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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SDF announces final 14



UGEN NEDUP BHUTIA
Kabi-Lungchuk



TSHERING WANGDI LEPCHA
Lachen Mangan



K.B. RAI
Chujachen



KARMA WANGDI BHUTIA
Syari



TASHI THENDUP BHUTIA
Barfung



S.R. SUBBA
Soreng-Chakung



HEMENDRA ADHIKARI
Rhenock



GOPAL BARAILY
West Pendam



SHYAM PRADHAN
Arithang



ACHARYA TSHERING LAMA
Sanga



G.M. GURUNG JR.
Khandong-Singtam



D.T. LEPCHA
Martam-Rumtek



D.R. THAPA
Upper Burtuk



D.B. SUBBA
Yangthang



D.B. KATWAL
MP

SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 22 MAR:
Sikkim Democratic Front released its final list of 14 candidates for the upcoming Assembly and Parliamentary elections in the State on Friday.

Sitting Minister, DT Lepcha, who had already got the party ticket from Gnathang-Machong constituency, is also contesting the election from Martam-Rumtek constituency and another sitting Minister, Tshering Wangdi Lepcha is contesting from Lachen-Mangan constituency.

Likewise, sitting MLAs in the final list to contest the election are Gopal Baraily from West Pendam, Hemendra Adhikari from Rhenock, Shyam Pradhan from Arithang,

DR Thapa from Upper Burtuk and Ugen Nedup Bhutia from Kabi-Lungchok. Tshering Lama is contesting the election from Sangha seat.

New faces this time are DB Subba from

Yangthang, Sancha Raj Subba from Soreng-Chakung, Tashi Thendup Bhutia from Barfung, GM Gurung from Khandong-Singtam, KB Rai from Chujachen, Karma

Ongdi Bhutia from Shyari and DB Katwal for the Lok Sabha seat.

In a press conference here this evening, SDF Spokesperson, PD Rai officially announced names of SDF candidates in the

final list unanimously approved by the parliamentary committee of the party. He informed that the party has given tickets to 18 new faces including Lok Sabha and

four women candidates. He further added that the party has also fulfilled its promise to give five candidates from Limboo and Tamang communities. He informed that the party has three Limboo candi-

dates and two Tamang candidates.

Responding to media queries on sitting Minister DT Lepcha contesting from two seats, SDF spokesperson Bhim Dahal stated that it was a strategic decision of the party.

"DT Lepcha was an effective and popular MLA and Minister from Sang-Martam constituency. On the demand of the people of the area and even aspirants, the party decided to field him from Martam-Rumtek," he said.

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SKM releases third list, 13 constituencies left

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha on Thursday released its third list of Assembly election candidates. This list of candidates for seven constituencies still leaves 13 constituencies for which the party has not yet declared candidates. The party declared candidates for nine constituencies in its first list and then three in the second list.

As per the list released on Holi, Kunga Nima Lepcha, the party's sitting MLA from Syari, will also be contesting from Gangtok, the constituency which posted SKM's strongest victory in 2014.

Tshering Bhutia has received the SKM ticket for Gnathong Machong, while Danish Rai has been named for Namcheybong, Samdup Tshering Bhutia for Tumin-Lingee, Phurba Tshering Bhutia for Rinchenpong and Karma Loday Bhutia for Kabi-Lungchok from where SKM had won in 2014.

Sources in the SKM inform that final list will be released on Saturday. This list will interesting as much for the names it



KUNGA NIMA LEPCHA
Gangtok



B.S. PANTH
Temi-Namphing



KARMA LODAY BHUTIA
Kabi-Lungchuk



DANISH RAI
Namcheybong



PHURBA T. BHUTIA
Rinchenpong



SAMDUP T. BHUTIA
Tumin-Lingee



TSHERING BHUTIA
Gnathang-Machong

contains as for the names left out. All eyes will be on where the SKM president, PS Tamang [Golay], contests from. The party, it may be recalled, has remained insistent that he will be able to contest the elections despite his

conviction in a corruption case. Also, the party has not yet announced candidates for Mr Tamang's traditional seat, Soreng-Chakung, or Upper Burtuk from where he has won the past two elections.

It is going to be a hectic Monday for Returning Officers

Upwards of 180 nomination papers expected to be filed on last day

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

Placing the simultaneous elections in Sikkim in the first phase of polling gave the State barely a month of preparation and campaigning time. Further, holidays eating into days allowed for submission of nomination papers has led to

a situation where Monday, 25 March, the last date for filing of nomination papers, is setting up to be a hectic day for the Returning Officers with upwards of 180 nomination papers expected to be filed on the day.

So far, only 15 Sikkim Democratic Front candidates, four Hamro Sikkim Party candidates and one Sikkim National People's Party candidate have filed nomination papers for the upcoming Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Sikkim Kranti-

kari Morcha is yet to file any nominations.

The last date for filing nominations, as mentioned, is 25 March and with 23-24 being Government holidays, all remaining nominations will have to be filed on Monday.

As things stand, apart from SDF and SKM, HSP, BJP, Congress and possibly Sikkim Progressive Alliance are expected to contest from all the 32 Assembly constituencies and field candidates for the Lok Sabha as well.

turn to pg02

HSP names nine more candidates

Bhaichung to contest from Gangtok and Tumin-Lingee



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

Hamro Sikkim Party working president, Bhaichung Bhutia, will be contesting the assembly elections from two constituencies - Gangtok and Tumin-Lingee, both in East Sikkim. He has now become the fourth candidate to be contesting from two constituencies after Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, SKM's Kunga Nima Lepcha and SDF's DT Lepcha who is contesting from Gnathong-Machong and Martam-Rumtek have been named for two constituencies each. In fact, among one of the

contenders for Gangtok along with Mr Bhutia is Mr Lepcha who is also contesting from Shyari.

HSP released its fourth list comprising of nine candidates for the upcoming elections on Thursday.

Keshar Lal Thapa has been named for Gyalshing-Bermiok, Durga Bahadur Chettri for Temi Namphing, Prakash Sharma for Maneybong Denam, Hukum Chandra Rai for Namchi Singhithang, Tashi Topgay Bhutia for Rinchenpong, Sukhraj Subba for Soreng-Chakung and Philip Lamichaney for Upper Burtuk constituency.

Speaking to media persons, Mr Bhutia

shared that it was a momentous day for him to be contesting elections in his home State for the first time. He has already contested Assembly and Lok Sabha elections from neighbouring West Bengal, it may be recalled.

As for the party's election strategy, he alleged that the SDF government has failed to fulfill the basic needs to the people of Sikkim and said that the HSP will be exposing these failures.

Mr Bhutia stated that HSP's mission was to make Sikkim corruption-free.

He thanked the party for giving him two seats.

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check out an experiment with some podcasting from Sikkim.



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<https://soundcloud.com/tshering-ed-506860426/stray-thoughts-01>

POLL VAULT

PEMA WANGCHUK/

TSHERING EDEN

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

The last election saw the strongest challenge to the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front

The last time that the Opposition had impressed was way back in 1994 when the Sikkim Democratic Front formed its first government in Sikkim. That year, the combined votes of the

lating into 19 seats]. Between themselves, SSP, with 35% of the votes, and Congress, with 15%, had cornered a shade over 50% votes. This gave them 12 seats - 10 to SSP and two to Cong - and

1994 was a three-cornered race, but 2014 was a head-on clash between SDF and SKM. With no other local parties in the fray and the "national" parties in organisation ennui, that

HOW THE OPPOSITION FARED IN 2014



BTW: Except SDF and SKM candidates, all other candidates forfeited their deposits in 2014.

since it came to power, from Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, a party that was "recognised" but had not even been registered when the State went to polls.

Sikkim Sangram Parishad and the Congress were more than the votes polled by the SDF which formed the government with 42% of votes polled [trans-

in that lies the kernel of some of the inconsistencies of the first-post-the-post format of Indian elections, but we leave that discussion for some other time.

election was only about SDF and the party born from dissidence in its ranks. 57 of the 121 contestants forfeited their deposits

turn to pg02

Cong to contest all 32 seats, releases final list

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

The Congress today released its final list of 16 candidates and with it confirmed its plans to contest from all the Assembly constituencies and the lone Lok Sabha seat in the State.

The list was released after the party high command cleared the list of candidates. The Sikkim Congress president, Bharat Basnet, who was already named the party's Lok Sabha candidate, will also be contesting the Assembly elections from Namchey-bong constituency.

The 16 remaining candidates announced today are:

Phuchung Lepcha for Rinchenpong, Pas-sang Gyalchen Sherpa from Rinchenpong, Sandup Lepcha for Bar-fung, Kamala Rai from Namchi-Singithang, Hari Basnet from Melli, Tank-anath Adhikari from Rang-gang-Yangang, Sangit Lepcha from Tumin Lingee, Binod Trikhatri for West Pendum, Bharat Basnet for Namcheybhong [he is also contesting the Lok Sabha elections on a Congress ticket], Chewang Dorjee Bhutia from Shyari, Sonam Tshering Bhutia for Mar-tam-Rumtek, Anita Gu-rung from Upper Tadong, Sumitra Rai for Arithang, Aita Tamang from Upper Burtuk, Gyurmik Yauseel Bhutia from Kabi-Lung-chok, and Acharya Kar-ma Tashi Bhutia from Lachen-Mangan.

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Training on water use enhancing for enhanced crop production begins for PMKSY officers

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

A 3-day training program on "Planning for Improving Water Use Enhancing for Enhanced Crop Production" got underway here at the College of Agricultural Engineering and Post Harvest Technology (CAEPHT) today.

The participants were officers of the department posted in different districts and involved in implementation of PMKSY program.

The program, a press release informs, is approved by the Directorate of Extension Education, CAU, Imphal and sponsored by ATARI Zone VII, Barapani,



Meghalaya. The inaugural function had Khorlo Bhutia, Secretary (Agriculture), as chief guest accompanied by Prof PP Dabral, Dean CAEPHT, Sherap Bhutia,

Director Agriculture, Jagadish Pradhan, Additional Director (PMKSY), Pas-sang Tamang, Supdt Engg (PMKSY).

Prof BC Kusre, Prof IDE

of the scheme in the state.

In his inaugural address, the chief guest underlined the importance of the PMKSY scheme and its significance to the state. He highlighted the importance of water to enhance food production and also urged field engineers to implement the schemes properly as it is monitored at the highest level, the release adds.

Prof PP Dabral, DEAN, CAEPHT, spoke about the efforts made by the college in the field of water conservation and management. He also mentioned other efforts made by the college in the field of agriculture in Sikkim.

BJP RELEASE FIRST LIST

Laten Sherpa to contest for Lok Sabha, Chauhan from Arithang

BJP not to contest from all 32 seats

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

The Sikkim unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party today released its first list of candidates for the upcoming polls. While the party's youth wing president, Laten Sherpa, who has been in the forefront of some labour protests, has been named the Lok Sabha candidate, the Sikkim-BJP president, DB Chauhan, has received the party ticket for Arithang. The party also informed today that it will not be contesting from all 32 constituencies.

As things stand, Mr Sherpa will be going up against SDF's DB Katwal, HSP's Biraj Adhikari and Bharat Basnet from Congress.

The party president will have SDF's sitting MLA, Shyam Pradhan, and SKM's Arun Upreti pitted against him.

The other parties have not yet announced candidates for these constituencies.

Among the other names featuring in the BJP first list are Bhanu Bhakta Sharma from Gyalshing-Barnyak, Sancho Lepcha from Rinchenpong, RT lepcha from Daramdin, Bhol-a Chauhan from Melli, SB Karki from Kham-dong-Singtam, Birendra Poudyal from West Pendum, Bharat Dulal from Rhenock, Mohan Gurung from Chujachen, Devi Basnet from Namchey-bong, Jigdal Bhutia from Martam-Rumtek and YT Lepcha from Gangtok.

