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SummitTIMES

Vol 04 | Issue 211 | Gangtok | Wednesday | 07 August 2019

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

DON'T TINKER WITH SPECIAL STATUS PROVISIONS IN NORTHEAST: PARTIES, GROUPS; CENTRAL GOVT SAYS NO INTENTION

371 series safe, Home Minister assures

GANGTOK/NEW DELHI, AUG 6 (PTI): Several parties and organisations in the Northeast have asked the Centre not to tinker with special status provisions in place in their states even as Union Home Minister Amit Shah Tuesday asserted the government has no intention to remove any of the Art 371 series which gives such rights.

While Opposition parties in Sikkim sought an assurance from the Centre that the state's special status enshrined under Article 371F will not be disturbed, there were apprehensions in Nagaland and Mizoram in the wake of how Article 370 has been hollowed out that the NDA government may remove the special rights enjoyed by people there.

However, Shah while replying to a debate on resolution for abrogating some provisions of Article 370 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorgani-

sation Bill 2019, said that the Narendra Modi government has no intention to remove Art 371 which gives certain special rights to some Northeast states.

Most of the states that have been accorded special provisions under Article 371 are in the northeast and the special status aims to preserve their tribal culture.

Article 371A deals with Nagaland, Article 371B with Assam, and Articles 371C, 371G and 371H deal with Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh and Article 371F with Sikkim.

The main objective of inserting Article 371B was to facilitate the creation of the sub-state 'Meghalaya'.

Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) and Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP) were of the view that the Art 371F should not be tinkered with as the situation in the Northeastern state is different from Jammu and Kashmir.

SDF leader KT



Gyaltsen said Sikkim has been a peaceful state ever since it became a part of the Indian union in 1975 contrary to the situation in Jammu and Kashmir since 1947.

Gyaltsen, who was the speaker of Sikkim Assembly from 2009 to 2014, said Article 371F is there to "stay forever as the integration of Sikkim with the Union of India is

final and irrevocable".

There has been a sense of unease among the people of Sikkim ever since the news of abrogation of special status to Jammu and Kashmir

came, HSP spokesperson Biraj Adhikari told PTI.

"The special status accorded to us are very different from that in Jammu & Kashmir," he said. In Nagaland, political parties

and tribal organisations said that a similar move in the state would jeopardise the ongoing peace process and hurt the sentiment of the Nagas.

Negotiations are cur-

rently on between the Centre and the insurgents groups to resolve the decades-old Naga political problem.

"As an Opposition party, we are confident that the central government will not dare to take the Jammu and Kashmir path in Nagaland, lest the sentiments of Naga people are hurt and the consequences would be severe," said Achumbemo Kikon, spokesperson of the opposition Naga People's Front (NPF).

Mutsikhoyo Yhobu, a Naga leader associated with various tribal bodies and civil societies, said the NDA government is more focused on creation of Uniform Civil Code and maintained that it was high time for the Naga people and the state government to react strongly before it is too late.

Naga Mothers Association adviser Rosemary Dzuwiche said repeal of Article 370 was a violation

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BJP-Sikkim discusses membership drive and by-elections



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 06 AUG:**

A coordination meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Sikkim unit was held in Gangtok on Monday.

The meeting was chaired by BJP-Sikkim president, DB Chauhan, and was attended by vice-presidents Devi Basnet and Mohan Gurung, treasurer GD Agarwal, East District President YT Lepcha and other party workers.

The main purpose behind the meeting was to streamline coordination

between party cadre and boost the party's membership drive across the State.

The meeting also discussed the party strategy for the up-coming Assembly by-elections and resolved to field candidates from all three constituencies.

The party also prepared a special strategy for Gangtok constituency. In follow-up, all the booths in Gangtok will be visited to look into the problems of the resident and expand the party's membership.

Soon, a coordinating

committee will be formed for the same, a BJP press release informs.

The party also decided to prepare a by-poll strategy for Martam-Rumtek and Poklok Kamrang constituencies.

Meanwhile, the party's membership extension program was held today at Sombarey, West Sikkim, led by the West District president of the party, Sanjit Hang Subba, and RT Lepcha, who was the BJP candidate for Daramdin constituency during the last assembly election.

HSP "disturbed" by Sikkim-Darjeeling merger talk on social media

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 06 JUL:**

Hamro Sikkim Party has shared it is "disturbed" by talks of Sikkim-Darjeeling merger circulating on social media of late.

Sikkim's merger was actually an annexation which was then justified by the 35th amendment to the Constitution of India and then by the 36th amendment which granted Sikkim special status, the party has said in a press release issued today.

This was done to satisfy the international community because of laws that were international in nature, as Sikkim had a treaty with the Government of India which governed all interactions between the two, the release adds.

"In view of this, any unilateral move by the Centre to again change the status of Sikkim would be akin to opening enquiry and scrutiny into these conditions as dictated by international laws. The party feels that it is a situation which does not suit the Centre nor the state at the present juncture and cautions the Central Government that the people of Sikkim shall not accept any such unilateral moves, and will oppose it," the release adds.

The HSP would also like to assure the people of Sikkim that the party shall not stand back and watch if any such move is contemplated either by the Centre or any other vested interests, HSP has reiterated.

Heavenly Path thanks CM for clearing spiritual leader's Sikkim visit

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 06 AUG:**

Heavenly Path Organisation has expressed gratitude towards Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golyay] for allowing its spiritual leader, Om Nanda Bhakta Kumar Rai, to visit Sikkim. The organisation has also thanked the State government for allocating Rs 1 crore in the budget session for the Akhanda Deep project of HPO in Sikkim.

A letter from the Home Department to HPO Sikkim president, Manu Rani Limboo, issued on 29 July conveys that the State Government was pleased to allow Om Nanda Bhakta Kumar Rai to visit Sikkim whenever he wishes to just like any other Nepali or Indian citizen who have free access to each others' country as per the Treaty of Friendship 1950.

It is informed that the last time he visited Sikkim was in April 2016



when he visited Jorethang in South Sikkim and since that he has not been allowed to visit Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, the HPO Sikkim president expressed her deep gratitude towards the State Government and the Chief Minister on behalf of all followers across the world for allowing their spiritual leader to visit Sikkim.

She conveyed that followers were very happy and excited with the decision of the State

government taken within two months of taking charge.

Likewise, Vyas Nanda Guruji of the HPO stated that they had struggled for a long time under the earlier government to bring their spiritual leader to Sikkim.

He stressed that it was "great injustice" that the last government heaped on HPO followers who even sat on an 8-day dharna in front of the District Administrative Centre [East] to press for their demands.

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Kashmir Valley blacked out, anxiety deepens despite official assurances

NEW DELHI/JAMMU, AUG 6 (PTI): The situation in all three regions of Jammu and Kashmir is totally peaceful, top officials said on Tuesday but that did little to dispel the clouds of anxiety for lakhs of Kashmiris and many others as another day went by with the Valley blacked out from the world. With few workable phone and internet connections, just smatterings of information filtered out from the curtain of non-communication.

There was also no news of former chief ministers, NC's Omar Abdullah and PDP's Mehbooba Mufti, as well as People's Conference's leader Sajjad Lone, who were arrested in Srinagar on Monday evening.

There are no untoward reports from any-

where in the state and the law and order situation in Jammu and Kashmir is "totally peaceful", Director General of Police Dilbagh Singh said from Srinagar, a day after the Rajya Sabha approved the resolution withdrawing the state's special status under Article 370 and the bill proposing that it be bifurcated into the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

On Tuesday evening, the Lok Sabha gave its approval too.

Television channels aired visuals of celebratory fireworks as news came in of Parliament approving the government's far-reaching move.

In Srinagar city, under a security and communications lockdown, people with urgent work are being allowed to move despite strict

restrictions, Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar, Shahid Iqbal Choduhary said in his message.

General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command, Lt Gen Ranbir Singh chaired a meeting of the Core Group of Intelligence and Security Agencies in Srinagar to review the operational readiness in case of any contingency.

Pakistan, he said, has intensified its efforts at increasing the strength of terrorists in launch pads along the LoC over the past few days and pushing infiltrators into Jammu and Kashmir. But the Indian Army will respond with resolve and the costs will be prohibitive for them, he said.

According to a press release issued by Udhampur-based Army officials, Singh also said

necessary security arrangements were in place to ensure peace and security.

But all of that was scant comfort, even for NC chief Farooq Abdullah. The 81-year-old said he learnt about the arrests of his son Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba only through the media.

He contested Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion in the Lok Sabha that he was neither under detention nor arrest and was at his home of his own will. Emotional but determined, he said they will fight and go to court against the Modi government's decision.

"As soon as the gates will open, our people will be out, we will fight, we'll go to the court. We're not gun-runners, grenade-throwers, stone-throwers,

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Young Talent Artistes Award 2018-2019

GANGTOK, 05 AUG (IPR): North East Zone Cultural Center, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, Dimapur invites application for Young Talent Artistes Award for the year 2018-2019 from outstanding candidates, talented/skilled in the categories of Folk and Tribal Music/Song and Dance, Theater, Dance Drama, Mime, Painting, Wood, Cane & Bamboo Crafts, Traditional Handloom & Handicrafts, Pottery, etc.

Young artistes/artisans in the age group of 18 to 30 years (as on 31 Mar, 2020) are eligible to apply for the award. The award consists of Rs 10,000, Citation and Memento.

Candidates should be an Indian citizen and Indigenous to the eight North Eastern States, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, As-

sam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Candidates who have received any such Awards (State/National) earlier in the same field are not eligible for the Scheme.

Deserving artistes/artisans may collect Application Form from the Office of the Directorate of Art & Culture/Cultural Affairs, Government of Arunachal Pradesh/Assam/Manipur/Meghalaya/Mizoram/Nagaland/Sikkim, Tripura, Shilpgram, Panjabari, Guwahati and Headquarter Office, Dimapur.

The form is available in NEZCC Website <https://nezccdimapur.org.in> and <https://www.facebook.com/NE2CC>. The last date to receive the application is on 31 Aug, 2019 and no application received thereafter will be entertained.

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Heavenly Path...

“The earlier government did not listen to our repeated requests to bring our spiritual leader to Sikkim. Now, this new government in the State has given a big justice to us by allowing our leader to visit Sikkim. We will never forget this big gesture and this will always be remembered,” he said.

Vyas Nanda Guruji also thanked the CM for immediately working on their demand of Akhanda Deep project.

Responding to media queries, he informed that preparations and discussions have been going on to bring their spiritual leader to Sikkim at the earliest.

He shared plans to meet the CM regarding the visit and finalise the dates.

TMC will strongly oppose bill to bifurcate J&K: Mamata

KOLKATA, AUG 6 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister on Tuesday said her party, the Trinamool Congress, will strongly oppose the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill that proposes to bifurcate the state into two union territories. Banerjee also said the Centre should have consulted all political parties before coming to a decision to scrap Constitutional provisions that accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

The chief minister was talking to reporters at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport here before heading to Chennai, to unveil a statue of DMK leader and former chief minister M Karunanidhi.

“The government could have taken the decision after consulting all the political parties and Kashmiris. There was no vote or discussion on the Kashmir issue. This is not democratic. We will oppose it tooth and nail,” Banerjee said. Home Minister Amit Shah had on Monday moved a resolution in the Lok Sabha for bringing a bill to reorganise the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

The government also revoked Article 370 which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

CSmeetsindustrialheads



GANGTOK, 06 AUG (IPR): A meeting with Industrial Plant heads in co-ordination with the Commerce & Industries Department was held in the conference hall of Tashiling Secretariat on Monday.

