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SC Gupta to stand in as Chief Secretary

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 15 APR:

Additional Chief Secretary, SC Gupta, a 1986 Sikkim batch IAS officer, was today entrusted additional charge of Chief Secretary to stand in for Chief Secretary AK Shrivastava who is away on a Japan tour from 13-20 April.

Interestingly, a day before proceeding on his Japan tour, CS Mr Shrivastava had, on 12 April, issued a Department of Personnel office order announcing Additional CS, Development Commissioner VB Pathak, a 1990 batch IAS officer, to officiate as the Chief Secretary in his absence.

Today's DoP office order amending the previous one has been signed by the Special Secretary.

CVC awaits sanction to prosecute 79 corrupt employees; 13 from banks

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI):

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) is awaiting sanction to prosecute 79 corrupt central government employees, including an IAS officer, for over four months from different organisations.

A total of 41 cases, involving these officers, are pending sanction of prosecution from government departments, according to a latest data by the CVC.

Of the total cases, the highest of nine are pending with the Ministry of Personnel, that acts as a nodal department for anti-corruption matters and eight with the government of Uttar Pradesh.

A total of four cases, involving 13 of its staff, are pending with the State Bank of India, Canara Bank, Corporation Bank and IDBI, the data said.

Three such cases involving corrupt employees are pending with Union territories, two each with the Defence Ministry, Food and Supply Ministry, Health and Family Welfare Minister and the Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation, among others, it said.

As per norms, sanction for prosecution has to be decided within four-month time.

"These cases are pending sanction of prosecution for more than four months. We have reminded the government departments and the banks concerned to act fast on these requests," a senior CVC official said.

Strong Rooms guarded 24x7, DEO reassures

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 15 APR:

The District Election Officer, East, in a press communiqué issued today, has assured that the EVM strong-rooms established at Brihaspati Parsai Senior Secondary School at Ranipool are being guarded 24x7 by an Sashastra Seema Bal platoon stationed in the innermost cordon.

It may be recalled that the opposition Sik-

kim Krantikari Morcha, while stating on record that EVMs were safe, has also laid out plans to depute party-workers to keep watch on the strong-rooms.

The DEO-East detailed today that a 3-tier security cordon was in place with SSB, Sikkim Armed Police and District Police personnel manning each layer.

Additionally, nearly 50 CCTV cameras have been installed inside

each strong-room and at important points outside the strong room, the release adds.

Power backup, fire tender, fire extinguishers along with fencing around the premises have also been installed and regular visits are made of the premises by the DM and SP to monitor the arrangements.

The release goes on to state that unauthorised entry into the premises is not allowed

and everyone visiting the campus needs to carry identity cards.

For any political party representative who wants to stay at the premises, a room has been identified to accommodate 2-3 representatives from a political party at a time. These people need to obtain identity cards from the DEO's office to gain access.

The release adds that regular checking of this room will be done by

SSB and in case any prohibited activity is detected, the I-cards will be cancelled.

Representatives can stay in rotation after seeking permission from the DEO, the release adds.

These arrangements will continue till the day of counting as per ECI Guidelines in this regard, the DEO informs while appealing to all to cooperate with his office in this regard.

DEO East thanks all for successful conduct of polls, apologizes for delays

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 15 APR:

District Election Officer, East, Kapil Meena has thanked all for the successful conduct of polls and also apologised for mistakes and delays on poll day. In a press release, the DEO has said that despite the delays voter turn-out crossed 75%.

It may be mentioned that this election, there were numerous complaints regarding long queues, mismanaged polling booths, voting going on late into the night and malfunctioning of EVMs. Although a number of polling stations

across the State had such complaints, here in East, there were many complaints about polling in Upper Tadong.

In the letter of gratitude, Mr Meena has thanked all agencies, officers, staff members and general public in making poll day a success.

"I need to thank my own team of officers from Collectorate and some attached to our office who played vital role in efficiently disposing of works since first day of nominations till end of the poll process, all my Assistant Returning Officers, administrative staff who

were involved into almost all activities on a daily basis," he states.

He has thanked the CEO, Special CEO and election offices of state/district level, Presiding Officers and their polling teams, police, para military force, political parties and Election Observers.

The DEO has further mentioned that the Model Code of Conduct will continue till the counting process is over.

Preparations will begin shortly for the day of counting for which we need support from number of agencies as for the poll day, he has said.

Not only Mallya and Nirav, 36 businessmen fled from country in recent past, ED informs court



NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI):

ED Monday opposed the bail plea of Sushen Mohan Gupta, alleged defence agent arrested in the AgustaWestland VVIP choppers scam, saying there was a likelihood of him fleeing the country like 36 businessmen who had criminal cases against them.

The Enforcement Directorate told special judge Arvind Kumar that 36 businessmen, including Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi, have fled from the country in the recent past.

The probe agency's special public prosecutors D P Singh and N K Matta countered Sushen's claim that he had deep roots in the society, saying, "Mallya, Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and Sandesara brothers (Sterling Biotech Ltd promoters) had deeper routes in the society yet they left the country. There are such 36 businessmen who fled from the country in the last few years."

During the argument, ED's advocate Samvedna Verma told the court that the probe was at a crucial stage and the agency was trying to find out who was "RG" referred in the diaries of Sushen.

Verma also accused Gupta of influencing the witnesses in the case and told the court that he also tried to destroy the evidence in the case.

The court reserved order on Gupta's bail application for April 20.

Gupta has sought the relief on the ground that the agency has already completed the investigation and filed a charge sheet in the case.

In his bail application, the accused told the court that the ED's contention of the flight risk can be rejected considering his past activities, where he joined the investigation as and when summoned.

Gupta was arrested by the agency under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The ED officials said Gupta's role in the case came to light on the basis of disclosures made by Rajiv Saxena, who has turned approver in the case after he was deported from the UAE and arrested by the agency here.

It is suspected that Gupta has in his possession some payment details in the Rs 3,600 crore purchase deal of AgustaWestland VVIP choppers and the link is to be unravelled, they said.

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Whistleblower bureaucrat writes to PM for details of conversation with former Health minister

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI):

Citing "relentless persecution", whistleblower bureaucrat Sanjiv Chaturvedi has asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to disclose the details of the 2014 conversation he had with then Union health minister Harsh Vardhan.

The conversation between Modi and Vardhan led to his removal as anti-corruption officer of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Chaturvedi has said in a letter to the prime minister on February 28.

Though the letter was written in February, the contents of the letter have been accessed only recently.

Chaturvedi has sought action against those responsible for harassing him as well as disclosure of information

related to the status of investigation of corruption cases against serving central ministers, in accordance with a recent order of the Central Information Commission.

In his letter, Chaturvedi said he was subjected to "relentless persecution" and dragged into "endless litigations" in more than a dozen court cases across four high courts, tribunals and Supreme Court after the phone conversation between Modi and Vardhan on August 23, 2014.

The telephonic conversation was on the issue of removing Chaturvedi from the post of chief vigilance officer, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), according to the response to an RTI query filed by Chaturvedi.

A letter dated August 23,

2014, issued by then Union Health secretary Lov Verma to the Prime Minister's Office said, "The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India had a telephonic discussion with the Hon'ble Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare regarding relieving of charge of CVO, AIIMS, New Delhi from Shri Sanjiv Chaturvedi, Deputy Secretary, AIIMS, New Delhi."

A detailed note in this regard is submitted for perusal of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India," the letter said.

In his letter to the prime minister, Chaturvedi has cited a May 2014 file noting of then health secretary mentioning his exemplary performance as CVO. He has also cited the Parliamentary Committee Report of August 2015, which strongly deprecated the non-seri-

ous approach of the Ministry towards tackling such a large number of cases of corruption at AIIMS.

Chaturvedi, who earlier worked with the Haryana government, faced similar harassment earlier.

Recently, in a case related to award of zero grading into his annual performance report, Uttarakhand High Court termed the central government/AIIMS vindictive and imposed a fine of Rs 25,000.

This order was upheld by the Supreme Court, which imposed a further fine of Rs 25,000.

Chaturvedi is a 2002 batch officer of India Forest Service and exposed a series of corruption cases during his tenure as AIIMS CVO between 2012 and 2016.

Delhi CEO writes to EC over web series on PM

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): The Delhi CEO has written to the Election Commission drawing its attention to a web series on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which went online earlier this month and is being aired without permission from the Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC), officials said.

The move comes days after the EC banned the screening of a biopic on the prime minister during the current poll period, saying any such film that subverses purpose of any political entity or individual should not be displayed in the electronic media.

Meanwhile, district election officer (East) K Mahesh also wrote to the Delhi CEO asking whether the web series has been approved by the MCMC, a senior official said.

"The MCMC of the East Delhi constituency had received a complaint on April 11 through a grievance redressal portal," the official said.

As per the complaint, the web series was being streamed despite directions from the EC banning such biopics, he said.

Sources from the Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi said the letter from the East district might be forwarded to the EC in continuation of the letter already sent by them.

An official from the Delhi CEO office said, "We wrote a letter to the Election Commission bringing it to their notice that a web series is streaming. Since it is not a Delhi specific matter, we have urged the EC to take cognisance of the matter."

Another official said, "The web series has been produced by a private entity and so far, we have not found that the party has any stake in it. Ideally, the producers of the web series, who are based in Mumbai, should have taken permission from the poll body there to stream the series since the model code of conduct is in place."

The 10-episode web series Modi: Journey of a Common Man, is currently being streamed on Eros Now platforms. Directed by Umesh Shukla of OMG: Oh My God fame, the series features actors Faisal Khan, Ashish Sharma and Mahesh Thakur, who portray Modi at different stages of his life.

When contacted, one of the actors of the series said he had no idea about the matter.

Monsoon to be 'near normal' this year: IMD

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI):

The country is likely to have 'near normal' monsoon this year with a well distributed rainfall which could be beneficial for the agriculture sector, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) announced Monday.

The seasonal rainfall is likely to be 96 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA) with a model error of plus or minus five per cent, Secretary Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) M Rajeevan said.

The LPA of the season

rainfall over the country as a whole for the period 1951-2000 is 89 centimetres.

Significantly, this year the IMD has introduced a category of 'near normal' for rainfall between 96-104 per cent of the LPA. In its forecast last year, the rainfall between 96-104 of the LPA was classified as "normal" category.

Rainfall of 90 to 96 per cent of the LPA is below normal. Ninety-six per cent rainfall borders on below normal and normal category.

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Ex-Kolkata top cop says CBI targeting him in conspiracy by BJP leaders in Saradha scam

New Delhi, Apr 15 (PTI): Former Kolkata Police commissioner Rajeev Kumar on Monday told the Supreme Court that he has been targeted by the CBI as part of the larger conspiracy between two BJP leaders in the Saradha chit fund case.

Kumar in his affidavit named BJP leaders Mukul Roy and Kailash Vijaywargiya behind the larger conspiracy and told the apex court that an audio clip is available in public domain where they clearly speak of "targeting" a few "senior police officers".

"The sudden inexplicable turn by the petitioner/CBI in pointing out problems with the investigation and targeting the alleged contemnor seems to be borne out of a larger conspiracy between two senior leaders Mukul Roy and Kailash Vijaywargiya of the BJP, the ruling party at the centre," the affidavit said.

Kumar claimed that he has been targeted due to political vendetta and "this apprehension is corroborated by the contents of an audio clip that was reported widely by the press and electronic media at the time where the said leaders clearly speak of 'targeting' a few 'senior police officers' of the state".

Earlier in the day, Kumar told the apex court that he could not file his response on Saturday to the CBI's plea seeking his arrest in the multi-crore Saradha chit fund scam and sought adjournment of the hearing.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi took note of the submission of senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for Kumar, and postponed the hearing on the plea of the probe agency till April 22.