Addressing a press conference, the Sikkim-BJP president, Mr Chauhan stated that BJP will not be contesting from all the 32 seats but only from constituencies where it has BJP workers.

He added that the central committee is likely to send the second list by Saturday evening.

As for the campaign strategy, he mentioned that the party will reach out to the people to make

people aware about funds sent by the Centre to Sikkim and how the State has utilised them.

"We will also go to the people with 129 people-centric programmes and schemes of the Modi government for the people and will also give the report card and achievements of the Modi government," Mr Chauhan said.

Responding to media queries, Mr Chauhan informed that BJP national leaders like Kiran Rijui, Ram Madhav, Rajnath Singh and even national president Amit Shah are expected to visit Sikkim and campaigners. He stated that some local issues related to the Centre have also been included in the national manifesto and even the State manifesto will be release soon.

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Election Control Room set up in South

NAMCHI, 23 MAR (IPR):

With General Elections, 2019 around the corner the District Administrative Centre, South (DAC) under the guidance of Election Commission of India (ECI) has set up an election control room with the aim to address complaints from the public on various facets such as violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and other election related issues.

The Returning Officer, Ragul K updated that the number for District Control Room is 03595 264404, 264927 the fax number for the same is 264734 and anyone can file a complaint in these number. He also informed that adequate number of officials has been deployed to handle complaints registered via calls and a control room has been already established in general section one for monitoring complaints as well as for receiving urgent communication regarding the General Elections.

No nominations filed in South

Namchi, 20 Mar (IPR): As informed by the Returning Officer (South), Ragul K, no nominations

He added, ample awareness has been generated amongst the public with regards to the control room number in order to encourage them to report or get wide-range of information in connection to elections. Moreover, the district control room is round the clock headed by SDM (Namchi), Choden Gyatso and other officials.

Additionally, ECI has also come up with an on-line application named cVIGIL which can be downloaded from Google playstore. This application aids the citizens to report Model Code of Conduct (MCC)/ Expenditure violations during the election period. Once an incident of MCC/ Expenditure violation is reported by cVIGIL Citizen App, it is forwarded to a Flying Squad for investigation. In case of a registered complaint, a unique ID number is generated to allow the citizen to track the complaint status.

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HSP names nine...

He added that he has also prepared mini-manifestos for both constituencies.

He mentioned that he plans to make a U-16 football team each from Gangtok and Tumin-Lingee constituencies and provide them the national exposure. He also assured to identify two talented U-16 players from these constituencies to take them for trials and training to Barcelona within one year.

It is going...

And then there will be the independent candidates as well.

Even on a rough estimate upwards of 190 Assembly election candidates can be expected this election cycle and there will definitely be a handful of Lok Sabha aspirants as well. By comparison, there were 121 Assembly election candidates in 2014.

With only 20 candidates having submitted nomination papers thus far, the four DC, who are also the Returning Officers, can expect a crowd of upwards of 180 candidates trooping to the District Administrative Centres with their nomination papers. The East DAC will have the strongest rush since it has the highest number of Assembly constituencies [12].

Expect a lot of nervous energy and frayed nerves at the DC offices on Monday.

Given what is at stake, the candidates and officers can be expected to stretch the hours longer and get the documents submitted eventually, but this last-minute-ness will definitely manifest as tardy preparation and campaigning.

With election scheduled for 11 April, the parties have only 15 days at hand for campaigning. The logistics of organising public meetings take time, and with the model code of conduct expected to be enforced even more strictly and paper work for earmarked public meeting venues more specific this time, campaign planning will be stressful exercise. It will be interesting to see if parties manage anything substantially more elaborate than door-to-door campaigning.

And while candidates and the party machineries are directed to campaigning, one wonders when the party manifestos will be released, circulated and read.

SDF announces...

On the disappointment shown by supporters of few aspirants who did not get party tickets, SDF spokesperson, KT Gyaltsen mentioned that many aspirants come out in every election from every constituency.

Such situations arise in every election when the focus is on the individual instead of the party, he said further adding that the situation will become normal soon.

On the same, he asserted the need to focus on the party and thoughts of the party leader.

"The party president has repeatedly appealed to party workers to work according to the party's principles. The high command gave the responsibility to the parliamentary committee to select candidates considering all factors," said Mr Dahal.

Party supporters will understand the process soon and will campaign for candidates given by the party, he added.

The party supporters from Arithang and Shyari who were unhappy with the candidates announced for their respective constituencies expressed their displeasure at the party head office on Bye Pass Road. They raised slogans demanding the candidates of their choice and also damaged some property of the party office.

Supporters of GMC Chairperson, Ashish Rai, for Arithang constituency and Tenzing Lamtha for Shyari constituency were protesting outside the SDF head office today.

i.e. candidates from all other parties except SDF and SKM.

SKM offered 'Parivartan' [change] to the voters hoping to push and then ride an anti-incumbency wave in the State. One could argue that the party could have performed even better if it had been more consistent in its build-up and not confounded with its fits-and-start approach. Even though the then dissident SDF MLA, PS Tamang [Golay], was not the party president when SKM was eventually formed less than a year before the elections, it was always obvious that it was around him that the party was built. In retrospect, one can surmise that the party would have benefitted from better planning, more clear and consistent communication and an earlier start.

Eventually, when the EVMs were tabulated, SKM had won 10 Assembly seats out of 32 – a commendable feat for a party contesting elections for the first time. The 40% vote-share that the party had mopped up was only a shade lower than the best-ever performance by an Opposition party in Sikkim – the nearly 42% that had gone to SSP's kitty in 1999 which had secured the Bhandari-led party seven seats.

So yes, 10 seats on debut was an impressive showing by SKM. However, these wins did not come easy with most of them being close calls. Further, almost all the seats, save one in North Sikkim, were won in East district, a district which has traditionally sent Opposition MLAs to the Assembly, i.e. whenever voters here have decided to vote in Opposition members as well. One must bear in mind that of the eight legislative assemblies that Sikkim has elected, two have been absolute 32/32 victories [1989-94 and 2009-14], two near absolute 31/32 [1974-79, 2005-09], and one Assembly where the party in office had 30/32 presence. In effect then, five of the eight times that Sikkim voted, it

did not feel the need to vote an Opposition into the Assembly. This track-record makes SKM's success in resuscitating the Opposition even more significant even if too many of its wins were on the slimmest of margins.

All wins for SKM were close fights except Gangtok which saw the highest margin of 1,891 votes when Pintso Chopel Lepcha trounced the SDF candidate, sitting Rajya Sabha MP, Hishey Lachungpa.

The closest call for SKM was Upper Tadong where it won the seat by just 122 votes where the 3,333 votes polled by Timothy William Basnet had him edge past SDF's Bharat Basnet who received 3,211 votes, a slim 2% vote difference.

On the other hand, the closest loss for SKM was at Khamdong Singtam where Dr MK Sharma lost to SDF's Somnath Paudyal by 270 votes. Dr Sharma has returned to the constituency as the SKM candidate, and this time his opponent in the SDF is GM Gurung [Jr].

Interestingly, SKM had campaigned hard in West and South districts, traditionally the more politically active districts of the State and from where the SKM "movement" had begun. Some incidents of violence were also reported in these districts between SKM and the ruling party.

Ironically, SKM did not win a single seat in these two districts with even the party president, PS Tamang [Golay], conceding to SDF's Tilu Gurung at Namthang Rateypani [4,792/ 5,947]. However, Mr Tamang did win from Upper Burtuk where he polled 50.73% of the votes against the 45.21% received by SDF candidate, DR Thapa.

In these two districts, the lowest margin was 639 votes at Gyalshing-Bermiok where SB Subedi of SDF defeated LN Sharma of SKM. Everywhere else in West and South district, SKM lost by substantial margins.

Apart from East district, SKM did score a seat in the North, from a constituency bor-

dering Gangtok. North Sikkim has only three constituencies. The SKM candidate, Ugen Nidup Bhutia, who has since joined the SDF and has been fielded from there again by the party, won from Kabi-Lungchok by a margin of 126 votes fewer than the NOTA votes.

The Sangha seat was won by SKM by 125 votes.

This was an election which also saw two bye-elections. Chief Minister Pawan Chamling had contested from Rangang Yangang and Namchi Singithang winning in both constituencies. He chose to give up the Rangang-Yangang seat following which a bye-election was held in Sept 2014 which was won by RN Chamling, an Independent candidate. This was a substantial victory in that the party in office lost a bye-election while in office, and that too the CM's constituency. Mr RN Chamling has since floated his own party and will be contesting from the constituency again.

Interestingly, SKM's Bikash Basnet also contested the bye-election, but on a BJP ticket. The alliance fetched him only 352 votes. A big drop from the times only a few months earlier when he had contested on an SKM ticket against the Chief Minister when he polled 3,201 votes [32.22%] against the 6,343 bagged by the CM.

Another bye election was also held for Upper Burtuk in 2017 after the sitting MLA, the SKM president, was disqualified following his conviction in a corruption case. Seven candidates contested this bye election with SKM boycotting it citing wrongful disqualification of their party president. SDF's DR Thapa won Upper Burtuk with 8,406 of the total 9,428 votes polled.

Apart from SKM, Congress contested all 32 seats in the last elections while BJP contested 15 seats [including the bye elections]. Congress polled a total of 4,390 votes while BJP got 2,934 votes, both fetching lesser than the number of NOTA votes cast i.e. 4,460.

EVM with VVPAT Unit

Q8. Where were VVPATs used for first time in India?

Ans: VVPATs with EVMs were used for first time in a bye-election from 51-Noksen (ST) Assembly Constituency of Nagaland.

Q9. In our country a sizeable section of the population is illiterate. Will it not cause problems for the illiterate voters?

CALL 1950 FOR ANY ELECTION RELATED QUERIES

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Gangtok hosts annual research council meeting of ICRI



Gangtok, 22 Mar (PIB): The XXVth Annual Research Council Meeting for large cardamom for 2017-18 of the Indian Cardamom Research Institute, Regional Research Station, Spices Board, was held in Hotel Mount Siniolchu here on 20 Mar.

The meeting was attended by Heads and Scientists representing various national research institutes, officials from State and Central Govt. Departments, faculty members of Sikkim Central University, NGOs & farmer's representatives of Sikkim and Darjeeling district of West Bengal and other stakeholders of large cardamom industry.

The inaugural function was graced by Dr S Anbalagan (IFS), Executive Director, Sikkim Organic Mission, Dr DR Singh, Director NRC Orchids (ICAR), Dr Rajiv Gogoi, Scientist E & Head, Botanical Survey of India, DL Lama, Principal Director Horticulture, Dr

DK Agarwal, Scientist D, Botanical Survey of India, Dr Raghavendra, Senior Scientist, ICAR-NORRI, Dr Laishram Shantikumar Singh, Scientist-B, IBSD, Sikkim Centre, officials and faculty members from CAEPHT, Regional Ayurveda Research Institute and Dr AB Remashree, Director (R&D), ICRI, Spices Board, Myladumpara, Kerala.

Dr AB Remashree, Director (R&D), ICRI, Spices Board, Myladumpara, Kerala gave a brief introduction on research and development activities of large cardamom for the North Eastern Region carried by Indian Cardamom Research Institute and requested for the support of state govt. for the development of large cardamom industry in holistic manner. She also thanked the State Govt. for the support provided to Spices Board and also requested for similar support to Spices Board in future also which will help the Board to do in

the best manner for the benefit of large cardamom farmers in the region. She also appreciated the research community of state that they are working very closely and expected similar support to ICRI in future also.

