoni.

An interesting battle looms between the two three-time champions.

Teams (from):

Chennai Super Kings: MS Dhoni (captain & WK), Suresh Raina, Ambati Rayudu, Shane Watson, Faf du Plessis, Murali Vijay, Kedar Jadhav, Sam Billings, Ravindra Jadeja, Dhruv Shorey, Chaitanya Bishnoi, Rituraj Gaikwad, Dwayne Bravo, Karn Sharma, Imran Tahir, Harbhajan Singh, Mitchell Santner, Shardul Thakur, Mohit Sharma, K M Asif, Deepak Chahar, N Jagadeesan (wk), Scott Kuggeleijn.

Mumbai Indians: Rohit Sharma (C), Quinton de Kock (WK), Suryakumar Yadav, Yuvraj Singh, Kieron Pollard, Hardik Pandya, Krunal Pandya, Mitchell McClenaghan, Jason Behrendorff, Mayank Markande, Rahul Chahar, Jasprit Bumrah, Anmolpreet Singh, Siddhesh Lad, Ankul Roy, Evin Lewis, Pankaj Jaiswal, Ben Cutting, Ishan Kishan, Aditya Tare, Rasikh Salam, Barinder Sran, Jayant Yadav, Beuran Hendricks.

Match starts at 8 PM.

Both Virat and I react out of passion: Ashwin

BENGALURU, APR 25 (PTI): Kings XI Punjab captain Ravichandran Ashwin played down the animated reaction from his Royal Challengers Bangalore counterpart Virat Kohli after taking his catch near the boundary rope, saying both of them react out of passion.

With 27 runs needed from the final over, Ashwin hit the first ball for a six, but on the very next delivery, he hit one straight to Kohli at long-on off Umesh Yadav's bowling. Kohli celebrated in his typical usual self, giving Ashwin a fiery send-off.

Ashwin, on his part, was also seen throwing his gloves in the dugout in anger.

"I just played with passion, so does he (Virat). That's it. As simple as that," Ashwin said at the post-match press conference here on Wednesday night after KXIP lost to RCB by 17 runs.

KXIP skipper said his team failed to come good during crunch situations.

"Three overs for 60 odd runs wasn't desirable, but we were in the chase all along and I thought we couldn't finish it off in crunch situation. That is what you back the senior players to do. Didn't quite turn out the way we wanted.

That is exactly how that is gone for us the entire tournament.

"Whenever we played those crucial moments, we won, and whenever we haven't, we have lost it, because the games are really really tight for



us," said Ashwin. The 32-year-old said KXIP lost the plot in middle overs despite Nicholas Pooran and David Miller bringing them back into the game.

"When you chase down 200, you ideally like one of your batsmen to make 70-80. We were not in it. We were 105 in 10 overs or something like that. We lost momentum similar to what RCB did in middle overs, but I thought Nicholas Pooran played really well and he got us back into the game. "I thought we were cruising at 4 overs 45 or 46 needed. From there on, it is quite disappointing that we could not finish the game on this ground."

Ashwin felt it was important to curtail AB de Villiers as he could make a lot of difference in end overs.

"I think (Marcus) Stoinis was 26 off 30 balls before the last over started. So I don't think that was quite the parameter. I think AB de

Villiers is someone who definitely makes a difference in those end overs. It is very important we curtail him. Like I said our execution was all over the place towards the last two-three overs," he said.

India off-spinner said 30 runs in two overs was gettable here at Chinnaswamy track, given the bowling attack of RCB, which had crumbled a lot in this season.

"I don't think it was really tilted. It was a balance like 2 overs 30 is still gettable in this ground against the bowling attack we have seen that has crumbled before," he said.

Ashwin said had Miller connected one out of the park, KXIP would have won.

"If David (Miller) would have connected one out of the ground it was - like I said it was that close. Just that we could not close out the game. That is really been our downside of the year so far. Hopefully, we can

correct it in the coming games," he said. On winning three out of their remaining games now, Ashwin said it is important to take one game at a time.

