



DT LEPCHA CONFIDENT OF WINNING FROM GNATHANG-MACHONG AND RUMTEK-MARTAM CONSTITUENCIES

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TEENS HAVE LESS FACE TIME WITH THEIR FRIENDS – AND ARE LONELIER THAN EVER

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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General Observer arrives in North dist; 10-12 nomination submissions expected on last day

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 24 MAR;

District Election Officer-cum-Returning Officer, North, Raj K Yadav, informs that General Observer, Dr Pratibha Singh, arrived in the district today.

She is here to monitor the election preparedness and issues/ complaints of political parties related to elections until poll day.

Dr. Singh can be contacted for any election-related issues at the following numbers: 03592-234400, 7076989068/7586909224.

Further, Expenditure Observer, Ravi Patel, can be contacted for expenditure-related issues at 03592-234003 and 7076988286/7586908422.

DEO-North informs that on the last day for filing of nominations, 25 March, the district administration is expecting 10 to 12 nominations. No nomination papers have been filed in the district till date.

He further informs that to ensure security measures sufficient police personnel have been deployed at the District Administrative Centre and the entire process of the filing of nominations will be videographed by an IPR team.

The time for filing nominations is 11am to 3pm. After 3pm, the main door of the DAC will be closed, he adds. The entire process will be monitored by the General Observer.

The DEO also informs that the second randomization of polling personnel will be done on 27 March in the presence of General Observer to form polling teams.

After withdrawal of candidatures, a meeting will be held at DEO's chamber on 29 March at 11am with the contesting candidates to make them aware about the rules and regulations, Expenditure Monitoring and Model Code of Conduct as per the guidelines of the Election Commission of India.

State Govt's claim of eradicating TB by 2022 rings hollow: People Living with TB

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 MAR:

Sikkim Drug Users Forum, a group which represents people who use drugs, people living with Viral Hepatitis, HIV and TB across State, has thumbed down the program implementation of the TB programme by the State Government. Their message was released on the occasion of World TB Day, today.

TsewangBhutia, Convener for TB and Viral Hepatitis, Sikkim Drug Users' Forum, in a press statement issued today, listed out a charter of 20 aspects in which the government was failing the TB patients and survivors in the State [see box for details].

The Forum has expressed "disappointment and shame" with the Health Department, the political leadership for its hollow claims of eradicating TB by 2022 and contends that poor implementation of the TB programme, poor diagnostic facilities, ineffective



drugs etc have instead led to many families having lost members to TB.

"We are ashamed to say that Sikkim State TB program is in completely in bizarre state, when the goal is set to be achieved by 2022, we the Sikkim Drug Users' Forum appeal and demand that the Govt. of Sikkim, Health Department to re-look the guidelines and start working for the people living with TB and families who has suffered from very long time, work to protect more TB related suicidal deaths,

reach-out to the people who needs to put people in treatment," the statement appeals.

SDUF underlines that the TB programme should not be run just for show and that it was the right of the people to receive better health and diagnostic services and better drugs to get cured from TB and not die unfortunate deaths.

"No program has ever succeeded if the people who are affected are not engaged in the program designing and program implementation, period!"

the statement points out.

As for the observance of World TB Day, SDUF members living with TB and TB survivors held a community outreach program at Jeewan Marg Rehabilitation Center.

"And we as a community forum strongly voice against the poor program implementation of the TB programme in the Sikkim by Government of Sikkim," they reiterated.

SDUF, it is informed, is the only State-level organization of its kind in Sikkim.

As per the SDUF, Sikkim TB Cell, Health Department, is lacking in the following areas:

1. Delay of nutritional support INR. 500 (GOI) & INR. 2500 (GOS) to the TB patients.
2. Conditional INR. 2500 (nutritional support) from the State Government.
3. No proper guideline developed by the Health Department of Sikkim to end TB by 2022.
4. No proper psychological and counseling support to the MDRTB patients.
5. Lack of human resource in State TB cell and District TB cell.
6. NO IEC materials being developed for the TB awareness.
7. Active TB case findings.
8. Prevention of new TB infection.
9. No proper plans to prevent high mortality rates in Sikkim.
10. No program to address stigma and discrimination attached to TB.
11. No enough necessary resources sanctioned by the government of Sikkim to achieved the commitment of ending TB by 2022.
12. Poor filed services to the people who live in far-flung areas.
13. Poor engagement of the people living with TB (communities) in-terms of implementation of TB programme in State.
14. No diagnostic facility for drug sensitivity test in the state.
15. No better drugs for the MDRTB and XDRTB patients.
16. No studies and research has been conducted to control TB related suicide deaths in State.
17. Formation of District TB committee and TB forum in state is being delayed from many years.
18. Lack of political will and necessary resources to end TB by 2022.
19. Poor awareness building among the mass and people living with TB and people affected.
20. No program or support to TB affected families from catastrophic cost.

People demanded my son's candidature: Golay

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 MAR:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party president, PS Tamang [Golay], today clarified that his son, Aditya Golay, getting the party ticket to contest from his home constituency, Soreong-Chakung, was not a manifestation of either nepotism or his personal interest, but in response to the people's demand.

Mr Tamang, it may be recalled, cannot contest elections for till August 2024 and does not feature in the SKM candidates list. He has however been officially projected by the party as its chief ministerial candidate.

While rumours had been circulating that Mr Tamang will field his son in his lieu from Soreong-Chakung and Upper Burtuk [his last constituency], this was confirmed only on Saturday when Mr Golay's candidature was included in the SKM final list.

Mr Tamang today insisted that people from Soreong-Chakung and Upper Burtuk had both demanded his eldest son as the SKM



candidate and that the party's parliamentary committee decided to field him from the former.

He added that this was also in line with the party's commitment to give opportunities to the youth.

As for his own being named as the Chief Minister candidate even though he cannot contest elections, Mr Tamang said that this was decided by the party's parliamentary committee and not him.

"I have not come to politics to become CM, but the party has given me a responsibility and I am ready to fulfill the decision," he said.

Mr Tamang also informed that SKM will go into full campaign

mode once the scrutiny process of nomination papers end on 28 March. "After that we will be have daily programmes and campaign in every constituency. I will tour each constituency during the campaign," he said.

Also today, SKM party spokesperson, Jacob Khaling, stated that the party chose candidates after weighing all factors and on the people's demand.

The party's Cheli Morcha chief convener, Kala Rai, who was also a member of the parliamentary committee which selected the candidates, accepted that there has been some criticism over SKM picking only two women candidates.

"We were in the favour to having at least four women candidates, but we could not despite of our best efforts while trying to balance the candidates list from every community," she explained while stressing that SKM candidates offered Sikkim the best options and calling on the people to support them.

Dr Mechung respects party decision, rues some seniors switching sides

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 MAR:

Sitting MLA from Martam-Rumtek constituency, Dr Mechung Bhutia, today stated that it was not important to have a post to serve the State and its people. He assured to continue working for the constituency as a party worker under the leadership of SDF

president, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling. Dr Mechung, it may be recalled, was not picked for a party ticket this time.

Speaking to media-persons here today, Dr Bhutia said, "I am not disheartened over not getting the party ticket this time as it is not important to have a post to serve the people and

there are other ways to serve the people."

He also regretted that some seniors of the party, who, even after having become MLAs and Ministers many times from SDF party, were not respecting the decision of the party.

"I strongly condemn such acts as Sikkim is

turn to pg02

Projecting Golay as CM candidate is electoral malpractice: HSP

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 MAR:

Hamro Sikkim Party has denounced the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha announcement of PS Tamang [Golay] as the party's chief ministerial candidate as "illegal in substance" and an electoral malpractice.

Cautioning voters not be misled by the "false and impossible claims" being made by SKM, an HSP press release issued by the party spokesperson, Biraj Adhikari, goes on to quote provisions of the law to point out that Mr Tamang cannot contest not just election 2019, but owing to his conviction in a corruption case,

will remain disqualified even for the Assembly elections in 2014.

The HSP statement details that "Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) was convicted and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment by a Session's Court in Sikkim for offences under the Indian Penal Code and the Prevention of Corruption Act. He was found to have committed corrupt practices when he was the minister for Animal Husbandry from 1996.

"The Hon'ble High Court of Sikkim upheld the verdict of the Session's Court and dismissed his appeal in June 2017. Con-

sequently, he was behind bars for 12 months and his sentence ended on August 10, 2018."

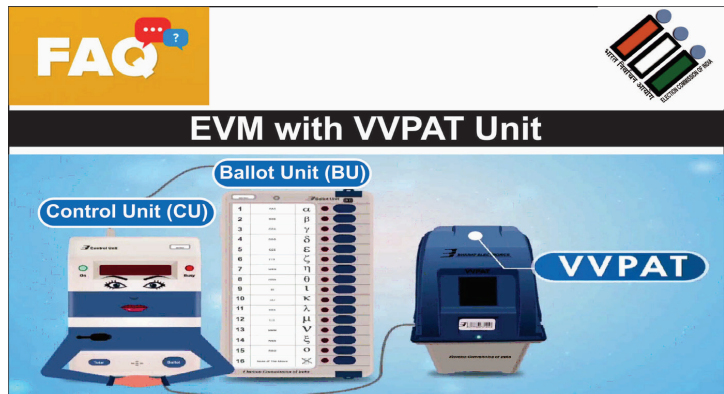
The release explains that Representation of People's Act provides that a person convicted under Prevention of Corruption Act cannot contest an election for a period of six years from the date of completing a sentence of imprisonment.