The chief guest of this function was Dr S Anbalagan (IFS), Executive Director, Sikkim Organic Mission, Govt. of Sikkim, and he stated that large cardamom is the main cash crop of Sikkim. He appreciated the activities of Spices Board for maintaining the good germplasm collection and maintenance in the ICRI farm. Spices Board is doing good work for development of large cardamom but initiatives should be taken for study on increased population of Bumble Bee after the implementation of organic system in state as he told. He congratulated the Spices Board in his concluding remark.

Dr DR Singh, Director NRC Orchids (ICAR), Pakyong in his brief speech

appreciated and informed that the research work and development work of Spices Board effort may be taken for doubling the farmer's income in large cardamom cultivation. The broad collections of germplasm accessions may be deposited in NBPGR, New Delhi.

Ms Lama, Principal Director Horticulture, Govt. of Sikkim in her speech discussed about ongoing activities of Dept. of Horticulture, Govt. of Sikkim and expressed that a collaborative effort of Spices Board & State Govt. has resulted in increased area under large cardamom which more than 21,700 ha at present. She also requested that disease free quality planting material may be provided to state govt. nurseries for area expansion.

Dr Rajiv Gogoi, Scientist E & Head, Botanical Survey of India, informed about the diversity of flora and fauna in North East India and appreci-

ated the efforts of Spices Board citing his experience of Arunachal Pradesh in yester years. He also stressed that collaborative work with Sikkim Central University, ICAR, ICRI, Spices board and other research institute will have a long time for benefit for North East and cater the need of large cardamom farmers of Sikkim. The inaugural session was over by 12:30 pm with the vote of thanks by Shri BA Gudade, Dy. Director (Research) i/c, ICRI, Spices Board, Tadong.

Inaugural session was followed by technical session which includes the presentation of progress reports of 2017-18 and open house discussion. Shri BA Gudade, Dy. Director (Research) i/c presented an overview and research highlights of ICRI, RRS, Tadong, Sikkim and progress work was presented by scientists of respective divisions. Chairman of each technical session critically reviewed the research experiments and forwarded their suggestions and the house as well. After a thorough discussion and suggestions for each session, decisions were taken for the ongoing experiments for year 2018-19. At the end of the technical sessions rapporteurs of respective sessions presented the decision taken and comments of chairman of each session.

Technical session as well as the program concluded by 4:30pm with of vote of thanks from Shri. Ashutosh Gautam, Scientist B, ICRI, RRS, Tadong.

Governor celebrates Holi with Black Cat Division



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

Continuing with the festivities of Holi, Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad accompanied by his family members, celebrated Holi with the Officers and Ranks of Black Cat Division at Libing and Company Headquarters of 13Bn ITBP at Lingdum, East Sikkim on 21 Mar, 2019, a press release informs.

On reaching the Headquarters of Black Cat Division, the Governor was warmly received by

GOC Major General, Ram Chander Tiwari, SM, officers and ranks. Later, the Governor exchanged Holi greetings and colours with the officers and jawans.

On his second leg of the Holi celebrations, the Governor reached Company Headquarters of 13Bn ITBP at Lingdum, East Sikkim. He was received by DIG Sector Headquarters Gangtok, KD Dwivedi, Commandant 13Bn ITBP, Officers and ranks of ITBP among others. Following the Guard of honour, the

Holi celebrations began with songs, dances and colourful festivity.

The Governor extended Holi greetings to all officers and ranks and expressed his happiness to be among them during the special occasion of Holi. He also acknowledged the selfless service and sacrifice of members of armed forces in keeping the country safe and contributing to its progress and prosperity.

This, he said, was the highest contribution in nation building.

Five nominations filed in East



GANGTOK, 22 MAR (IPR): On the fifth day of filing nominations, for General Election 2019, the District Election Officer (East), Kapil Meena informed that five nominations were filed from East District, today.

The nominations were filed by Delay Namgyal Barfungpa of SNPP from Gangtok constituency, Nima Lepcha of

HSP from Martam-Rumtek constituency, Bhaichung Bhutia of HSP from Gangtok constituency, Dr. Bina Basnett from HSP from Upper Tadong constituency and Philip Laminchane of HSP from Upper Burtuk constituency.

The District Election Officer (East), Kapil Meena further informed that as per the instruction of Election Commission of India,

no nominations will be filed on 23 and 24 March, 2019 since it is 4th Saturday and Sunday, respectively. Hence, nominations can be filed now only on 25 March 2019 (Monday) between 11 am to 3 p.m.

All candidates physically present outside RO's Chamber at 3 p.m will be issued number coupons to receive nominations in that sequence.

No nominations filed in South

NAMCHI, 22 MAR (IPR): As informed by the Returning Officer (South), Ragul K, no nominations were received on the fifth day for the upcoming General Elections in the South District today. Additionally, the RO informed that nominations for the Sikkim Legislative Assembly Elections, 2019 will not be accepted on 23 and 24 March (4th Saturday and Sunday) being a government holiday as per the Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881.

No nominations filed in West

NAMCHI, 20 MAR (IPR): As informed by the Returning Officer (South), Ragul K, no nominations were received on the third day for the upcoming General Elections to Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly, in the South District today.

Sikkim Himalayan Warriors Boxing Club congratulates

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

Sikkim Himalayan Warriors Boxing Club has congratulated its pugilists for their outstanding performance in the recently held school games in the capital.

Sarathi Mukhia from Modern SSS and Chirag Pradhan from Tashi Namgyal SSS won

a gold medal each. Likewise, Sunana Tamang of Modern SSS, Neha Limboo of Enchey SSS and Anne Lepcha of Sichey SSS won a silver medal each and Diya Thapa of Modern SSS won a bronze medal.

All medallists have been training under the State boxing coach, Pratima Gooorong.

Mamring School celebrates World Water Day

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

Today Mamring Senior Secondary School, East Sikkim celebrated World Water Day in the school premises. The program was jointly organised by the NSS Unit, SAATHI Club and Eco Club of Mamring School, a press release informs.

The program started during the morning assembly with the introduction and brief background about the observation of World Water Day by Srijana Sharma, student volunteer from class XII. It was followed by the open Quiz competition conducted by Rajani Dhakal, a student volunteer from class XII for junior level and Anisha Chhetri, NSS Prefect for senior class.

Principal of the school, Sir Prahlad Sharma addressed the gathering and highlighted the importance of water in our daily life. He urged the every staff and students to spread the awareness.

He appealed to the audience to do every possible means to preserve the sources of drinking water so that the coming generation may not be suffered from the scarcity of water.

It was also declared that from today onwards students should carry water bottles compulsorily in the school for safe drinking water.

A painting competition was also held in the afternoon session on the theme of World Water Day. Winners will be awarded prizes in the school assembly.

The programme was ended with the vote of thanks by Songmit Lepcha, a student volunteer from Class XII. Today's programme was conducted by Thendup Lepcha, NSS prefect of the school under the guidance of teacher coordinators I.P. Khatiwara, Bikash Bhattarai, B.S. Bastola and others. The program was attended by all staff and students.

Four warehouses set up at CEO Office



GANGTOK, 22 MAR

(IPR): As per the guidelines of Election Commission of India (ECI), the opening of four warehouses took place at the CEO Office Baluwakhani this morning in the presence of ADC East (HQ), Shri Jamyang C Namgyal who is also the Nodal Officer for EVM, VVPAT management for East District and for shifting and transportation of all EVM and VVPAT from warehouse to strong room at Brihaspati Parsai Senior Secondary School, Ranipool.

The opening of warehouse was held in the presence of representatives of all political parties, officials and security personnel. The EVM and VVPAT units were shifted under strict security vigil and it was informed that the Strong Rooms for each of the Assembly Constituencies would be separate and under 24x7 CCTV Coverage and Double Lock System.

The District Election Officer took stock of the situation and inspected the shifting of EVM and VVPAT units from the warehouse. He also informed that adequate police security would be kept at Strong Rooms complex after keeping EVMs and VVPATs which will continue till the Election process is over. Fire Safety and all other ECI directions in this regard would be carried out at the Strong Rooms, he said.

The total number of EVM and VVPAT units shifted to venue for Assembly Constituency today is 331(BU), 331 (CU), 360 VVPAT and for Parliamentary is 308(BU), 308(CU), 311 VVPAT.

PAYING GUEST AVAILABLE

PG available for working women & girls at EPCS Church premises, near Primula Lodge at Chruach Road, Gangtok, Sikkim. Contact: Mob: 9064804782/ Whatsapp No: 9641549764.

4 nominations filed in West District

GALSHING, 22 MAR

(IPR): On the fifth day of nominations in the West District a total of 4 candidates (SDF) filed their nominations successfully in the Office of the Returning Officer.

The candidates are Dichen Wangchuk Bhutia (SDF) for Yoksam Tashiding (BL), Karma Sonam Lepcha (SDF) for Rinchenpong (BL), Pem Norbu Sherpa (SDF) for Daramdin (BL) and Dhan Kumari Kami (SDF) for Salghari Zoom (SC).



DEO West informed that 'No Nominations' will be accepted on 23 and 24 March (4th Sat-

urday and Sunday) being a government holiday as per the Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881.

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MCC IS IN EFFECT

WHAT IS MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT?

Model Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections. The Model Code of Conduct comes into force immediately with the announcement of the election schedule by the Commission for ensuring free and fair elections.

Visit the website: eci.gov.in

SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

The Dalai Lama

The Precious One is special

A major anniversary is coming up. In a week from now, it will be sixty years since the Dalai Lama stepped into India and into exile. On 31 March, 1959, the Dalai Lama crossed into India at Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh after a 15-day journey from Lhasa, completing one leg of an epic journey which continues to this day, 60 years since. A lot has changed over the years, the Dalai Lama has aged, China, save the totalitarian instincts, has junked communist ideology for all practical purposes and there are now many more refugee-creating situations around the world. What has not changed though is China's handling of Tibet and the foisting of a situation there which continues to force people to rebel and flee.

One may ask here, how, despite countries and their leaders wanting to be friends with China, does Tibet still make news; how their situation still makes headlines? Well, because of the Dalai Lama. Tibetans in exile have been refugees for nearly six decades now. Media has lost interest in other exiled people within a few years. How much does one read about the Lhotsampa refugees from Bhutan anymore? It is in the manner that the Dalai Lama has led Tibetan aspirations, modulated public debate on Tibet and communicated a nation's desire for greater expression that keeps the movement alive [in the media circles and thus public consciousness]. It is because of the Dalai Lama's personality that the aspirations remain alive even inside Tibet. Tibetans in Tibet have never experienced democracy [it was theocracy with a God King till Communist China took over] and their world-view now comes distilled from Beijing which is no democrat. And yet, Tibet witnesses uprisings. Rioters, even when they veer away from the Dalai Lama's path of non-violence, hold up his photographs and his flag of Tibet to prove their devotion to him and qualify to become patriots.

It is the Dalai Lama who keeps everything Tibetan relevant. Which is also why China has launched and sustained a concerted effort to demonise him and strong arming countries into ignoring him. China, which routinely humbles India, browbeats the Koreans, stares down USA and generally bullies everyone else, has met with only failure when it comes to challenging the Dalai Lama. It has swamped Tibetans into a minority at home, indulged Tibet Autonomous Region with developmental funds but has utterly failed in quelling the unquestioned devotion the Dalai Lama commands [even if in secret] among the million Tibetans still in Tibet. And this frustrates them. China obviously plans to wait out the 14th Dalai Lama and the Dalai Lama obviously knows this as well. While China continues to unsuccessfully project the Dalai Lama as a "splittist" in the world's eyes, the Dalai Lama is reinforcing the Tibetan spirit in exile – literally forcing democracy on his people, ensuring that they practice it, and grooming alternatives in the religious realm who could deliver the unifying compassion that his people in exile will need in future.