"I think we have a couple of more players who get fit by the time we go to Hyderabad which will be a good boost for us. You can look at it as three out of three now, but it is very important to see that we have to win one at a time. The last two games are home games for us where we played reasonably well," he said.

"We have played some good cricket to actually end up only winning five games in the season. It is not quite pleasing that way, but going into the next three games, I am pretty confident that we can turn it around," he said.

Meanwhile, Marcus Stoinis lavished praise on de Villiers for his match-winning knock by saying "What a superstar. He showed it again how good he is.

Mo Farah lifts lid on bust up with Gebrselassie

LONDON, APR 25 (AFP): Athletics icons Mo Farah and Haile Gebrselassie are locked in a bitter dispute just days away from the London Marathon with claims of robbery and an unpaid hotel bill at the heart of the row. Britain's quadruple Olympic champion Farah, aiming to win Sunday's race, wrapped up his pre-marathon press conference with claims that Gebrselassie had made no effort to recover items stolen from his room at the Ethio-

pian's hotel near Addis Ababa. Farah was staying at the hotel in late March as part of training for Sunday's prestigious race.

Gebrselassie -- a two-time Olympic champion -- hit back by accusing Farah of not paying his heavily discounted hotel bill and claimed in a statement to media that only thanks to his intervention had an assault charge brought by a fellow guest against the Briton been dropped.

Farah, in hardly ideal prepara-

tions for taking on world record holder and defending champion Eliud Kipchoge on Sunday, said on Wednesday that around 2,500 pounds (3,200) had been stolen on March 23 -- his 36th birthday -- along with a watch given to him by his wife Tania.

Farah denied Gebrselassie's accusations, saying they were an effort to "distract from the situation, where members of his hotel staff used a room key and stole money and items

from Mo Farah's room."

"Someone's got the key from reception, opened it up, took my money, took my nice watch that my wife got me, and two phones," said Farah.

"The watch was sentimental -- it can't be replaced."

- 'ACT OF BLACKMAILING'

Farah, who finished third in last year's race but has since set a new European record in landing the prestigious Chicago Marathon, also revealed the contents of a text message he sent

to Gebrselassie when he lost patience at not having his pleas for help answered. "I want to inform you that I'm disappointed you have not made any effort to find my stolen money, and especially my watch," the text read.

"I have tried to contact you by telephone several times.

"Know that I am not responsible for what I say during the press conference in London and what influence it will have on your personality and your business.

Chinese military silent over Pakistan naval ships absence at Chinese navy fleet review



BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, APR 25 (PTI): The Chinese military said on Thursday that it "always attached importance" to relations with the Indian and Pakistani counterparts and was ready to make more efforts to advance the ties, but kept silent over the absence of ships from its all-weather ally at the fleet review of the 70th anniversary celebrations of China's navy. Two Indian battle ships, including INS Kolkata - the biggest indigenously built stealth destroyer - along with

INS Shakti - one of biggest fleet support ships - took part in the fleet review at Qingdao on April 23 which was presided over by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Significantly, conspicuous by their absence were the ships of Pakistan Navy at the parade. The Pakistan Navy reportedly could not send its ships to PLAN's most celebrated moment despite the all-weather relations due to the recent Indo-Pak hostilities after the deadly Pulwama terror attack in February. However, a delega-

tion headed by Pakistan Navy chief Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbas attended the event. Asked how China viewed the participation of the Indian Navy ships, Chinese defence ministry spokesman Col Ren Guochang told a media briefing that more than 60 countries sent their naval delegations and 13 countries have sent their ships to take part in the review. He said the Chinese navy's 70th anniversary celebrations will "undoubtedly concretise the friendship and mutual relations between the

PLA Navy (PLAN) and its international counterparts." "At the same time, China always attached importance to the military-to-military relations between China and India and China and Pakistan. We are ready to make more efforts with the two nations to push forward the military relations and exchanges," he said. He, however, evaded answer to a question over the absence of the Pakistan Navy ships in the fleet review. Col Ren was critical of the French naval ship

which was scheduled to take part in the PLAN celebrations. China reportedly withdrew the invitation to the French naval ship Vendemiaire on the ground that it trespassed into Chinese waters at the Taiwan Strait, which Beijing claims as part of it.