Given this clause, Mr Tamang will remain disqualified till 10 August, 2024, by when even the elections scheduled for 2024 would have been over, the release details.

"As only seven months have passed since he was released

from jail, the so-called Chief Ministerial Candidate of SKM cannot contest the 2019 Sikkim Assembly Election or any by-election later on. If he cannot contest any election now or within 6 months from now, how will he become a Chief Minister? In fact, he cannot even contest the 2024 Sikkim Assembly Election," HSP underlines.

For SKM to still project him as the party's chief ministerial candidate was not only an "impossible promise" but also "illegal in substance and amounts to electoral malpractice," HSP maintains.



Q12. Is it possible to vote more than once by pressing the button again and again?

Ans. No. As soon as a particular button on the Balloting Unit is pressed the vote is recorded for that particular candidate and the machine gets locked. Even if one presses that button further or any other button, no further vote will be recorded. This way the EVMs ensure the principle of "one man, one vote". The next vote is enabled only when the Presiding Officer/Polling Officer in-charge of the Control Unit releases the Ballot by pressing the Ballot Button. This is a distinct advantage over the ballot paper system.

Q13. How can a voter be sure that the EVM is working and his vote has been recorded?

CALL 1950 FOR ANY ELECTION RELATED QUERIES

Contact Hours : 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM

DT Lepcha confident of winning from Gnathang-Machong and Rumtek-Martam constituencies

SUMMIT REPORT

Gangtok, 24 Mar:

Senior SDF leader DT Lepcha who has been awarded the party ticket to contest from two constituencies - Gnathang-Machong and Rumtek-Martam - is keeping a hectic campaign schedule but insists that although he is keeping busy, he is enjoying the experience.

Interestingly, Mr Lepcha is the sitting MLA from Gnathang-Machong and has represented Martam-Rumtek in the past as well.

Speaking to SummitTimes, Mr Lepcha said that the additional charge of Rumtek-Martam was not difficult for him since



he enjoys a good rapport there having served as an MLA from the area for 15 years in the past.

“Due to my work done in the past, 99% of the people of Martam-Rum-

tek have accepted my candidature. My victory is a certainty there. No doubts about that. I will fulfill the responsibility given by the party and party president for Mar-

tam-Rumtek constituency also,” he said.

Mr Lepcha, 61, shared that he has an emotional attachment with the people of Martam-Rumtek constituency.

He added that in 2004,

he had defeated the opposition candidate from Rumtek-Martam constituency by a huge margin.

“The same candidate has come again from the constituency this time and I welcome him to this contest of democracy. The people of Rumtek-Martam have made up their mind to make the SDF party victorious,” he said.

Mr Lepcha wants to promote homestay tourism in Rumtek-Martam, pointing out that this option has worked very well in Gnathang-Machong.

There are around 13,000 voters in Gnathang-Machong and around 15,000 voters in Rumtek-Martam.

General Election Observer arrives for South dist

NAMCHI, 24 MAR [IPR]: The General Election Observer for South District, Shrish Chandra Verma, arrived today and is presently staying at the PWD Dakbungalow here.

Mr Verma is the general election observer for all the eight Assembly Constituencies in South District - Barfung, Poklok-

Kamrang, Namchi- Singhithang, Melli, Namthang Rateypani, Temi-Namphing, Rangang Yangang and Tumin- Lingi.

People wishing to meet Mr Verma can visit him between 10 to 11AM at the PWD Dak Bungalow or contact him for election-related issues at 8158017513.

Training and demonstration on efficient utilization of draught animals

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 23 MAR:

The College of Agricultural Engineering and Post-Harvest Technology (CAEPHT), Central Agricultural University (CAU, Imphal), centre of the All India Coordinated Research Project on Increased Utilization of Animal Energy with Enhance System Efficiency organized daylong training and demonstration to the farmers on “Efficient utilization of draught animals with matching agricultural equipments” on 20 March at Panmphok, South Sikkim, a press release informs.

Forty-four farmers were familiarized with improved animal drawn equipments during training and demonstration programme.

Assistant Professor & Principal Investigator (PI), Er. S.K. Chauhan explained the activities of CAEPHT-AICRP on UAE centre in villages of Sik-

kim for animal based farming system on terraces for major crops.

The highlight of the training included display and demonstration of animal drawn improved wedge plough, improved peg type puddler, Bio-fertilizer applicator cum maize planter, improved single and two row multi crop zero-till planter and improved yoke in village Panmphok, South Sikkim.

The PI explained the working of all the equipments on display to the farmers for cultivation of crops. The associated staffs of AICRP on UAE also explained the working of equipments on display and demonstration.

One small hand tools (Tubular hand maize Sheller) was offered from the college to experience the performance of the tools by the farmers and provide feedback for further rein-ement if required.

Dr Mechung respects...

presently in this great position only due to SDF party under the successful leadership of Pawan Chamling,” he said.

Dr Bhutia added that the departure of such leaders also created more opportunities for the youth in the party and that this would make the party stronger.

In this regard, he also urged the youth to clear the misconception that they can serve the people only by becoming MLA.

He also announced that he would continue to work under the leadership of Pawan Chamling and extend full support to the candidate given by the party to Martam-Rumtek constituency.

“I will provide my full support to my political guru, DT Lepcha, to ensure his victory with the highest margin from our constituency,” he said.

South DEO launches music video to promote voting



NAMCHI, 24 MAR [IPR]:

The District Election Officer-cum-Returning Officer (South), Ragul K, launched a short music video titled, ‘Desh Lai Banauna Lai Aba Jaagana,’ aimed at generating awareness, particularly amongst women voters, for the upcoming general elections.

The video is directed

and edited by Mandira Chettri and performed by school students of the south district.

Speaking about the music video Mr Ragul K said that it was part of Systematic Voter’s Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) under the guidance of Election Commission of India. The main objective of this

Nepali public service announcement video is to educate women voters and urge them to exercise their right to vote.

It also maybe mentioned that this is the first time that the South DEO has prepared such a music video with the aim to sensitize the youth especially women to go and cast their vote.

Lamtha joins SKM, officially

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 MAR:

SDF’s Tenzing Lamtha, a ticket aspirant for Shyari who was overlooked, and several of his supporters officially joined the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha at Tathangchen on Sunday evening. They were received into the party by SKM president PS Tamang [Golay] in presence of acting president and Shyari candidate KN Lepcha.

Addressing the media, Mr Tamang said that Mr Lamtha had given up his government job and entered politics to do social work.

“He was selected by the people of Shyari as their leader but they were ignored by the SDF party president. When a social worker like Tenzing Lamtha joins our party with his supporters, we welcome him heartily and we are confident that with his joining, we are ensured



a comfortable victory in Shyari,” Mr Tamang said.

He added that Mr Lamtha had joined the party without any preconditions.

On his part, Mr Lamtha said he joined SKM because he realized that the future of the people of Shyari constituency was secure with SKM.

He also rejected notions that he switched sides on being denied the SDF ticket and said that the people of Shyari were keen for him to be the SDF candidate and were disheartened when he was overlooked.

When no one from the SDF stepped forward to address the hurt of the people, he realized that the voice of the people was lost on the party, Mr Lamtha said. This convinced him to join SKM.

When asked whether Mr Lamtha would be considered in the event that Mr Lepcha, contesting on an SKM ticket from Shyari and Gangtok, wins from both the constituencies, Mr Tamang said that the matter would be decided by the party’s parliamentary committee when required.

Election officials inspect strong-rooms and counting centres



GANGTOK, 24 MAR [IPR]:

In preparation for the upcoming general elections, a team of officials from the Office of the CEO, Sikkim, and the DEO, East Sikkim, visited the strong-rooms and counting centres for East district at Brihaspati Parsai Senior Secondary School, Ranipool.

Comprising of the Chief Election Commissioner of Sikkim, R Telang, Special CEO Prabhakar Verma, DEO/ East Kapil Meena, who is also the Returning Officer for East, ADC/ East and Returning Officer/ East, Bharani Kumar, Assistant Returning Of-

ficers, concerned officials and the Principal of the School, the inspection took stock of the preparations and progress for the safe-keeping of the EVMs and the VVPATs at the newly constructed strong-rooms there and various other aspects of the counting centres to be set up in the school premises.

The team took a thorough round of the venue and scrutinized the security arrangements, installation of CCTV cameras and 24/7 monitoring at the control room, barricading of the counting centres, waiting areas for the representatives of

political parties, guarded entrances and exits at the venue etc.

One section of SSB has been deployed at the venue and will stay put till the day of polling.

The Roads Department was instructed to immediately take up surface improvement and carpeting work on the road leading up to the school ground.

The team expressed satisfaction at the progress achieved and directed the concerned officials and staff to ensure that there was no laxity towards ensuring a smooth election process for the east district.

BJP public meeting in Singtam



YOGEN THATAL

SINGTAM, 24 MAR:

The Bharatiya Janata Party held a public meeting here at Singtam Bazaar today with its leaders echoing the party’s “chowkidar” reference promoted by the Prime Minister as the poll plank.

Speakers also challenged the Chief Minister’s frequent branding of BJP as an outside

party and called on the people to look at what PM Modi has delivered for the nation in his first term in office.

The party’s candidates, allowed brief stage time, reiterated their assurance for clean and effective governance in Sikkim should they be elected here.

The meeting was addressed by Sikkim-BJP president, DB Chauhan;

YT Lepcha, the candidate from Gangtok; Laten Sherpa, the Lok Sabha candidate; Bharat Dulal [Rhenock]; Zigden Bhutia [Rumtek]; Birendra Poudyal [West Pendam], along with Sikkim-BJP vice-president Mohan Gurung. SB Karki, the host for the day, and the BJP candidate from Khamdong-Singtam was also presented today.