The Chief Secretary chaired the meeting. Present with him were Additional Chief Secretary-Commerce & Industries, Thomas Chandy; Additional Chief Secretary- Education Department, GP Upadhyaya; Development Commissioner and Additional Chief Secretary-Planning & Development, VB Pathak; Commissioner cum Secretary-Health & Family Welfare Department, Vishal Chauhan; Secretary-Commerce & Industries, SK Pradhan and Secretary-Labour Department, SB Subba. Other officials from Commerce & Industries were also present in the meeting while representatives from several industries like V-Guard Industries Limited, Godrej Consumer Products Limited, etc. participated in the discussion.

The Chief Secretary briefly discussed the agenda and the Points of Discussion on the onset. The nine-points are as follows:

- What is the purpose of the Industries and what the products manufactured?
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- Details of labour working in the unit
- Labour Contract System
- Perks and facilities being provided to workers
- Transportation provided to workers
- Storage and ware houses
- Promotion prospects for workers
- Pollution Control Measures

He expressed his satisfaction with the functioning of the industries but stated that government desires the expansion of CSR activities for durable commercial assets.

He also spoke on the need for pollution control and cited an example of how companies like Sun Pharma-II was re-pumping used water into their air-conditioning ducts thereby reducing pollution. He suggested that companies use innovative and sensible ideas like these to combat pollution. He concluded by saying that the Chief Minister would most likely join them in the next meeting in this series.

Mr Chandy welcomed the gathering and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss various issues related to the operations and functioning

of the industries and the corporate sector in Sikkim, mainly CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) liabilities. He spoke on the various labour acts that are implemented in the state for the welfare of the working class. He said that minimum wage has to be provided and amenities have to be provided on site and beyond. He asked the industries to bear the pollution control in mind and to be cautious on this regard.

Mr Subba expressed his concern for the well being of the labourers and highlighted the labour acts and laws succinctly.

Mr Upadhyaya advised that the companies and industries integrate with the society by playing the required role in educating the children of their labourers and employees. He stressed that education was important to all and as these industries are benefitting from the society, it is only fair and cogent that they give back to the society. He also suggested that books and relevant literary articles could be donated to the schools.

Mr Chauhan informed that the government pharmacy college under the guidance of the health sector is in close proximity with the pharmaceutical companies through field trips and workshops; the students get a first-hand experience in the pharmacy sphere. He also proposed that these industries participate in their relevant fields and work in tandem with the multi-specialty hospital at Socheygang. He acknowledged and thanked the companies for the equipment received in district and the government health centres through CSR activities and said that the health sector would benefit and grow with more help in kind.

The company representatives stated their list of CSR activities like building footpaths, providing computers and smart classes in government schools and other such activities. Most of these industries have an average of 70-80% of local employees. Even the companies who are not liable to CSR said that they've been involved in various social work and labour and employee welfare.

The company representatives then listed down the points of discussion and their grievances and submitted it to Mr Chandy.

This was the second meeting in the series. The first meeting had taken place on 26 July.

The Joint Labour Commissioner, Mr DS Kanwar, delivered the vote of thanks.

ICAR-NOFRI organises 15-day training on organic farming

GANGTOK, 06 AUG (PIB): ICAR-National Organic Farming Research Institute (ICAR-NOFRI), Tadong concluded 15-day-Training Program on 'Organic Farming' for the Krishi Sakhis of Sikkim Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM), Rural Management and Development Department (RMDD), Govt of Sikkim on 05 Aug, 2019.

The program started on 22 Jul, 2019. A total of 25 Krishi Sakhis from the East and North Districts of Sikkim participated in the training program.

Special Secretary, Anil Raj Rai, Rural Management and Development Department, Govt of Sikkim was the Chief Guest during the valedictory function.

In his address, he said that Krishi Sakhis of RMDD are the symbol of women empowerment. After listening to the feedback of participants, he said that training program was very successful and appreciated the Joint Director and Scientists of ICAR-NOFRI for their sincere efforts in organizing the 15-day long training program.

He mentioned that initially, marketing of organic produce was big problem, however, after construction of Kisan Bazar in Gangtok the problem has been largely resolved. He also briefed about various programs and activities undertaken by RMDD especially Swachh Bharat Mission activities. Chief Guest also distributed training certificates and extension folders to the trainees.

Director, Padam Subba, Horticulture and Cash Crop Development Department (HCCDD), Govt of Sikkim participated as Guest of Honour during the valedictory function. He appreciated and motivated Krishi Sakhis for their ITKs in fermented plant



extract for the management of pest and diseases in Sikkim and that participating in this kind of training program will certainly improve their learning and working abilities. He assured the full cooperation and support from HCCDD for the production of horticultural crops in Sikkim.

Earlier, Joint Director, Dr RK Avasthe, ICAR-NOFRI, in his address highlighted the relevance of this training program for Krishi Sakhis. He said that ICAR-NOFRI is playing important role in developing organic production technologies in Sikkim. He motivated the trainees to learn the organic farming technologies and work with dedication and become the ambassadors of ICAR-NOFRI and RMDD. He further assured full support of ICAR-NOFRI in management of problems in organic farming especially in livestock and poultry. He also said the trainees to keep actively interacting with the scientist of ICAR-NOFRI in future also.

Dr Ashish Yadav, Senior Scientist (Horticulture) coordinated the program and welcomed all the dignitaries. He briefed about the various lectures,

hands-on and other activities undertaken during 15-day training program including the field visit. Scientist (Plant Breeding), Dr Chandan Kapoor proposed vote of thanks. On behalf of all the trainees, Ms NimChiki Sherpa and Ms Laki Doma Bhutia gave the feedback of training program and said that the training was well conducted and they have learned various organic production technologies which shall be very effective for them especially crop rotation with leguminous crops, mulching and green manuring etc. SM Kandwal (Sr Technical Officer) moderated the program. Rajeni Pradhan, Bandan Chettri and Naveen Chand Yadav assisted actively in organizing the program. During the training program, all the trainees also visited the ICAR-NOFRI Research Farm and were briefed about the ongoing research and development activities. During field visits, trainees were taken to KVK, East Sikkim and ICAR-NOFRI adopted model village Thanka-Martam, East Sikkim.

Earlier, during the 15-day training program, trainees were detailed with 'Concept of

physico-chemical and microbiological properties of soil and it's health'; 'Organic nutrient management'; 'Organic farming production standards'; 'organic agronomic practices of major field crops'; 'Organic production technologies of fruits especially Sikkim mandarin, kiwifruit and guava'; 'Intensive organic vegetable production techniques under low cost plastic tunnels and rain shelters'; 'Organic production of red cherry pepper, ginger and turmeric'; 'Organic large cardamom production and role of agro-forestry systems in organic farming'; 'Organic pest and disease management in major crops of Sikkim'; 'Nutrient deficiency symptoms in vegetables'; 'Organic tuber crops production'; 'Nursery raising techniques in organic crop production'; Importance of traditional horticultural crops in organic production system'; Postharvest management of horticultural crops'; 'Commercial flower production under organic management'; 'Backyard poultry and goat production and their role in organic farming'; 'Agribusiness management in organic farming'; 'Organic certification and traceability'; 'Dairy cattle management techniques and their role in organic farming'; 'Organic pig production techniques'; 'Mechanization in horticultural crop production'; 'Mushroom production techniques'; etc. Besides, hands on experience and practical demonstrations were also carried out for mushroom production technology, vermicomposting, plant propagation techniques, training and pruning of kiwifruit, preparations of biopesticides and biofungicides solutions etc.

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371 series safe...

of the democratic rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, describing it as the “darkest hour of the democracy”.

Nagaland Governor RN Ravi also assured that the state would not face the Jammu & Kashmir situation and people need not worry.

“Article 371A is a solemn commitment to the people of Nagaland. It is a sacred commitment. We are earnestly working to happily conclude the ongoing political process which is at a very advanced stage,” he affirmed.

In Mizoram, Article 371G came into effect in 1986 following the signing of the Mizo Accord between the Centre and the erstwhile underground Mizo National Front (MNF). Mizoram, then a Union territory, was granted the status of full-fledged statehood on February 20, 1987.

Newly-floated party People's Representation for Identity and Status of Mizoram said the “Northeastern states were no longer safe in the hands of the NDA government”.

The Centre's decision to revoke provisions of Article 370 and bifurcate Jammu and Kashmir, however, rekindled hope among major parties, which want Darjeeling to be a separate Union territory with a legislature.

The ruling Trinamool Congress, however, said it would oppose any move to bifurcate West Bengal.

Kashmir Valley...

we believe in peaceful resolution of things,” he told TV channels in Srinagar.

Among the few other images that came through the day were desolate streets with security personnel.

With not much to go by, M Junaid, whose Twitter bio said he is a cultural anthropologist, was one of the many thousands who vented their anguish on social media.

“Just so that you know, we have still not been able to speak with our families in Kashmir. There are dark whispers being shared about South Kashmir where my folks are. It has been the longest 24 hours, and there seems no end in sight...,” he said on Tuesday morning.

Unable to express their pain in words, many simply shared the last conversations they had with their loved ones.

Khalid Singh, a Delhi-based associate fellow with the Observer Research Foundation, tweeted, “On my last phone call my mother said: how will you get to know if I die?”

Local Kashmiris and tourists reaching the national capital from Srinagar were full of stories on their “disconnect” from the rest of the country.

“It is back to the stone age for Kashmir, said 42-year-old Khursheed Ahmed, who was heading to Haj via Delhi.

Sheikh, 32, who works in the corporate sector, and travels frequently for business purposes, poured his heart out.

“We felt caged inside in our own city. Our mobile phone connection has been snapped, Internet shut, even cable TVs and landlines connections cut,” he said.

There were also those who looked for ways to go home from the Valley to make another life for themselves.

Like the migrant workers and daily wage labourers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and other heartland states, who told NDTV there were worried about what the future holds for them.

Thousands of them, who come to the Valley to earn livelihood, are stranded in Srinagar as there have been little or no availability of inter-state bus services.

The curfew-like situation has affected their livelihood as there have been a total closure of construction works in parts of the state amid restrictions and heavy security deployment.

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SLSA debate deliberates penalty vs rehabilitation approach to addressing substance abuse

GANGTOK, 05 AUG (IPR): Sikkim State Legal Services Authority, under the directions of Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim and also Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA and as per the State Plan of Action, organized a Debate Competition on "Penalty Or Rehabilitation: Options To Be Exercised For Substance Abusers" for the Students Of Colleges/Universities of Sikkim, on 05 Aug, 2019 at the Auditorium of the Hon'ble High Court of Sikkim.

The programme commenced with a welcome note by Special Secretary, Matilda Isaacs, Sikkim SLSA who gave a brief introduction about the rising menace of drug addiction. The debate competition was held in compliance of the National Legal Services Authority (Legal Services to the Victims of Drug



Abuse and Eradication of Drug Menace) Scheme, 2015 to raise awareness on the topic. It was also informed that the Hon'ble Executive Chairperson has initiated detoxification, counselling and rehabilitation programmes

for UTP's and convicts in the State Jail at Rongyek and Namchi Jail. A Drug De-Addiction-cum-Rehabilitation Centre is being set up at Kitchudumra, South Sikkim along with Vocational/Livelihood Centre for skill develop-

ment of chemically dependent persons, with the initiation of the Hon'ble Executive Chairperson, in tandem with the Social Welfare Department.