Also significantly while arriving to take part in the PLAN's grand event, the Indian Navy ships came through Taiwan Strait, the narrow strip of waters of the Pacific that separates, China and Taiwan. China protested to the US on March 25 when two American naval ships sailed through the Taiwan Strait. In his media interaction after the arrival of the Indian ships, Commander of INS Kolkata, Captain Aditya Hara when asked whether the Indian ships came through Taiwan Strait said in April 21 during a media interaction at Qingdao that the India ships did pass through the Taiwan Strait and that the transit was made in accordance with international law.

Chinese ships were present in the Straits to offer assistance for a safe passage, he said.

Sri Lanka bans drones, unmanned aircraft after bombings



COLOMBO, APR 25 (PTI): Sri Lanka has banned the use of drones and unmanned aircraft following the massive Easter Sunday bombings that killed over 350 people and injured more than 500 in the country's worst terror attack.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said that the ban will be in effect until further notice.

The use of drones and unmanned aircraft has been temporarily banned within the Sri Lankan airspace, Colombo Gazette reported.

The CAA said that it was taking the measure "in view of the existing security situation in the country."

Meanwhile, authorities continued their search operations with the help of army and arrested many suspects overnight.

So far, over 75 people have been arrested in connection with the country's deadliest attack.

Nine suicide bombers, believed to be the members of a local Islamist extremist group National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ), carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three churches and three luxury hotels.

As many as 359 people have been killed in the attacks while 500 others injured, accord-

ing to authorities.

Many of the arrested people have suspected links to the NTJ, the group blamed for the bombings. However, the NTJ has not claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attacks and identified suicide bombers who carried out the devastating blasts.

Authorities have deployed thousands of troops to help police carry out search operations.

On Wednesday, the Sri Lankan government admitted that "major" intelligence lapses led to the horrific coordinated attacks.

Father of 2 Lanka suicide bombers arrested on suspicion of aiding and abetting sons

COLOMBO, APR 25 (PTI): A Sri Lankan spice tycoon, the father of two of the suspected Easter suicide bombers, was arrested Thursday on suspicion of aiding and abetting his sons carry out the deadly terror attacks that left nearly 360 people dead.

Spice merchant Mohamed Yusuf Ibrahim's two sons - identified as Ilham Ahmed Ibrahim and Imsath Ahmed Ibrahim - allegedly detonated their explosives at the Shangri-La and the Cinnamon Grand hotels on Sunday.

Police are holding the brothers' father on suspicion of "aiding and abetting" his sons, the CNN reported.

According to media reports, investigators are also searching the spice trader's mansion in Colombo - which was the site of the eighth blast - for evidence of the attacks. Three police officers were killed in the blast at the mansion.

Elder brother Ilham, who detonated a device at the Cinnamon Grand Hotel, was previously arrested by police and then released, a Sri Lankan government spokesman told CNN.

The majority of the Easter Sunday suicide bombers were from well-to-do Sri Lankan families and they were

well-educated, including one who studied in the UK, State Defense Minister Ruwan Wijewardene said Wednesday. Out of the nine bombers, eight have been identified. The ninth bomber was confirmed as the wife of one of the suicide bombers.

Sri Lanka's government has blamed the attacks on three Catholic churches and three luxury hotels on an Islamist extremist group National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ).

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but the government has blamed the NTJ.

Meanwhile, a huge international criminal investigation is ramping up in Sri Lanka, with six foreign police agencies and Interpol assisting local police, including Scotland Yard from the UK and the FBI from the US.

Officers from Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) have raided five safe houses across the country in connection with Sunday's attacks.

The Lankan authorities Thursday intensified their raids with the help of the army and arrested 16 more suspects in connection with the attacks, taking the total number of suspects under police custody to 76.

US records 695 measles cases, most since 2000

NEW YORK, APR 25 (AFP): The United States recorded 695 cases of measles in 2019, the most of any year since the disease was declared eliminated in 2000, health authorities said.