EC orders 26 lakh bottles of indelible ink for LS polls

NEW DELHI, MAR 24

(PTI): Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission has ordered 26 lakh indelible ink bottles worth Rs 33 crore.

The seven-phase election will begin on April 11 and conclude on May 19. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the poll panel had bought 21.5 lakh phials, 4.5 lakh less than this year.

Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd, a government of Karnataka undertaking, is the only authorised manufacturer of indelible ink for the EC.

Managing Director, Mysore Paints, Chandrashekhara Doddamani told PTI that the company has received an order for 26 lakh phials of 10cc each from the EC.

“The expected turnover is approximately Rs 33 crore,” he said.

The order, Doddamani said, is higher than the last general elections by 4.5 lakh phials. In this election, nearly 90 crore people are eligible to case their votes for which the EC will set up nearly 10 lakh polling stations across the country. In

1962, the Election Commission, in collaboration with the Law Ministry, National Physical Laboratory and National Research Development Corporation, had made an agreement with Mysore Paints for supply of indelible ink for Lok Sabha and assembly elections.

Since then, it has been supplying the ink for elections in India. A bottle of indelible ink contains 10 cubic centimetres (cc). As per modern measurement methods, one cubic centimetre is equivalent to one millilitre.

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IMA calls for unity among stakeholders to eliminate TB by 2025

NEW DELHI, MAR 24 (PTI): The Indian Medical Association Sunday organised a mass awareness program on World Tuberculosis Day and appealed to all stakeholders to work together as a unit towards the goal of eliminating the disease from the country by 2025.

The program was simultaneously carried out in all the 1,750 branches of IMA throughout the country. Sensitizing the public through such events will be a step closer towards eliminating TB from the country, IMA national president Dr Santanu Sen said.

The program aims to increase

awareness about the dreaded disease among the public and the ways to curb the instances and related mortality and morbidity by 2025.

The slogan for the event, inaugurated by Dr Sen, was ‘IMA ka naara, TB se Chutkara’, aiming to get rid of the disease.

The event witnessed release of as many balloons into the air to mark the 137th World TB Day.

This World TB Day commemorates the date in 1882 when Dr Robert Koch announced his discovery of Mycobacterium tuberculosis, the bacillus that

causes the disease. The highlights of the event included ‘Nukkad Natak’ (street plays) based on tuberculosis theme.

“Training sessions will be imparted to many NGOs present on the occasion over the next few days. Over 500 students, NGO workers and healthcare workers are expected to participate,” the IMA national president said.

“According to the recent statistics provided by the WHO, India leads the list of drug-sensitive and multi-drug resistance TB. One of the other vital issues remains the negligence of TB in women, which is under-reported,”

said IMA Finance Secretary Dr Ramesh Datta. “Over 3.2 million women are not only suffering from TB but the mortality rate is also on the higher side. We need to come forward as a unit to develop strategies that effectively address the impediments in the management of the disease, especially the notification,” he said.

Former Honorary Secretary General of IMA Dr Narendra Saini said : “The mortality rate last year dropped by 3 per cent, the IMA is committed to accomplish the targeted 80 pc reduction in mortality by 2025.”

Book donation campaign in Pakyong

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 MAR:
A children's book donation campaign was held at Pakyong Bazar on Sunday organised jointly by Pachey Senior Secondary School and Pakyong Bazar JHS. Teachers and students from both schools supported the campaign. Banwarilal Omkarmal, proprietor of a local shop, graced the occasion as chief guest. A healthy number of people donated books and magazines for the students. The campaign aimed



to collect books for children's books corners in govt schools. The collected books will be distributed to all the schools of Pakyong sub division, informs Hemant Gurung, a member of the organising team.

Inter-House elocution at Mamring school

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 MAR:
An elocution competition for juniors was held at Mamring Senior Secondary School on 23 March chaired by IP Khatiwara, Vice principal (Administration), a panel of judges comprising of Chiran Kafley, Bikash Bhattacharya and Chuki Lepcha (coordinators, house activities) and R Giridharan keeping time. 16 students represented



sending the four houses of the school participated in the competition with Ruby house emerging victorious and Anjana Rizal of Ruby house being declared the best speaker.

Indian sailors return after spending 13 months in Greek jail

MUMBAI, MAR 24 (PTI): Five Indian crew members of a cargo vessel arrived in Mumbai Sunday after spending 13 months in a jail in Greece. They were on board merchant cargo vessel 'MV Andromeda' that had set sail from Cyprus to Libya in December 2017.

The ship anchored in Turkey for repairs and then proceeded to its destination. However, in January 2018, when it reached Greece, authorities detained the ship on charges of carrying explosive material. Addressing the media here, one of the five sailors said he had last seen his daughter when she was four months old. "Now she is two years old and has started walking. And I was not there to see this," he said.

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Rahashya completes dubbing, moves for VFX

SUMMIT REPORT
SINGTAM, 24 MAR:
Dubbing for the much-awaited Nepali horror film, 'Rahashya,' from Sikkim has been completed, informs Arjun Chappagai, the director. Mr Chappagai left for Mumbai today for the visual effects. Rahashya, the first Nepali horror feature film from Sikkim, has been produced under the banner of Kreative Eye Production and has Januka Sharma and Jiwan Koyu in lead roles along with Deepak Sharma, a famed actor and theatre artiste in a key role. The film has been shot at locations across



the state and has cast artistes from Sikkim, most of whom are debuting with this feature. Angel Tshering, a Mumbai-based short filmmaker from Sikkim, is the Chief Assistant Director. The actors who completed the dubbing included Januka Rizal, Jeevan Koyu, Deepak Dhakal Amir Gurung, Arjun Baniya, Bharat Basistha, Abishes Sapkota, Ram Sharma, Kopil Dulal, Bhaskar Sharma, Deepika Chettri, Ajoy Guragai and Ajay Bishwakarma. [from SHITAL PRADHAN]

SLSA holds induction training on legal services for new judicial officers
SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 MAR:
The Sikkim State Legal Services Authority conducted an induction training programme for freshly recruited judicial officers on various aspects of legal services provided by legal services institutions on 23 and 24 March at the Sikkim SLSA conference hall. The training was held following resolutions passed at the 30th meeting of the central authority of NALSA and as per the directions of the SSLSA patrong-in-Chief and Executive Chairperson, a press release informs. The participants comprised of Jabyang Dorjee Sherpa, Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate [North Sikkim]; Urvashi Pradhan, Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate [South Sikkim]; and Zamyang Choden Bhutia, Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate [West Sikkim].

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General Observer arrives for West Sikkim

GYALSHING, 24 MAR [IPR]: The General Election Observer for West Sikkim, Faisal Aftab, Addl. Labour Commissioner UP, arrived here today. The General Observer is here to oversee the Legislative Assembly Election preparedness and issues/ complaints of political parties in relation to the election. People can meet him from 9am to 11am. He is stationed at the Power Guest House, Kyongsa, Gyalshing. He can also be contacted at (03595) 250637, 9452530493.

LIC Housing Finance partners with IMGC to offer special home loans

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 MAR:
LIC Housing Finance (LICHFL), one of the largest Housing Finance companies in India, has partnered with India Mortgage Guarantee Corporation (IMGC) to offer home buyers enhanced loan eligibility and easy loans. This strategic tie-up will help the LICHFL to accommodate more home loan borrowers, increase market penetration besides combating NPAs, a press release informs. Under the new partnership IMGC will provide LICHFL with mortgage guarantee which is a kind of financial product that compensates financial institutions for losses that may arise from a default on a mortgage loan. It will also help LICHFL accommodate more home loan buyers, improve eligibility criteria, extend repayment period and ease restrictions on profile of applicants, who face rejection related to work profile, work place, credit history amongst other reasons which may be unspecified by lending institutions.



The kingdom remains bitterly divided despite the ruling junta's pledge to rescue it from a decade-long treadmill of protests and coups. Politicians across the spectrum fear a stalemate under election rules, written by the junta, which limit the chances of any single party emerging with a comfortable parliamentary majority. But the lopsided set-up did not stop enthusiastic voters from turning out across the country, from ethnic Malay Muslims in the Deep South to residents in Thaksin's hometown of Chiang Mai. There are 51 million eligible voters and more than 7 million first-timers aged 18-25, adding a dash of uncertainty into the count. "I want to see Thailand become more democratic and inequality eased from society," said insurance

Five Indian sailors return home after 14 months in Greek jail

MUMBAI, MAR 24 (PTI): Five Indians, who spent over 14 months in a Greek jail after their cargo ship was detained on charges of carrying explosive material on board, arrived in Mumbai Sunday morning. MV Andromeda was detained by the Greek Coast Guard on January 9, 2018. Although it was established that the cargo in question was only a raw material for firecrackers, the crew of the ship had to languish in jail for over a year. The ship had set sail from Turkey on January 6, 2018 and was headed for Djibouti when it was diverted to the Greek coast for repairs and later, detained by the coast guard. "The explosive material was legal. Local authorities did not go through the documents which the Greek ship owner had," Bhupendra Singh, one of the Indian crew members who returned home Sunday, told the media here. "We were given consular access and they (the Indian embassy staff) were very supportive and were present at every hearing," said Singh, a native of Gurudaspur in Punjab, adding that they were not subjected to physical torture in any form. Singh, however, said he had to undergo mental agony "especially when beef was served frequently." "There were few times when I thought of ending my life. I was the only son of my father...I could not be present in my sister's wedding," he added. Another crew member, Gagan Deep, who is from Bengaluru, said jail authorities informed them that they were the first Indians to be lodged in the jail since it was built in 1953. Gagan Deep claimed that he had not been paid salary for the last 23 months by the company which owns the ship. Interestingly, it was the Pakistani inmates lodged in the the jail who provided them emotional support, he said. "Whatever grudge we may hold against each other's country, but when we meet each other in other countries, we (Indians and Pakistanis) understand each other very well ... those two Pakistanis helped us a lot in every way," Bhupendra Singh said.