"Indira Jaising, senior counsel, submits that the counter affidavit of the respondent No 3 (Kumar) was required to be filed on Saturday (April 13) but Saturday being a holiday for the Registry, she may be allowed to file the same today. The said affidavit may be brought on record during the course of the day. Rejoinder affidavit, if any, be filed on or before April 20. The matter will be listed on April 22," the bench, also comprising Justices Deepak Gupta and Sanjiv Khanna, said.

The apex court had sought Kumar's response on April 8 on CBI's plea seeking his arrest in the

the chit fund scam.

The apex court, on February 5, had granted protection from arrest to Kumar while directing him to appear before the CBI and "faithfully" co-operating into the investigation of cases arising out of the scam.

The central probe agency has sought vacation of the order so that it can arrest and interrogate Kumar.

"This is the interim application (IA) of the CBI seeking custodial interrogation of Rajeev Kumar. Issue notice. Let the matter be listed for hearing on April 15," the bench had said.

The bench had also allowed CBI to file a fresh affidavit regarding its allegations that telecom operators -- Vodafone and Airtel -- were not co-operating with it in the probe.

In its plea to the apex court, the agency has said the recall of the order granting Kumar an interim protection from the arrest was necessary "to unravel the entire gamut of the larger conspiracy in the ponzi scam cases".

The CBI also sought the court's directions to West Bengal authorities to comply with the court's earlier orders "in letter and spirit" and not to create any hurdle in the CBI probe or try to "intimidate, harass and scare the agency officials" probing the cases.

"Recall the interim protection granted to Rajeev Kumar for no coercive steps, including arrest, granted by this court by order dated February 5, 2019 to enable the CBI to subject him to interrogation in accordance with the law to unravel the entire gamut of larger conspiracy in these ponzi scam cases and its subsequent investigation," the CBI's application said.

The agency said it needs to examine Kumar and other police officials to recover the material evidence and to investigate into the acts of omission and commission on the part of Bidhan Nagar Police commissionerate and SIT officials in causing concealment of the evidence collected by them during investigation.

Earlier, the apex court had termed as "very very serious" the revelations made by the CBI in its status report relating to the interrogation of Rajeev Kumar.

Contempt plea: SC seeks Rahul Gandhi's explanation on Rafale comments

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): The Supreme Court Monday made it clear that the remarks made by Rahul Gandhi in the media on the Rafale case verdict were "incorrectly attributed" to the apex court and directed the Congress President to give his explanation by April 22.

The top court gave a categorical clarification that in its Rafale judgement there was no occasion for it to make a mention of the alleged contemptuous observation that "Chowkidar Narendra Modi chor hain" as has been attributed to it by Gandhi.

The apex court decided to consider the criminal contempt petition filed by BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi against Gandhi for attributing to it some observations that were not in the Rafale judgement.

It observed that politicians should not attribute any findings or views to the court in their speeches.

In the order, a bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi said: "We have considered the matter. We make it clear that this Court had no occasion to record any view or finding or make any observation as allegedly attributed to the Court by the respondent (Gandhi) in as much as what was decided by this Court was a purely legal question of admissibility of certain docu-



ments to which objections were raised by the Attorney General."

The bench, also comprising Justices Deepak Gupta and Sanjiv Khanna, said: "Having clarified the matter, we deem it proper to ask Gandhi for his explanation which will be laid before us on or before April 22."

While giving liberty to Lekhi to file additional affidavit to support her criminal contempt petition against Gandhi, the bench said: "We further observe that no views, observations or findings should be attributed to the Court in political address to the media and in public speeches, unless such views, observations or findings are recorded by the Court.

It posted the matter

for further hearing on April 23.

Lekhi, who is a sitting Lok Sabha MP from New Delhi constituency, has in her plea alleged that Gandhi has attributed his personal remarks to the top court and tried to create prejudice.

At the outset, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Lekhi, said it is a gross case of contempt committed by Gandhi who incorrectly attributed some remarks to the apex court about its judgement on Rafale case.

Rohatgi said Gandhi had come out in the public to make a remark that the "Supreme Court in its judgement said Chowkidar Narendra Modi chor hain". The bench said, "You were right to the ex-

tent we never said what has been brought in the petition. We will seek clarification".

Lekhi latched onto the apex court clarification to attack Gandhi, saying as to how the man who does not understand "Constitutional morality" and "democratic traditions" would represent Indians in Parliament.

She said the Congress President does not understand "Constitutional propriety" and was dragging institutions like the Supreme Court into "shabby politics".

Lekhi said Gandhi was raking up the issue on India's Rafale fighter jet deal with France to hide their own corruption. "Out of four members of a family, three are on bail. Will they be

giving lessons on honesty and integrity. To hide their own false, they are using these things," Lekhi told PTI.

She was apparently referring to the National Herald case and Enforcement Directorate case against Gandhi's brother-in-law Robert Vadra in money laundering case.

The Congress President and his mother Sonia Gandhi are accused in the National Herald case in which they have been accused of cheating and misappropriating funds.

The Congress president had on April 10 claimed that the apex court has made it "clear" that Prime Minister Narendra Modi "committed a theft".

He had made the statement while interact-

ing with reporters in Amethi after filing his nomination papers where he is contesting against BJP leader and union minister Smriti Irani.

Gandhi had also recalled a recent interview by the prime minister, in which Modi had said the Supreme Court had given a clean chit to his government on the Rafale deal.

The apex court, which had earlier cleared the Modi government of accusations of corruption over the Rafale deal with France, on April 10 said it will hear a review petition on the basis of the new documents referred to by petitioners.

It had on April 10 allowed the plea of petitioners relying on leaked documents for seeking review of its Rafale judgement and dismissed the government's preliminary objections claiming "privilege" over them. "I am happy and I have been saying so for months that Hindustan's PM has given the air force money to (industrialist) Anil Ambani, and the SC has accepted it. The SC is going to investigate it," Gandhi had said.

"I want to thank the SC. It's a very happy day. The SC has talked about justice. Justice has prevailed," he had added.

The Rafale fighter is a twin-engine Medium Multi Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) manufactured by French aerospace company Dassault Aviation.

It's a fight against anti-people BJP govt, says CPI's Inner Manipur candidate

RAJKUMAR LEISHEMBA IMPHAL, APR 15 (PTI): For the Communist Party of India (CPI), the ongoing general elections is about fighting the "anti-people and pro-corporate, undemocratic dictatorial BJP government", the party's candidate for Inner Manipur seat Moirangthem Nara Singh said Monday.

Singh, who is fighting Lok Sabha elections for the fourth time, believes that the people of Manipur will play their part in voting out the BJP which has "shown its true saffron colours" during the last two years of its rule in the state.

"They are a communal party and are trying to impose their agenda through Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) and implement the Hinduvta philosophy," Singh told PTI here.

He said people have to understand the underlying motive why the BJP

is forcefully trying to implement the CAB.

"It is because of the philosophy they have and their saffronisation programme has to be fought," Singh added.

He further said CPI has been "opposing this kind of ideology and have been fighting against it" right from the very beginning.

"We have been saying that BJP's policy is anti-people, pro-corporate and it is an undemocratic dictatorial government. They are trying to do whatever they want," he claimed.

Referring to the crackdown last September on students and teachers of Manipur University who were demanding the removal of then Vice Chancellor of Manipur University, AP Pandey, he said the whole approach of the state government during the crisis highlighted its "high-handed" attitude.

"Why did the removal of a VC of an university became such a huge issue and made people of the state suffer? The midnight crackdown on students of Manipur University and putting students and teachers in jail shows that this is a dictatorial government," he said. When asked what significant role can CPI play in national politics considering the fact that it has become a fringe player, he said, "In the political life of an organisation there are many ups and downs. The purpose for which we have been fighting are for the people and we are gaining momentum."

Projecting a "crucial role" for the party, he claimed an alternative government will be formed by an alliance of with other parties who are "secular and democratic".

"We are confident, some more parties will

also join our alliance after the results are out. We will be able to defeat BJP," he added.

The CPI has won the seat twice in the past and in the last three Lok Sabha polls, Singh continued to be runners-up, losing to Congress's Thokchom Meinaya.

When asked about Congress, Singh said, "Congress and BJP are the same. It is just that their names are different but their ways of doing things are the same."

He further said, "People of Manipur were unhappy with the Congress and they thought BJP would be a better option but now they have realised in the last two years of BJP rule in the state that this party is no different. They are fed up with them, with the way how they have ruled the state."

Polling in the Inner Manipur seat would be held on April 18.

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Monsoon to...

Weak El Nino conditions are likely to prevail during the monsoon season with reduced intensity, Rajeevan said.

There could some effect of the El Nino in June, but monsoon may pick up pace from July, he added.

"Southwest monsoon seasonal (June to September) rainfall over the country as a whole is likely to be near normal," the IMD said in Long Range Forecast for 2019 southwest monsoon rainfall.

IMD Director General K J Ramesh said overall, the country is expected to have well distributed rainfall scenario during the monsoon season which will be beneficial to farmers in the country during the ensuing kharif season.

Several parts of the country are witnessing agricultural distress.

Earlier this month, Skymet, a private weather forecasting agency, had predicted a below normal monsoon.

Last year, the IMD had predicted rainfall of 97 per cent of the LPA, but by the end of the season, the country received 91 per cent rainfall.

1984 anti-Sikh riots case: SC to hear Sajjan Kumar's bail plea in August

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): The Supreme Court Monday said it would hear in the first week of August the bail application of former Congress leader Sajjan Kumar, who was awarded life term by the Delhi High Court in a 1984 anti-Sikh riots case.

The CBI told a bench of Justices S A Bobde and S A Nazeer that offence for which Kumar was convicted was of "gruesome nature" as it was a "genocide". Kumar, 73, who is lodged in jail, had resigned from the Congress party after he was convicted by the high court.

The case in which he was convicted and sentenced relates to the killing of five Sikhs in Delhi Cantonment's Raj Nagar Part-I area of southwest Delhi on November 1-2 in 1984, and burning down of a Gurudwara in Raj Nagar Part-II.

Anti-Sikh riots had broken out after the assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984 by her two Sikh bodyguards.

Kumar has also challenged in the apex court the Delhi High Court's verdict of December 17 last year that awarded him life imprisonment for the "remainder of his natural life" in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case. During the hearing Monday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the CBI, told the apex court that Kumar is facing trial in another 1984 anti-Sikh riots case at the Patiala House district court here.

Mehta said recording of evidence was going on in the case and out of 35 prosecution witnesses, seven have been examined till date. The coun-

sel representing Kumar said the former Congress leader was granted anticipatory bail by the high court in the case in which trial is going on and it was affirmed by the apex court also.

"This will have to be heard fully," the bench said. When Kumar's counsel said that hearing on bail plea would not take much time, Mehta said, "See the gruesome nature of offence. It was a genocide." The bench said it would hear the matter in the first week of August.

On April 8, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had opposed his bail plea and claimed in the court that Kumar was the "kingpin" of a gruesome offence in which Sikhs were "massacred" in Delhi during 1984 riots.

However, the counsel representing Kumar had said that the former Congress leader was in jail for the past more than three months and during the adjudication of the trial, he was out on anticipatory bail and never misused the liberty.

Kumar had surrendered before a trial court here on December 31, 2018, to serve the sentence in pursuance of the high court's December 17 verdict. The high court had convicted and sentenced Kumar to spend the remainder of his life in jail for the offences of criminal conspiracy and abetment in commission of crimes of murder, promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of communal harmony and defiling and destruction of a Gurdwara.

sion the CCS had taken on the note forwarded to it by the MHA, an official said. The court was hearing a petition filed by the Assam Rifles Ex-Servicemen Welfare Association through lawyer Neha Rathi on the difficulties faced by the retired personnel of the force with regard to the payment of pension due to the dual control of the force.

The Assam Rifles came into being in 1835 as a militia called the 'Cachar Levy'. With approximately 750 men, this force was formed to primarily protect British tea estates and their settlements against tribal raids.