Deputy Inspector General, Sonam Tenzing Bhutia, Range, Sikkim

Police, Panel Advocate, Mr TR Barfungpa, Sikkim SLSA and President, Mr KC. Nima, Freedom Facility, Tathangchen judged the competition, where 18 students from Sikkim Government Law College, Burtuk, ICFAI University, Sichey and Sikkim University, Tadong, participated. 81 students from the above College/University were the audience to the programme apart from others.

The first position went to Ms Neha Gupta from Sikkim Government Law College and Mr Iaiiohsame CR Kharmujai from Sikkim University while the second position went to Ms Kinchok Choden Bhutia of ICFAI University and the third position to Ms Deeti Acharya, Sikkim University.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Deputy Secretary, Bikash Sharma, Sikkim SLSA.

Ajambari SHG cooks Mid Day Meal at Lingi Payong School

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 06 AUG:

Ajambari Self Help Group of Lingi Payong in South Sikkim cooked kheer and potato curry in Mid Day Meal for all the students and teachers of Lingi Payong School today, a press release informs. According to Hindu almanac, today was the second Monday of the holy month of Shraavan and auspicious occasion of Nag Panchami.

As such, the SHG took this opportunity to provide their service to the school by organising a feast, the release mentions. The programme was initiated under the leadership of SHG members Ambika Pekurel and Bhagawati Sharma who are also guardian and SMC along with their group members.

Agri Minister visits Integrated Mushroom Unit

MAJHITAR, 06 AUG (IPR): Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma visited the Integrated Mushroom Unit at Majhitar, East Sikkim, this morning.

He toured the various sections and also interacted with Deputy Director, Horticulture, Yogesh Sharma, Horticulture Development Officer JN Sharma and other staff and took stock of various activities being carried out at the Mushroom Unit.

The Minister was also accompanied by the Director Horticulture, Padam Subba.

Deputy Director Horticulture, Yogesh Sharma informed that the production unit provides training and demonstrations to the farmers besides compost production of bottom mushroom and spawn production.

Minister inspects Textile industry at Chingthang



CHINGTHANG, 05 AUG (IPR): Minister-cum-Area MLA of Gyalshing Bermiok constituency, Lok Nath Sharma made an inspection visit at Textile industry located at Mangshil, Berfok ward under Chingthang Gram Panchayat Unit (GPU), West Sikkim, this morning. He was accompanied by the District Collector, West, Karma R Bonpo, Block Development Officer Martam, Mukesh Dahal, Divisional Engineer Roads & Bridge, Phurba Bhutia, AE Martam BAC, RB Silal, AE PHE, Samir Rai, officials and local public.

Minister along with the officials thoroughly inspected the various compartments of the textile and also took a round of the industry to take stock on the present condition of water tank, boundary, approach road, etc.

Thereafter, Minister Sharma chaired a session and briefed the concerned officials to complete various pending works immediately so that the industry would be well furnished before its inauguration scheduled

to be held in the last week of September by the concerned Union Minister.

He also spoke with the Secretary Industry, Thomas Chandy over telephonic call and instructed to take up pending issues of land compensation to the private land holder of approach road, repair of flooring work, testing of machines etc. at the earliest.

He also instructed the AE RMDD to identify water source and submit estimate report before the competent authority to ensure water supply to the industry.

Thereafter, Minister-cum-Area MLA Shri Sharma attended a Special Gram Sabha for selection of Women Sericulture Beneficiaries for the fourth year of Intensive Bi-voltine Sericulture Development Project (IBSDP) at Megyong Chingthang. The programme was organised by the Directorate of Sericulture, Forest Environment and Wildlife Management Department, Government of Sikkim, funded by Ministry of Textile, Government of India.

Shri Sharma, in his address, informed that the ruling government is carrying out various programmes and activities in the field to provide livelihood earning opportunities for the farmers. He congratulated thirty beneficiaries of Megyong and Thangsing ward will be provided Mulberry plantation with fencing, Rearing House, Vermicompost unit and required tools & appliances. Scientist Sericulture, ST Lepcha made a power point presentation on Sericulture while ACF Sericulture, Dilli Ram Sharma drew lights on benefits and facilities being provided under IBSDP.

Consultant Sericulture, DR Sharma enlightened gathering on technical aspects of Sericulture. Later, the Minister along with DC and officials from line departments inspected sinking area at Sagbari under Megyong Ward. Minister interacted with the affected families along Legship Nayabazar Highway and assured to extend cooperation and support from the state government. He also urged to wait for inspection report of Mines & Geology for further needful action.



Tendong Lho Rum Faat and I-Day preparations reviewed

GAYLSHING, 05 AUG (IPR): A review meeting of preparations for the state-level Tendong Lho Rum Faat Festival and 73rd Independence Day celebration held at Zilla Assembly Hall, West District

Zilla Panchayat, Gaylshing today.

Deputy Speaker Sangay Lepcha, who is also the president of the organising committee, informed that preparations for Tendong Lho Rum Faat have been completed.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) is scheduled to attend as the chief guest. The Deputy Speaker urged the departments and organizations to deliver on their assigned responsibilities.

Quiz contest to continue legal education and professional development



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 06 AUG:

Sikkim State Legal Services Authority, under the directions of Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim, who is also the SLSA Executive Chairperson, conducted a quiz contest as part of its "Continuing Legal Education and Professional Development" programme for novice members of the legal profession and law students of various Colleges and Universities.

The inaugural function was presided over by Chief Justice Vijai Kumar Bist.

Participants comprised of students from Sikkim Government Law College, ICFAI University, Sikkim University and advocates with below eight years of practice from all four districts.

The preliminary and elimination rounds had been conducted by District Judges and senior advocates in their respective districts as Quiz Masters.

After the preliminary rounds, the final round of the Academic Quiz Contest was held on today at the High Court of Sikkim auditorium with six teams comprising of Advocates from South and West District and students from Sikkim Government Law College, Burtuk, participated.

The Quiz was conducted by Justice Pius C Kuriakose, former Chief Justice, High Court of Sikkim, former Lok Ayukta, Kerala and currently the President of Panampilly Academy for Continuing Legal Education, along with Registrar KW Bhutia as the Assistant Quiz Master.

The programme was attended by Mr Justice AP Subba, former Judge, High Court of Sikkim, Registrar General, Registrar, Judicial Officers and Officers of the High Court of Sikkim Registry and faculty members and students of the participating Institution.

Bikalp Karki and Sashi Pradhan, advocates from West District, came in the first place, Deo Kumar Chettri and Kinzum Sherpa, students from Sikkim Government Law College stood second and Rewarshi Rai and Rupesh Rizal, students from Sikkim Government Law College came in third.

The welcome address was delivered by Special Secretary, Matilda Isaacs, Sikkim SLSA while the vote of thanks was proposed by Dichen Dadul Bhutia.

Modernites bring Bhanu & Pala to Gangtok



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 06 AUG:

Modernite, the alumni association of Modern Senior Secondary School, organised a charity show, "Bhanu ra Pala" at Manan Kendra on Sunday with Forest Minister Karma Loday Bhutia as chief guest, and Principal Modern School, Mala Zigdel, as guest of honour.

President of the alumni association, Budha Subba, welcomed the

guests while general secretary Prakash Sundas presented a report on the association's activities.

The charity show was organized to raise funds for a smart class in the kinder garden section of the school.

"We are thankful to each and every one who helped us organize this charity show Bhanu ra Pala 4, our special thanks to Advisor Modernite, Tenzing N Lamtha who supported

us tirelessly and encouraged us and motivated us to proceed with this event. We are also very much thankful to the Principal, Teachers, Staff and students of Modern School for their support.

We would like invite our all Ex Students of Modern Sr Sec School to be a part of Modernite and to endeavor to repay to our alma mater in whatever way possible," a press release conveys.

We will fight, will go to court: Farooq Abdullah on Art370

SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, AUG 6 (PTI): Comparing the revocation of Article 370 by the Centre as "body being carved", National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah on Tuesday said they will fight and go to court against the Modi government's decision.

In his first remarks since the Union government on Monday revoked provisions of Article 370 to take away state's special status, and proposed its bifurcation into the Union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, Abdullah said a "dictatorial" authority has been invoked and not a "democratic" one.

Talking to TV channels in Srinagar, Abdullah said, "as soon as the gates will open, our people will be out, we will fight, we'll go to the court. We're not gun-runners, grenade-throwers, stone-throwers, we be-

lieve in peaceful resolution of things."

"They want to murder us, we are ready, my chest is ready, fire here, not into my back," 81-year-old Abdullah said in an emotional outburst.

He also contested Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion in Parliament that he was neither under detention nor arrest and was at his home out of his own will.

The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said there was a big padlock on his door and he had to "force himself" to come out and speak to the media.

"I heard the statement of the home minister of India that Farooq Abdullah is free and is staying in the house out of his own will. I thought how can he be lying when a DSP has been placed outside my house and no one can come in and no

one can go out," he said.

"I feel sorry that the home minister of India can lie like this," he added.

Responding to NCP's Supriya Sule in Lok Sabha, Shah said, "he (Abdullah) is neither under detention nor under arrest. He is at his home on his own will."

When Sule wondered whether the National conference leader was unwell, Shah said it was up to the doctors to say, "I can't carry out the treatment, it was up to doctors," he said.

Getting teary-eyed while talking to reporters, Abdullah said after "dividing the regions, are they going to divide people's hearts also. Are they going to put Muslims one side, Hindus one side, Buddhists one side? Is that what they want? Is this what India is. My India is for all, everyone who believes in a secular nation,

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Divided in Suspicion

Anyone can deal in whispers, it takes leaders to deliver coherence

It is worrying how discussions on communalism continue to remain in circulation and of how often different sections and groups keep crying wolf, painting monsters only they see and hyperventilating over threats only they perceive and project. After all, into how many slivers can a population of barely 6 lakh people be divided? Of course, with some sections, the divisions are a simple two-way process of “us” and “them”, and that is a disturbing condition to suffer because that reduces every disagreement into an attack, every counter argument into an attempt to deny or subvert and people into binary compositions.

To begin with, let us not deny that divisions exist within the Sikkimese society. That much is natural, but what has also been exceptionally reassuring about the State is that the privately held prejudices have not been allowed by the people to pour out in public displays of communal posturing; at least not in a scale that causes any more damage than hurt feelings. The State, despite some close calls, has never suffered a communal clash. Its politics and several politicians have often succumbed to communalism though and continue to do so, but the people have performed much better. The politics of social engineering, of stitching together winning vote-bank combinations have also been tried, and have, thankfully failed as well in Sikkim.

But, if people are resistant to communal confrontations, why is the bogey raised so often here? Perhaps because it is an easy divide to hack away at and experience elsewhere has shown that the people's defenses eventually crumble in the face of persistent communal scare-mongering. Given that everyone belongs to some community or the other, it is an accepted fact that people are also inherently communal, at least in as much as having a soft corner, if not hate, is concerned. Also, because we are social animals, this inherent communal streak seldom develops into paranoia or gets directed against other communities because in a small place like Sikkim everyone needs everyone else. This conditioning of social grooming, however, gets stressed when the leader of a pack smells blood – the possibility of making an issue emotive and convincing a people that they are under threat. Few things move off the counter faster than a fabricated conspiracy theory. The more dramatic the fabrication, the more looming is the threat perception. Years of shepherding a disinterested public has honed the skills of these leaders and they are only aided by the blunted perspicacity of the people. People share the blame of allowing space for such voices which keep growing in belligerence because no one holds them to account.