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BEFORE THE OATH COMMISSIONER EAST SIKKIM AT GANGTOK

AFFIDAVIT

I, Hanok Biswakarma, S/O Shri Karna Kami aged about 35 years, by faith Christianity by Occupation Labor a resident of Borong, P.O. & P.O. Ravangla, South Sikkim Pin 737139, do hereby solemnly affirm and state as follows:-

1. That I am legal son of Shri Karna Kami.
2. That my name is Hanok Biswakarma and son of Shri Karna Kami and the same has been recorded at my voter card identity card No. SUC0015388 issued by Election Commission of India.
3. That my name is Hanok Biswakarma and son of Shri Karna Kami and the same has been recorded at my AADHAAR card No. 3042 4505 8618 issued by Unique Identification Authority of India (Government of India).
4. That my name was mistaken as Sriman Kami son of Shri Karne Kami in my old voter card no. SK01/0111/000693 issued by Election Commission of India.
5. That this affidavit is made bona-fide and declared that Hanok Biswakarma and Sriman Kami is a same person.
6. That this affidavit is made bona-fide.

Deponent

ROADS & BRIDGES DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM GANGTOK

Memo No: 622/SD IV/R&B/2018-19/324 Date: 22.03.2019

CORRIGENDUM

NIT published vide memo no 622/SD IV/R&B/2018-19/257 dated 26.02.2019 and published vide R.O. no. 763/IPR/Pub/Classi/18-19/ dated 05.03.2019 under 33-Kopibari Syari GPU has been kept in abeyance till further notice.

Sd/-
Assistant Engineer
Sub Division IV
Roads & Bridges Department
R.O.No. 784/IPR/Pub/Classi/18-19 Date: 23.3.19

SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

The Employment Scenario

Is it dearth of opportunities or a lack of drive and imagination

Ask anyone about a problem they see developing in Sikkim and most will reply that it's unemployment.

The fact that there are many unemployed people cannot be denied. Just look around at the number of young packing into campaign vehicles and it becomes apparent that at an age when they should be at their busiest making their futures, they are going hoarse promoting someone else's ambition. The government, the Opposition, the lay people and the youth, all appear to be unanimous in their perception of unemployment as a major concern for the present and a probable tinder-box for the future. It is time that one invested a deeper enquiry into this situation.

First, does Sikkim have an unemployment problem? If, by employment one means service in the State Government, then yes, a worrisome situation is developing. The departments are already over-staffed, beyond overstaffed with the OFOJ experiment, and jobs with the government are not as easily available anymore. But does this mean that the youth stare at a problem of unemployment as resulting from a dearth of opportunities? Probably not. Why should employment mean only government service and why should saturation on this front be interpreted as an employment crisis?

The whole understanding of employment is flawed if the youth and their leaders see employment to mean only government service. Unemployment is a problem when people with employable skills remain unemployed. The operative term being "employable skills". The first lesson that every person wishing to be employed needs to learn is that s/he has to add "employable skills" to her/his resume before expecting to land a job. Certificates and degrees might be enough to convince government departments [which are anyways not very particular about the delivering capacities of a candidate], but the private sector demands delivery. After the youth have acquired skills commensurate to their education, they have to seek out opportunities in the private sector [and not just in Sikkim, but also elsewhere]. Only when all doors are shut even on this front can one claim to be unemployed and seek [not demand] State support. Even when a sizeable portion of the youth is qualified in this manner to be recorded as 'unemployed', it is inaccurate to suggest an employment crisis.

Unemployment becomes a problem only when people who deserve to be employed cannot be adjusted anywhere. Before one announces that the State is beset with an employment crisis, one has to confirm that those who fill the list of unemployed persons have the skills, aptitude and qualifications to be employed. When employment dries up for such persons, it is time to panic.

Is it time to panic yet? Not really, because it is still premature to suggest that 'employable' Sikkimese are not finding jobs anywhere. Opportunities abound even within Sikkim, but go a wanting because the sectors with potential are not being accessed by the youth. Sikkim now receives more tourists than its population, and yet, Sikkimese presence in the tourism industry workforce is not commensurate to what this service sector has to offer. Admittedly, apart from tourism, the private sector has not matured enough in the State. May be if enough of the young pursue options in the private sector in earnest and with more consistency, this segment will grow well and embrace more of them more lucratively.

This, however, does not mean that everything is hunky-dory in Sikkim. While unemployment remains more a problem resulting from irrational aspirations, a more real problem is the lack of opportunities for the higher qualified locals. While most highly qualified professionals might not be too keen to work in Sikkim, what if they decided to come home? Can Sikkim offer them challenges worthy of their experience and qualifications? A real academician sees no tempting bouquets of openings in Sikkim, ditto for medical specialists, computer engineers, senior journalists, and the list could go on and on. For them, there is a poverty of opportunities. If Sikkim seriously aspires for a more glorious future, it has to create the opportunities to attract specialists from all fields. They will not be drawn by government jobs, but they will definitely be excited by challenges to deploy their special skills and the whole State will benefit from their presence. As for those who refuse to acquire even employable skills, leave alone specialize in any field, they can only depend on luck and contacts and that is how things have always been. If their unemployed status is a crisis, then it is not of recent make.

Teens have less face time with their friends – and are lonelier than ever

JEAN TWENGE
theconversation.com

Ask a teen today how she communicates with her friends, and she'll probably hold up her smartphone. Not that she actually calls her friends; it's more likely that she texts them or messages them on social media.

Today's teens – the generation I call "iGen" that's also called Gen Z – are constantly connected with their friends via digital media, spending as much as nine hours a day on average with screens.

How might this influence the time they spend with their friends in person?

Some studies have found that people who spend more time on social media actually have more face time with friends.

But studies like this are only looking at people already operating in a world suffused with smartphones. They can't tell us how teens spent their time before and after digital media use surged.

What if we zoomed out and compared how often previous generations of teens spent time with their friends to how often today's teens are doing so? And what if we also saw how feelings of loneliness differed across the generations?

To do this, my co-authors and I examined trends in how 8.2 million U.S. teens spent time with their friends since the 1970s. It turns out that today's teens are socializing with friends in fundamentally different ways – and also happen to be the loneliest generation on record.

LESS WORK, BUT FEWER HANGS?

After studying two large, nationally representative surveys, we found that although the amount of time teens spent with their friends face to face has declined since the 1970s, the drop accelerated after 2010 – just as smartphones use started to grow.

Compared with teenagers in previous decades, iGen teens are less likely to get together with their friends. They're also less likely to go to parties, go out with friends, date, ride in cars for fun, go to shopping malls or go to the movies.

It's not because they are spending more time on work, homework or extracurricular activities. Today's teens hold fewer paid jobs, homework time is either unchanged or down since the 1990s, and time spent on extracurricular activities is about the same.

Yet they're spending less time with their friends in person – and by large margins. In the late 1970s, 52 percent of 12th-graders got together with their friends almost every day. By 2017, only 28 percent did. The drop was especially pronounced after 2010.

Today's 10th-graders go to about 17 fewer parties a year than 10th-graders in the 1980s did. Overall, 12th-graders now spend an hour less on in-person social interaction on an average day than their Gen X predecessors did.

We wondered if these trends would have implications for feelings of loneliness, which are also measured in one of the surveys. Sure enough, just as the drop in face-to-face time accelerated after 2010, teens' feelings of loneliness shot upward.

Among 12th graders, 39 percent said they of-

social teens are still more likely to meet up in person, and they're also more active on their accounts.

However, the total number of in-person hangs for everyone in the group drops as social media replaces some face-to-face time.

So the decline in face-to-face interaction among teens isn't just an individual issue; it's a generational one. Even teens who eschew social media are affected: Who will hang out with them when most of their peers are alone in their bedrooms scrolling through Instagram?



ten felt lonely in 2017, up from 26 percent in 2012. Thirty-eight percent said they often felt left out in 2017, up from 30 percent in 2012. In both cases, the 2017 numbers were all-time highs since the questions were first asked in 1977, with loneliness declining among teens before suddenly increasing.

A NEW CULTURAL NORM

As previous studies have shown, we did find that those teens who spent more time on social media also spent more time with their friends in person.

So why have in-person social interactions been going down, overall, as digital media use has increased?

It has to do with the group versus the individual.

Imagine a group of friends that doesn't use social media. This group regularly gets together, but the more outgoing members are willing to hang out more than others, who might stay home once in a while. Then they all sign up for Instagram. The

Higher levels of loneliness are just the tip of the iceberg. Rates of depression and unhappiness also skyrocketed among teens after 2012, perhaps because spending more time with screens and less time with friends isn't the best formula for mental health.

Some have argued that teens are simply choosing to communicate with their friends in a different way, so the shift toward electronic communication isn't concerning.

That argument assumes that electronic communication is just as good for assuaging loneliness and depression as face-to-face interaction. It seems clear that this isn't the case. There's something about being around another person – about touch, about eye contact, about laughter – that can't be replaced by digital communication.

The result is a generation of teens who are lonelier than ever before.