MHA, MoD leave it to CCS to take final call on dual control over Assam Rifles

New Delhi, Apr 15 (PTI): The Ministry of Home Affairs has conveyed to the Delhi High Court that it, along with the Ministry of Defence, will abide by any decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on the dual control over the Assam Rifles. In an affidavit filed to the Delhi High Court, the MHA has conveyed that the Union Home Secretary had held a meeting with the Defence Secretary on April 4 to discuss the issue.

Assam Rifles, the 184-year-old paramilitary force of the country, is under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)

while the operational control lies with the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The meeting discussed about a note moved by the MHA for the CCS on March 20 for resolving the issue of dual control over Assam Rifles.

The CCS is chaired by the Prime Minister and comprises the Minister of External Affairs, the Home minister, the Finance minister and the Defence minister. It was decided by both MHA and MoD that they will abide by the decision of the CCS, the MHA told the high court in its affidavit.

The court is now learnt to have issued a notice to the Cabinet Secretary to inform it as to what deci-

Communal speech: EC bars Adityanath, Mayawati from campaigning for 72 and 48 hrs respectively

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): In a first, the EC on Monday imposed a nation-wide ban on Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath and Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati from campaigning for 72 and 48 hours respectively from Tuesday for their “provocative” communal remarks, which it said had the “propensity to polarise the elections”.

The Election Commission order to bar these leaders came within few hours of the Supreme Court taking note of the communal remarks by them during their Lok Sabha poll campaigns and asking the poll watchdog about the action it has initiated against them.

However, a senior EC functionary said the commission had examined the two issues on April 14-15, and came up with the final decision on Monday after lots of deliberation as it felt a clear message should go out to the politicians.

In its order, the commission said, it “strongly condemns” the impugned statement made by the UP chief minister and “censured” him for “misconduct”.

Using its constitutional powers under Article 324 of the Constitution, the EC barred him from “holding any public meetings, public processions, public rallies, road shows and interviews, public utterances in media (print, electronic and social media) in connection with the ongoing elections for 72 hours (three days) from 6.00 am on April 16.”

In another order on similar lines, the commission also censured and “strongly” condemned Mayawati for her re-



marks, and barred her from campaigning for 48 hours or two days, starting from 6.00 am Tuesday.

According to EC officials, this is for the first time an all-India ban has been imposed on politicians to campaign in elections and also it is for the first time such a restriction has been put against a chief minister.

On the different time periods for the leaders, a senior EC official said, “it is for the second time that the Uttar Pradesh CM has been issued a show cause notice by the EC. On April 5, he was asked to be ‘careful’ in the future.”

“This is the first show cause and action against the BSP president ... the severity of the action is, therefore, different,” he said.

The EC has written to chief electoral officers of all states informing them about their decision on Adityanath and Mayawati to ensure that the orders are not violated. May-

awati was issued the notice for her speech in Deoband, where she appealed to Muslims to not vote for the Congress.

The BSP chief had violated the Model Code of Conduct, the poll panel found.

Chief Minister Adityanath was served the notice for his “Ali” and “Bajrang Bali” remarks while addressing a rally in Meerut.

He compared the Lok Sabha elections to a contest between ‘Ali’, a revered figure in Islam, and Bajrang Bali (another name of the Hindu god Hanuman).

The poll panel also observed that being the chief minister of a state, Adityanath has an “added responsibility to not only uphold the basic tenets, including secularism, of the Constitution of India, but also to display the same in his public appearances”.

The order said, the EC is convinced that Adityanath made a “highly provocative” speech which had the “tone

and tenor” to aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred between religious communities.

The poll panel told Mayawati that being a senior leader, she should have “desisted” from making such comments that have the “undertone and propensity to polarise the elections” in several constituencies due to the reach of the media.

Earlier, a bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi has summoned a representative of the EC on Tuesday while agreeing to examine the poll panel’s contention that it has limited legal powers to deal with hate speeches of politicians during electioneering.

During 2014 LS polls, the EC had imposed state-specific ban on BJP leader Amit Shah and SP leader Azam Khan from campaigning in Uttar Pradesh on April 11 for their controversial remarks.

The ban on Shah was lifted in a few days after he assured the poll body that he would not

disturb public tranquillity and law and order. Since Khan had not given a similar assurance, the ban on him had continued.

A similar ban was placed on BJP leader Giriraj Singh from campaigning in Jharkhand and Bihar for his controversial remarks that people who do not vote for Narendra Modi will have to find a place in Pakistan.

While there was no immediate reaction from Adityanath and Mayawati, SP leader Akhilesh Yadav took to Twitter to ask EC whether it is capable to issue similar directives to the prime minister.

“EC directive against @mayawati ji begs the question: do they have integrity to stop PM from asking for votes in name of the army?”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s remarks asking first-time voters to dedicate their vote to those who carried out the Balakot air strike are under examination of the poll panel. The poll authorities in Maharashtra’s Latur, where he made the speech, have told EC that prima facie the comments are violative of its orders, asking parties against using the armed forces in their campaigns.

Meanwhile, the EC is also examining SP leader Azam Khan’s alleged “underwear” jibe against his BJP rival from Rampur Lok Sabha seat Jaya Prada.

“If the EC concludes that he has actually made those remarks, it would take a call based on the provision. It can also go beyond the ambit of the model code as the reported remarks are not in a good taste,” a senior EC official said.

SC to hear plea for proper probe in Muzaffarpur shelter home case after 2 weeks

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): The Supreme Court Monday said it would hear after two weeks the fresh plea alleging that CBI tried to “shield the real perpetrators” in the Muzaffarpur shelter home case by not conducting proper probe on “crucial leads” which are available on record.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi said an advance notice has been circulated in the matter by the other side seeking deferment of the hearing on the plea.

The fresh interim plea has been filed in a pending PIL of Nivedita Jha in which the apex court had directed CBI to probe the shelter home sexual assault cases.

The plea, filed through advocate Fauzia Shakil, has sought a direction to the CBI to carry out a thorough, proper and scientific probe into the case. Several girls were allegedly raped and

sexually abused at an NGO-run shelter home at Muzaffarpur in Bihar and the issue had come to light following a report by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS).

The probe into the case was transferred to CBI and the agency has chargesheeted 21 people, including prime accused Brajesh Thakur.

“It is evident from the statement of victims that a large scale prostitution racket was being run by prime accused Brajesh Thakur.

“From the perusal of the charge sheet, it is apparent that CBI is trying to shield the real perpetrators and has intentionally avoided to investigate the leads given by the victims about the outsiders and alleged friends of Thakur who were involved in the offence,” the plea said.

It also claimed that victims have stated in their statement to CBI that they were sent to ho-

tels and were also raped by outsiders and friends of Thakur who visited the shelter home.

It further alleged that despite statement of the victims which disclosed grave and serious cognisable offences like rape, murder, gang rapes, prostitution racket and trafficking, the CBI has not chargesheeted the accused under the relevant penal provisions.

The plea sought identification of accused as per law on the basis of statements of victim and further probe to establish identity of Thakur’s “guests, uncles and friends”, who had visited the shelter home.

It also urged the court to direct CBI to carry out further investigation on the issues highlighted by the apex court in its September 20 last year order regarding Thakur’s connections and antecedents and also about culpability of Bihar social welfare department, if

any, in the case.

“No effort was made by the CBI to look into the antecedents, connections and influence of Thakur,” the plea said.

“The charge sheet does not disclose that any investigation has been conducted to ascertain whether the social welfare department of the Bihar government was aware of criminal activities being carried out in the shelter home and that may have bene the reason for transfer of the victim girls”, it said.

The apex court had in February transferred the case from Bihar to a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) court in Saket District Court complex in Delhi.

On November 28 last year, the top court had directed the CBI to conduct probe into allegations of physical and sexual abuse of inmates in 16 other shelter homes in Bihar which were flagged in the TISS report.

RKS Monthly Literary Program held at Rangpo



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 15 APR:**

Rastriya Kavi Sangam [RKS] Sikkim organized the 7th episode of Monthly Literary Program today at Driver Association Hall, Rangpo. Litterateur, Thaman Navwag was present as chief guest in the program.

RKS also celebrated 128th Birth Anniversary of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Baisakhi program on the day. The program started with the welcome speech by RKS president,

Sanjay Agarwal. Shiv Darnal, Kavita Pariyar, Sabir Ghaley, Bijay Bantava and Chandan Gurung recited poems and other written material during the event.

Vice president of Rangpo Taxi Drivers Association, Mahindra Adhikari, was also present in the program along with Chanda Kumari, Sapna Pariyar, R Tamang.

Chief guest, Mr Navwag, in his address appreciated the program organised by team RKS.

Fire safety awareness at Singtam

**YOGEN THATAL
SINGTAM, 15 APR:**

Singtam Fire Service Department conducted a fire safety awareness drive at Singtam bazaar today. Fire safety week had started from 14 April and will continue till 20 April wherein participation

of all shops is mandatory. Shop keepers were instructed to install fire safety equipments immediately. Officers and staff of the Fire Department gave instructions on procedures and steps to be taken for ensuring fire safety to shop keepers of Singtam bazaar.

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We are believing we can win IPL: Iyer

Hyderabad, Apr 15 (PTI): Delhi Capitals skipper Shreyas Iyer said his team has the self belief to win the IPL title this time after it jumped to second spot in the points table following a 39-win over Sunrisers Hyderabad here.

Invited to bat, Delhi posted 155 for seven and then returned to bowl out Hyderabad for 116 in 18.5 overs to notch up their second successive win.

“We are believing so and it’s never too far,” Iyer said when asked if he thinks his side can win the IPL. Talking about the partnership he had with Rishabh Pant in Delhi Capitals’ innings, Iyer, who scored 45, said, “It started to slow down. Me and Pant had decided so that one of us will take the charge.”

Iyer’s 56-run partnership with

Pant (23) for the fourth wicket took Delhi to a challenging total of 155 for 7. “We got a little cameo from Keemo and Axar and helped us get to that total,” he said.

Asked about the composition of the tea, he said, “We have played together (Rabada and himself during U-19 days). It is good to be around each other. It is easy to have that camaraderie.

“It is a positive thing to carry around. We are positive as well when we chase. We will be backing our abilities.”

Rabada, who took four wickets for 22 runs, said, “We have our game plans and all that we try to do is to stick to it. We hope it goes our way and more often than not, it should go your way.

“It’s been the trend so far, you

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ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

Anthyesthi kriya of our beloved mother, Lt. Hasta Kumari Subba who left for her heavenly abode on 12 Apr, 2019 falls on 20 Apr, 2019.

All relatives, friends, and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers to the departed soul at our residence at Soreng busty.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank those who stood by us during the time of our bereavement.

Jit Bahadur Subba (Husband).

Deepen Subba, Sachin Subba, Preeten Subba (Sons): 70298 85112, 74309 25608.

KUTSHE SHEGU

The 49th Day Kutshe Shegu of Late Norden Tshering Lepcha of Naga Namgor, North Sikkim who left for his heavenly abode on 04/03/2019 falls on 21/04/2019. All friends, relatives and well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayer of departed soul at our residents at Naga Nomgor, North Sikkim.



We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us in our time of bereavement and regret our inability to thank them individually.