One must realise that India has perhaps the best, most detailed Constitution at hand for the protection of its minorities. Ironically, the minorities still feel perpetually threatened in our country. It is unlikely that any minority was ever threatened as a state policy in the past; it was the majority they feared. As time passed, this suspicion fermented into animosity and now teeters on the brink of hatred. When one weighs in the current environment where hate crimes result often from the not so subtle nudging from the new powers in Delhi, one shudders to think what madness still awaits the country. In that light, one is almost relieved that the ultra-nationalist brigade has rediscovered an enemy in Pakistan because that just might keep their paws off the victims back home. But, like always, we digress here. One needs to ask who allowed such hate and such suspicions to get so normal? Surely not the people, because they are too preoccupied with aam-aadmi concerns. It's the leaders who failed us. This deduction holds as true for Sikkim as it does for the nation.

Those claiming to represent communities started becoming instigators instead of counselors. These leaders forget that democracy offers people the right to self-determination, the right to negotiate, the right to harmonise. Instead, they allowed their supporters only the options of complaint, bickering and suspicion. Someone who speaks for a community should bridge the communication gap between communities. Anyone can deal in whispers, but it takes a leader to represent a cause and mediate.

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Mail us at: news@summittimes.com



Fresh vigilance is needed to protect media freedom across Africa

JEFF CONROY-KRUTZ
theconversation.com

One of the least enviable tasks of journalists in the US must be reporting on how the public trusts their work less and less. A 2018 study found that only about four in ten Americans had at least a “fair” amount of trust in the media. Also, in a June 2019 survey, a full third of respondents agreed with President Donald Trump that the news media are “the enemy of the people.”

The US isn't unique in this respect. A study last year by the Reuters Institute and Oxford University found that, across 37 countries, trust in the media stood at only 44%. Countries that had particularly abysmal scores included Hungary, Greece and South Korea. And in Africa new data suggests citizens' support for press freedoms is in sharp decline.

This news isn't just bad for journalists' self-esteem. Erosion in public confidence in the media could embolden leaders with autocratic tendencies. It could also provoke violence against journalists, limits on freedoms of expression, and an undermining of democracy more broadly.

DECLINING SUPPORT FOR FREE MEDIA

Afrobarometer, an independent African research network, has been tracking African citizens' attitudes on political, economic, and social issues since 1999. Its latest round of surveys, conducted between 2016 and 2018, included more than 45,000 respondents in 34 countries.

Most say they support democracy. But there are indications that confidence in institutions like elections and the media might be declining.

In surveys conducted between 2011 and 2013, a majority (56%) of people interviewed in 31 countries supported the media's right to publish any views and ideas without government control. Only 39% said the government should have the “right to prevent the media from publishing things

that it considers harmful to society”.

But in the intervening years, support for media freedoms has declined sharply. The most recent survey showed that only 46% supported press freedoms; 49% favoured some government censorship.

This marks the first time that Afrobarometer has found government restrictions to be more popular than media freedoms.

These declines are not limited to a few countries. Echoing trends elsewhere in the world, nearly every country in Africa has seen sharp declines in support for press freedom in the last decade. The biggest drops were in Tunisia (-21 points), Uganda (-21), Cabo Verde (-27), and Tanzania (-33).

These responses suggest that people are reacting to many of the same changes in media environments that are causing disenchantment around the globe. These include increasingly partisan outlets, social media that facilitate the spread of hate speech and “fake news”, and politicians who find it increasingly easy to downplay critical reporting by making reporters themselves targets.

THREATS TO FREE PRESS

Across much of Africa, journalists and other media practitioners are finding it increasingly difficult to work. Governments in Uganda and Tanzania are enforcing new restrictions on media.

In addition, full and partial shutdowns of Internet and social media are becoming increasingly common. In 2019 such shutdowns occurred in Benin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe. Chadians went without social media for 16 months before services were restored in June 2019. The government of President Idriss Déby, who has been in power since 1990, claimed the shutdown was necessary because some were using the Internet for “malicious purposes.”

Many of these countries have had broader problems with a lack of democratic accountability.

But even Ghana, perennially rated as one of the continent's most democratic countries, has seen serious threats to press freedom recently. In June 2019, two journalists – Emmanuel Ajarfor Abugri and Emmanuel Yeboah Britwum – were arrested, apparently due to their reporting on a powerful government minister.

WHY PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR FREE MEDIA MATTERS

Declines in support for press freedoms are concerning. Increased support for government limitations on media doesn't suggest that there is broad popular sentiment favouring Internet shutdowns, closures of television stations, and violence against journalists. And it does not mean that people in Africa generally support returning to the days of state-run monopolies of broadcast outlets and the heavy-handed censor's red pen.

But it's imperative that African leaders are called to account for any encroachments on media freedom. While rhetorical attacks on the press by leaders like Trump, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte, and Poland's Andrej Duda have received attention for stoking popular vitriol against journalists, these leaders are also taking advantage of deeper and long-evolving declines in popular support for the media.

In some African countries threatening words too often turn into action. Examples include Uganda's “social media taxes” intended to squelch opposition voices, the teargassing of newsrooms in Zimbabwe, the criminalisation of reporting certain kinds of content in Burkina Faso, and impunity for violence against journalists.

A failure to denounce these actions could – even unwittingly – contribute to dismantling one of the most essential underpinnings of democracy: a free press.

[the writer is Associate Professor of Political Science, Michigan State University]

Stop blaming video games for mass killings

CHRISTOPHER J. FERGUSON
theconversation.com

In the wake of the El Paso shooting on Aug. 3 that left 22 dead and dozens injured, a familiar trope has re-emerged: Often, when a young man is the shooter, people try to blame the tragedy on violent video games and other forms of media.

This time around, Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick placed some of the blame on a video game industry that “teaches young people to kill.” Republican House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California went on to condemn video games that “dehumanize individuals” as a “problem for future generations.” And President Trump pointed to society's “glorification of violence,” including “gruesome and grisly video games.”

These are the same connections a Florida lawmaker made after the Parkland shooting in February 2018, suggesting that the gunman in that case “was prepared to pick off students like it's a video game.”

But, as a researcher who has studied violent video games for almost 15 years, I can state that there is no evidence to support these claims that violent media and real-world violence are connected.

As far back as 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that research did not find a clear connection between violent video games and aggressive behavior. Criminologists who study mass shootings specifically refer to those sorts of connections as a “myth.” And in 2017, the Media Psychology and Technology division of the American Psychological Association released a statement I helped

craft, suggesting reporters and policymakers cease linking mass shootings to violent media, given the lack of evidence for a link.

A HISTORY OF A MORAL PANIC

So why are so many policymakers inclined to blame violent video games for violence? There are two main reasons.

The first is the psychological research community's efforts to market itself as strictly scientific. This led to a replication crisis instead, with researchers often unable to repeat the results of their studies. Now, psychology researchers are reassessing their analyses of a wide range of issues – not just violent video games, but implicit racism, power poses and more.

The other part of the answer lies in the troubled history of violent video game research specifically.

Beginning in the early 2000s, some scholars, anti-media advocates and professional groups like the APA began working to connect a methodologically messy and often contradictory set of results to public health concerns about violence. This echoed historical patterns of moral panic, such as 1950s concerns about comic books and Tipper Gore's efforts to blame pop and rock music in the 1980s for violence, sex and Satanism.

Particularly in the early 2000s, dubious evidence regarding violent video games was uncritically promoted. But over the years, confidence among scholars that violent video games influence aggression or violence has crumbled.

REVIEWING ALL THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

My own research has examined the degree to which violent video

games can – or can't – predict youth aggression and violence. In a 2015 meta-analysis, I examined 101 studies on the subject and found that violent video games had little impact on kids' aggression, mood, helping behavior or grades.

Two years later, I found evidence that scholarly journals' editorial biases had distorted the scientific record on violent video games. Experimental studies that found effects were more likely to be published than studies that had found none. This was consistent with others' findings. As the Supreme Court noted, any impacts due to video games are nearly impossible to distinguish from the effects of other media, like cartoons and movies.

Any claims that there is consistent evidence that violent video games encourage aggression are simply false.

Spikes in violent video games' popularity are well-known to correlate with substantial declines in youth violence – not increases. These correlations are very strong, stronger than most seen in behavioral research. More recent research suggests that the releases of highly popular violent video games are associated with immediate declines in violent crime, hinting that the releases may cause the drop-off.

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

With so little evidence, why are lawmakers still trying to blame violent video games for mass shootings by young men? Can groups like the National Rifle Association seriously blame imaginary guns for gun violence?

A key element of that problem is the willingness of professional guild

organizations such as the APA to promote false beliefs about violent video games. (I'm a fellow of the APA.) These groups mainly exist to promote a profession among news media, the public and policymakers, influencing licensing and insurance laws. They also make it easier to get grants and newspaper headlines. Psychologists and psychology researchers like myself pay them yearly dues to increase the public profile of psychology. But there is a risk the general public may mistake promotional positions for objective science.

In 2005 the APA released its first policy statement linking violent video games to aggression. However, my recent analysis of internal APA documents with criminologist Allen Copenhaver found that the APA ignored inconsistencies and methodological problems in the research data.

The APA updated its statement in 2015, but that sparked controversy immediately: More than 230 scholars wrote to the group asking it to stop releasing policy statements altogether. I and others objected to perceived conflicts of interest and lack of transparency tainting the process.

It's bad enough that these statements misrepresent the actual scholarly research and misinform the public. But it's worse when those falsehoods give advocacy groups like the NRA cover to shift blame for violence onto non-issues like video games. The resulting misunderstanding hinders efforts to address mental illness and other issues, such as the need for gun control, that are actually related to gun violence.

[the writer is Professor of Psychology, Stetson University]

After J&K bifurcation, hill parties want Darjeeling to be Union territory

PRADIPTA TAPADAR

KOLKATA/DARJEELING, AUG 6 (PTI):

The Centre's decision to revoke provisions of Article 370 and bifurcate Jammu and Kashmir has rekindled hope among the major hill parties, which want Darjeeling to be a separate Union territory with a legislature.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP from Darjeeling, Raju Bista, said he was hopeful that the saffron party's promise of a "permanent political solution" in the hills would be a reality by 2024. The ruling Trinamool Congress, however, said it would oppose any move to bifurcate West Bengal. The Centre had on Monday revoked Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and proposed bifurcation of the state into two Union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

The Bimal Gurung-led Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) faction, which supports the BJP, said the saffron party should keep its poll promise of a permanent political solu-

tion in the hills, which have witnessed violent agitation for the past few decades over the demand of a separate statehood.

"We have been demanding a separate state of Gorkhaland for a number of years. The BJP in its manifesto had also promised a permanent political solution," GJM general secretary Roshan Giri told PTI, quoting party supremo Gurung. "We think this is the appropriate time for the Centre to carve a Union territory with legislature. We would soon start agitation over this." The statehood issue and implementation of the sixth schedule of the Constitution have been the major demands in the hills since the beginning of the protracted Gorkhaland movement in 1986.

Darjeeling witnessed one of its most violent agitations -- a 104-day-long strike -- over the demand of a separate statehood in June 2017, leading to death of several locals and security personnel.

The GJM's call for Darjeeling to be a Union territory was backed by the Gorkha National Lib-



eration Front (GNLF), which felt it would be the most suitable solution for the problem.