[the writer is Professor of Psychology, San Diego State University]

‘It’s real to them, so adults should listen’: what children want you to know to help them feel safe

TIM MOORE
theconversation.com

In recent months, we have been confronted by events that make the world seem unsafe. Among these are the horrific stories of child sexual abuse, the rise in Aboriginal youth suicide and the tragedy of mass killings at the hands of an Australian terrorist in Christchurch.

Many of us feel anger, despair, hopelessness and grief as we are hit by what feels like a constant barrage of bad news. It's important to take care of our mental health during such times, but it's also vital to think about how children and young people are experiencing and responding to difficult events, and the ensuing emotions.

During the life of the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse, we conducted a study to better understand how children and young people conceptualise and experience safety. We wanted to know what they believed adults might do to both keep them safe and help them feel safe.

We spoke to 121 children and young people aged 4-18 in the ACT, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. The participants represented various institutional contexts, including having attended early learning centres, schools, sporting groups, holiday camps, church groups, out-of-home care and hospitals.

Below are some key messages children and young people wanted to get across to the adults in their lives. **CHILDREN KNOW THE RISKS, BUT MIGHT MISJUDGE THE EXTENT OF THE DANGER**

In addition to snakes, ghosts, escaped tigers and bullies, participants raised concerns about child abusers and abductors, online dangers, wars and terrorism. They said they learnt about these threats by hearing things

directly from parents, siblings and peers (including quiet discussions that weren't for them), the television and radio, and social media.

Many children and young people felt they were exposed to so much information about risk, they often found it difficult to determine how pressing the danger was. When their parents, teachers and other trusted adults failed to talk to them about the issues, they said they often imagined the worst-case scenario.

Young people said:

"Sometimes we freak out when we don't need to. We might have heard something and now we think that it's a huge risk but it could turn out that we've heard the wrong thing or that it's not really a problem."

"No one really talks to kids about what really could happen or tell them not to worry when the thing they're scared about ain't gonna happen. So kids are all stressing about the wrong things and they don't know what to do if something real bad happens, because no one talked to them about it."

Young people believed children lacked the ability to accurately assess threat. When news reporting was coupled with fictional movies and urban legends, and when children were not given context, their perceptions were skewed.

HELP CHILDREN ARTICULATE AND PROCESS THEIR FEARS

Children and young people told us they were often overwhelmed by the risks that surrounded them. Young women, in particular, said they were constantly worried about threats to their physical and emotional safety.

Children felt this lack of safety in their bodies – they sweated, felt butterflies in their stomachs, found it hard to settle and concentrate, and were easily frightened. They demonstrated these fears in their behaviours – by being restless, feeling

tired and fighting with others.

They said it was often difficult to articulate their emotions and they needed adults to help them find the words. They needed help to understand the links between their lack of security and their response.

DON'T DOWNPLAY CHILDREN'S CONCERNS

Children and young people felt adults often too readily dismissed their concerns and downplayed the impact their fears were having on them. One young person said:

"Not everything they (children) fear is imaginary. That's what parents get wrong. They think that cause they're little they're not telling the truth or they've imagined it but most of the time they're telling the truth but people don't believe them because they're little. And anyway it's real to them so adults should listen."

Participants said trusted adults should listen and acknowledge their feelings, and take their fears and concerns seriously. They wanted adults to let the child voice their thoughts and feelings before trying to solve them and to respect the child's experience.

They felt it was sometimes appropriate for adults to distract a child to help them calm down. But they also believed adults should return to the conversation when the child was calm to help them make sense of their fears and feel acknowledged.

TELL YOUNG PEOPLE WHAT IS BEING DONE TO PROTECT THEM

Participants observed the information they were given was often restricted to the risk or danger, but they weren't being told what was being done to protect them.

Participants said they had heard a lot about the threat of child abduction, for instance, but no one had told them there were more police stationed around schools, that teachers

were more vigilant and that policies were in place to reduce the likelihood a child could be harmed.

Young people reflected that when adults didn't inform them of how they were responding, children had little confidence adults fully appreciated the risk or were adequately equipped to keep them from harm.

Many participants also believed adults could not always be around to help protect them and it was important for children and young people to be skilled to deal with issues themselves. This was seen as particularly important for older young people who were more likely to be alone and who would more likely want to deal with issues themselves rather than seek support.

They advocated for more classes on how to assess and respond to risks, giving examples of drills, role plays and lessons from others who had confronted similar challenges. It was important the recommended strategies were effective because young people felt the consequences of doing the wrong thing when they were unsafe would be significant.

"They've gotta get it right or we're fucked, you know. It's better to feel scared and to watch out for things than to feel comfortable because someone has told you not to worry and then you end up in a bad situation because you got the wrong advice."

Ultimately, children and young people need adults who are there for them, who discuss their fears, provide them with enough information to deal with potential threats but not cause them unnecessary worry, and help them understand how other adults and the community around them are keeping them safe.

[the writer is Associate Professor and Deputy Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia]

Nepal to fix electronic chips on animals to monitor them

KATHMANDU, MAR 24 (PTI): Authorities in Nepal have planned to fit electronic chips on animals including cows and oxen to keep a record of loitering cattle in Kathmandu, a media report said Sunday.

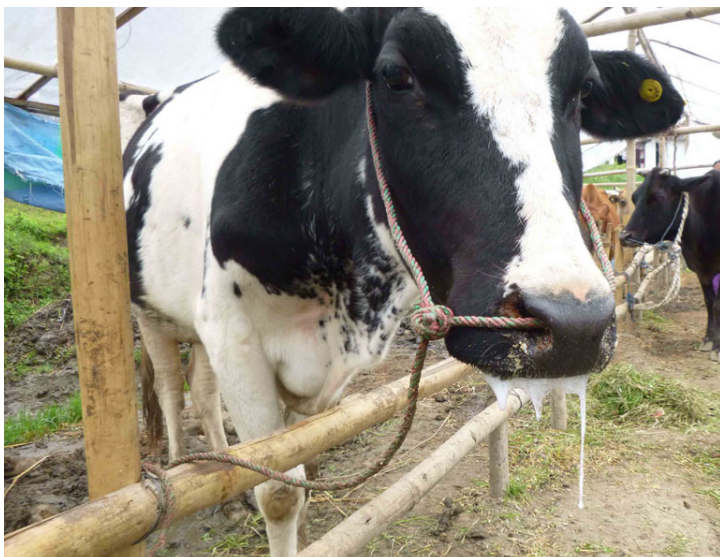
The chips may be installed on the ear or neck of an animal, The Kathmandu Post reported.

"We will have a control room to monitor those animals," Dhana-pati Sapkota, chief of the Implementation Department at the metropolis, said.

He said his office is planning to maintain a database of households that keep animals such as cows and calves.

The metropolis held a meeting with officials from Animal Nepal, a non-profit organisation working to set a standard of animal welfare.

"We'll be helping the metropolis for the in-



stallation of chips and handling the data," said Bishnu Prasad Joshi, former chief of the municipality.

The metropolis has been consulting with other organisations as well and seeking technical consultancy to

curb the problem of stray cattle.

"The metropolis had started a drive two decades ago of lifting animals from the streets and auctioning them but the problem has yet to be resolved. With this new initiative, we'll be able

to root the problem out," said Sapkota.

Over 10,000 such animals have been auctioned in the past two decades, he said.

Joshi said the reason behind the lack of progress was the metropolis not having a shelter for

loitering animals.

"Since we don't have a good Kanji (animal care) house, many stray animals, which were already sick, died in Teku last year," said Joshi.

Due to the ill-health of animals, people were not interested in buying them, he said.

Sapkota is hopeful that the new drive will be successful.

Reports show that 500 animals, including oxen and cows that do not give milk, are left on the streets of Kathmandu every year.

Sick animals are also abandoned by their owners.

These animals not only occupy the roads, they also cause accidents.

The Metropolitan Traffic Police Division had planned to search for the owners of abandoned cattle and fine them but not a single owner has been booked so far.

Agatha hopeful that people of Tura have not forgotten PA Sangma



SHILLONG, MAR 24 (PTI): Former Lok Sabha Speaker Purno A Sangma passed away three years ago, but his daughter Agatha Sangma, the ruling NPP candidate for the Tura Lok Sabha seat is hopeful that the people of the constituency have not forgotten the 'tallest' leader while campaigning for the seat.

Agatha is pitted against Leader of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Assembly and senior Congress leader Mukul Sangma in the Tura seat, the election for which will be held on April 11.

On the campaign trails in the five Garo Hills district of Meghalaya which fall under the Tura seat, Agatha and her brothers - Chief Minister Conrad Sangma and Home Minister James Sangma - remind the voters the legacy of their father P A Sangma and how he devoted his life for the Garos.

"I am here to serve the people. I am grateful for the opportunity given to me by the party, the NPP. I hope the people of Garo Hills will never forget my father for the contribution he has made for them," Agatha told PTI.

PA Sangma had represented Tura Parliamentary constituency for over four decades as its MP.

Agatha is seeking re-election to the Lok Sabha seat she had once represented in 2009 when her father returned to the state politics.

Conrad Sangma won the byelection to the Tura seat in 2016 after P A Sangma died, but he resigned last year when he won the South Tura Assembly bypoll after he became the chief minister of Meghalaya.

Tura seat has been

the stronghold of P A Sangma and his family.

Conrad admitted that the NPP managed to wrestle the seat from the might of the ruling Congress in 2014 and 2016 in Meghalaya.

"We won the elections in our worst. People of Garo Hills believe in our leader P A Sangma. It is all the more important that we take his mission forward and try to achieve the development goal for the people," Conrad told media persons at the sideline of a rally at North Garo Hills recently.