**Lachhi Tamang (wife) and family members.
7384321454/9775819998/8945969929**

**BEFORE THE LEARNED OATH COMMISSIONER
: EAST SIKKIM AT GANGTOK**

AFFIDAVIT

I Mrs. Dawn Denzongpa, wife of Mr.Tshering Topgay Bhutia @ Tshering Topgay Denzongpa, aged about 33 years, by faith Christian, by occupation Government Employee, resident of Amdo Golai- Tadong, P.O. Daragaon, Tadong P.S. Gangtok, East Sikkim, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare on oath as follows:-

1. That my name in my Academic Certificates and other official documents is lying recorded as “DAWN LEPCHA”, daughter of A.M. LEPCHA”, which is my maiden-name.
2. That I am legally married wife of Mr. TSHERING TOPGAY BHUTIA @ TSHERING TOPGAY DENZONGPA, as such, my name in my Certificate of Identification is lying recorded as “DAWA DENZONGPA”, wife of Mr. TSHERING TOPGAY BHUTIA instead of “DAWN DENZONGPA”.
3. That “BHUTIA” is my Caste/Community adopted/embraced by me by virtue of my marriage with my husband and “DENZONGPA” is the Sub-Caste/Title of “BHUTIA”.
4. That the person by name “DAWN LEPCHA”, DAWA DENZONGPA” and “DAWN DENZONGPA” is one and same person i.e., myself and the person by name “TSHERING TOPGAY BHUTIA” and “TSHERING TOPGAY DENZONGPA” is one and the same person i.e. my husband.
5. That this affidavit is sworn by me to declare that “DAWN LEPCHA”, DAWA DENZONGPA” and “DAWN DENZONGPA” is one and the same person i.e., myself and to declare that “TSHERING TOPGAY BHUTIA” and “TSHERING TOPGAY DENZONGPA” is one and the same person i.e. my husband and for the purpose of recording the same for all intents and purpose, whatsoever.

Sd/-
Mrs. Dawn Denzongpa
DEPONENT.

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SummitTIMES

The Economics of Freedom

Free expression will require self reliance

Freedom remains but a concept till the people who claim to be, say politically free, are also economically independent. We see it in families every day, but refuse to understand its import. Children wanting to become independent find a livelihood before they leave the “mool-ghar”. What applies to individuals applies to a people too. Now let’s look at Sikkim. Political freedom came with one-man, one-vote in 1975. Political expression has been relatively free ever since, but is the State really free? Can a State, which actually protested the extension of Direct Taxes with the slogan: “No income, what tax?” ever be free? How much ‘independence’, we mean the executive and political kind, can be expected when the spending power is so completely dependent on what Delhi will release and the State will pass on?

For anyone who has tried to figure out why Sikkim remains so compliant and feeble when it comes to engaging Delhi and why its “long-pending” demands are still carefully and politely worded in memorandums and public statements even when the delay hurts, the answer is simple. Sikkim was never free to take its own decisions because it is still not – in the jargon of the development-types, self-sustaining. The health of its coffers dictate a subservience which an economy sustained on grants enforces. It is not implied that the Centre continually played dirty with Sikkim, but what cannot be ignored is that Delhi can afford to be disinterested. In that, the State has failed itself. No matter how stringent and passionate the sloganeering in Sikkim, the State loses its voice the moment it steps out of the confines of Rangpo. Through the years, no one has displayed any keenness in offending a paymaster, save during elections, who has admittedly been extravagantly good through most of the years. All the professed attachment to 371F and Old Laws gets diluted into meek memorandums which gather dust in the powerful corridors of Shastri Bhavan.

What explains the politics percolates down to the people as well. A majority remains dependent (economically) on the Government. Education, jobs, celebration, sorrow - whatever the need, it has to Manan Bhawan of Samman Bhawan that everyone troops to. In doing so, the people relinquish the right to question, debate or disagree. They also lose the interest to do so because everything was paid for and lazy hands don’t seek explanations. No one squabbles over real issues because interests rarely move beyond the preparation of the latest list of government ‘hand-out’ nominees. Even as you read this, a new list of beneficiaries awaits to the end of MCC to collect, well, benefits.

While a people might have grown comfortable with this option, it owes the next generation to survive with some more self respect. And, self-respect will come only when Sikkim becomes self-reliant. Self-reliance might demand many sacrifices, but rest assured it sets the future free. For Sikkim, with a population of barely 7 lakhs, the task is easy. It does not take much to change the mind-set of so few. There are enough stories take heart from of how shanties in Mumbai (and that’s about all that the population here measures to despite the trappings of being a full-fledged State) have pulled off miracles by banding together and remaining focused. But one should not look towards the State alone to make the people self-reliant. Such expectations go against the very grain of the concept. And neither should the government think that it can deliver self-reliance. All that is required of the government is to Govern, not over-govern even though the success of this very attitude at the Centre makes this a hard sell. Nevertheless, make the conditions available for self-expression and the people will express themselves economically as well. Let us make mistakes and learn from them because no one, not even the government, is perfect, because at the end of the day, it’s only when the pockets are freed that the mind can be truly liberated. Don’t do so and resentment festers.

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

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Songs of freedom: the soundtracks of political change in Sudan

MOHAMED A. SATTI
theconversation.com

The uprising in Sudan has been vocal – and musical. “Tasqut bas!” – just fall, that’s all – was a commonly-used slogan by Sudanese as they revolted against military dictator Omar al-Bashir’s 30-year rule. The uprising, which began in December 2018, intensified over the following weeks, forcing Al-Bashir to step down on 11 April 2019.

Sudanese played a crucial role as they camped in front of the compound housing the military and security services in central Khartoum. For five days, the protesters refused to budge until the army removed the president from power.

During the days in early April, when the revolution gathered steam, the government expelled most international media outlets. So it was up to the citizens to capture the uprising on cellphones. These cellphone images and videos were soon circulated on social media platforms to Sudanese in the diaspora and to a global audience. Local media outlets continued with regular programming despite the government’s efforts to impose a media blackout.

Cellphone footage from the heart of the revolution all contained one thing in common: the familiar beat of music. This was to be expected. Sudanese music has always been heavily laden with political rhetoric.

The saying goes that everyone in Sudan is a politician, in reference to how politics creeps into everyday conversation. Sudanese also tend to be musically savvy and are inclined to know the lyrics to many popular songs by heart.

Previous revolutions in the country have been marked by particular songs. That hasn’t been the case this time, although the protesters chanted slogans to music that was accompanied by the persistent beat of drums.

POLITICS AND MUSIC

The link between music and politics is not

new to Sudan.

One of the earliest examples of how powerful lyrics drove political change was a poem entitled “Umm Dhafayir” – The Lady with Pleated Hair – by Obeid Abdul Nur, an educator and a poet.

Written in 1924, the poem urged Sudanese to rise up and fight against British occupation. The eloquently-articulated words highlighted the importance of the nation and urged the youth to fight for their homeland. Perhaps Abdul Nur’s rousing words provided inspiration to others to integrate political content in their lyrics.

“October Al Akhdar” (Green October) was famously performed by the revered singer Mohammed Wardi during the 1964 revolution that overthrew a military government and ushered in a civilian one. The song’s lyrics applaud the power of the people to bring about political change. The use of the word “green” in the title was a direct reference to agriculture and its importance to Sudan’s economy.

In 1985 Sudan again underwent change in its leadership through a popular uprising. Again the people took to the streets to oust a military government. Again elections ushered in a civilian government. And again, songs played a central role in the revolution.

Wardi’s lyrics played a powerful role this time too. His song “Ya Sha’aban Lahabak Thouritak” – which loosely translates to “Oh People Your Flame is Your Revolution” – referred to the immense pride and confidence Sudanese people have in their abilities. In the song Wardi yearns for Sudan’s population to stand up and to speak up for itself and to control its own destiny. The words empowered Sudanese to realise their ability to work for the good of the country with resolve and purpose.

Wardi died in 2012. The legendary singer is still celebrated as “The Last King of Nubia”.

USING SONGS

Sudan has endured a total of almost five decades

of military dictatorship since its independence in 1956. Its people yearn for political freedom.

Democratic civilian governments have never been allowed to serve out their time in office. Songs are therefore used to instil belief in the population. Music seems to lessen the pain and suffering during difficult times.

What the revolutions of 1964, 1985 and 2019 have demonstrated is that political and economic hardships push people to defy the government.

But songs also have a unifying power. The 2019 uprising is a testament to that. Shouts of “hurriyya” (freedom), “shaabun wahid jayshun wahid” (one people, one army) and “al shaab yurid ‘isqat al nizam” (the people want to overthrow the regime) were repeatedly heard.

These slogans and lyrics were often accompanied by the beat of drums, the shuffling of feet and the swaying of hips. On the day that al-Bashir was expelled, a video circulated of a group of protesters playing music. One was playing a saxophone while another beat on a drum. Those around joined in the festivities.

In 2019, songs provided motivation and guidance. Protesters in Sudan could easily have been dissuaded from pursuing their goal of instigating regime change. Al-Bashir’s three decades in power made him a cunning and wily power broker and the fear was that another uprising could be crushed like many before it. The removal of al-Bashir from power to be replaced by his defence minister isn’t the kind of democratic change that the protesters were looking for and it remains to be seen how the scenario will unfold in the coming days.

But whatever happens, the protesters have persevered, united by a common goal and guided by nationalist songs of freedom – songs that will ultimately be etched in Sudan’s history records.

[the writer is Assistant Professor of Communication and Media, American University of Kuwait]

Game of Thrones was about the horror of fossil fuels all along

ALF HORNBERG
theconversation.com

I have eagerly awaited the final season of Game of Thrones, and its strange blend of fictive medieval Britain, supernatural monsters and pornography. Over the seasons the plot has gained speed and focus while the pornography has vanished and – incredible as it seems – we can also detect that George R.R. Martin’s fantastic story has a message. Perhaps we can explain its enormous success by considering how, at a subconscious, dreamlike level, it deals with humanity’s most profound problem.

I want to believe that my interpretation is more than a pathetic attempt to legitimise all those hours of passive TV-watching. Just as the great anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was able to expose central problems of specific Amerindian peoples by analysing their myths, we can analyse our own tales in order to discern the contradictions and apparently unsolvable dilemmas that torment our subconscious.

What Lévi-Strauss called “mythemes” are abstractions of central elements of stories – the basic themes which express their essential messages. Using his method for dissecting myths, we can unearth submerged meanings in fantasy and science fiction. And these dreamy worlds tell us more about ourselves than we generally realise.

Film director James Cameron’s blockbusters Aliens (1986) and Avatar (2009), for instance, reflected a fundamental transformation in the predominant worldview of movie audiences. In the quarter of a century that separated the two movies, the signs had been reversed regarding

nature, diversity and technology. In the final scene of Aliens, Sigourney Weaver – inside a machine which gives her superhuman strength – battles with a monstrous organism from another planet. With the help of technology she defeats an evil Nature. The monster from outer space symbolises an untamed and threatening biological diversity. Only with the help of the



machine can humankind survive.

Two decades later the roles were reversed. The final scene in “Avatar” instead shows an evil male capitalist, dressed in similar technological armour, being defeated by a benevolent Nature. The entire ecosystem of the planet Pandora is mobilised in the battle against the human exploiters. Now it is the machines, rather than the monsters, who come from another planet. In this story, technology loses the battle against nature. Only by stopping the machine can nature survive.

FOSSIL ENERGY IS AT WAR WITH LIFE ITSELF

A similar analysis reveals the real

threat against the warring medieval kingdoms in Martin’s imaginary continent of Westeros. The White Walkers’ army of dead beings threatening to destroy the world of humans, accompanied by ongoing climate change (“winter is coming”), is an allegorical representation of fossil fuels. Today, the energy that propels our technological civilisation derives

from countless billions of dead organisms whose extinguished sparks have been buried in the Earth’s crust. The metaphor is not at all far-fetched: in both cases, fossil energy is at war with life itself.

Fear of the Night King’s murderous corpses could of course be interpreted simply as the existential fear of death which might unite all people. But the connection between the dead army and climate change is sufficiently distinct to make a more political allegory convincing. The forces animating the dead beings threaten to lead to the collapse of civilisation as a whole, beyond the lives of individual humans. As smuggler-turned-knight Davos Seaworth points out to Daenerys: “If we don’t put aside our enmities and band together we will die. And then it doesn’t matter whose skeleton sits on the Iron Throne.”