When the Dalai Lama stepped on to Indian soil in 1959, very few knew of him or of the Tibetans. That is no longer the case. The world has also not seen a leader who has remained relevant and universally loved and for six decades until the Dalai Lama showed us what selfless commitment means and can deliver. And this journey began on this day back in 1959. Just like the Kundun hence, even this day has become special...

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Livestreamed massacre means it's time to shut down Facebook Live

JENNIFER GRYGIEL
theconversation.com

When word broke that the massacre in New Zealand was livestreamed on Facebook, I immediately thought of Robert Godwin Sr. In 2017, Godwin was murdered in Cleveland, Ohio, and initial reports indicated that the attacker streamed it on Facebook Live, at the time a relatively new feature of the social network. Facebook later clarified that the graphic video was uploaded after the event, but the incident called public attention to the risks of livestreaming violence.

In the wake of Godwin's murder, I recommended that Facebook Live broadcasts be time-delayed, at least for Facebook users who had told the company they were under 18. That way, adult users would have an opportunity to flag inappropriate content before children were exposed to it. Facebook Live has broadcast killings, as well as other serious crimes such as sexual assault, torture and child abuse. Though the company has hired more than 3,000 additional human content moderators, Facebook is not any better at keeping horrifying violence from streaming live online without any filter or warning for users.

In the 24 hours after the New Zealand massacre, 1.5 million videos and images of the killings were uploaded to Facebook's servers, the company announced. Facebook highlighted the fact that 1.2 million of them "were blocked at upload." However, as a social media researcher and educator, I heard that as an admission that 300,000 videos and images of a mass murder passed through its automated systems and were visible on the platform.

The company recently issued some analytic details and noted that fewer than 200 people viewed the livestream of the massacre, and that surprisingly, no users reported it to Facebook until after it ended. These details make painfully clear how dependent Facebook is on users to flag harmful content. They also suggest that people don't know how to report inappropriate content – or don't have confidence the company will act on the complaint.

The video that remained after the livestream ended was viewed nearly 4,000 times – which doesn't include copies of the video uploaded to other sites and to Facebook by other users. It's unclear how many of the people who saw it were minors; youth as

young as 13 are allowed to set up Facebook accounts and could have encountered unfiltered footage of murderous hatred. It's past time for the company to step up and fulfill the promise its founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, made two years ago, after Godwin's murder: "We will keep doing all we can to prevent tragedies like this from happening."

A SIMPLE TIME-DELAY

In the television industry, short time-delays of a few seconds are typical during broadcasts of live events. That time allows a moderator to review the content and confirm that it's appropriate for a broad audience.

Facebook relies on users as moderators, and some livestreams may not have a large audience like TV, so its delay would need to be longer, perhaps a few minutes. Only then would enough adult users have screened it and had the chance to report its content. Major users, including publishers and corporations, could be permitted to livestream directly after completing a training course. Facebook could even let people request a company moderator for upcoming livestreams.

Facebook has not yet taken this relatively simple step – and the reason is clear. Time-delays took hold in TV only because broadcasting regulators penalized broadcasters for airing inappropriate content during live shows. There is effectively no regulation for social media companies; they change only in pursuit of profits or to minimize public outcry.

Whether and how to regulate social media is a political question, but many U.S. politicians have developed deep ties with platforms like Facebook. Some have relied on social media to collect donations, target supporters with advertising and help them get elected. Once in office, they continue to use social media to communicate with supporters in hopes of getting reelected.

Federal agencies also use social media to communicate with the public and influence people's opinions – even in violation of U.S. law. In my view, Facebook's role as a tool to gain, keep and spread political power makes politicians far less likely to rein it in.

US REGULATION ISN'T COMING SOON

Congress has not yet taken any meaningful action to regulate social media companies. Despite strong statements from politicians and even calls for hearings about social media in response to the

New Zealand attack, U.S. regulators aren't likely to lead the way.

European Union officials are handling much of the work, especially around privacy. New Zealand's government has stepped up, too, banning the livestream video of the mosque massacre, meaning anyone who shares it could face up to NZ\$10,000 in fines and 14 years in prison. At least two people have already been arrested for sharing it online.

FACEBOOK COULD – AND SHOULD – ACT NOW

Much of the discussion about regulating social media has considered using anti-trust and monopoly laws to force the enormous technology giants like Facebook to break up into smaller separate companies. But if it happens at all, that will be very difficult – breaking up AT&T lasted a decade, from the 1974 lawsuit to the 1984 launch of the "Baby Bell" companies.

In the interim, there will be many more dangerous and violent incidents people will try to livestream. Facebook should evaluate its products' potential for misuse and discontinue them if the effects are harmful to society.

No child should ever see the sort of "raw and visceral content" that has been produced on Facebook Live – including mass murder. I don't think adult users should be exposed to witnessing such heinous acts either, as studies have shown that viewing graphic violence has health risks, such as post-traumatic stress.

That's why I'm no longer recommending just a livestream delay for adolescent users – it was an appeal to protect children, when more major platform changes are unlikely. But all people deserve better and safe social media. I'm now calling on Mark Zuckerberg to shut down Facebook Live in the interest of public health and safety. In my view, that feature should be restored only if the company can prove to the public – and to regulators – that its design is safer.

Handling livestreaming safely includes having more than enough professional content moderators to handle the workload. Those workers also must have appropriate access to mental health support and safe working environments, so that even Facebook employees and contractors are not unduly scarred by brutal violence posted online.

[The writer is Assistant Professor of Communications (Social Media) & Magazine, Syracuse University]

Drug-resistant TB: a new study offers new hope

ANDREW NUNN & ID RUSEN
theconversation.com

Tuberculosis (TB) is the leading cause of death in the world from a single infectious disease, causing more deaths than HIV/AIDS. In 2017, 10 million people developed TB disease globally and an estimated 1.6 million died.

One of the biggest blocks to beating the epidemic is the growing resistance to drugs that have previously cured TB.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared drug-resistant TB a global health crisis. Worldwide in 2017, an estimated 558,000 people developed TB that was resistant to the most effective first-line drug – rifampicin (RR-TB). Of these, 82% had multidrug-resistant TB.

But treating drug-resistant TB is still hopelessly inefficient. The 20-month to 24-month regimen used in many countries to treat people is costly and has significant side effects. In addition, the length of the regimen makes it hard for patients to adhere to, as well as for health systems to sustain. Globally, the regimen has an average treatment success rate of little more than 50% in real-world treatment settings, although there is considerable variation from country to country.

As a result researchers around the world have been urgently exploring shorter, more effective, and safer treatments for patients who have

drug-resistant TB.

One of these efforts has begun to bear fruit. Results from Stage 1 of a clinical trial have recently been published. The news is encouraging. The trial provides evidence that a shorter treatment regimen – of nine to 11 months – is as effective for the treatment of multidrug-resistant TB as the longer, 20-month treatment recommended by the WHO in 2011.

The STREAM trial presents robust evidence for the effectiveness and safety of the nine to 11-month regimen when compared to the much longer 20-month regimen. The results are as good and the fact that the regimen is shorter should make it much more acceptable to patients. It is also likely to result in cost saving to both patients and health services.

THE TRIAL

The STREAM trial (Standardised Treatment Regimen of Anti-TB Drugs for Patients with MDR-TB) is the world's first multi-country randomised phase III clinical trial to test the efficacy, safety and economic impact of shortened MDR-TB treatment regimens. The randomised nature of the trial means that patients were assigned to the long or short regimen in such a way as so as to avoid bias. Treatment allocation is determined by chance not by the choice of a physician.

Phase III trials are designed to assess the effectiveness and safety of a new intervention in practice.

Stage 1 of the trial was designed

to assess whether a nine to 11-month treatment regimen that demonstrated promising cure rates during a pilot programme in Bangladesh, is as effective as the longer regimen when assessed in other settings under rigorous control trial conditions. Seven sites in Vietnam, Mongolia, South Africa, and Ethiopia participated.

The results from Stage 1 show that the shorter regimen is as good as the 20-month regimen.

Nearly 80% of patients in the trial showed a favourable outcome after two and a half years of follow-up from entry into the trial. The percentage was 79.8% in the 20-month regimen. In the nine to 11-month regimen the percentage was 78.8%.

Results in participants with HIV, although not as good as in those who were HIV-negative, were very similar in the short and long regimen.

The findings on side-effects were also interesting. There were very similar rates of severe side-effects during treatment and follow-up between the two regimens. But there were differences in the types of side-effects. The most common side-effects were cardiac conduction disorders, which increase the risk of serious and potentially fatal arrhythmias, in the nine to 11-month regimen. In the 20-month regimen the most common side effects were metabolic disorders, particularly hypokalemia.

A health economics data analysis is ongoing and will assess po-

tential cost savings to patients and health systems when the nine to 11-month regimen is compared to the 20-month regimen.

CONCLUSIONS

The final results from the trial are encouraging because they show that the nine to 11-month treatment regimen is comparable in efficacy and safety to the 20-month regimen. This supports the use of a shorter regimen for patients with rifampicin-resistant TB.

The nine to 11-month regimen presents substantial advantages. It reduces treatment times, may improve patient retention under programmatic conditions, and reduces the number of pills patients have to take.

However, the required ECG monitoring is an important consideration.

In its latest guidelines issued last year the WHO again highlighted the need to continue to look for regimens that are not only shorter, but are also less toxic for the patient. The STREAM Stage 1 results suggest that some progress is being made.

STREAM Stage 2 is currently evaluating an all-oral regimen that is potentially as effective and more tolerable than the injectable-containing regimens currently used some countries. This, too, would be another major step forward in the battle against MDR-TB.

[Andrew Nunn is Senior scientist, MRC Clinical Trials Unit at UCL, UCL; ID Rusen is Adjunct Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto]

CPI(M) comes up with “Iss Bar Modi Berojgar” poll mantra

NIRMAL YADAV

NEW DELHI, MAR 22 (PTI): With a view to freeing the central government from the policies of the NDA, the CPI(M) has come up with the poll mantra “Iss Bar Modi Berojgar” (this time Modi will be unemployed) ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

The decision was taken during last week’s marathon meeting, under the leadership of party secretary general Sitaram Yechury, said sources.

Speaking to PTI-Bhaskar on Monday, CPI(M) politburo member Brinda Karat said this time her party will campaign with a three-point agenda.

First the Modi gov-



ernment must be removed from power to save the country, second, for policy change the left parties must be voted and, third, a secular gov-

ernment must be formed at the Centre, she said.

Karat said the left parties have decided on the “Iss Bar Modi Berojgar” mantra in re-

sponse to the BJP’s “main bhi chowkidar” (I too a watchman) campaign on social media.

“The CPI(M) has decided to fight the election

with other left parties and suitable candidates are being identified. In seats where we do not have strong candidates, we will support opposition leaders,” she said.

Speaking on the reported differences in West Bengal with the Congress, Karat said, “In Bengal, our aim is to fight against the BJP and the TMC. In 2014, we won two seats, while the Congress won four. We hope to support each other in these six seats.”

She said in seats where the CPI(M) was going alone, there was no delay in nomination of candidates but in seats where they were going with other Left candidates a little delay was expected.

Bill passed to bring back total prohibition in Mizoram



AIZAWL, MAR 21 (PTI): Mizoram assembly has passed a bill to bring back total prohibition of liquor in the northeastern state after four years.

The state government decided to prohibit manufacture, import, sale and consumption of liquor for the common people for their general health and help in law

enforcement, Excise and Narcotics Minister Dr K Beichhwa said while introducing the bill.