Agatha, who filed her nomination for the Tura seat on Friday said "the focus has always been development. The mandate will reflect the faith the people have on the government. There are a lot of development issues that we will be working together with the NPP leading the government in the state and I as the MP."

Tura seat is important for the ruling dispensation and the Opposition Congress knows this too well when it nominated Leader of Opposition Mukul Sangma to contest from Tura.

Mukul is also former chief minister of Meghalaya.

"The party knows that Mukul Sangma is the best bet to represent the Garo people in Parliament. He is a seasoned politician and has proved his mettle in the state when he led the pro-people government for 10 years," Meghalaya Congress president C Lyngdoh said.

He alleged that the present government under the leadership of Conrad K Sangma has "failed" on many fronts and is only good in lips service.

The war of words between Conrad and Mukul has also escalated in the otherwise quiet Garo Hills region each accusing the other of incompetence to lead the people.

In his rallies across North Garo Hills district last week, Conrad slammed the former chief minister over the "missions" he introduced since assuming office in 2010.

"He (Mukul) had introduced several missions in the state which led to financial burdens. He was least bothered to executive the mission properly, and the programs failed. Mukul has done all these without any research or papers based on mapping the skills of the farmers," Conrad said.

Reacting to this, Mukul said, "Conrad will need plenty of homework to do before he can understand about Agar (aquilaria malaccensis) plantation in private land and its positive economic ramifications.

The Leader of Opposition said it is with his initiative that a legal provision for harvesting agar plant for its commercial exploitation is now available.

The former chief minister also slammed Agatha for her "failure" to raise the issues concerning the common man in the Garo Hills during her tenure as MP.

"What was Agatha doing as an elected MP of Tura not voicing for the voiceless people who have voted her? Is this why people of Garo Hills elected her to have a vacation in New Delhi? People need to see the facts and not believe in the promises and lies of Conrad and his siblings," Mukul said.

BJP files complaint with Tripura CEO against Rahul Gandhi

AGARTALA, MAR 24 (PTI): The BJP has lodged a complaint with the Chief Electoral Officer of Tripura against Congress president Rahul Gandhi for allegedly referring to party chief Amit Shah as a "murder accused" at a rally.

BJP Tripura spokesperson Ashok Sinha Sunday alleged that Gandhi "violated" the provisions of the model code of conduct as he had stated in his speech at the March 20 rally in Khumulwng that Shah was a "murder accused". The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader stressed that the "false case" of murder against Shah was dismissed by Supreme court in 2014.

"A false case of murder was filed against Amit Shah during the Congress-led UPA regime, which was dismissed by the Supreme court in 2014 itself. Gandhi distorted facts for the sake of political mileage at a rally at Khumulwng," Sinha told reporters here.

"We have filed a complaint against him on March 23 for violating the model code of conduct," he added.

Gandhi in his speech also stated that a "sum of Rs 30,000 crore was paid to Anil Ambani in the Rafale deal". Sinha claimed that this was an unsubstantiated accusation which also violated the model code of conduct.

He said that the Tripura BJP unit had on Saturday submitted a written complaint to the state's CEO against the Gandhi scion.

On Friday the Congress' Tripura unit had demanded an "unconditional" public apology from chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb for calling the party "sly fox, thief and satan", and said the use of "unparliamentary" words was unbecoming of a leader of his stature. The Congress had also filed a complaint against Deb with the Election Commission of India.

LF will win both Lok Sabha seats in Tripura: Dhar



AGARTALA, MAR 24 (PTI): Convener of the Left Front in Tripura, Bijan Dhar Sunday claimed that the Left would win the two Lok Sabha seats in the state.

Dhar, also the Central Committee member of CPI-M, ruled out possibility of any alliance with Congress or other regional political parties in Tripura saying Congress and BJP both work at the "behest of capitalist forces".

"If the polls are held

peacefully and in a free and fair manner, we are confident of victory in both seats," he told a meet the press programme organised by the Agartala Press Club here.

He alleged that BJP made "false" promises and came to power but didn't fulfil any of the promises.

"They (BJP) made such promises which are impossible to implement, so people were frustrated and started opposing

them," Dhar said.

He appealed to supporters of Congress, Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra (INPT), Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT) and other regional political parties of Tripura to vote for CPI(M) in the Lok Sabha polls.

Dhar said senior CPI(M) leader and former chief minister Manik Sarkar would lead the party's campaign in Tripura.

BJP will win both Lok Sabha seats in Manipur: CM

IMPHAL, MAR 24 (PTI): Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh Sunday claimed that the NDA government will return to power at the Centre and the BJP will win both the Lok Sabha seats in the state.

He claimed that the people are with the BJP and it would be "impossible" to defeat the BJP in the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls. Speaking to reporters after offering prayers at a local shrine at Wangoi in Imphal West district for the success of the two BJP candidates-RK Ranjan (Inner seat) and Benjamin Mate (Outer seat), he claimed that most of the poll surveys predict that the NDA will return to power at the Centre.

The chief minister said the full-fledged campaigning for the two BJP candidates in the state will be started after scrutiny. Scrutiny of nomination for the Outer Manipur seat is March 26 while that of Inner seat is March 27.

All eyes on VIP LS seats in UP

ABHINAV PANDEY

LUCKNOW, MAR 24 (PTI): In politically crucial Uttar Pradesh, focus will not only be on the performance of political parties but also on the VIPs seats, including those of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress chief Rahul Gandhi.

The poll results of the state, which has 80 Lok Sabha seats, can make or mar the prospects of any political party at the Centre.

There will be many seats in the state which will be keenly watched by political observers as any setback there might have great political repercussions.

"UP is the most politically crucial state and it's results set the tone and tenor of national politics. All eyes will be here, especially on VIP seats where prominent leaders are in fray," senior journalist JP Shukla said.

"Whether the state is going to give the next prime minister or not is the answer everyone will be looking for with the performance of political parties," he said.

While the outcome of the prime minister's Varanasi seat will be watched globally, other seats like Amethi and Raebareli of Congress president Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi respectively will be of equal interest to the people.

During the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, Modi's slogan that "I have not come here...Mother Ganga has called me" struck an emotional chord with the people, who elected him as their representative.

During his recent visit, Modi invoked Lord Vishwanath, saying, "I might have been called here to fulfil his dream to see the city developed." In Amethi, Union minister Smriti Irani will challenge Rahul Gandhi. She has been spending a lot of time with the voters there, making the BJP workers feel that she will make the Congress chief uncomfortable this time.

Sonia Gandhi has been representing Rae Bareilly since 1999, while Rahul Gandhi has been an MP from Amethi since 2004.

The seats of Kannauj, held by SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's wife Dimple Yadav, Badaun, held by Dharmendra Yadav (SP), and Azamgarh, from where SP patron Mulayam Singh Yadav won in 2014, will also be crucial.

While Dimple Yadav and Dharmendra will contest from their traditional seats, Mulayam Singh, this time, will be contesting from the Mainpuri seat.

Akhilesh Yadav has decided to contest from Azamgarh after a formal request from the district unit.

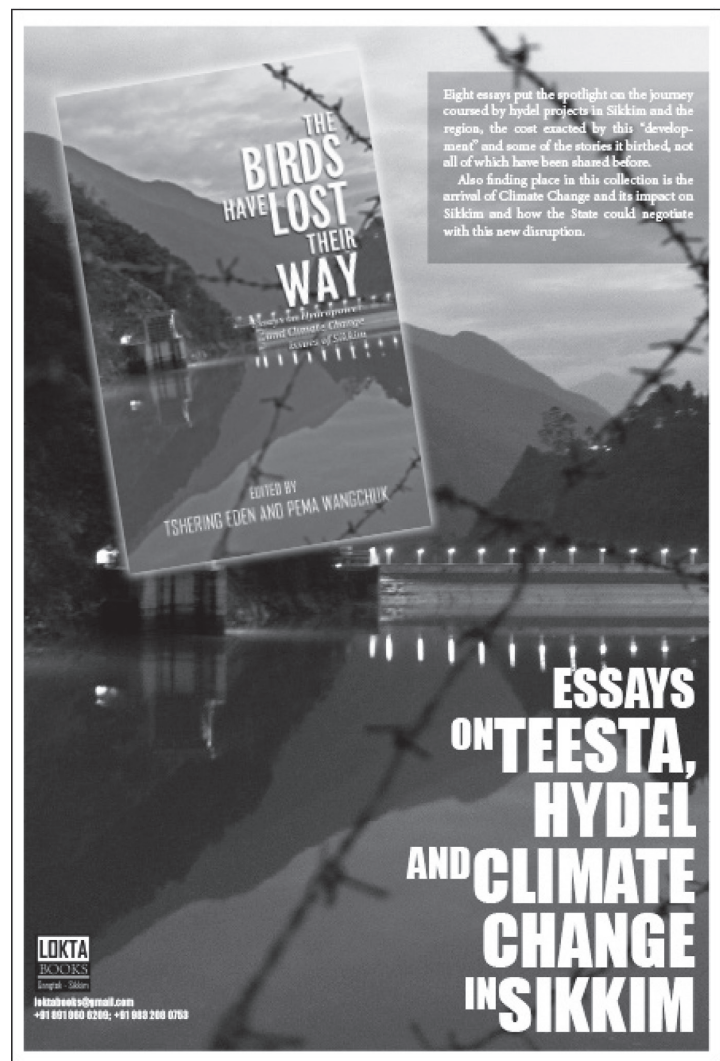
Home Minister Rajnath Singh is once again in the fray from the Lucknow seat, a BJP stronghold.