Although the intuition that the approaching White Walkers’ winter could be seen as a metaphor for climate change may be fairly widespread among followers of Game of Thrones, the literal identification of dead (fossil) energy as a lethal threat to humanity appears to have escaped most analyses. The army of zombies evokes modern society’s stock of machines animated by long-dead inorganic energy in the form of coal, oil or gas. Like pre-modern people confronted with such technical contraptions, the inhabitants of Westeros are shocked by the magical capacity of dead objects to move and to wage war on the living.

George R.R. Martin’s message is that the continuous human competition for power must be set aside in a joint effort to defeat the threat from the army of the dead. The message from Game of Thrones appears familiar and urgent at a time when humanity is subconsciously struggling with its paradoxical ability to sweep the climate crisis under the carpet while preoccupying itself with everything else. As in a dream, we try to make sense of the contradiction between our awareness of the approaching catastrophe and our remarkable capacity to ignore it. Dreams and fantasies prompt us to reflect on matters that we suppress. In that sense, Game of Thrones is a tale for our times.

[the writer is Professor of Human Ecology, Lund University]

‘BJP will bring Citizenship Amendment Bill again to protect interests of indigenous people’

RAJKUMAR LEISHEMBA IMPHAL, APR 15 (PTI): The BJP is committed to protecting the interests of indigenous people against the influx of illegal immigrants, a major concern in Manipur which witnessed violent protests against the now-aborted Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, the party's candidate from the Inner Manipur seat - R K Ranjan Singh - has said.

Singh said the protests in the state in February this year against the bill were based on “ill-informed campaigns” and reiterated that his party will curb illegal immigration into India through a fresh version of the bill, along with the implementation of National Register of Citizens (NRC) across the country.

“It is clearly stated in our manifesto that we will bring the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill and it already has appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of indigenous people against immigration of foreigners,” Singh told PTI here.

He reiterated that “the bill cannot be implemented without the con-



sent of the states where immigrants are proposed to be accommodated”.

Asked about the protests against the bill in the state, he blamed the Congress for carrying out “misinformed campaigns”.

“The bill was introduced in Parliament with the approval of a Parliamentary Standing Committee in 2016. At that time, there was a Congress government in Manipur. Why didn't they raise the issue then and are bringing it up now only at the time of elec-

tions?” he said.

On the issue of illegal immigration, he said the BJP has made it clear in its manifesto that NRC will be implemented, as it has been done in Assam, in a phased manner across all the states in the country.

“Once that's done, there will be a complete check on illegal immigrants,” Singh said adding people of Manipur need not worry about the influx of illegal immigrants. On the long-pending demand for imple-

mentation of Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Manipur, Singh said the state unit of the party has been persuading the Centre to consider Manipur People's Protection Bill which was passed by the state Assembly in July 2018.

The bill seeks to regulate the entry of ‘non-Manipuris’ into the state. It defines ‘Manipur people’ as those citizens of India who have been living in Manipur before 1951.

The bill proposes registration of the non-Ma-

nipuris within a month of its enactment. Thereafter, no outsider would be able to enter the state without a pass. It is yet to be approved by the President. Singh blamed the Congress for “letting illegal immigrants enter the Northeast, including Manipur, during its rule for decades” and said his party was only trying to address the issue.

“Illegal immigration of foreigners into India was allowed by the Congress and not the BJP,” he said.

Jewellers bat for standardisation in hallmarking of gold

KOLKATA, APR 15 (PTI): Major jewellers in the country have appealed to the consumer affairs ministry for allowing standardisation in hallmarking of gold of various purity measures.

“At present, there are three categories of purity, which are allowed for hallmarking -- 14, 18 and 22 carats,” Shankar Sen, vice-chairman, All India Gem and Jewellery Do-

mestic Council (GJC), said in a statement on Monday. GJC and other associations have appealed to Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan to also consider bringing 20, 23 and 24 carats in the purview of hallmarking, along with coins and bars in the 24-carat purity.

Talking about the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, GJC Chairman Anantha Padmanabhan said when

the the model code of conduct is in force, there is a need for a standard operating procedure (SOP) regarding the seizure of gold in transit, based on valid documents.

He said the annual turnover of the gem and jewellery industry is around Rs four lakh crore, which is expected to double in the next couple of years.

Thunderstorm, heavy rain claim three lives in Manipur



IMPHAL, APR 15 (PTI): Heavy rain lashed parts of Manipur Monday morning, claiming lives of three women and injuring 10 school students, an official said.

In Churanchandpur district, two women, aged 74 and 50, died after their houses collapsed during thunderstorm.

Another woman vendor was killed in Kakch-

ing district, when a tree fell on her shop, the official said.

At two different areas in Bishnupur district, at least ten children sustained injuries when they were on their way to school in the rain.

Several houses and market sheds were also damaged in the downpour across the state.

Meanwhile, Chief Electoral Officer PK Singh

said he has apprised the Election Commission of the situation, seeking “immediate relief measures” for those affected in the thunderstorm and subsequent rain.

With the model code of conduct in place, Singh, however, cautioned the political parties against involvement in the relief work. All measures will be taken up through official machinery, he added.

Liquor seized in Assam



RANGIA, APR 15 (PTI): Ahead of the Lok Sabha poll, the Static Surveillance Team (SST) has seized 15 cartons of Indian-made foreign liquor valued at Rs 50,000 during routine checking at Borka in Kamrup district on Sunday night.

According to the SST, one Shyamal Baro of Hel-

echa village near Rangia was carrying the cartons in his personal vehicle without any valid document. He could not offer a proper explanation for the cartons that were found in his vehicle, the SST said.

The SST apprehended Baro and handed him over to Kamalpur Police.

Cong taking help from RSS: Mamata

BELDANGA/BHAGWANGOLA (WB), APR 15 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Monday accused Congress of taking help from RSS to win elections and urged to the people to defeat the “deadly” combine of the Congress, BJP and the Left.

The Trinamool Congress supremo recalled former president Pranab Mukherjee's participation in an event of the RSS in its headquarters in Nagpur in 2018 and alleged that the organisation is campaigning for his son, Congress candidate Abhijit Mukherjee.

“Don't force me to open the Pandora's box. The entire gameplan of the Congress will be exposed,” she told an election rally at Beldanga in Muslim-dominated Murshidabad district.

“Baharampore Congress candidate Adhir Chowdhury's tactics to win election with the help of the Left and BJP will not be successful this time ... People should not to vote for such a party with a dubious character,” Banerjee.

TMC candidate for Baharampore Apurba Sarkar (David), who is contesting against Chowdhury, had defected from the Congress and joined her party. “RSS is



campaigning for Abhijit Mukherjee at Jangipur and Adhir Chowdhury at Baharampore, while the CPI(M) has already sold out to BJP,” Banerjee alleged.

“This tactics of the Congress-Left-BJP combine will be given a fitting reply by the people of Bengal. The Trinamool Congress will win all 42 seats in West Bengal by defeating this deadly combine,” she claimed.

Addressing another rally at Bhagwangola in the same district, Banerjee hit out at BJP for trying to gain political mileage by playing the religion card.

“The BJP is trying to divide the people in the

name of religion. They are using it as a tool to divide the masses in Bengal ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. The culture of Bengal never supports the politics of violence,” she said.

The TMC supremo also cautioned people against RSS alleged bid to bribe the voters.

Referring to BJP's stand on implementing NRC in the country, Banerjee said she would not allow it in West Bengal.

“We are confident that we will foil this misadventure in the state,” she said.

She also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for doing politics by taking the name of the army.

Govt signs ceasefire agreement with three Naga insurgent groups for 1 year



NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): The Centre on Monday extended the ceasefire agreement by one year with two insurgent groups in Nagaland, while a fresh pact for suspension of operations was signed with another outfit, the Home Ministry said.

A ceasefire is in operation between the Union government and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Neopao Konyak/Kitovi) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland/Reformation (NSCN/R).

It was decided to extend the suspension of operation agreement with NSCN/NK and NSCN/R for a further period of one year with effect from April 28 this year till April 27, 2020, a Home Ministry statement

said. This was signed on behalf of the central government by Satyendra Garg, Joint Secretary, in the Home Ministry, and Jack Jimomi, Supervisor, GPRN/NSCN, on behalf of NSCN/NK and by Amanto Chishi, Supervisor, and Toshi Longkumer, Secretary, on behalf of NSCN/R.

Meanwhile, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland/K-Khango has also entered into a fresh ceasefire agreement with the Union government from Monday for a period of one year, the statement said.

The new ceasefire agreement and revised ceasefire ground rules were signed by Garg and Newell Naga, Supervisor and Michael Yeptho, member, on behalf of NSCN/K-Khango.

Jet Airways pilots appeal to SBI for funds, also ask PM to save 20,000 jobs

MUMBAI, APR 15 (PTI): Jet Airways pilots body, the National Aviator's Guild, Monday appealed the State Bank of India (SBI) to release Rs 1,500 crore, which was proposed to be infused in the ailing carrier as part of a debt-restructuring plan last month.

The airline is operating just 6-7 planes, with almost its entire fleet being grounded due to non-payment of rentals to lessors amid severe paucity of cash.

“We would like to appeal SBI to release Rs 1,500 crore funds for the

airline to help it continue operations. We also appeal Prime Minister Narendra Modi to save 20,000 odd jobs at the airline,” National Aviator's Guild (NAG) vice president Adim Valiani told reporters at the airline's headquarter, Siroya Centre, here Monday.

Earlier, the airline's pilots, engineers and cabin crew members assembled at the headquarters to show their solidarity.

The airline's pilots along with engineers and senior staff were last paid for December, 2018. This apart, the air-

line has also defaulted on the March salary of other categories of employees as well. Last month, an SBI-led consortium of lenders had taken management control of the airline post a debt-recast deal, following which the lenders had proposed to infuse as much as Rs 1,500 crore to the carrier to keep it afloat till the time it gets a investor.

The Monday meeting with lenders is reportedly expected to take a final decision on the quantum of funds to be infused immediately to avert a possible shut down.

Repolling likely in two booths of Outer Manipur LS seat

IMPHAL, APR 15 (PTI): Repolling is likely in two booths of Outer Manipur constituency, where unidentified miscreants allegedly destroyed EVMs and VVPATs, an official said. The miscreants had entered the polling stations posing as voters, he said.

“Around 1.30 pm

on April 11, unidentified men ransacked two booths at Poi and Chingkhai villages, along the India-Myanmar border, breaking some of the machines. They fled the scene even before the security guards could react,” Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) PK Singh said.

An FIR has been registered in connection

with the incidents and police are looking into it, the CEO said.

“The Election Commission is likely to announce a date for repolling after it receives necessary reports on the two incidents, he said.

Polling for the Inner Manipur constituency is slated to be held on April 18.



Smith, Warner likely to miss final stages of IPL

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): Australian batsmen Steve Smith and David Warner are likely to leave their respective IPL teams by the end of this month to attend their national training camp from May 2 after being drafted into the squad for the upcoming World Cup.

Smith and Warner are currently playing for Rajasthan Royals and Sunrisers Hyderabad respectively in the IPL after serving their 12-month ban for their role in the ball-tampering scandal that rocked Australian cricket last year.

The two were recalled to the national team after Australia named their 15-member squad for World Cup beginning May 30 in England and Wales.

“The fifteen-player squad for the ICC world cup will assemble in Brisbane for a training camp at the National Cricket Centre on May 2,” Cricket Australia said.

“The training camp will include three practice matches between Australia XI and New Zealand XI at Allan Border Field.”

While Warner has been in red-hot form for Sunrisers, holding the orange cap with 400 runs, which includes a century and four fifties, Smith has found the going tough for Rajasthan, having scored just 186 runs in seven matches.

They are likely to miss a couple of matches for their respective franchises, besides the knockout stage in case the teams make it to the play-offs.

Rajasthan will play Royal Challengers Bangalore on April 30 before meeting Delhi Capitals in their last league game on May 4, while Sunrisers will be up against Mumbai and RCB on May 2 and May 4 respectively.