Cutting across party lines, all the legislators supported the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Bill, 2019 and it was passed Wednesday.

The ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) had promised during the as-

sembly election in November last year that if voted to power, it would ensure total prohibition in the state.

Total prohibition was in force in Mizoram from 1997 to 2015. The previous Congress government led by Lal Thanhawla allowed opening of wine shops in the state from March, 2015.

KL Chishi is Congress candidate for lone LS seat in Nagaland

KOHIMA, MAR 21 (PTI): Nagaland Congress president K Therie Thursday announced that former chief minister K L Chishi would be the party’s candidate for the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state.

Therie also announced that Alemjionshi Longkumer would be the Congress candidate for the bypoll to the Aonglenden Assembly constituency in the state.

Therie alleged that RSS and BJP do not have any solution for Naga

political problem as their ideology is to enforce Uniform Civil Code throughout the country.

He claimed that the Congress can understand the problems of the Naga people and the North East as its policy is unity in diversity.

Chishi said that if successful, he would represent the whims and aspirations of the people of Nagaland and give special focus on four issues two each at the state and National level, which are

confronting the Naga society. The priorities, he said, would be resolution of Naga political issue and Citizenship Amendment Bill at the Central level and creation of employment avenues for the Naga youths and bringing about good governance and development for the state.

Election to the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland will be held on April 11 along with the byelection to the Aonglenden Assembly constituency.

JD(U) releases second list of candidates for Arunachal assembly polls

ITANAGAR, MAR 22 (PTI): The JD(U), which is contesting the elections for the first time in Arunachal Pradesh, has released its second list of eight candidates for the assembly polls.

The party’s North East Executive Council (NEEC) Chairman, Senchumo Lotha, released the second list of nominees for the polls on Thursday.

The Janata Dal (United) on Wednesday had announced the names of five candidates.

Sitting MLA from Ita-

nagar constituency, Techi Kaso, has been fielded once again, this time by the JD(U), as he was not given a ticket by the BJP.

The party has also fielded sitting BJP MLA Dikto Yekar from the Daporijo constituency.

Six new faces were included in the JDUs second list.

The Lok Sabha and the assembly polls will be held simultaneously in Arunachal Pradesh on April 11.

The opposition Congress is yet to announce the names of candidates.

Sit-in by 200 aspiring school teachers enters 22nd day



KOLKATA, MAR 21 (PTI): The indefinite dharna in the city by around 200 aspiring school teachers who were demanding a recruitment entered the 22nd day Thursday.

The agitators who had come from across the state claimed that a large number of teachers’ posts were lying vacant but the authorities were not calling them for interview though they have the requisite qualifications.

They said hundreds of candidates have passed the School Service Commission (SSC) recruitment examinations and found their names in the wait list for the past few years.

Continuing the dharna on Mayo Road since February 28 under the banner of the SSC Yuva-Chhatra Adhikar Manch, many had fallen sick, affected by dengue and blood dysentery, said Tania Seth, one of the agitators.

“However, our movement will not stop till the vacant posts are filled,” she asserted.

Arpita Das of Raiganj and Subodh Halder of Birbhum had to be taken to hospital from the sit-in venue on Wednesday, a spokesman of the agitating organisation the SSC Yuva-Chhatra Adhikar Manch said Thursday.

The Manch organised a mass convention on Wednesday near the venue where film maker Anik Dutta, actor Badshah Maitra criticised the state government for delay in recruitment of teachers.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the students’ wing of the RSS, also slammed the authorities for doing precious little to end the impasse.

Education Minister Partha Chatterjee had met the agitating students earlier this month and appealed to them to withdraw the stir but they refused to budge before getting specific assurances.

Chatterjee had later said none of the eligible candidates would be deprived.

TV journalist knifed in restaurant, four detained



GUWAHATI, MAR 22 (PTI): A journalist of a news TV channel was attacked with knives and seriously injured in an attack in a restaurant Ganeshguri locality here, police said Friday.

Chakrapani Parashar, a journalist of satellite news channel News18/AssamNE, was stabbed by some workers of a restaurant adjacent to his office when he was on duty on Thursday night, police said.

Police have detained four accused in connection with the attack.

Parashar sustained serious injuries in various parts of his body and was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he is stated to be out of danger, News 18/Assam NE editor Sanjoy Paul said.

Trouble began on

Thursday afternoon when Parashar went with his unit to cover a fight between the main accused, who runs a restaurant in the same building as the news channel and some youths while playing Holi, News18 Assam/NE Deputy Manager (Operations) Aparup Barua said.

“Though the news was not telecast, the restaurant owner started an argument with Parashar for covering the incident. In the evening when about five to six of our journalists, including Parashar, went to the restaurant to settle the matter amicably, the accused took out a dagger and stabbed him repeatedly,” Barua said.

The accused has a criminal record and was arrested earlier too, he

said. Various political parties - national and regional and journalists organisations have condemned the attack on Parashar.

The Electronic Media Forum Assam (EMFA) has expressed concern over the attack and demanded stringent actions against the culprits. It also urged the state government to ensure security to media persons by enacting a special protection law at the earliest.

In a statement here on Friday, EMFA claimed that increasing instances of physical assaults are being reported from various parts of the country and the Centre should take the matter seriously.

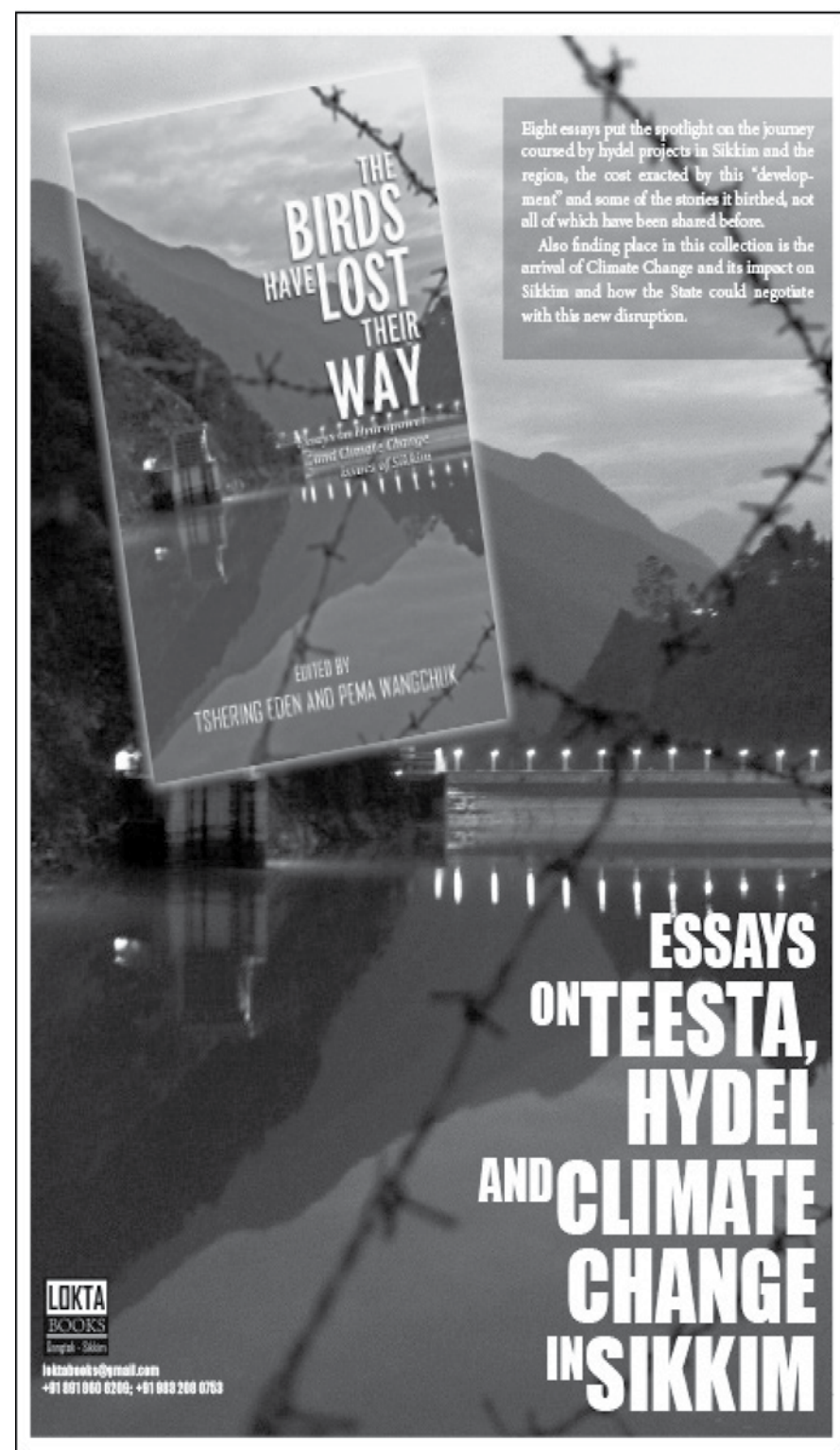
It also appealed to all media persons across the country to be united over the issue.

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Dhoni opens up on 2013 IPL fixing scandal: No one asked how I dealt with it

NEW DELHI, MAR 21 (PTI): Mahendra Singh Dhoni gives in very little with his body language and that's the reason he feels that people never asked him how he coped with all the baseless allegations levelled at him when 2013 IPL spot-fixing scandal reared its ugly head.

For Dhoni, who has always preferred to go about his job quietly even when leading the Indian team, his silence may have been misunderstood.

"The problem when people think you are very strong, is that more often than not, nobody comes and asks: how are you doing. It was more of how I dealt with it. I did not want to talk about it to others, at the same time it was scratching me. I don't want anything to affect my cricket. For me, cricket is the most important thing," Dhoni said on Hotstar's new documentary on CSK.

What mistake did the players make, asked Mahendra Singh Dhoni, opening up on a phase of life made "most difficult and depressing" by the 2013 IPL fixing scandal.

The two-time World Cup winning captain broke his silence in a docudrama aptly titled 'Roar of the Lion', which focuses on the scandal that rocked Indian cricket and the ensuing fairy tale comeback by Chennai Super Kings following



a two-year suspension for its management's role in spot-fixing.

"2013 was the most difficult phase in my life, I was never depressed as much as I was then. The closest was 2007 World Cup when we lost in the group stages. But all said and done, 2007 happened because we did not play good cricket.

"But 2013, the angle was completely different. People are talking about match-fixing and spot-fixing. It was the most talked about thing in the country," Dhoni said in the first episode titled 'What did we do wrong?' broadcast on Hotstar.

Dhoni, who led the CSK to three IPL titles, said they knew a

"harsh punishment" was on the cards.

"We did deserve the punishment but the only thing is the quantum of the punishment. Finally we got to know that CSK will be banned for two years. There was a mixed feeling that time. Because you take a lot of things personally and, as a captain, question what did the team do wrong," Dhoni stated.

"Yes there was mistake from our side (the franchise) but were the players involved in this? What mistake did we, as players, do to go through all of that?"

Recalling the torrid time when insinuations and allegations flew thick and fast, Dhoni said fixing a match requires

the involvement of the majority of players.

"My name also came up in talks of fixing. They started showcasing in the media or social media as if the team was involved, I was involved. Is it possible (in cricket)? Yes it is possible, anyone can do spot-fixing. Umpires can do that, batsmen can, bowlers can... but match-fixing needs the involvement of the majority of the players."

In a trailer of the documentary recently, Dhoni had called match-fixing a bigger crime than murder.