Bollywood star Hema Malini is contesting again from Mathura, while the Ghaziabad seat held by Union minister Gen VK Singh (ret'd) will be also on the list of constituencies to watch.

Another important seat will be of BJP leader Varun Gandhi, who is likely to leave the Sultanpur seat and contest from Pilibhit, represented by his mother and Union minister Maneka Gandhi.

While these polls will be a litmus test for the SP-BSP alliance, it would be a challenge for the BJP to repeat its 2014 performance of winning 73 seats, including two of Apna Dal. The prestige of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya will be at stake on seats like Gorakhpur and Phulpur, won by them in 2014 but subsequently frittered away to opposition in the bypolls last year.

Charisma of Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will also be tested in these polls and she is trying to woo voters by reaching them. Prestige of Congress state chief Rajbabbar, who is contesting from Fatehpur Sikri will also be at stake.



CAPFs asks govt for new assessment system to 'weed out' unfit personnel

NEELABH SRIVASTAVA
NEW DELHI, MAR 24

(PTI): The central paramilitary forces have asked the government to bring a new assessment system that would annually "weed out" unfit personnel as over 55,000 troops in their combat ranks are in the "low medical category". The recommendation was made after the Union Home Ministry, under which these internal security forces function, recently held a meeting with all the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) at the North Block here.

The six CAPFs are the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Border Security Force (BSF), the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Assam Rifles.

The meeting was called in the wake of a recent Delhi High Court directive to increase the retirement age of jawans and officers, up to the rank of commandant, in these forces from 57 to 60 years, like that in the CISF and the Assam Rifles. The court had called the current policy of different age of superannuation in four paramilitary forces -- CRPF, BSF, ITBP and SSB -- as "discriminatory and unconstitutional" and said it created two classes in the



uniformed forces. While all the forces, except the CRPF, said they had no problems in enhancing the superannuation age of their combat troops, they raised concern over the fallout of this move as they needed to have young blood and an agile workforce to guard the country's borders and undertake anti-naxal and counter-terror operations.

The CRPF, which is undertaking new initiatives to enhance its operational effectiveness post the February 14 Pulwama attack, said it will be unviable for it to have accumulation of older personnel as maximum of its battalions are operationally deployed all times and have very less

peace time duties.

It said it will have more low medical category (LMC) cases if the retirement age of personnel, up to the commandant rank, is increased from 57-60 years.

The forces, as per records accessed by PTI, told the Home Ministry that they have a total of 55,330 personnel "in the low medical category at present, owing to injuries suffered by troops during action or the irreversible wear and tear their bodies take owing to deployment in inhospitable terrains for maximum time of their tenure".

The highest number of personnel in LMC, 22,120, are in the CRPF, the report said. The BSF

has 14,115 personnel in LMC or 5.5 per cent of its total strength, the Assam Rifles has 10,202 troops in the category (3.79 per cent) and the ITBP 5,619 personnel or six per cent of its total strength, it said.

The CISF has 2,180 and the SSB 1,094 personnel (1.37 per cent) in LMC, the report said.

The forces, after the conclusion of the meeting, recommended to the government that "in case retirement age is raised to 60 years, it may be explored if a system is put in place to make yearly assessment to weed out those who are not fit to continue in the force consistent with its objective."

People categorised under LMC are taken out

of combat tasks and given administrative duties, and only certain select cases are chosen to be boarded out completely from the force, as per the present policy.

Conforming the move for a new assessment system to PTI, a senior official of the ministry said the proposal is being "analysed at the senior-most level of the Ministry of Home Affairs."

The data provided by the six CAPFs, said LMC cases were higher in the age group above 35-40 years and hence, it was essential to keep the "operational and physical efficiency" of these forces up to the mark, a mandatory requirement for uniformed forces.

Dhoni, Kohli unhappy with the quality of Chepauk track

CHENNAI, MAR 24 (PTI):

The IPL 2019 opener turned out to be a low-scoring contest and rival captains Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Virat Kohli expressed their dissatisfaction over the slowness of the Chepauk track.

Royal Challengers Bangalore were all out for 70 in 17.1 overs, a target that Chennai Super Kings achieved in 17.4 overs to win the match by seven wickets.

Despite finishing on the winning side, Dhoni made it clear that he would expect better wickets in the upcoming games.

"I never expected the wicket to play how it actually played. It was too slow. We were really surprised by how slow the wicket was. It reminded me of a Champions League wicket in 2011 after we won the IPL.

"The wicket definitely needs to be much better, even with dew it was spinning big," Dhoni said at the post-match presentation ceremony here last night.

Kohli, who is also the Indian captain, on his part said: "The wicket looked much better than it played. No one thought the wicket's going to play the way it played. We thought somewhere 140-150 would be an ideal score because of the dew factor later on. A scrappy sort of start to the league. That is what you get when you have a wicket like that.

"But either team would have struggled batting first. I don't think either team had control over it. The pitch was under the covers for four days."

Kohli felt neither teams enjoyed "that kind



of a pitch". "I don't think either of the team would have enjoyed that kind of a pitch, especially in T20 cricket where guys want to get runs and put the runs on the board or chase scores down."

Dhoni said any genuine spinner will do well on this track.

"Something like 140-150 is something you are looking at; 80, 90, 100 or 120 is very low scoring. If you saw how the wicket played and if you have genuine spinners in your line-up you can create lot of trouble. It will be very difficult to score runs.

"So the wicket needs to get much better than where it is right now. It needs to be (more) high scoring. Other teams have good spinners as well and this isn't the pitch we are looking forward to," the CSK skipper added.

Dhoni said his reason for opting to bowl after winning the toss was the uncertainty over how the surface would behave as CSK had the experience of playing a practice match leading into the

IPL opener.

"We were not really sure about the wicket. We played a practice game on the same wicket and it wasn't turning so much. It was a slightly high-scoring game. Yes, practice game, there is a tendency normally you will score 30 runs more than what you will in a proper game."

For Kohli, it was a relief that a match like this happened at the start of the tournament.

"No one wants to start like this, but it's good to get a game like this out of the way early in the tournament rather than having it at a very important stage in the tournament," the RCB captain said.

"We spoke of trying to be in the game, taking it to the 18th over was nice to see." Kohli, however, admitted that his team's batting was not good.

"The batting wasn't good, it wasn't easy to bat on, looked much better surface though. We should have batted better. If that was 100-110 run game it would have been very close," he said.

Serena withdraws, No. 1 Osaka loses, Federer wins at Miami



MIAMI, MAR 24 (AP): The new site for the Miami Open suddenly is missing a lot of star power. Serena Williams withdrew, blaming a previously undisclosed left knee injury. Less than two hours later, top-ranked Naomi Osaka lost in the third round to tour veteran Hsieh Su-Wei of Taiwan, 4-6, 7-6 (4), 6-3.

Osaka's departure matched the earliest ever in the tournament by a top-seeded woman and jeopardized her No. 1 ranking, depending on results next week.

"I feel like I've dealt with the stress of people asking me do I have pressure because I have the No. 1 next to my name," Osaka said. "I thought I was doing fine with that, but I guess I'm not."

Roger Federer briefly seemed headed for the exit but instead advanced to the third round by rallying past qualifier Radu Albot 4-6, 7-5, 6-3.

"Radu put me through the ringer," Federer said.

No. 2-seeded Alexander Zverev double-faulted 12 times and lost to wild card David Ferrer, 2-6, 7-5, 6-3.

Williams' withdrawal was unexpected because she showed no signs of injury a day earlier while winning her opening match against Rebecca Peterson, 6-3, 1-6, 6-1. Williams didn't mention any health issues during a news conference after the match, and the WTA had no information regarding when she was hurt.

Williams' victory Friday was her first at Hard Rock Stadium, the Miami Dolphins' home and the Miami Open's new center court.

The tournament moved this year from Key Biscayne, where Williams won eight titles.

"I am disappointed to withdraw," she said in a statement. "It was an amazing experience to play at Hard Rock Stadium this year, and I would like to thank the Miami Open for putting on an amazing event. I hope to be back next year to play at this one-of-a-kind tournament in front of the incredible fans here in Miami." Federer, a three-time champion, lost serve only once in the first game but was on the ropes until he swept the final three games, to the relief of an enthusiastic stadium crowd.

"It was a great atmosphere," Federer said. "It was electric. I think that's why I played so well at the end." While attendance in the stadium continued to be spotty, outer courts were jammed, and the day session drew a tournament record 32,831 spectators.

Seeded losers on the men's side included No. 10 Karen Khachanov, No. 21 Diego Schwartzman, No. 26 Guido Pella, No. 30 Stan Wawrinka and No. 31 Steve

Johnson. In a game of inches, the 5-foot-6 Schwartzman lost to 6-foot-11 Reilly Opelka 6-4, 3-6, 6-4. Williams was next scheduled to play No. 18-seeded Qiang Wang, who advanced to the fourth round.

Also reaching the women's round of 16 was the 33-year-old Hsieh, who turned pro in 2001 but has achieved the two biggest victories of her career in the past nine months. Her only other win over a No. 1 player came against Simona Halep at Wimbledon last year.

With two-handed groundstrokes from both sides, Hsieh was the steadier player from the baseline against Osaka. When Hsieh closed out match point with a forehand volley winner, she began to cry as the crowd applauded her performance.

Osaka smiled when reminded it was the first time in 64 matches she lost after winning the first set. "I know it's depressing," she said. "I was thinking about it right after I lost." Osaka, 21, has won the past two Grand Slam tournaments. Williams, 37, still hasn't won a tournament since the 2017 Australian Open, before she took a break of more than a year to become a mom. She has played only eight matches this year.