"The demand of a separate state may be a long-drawn process, but we think a Union territory (UT) with legislature would be accepted by all the stateholders," GNLF leader N V Chetri told PTI. "The present governing body of the hills, the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), has failed to deliver."

The views of the GJM

and the GNLF also found support from several smaller outfits in the hills. BJP MP Bista said he respected the views of the hill parties, adding that all options would be discussed while deciding on a solution.

"I can assure that the BJP would keep its promise of a permanent political solution," Bista told PTI. "All the options -- be it Gorkhaland, Union territory with legislature or any other -- would be discussed with all the stake-

holders before taking a final call."

Several state BJP leaders, however, declined to comment on the issue, but exuded confidence that the central government would come up with a solution to the decades-old problem.

The BJP, which was once sympathetic to the Gorkhaland statehood demand, has been stressing on the restoration of democracy in the region and the end of the "reign of terror by the police",

which, it alleged, started since the 2017 agitation.

Bista, supported by Gurung and several other hill parties, was elected from the Darjeeling Lok Sabha seat by a record margin in the 2019 general election.

The demand of a Union territory with legislature was, however, ruled out by the GJM faction supported by the TMC, which said the BJP had for the last 10 years "fooled" the people of the hills with the "lollypop of

separate statehood".

"Neither the BJP nor Bimal Gurung are serious about the problems of the people of the hills. They just want to exploit them to serve their own political purpose," said Binay Tamang, the leader of the GJM faction supported by the TMC.

Senior TMC leader Gautam Deb said it would never favour the state's bifurcation. "The BJP's policy is to divide, break and rule. But, we won't allow it in Bengal," the minister added.

Darjeeling is a picturesque hill town and the area is ethnically dominated by the Gorkhas. The place, known for its world-renowned tea, is also inhabited by the Lepchas, Sherpas, Bhutias among others.

Several political parties have over the years promised the people of the hills a separate state and implementation of the sixth schedule, which grants more autonomy to a region. The demand for a separate state was first made in the 1980s, with the Subhas Ghisingh-led GNLF launching a violent

agitation in 1986, which went on for 43 days and led to the death of 1,200 people in the hills.

The movement culminated in the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1988, following the intervention of then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu.

The separate statehood demand gained momentum yet again in 2007 after the formation of the GJM, under the leadership of Bimal Gurung, who was once a trusted aide of Ghisingh.

After the TMC took over the reins of the state in 2011 by ending the 34-year Left rule, the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) was formed with Gurung as its chief.

But, peace was short-lived in the area as Gurung led an agitation in support of the statehood demand, first in 2013, and then engineered a 104-day-long strike in 2017, accusing the TMC government of trying to "wipe out" Gorkha identity.

JD(U) walks out of Lok Sabha to protest govt's JK measures



NEW DELHI, AUG 6 (PTI):

The JD(U) on Tuesday reminded its ally BJP of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance's decision to not tinker with Article 370 to register its protest against the Narendra Modi government's move to abrogate Jammu and Kashmir's special status.

The party's leader in Lok Sabha Rajiv Ranjan, better known as Lalan Singh, said in the House that the JD(U) cannot be a part of the passage of resolutions and bills concerning the state. "You should not have touched on this controversial issue," he told treasury benches.

The Bihar-based party then walked out of the House.

The Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led party has maintained that its stand is in line with its traditional stand to oppose any move to repeal or weaken Article 370. The agenda of

governance agreed to by the BJP and its allies in 1990s had kept the saffron party's core agenda, which included repealing Article 370, out of its purview.

His party has been part of the NDA since 1996, he said. The JD(U) had walked out of the NDA in 2013 but joined it again in 2017.

Not wanting to be seen as being critical of the government, Lalan Singh also lavished praise on it for its measures against terrorism and noted that his party has supported them.

Terror incidents happened regularly during the 10 year UPA rule between 2004 and 2014, he said, adding the Modi government with Amit Shah as home minister has shown its resolve to fight the menace.

It had also taken decisions like carrying out surgical strike and air strike to target terrorism, he said.

Prohibitory orders imposed in entire Hailakandi district

HAILAKANDI (ASSAM), AUG 6 (PTI):

The Hailakandi district administration has imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC in the entire district, Deputy Commissioner Keerthi Jalli said on Tuesday.

The decision was made following reports that some elements and groups are trying to disturb the peace in the district, Jalli said.

This move seems to be a preventive measure

ahead of the Bakar Eid festival on August 12 and the Independence Day, as Hailakandi had been under curfew between May 10 and 25 following a communal clash which left 1 person dead and 14 others injured.

The deputy commissioner's order banned assembly of five or more persons in public places, carrying of weapons or fire arms, holding public meetings or rally until the order is withdrawn.

India facing "extremely high" water stress: Report

WASHINGTON, AUG 6 (PTI):

India is among the 17 countries, which are a home to a quarter of the world's population, facing "extremely high" water stress, close to "Day Zero" conditions when the taps run dry, according to a report unveiled on Tuesday.

The World Resources Institute's Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas ranked water stress, drought risk, and riverine flood risk across 189 countries and their sub-national regions, like states and provinces.

India, ranked 13 on Aqueduct's list of "extremely highly" water stressed countries, has more than three times the population of the other 16 countries in this category combined, the report said.

Northern India faces severe groundwater depletion, visualised on Aqueduct's maps and included in calculations of water stress for the



first time, according to the report. "The recent water crisis in Chennai gained global attention, but various areas in India are experiencing chronic water stress as well," said Shashi Shekhar, former Secretary of India's Ministry of Water Resources, and Senior Fellow, WRI India.

"India can manage its water risk with the help of reliable and robust data pertaining to rainfall, surface, and

groundwater to develop strategies that strengthen resilience.

"Aqueduct can help identify and prioritise water risks in India and around the world," Shekhar said in a statement.

The tool uses a robust, peer reviewed methodology and the best-available information to create customisable global maps.

Aqueduct's updated hydrological model shows a more accurate,

granular picture of water risk than ever before.

In the 17 countries facing extremely high water stress, agriculture, industry, and municipalities are drinking up 80 per cent of available surface and groundwater in an average year.

When demand rivals supply, even small dry shocks -- which are set to increase due to climate change -- can produce dire consequences, researchers said. "Water

stress is the biggest crisis no one is talking about. Its consequences are in plain sight in the form of food insecurity, conflict and migration, and financial instability," said Andrew Steer, President and CEO of the World Resources Institute.

"The newly updated Aqueduct tools allow users to better see and understand water risks and make smart decisions to manage them.

"A new generation of

solutions is emerging, but nowhere near fast enough. Failure to act will be massively expensive in human lives and livelihoods," Steer said in a statement.

Aqueduct sheds light on hot spots for water risk around the world.

For example, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, home to 12 of the 17 countries facing "extremely high" stress, experts have pinpointed water scarcity as a force that can exacerbate conflict and migration.

Many companies use Aqueduct to plot priority locations, like facilities, suppliers, new markets, or proposed power plants, and evaluate their exposure to water risk.

Aqueduct now includes 13 indicators of water risk, including new additions such as groundwater availability and water depletion, and monthly snapshots of water stress and variability.

Govt committed 'constitutional impropriety' in way it revoked Art 370 provisions: TMC

NEW DELHI, AUG 6 (PTI):

The government committed "constitutional impropriety" in the way it revoked provisions of Article 370, the Trinamool Congress said on Tuesday, indicating the party was against the process in which the government sought to remove Jammu and Kashmir's special status.

While the Kashmir Valley has been under a virtual lockdown since Monday with a communications blackout with few phones and internet connections, political leaders like Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti have allegedly been kept under house arrest.

"Democratic institutions must work democratically. Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti must be released. We are



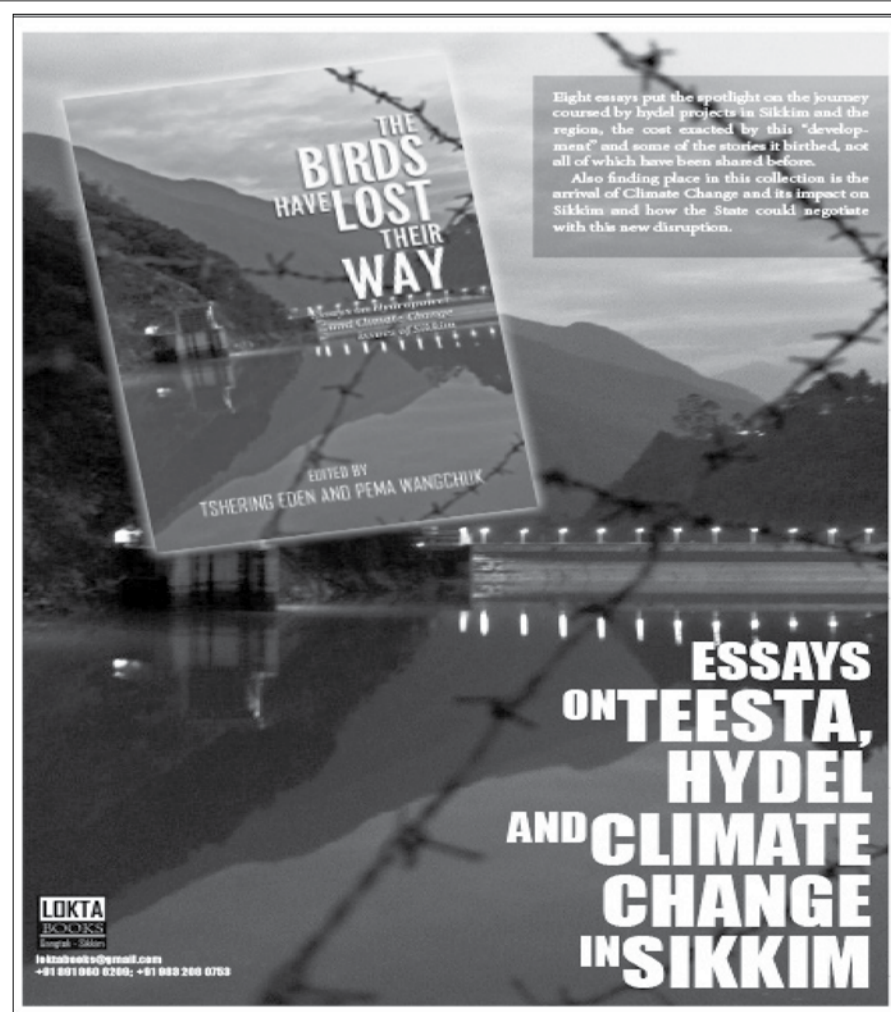
(always) with the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Please release Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti... Let the democratic institutions of Jammu and Kashmir function. We are with the people of Jammu and Kashmir... We are concerned about both the leaders," TMC national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien told reporters.

Clearing his party's stand on the move

to revoke Jammu and Kashmir's special status, O'Brien said, "The way it was brought in Parliament, it was constitutional impropriety. We have a problem with the process which they used."

The MP from West Bengal said present Parliament session has been efficient, but questioned the quality of work as only 18 per cent of bills were referred to parliamentary committees.



With no live coverage till finals, Duleep back to red ball format

KUSHAN SARKAR

NEW DELHI, AUG 6 (PTI):

The season-opening Duleep Trophy, which has been India's only day-night first-class tournament with pink ball for the last three seasons, is set to go back to the day format with red ball due to lack of TV coverage.

The blue-riband tournament, which will feature India's top domestic stars, will be played from August 17 to September 9 at Bengaluru's Chinnaswamy Stadium.