"The high number of cases in 2019 is primarily the result of a few large outbreaks -- one in Washington State and two large outbreaks in New York that started in late 2018," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement on Wednesday.

The resurgence of the once-eradicated, highly-contagious disease is linked to a growing anti-vaccine movement in richer nations -- which the World Health Organization has identified as a major global



health threat.

Outbreaks in the United States have mostly been confined to tight-knit communities where vaccination rates are lower than the national average of more than 90 percent.

People infected with the virus brought it to the United States from Israel and Ukraine and passed it on to members of their communities,

many of whom had not been vaccinated.

"The measles vaccines are among the most extensively studied medical products we have, and their safety has been firmly established over many years in some of the largest vaccine studies ever undertaken," Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said in a statement confirming the new record.

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**THE BIRDS
HAVE LOST
THEIR WAY**

Edited by
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**ESSAYS
ON TEESTA,
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Kim, Putin vow to seek closer ties at first talks

VLADIVOSTOK, APR 25 (AFP): Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to seek closer ties as they met face-to-face Thursday for the first time.

The meeting in Russia's Far Eastern city of Vladivostok came with Kim looking for support in his nuclear stand-off with Washington and Putin keen to put Moscow forward as a player in another global flashpoint.

In brief statements before heading in to the talks, both leaders expressed their hopes for strengthening historic ties.

"I think it will be a very useful meeting in developing the relationship between the two countries, who have a long friendship and history, into a more stable and sound one," Kim said.

"As the world is focused on the Korean peninsula, I think we will hold a very meaningful dialogue," Putin told Kim he supports ongoing efforts to ease tensions on the Korean peninsula and wants to boost economic ties.

"I am confident that your visit... will help us to better understand how we can resolve the situation on the Korean peninsula and what Russia can do to support the positive processes that are currently taking place," Putin said.

"In terms of bilateral relations, we have a lot to do to develop economic relations." The meeting was Kim's first face-to-face talks with another head of state since returning from his Hanoi summit with US President Donald Trump, which broke down without a deal on North Korea's nuclear arsenal in February.

Among the issues likely to be on the table is the fate of some 10,000

North Korean labourers working in Russia and due to leave by the end of this year under sanctions.

Labour is one of North Korea's key exports and sources of cash. Pyongyang has reportedly asked Russia to continue to employ its workers after the deadline.

Kim, whose government has told the United Nations it is facing food shortfalls this year, will also be keen to see Moscow continue or boost its aid.

Russia has provided some 25 million in food aid to North Korea in recent years, according to the Kremlin. One delivery in March saw more than 2,000 tonnes of wheat supplied to the port of Chongjin, news agency TASS reported.

For Putin, the summit is a chance to push Russia's agenda of opposing US international influence.

In an interview with China's official People's Daily published on Thursday, Putin lashed out at "countries claiming sole global leadership".

"They carelessly trample on the norms and principles of international law, resort to blackmail, sanctions and pressure, and try to force their values and dubious ideals on entire countries and populations," said Putin, who is heading to China after the talks for another summit.

The Vladivostok meeting follows repeated invitations from Putin since Kim embarked on a series of diplomatic overtures last year.

Since March 2018, the formerly reclusive North Korean leader has held four meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping, three with South Korea's Moon Jae-in, two with Trump and one with

Vietnam's president.

At the meeting with Trump in Hanoi, the cash-strapped North demanded immediate relief from sanctions, but the talks broke up in disagreement over what Pyongyang was prepared to give up in return.

North Korea last week launched a blistering attack on US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, insisting he be removed from the negotiations just hours after announcing it had carried out a new weapons test. Pompeo said on Wednesday he expected "bumpy" talks ahead with Pyongyang but that he still hoped to reach a potentially landmark denuclearisation deal.

Russia has already called for the sanctions to be eased, while the US has accused it of trying to help Pyongyang evade some of the measures -- accusations Russia denies.

The Kremlin has said the focus of Thursday's talks will be on finding "a political and diplomatic solution to the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula" but that no joint statement or signing of agreements was planned.