"Whatever I am today, whatever I have achieved is because of cricket. So the biggest crime that I can commit personally is not murder. It's actu-

ally match fixing because it doesn't get restricted to me. If I'm involved in such a thing, it has a bigger impact.

"If people think a match is fixed because the outcome of a match is extraordinary, then people lose their faith in cricket. I don't think in my life I would deal with something that is tougher than this," he said.

Dhoni had not commented on the turmoil before this. In July 2015, Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals were suspended from the cash-rich league for two years for betting activities by their key officials Gurunath Meiyappan and Raj Kundra during the 2013 season.

On his silence post

the episode, Dhoni said, "What makes it even tougher is that, as the Indian captain you keep going to press conferences. There is a known line that is drawn that that was the IPL and this is the Indian cricket team.

"It's not easy to keep performing at the top level when these things are on your mind. Ten years down the line, no one is going to remember what was said in a press conference but how the team did."

While he agreed that then BCCI chief N Srinivasan's son-in-law Meiyappan was part of the team setup, Dhoni said, in what capacity, is open to debate. "Initially, when Guru's name came up, (we knew) he was part of the team, all said and done. But in what capacity, that is debatable. Was he the owner, the team principal, the motivator... what exactly was he?"

"I don't know if anyone from the franchise introduced Guru to us as the owner... we all knew him as the son-in-law."

The punishment was handed down by a Supreme Court-appointed three-member committee headed by former CJI R M Lodha, which held that the betting activities brought the game of cricket, BCCI and IPL into disrepute.

Lastly, Dhoni called his association with CSK is "like a match made on matrimonial site - an arranged marriage".

Around the world in three years, three days



MUMBAI, MAR 22 (PTI): "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans," wrote famous English writer John Lennon in his song 'Beautiful Boy' released in 1980.

Vishnudas Chapke, a Mumbai-based journalist, has lived that wisdom quintessentially, trotting the globe by road "unplanned" on an impecunious budget.

The 36-year-old scribe, who had set out on the journey exactly three years and three days ago from Thane railway station hear here, has returned to the Maharashtra city, covering 35 countries in Asia, South America, Central America, Europe and Australia.

Chapke, who has roots in a farming family from Parbhani in the Marathwada region, undertook the journey seeking inspiration from naval captain Dilip Donde's solo circumnavigation of the world by sea.

The scribe returned to India, crossing the border from Myanmar at Manipur last Friday. He reached Thane Thursday night.

"My mind was filled with uncertainty when I began the journey on March 19, 2016. It was an unplanned trip. But what unfolded over the next three years was an amazing and beautiful experience," Chapke said.

"Returning home after being away from family and friends for a long span is an extremely emotional experience," he added.

Chapke feels the

trip has enriched him as a person.

The scribe added it taught him to live in tough and varying weather conditions as he went about vagabonding around the world.

But the tour had its share of unpleasant experiences.

Chapke recounted how two years ago he was allegedly mugged in Chile by a drug addict who decamped with his cellphone and money.

Practicing austerity at personal-level until before undertaking the journey came handy during the wayfaring, he added. "This trip helped me connect with people belonging to different backgrounds culturally and religion wise and who speak different languages. Notwithstanding these barriers, I could become friends with them and that's an asset now," he added.

Chapke said he sought to flag the environment cause all along the trip, planting saplings with ministers and diplomats in at least 15 of the countries the journalist visited.

Among his memorable experiences was playing a volunteer during a forest fire in Chile in January 2017. His contribution towards relief work was appreciated by the South American country's then President Michelle Bachelet, Chapke said.

He also expressed gratitude towards those who helped him, including organisations like Tata Trust, during the journey, which was demanding financially.

Amit Panghal, Shiva Thapa in Indian men's boxing team for Asian Championships

NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI): Asian Games gold-medallist Amit Panghal will be making his competitive debut in the 52kg category while Shiva Thapa (60kg) will eye a record-breaking fourth successive medal after the duo found a place in the Indian men's boxing team for the Asian Championships, next month.

The Asian Championships are scheduled to be held in the Thai capital of Bangkok from April 19 to 28. Panghal won a second successive 49kg category gold medal at the prestigious Strandja Memorial Tournament in Bulgaria last month and trained in his new weight division in Germany earlier this month.

The Haryana-boxer has been forced to shift divisions after the 49kg category was dropped from the 2020 Olympic programme. Thapa also started the new season on a positive note with a silver medal at the Gee-Bee Tournament in Finland this month.

The former world championship bronze-medallist from Assam has won medals in three previous editions of the Asian showpiece event -- gold in 2013, bronze in 2015 and silver in 2017. "The boxers who win gold or silver medals at the Asian Championships in the Olympic weight categories will be our automatic choices for the world championships later this year," national coach C A Kuttappa told PTI. The 49kg category will be represented

by national champion Deepak Singh, who clinched a gold medal in the Makran Cup in Iran earlier this month.

Kavinder Singh Bisht, the gold-winner in the GeeBee Tournament, has been picked for the 56kg category, while Commonwealth Games silver-medallist and Satish Kumar was expectedly the choice for the +91kg division. Satish won a bronze medal at the 2015 Asian Championships.

The World Championships, to be held from September 7 to 21 in Yekaterinburg, Russia in September, will be conducted in the new Olympic weight categories as the event will double up as a qualifier for the 2020 Games in Tokyo.

The other weights to have been dropped from the Olympic roster, apart from the 49kg division, are 56kg, 60kg and 64kg. In their place, the International Boxing Association (AIBA) has brought back 57kg and introduced the 63kg division.

Due to the re-jigging, the 60kg category boxers such as Thapa and Commonwealth Games silver-medallist Manish Kumar will be moving to the 63kg division.

"That is why, the world championship selection in the 63kg category will be done on the basis of probably trials and an assessment of their sparring performance in the camp," Kuttappa said.

The women's competition will be held alongside the men's event at the continental showpiece.

India to begin open campaign against Japan in Sultan Azlan Shah Cup

IPOH (MALAYSIA), MAR 22 (PTI): Putting behind the disappointments of last year, the Indian men's hockey team will renew its quest for glory when it takes on Asian Games gold medallists Japan in their opening encounter of the 28th Sultan Azlan Shah Cup here on Saturday.

Despite being without the guidance of a coach and a series of injuries plaguing its players, most recent being Gurjant Singh, who returned home after fracturing his nose during a practice match, the Indian team is upbeat and confident of a show good.

"Japan, Korea and hosts Malaysia will be the teams to watch out

for. They are travelling with full squads and they will pose a stiff challenge for us," skipper Manpreet Singh said on the eve of their opening match. "The youngsters will need to step up their game and I believe having fresh faces can be an advantage as the possibility of the opponents knowing much about the new comers is less."

The Indian team reached here on Monday and have been going about their routine to get used to the humid conditions. On Thursday, the team played a practice match against hosts Malaysia and are geared up for a good start to the tournament.

India's previous outing at Sultan Azlan Shah ended with the

team finishing fifth but saw some good performances by a young unit combined with a few senior players. The team had lost narrowly (2-3) to Olympic Champions Argentina in their first match, drew with England 1-1, lost to eventual champions Australia 2-4 and beat Malaysia 5-1. Though they lost 2-3 to Ireland in the round robin stage, they beat them 4-1 in the placing match.

"Youngsters have always used the platform to come up with memorable performances here and though the forwardline barring Mandeep Singh has about 12 caps between each other, we are hopeful they will soak up the pressure early on and deliver," Manpreet said.

Gully Boy gave us great push but we shouldn't be dependent on it: DIVINE

MUMBAI, MAR 22 (PTI): Zoya Akhtar's "Gully Boy" brought Mumbai's underground hip-hop scene to the mainstream and rapper DIVINE whose life, along with rapper Naezy, inspired the film says they should now make use of the recognition and not be "dependent" on it.

The film, headlined by Ranveer Singh, chronicled the story of the rise of a rapper from Dharavi. "Gully Boy" emerged as one of the most critically-acclaimed films of the season and has helped put the spotlight on the hip-hop culture, which was hitherto ignored.

DIVINE says, thanks to the film, the artistes aren't "alien anymore" and are now in the mainstream, with hip-hop reaching all corners of the country.

"The movie was a great push for us but we should not be dependent on the movie anymore. We should do our own thing. A mainstream movie came about us and now everybody knows about this scene in Mumbai.

"Now every city should be pushing and putting themselves out there because now



there is an audience who is ready to listen," DIVINE told PTI. The film, written by Zoya and Reema Kagti with dialogues by Vijay Maurya opened first in Berlin before a theatrical release in India.

"Gully Boy" went on to become a huge success and put the spotlight on emerging rappers in the country, especially DIVINE. Asked if he feels his art can get affected with so much attention, the rapper

says, "No. It clearly depends on

how you take it. The film was being made since three and half a years.

"It always got me excited, obviously, but in the back of my head, I knew I'm here to do music, give the people what I have. My life is still the same, only the love has been getting bigger."

There were reports that the team is planning to make a sequel to "Gully Boy" but DIVINE says he is not aware of any such development.

"I didn't have a word with her (Zoya) yet. If she's doing one then all the best to her. She has my love already."

The rapper is currently gearing up to perform at the second edition of BUDX, which aims to give a closer look into the growing music scene in the country. DIVINE, whose first ever live performances included a total audience of 10, with six being his friends, has reached a position where he has teamed up with different

musicians to come out with a "collaborative" sound.

From Randolph Correia, guitarist with "Pentagram" to "Skyharbor" base guitarist Krishna Jhaveri, DIVINE is working with musicians from different backgrounds.

"This is not just a DIVINE sound. It's a bunch of like minded guys coming together to give a new sound when we play live. I am playing a set with a whole showcase, I've got my record label.

"We are helping some like minded guys to grow with us and work as a team. This is the first time I'll be showcasing all the talent I have on the roaster." The rapper says its important for artistes to collaborate with others, both emerging talents and existing stars, to grow.

"It's important to help each other out. We don't have to be dependent on Bollywood or a particular genre, tour to help us make it big. We have our own platforms right now and we should make use of it. That's why it's important to support anyone who's into music," he adds.

Critics question timing of Trump’s tweet recognising Israel’s sovereignty over Golan Heights

BY HARINDER MISHRA
JERUSALEM, MAR 22 (PTI): Critics have questioned the timing of US President Donald Trump’s tweet recognising Israel’s sovereignty over the strategic Golan Heights, describing it as America’s effort to intervene in Israeli elections to help a beleaguered friend at the cost of opening a “Pandora’s box.”

Trump took to Twitter on Thursday to state that it was time the US recognised Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, a territory the Jewish state occupied in the 1967 war.

Trump’s declaration comes as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces a closely fought general election on April 9, as well as a series of possible corruption charges.

“After 52 years, it is time for the United States to fully recognise Israel’s Sovereignty [sic] over the Golan Heights, which is of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and regional stability [sic]!” the US President tweeted.

Trump’s tweet was hailed by Netanyahu, stating that the former had “just made history” and thanking him on behalf of the people of

Israel. The Israeli leader also noted that Trump is trying to send the message that Iran is trying to destroy Israel.

Several political analysts in Israel reacted in disbelief at the announcement noting the fact that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is due to visit Washington next week.

“Why now? Since Netanyahu is flying to Washington, it would have made more sense for Trump to make the announcement standing by his side in the White House,” Ha’aretz columnist Anshel Pfeffer said, arguing that the US President is not “even trying to pretend that he isn’t intervening” in the Israeli elections.

Pfeffer said that the reason why Trump did not wait for Netanyahu’s visit was because of the latter’s worried and pale features at a press conference Wednesday where he stated that Iran has obtained embarrassing material from the phone of Benny Gantz, his main rival in the April 9 elections, that could be used to discredit him.