Seamer Jason Behrendorff and all-rounder Marcus Stoinis, who were also named in the World Cup squad, are also expected to leave Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bangalore respectively by the end of the month to attend the camp.

While Jason is likely to miss two scheduled Mumbai matches on May 2 and May 5 against SRH and Kolkata Knight Riders, Stoinis might leave a little early considering RCB's dismal run in the IPL this season.

Stoinis played a crucial cameo of 28 runs off 16 balls to help RCB register their first win this season when they defeated Kings XI Punjab by eight wickets.

RCB will have to win the next seven matches to salvage any chances of making it to the play-offs. The team has just one league match next month against Sunrisers on May 4.

Among others, pacer Nathan Coulter-Nile, who also plays for RCB, has already been ruled out of the IPL following an injury and South Africa's Dale Steyn has been drafted into the squad.

Australia opens their World Cup title defence against Afghanistan on June 1 in Bristol.

Inconsistent KXIP eye revival against rejuvenated RR

SANJAY GANJOO

MOHALI, APR 15 (PTI): An inconsistent Kings XI Punjab will look to sort their bowling woes and regain the momentum when they host a rejuvenated Rajasthan Royals in an Indian Premier League (IPL) encounter here on Thursday.

The R Ashwin led Kings XI slipped to number fifth spot after suffering back-to-back losses against Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bangalore respectively. Overall, the hosts have registered four wins from eight matches.

The bowling attack of Kings XI has been good only in patches. They failed to defend 197 against MI the other day with Kieron Pollard's knock of 31-ball 83 blowing them away.

In their last game against RCB, Punjab's bowling again failed as they allowed the opposition overhaul the target of 173 with four balls to spare. Mohammad



Shami, Andrew Tye and all-rounder Sam Curran bled too many runs to hurt the hosts and they will need to bowl a tight line to support their skipper R Ashwin, who has the ability to frustrate even top batsmen with his intelligent bowling.

“We let ourselves down on the field. We have a few more games at home and We need

to string some wins and gain some momentum,” Ashwin had said.

Rajasthan, on the other hand, come into this match with a win under their belt. They defeated Mumbai Indians on the latter's hometurf by four wickets and are currently placed at the seventh spot with two wins from seven matches.

Opener Jos Buttler's

43-ball 89 was the cornerstone of Rajasthan's chase of 188 against Mumbai. He was supported well by Rahane's 37 and Sanju Samson's 31 to achieve the victory target.

The only other match which Rajasthan won was against RCB, in which Buttler again played a key role, hitting 59 runs when his team was chasing a target of

159. If Buttler boosts Royals' batting, Kings XI have Chris Gayle, who smashed an unbeaten 99 to single-handedly anchor Punjab to 173 against RCB in the previous game.

Other Punjab opener KL Rahul also have been in good form but his 64-ball unbeaten 100 too went in vain when MI chased down 197 to

hand them a three-wicket loss. KXIP have been a dominant side on their home ground and they would hope that the loss to RCB in the previous match here was an aberration.

Kings XI have the likes of Mayank Agarwal, David Miller, Sam Curran and Mandeep Singh to bolster their batting, but they will need to play

good knocks to support their openers.

For Rajasthan, Buttler has been the top-scorer but their batting line-up also includes skipper Rahane, Samson and Steve Smith and they will need to deliver to confront Kings XI at I S Bindra PCA stadium here.

Rajasthan Royals pacer Jofra Archer has troubled the batsmen with his fast bouncers and deadly yorkers and would look for another good outing Tuesday.

Among others, seamers Jaydev Unadkat and Dhawal Kulkarni along with spinner Shreyas Gopal would have to deliver for their skipper if they have to stay alive and make it to the Playoffs.

English all-rounder Ben Stokes, who failed to defend 18 runs in the last over against Chennai Super Kings, had missed the last match due to an injury and it remains to be seen if he makes a comeback against Punjab.

SC refuses to stay HC order banning TikTok app, to hear plea on Apr 22



NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): The Supreme Court Monday refused to stay the Madras High Court order that directed the Centre to ban the “TikTok” app over concerns about access to pornographic content through it.

The top court said that ban directive was just an interim order and the high court is scheduled to hear the matter on April 16.

A bench of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justices Deepak Gupta and Sanjiv Khanna said that it is keeping the issue open for further adjudication and would consider it on April 22.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Chinese company ByteDance, said there were over billion downloads of the mobile app and an ex-parte orders were passed by the Madurai bench of Madras High Court.

He said the court did not even issue notice in the matter and an order was passed without hearing them.

The bench said the high court is already seized of the matter and the ban order was just an interim order.

“We are not closing the issue. Let the high court hear the matter,” the bench said and listed the matter for further hearing on April 22.

The high court had on April 3 directed the Centre to ban mobile ap-

plication “TikTok” as it voiced concern over the “pornographic and inappropriate content” being made available through such apps.

It had directed the media not to telecast video clips made with TikTok. The app allows the users to create short videos and then share them.

It had asked the government if it would enact a statute on the line of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act in the US and posted the matter for further hearing on April 16. The high court's interim order came on a public interest litigation (PIL) which alleged that the app encouraged paedophiles and the content “degraded culture and encouraged pornography”.

Even after the havoc caused by Blue whale online game, which reportedly led to suicides by several people, officials have not learnt that they should be alert to these types of problems, the high court said.

Only when the officials and policy makers were able to act on the problems of society, decision could be taken to prevent these kind of apps, it had said.

Voicing concern, the court had said that it was evident from media reports that pornography and inappropriate content were made available through such mobile applications.

Dani clinches Dutch Open International

NEW DELHI, APR 15 (PTI): India's Harsheel Dani recovered from a game down to get the better of Denmark's Mads Christophersen to clinch the Dutch International badminton title in Wateringen, The Netherlands.

Dani, a former junior national champion, clinched his maiden crown of the season with a 15-21, 21-12, 21-13 victory over world no 149 Mads in a 47-minute clash.

The 22-year-old, who was left on the sidelines for almost eight months last year due to an ankle injury, didn't drop a game on his way to the final but he found the going tough



initially in the summit clash. Dani made simple errors in the opening game to concede the

advantage to Mads but he got his bearing right in the second game and took the match to decid-

er. “I made a slow start in the first game. I made too many mistakes from my end, plus the player had

a different style of play but in the second and the third game I was very steady and kept rallying till I didn't get the chance to finish,” Dani told PTI.

“I'm improving step by step. It is an important win for me. It gave me a big boost to my confidence and motivation.

“I will be next playing Danish International Challenge and Slovenia series,” added the Mumbai lad, who had finished at the quarterfinals of Senior National Championship in February this year.

Dani had won the Ghana International and finished runners-up at Polish International last year.

T20 needs players like Pant: Munro

HYDERABAD, APR 15 (PTI): Rishabh Pant is known for his flamboyant brand of cricket and Delhi Capitals batsman Colin Munro feels players like the dashing wicketkeeper batsman are an absolute must in the shortest format of the game.

Once Rishabh gets going, he becomes a nightmare for the bowlers. The left-hander had smashed a 27-ball 78 against Mumbai Indians before scoring 46 against Kolkata Knight Riders.

“Look at someone like Rishabh, he knows his game so well. Whether he is going to bat at number 4, 5 or 6, he's plays the same way and that's okay, we need those players in the T20 format to just go out there and try to take the bull by the horns from ball one,” Munro said after DC's 39-run win against Sunrisers Hyderabad Sunday night.

Led by 24-year-old Shreyas Iyer, Delhi Capitals have a young group as its core including the likes of Pant, Indian under-19 world cup winning skipper Prithvi Shaw and South African pacer Kagiso Rabada.

“Just seeing the young guys in our team coming in and playing with absolute freedom, no fear and with clarity in the way they go on about there cricket is great. They



know their strengths and weaknesses,” he said.

“The beauty of our team is that we have some really experienced international players and Indian players like Shikhar (Dhawan) and Axar (Patel) alongside youngsters and the boys on the bench are working hard as well.”

The New Zealander, who scored 40 off 24 balls against SRH, was also lavish in his praise for Iyer's leadership skills.

“Last year he was named skipper halfway through IPL, I think he has taken it with both hands now. He is very calm and collected on the field and that is great about him,” he said.



“He is so young but you learn a lot from him. Today he was talking about fitness so it's not just batting and bowling he's working on, it's all parts of his games. His captaincy is getting stronger and he and Ricky (Ponting) have a good relationship and he is definitely a very good leader.”

Talking about his own innings after Delhi lost two early wickets, Munro said he tried and played to his strengths.

“After two wickets down early in the innings I had to play to my strengths and that is going out there and being aggressive,” the left-handed batsman said. “Even if they bowl

well I have to put pressure on them, can't just sit there and defend the ball. I have to try and put pressure on the bowlers that makes the margin for error smaller.”

Munro credited the Delhi bowlers for providing breakthrough at crucial junctures in the game.

“We got off to a good start but the game got away from us in terms of the run rate, credit to our bowlers because of them we stayed in the contest,” he said.

“We knew that if we stayed in the contest for every ball it would go down to the wire and we got those breakthroughs, picking up wickets at crucial stages.

No online voting for 2019 elections for Indian expats in UAE: clarifies Consul-General of India

DUBAI, APR 15 (PTI): There will be no online voting for the 2019 polls for Indian expatriates in the UAE, the Consul-General of India in Dubai has said, as he dismissed rumours that it was possible for non-resident Indians to vote online for the ongoing general elections.

Indian expats have complained that social media platforms have been rife with forwards of misleading posts that suggest non-resident Indians (NRIs) can vote online for 2019 polls.

There will be no e-voting for the 2019 elections, the Consul-General of India in Dubai, Vipul was quoted as saying in a media on Sunday.

“One can register on the National Voters' Service Portal (NVSP), and ensure that their name has appeared in the electoral roll,” he told Khaleej Times, adding that the only way people can vote is by personally visiting the polling booth in their respective constituency.

According to many Indian expats, the posts have been making the rounds since January.

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After IS war, Iraq seeks to reclaim status in Arab world

BAGHDAD, APR 15 (AFP): After decades of conflict, Iraq is seeking to reclaim a leadership role and status in the Arab world with a centrist policy and a determination among the country's top leaders to maintain good relations with both Iran and the United States.

A flurry of recent diplomatic activity and high-profile visits to the Iraqi capital, including this month's re-opening of a Saudi Consulate in Baghdad for the first time in nearly 30 years points to a new era of openness as the nation sheds its war image and re-engages with the world.