India's next superstar in making Shubman Gill, India A regular Priyank Panchal and Vidarbha Ranji champion skipper Faiz Fazal will lead Blue, Red and Green teams respectively. However, the BCCI's GM (Cricket Operations) Saba Karim confirmed that save the final from September 5-9, which will be telecast live on Star Sports, all the other matches will be traditional red-ball games like the old times.

"We have floodlights at the Chinnaswamy but we are not playing with pink ball under lights as there is no live coverage. Only the final match will be a day/night affair as that's the only match to be aired live" Karim told PTI on Tuesday. Asked if this will be a roadblock in moving towards pink ball Tests in future, Karim disagreed.

"I don't think so. If everyone associated with Indian cricket is on the same page, may be we can think of having India A first class games with pink balls. I am not saying anything is confirmed but you never know if everyone comes on same page," Karim said.

However, a senior BCCI official said the decision to scrap pink balls save the final has been done keeping bigger picture in mind.

"The Indian team is not playing any pink ball cricket in near future. All our Test engagements are a part of World Test Championship. And we are not playing any Day/Night games in World Test Championship," the senior official, who is privy to Indian team management's selection policies, told PTI on condition of anonymity.

"So what's the logic of our supply line of players playing a tournament with pink ball when they are in any case going to play red ball cricket if selected for India," he said.

On the three Duleep squads formed, most of the current India A players along with performers from Vidarbha and other Ranji teams have got a chance. The likes of Abhimanyu Easwaran, Anmolpreet Singh, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shreyas Gopal, Jayant Yadav, Axar Patel, all of whom have played at least one format for India A in the West Indies A tour, are there.

India discards like Karun Nair and Varun Aaron are also in the mix just like last season's highest run-scorer Milind Kumar of Sikkim or talented left-arm seamer from Rajasthan Tanveer ul Haq.

Who's crying now? Australian glee as cricketers rise from Ashes



SYDNEY, AUG 6 (AFP): Australians basked in rediscovered pride in their cricketers Tuesday after Steve Smith inspired a thumping Ashes Test win over England, redeeming himself following a ball-tampering scandal that left the team in disgrace.

Smith, pilloried and banned for a year over the infamous 'Sandpaper-gate' affair, rose above taunts of "We saw you cry on the telly" with centuries in each innings before England crumbled to a 251-run defeat in Birmingham.

"It's a redemption story like no other, from Sandpaper-gate to standing up to England,

in England," tweeted 7News Brisbane.

"The Miracle of Birmingham", trumpeted The Australian, as any lingering embarrassment from the tampering scandal more than 18 months ago evaporated. Instead, attention turned to the "redemption" of Smith from a tearful press conference last year to his Test-defining innings which humbled England, just weeks after they were crowned ODI world champions.

Nathan Lyon and Pat Cummins took all 10 wickets as England's second innings folded for 146, but it was the knocks of 144 and 142 by Smith that set up the vic-

tory and renewed comparisons with the great Donald Bradman.

At the start of the Test the Australians were mocked as "cry-babies" and endured taunts of "cheats and losers", but five days on they were winners, the Herald's Malcolm Knox noted.

- 'REDEMPTION TALE' - Knox described the fidgety Smith's centuries as "pure cricket alchemy, turning base metals into gold". The net effect of the abuse by England fans "was to knit the Australians together" and bring out their best cricket, he wrote.

"Even as he received his player-of-the-match award, Steve Smith had

to speak above the songs of the last desperates whose claim to fame was having seen him cry on the telly. He wasn't crying now."

News Corp. Australia's James Matthey said the vocal Edgbaston crowd "wasn't able to provide the spark needed to overcome an Australian team welcoming the ball-tampering trio back into the fold".

Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft were playing in their first Test together since receiving lengthy suspensions for their part in the sandpaper affair.

The Australian called Smith's performance "a redemption tale"

and said he "brings to a dressing room a belief in bright sides and silver linings, if not unicorns and rainbows... Has any previous Australian team, it is also worth asking, been so leveraged to the fortunes of a single player?"

Former Australian captain Gregg Chappell, who had his own scandal in the past with the infamous underarm bowling to New Zealand in 1981, said Smith couldn't rest on his laurels.

"He's taken a huge stride towards that redemption," Chappell was quoted as saying.

"The way forward for that redemption is to keep making runs.

Indian paddlers must pick and choose events ahead of Oly qualifiers: former coach

New Delhi, Aug 6 (PTI): Country's former table tennis coach Massimo Costantini has advised the Indian paddlers to pick and choose tournaments wisely ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic qualifiers.

Under the Italian, India had made rapid strides with historic performances at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games and Jakarta Asian Games, where the country ended a 60-year-wait for a table tennis medal.

However, Costantini had decided against renewing his contract last year citing personal reasons. Since his departure, Indian paddlers have been without the services of a national coach.

"Olympics is always very special. I think you have to analyse your opportunities and adopt a balance approach towards tournaments. Try to get the proper appetite and miss tournaments if the need be. They need to plan fitness and training well and strike the perfect balance," Costantini said on the sidelines of Ultimate Table Tennis league here.

"They have to combine the quantity of competition and performance. They must also prioritise their training plans. Now they have the qualification stage that they must focus on," he added.

Constantini, who is currently serving as the High Performance Manager at International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), lauded the Indian paddlers for their good show despite being

without a coach. "Lack of guidance is a major problem. Being alone can be a weakness. Planning, guidance and support are very important for players. So I admire the Indian players that they are performing so well in spite of that. Manav (Thakkar), G Sathiyam and Manika (Batra) are doing very well. They have managed this period very well," he said.

The 61-year-old backed world number 30, Sathiyam, to give a good fight to his opponents at the Olympic qualifiers.

"Sathiyam has a fantastic chance of qualifying for the Olympics. He can be a big threat for many players. In fact I feel Olympics is easier than the World Championships, which has more Chinese, Japanese and Korean competitors. Here there is a lesser number. So technically, Sathiyam has a great chance," Constantini said.

Constantini also revealed that he has remained in contact with the India paddlers and they are open seek his advice at any point of time.

"I have not only been in touch but I have been following their performances on the ITTF website. Some have been still asking me what to do, what to change. Some personally text me which feels great," he said.

"But that is natural because after having done so much and achieved so much, I keep following them. Even in ITTF training camps, I meet them."

Chemnitzer FC sack captain for 'openly displaying' sympathy for neo-Nazi groups

PHILIP OLTERMANN

theGuardian

The German third division team Chemnitzer FC have parted ways with their captain after accusing the player of "openly displaying" his sympathy for neo-Nazi groups among the club's supporters.

Star striker Daniel Frahn, who missed Saturday's away game against Hallescher FC due to an injury, had chosen to watch his side's 3-1 defeat from the guest block rather than the team bench, seated next to leading figures from the far-right hooligan scene.

Former RB Leipzig player Frahn, 32, was already fined by the club in March this year after joining in on a tribute to a deceased far-right activist and known hooligan by holding up a black T-shirt bearing the slogan "Support your local hools".

At the time, the player had apologised, saying he had acted "in solidarity with the relatives" of Thomas Haller, a co-founder of far-right group HooNaRa ("Hooligans, Nazis, Racists"), knowing that the T-shirts had been sold to help pay for his medical care. "I didn't know that that T-shirt was so widespread in the Nazi scene," he said.

In a statement released on Monday, the club described Frahn's show of remorse as a "farce" and said it had been wrong to trust his words following the incident earlier in the year.

"He could not and would not live up to the responsibility of the player and team captain of a football club, which involves more than scoring goals and letting yourself be cheered by the crowd: namely, attitude," said Romy Polster, deputy chair of Chemnitzer FC's shareholders meeting.

The divisions at the scandal-hit third division club, who are second from bottom of the league after three games and face bankruptcy due to crippling debts, have become symptomatic of Chemnitz's wider problem with far-right movements.

Last August, the city in the formerly socialist east German state of Saxony saw two days of far-right violence that left several people injured. In the wake of the riots, Chemnitzer FC said on Monday the club saw itself "duty-bound to be a bulwark against rightwing extremism".

Pollard fined, handed demerit point for disobeying umpire in T20 against India

DUBAI, AUG 6 (PTI): West Indies all-rounder Kieron Pollard has been fined 20 per cent of his match fee and handed one demerit point for disobeying the umpire's instructions during the second T20 International against India in Florida.

The International Cricket Council said that Pollard's conduct was in breach of Level One of the ICC Code of Conduct. Pollard was found to have violated Article 2.4 of the code of conduct.

The incident occurred after Pollard called a substitute onto the field despite having been repeatedly told by the umpires that a request must be made first.

He was advised to wait until the end of the next over but Pollard failed to follow the umpire's instructions, the ICC said.

West Indies lost the rain-hit match by 22 runs via the Duckworth-Lewis method on Sunday.

The player denied

the offence and a formal hearing in front of match referee Jeff Crowe was conducted. "Pollard was found guilty following the hearing and fined 20 per cent of his match fee and consequently has had one demerit point added to his record," the ICC stated.

On-field umpires Nigel Duguid and Gregory Braithwaite, third umpire Leslie Reifer and fourth official Patrick Gustard levelled the charges.

When a player reaches four or more demerit points within a 24-month period, they are converted into suspension points and he/she is banned.

Two suspension points equate to a ban from one Test or two ODIs or two T20Is, whatever comes first for the player.

Demerit points remain on a disciplinary record for a period of 24 months from their imposition following which they are expunged.

Bristol City write to clubs to explain new policy of not kicking ball out of play



Bristol City have written to every Championship club to tell them that they will not kick the ball out of play for any opposing player unless they have suffered a head injury.

The club's manager, Lee Johnson, explained the new policy following an incident in the 3-1 home defeat by Leeds in which midfielder Mateusz Klich went down but City played on, leading to angry scenes on the touchline as coaching staff from both sides confronted each other.

"It's fine. We sent an

email out to the clubs because this happens often," Johnson said. "Somebody goes down and sometimes it's tactical, because people try and gain an advantage and sometimes it's genuine."

"So we just decided as a club that we're going to make a rule for the 46 games that we're going to let the referee manage the game. So therefore if that's our player injured or the opposition player injured, there's a consistency there."

Johnson and Marcelo Bielsa emerged from

the tunnel late after half-time as the Bristol City manager tried to explain the club's decision to his Leeds counterpart.

"If the referee sees a head injury he will stop the game but if it's not a head injury he will play on," said Johnson. "And our players are coached to play with 10 men in certain environments. And that's what I was trying to explain [to Bielsa]. Obviously that's not easy with the language barrier but in the cold light of day we were able to sit and talk it through."

New Zealand retires Vettori's ODI jersey No. 11

WELLINGTON, AUG 5 (PTI): New Zealand Cricket on Monday retired spin legend Daniel Vettori's jersey no. 11 as a mark of respect to the much-admired former captain's achievements.

In fact, it's not just Vettori, NZC will retire the jerseys of all those cricketers who have represented the Black Caps in more than 200 ODIs.

"Players that represent New Zealand in 200 ODIs have their shirt number retired.

Daniel Vettori who wore number 11 has played the most ODIs for the BLACKCAPS with 291," NZC tweeted on Monday.

Vettori has scalped 305 wickets while representing New Zealand in 291 ODIs. With the bat, he scored 2253 runs, including four fifties.

The 40-year-old former left-arm spinner has played 113 Tests for New Zealand, in which he picked up 362 wickets and amassed 4,531 runs with the bat, includ-

ing six centuries and 23 half-centuries.