Moscow was a crucial backer of Pyongyang for decades and their ties go back to the founding of North Korea, when the Soviet Union installed Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung as a leader.

The USSR reduced funding to the North as it began to seek reconciliation with Seoul in the 1980s, but Pyongyang was hit hard by its demise in 1991.

Soon after his first election as Russian president, Putin sought to normalise relations and met Kim Jong Il -- the current leader's father and predecessor -- three times, including a 2002 meeting also held in Vladivostok.

'Empire' cast pens letter demanding Jussie Smollett's return to show

LOS ANGELES, APR 25 (PTI): The cast of "Empire" has sent a letter to Fox and the show's producers, asking them to bring back Jussie Smollett in the next season.

Smollett was written out of the last two episodes of season five after he was accused by Chicago police of orchestrating a staged assault against himself earlier this year.

The 36-year-old was initially charged with 16 felony counts related to filing a false police report, but they were later dropped.

The letter, signed by the actors, including lead stars Taraji P Henson and Terrence Howard, urged the makers to ensure Smollett's return for the sixth season, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

"Together, as a united front, we stand with Jussie Smollett and ask that our co-star, brother and friend be brought back for our sixth season of 'Empire,'" they wrote.

The letter has been addressed to Fox Entertainment CEO Charlie Collier, Disney TV Studios and ABC Entertainment chair Dana Walden, Fox Entertainment president Michael Thorn, as well as "Empire" co-creators Lee Daniels and Danny Strong. "We understand the past

months have been difficult to process sometimes the headlines brought more confusion than clarity, yet we now have a conclusion to the ordeal," the cast said.

"honest" man who is "filled with integrity".

"He is also innocent and no longer subject to legal uncertainty with the



"Throughout 'Empire's' five seasons working with Jussie and watching how he has conducted himself throughout this traumatic event, we have come to know not just the character Jussie portrays, but also truly come to know Jussie's personal character," they added. The cast described Smollett as an

criminal charges against him having been dropped. We are confident in his lawyer's assurance that the case was dismissed because it would not have prevailed," they said.

The letter has also been signed by actors Bryshere Y Gray, Trai Byers, Gabourey Sidibe and Nicole Ari Parker.

Randeep Hooda to play a cop in Bhansali's comic-thriller



MUMBAI, APR 25 (PTI): Filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali's next production will feature actor Randeep Hooda in the role of a cop.

The film has been described as a comic-thriller with a social message.

"The film is a thriller comedy. It is a rom-com. It has a social message and deals with an issue that is considered taboo in small town.

"It has Randeep in the lead as a cop. He will be seen in a different avatar. It is not like 'Dabangg' style cop. We are looking for the female lead," sources close to the development said.

The film will mark the directorial debut of Balwinder Singh Janjua, the scribe of films such as "Mubarakan", "Firan-gi" and yet-to-be-released "Saand Ki Aankh". It will be produced by

Bhansali's banner.

The project will go on floors by September or October and is likely to release in the first quarter of next year.

Bhansali is currently busy with his next directorial venture "Inshallah", featuring Salman Khan and Alia Bhatt.

Randeep will next star in Intiaz Ali's remake of "Love Aaj Kal", featuring Sara Ali Khan and Kartik Aaryan in the lead.

Sara Ali Khan to star opposite Varun Dhawan in 'Coolie No 1' adaptation

MUMBAI, APR 24 (PTI): Sara Ali Khan is set to star in the modern version of "Coolie No 1", the makers announced Wednesday.

There were speculations that the actor, who made her Bollywood debut with 2018's "Kedarnath", would be playing the female lead opposite Varun Dhawan in the modern adaptation of the hit comedy.

The original, which starred Govinda and Karisma Kapoor in the lead, was directed by Varun's father, filmmaker David Dhawan. David is return-

ing to direct the new movie, which is produced by Vashu Bhagnani who also backed the 1995 film.

"It's official... After 25 years David Dhawan and Vashu Bhagnani come back together to adapt their timeless comedy, 'Coolie No 1'. The film starring Varun Dhawan and Sara Ali Khan begins shoot this August," a statement from the makers read.