Former US Middle East peace negotiator Aaron David Miller too argued that like so many actions taken by the



Trump administration on Israel, US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over [the] Golan would be a political gimmick driven by domestic politics.

It’s unnecessary and ill-advised, he said.

Netanyahu, 69, faces the toughest political challenge after a decade at the helm of affairs, complicated also by recent revelations in graft related investigations against him that has strengthened the opposi-

tion’s campaign. Analyst at the Times of Israel (TOI), Rafael Ahren, quoted several American pundits and analysts, who criticised the move as “a solution in search of a problem,” when there is none.

“After all, very few in the international community were seriously demanding Israel return the Golan to Syria, and making the annexation official could open a Pandora’s box with unwanted side effects,” Ahren asserted. The Executive Director of The Washington Institute for Near-East Policy, Robert Satloff, was also quoted by the TOI as saying that he did not see any “wisdom” in the move.

As someone who advocated and endorsed the long-overdue move of the US embassy to Jerusalem, it is difficult to see urgency or wisdom in US recognition of Is-

rael’s sovereignty over [the] Golan, Satloff said.

Ilan Goldenberg, Director of the Middle East Security Programme at the Center for a New American Security argued that the recent development stirs a Hornet’s nest that didn’t need stirring.

Nobody cares about the Golan Heights right now or (neither is anyone) actively contesting Israel’s position in the Golan. So why create this headache?” he said.

The announcement follows a surprise move by the State Department last week when it opted to scrap the use of word “occupied” in reference to the Golan Heights in its annual human rights report for 2018. The change, which now reads, “Israeli-controlled territory,” is in stark contrast to the language used by previous US administra-

tions. Ofer Zalberg, a Jerusalem-based analyst for the Crisis Group, argued that a formal US recognition of Israel’s annexation of the Golan could weaken the administration’s ability to oppose other instances of countries acquiring territory by force, such as Russia’s annexation of Crimea.

Second, US recognition of Israel’s annexation of the Golan could lay the ground for US recognition of future Israeli annexation of the West Bank or parts of it, Zalberg added.

Trump’s announcement in December 2017 recognising Jerusalem as Israel’s capital had a huge backlash with the UN General Assembly voting to dismiss the move “null and void” as 128 countries voted against Washington’s move and only nine supporting it.

The US President’s announcement on Golan did not evoke any earth shattering media coverage in the Arab world with most media houses focusing on other issues and this passing as just another development.

The Arab world has described the move as “illegal” and the Palestinian Authority has said that it will destabilise the region.

Pak to receive USD 2.1 loan from China by March 21



ISLAMABAD, MAR 22 (PTI): Cash-strapped Pakistan will receive over USD 2 billion loan from its “all-weather” ally China by Monday to provide a boost to its ailing economy, the Finance Ministry has announced.

Ministry’s adviser and spokesperson Khagan Najeeb Khan said that “all procedural formalities” for the transfer of the USD 2.1 billion (15 billion yuan) loan being provided by the Chinese government have been completed, and “the funds will be deposited in the State Bank of Pakistan’s account by Monday, March 25,” the Dawn newspaper reported.

Pakistan has received USD 1 billion each from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as part of the bailout packages by the two Gulf nations to help shore up Islamabad’s dwindling foreign currency reserves.

Saudi Arabia’s assistance was part of the USD 6 billion bailout package - USD 3 billion balance-of-payments support and another USD 3 billion in deferred payments on oil imports - which Riyadh had agreed in October last year.

Islamabad is also in talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bailout package.

The loan facility “will further strengthen foreign exchange reserves and ensure balance of payment stability,” the spokesperson said.

Following a meeting in Beijing between Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Prime Minister Imran Khan in November 2018, China said that it was willing to offer assistance to Pakistan to help it weather its current fiscal woes but the terms of such aid were still being discussed.

Shortly after, Chinese Consul General Long Dingbin had said during an interview that in order to “boost Pakistan’s economy”, Beijing was investing in multiple sectors and launching business ventures instead of providing loans.

Earlier, Pakistan officials said that Islamabad would seek around USD 8 billion from the IMF which would be the biggest package by the Fund for Islamabad.

Although the Pakistan government has secured a breathing space from Saudi Arabian and the UAE loans, an IMF programme is essential to unlock access to resources from other multilateral lenders like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, as well as the global capital markets.

Italian move to join China’s Belt and Road coup for Beijing

Beijing, Mar 22 (AP): Despite criticisms, Beijing has been steadily gathering support for its “Belt and Road” initiative, which aims to weave a network of ports, bridges and power plants linking China with Africa, Europe and beyond.

Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte has pledged to sign a memorandum of understanding this week on supporting the initiative during a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has made the initiative a signature policy of his administration. Italy’s involvement would give China a crucial inroad into western Europe and a symbolic boost in its economic tug-of-war with the United States.

Italy would be the first member of the G-7, a group of seven major economies that includes the United States, to join Belt and Road, following Portugal’s embrace of the initiative in December.

It appears to be driven partly by hopes that Chinese investment in Italy’s ports might help revive the country’s traditional role as a key link in trade between the East and West. The Belt and Road program is a loosely defined umbrella for predominantly China-financed and usually China-built projects in more than 60 countries from the South Pacific through Asia to Africa and Europe. As President Donald Trump squares off with China over trade and other issues, gaining Italy’s support is a coup for Beijing.

“It’s important for the Xi administration to show that you have Portugal and Italy, two well-known countries in western Europe breaking ranks with the west-

ern alliance in BRI,” said Willy Lam, an adjunct professor of China studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. China says some 150 countries have signed Belt and Road related agreements since the program’s launch more than five years ago. A major conference is planned next month in Beijing, marking further expansion of the initiative.

Beijing has marketed the initiative as a way to give some of the world’s neediest countries a leg up, helping them gain access to more trade and investment. But it also helps Chinese companies tap new markets for their products while, inevitably, helping Beijing amass greater global influence.

Some governments including the United States, Japan and India worry that Beijing is trying to build a China-centered sphere of influence that would undermine their own sway, pulling developing nations into so-called “debt traps,” that would give China ever-more control over their territories and economies.

China already has made inroads in Eastern Europe through investments in railways, ports and steel mills. That’s stirred fears of a growing divide within the 28-member European Union between its wealthier and poorer members. Some also worry Chinese-led projects might undercut the bloc’s standards on transparency.

As the U.S. takes on long-standing complaints of Chinese intellectual property theft and unfair trade practices, a Chinese win in Italy could boost Beijing’s arguments that it is ulti-

mately a force for good in the global economy. China’s official position is that Belt and Road is solely an economic initiative with no political motives. Xi said in a speech late last year that even as China moves closer to the center of the world stage, it will never seek hegemony.

“The Belt and Road Initiative in nature is an economic strategy,” said Chu Yin, a researcher at the Center for China and Globalization, a think tank in Beijing affiliated with the government and with the ruling Communist Party. “China has no intention to become a global hegemon and nor does China have such an ability,” he said.

Launched in 2013, the initiative is at heart a business venture, not aid. China wants to attract non-Chinese investors but that has happened only on a few of the hundreds of projects, which range from oil drilling in Siberia to construction of ports in Southeast Asia, railways in Eastern Europe and power plants in the Middle East.

The initiative has run into some roadblocks in the past year, as the Chinese economy cooled and the US and others accused Beijing of saddling developing countries with too much debt.

Some governments including Thailand, Tanzania, Sri Lanka and Nepal have scrapped, scaled back or renegotiated projects amid complaints that they are too costly and give too little work to local contractors. Last year, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad cancelled projects including a USD 20 billion railway he said his country cannot afford.

Two US soldiers killed in Afghanistan: NATO

KABUL, MAR 22 (AFP): Two US service members were killed in Afghanistan Friday, NATO said, in the latest casualties to hit the international coalition amid ongoing peace talks between Washington and the Taliban.

NATO’s Resolute Support mission would not immediately release any details about the soldiers but said they had been killed during an unspecified “operation” in the country.

“In accordance with US Department of Defense policy, the name of the service members killed in action are being withheld until 24 hours after notification of next of kin is complete,” said

NATO. The deaths come a day after at least six people were killed by blasts in an Islamic State-claimed attack during Persian New Year celebrations in a Shiite area of Kabul.

The number of American casualties has fallen dramatically since the end of 2014 when Afghan forces took over from US-led NATO combat troops to secure the country.

Fighting continues to flare across Afghanistan more than a week after the latest round of talks between the US and the Taliban ended in Doha, as Washington continues to seek an end to the nearly 18-year war.

The Afghan government has complained it is

being left out of the negotiations, as many Afghans fear a premature US withdrawal could see the Taliban return to some semblance of power.

The country remains on edge as winter comes to end, with warmer weather sparking the potential onset of a new fighting season as analysts warn the Taliban may increase attacks to gain leverage at the negotiating table.

US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is spearheading efforts to strike a peace deal with the Taliban before Afghanistan’s presidential election, which was pushed back to late September earlier this week.





HAPPY DANCE! The Camping star, Jennifer Garner has a spring in her step while grabbing coffee in LA.

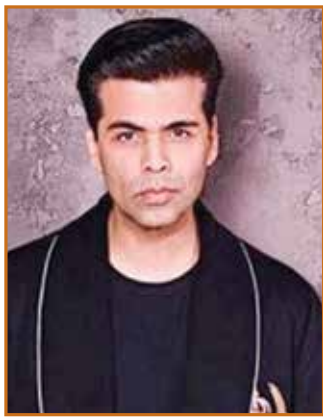
Johar roasted over liking anti-SRK tweet

Mumbai, Mar 22 (PTI): Film-maker and Shah Rukh Khan's one of the closest friends, Karan Johar, on Friday received flak from the superstar's fans for liking a tweet containing objectionable terms against the actor.

Karan, who has always been vocal about his affection towards SRK, issued an apology after #Shameon-KaranJohar started trending on the microblogging site.

"Guys having a technical problem with my Twitter account. Strange things are going on. From uploading shoe picture and gibberish to liking tweets I haven't even read and would NEVER even acknowledge. Please bear with me and I apologise for any inconvenience. Sorting it out asap," Karan tweeted.

The post, which landed the director in trouble, compared the day one box-office performance of Shah Rukh's "Zero" and Karan's production, Akshay Kumar-starrer



"Kesari". The filmmaker has since unliked the tweet.

Unlike his fans, Shah Rukh had a witty response to the controversy and said he hated clarifications on social media. "Karan Johar is technologically challenged but has other good qualities like his taste in clothes! Just like life, Twitter does not come with instructions, so mistakes are natural... and also he has fat fingers. Go easy all, Make Love not War... It's more fun," SRK tweeted.

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'Delhi Crime' shot with non-judgemental eye, says director Richie Mehta

BY RADHIKA SHARMA

NEW DELHI, MAR 22 (PTI):

"Delhi Crime", based on Nirbhaya case files, explores the 2012 heinous gangrape and murder from the viewpoint of the Delhi Police team that probed the incident, but Netflix's new web series was shot with a non-judgemental eye, says director Richie Mehta.

The seven-part series, which starts streaming Friday, directed by the Indian-Canadian filmmaker follows the investigation to nab the six males who raped the 23-year-old physiotherapy intern on a cold December night in a moving bus in the national capital. She died of her grievous injuries 13 days later in a Singapore hospital.