Vettori was the captain of New Zealand from 2007 to 2011.

Meanwhile, New Zealand on Monday also revealed the Test jersey numbers of their players ahead of the two-match series against Sri Lanka, starting August 14 at Galle.

New Zealand will begin their campaign in the ICC World Test Championship with the two-Test series against Sri Lanka.

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Israeli PM Netanyahu to visit India next month: Minister

BY MANVENDRA JHA

TEL AVIV, AUG 6 (PTI): Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would be visiting India next month for talks with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, a senior minister said here on Tuesday, days ahead of repeat polls in the Jewish nation. Israel's Minister for Construction and Housing Yifat Shasha-Biton, while addressing a conference of Indian realtors' body CREDAI here, called India an "economic power" with whom Israel shares common values.

Touching upon the close ties enjoyed between the two countries, she dived on prominent past visits by leaders from the two countries and then went on to say that the Israeli prime minister would be visiting India again next month. Shasha-Biton also praised India for being "the unique country in the world where Jews were never prosecuted".

Informed sources have told PTI that the day-long visit by Netanyahu is scheduled for September 9, just eight days before Israel goes to repeat polls after he failed to form a government following the April 9 elections.

Some political analysts feel that Netanyahu's meeting with Modi is a photo-op to project his acceptance worldwide and prop up his campaign just before the polls.

Netanyahu, who created history on July 20 by becoming the longest serving Israeli prime minister, surpassing Israel's first premier David Ben-Gurion, is facing a tough political challenge as opinion polls show flagging fortunes for his ruling Likud party.

Ha'aretz columnist Yossi Verter, in an opinion piece, 'Netanyahu's Out of Luck, but He's Hoping a Photo-op With India's Modi Will Help', recently argued that Netanyahu, who's fighting for his personal survival ahead of a hearing before the state prosecution on several graft cases, must find a way to bounce back. He wrote that the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem is said to have reached out to their counterparts in New Delhi and requested for an invitation.

Netanyahu had in fact tried to also meet Modi before the April 9 polls but it did not work out due to scheduling issues.

Sources privy to the development had told PTI that the first request for an invitation for Netanyahu to visit New Delhi was made in January during the visit of Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Sabbath to India.

The two premiers were scheduled to meet on February 11 before the elections in Israel but Netanyahu called off his trip to New Delhi due to other engagements.

The efforts regarding the visit were renewed after the Israeli parliament was dissolved and fresh elections announced.

China concerned over situation in Kashmir; Asks India, Pak to avoid actions that exacerbate tensions

BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, AUG 6 (PTI): Voicing serious concern over the situation in Kashmir, China on Tuesday asked India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and avoid actions that "unilaterally" change the status quo and exacerbate tensions between the two countries.

"China is seriously concerned about the current situation in Kashmir," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said in a written response to media queries about the militaries of India and Pakistan exchanging fire along the Line of Control and the Indian government's move to revoke Article 370 which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

"China's position on the Kashmir issue is clear and consistent. This issue is a legacy of history between India and Pakistan, which is also the consensus of the international community," Hua said, without directly referring to revocation



of Article 370 by India.

"The parties concerned should exercise restraint and act with caution, especially to avoid actions that unilaterally change the status quo and exacerbate the tension," she said.

"We call on the two

sides to peacefully resolve relevant disputes through dialogue and consultation and safeguard regional peace and stability", she said.

This is the second statement issued by China on the Kashmir issue in recent weeks. On July

26, China said India and Pakistan should peacefully settle the Kashmir issue and other disputes through dialogue and expressed its support to the international community, including the US, in playing a "constructive role" to improve ties be-

tween the two countries.

The statement was issued in response to US President Donald Trump's offer to mediate between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue during his meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran

Khan in Washington. India rejected Trump's offer, saying that Kashmir is a bilateral issue.

Over the years, China's official stand on Kashmir has been that it is an issue left over by history and should be properly addressed

by India and Pakistan through consultation and negotiations. Commenting on the Indian government's decision to create Ladakh Union Territory, which involves the territory of the western section of the Sino-Indian border, the foreign ministry said, "China always opposes India's inclusion of Chinese territory in the western section of the China-India boundary under its administrative jurisdiction."

"This position is firm and consistent and has never changed. The recent unilateral revision of domestic laws by the Indian side continues to undermine China's territorial sovereignty, which is unacceptable and will not have any effect," the ministry said.

It urged the Indian side "to be cautious in its words and actions on the boundary issue, strictly abide by the relevant agreements reached between the two sides and avoid any move that further complicates the boundary issue."

Indian national sentenced to jail in Singapore

BY GURDIP SINGH

SINGAPORE, AUG 6 (PTI):

An Indian national was sentenced on Tuesday to three years and seven months' jail, as well as 15 strokes of the cane for various offences ranging from robbery to punching a policeman, according to a media report. Murugesan Ragupathiraja, 25, assaulted and slapped two police officers on one occasion. While out on bail, he robbed a fellow construction worker by throwing chilli powder in his face, Channel News Asia reported.

He was tasered by police at Everton Park housing estate in a stand-off that went viral.

When released on bail again, he kicked benches and dustbins while drunk, and was tasered twice by police before being subdued, the report said.

Murugesan pleaded guilty to six charges of robbery with common intention, using criminal force on a public servant, assaulting a public servant, hurting a public servant, vandalism and mischief.

Another five charges were taken into consideration.

The construction worker's troubles with the law began on December 11 last year, after drinking with a friend at Tekka Market in the Little precinct of Singapore, according to the report.

While walking along a corridor outside Park 22 Hotel in Little India, Murugesan pulled three wooden window panels from the wall, cracking one and dislodging the other two.

The hotel's house-keeping manager ran to two auxiliary police officers who were patrolling the area, asking for help.

Murugesan punched Lance Corporal Srisivasankar Subramaniam's



face three times in a row and tried to run away.

The other officer, Police Constable Chong Sheng Liang, tried to help his colleague restrain Murugesan but was slapped in his face three times. The officers eventually managed to handcuff Murugesan.

However, he began shouting at passers-by, and when more police officers went to the scene, Murugesan spat at them.

Even when he was placed in the police van, Murugesan continued kicking and spitting repeatedly at the officers near him and cursing at them.

He also tried to bite the arm of an officer, and the police eventually resorted to placing a face mask on him to stop him from spitting at the police.

Murugesan was released on bail and continued his spate of crimes in April this year, when he committed robbery with another man, 25-year-old Indian national Raman Lakshmanan.

At about 9pm on April 7, the two men went to Kovan MRT (metro) station intending to rob another construction worker, 39-year-old Bangladeshi national Ullah Hedayat.

The pair robbed 160 Singaporean dollar in cash, name cards, a notebook with a series of remittance transactions and an ATM card. The

victim sought help from a passer-by, who called the police.

Raman fled Singapore a few days later and is still at large, but Murugesan was arrested.

While on bail for these offences, Murugesan got into another scuffle with police officers. This time, it was caught on camera.

On the morning of June 9, Murugesan had alcohol and walked around topless in Chinatown and Everton Park.

At about 4.45pm, he came to Duxton Plain Park and kicked a dustbin on the pavement, spilling the contents of the bin. He also kicked a wooden bench, uprooting it.

The prosecution had asked for at least three years and nine months' jail and 15 strokes of the cane, pointing out that Murugesan had committed some offences while out on bail and has not made any restitution for the damage to property.

His actions over the damaged wooden hotel panels "clearly demonstrated contempt" for the police, and his violent behaviour drew a large crowd, said the prosecutor. Murugesan, who was unrepresented, initially tendered to the court a written mitigation plea.

However, he told the court on Tuesday that he had asked a Malaysian inmate to write it for him and did not know what

it said. When the court interpreter read it for him in Tamil, he said he would not rely on it but make his own oral mitigation.

He then told the court that he came to Singapore in July last year as a construction worker and earned about SGD600 a month, which he used to support his elderly parents in India.

"My father is a farmer and my mother is a housewife. They were totally reliant on me, sir, for their basic necessities," said Murugesan through the Tamil interpreter. "I have an elder brother who is very irresponsible and does not contribute anything towards the family's upkeep."

"Your honour, I pleaded guilty today to express my remorse," he continued. "I realise that by committing these offences, I have not only jeopardised my future but have also robbed my family of a comfortable life. I sincerely apologise, your honour, to the court and all the victims for what I have done. I humbly urge your honour to take my guilty plea into consideration and impose the minimum sentences for all the charges."

District Judge Chay Yuen Fatt calibrated the sentence slightly lower than what the prosecution asked for and backdated the sentence to his date of remand in June this year.

Hong Kong protesters and opponents battle in old communist stronghold

HONG KONG, AUG 6 (AFP):

Armed with wooden poles and ransacked road signs, pro-democracy protesters and their opponents fought an extraordinary battle on a Hong Kong street, exposing deep ideological fault lines coursing through the city. Dozens of unidentified men charged onto a road where protesters had been walking and attacked them with long wooden poles on Monday night. The shocking scenes -- captured on film -- showed the demonstrators fighting back against the men, pelting them with traffic cones and even turning their aggressors' weapons against them.

Cars, including taxis and a Mercedes-Benz, were also caught up in the melees as both sides fought over street fencing dividing the thoroughfare. The men were eventually chased away, with protesters smashing the windows of a nearby building where they believed some of the attackers had taken refuge as a man inside brandished a meat cleaver.

The clashes illustrate the polarisation of Hong Kong after two months of pro-democracy protests and clashes that

pose the biggest threat to Beijing's authority since Hong Kong's handover from the British in 1997. North Point, a district on the main island where the clashes took place, was historically a communist stronghold during British rule.

It is known for its large community of Fujianese people who migrated from the mainland province in the 1960s and have long maintained strong family and clan links there.

During the 1967 leftist riots -- in which more than 50 people died -- North Point was often the epicentre of the violence.

Police famously landed by helicopter on the roof of an apartment building and discovered a leftist headquarters.

The riots were sparked by widespread social discontent towards the colonial government over widespread corruption and poverty. But they were also fuelled by the influence of the Cultural Revolution which was raging on the mainland at the time. Popular opinion soon turned against the leftists who left hundreds of bombs

across the city and murdered a well-known anti-communist radio commentator. Two young children were killed by a bomb left in North Point.

Monday's clashes in North Point took place during the most sustained and widespread day of battles with Hong Kong police, who fired 800 tear gas canisters in at least a dozen locations and made 148 arrests.

After sunset, messaging forums used by anti-government protesters began circulating pictures of unidentified men holding sticks standing on North Point's streets.

The scenes were reminiscent of shocking violence two weeks ago when suspected triad members in white T-shirts, armed with poles and batons, set upon anti-government protesters and bystanders at a train station in the town of Yuen Long close to the Chinese border. The men in North Point weren't dressed alike, and unlike the Yuen Long assailants -- who ambushed their targets and hospitalised 45 people -- they were soon bested.

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My culture is in my art: **Rapper Raja Kumari**

BY RADHIKA SHARMA

NEW DELHI, AUG 6 (PTI): While growing up in the US, Svetha Rao was called 'The Indian Princess' by her friends and somewhere in her heart she knew the name would stick. Now as songwriter-rapper Raja Kumari, she has made it to the bylanes of India with her collaboration with Divine on "City Slums" and rap in "Husn Parcham" from "Zero".