After "Judwaa 2", the film marks David and Varun's second collaboration.

While Varun's latest release was "Kalank", Sara was last seen in "Simmba".

Though a big star, Alia is hardworking and inspiring: Tiger

MUMBAI, APR 24 (PTI): Actor Tiger Shroff recently shot for a song with Alia Bhatt for his upcoming "Student of the Year 2" and says the actor is open to new ideas on sets, despite having achieved great success.

It was Karan Johar's 2012 film "Student of the Year" that marked the debut of Alia, along with Varun Dhawan, Sidharth Malhotra, and now seven years later, its sequel features Tiger along with newcomers Tara Sutaria and Ananya Panday.

Tiger said shooting the song with Alia was a fun experience.

"It is a different sort of a song that I have shot. Personally, I have not done something like that before. Working with Alia was an amazing experience," he told reporters.

"Though she is such a big star, she was so easy to work with, she was so open and hardworking on set, ever after achieving so much. It was really inspiring being around her," he added. The actor was speaking at the song launch of his film, which has been directed by Punit Malhotra.

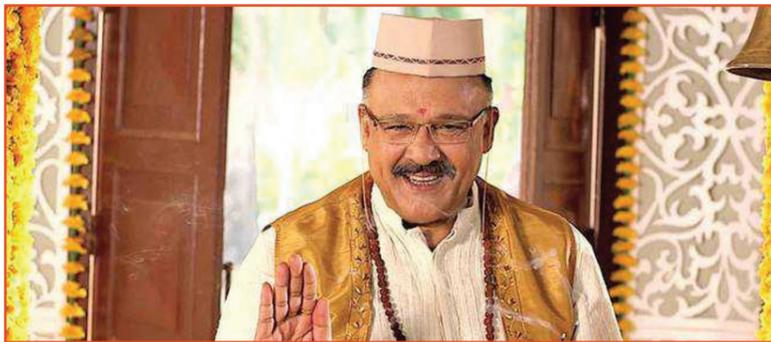
The college-drama will be a departure for Tiger, usually known to star in heavy-duty action films, but the actor says it wasn't as if "Student of the Year 2" was a breather for him.

"I am very glad that I got a chance to work on 'Student of Year 2'. It's a total different world for me all together. It is a very different character too. I am not Superman, you punch me and I bleed. It is not like I am indestructible. "I am thankful that I had Karan sir and Punit sir for guiding me through the journey, for holding my hand through every scene. I wouldn't say it was a breather, but it was a light and a fun experience."



LOL! The Younger actress, Hilary Duff cracks up during filming of the show in NYC.

Film featuring Alok Nath struggling to find distribution, producer says it's unfair



MUMBAI, APR 25 (PTI): Producer Imran Khan says his upcoming project "Main Bhi", featuring Alok Nath as a judge, is struggling to find a distributor as no one wants to touch the film owing to the rape allegation against the veteran actor.

The producer claims some distributors along with his publicity partners are shying away from the film as Nath's image has been "tainted". "I shot this film much before the #MeToo allegations and his ban came up. My film was complete in July. I've been trying to release

the film since February. "My publicity and advertisement partners, who had given me the word to pump in money for release, have now backed out. There are distributors I know who aren't ready to take it," Imran told PTI. The TV actor-turned-producer said, "I wish they let the court take its course. If I had made the film after his accusations and the ban, then I can understand."

Imran said the film's chances of getting a release was damaged further due to the controversy surrounding "De De Pyaar De", which also features Nath.

The producers of the film, headlined by Ajay Devgn, came under fire from Tanushree Dutta, who had kick-started the #MeToo movement in India, for retaining portions of Nath, shot before the allegations surfaced.

"Because of the Ajay Devgn controversy, it has fanned the fire. The industry will be different to me and to Ajay. He is a big shot producer and has his own distribution. Things aren't the same. I didn't expect people who were helping me to distance themselves because of this issue."

ARIES: Career coup! As the moon mingles with first Saturn and then power broker Pluto in your ambitious tenth house, you could earn a well-deserved payday or promotion. And not a moment too soon! You've been toiling away with your nose to the grindstone—and not just to earn brownie points, thank you very much.