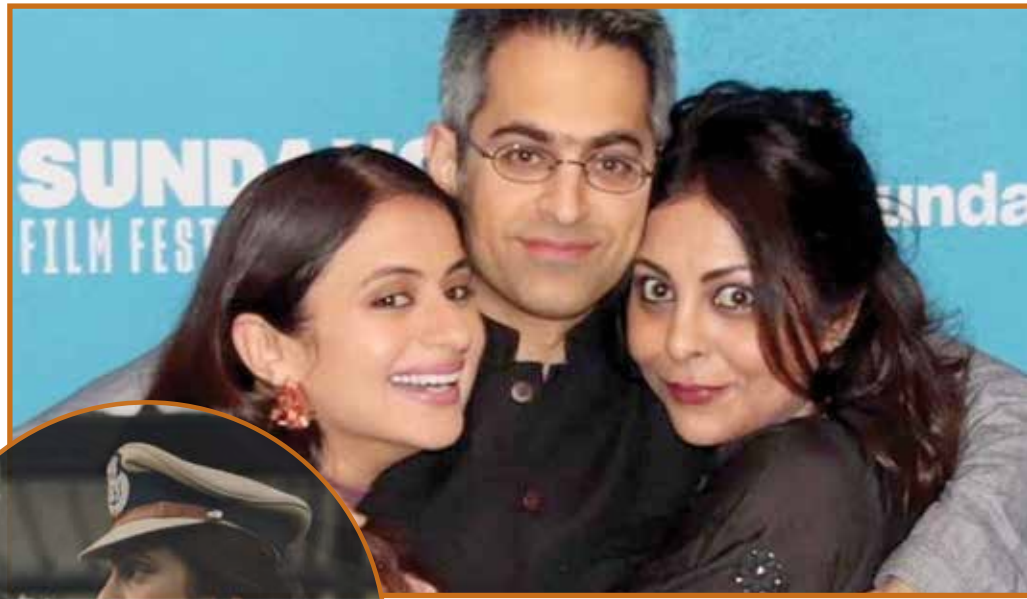
Mehta said it was a family friend serving in Delhi Police who suggested him to make a film on the subject. He started the research in 2013 after a trial court convicted and gave death sentence to the four adult defendants.

After four years of research and writing, the director said he came up with a 170-page bible followed by 430-page script, wherein he has explored the perspective of "the people who were in the front lines". "I realised they have a point of view on these things that we don't talk about. We had a very visceral reaction to this particular case and these are the people who are doing it every day. So why aren't we talking to them and getting their points of view?" Mehta told PTI in an interview here.

The director, known for films like "Amal" and "Siddharth", has not depicted the act of gangrape in the series neither in visuals nor audio.

"I was very clear from the beginning that I didn't want to showcase the rape scene because I wanted the series to be about the procedure, not the crime," he said. Mehta said the team filmed the series as if they were a "bystander", sneaking up to see and listen in to what was happening.

"We would take point of view shots, bystander shots. Sometimes we took long shots, people are walking down the hallway and we're behind them or we are just a person listening in. This was part of the non-judgmentalness of it. The whole show was shot in that par-



ticular style." He said the only time he changed tack was when DCP (south district) Vartika Chaturvedi, played by Shefali Shah, gets Jai Singh, the main rapist, to confess.

"In rest of the scenes, you're just sitting in the corner. The only time I broke that rule was when I needed to see both the people's eyes, it was that moment - behind Vartika's and Jai Singh's shoulders. This was not a bystander thing anymore," he said. In a time when producers have become prompt in registering movie titles after an event of national importance occurs, Mehta said he did not go for the project soon after verdict was out as the wound was still fresh in the country's consciousness.

"I sensed it wasn't right to make a project on this then. Subjects like this are sensitive, especially when you have to tackle it from different points of view. It was going to take me a lot of time to understand all of that before I could dramatise it. "I said to myself every day in those first four years that if somebody else does it, fine! It will alleviate the pain I was going through. I would have been happy if somebody did the exact same show."

After Leslie Udwin's 2015 documentary "India's Daughter" and Deepa Mehta-directed drama "Anatomy of Violence" in 2016, "Delhi Crime" is the latest project to bring the highly publicised case, which led to a change in India's rape laws, on screen.

The filmmaker, who divides his time between New Delhi and London, said as

he was researching, he kept his eyes and ears open. "There was a presentation of similar viewpoints through TV or media. By the time I made the decision to go shoot this two years ago, it was after knowing that I had come upon a point of view which has not been expressed."

The show dramatises the incident and includes back stories of the cops, the condition of the police force, their power struggle with the bureaucracy and managing the scoop-hungry media.

Asked about the portrayal of the then Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit (though there is a gender swap) and the press, Mehta said, "What I'm saying is exactly what is presented there. So, I don't believe I'm presenting anything that people don't know."

The director said his vision was about presenting the police personnel in an empathetic manner while also identifying what they are tasked to do.

"We demand that they catch these people and so I thought let's actually look at what that means. There are cops who don't go home for months at a time or a sub-inspector may not have a vehicle to go to the crime scene. There are power cuts at the police station every day. These back stories are inspired by many people who are all real."

The series also gives a hat-tip to Bollywood songs from the 1960-80s era and Mehta said the officers he met were so busy for the last 20 years they had no time to engage with pop culture.

"Whenever they turn the radio on, it's the old classics. It was evocative of something," he added. "Delhi Crime" season two is afoot and the director said the series will be back with same characters in "more or less the same rank" and a different crime.

Emilia Clarke says she survived two life-threatening brain aneurysms in early 'GOT' days

Los Angeles, Mar 22 (PTI): Actor Emilia Clarke has revealed that in the early years of "Game of Thrones" she suffered from two brain aneurysms that nearly took her life. In an essay for The New Yorker, published online on Thursday, Clarke said the health scares began soon after the success of the first season of the HBO epic-fantasy drama.

Clarke said just before she assumed her role as Daenerys Targaryen in 2011, she started feeling a "shooting, stabbing, constricting pain" in her head during a workout with her trainer. "I immediately felt as though an elastic band were squeezing my brain. I tried to ignore the pain and push through it, but I just couldn't. Somehow, almost crawling, I made it to the locker room. I reached the toilet, sank to my knees, and proceeded to be violently, voluminously ill. Meanwhile, the pain shooting, stabbing, constricting pain was getting worse. At some level, I knew what was happening: my brain was damaged." The actor

was rushed to the hospital where she had an MRI scan that showed an aneurysm requiring brain surgery. The then-24-year-old actor underwent a two-week recovery period, during which she could not remember her name, a result of a condition called aphasia.

"I'd never experienced fear like that a sense of doom closing in. I could see my life ahead, and it wasn't worth living. I am an actor; I need to remember my lines. Now I couldn't recall my name," Clarke said.

After recovering, Clarke returned to promote "GOT", but soon discovered that she had another smaller aneurysm on the other side of her brain that could rupture any time. Around the third season of the series, the actor visited the medical facility for regular brain scans and learned that the second aneurysm had doubled in size. She had another surgery, but it



did not go as successfully as the first one. "When they woke me, I was screaming in pain. The procedure had failed. I had a massive bleed and the doctors made it plain that my chances of surviving were precarious if they didn't operate again. This time they needed to access my brain in the old-fashioned way through my skull. And the operation had to happen immediately," Clarke said.

"I looked as though I had been through a war more gruesome than any that Daenerys experienced. I emerged from the operation with a drain coming out of my head. Bits of my skull had been replaced by titanium," she added. The actor spent one month in the hospital, where she said she had "lost all hope." "I felt like a shell of myself. So much so that I now have a hard time remembering those dark days in much detail. My mind has blocked them out. But I do remember being convinced that I wasn't going to live," she said.

Several weeks after the surgery, Clarke was back to work promoting the series at the San Diego Comic-Con with her castmates.

ARIES: You're known for doling out tough love, but today, bring the gift of empathy to every situation. Lend a shoulder to cry on—to a friend or even a stranger! Be a walking role model for how to treat others with grace. Follow your intuition throughout the day. If you get the sense that a someone close to you needs to unload, delicately initiate a personal conversation.

TAURUS: Hoping a problem will go away if you ignore it long enough? Forget denial, Taurus: It's time to stop averting your gaze. Today, dealing will actually be healing. Square your shoulders and face the behemoth head-on. It takes courage to address a troubling situation, but that's the only way you'll get to the other side. Remember: You don't have to fight this battle by yourself.

GEMINI: Planetary PSA: You don't have to be perfect to be loved. As a matter of fact, Gemini, your vulnerability makes you much more relatable. Today, it's safe to strip away the mask and let people see the authentic you; yes, even the "messy" parts. People are perpetually texting you

for advice and wisdom, but right now you need someone else to be the rock.

CANCER: Projecting confidence is one thing, Cancer, but are you working a little too hard to prove your competence? What you shouldn't do today is tell your colleagues "I've got it under control" while you're desperately scrambling behind the scenes. That's just too stressful—and perhaps detrimental to progress. If you find yourself stumped, call a summit to discuss strategy or schedule a sit-down with your boss.

LEO: This Saturday, a refreshingly honest conversation can move the needle on a stuck relationship. Don't get hung up with saying the "right" thing, Leo; just speak your piece in a non-blaming way. And make sure you extend that open-minded courtesy to the other party as well. Of course, sometimes these sentiments are best expressed in a letter—one that you don't send, but rather write, then rip up and burn as a ceremonial release.

LIBRA: Who says February 14th gets to have all the fun? Saturday's playful pairing

of Mercury and Uranus could bring an early visit from St. Valentine. A scintillating conversation could lead to a dinner date that lingers on for hours. If you're already spoken for, Saturday could be like a V-Day prequel. Reserve a table for two or pick up a pair of tickets for a raved-about show.

VIRGO: Thoughts are swirling through your head this Saturday, but don't let them evolve into an epic work of fiction. With analytical Mercury getting a boost from innovative Uranus, talk to people who can help you see the situation from an enlightened perspective. Everything happens for a reason, Virgo, even if it makes zero sense in the moment.

SCORPIO: Is it a fact or just a feeling? Saturday's Mercury-Uranus mashup brings some much-needed objectivity to a situation that's been hitting all your emotional buttons. While you don't want to ignore your intuition, what's bothering you might be a result of a past trigger rather than something that's actually occurring in the here and now. The surest way to find out? Investigate, as only a Scorpio can!

Your inner bon vivant takes the wheel this Sunday as social Mercury high-kicks into Pisces and your flamboyant, fun-loving fifth house!

SAGITTARIUS: If other people are slowing you down this Saturday, no need to drag those stragglers along for the ride. Enjoy a day of independence, allowing yourself to come and go as you please without checking for approval. The dedicated alone time will refresh your feed and you'll be ready to reign as life of the party come sundown. Avoid any venues that feel stuffy or elitist!

CAPRICORN: Anyone can dazzle you with a first impression—but can they actually walk their talk? Under Saturday's convivial alignment of Mercury and Uranus, you might not be the best at separating the wheat from the chaff. Enjoy the magic moments you share with people socially, remembering that only time can tell the true story about their integrity and character. Reserve judgement, one way or the other, because it's equally possible that someone you wrote off as annoying could

start to grow on you!

AQUARIUS: Chat up strangers this Saturday, because at any moment, random banter could reveal a serendipitous spark. The fateful encounter could happen during an espresso run or while you're rolling up your yoga mat after class. One thoughtful comment on an Instagram-friend's feed could lead to a DM exchange—and one bold right swipe could swiftly evolve into a Saturday night date!

PISCES: Has money created a rift between you and a loved one, Pisces—or perhaps an imbalance in your workload? Today, you can heal that uncomfortable divide with an honest conversation. Look at the situation retrospectively. When did everything start to melt down between you two? Unspoken expectations—or possibly a miscommunication—may be the culprit here. Lean in to practical solutions like setting up an installment plan for IOUs or divvying up the task list in a way that feels fair. And let this be a lesson not to leave anything like this up to a verbal agreement again.