A trained Indian classical dancer, she said, Bollywood was her window to learning about the Indian culture in America. Interestingly, she had a cameo in this years' critically-acclaimed hit music drama "Gully Boy". "My mother tongue is Telugu and I learnt English in the US. I learnt Hindi later in college by watching Bollywood movies and being connected to the Indian culture. I went on India tours when I was 10 and performed in many Indian cities and that was as Svetha Rao. "But when I wanted to start making rap music, I thought I should do something about the name as the uncles in the audience would expect me to sing something, I would do the rap, how would they take it?" Kumari told PTI in a telephonic interview.

At 15, she knew she wanted to go the hip-hop way and wanted to make people believe in themselves through her music. "They would always called me 'The Indian Princess', and it means 'Raj Kumari'. I liked the sentiment behind this name with which my friends would call me in America. When I was dancing, my name was Kumari Svetha Rao. Kumari has been attached to me my entire life."

That's why Shveta became Raja Kumari from 'The Indian Princess'.

"I wasn't necessarily there yet, but I made this character -- how I would dance as a devi (goddess), and slay the demons. I'd become this warrior goddess character I created. When I'm on the stage I just become that. It's my offering to god out of whatever I can give. That persona helps me translate it all," she said. In the initial six-seven years of her career, Kumari collaborated as a songwriter with international names

such as Gwen Stefani, Fifth Harmony and FallOut Boy and she believes collaboration is the key for great art.

"If I encounter an incredible songwriter in Telugu who can help me express myself, I'd love to make music in my mother tongue. I believe in songwriters and co-writing as that's how I got my start. I have a lot of respect for collaboration," she added.

The recording artiste said it often

offered in a country like India where hip-hop is young but the love, excitement and culture is so real. When I came to Mumbai, I could see that the future of hip-hop was really looking bright and I wanted to be a part of it.

"When I found out Raftaar and Nucleya were the other judges, I knew that I could count on them to be authentic. I could really represent what I really believe in through this show." With the



happens that people only want to understand the "Indian-ness", as they call it in America, in one way.

"For me, my culture is in my art. Growing up so far away from India... the sound and the art... That's how I connect with who I am. I think it's always a part of my artwork. It's truly bizarre when some people call me a 'culture vulture'... How can I be a 'culture vulture' in my own culture just because I'm born in America? "I have studied Indian music, religion... I'm not just another South Asian. I still have put in my time to be Indian enough to talk about India without being an appropriator of culture. It works both ways. But for me, this is who I am. I don't know how to be any other way for anyone." Kumari said it is her experience of being around different musicians that she wants to share as a mentor through rap reality show, "MTV Hustle" which starts airing from August 10.

"I was excited as it was for the first time that a platform like this was being

success of "Gully Boy", hip-hop appears to have gone mainstream and Kumari said the people are going to take the genre in their own way and make it their own. "We will start hearing rap songs in commercial stores or grocery stores. Hip-hop is the most powerful genre worldwide. I think the evolution that's happening now is that more people are encouraged to write their music and write it in their language and style. We are going to see this explosion of talent. I feel India has so much talent.

"Music and arts are not really seen as a viable career. For most of the people in the Indian community, the struggle is their family and friends thinking that what we do might actually not go somewhere. In 'Hustle', whether the winner goes on to have a huge hit or not, it's going to increase the awareness."

On female stars of the genre, the singer said there may have not been an emphasis on women but she has no doubt that "the girls are coming".



FLOWER POWER! The actress, Amanda Seyfried is spotted in a pink, white and black floral dress before entering AOL Build in New York City.

Kirti Kulhari to play cop in 'The Girl on the Train'



MUMBAI, AUG 6 (PTI): Actor Kirti Kulhari will be playing the role of a British cop in the Hindi remake of Hollywood blockbuster "The Girl on the Train".

The film, starring Parineeti Chopra in the lead, is an official remake of the 2016 thriller featuring Emily Blunt. Parineeti will play an alcoholic divorcee, who becomes involved in a missing person's investigation.

Kirti will essay the part of Aaliyah Kaur in the film. The actor said she is excited to reunite with director Ribhu Das Gupta for the film, after working with him on Netflix original series "Bard of Blood".

"I have had a great time shooting with Ribhu for 'Bard of Blood' and I totally love his

perspective and vision. What excited me the most was definitely the character, I have never played a role like this.

"It's challenging, it's full of layers. Really looking forward to shooting this one," Kirti said in a statement.

The movie is produced by Reliance Entertainment.

Set in the UK, the film will also feature Aditi Rao Hydari and Avinash Tiwari.

Kirti will next be seen in "Mission Mangal", slated to be released on Independence Day.

The actor also has season two of Amazon web series "Four More Shots Please" and film "Bataasha", in which she will play a musician, in the pipeline.

'Wicked women' are just women who are tired of injustice, abuse: Angelina Jolie

NEW YORK, AUG 6 (PTI): Angelina Jolie wants the world to have more "wicked women".

The Hollywood star, in an op-ed for Elle magazine, goes on to redefine the labels often used to brand women as "unnatural" and "dangerous", saying the term "wicked" today should be used for those women who are tired of injustice and are not ready to give up their voice and rights.

"Since time immemorial, women who rebel against what is considered normal by society-even unintentionally-have been labelled as unnatural, weird, wicked, and dangerous. What is surprising is the extent to which this kind of myth and prejudice has persisted throughout the centuries and still colours the world we live in," Jolie wrote.

The actor-humanitarian reflected on how often women who run for political office in democratic countries are described as witches.

"Bring together a group of strong women, and before too long someone will brand them a 'coven' the technical term, to be clear, for a gathering of witches meeting at night to consort with the devil. Women who stand up for human rights in many countries are still labelled 'deviant', 'bad mothers', 'difficult' or 'loose', she wrote. Jolie, 44, said the accusation of witchcraft has been used to control and silence women in almost all societies and in every century.

"Women could be accused of witchcraft for having an independent sex life, for speaking their mind on politics or religion, or for dressing differently. Had I lived in earlier times, I could have been burnt at the stake many times over for simply being myself"

In her personal life, when the actor started dating Brad Pitt, she was called names like the "homewrecker" and "the other woman" for breaking up her "Mr and Mrs Smith" co-star's marriage with actor Jennifer Aniston, with Pitt let off easily in a well-publicised Hollywood scandal.

After 12 years of relationship and two years of marriage, Jolie filed for divorce from Pitt in 2016.

The actor, who is an UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, added that her essay was not an attempt to "dismiss or downplay" the abuse against men and boys.

"But looking across the world, we have to ask, Why is so much energy expended to keep women in a secondary position?" she asked.

Jolie then attempted to yield a new connotation to the term "wicked women".

"Looked at in this light, 'wicked women' are just women who are tired of injustice and abuse. Women who refuse to follow rules and codes they don't believe are best for themselves or their families.

"Women who won't give up on their voice and rights, even at the risk of death or imprisonment or rejection by their families and communities. If that is wickedness, then the world needs more wicked women," she wrote.

The actor, who will next be seen reprising her role as the eponymous antagonist in "Maleficent: Mistress of Evil", said there is nothing more attractive than a woman with an independent will and her own opinions.

"With love to all the wicked women and the men who understand them," she ended the essay on a hopeful note.

ARIES: Things in your outer reality may or may not be as turbulent. The ebb and flow of your own emotions is responsible for the heart-break you are experiencing in this moment. Ground your energy, Aries. This is the only way to see things as they are and make practical decisions. Have you been keeping a secret? It's time to come clean, wild one. Your partner and loved ones are more understanding than you are willing to give them credit for.

Tip: Grounding your energy will help you were things clearly.

TAURUS: This is the transition period, Taurus. One that's taking you to the calmer side of the shore. The real question is: are you willing to leave the negativity behind? Are you ready to make space for healthier relationships where you feel loved and nurtured? The choice is and has always been yours. PS: If something isn't working out like you hoped it would, trust that it is for your greater good. Tip: Make space for relationships that make you feel loved and nurtured in return.

GEMINI: It's easy to point fingers at others and hold them accountable for what's happening. It takes courage to look within and see

how and where you have erred. This week, rely on non-violent communication to resolve any conflict. This way, you can express your feelings without making the other feel attacked, and also give them a chance to share their side of the story. Let peace and harmony be your operative words, Gemini.

Tip: There's two sides to every story.

CANCER: Beware of overdramatising your situation. There's no doubt that you've been treated disrespectfully. But what did you do to get here, Cancer? Remember, we create our reality. Our actions, or lack thereof, determine where we are at today. If there's anything your circumstances are teaching you, it's the importance of setting boundaries and standing up for yourself, no matter how daunting it may seem in the beginning.

Tip: You are being taught the importance of standing up for yourself.

LEO: If they wanted to be a part of your life, they would have done what it takes. Take their absence or silence as a sign, Leo. Beware of pushing against the flow in certain areas of your lives. Coupled Leos, don't take your relationship for granted. You're being asked to

prioritise quality time. Yes, this could involve moving a few things around. You know exactly why your partner (or a loved one) is worth the effort.

Tip: Spend quality time with the beloved.

VIRGO: Actions, not words. Their unwillingness to show up for you says a lot about where they are. Word for the wise: reclaim your power. This will help you redirect your energy towards self-growth, Virgo. When it comes to money matters, reserve the right to say no. You know that friend who is always asking you to fund their drinks because they are perpetually broke? You know exactly how to deal with them now.

Tip: Redirect your energy towards self-growth.

LIBRA: If it's working out seamlessly, take it as a sign that you're meant to be together. If it's not, trust that you are destined to find a greater love. The Universe wants you to practice the fine art of surrender, wild one. It's okay to lay low for now. It's okay to focus on nurturing on your inner temple. Self-healing is going to be an important theme for you in the days to come.

Tip: You are transitioning to a better place.

Trust the flow.

SCORPIO: Love and freedom. Freedom and love. They are not mutually exclusive, Scorpio. This phase of your life requires you to focus on self-growth, and the expansion of an empire you have so painstakingly built. It's only fair that you give the other a chance to follow their dreams as well. Let go of your need to control the situation. You will find that things will work out seamlessly once you perfect the fine art of surrender.

Tip: This phase of your relationship requires a greater degree of freedom.

SAGITTARIUS: What does your dream wedding look like, Sagittarius? A close knit ceremony at home or a fancy destination wedding? And what about your bridal outfit? Are you dreaming of a Sabyasachi lehenga or do you consider yourself a Manish Arora bride? Sagittarians who are one step closer to that happily-ever-after, start planning your dream do today.

Tip: Channel your inner wedding planner.

CAPRICORN: Your revelation this week: your body is indeed a temple. What does the art of self-nurture entail? How do you make yourself feel celebrated? Get your priorities

in order, Capricorn, and we're not just talking about getting abs. Some of you may even feel inspired to take your style game up a notch. In the mood for highlights? You know exactly who to call today.

Tip: Get on board the wellness bandwagon.

AQUARIUS: All this texting isn't going to get you anywhere, Aquarius. If you're feeling the attraction, why not make a move? You'll have to go on a couple of dates to know if the chemistry translates offline. Single Aquarians, consider the art of swiping right. You never know who the Universe will align you with once you open that space in your life.

Tip: Ask them out already!

PISCES: It's the things we don't talk about that haunt us the most. But is what you're hiding as big a deal as you have made it out to be in your head? Your love is stronger than you think, Pisces, and it has the capacity to survive the stormiest weather. If the offer at hand means the world to you, allow yourself to speak about it with your partner or loved ones. They will surprise you by being the most supportive versions of themselves.

Tip: Communicate where you are at in an honest manner.