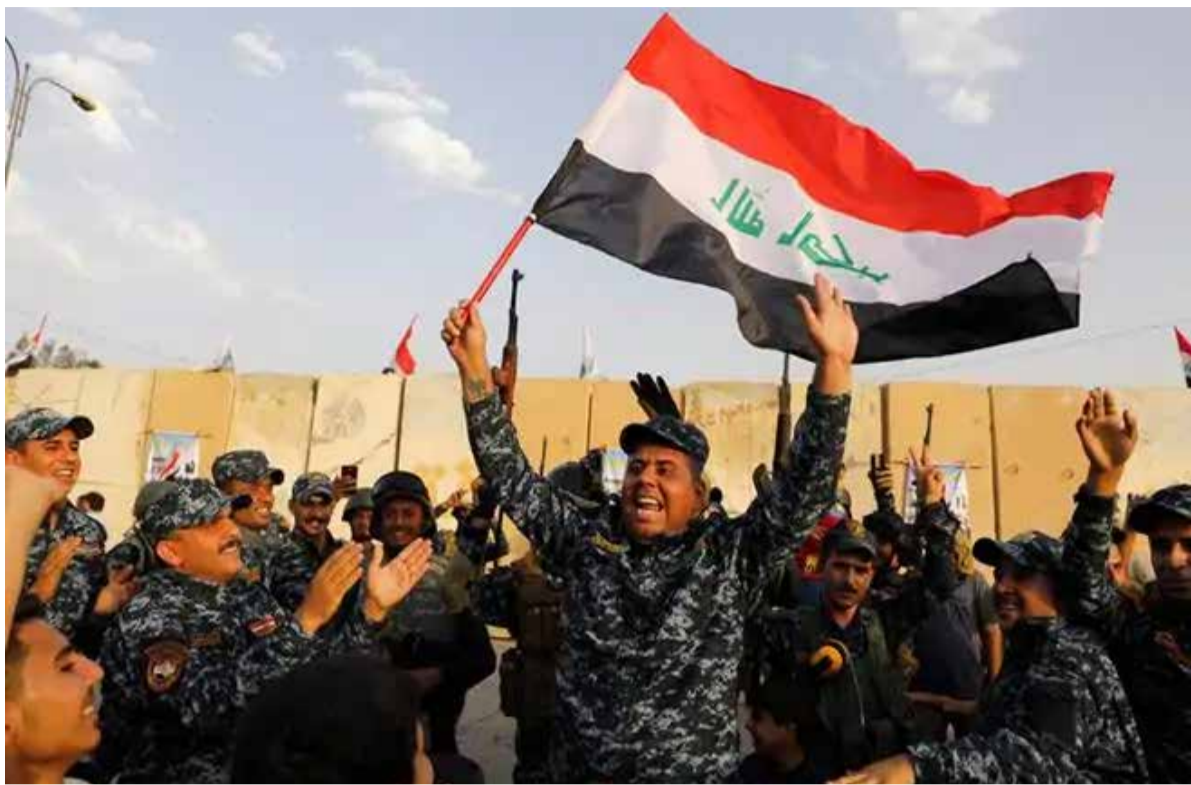
"Iraq is coming back to the neighbourhood," President Barham Salih told The Associated Press in a nearly hour-long interview last month. The veteran politician laid out a vision centered on an "Iraq First" policy, saying his country can no longer afford to be caught in regional disputes.

"For almost four decades Iraq was the domain in which everybody pursued their agenda at the expense of the Iraqi people. It's time we say we need a new political order ... in which Iraq must be an important pillar," Salih said.

Iraq has emerged from a ruinous three-year war against the Islamic State group and faces the mammoth task of reconciling, rebuilding and returning tens of thousands of displaced to their homes.

And while the extremists' territorial "caliphate" has been defeated in Iraq and Syria, the militants have now shifted to an insurgency campaign of targeted assassinations, car bombings, and suicide attacks.

The issue of Iran-backed Shiite militias who fought IS alongside Iraqi security forces poses a challenge to the



government's central authority, and the country's oil-based economy is suffering from wide-scale corruption.

"Iraq's path to reclaiming a leadership role in the Arab world will depend on how successful its leaders are in tackling security and economic challenges at home," Randa Slim, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Institute wrote recently.

Amid rapidly escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran, Iraq also needs to maintain a delicate balance with the two as Baghdad has strong ties with both countries.

The dynamics are complex. The Shiite-majority country lies on the fault line between Shiite Iran and the mostly Sunni Arab world, led by powerhouse Saudi Arabia, and has long been a theater in which Saudi-Iran rivalry for regional supremacy played out.

Relations have been particularly frosty with Riyadh, which broke relations with Baghdad following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and never really warmed much as

Iraq was increasingly pulled into Iran's orbit in later years.

Iraq needs much help and investment to rebuild its cities something it can only get from oil- and gas-rich Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia. But it can also ill afford to alienate Iran, which holds enormous political and military sway in Iraq through powerful militias and pro-Iran politicians.

"We have 1,400 kilometres of borders with Iran, we simply cannot ignore that reality," Salih said, adding that it's in Iraq's national interest to nurture good relations with Iran, with which Iraq fought an eight-year war in the '80s.

He said Iraq, however, was also keen on good relations with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other regional countries.

Mindful of the need to counter Iran's growing influence in the region in the post-IS order, Saudi officials have sought closer ties with Iraq, and last week sent a high-level delegation to Baghdad where the kingdom's consulate was inaugurated.

The Saudi delegation's visit followed a trip to Baghdad last month by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during which the two sides signed several agreement designed to boost bilateral relations.

It's a stark contrast from past years when Baghdad was shunned and isolated, first because of international sanctions after Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of neighboring Kuwait, and later, after the U.S.-led invasion that toppled him, when Iraq sank into cycles of sectarian bloodletting.

Amid the violence, international dignitaries avoided visits to the Iraqi capital, and when they did, made them brief and unannounced for security considerations.

In 2007, U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon famously ducked behind the podium during a live press conference with the prime minister at the time, Nouri al-Maliki, as a rocket slammed outside the building.

Now, Iraqi leaders say their country is not part of any regional conflict.

Prime Minister Adel

Abdul-Mahdi in his first foreign trip last month traveled to Cairo to meet with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi. They were joined by Jordanian King Abdullah II for a tripartite summit on measures to strengthen economic cooperation. On Tuesday, Abdul-Mahdi announced he will soon be visiting Saudi Arabia to sign several agreements.

Some are even suggesting that Iraq could play a mediating role between regional foes.

Lebanon's parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, on a visit to Baghdad earlier this month, said Iraq is a unique position to play an important regional role "in the reconciliation between the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Watheq al-Hashemi, an Iraqi political analyst, said it's an opportunity for Iraq to again become an important regional player.

But for that to happen, Iraqi politicians "need to put country before sect and act as statesmen," something he says they've had trouble doing for a long time.

Finland eyes left-right coalition to keep populists out

HELSINKI, APR 15 (AFP): Finns can expect a broad, ineffective coalition government for the next four years as the Social Democrats, who narrowly won weekend elections, focus on keeping the surging anti-immigration populists out, analysts said.

The polls were closely watched to see how the nationalists would do ahead of European Parliament elections in May when many believe they and the eurosceptic camp as a whole could make significant inroads.

As Finland's politicos digested Sunday's vote, the big question Monday was what role the far-right anti-immigration Finns Party, which more than doubled its seats in parliament under the leadership of hardline nationalist Jussi Halla-aho, would play.

The Social Democrats came in as Finland's biggest party with 17.7 percent of the votes, just ahead of the Finns Party on 17.5 per cent.

Halla-aho told Finnish media Monday he did not want to repeat the mistakes his party made in 2015 when it entered government and was forced to compromise on immigration and EU bailouts. "We were flexible about the wrong things," he told Finland's biggest newspaper Helsingin Sanomat.

"I don't see it as possible that the Finns Party would take part in a government which doesn't clearly commit to reducing humanitarian migration," he added.

On the campaign trail, Halla-aho told supporters he wanted to see the refugee intake reduced to "almost zero".

This would appear to clash directly with the Social Democratic Party's manifesto pledge to make it easier for refugees in Finland to be joined by family members from their home countries.

Social Democrat leader Antti Rinne told reporters early Monday that cooperation with the



Finns Party "looks unlikely". While Halla-aho said he would be interested in the post of interior minister, in charge of immigration, he was also upbeat in interviews at the prospect of being in opposition.

He told reporters that the huge increase to his party's parliamentary seat-count -- from 17 to 39, just one shy of the Social Democrats -- would give his party sway over any future discussion on immigration, whether or not it was a member of the government.

"Of course they're scared of losing voters to us," he told Helsingin Sanomat. "It would be quite strange if they didn't take that into account in some way."

Political analyst Sini Korpinen told AFP that, in a bid to keep the nationalists in opposition, a coalition between the leftist Social Democrats and the centre-right National Coalition appeared almost a certainty.

"It's very hard to see that the other parties would say no to working with the Social Democrats because then we would be in a situation with Halla-aho trying to form a government and I just don't see that happening," she said.

Political commentator Jeanette Bjorkqvist agreed.

"Rinne has been pretty clear that there are substantial ideological differences between the Social Democrats and the Finns Party. It would be astonishing to see them in the same government," she told public broadcaster YLE.

Korpinen predicted the Social Democrats would likely try to build a coalition with the National

Coalition, the Greens, the far-left Left Alliance, and centrist Swedish People's Party.

"But the broad coalition Rinne will need to keep the Finns Party out will be difficult to manage and ineffective," Korpinen said.

Goran Djupsund, political science professor at Abo Akademi University, said the outcome showed how rising populism across Europe was fragmenting and weakening political systems.

"A splintered political landscape makes it harder to build a government and nations become harder to lead," Djupsund said.

"When populists win, the EU also becomes hard to govern... then no one cheers, with perhaps the exception of our neighbour to the east," Russia. Much of the pre-election discussion centred around whether cuts to Finland's cherished welfare state and education system went too far.

Social Democrat leader Rinne has been a staunch opponent of the National Coalition's austerity policies over the past four years.

Meanwhile Petteri Orpo, leader of the conservative National Coalition Party and co-architect of the government's savings programme, has repeatedly denounced the Social Democratic Party's anti-austerity plans as "irresponsible".

However, there are signs the two parties may be able to reach some agreement to restrict further belt-tightening, as Orpo has insisted that the economy is now strong enough to allow for some more generous public spending.

Macron to set out fix for 'yellow vest' anger

Paris, Apr 15 (AFP): French President Emmanuel Macron was to set out a series of major policy announcements Monday in response to five months of nationwide "yellow vest" protests, in what has been billed as a make-or-break moment for his presidency.

Yet the task of trying to satisfy the many, sometimes competing demands coiled up in the protests will be a tricky one for the 41-year-old leader, who was elected two years ago on promises of sweeping changes.

His reform drive was abruptly knocked off course by the yellow vests, whose movement erupted in November against social inequality.

Macron responded by embarking on a major voter-listening exercise between January and March called the "Great National Debate", in which grievances were aired during thousands of town hall-style meetings.

"We have decided to transform the anger into solutions," Macron wrote on Twitter. "For several months you told us what you think and we heard... (Monday) night I will respond to you."

The centrist will give a speech at 1800 GMT Monday setting out the "first concrete measures", the presidency told AFP.

One of Macron's aides told AFP that the country could look forward to "a new act" marked by "profound changes" aimed at drawing the line under the enduring and often violent anti-government protests.



Summing up the weight of anticipation on Macron's shoulders Senate leader Gerard Larcher, a member of the opposition Republicans, told Le Figaro newspaper on Saturday: "He won't get a second chance." French media said the content of the speech of Macron could determine whether he wins re-election in 2022.

"It's double or quits for Macron," Le Journal du Dimanche weekly newspaper wrote Sunday.

"Macron's five years is at stake," said Le Figaro Monday, adding that the head of state has "no room for error".

Left-leaning Liberation said Macron had to decide whether to side with conservative supporters or placate those wanting a softer approach.

In one of the most important weeks of the president's career, he is also due to hold a press conference at the Elysee on Wednesday in an unusual move for a man who has kept his distance from the French media. What Macron intends to announce has been kept under wraps.

He has much work to do if he is to convince French citizens outside of his hardcore

support base that he really cares about them.

According to an Ifop poll published on Sunday, 85 per cent of French think that Macron should pay greater attention to their concerns.

One option Macron is examining is to curb the privileges enjoyed by senior civil servants and former presidents. Another is push ahead with plans to reduce the number of national lawmakers.

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, who met Macron on Sunday, said last week that the clear message from the nationwide debates was that the French wanted lower taxes.