TAURUS: "The whole truth and nothing but" is your agenda at today's penetrating merger between the moon and first Saturn and then Pluto. Stop at nothing, Bull, until you excavate the hidden facts and figures you've been looking for. Don the detective's chapeau and start digging. Check the legitimacy of your sources too, since some people might be telling you what they think you want to hear.

GEMINI: Secrets always hurt someone, Gemini. There's a fine line between spilling the beans out of loyalty and opting out of other people's business entirely. So which will it be? On the one hand, you would hate to breach trust, but on the other, someone else's reputation could be at stake. As a rule of thumb, steer

clear of any conversation that drifts into gossip terrain.

CANCER: Gather round the negotiation table, Cancer. Deliberations are the name of the game under today's cosmic cabal between the moon and first Saturn and then Pluto in your partnership house. While it may seem like you're hitting a wall with someone who just won't budge, your powers of persuasion are amplified now. It's going to take some give and take, but DO stand firm on your principles.

LEO: Easy there, Leo! The stars fire a warning salvo, urging you to slow down. You might be ready to go at it hard, but missing important details in haste could backfire later. Today's intense meetups between the moon and first Saturn and then Pluto advise you not to make ego- or fear-based decisions. Instead, trust your intuition while doing as much research as you need. Sure, it's painstaking to comb through the nitty-gritty and address the minutiae of a project. But later, you'll be thankful you didn't cut corners. Remember,

this is a marathon, not a sprint.

LIBRA: Home is where your Libran heart is today. Share the love with your closest companions, nurturing your relationships with random acts of kindness. Channel the domestic vibes at the office, bringing in a batch of gluten-free muffins or little succulents for everyone's desk. If someone dear to you has been struggling, lend them your ear and listen without interrupting or judging.

VIRGO: It's showtime, Virgo! Fame-focused meetups of the moon with first masterful Saturn and then potent Pluto puts your name in lights. Keep your inbox organized! You won't want to miss that impromptu VIP invite or media request for an interview. Just make sure you give credit where it's due and show your appreciation to your supporters and fans, ideally in a public forum.

SCORPIO: Generosity is a wonderful thing, but are you expecting something in return for your noble act of goodwill? As the moon links up with first Saturn and then Pluto, take a hard look at your magnanimity. If you're placing expectations on other people, you're setting

the stage for resentment. Practice giving without secretly hoping you'll get something in return.

SAGITTARIUS: Today's connections between the moon and first serious Saturn and then power broker Pluto in your money zone prompts a deeper look at your financial patterns. Think before you reach for your wallet, especially when it comes to a large expense that maybe just maybe you don't really need. If you're frustrated by a lack of momentum in your career, look back at how much progress you've made since you first began this trajectory!

CAPRICORN: Are you suffering needlessly by working yourself to the bone? Sure, your tireless ambition and persistence reaps great success, but it doesn't have to be such a struggle either. Today, the Capricorn moon connects to (first) pragmatic Saturn, your ruler, and then penetrating Pluto, encouraging you to reach for the low-hanging fruit and simplify your goal-setting!

AQUARIUS: Plt's hard for you to say no, Aquarius, but will saying yes drain you? Set

firm boundaries with a needy friend or loved one as the moon gets in step with (first) stern Saturn and then moody Pluto. Watch for temptation to dive in for the rescue; save the hero act for another time. You don't have to dismiss this person entirely. Show your support by asking poignant questions to help them draw their own conclusions. There's only so much hand-holding and coddling you can do before resentment ensues. Empower them to figure this out on their own!

PISCES: There's nothing wrong with sharing the limelight, Pisces. Invite someone you admire to join you on the stage or hitch your wagon to a rising star's. Today's collaborative cabal of the moon and first Saturn and then Pluto sparks synergy between you and the like-minded trailblazers in your sphere. Organize an epic brainstorming session and let the creative juices flow! You may have to set aside some chemistry to see this one through since romance could distract you from formulating your next big idea. No shame in a little flirting...there's plenty of time to explore that part of your connection later on.