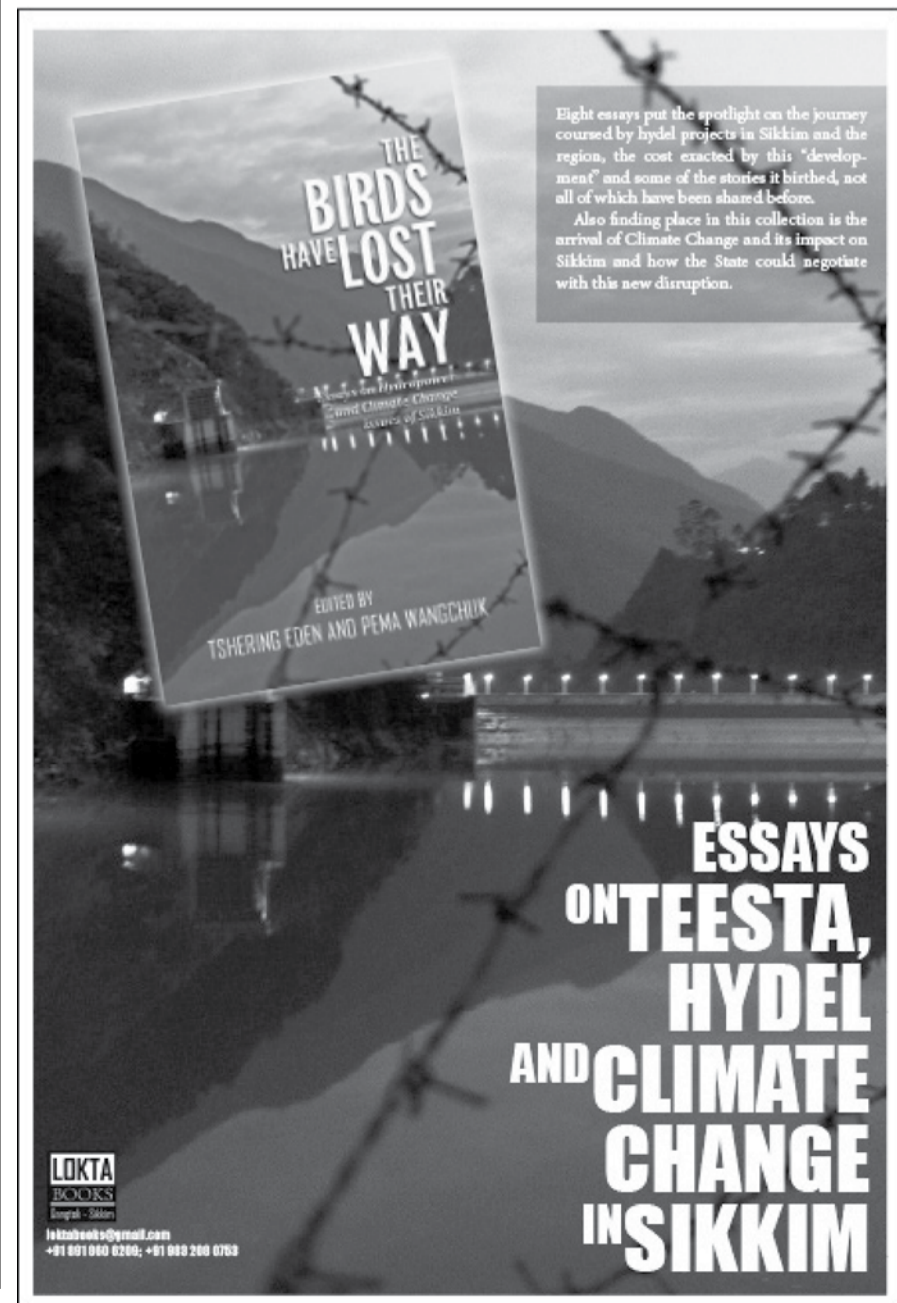
"We need to lower taxes, and lower them more quickly," Philippe.

The yellow vest movement, named after the fluorescent safety jackets worn by demonstrators, began in rural and small-town France over fuel taxes and quickly snowballed into a broader anti-capitalist, anti-establishment rebellion.

Macron, a former investment banker and ex-economy minister, was caught off guard when protesters began occupying roundabouts to denounce policies widely seen as tilted towards the rich and big business.

Admitting to failures, he unveiled a 10-billion-euro (11-billion) package of tax cuts and income top-ups for the working poor and pensioners and travelled into the rural heartland to try to reconnect with voters.

But most yellow vests boycotted the consultations. They accused Macron of prejudging the outcome by taking their top demands -- including the return of a popular "solidarity tax" on the rich which he cut and citizen-sponsored referendums -- off the table from the outset.





YUNG LUV! THE SINGERS, HALSEY & YUNGBLUD WERE SPOTTED PACKING ON THE PDA AT COACHELLA.

'Andhadhun' crosses Rs 200 cr mark at China box office



MUMBAI, APR 15 (PTI): Thriller drama "Andhadhun", directed by Sriram Raghavan, earned over Rs 200 crore at the box office in China, the makers announced Monday.

The film, starring Ayushmann Khurrana, Tabu and Radhika Apte, crossed the Rs 200 crore mark within 13 days of its release in the country.

It released on April 3 in China under the title "Piano Player".

According to the makers, it is the fifth highest grossing Indian film in China after "Dangal", "Secret Superstar", "Bajrangi Bhaijaan", and "Hindi Medium".

"We had no idea that our little 'experimental film' would travel so much. Experimental doesn't mean no fun. The film, I learn, is screening in both subtitled and dubbed versions in different screens. My whole team is super thrilled," Raghavan said in a statement here.

The critically-acclaimed film, produced by Sanjay Routray's Matchbox Pictures, ran successfully for over 75 days, earning over Rs 100 crore after its release in October 2018 back home in India.

Last week, "Andhadhun" opened the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles (IFFLA) and also received a standing ovation in the presence of Tabu, Raghavan and Routray.

"This April has been especially exciting for all of us at Matchbox Pictures. We are overjoyed that his (Raghavan) vision and our film is being celebrated across the world now," Routary added.

I was the new kid, asked for advice from fellow superheroes: Brie Larson on 'Avengers: Endgame'

Seoul, Apr 14 (PTI): In the recently released footage of "Avengers: Endgame", War Machine calls Captain Marvel the "new girl" and Brie Larson says she felt just that when she joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and even asked her co-stars for advice on "how to be a superhero". The 29-year-old star's first introduction to other superheroes in MCU was during Marvel's 10-year anniversary photo opportunity, which she says was "crazily timed" for everybody to meet.

"It was really wonderful because I got to meet everyone at once, shake hands and go like 'I'm the new kid, do you have any advice for me?' And I was able to take in a bunch."

"Marvel gave us books and we used them as yearbooks and everybody went around and signed them and I put in mine for people to give me advice on how to be a superhero. It was really lovely," Larson said in a group interview here.

The Oscar-winner is in the city to promote the much-awaited "Endgame" along with co-stars Robert Downey Jr, Jeremy Renner, directors Joe and Anthony Russo, Marvel Studios chief Kevin Feige and executive producer Trinh Tran.

The actor, who made her superhero debut as Carol Danvers in "Captain Marvel", says it was surreal to come on board the MCU which has been an integral part of her movie watching experience. "The thing I loved about marching into 'Infinity War' is (after) having watched so many of these movies for so long, seeing these characters interact felt quintessential and also totally surprising at the same time. "This has been something that

I've loved watching on screen. To be a part of it and bring new layers to the complexity of how these characters meet and who's seeing whom was really cool," she adds. Being a part of



the vast universe can be intimidating for an artiste, but Larson believes every character in the MCU is special.

"This universe is so vast. What makes it so unique and special is that every character has its piece that completes this puzzle. So figuring out who Carol was, where she's at in this part of the journey, where she fits into this larger world, that was the challenge." Larson, however, does not "feel the pressure" of taking the legacy forward after the culmination of the decade-long journey of the Avengers core team.

"I don't really think it's on me. To be totally honest, I haven't seen this film yet. I have no idea what's in store for the future of the MCU. But I had a really awesome time making this."

Carl Weathers to star in 'The Mandalorian'



LONDON, APR 15 (PTI): "Rocky" alum Carl Weathers is set to star in "Star Wars" TV series, "The Mandalorian".

According to ContactMusic, the 71-year-old star will play Greif Marda, the head of a bounty hunter organisation that enlists the Mandalorian for a mission.

"Narcos" star Pedro Pascal features in the title role, with Gina Carano essaying Kara Dune, a former Rebel shock trooper. Speaking at the Star Wars Celebration in Chicago, Weathers explained his character sketch.

"Of all things I've been in, nothing comes close to this. This group of fans is like

something out of 'Star Wars'. The character is Greif Marda and he's a guy that's running this group of bounty hunters. He's kind of the head of this guild of bounty hunters. There seems to be a lot of kind of nefarious people...

"He's looking for someone to go after a product for a client that's very valuable... and he finds a bounty hunter named Mandalorian... and he hires this guy and sends him out there and the Mando does what needs to be done," the actor said.

Written by Jon Favreau, the series is set after the fall of the Empire and before the emergence of the First Order. It follows the laborious

effort of a lone gunfighter in the outer who reaches of the galaxy far from the authority of the New Republic.

Dave Filoni, who has worked on "Star Wars: The Clone Wars" and "Star Wars: Rebels," will direct the first episode of the series.

Taika Waititi, Bryce Dallas Howard, Rick Famuyiwa and Deborah Chow will direct other episodes.

The series will premiere on Disney+ in November.

Disney has another "Star Wars" prequel series in the pipeline which will focus on the "Rogue One" character Cassian Andor, played by Diego Luna.

Elisabeth Moss to star in 'The Invisible Man' reboot

Elisabeth Moss to star in "The Invisible Man" reboot

Los Angeles, Apr 15 (PTI): Elisabeth Moss is officially on board "The Invisible Man" reboot, based on the classic 1897 sci-fi novel by HG Wells.

"The Handmaid's Tale" star was in early talks for the Universal-Blumhouse production, Deadline reported.

This would be Moss' second collaboration with Blumhouse after Jordan Peele's recent critically-acclaimed hit, "Us". Leigh Whannell wrote and is directing the film. He will co-produce alongside Blumhouse.

The novel has been adapted for both the big screen and television over the years.

Its most notable adaptation is the 1933 black-and-white film, featuring Claude Rains in the title role.

The studio had earlier planned a shared universe based around its classic monster characters and had roped in stars like Johnny Depp, Tom

Cruise, Russell Crowe, Javier Bardem and Sofia Boutella for it. The shared universe was dubbed as the Dark Universe. The plan has been kept on hold after the fail-



ure of Cruise's "The Mummy" in 2017. Depp, who was supposed to take on the title role, will not star in the new project, which is being developed as a separate entry.

ARIES: You are wisely embracing new ideas right now, but it looks as though you might be the only one. Everyone around you is behaving with extra caution. What they fear might not be clear to you—and it doesn't have to be. You do not have to take on the burden of changing everyone's minds, though putting some effort in that direction will make you feel good. Pushing your agenda too hard will turn people off, but it will also show them that you are a person of substance and convictions.

TAURUS: Jealousy alert! A tangled angle between expansive Jupiter and ardent Venus could provoke an attack from the green-eyed monster. Get the facts before you react—what's actually happening may differ from the story in your head. It may be someone else seeing emerald, so take extra measures to avoid provoking envy.

GEMINI: "No" is a complete sentence. Today's terse Venus-Jupiter square could find you in the crosshairs of an emotionally demanding person—someone who regularly insists on getting their way. Gently but firmly assert your

boundaries. Setting limits helps people know where you (and they) stand. With honest-to-a-fault Jupiter involved, you may need to be more upfront.

CANCER: If you want something done, give it to a busy person. Today, you may need to delegate some duties to manage all you've got going on in your life. Although it may seem illogical, someone whose plate is almost full would be more reliable than the person who perpetually has "nothing to do." Just remember, everything comes at a price.

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.

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: Thanks to a befuddling workplace situation, you may be craving career guidance or advice on a move you're pondering. But careful: A harsh Venus-Jupiter square could make you come across as self-absorbed or even a tad unprofessional. If there's no clear opening for shoptalk, don't force it. And even if there is, make sure you treat for lunch or coffee to express gratitude for people's time. Similarly, if you're not in the mood to hear about a friend's workplace woes, don't feel obligated. Redirect the focus to fun plans that will take everyone's minds off their issues.