Modi engaged celebrities to increase his Twitter visibility: Study

WASHINGTON, MAR 24 (PTI):

Prime Minister Narendra Modi engaged celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan and Sachin Tendulkar on Twitter to increase his visibility and help his electoral ambitions during the run-up to the 2014 general elections in India, according to a US study.

Joyjeet Pal, associate professor at the University of Michigan, examined over 9,000 tweets from @narendramodi between February 2009 and October 2015 to research Modi's engagement with Indian public figures pre- and post-elections.

Modi started tweeting in the year 2009 when he was among a very few leaders of India on a social media platform. By October 2012, he had over one million followers.

At present, his account has over 46 million followers.

During the early and mid-2000s, a series of public relations challenges plagued the outreach machine of Modi. Antagonistic live interactions with television commentators, made media appearances unpredictable, Pal said.

"A number of mainstream films directly addressed the 2002 Gujarat riots and pointed towards politicians and



the administration as the perpetrators of the riots," Pal wrote in the study.

According to Pal, Modi's rise to political leadership coincided with the expanding use of social media in India.

"As a result, a vast range of celebrity engagements, both during the campaign period, and in the subsequent leadership of the government, were enabled and widely disseminated with greater access to digital media outreach online," he said.

Examining Modi's Twitter feed, researchers found 414 instances of tweets with the mention of celebrities, including those in which multiple celebrities were mentioned.

According to Pal, there

were three distinct phases of engagement that happened in the six years he studied Modi's tweets.

In the first phase, it was important to move Modi away from being seen either as a provincial politician with polarising views or with no national appeal. He started by creating a more acceptable national image.

During the second phase, he reached out to celebrities like actor Amitabh Bachchan, businessman Narayana Murthy, cricketer Sachin Tendulkar and spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

By engaging with them, he presented the notion that people outside of his core supporters and with broad followings

were willing to engage with him. Around 2013, his approach moved to getting support for his campaign by referring to various celebrities in his tweets, posing with them, and in some cases, getting their outright endorsement for his campaign.

During this phase, celebrity engagement was mainly through pictures showing affiliation.

The third phase of celebrity engagement was post election, when he called on celebrities primarily as champions for his initiatives.

According to Pal, this was the phase when he presented his initiatives as campaigns with national appeal rather than something imposed on

the country. This is particularly seen with the "Swachh Bharat," a national movement to clean up India's roads and infrastructure, and, subsequently, with demonetisation.

Celebrity engagement at these points presents the views of a collaborative, thoughtful leader.

Most of the figures who were named by Modi did not publicly express electoral support for him. The references to most of the celebrities were either congratulatory or casual, suggesting an important role for implicit celebrity engagement, researchers said.

"One of the ways he engaged was by calling out celebrities. So for example, he would use the hashtag of a celebrity, like @deepikapadukone, and ask her to encourage young people to vote," said Pal.

Pal said that social media users may not have known if Modi knew the actress Deepika Padukone, but his tweets suggest that he did.

More importantly, it also suggests that he was interested in encouraging citizens to vote. Even if the celebrity is reluctant to take a position in favour of or against a politician, their exchange with Modi ends up being suggestive of a positive relationship.

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Venezuelan power struggle creates diplomatic duel abroad

BOGOTA, MAR 24 (AP): When Lorena Delgado approached the Venezuelan consulate in Colombia's capital on a recent afternoon hoping to extend the life of her expiring passport, she found the metal gates to the languishing building shuttered.

Days earlier, Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro had severed ties with the neighboring Andean nation where over a million of his compatriots have fled in recent years, recalling all his diplomats and leaving the consulate and embassy buildings closed.

The man challenging Maduro's claim to the presidency had appointed a new ambassador, but he was at a loss about how to help her. Despite the fact that Colombia recognizes Juan Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate president, the ambassador he sent does not have access to the consulate or the ability to issue passport extensions.

"You feel trapped," said Delgado, 32, who needs to travel abroad to apply for a work visa. "We're in limbo." As Venezuela's power struggle stretches on, a parallel dispute for control of embassy buildings in the countries recognizing Guaido as Venezuela's true president has taken root.

While new opposition-appointed diplomats are being recognized around the world, the United States is the only nation where they control a consulate building. In no country do Guaido's envoys have the ability to carry out basic tasks like issuing a passport, as Venezuela's civil registration agency remains under the control



of Maduro. The diplomatic duel has left the estimated 3.4 million Venezuelans who now live abroad stuck between two administrations. In most countries holdover consular employees continue to carry out tasks like registering births abroad while new, Guaido-appointed ambassadors remain outside embassy walls, symbols of their movement's lagging advance.

"At this moment, we don't have a solution from either side," said Paola Soto, 25, who is trying to reunite with her 5-year-old son in Chile.

The battle for diplomatic recognition is largely taking place behind closed doors, but it has occasionally spilled out into public.

In February, the Guaido-appointed ambassador to Costa Rica, Maria Faria, announced she had taken control of the embassy in San Jose, proudly posting on Twitter a photograph of herself standing in front of a Venezuelan flag inside the building. A shouting match erupted outside when the Maduro-ap-

pointed diplomats tried to get in. Costa Rica's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, despite recognizing Faria as Venezuela's ambassador, issued a statement deploring her actions, saying she'd broken an established protocol allowing Maduro appointees 60 days to leave.

In March, a similarly confusing incident took place in Lima, Peru when workers were spotted at night removing chairs and even a stately bust of South American independence hero Simon Bolivar from the Venezuelan embassy. The furniture was put back inside after anti-government protesters decried them.

"You've robbed enough in Venezuela!" one angry woman shouted. More recently, on Monday, Guaido's U.S. ambassador announced he was taking control of the New York consulate and two military-owned buildings in Washington where images of Maduro have now been replaced with portraits of Guaido.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza accused the United States of violating articles of

the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations that require host countries to protect foreign embassy buildings even when ties are severed.

He warned that if the U.S. doesn't fulfill its international obligations, the Venezuelan government could pursue legal action and retaliate with reciprocal action - a not so veiled threat that they might occupy the recently vacated U.S. Embassy in Caracas. The U.S. withdrew all embassy personnel from Caracas due to safety concerns after Maduro severed ties with the U.S. over its support for Guaido.

Gustavo Marcano, an exiled Venezuelan mayor who now works for the Guaido-backed Venezuelan embassy in the U.S., said the building acquisition is one of several attempts to ensure Venezuela's assets abroad are protected. The U.S. is also working to transfer other prized belongings, like Houston-based CITGO, a subsidiary of Venezuela's state oil company, to Guaido.

"This is the first step toward ending usurpa-

tion," he said from inside the Manhattan consulate, where photos of the late socialist leader Hugo Chavez still hung on the walls. He added that while they cannot issue documents like passports, the Guaido-led consulate does plan to look for other remedies to help the increasingly large number of Venezuelans who possess no valid form of identification. One idea being floated is the creation of a consular-issued identification card that would be recognized by the host nation.

In other countries, the Guaido-named ambassadors are taking a gentler approach, choosing to slowly work toward eventually taking control of consulates in conjunction with the host nation's foreign relations ministry - or avoiding the topic altogether.

Humberto Calderon, the appointed ambassador to Colombia, said he's focused more on tending to Venezuelan migrants, viewing occupying the buildings as a potential agitator that could harm Colombians living in Venezuela.

115 reported dead after attack on central Malian village

BAMAKO, MAR 23 (AP): Militia fighters descended on a village in central Mali before dawn Saturday, killing at least 115 people in the latest deadly attack blamed on an ethnic militia, local authorities said.

The massacre in the village of Ogossogou left the village chief and his grandchildren dead in the ethnic Peulh community, according to a local official who had received detailed accounts from the remote area.

The victims "included pregnant women, young children and the elderly," according to Abdoul Aziz Diallo, president of a Peulh group known as Tabital Pulaaku.

It was not immediately possible to independently corroborate the toll given by those in contact with survivors

from the Peulh village.

The UN mission in Mali confirmed reports of an attack but gave no figures.

Militants from a Dogon group known as Dan Na Ambassagou have been blamed for scores of attacks over the past year, according to Human Rights Watch.

The umbrella group comprises a number of self-defence groups from the Dogon villages among others.

The growing prominence of Islamic extremists in central Mali since 2015 has unravelled relations between the Dogon and Peulh communities.

Members of the Dogon group accuse the Peulhs of supporting these jihadists linked to terror groups in the country's north and be-

yond. Peulhs have in turn accused the Dogon of supporting the Malian army in its effort to stamp out extremism.

In December, Human Rights Watch had warned that "militia killings of civilians in central and northern Mali are spiraling out of control."

The group said that Dan Na Ambassagou and its leader had been linked to many of the atrocities and called for Malian authorities to prosecute the perpetrators.

Mali's Dogon country with its dramatic cliff landscapes and world renowned traditional art once drew tourists from Europe and beyond who hiked through the region's villages with local guides. The region, though, has been destabilized in recent years along with much of central Mali.

Pak PM orders probe into forced conversion and marriages of 2 teenage Hindu girls

ISLAMABAD, MAR 24 (PTI): Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has ordered a probe into reports of abduction, forced conversion and underage marriages of two teenage Hindu girls in Sindh province and to take immediate steps for their recovery, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said on Sunday. The two girls, Raveena (13) and Reena (15), were allegedly kidnapped by a group of "influential" men from their home in Ghotki district in Sindh on the eve of Holi. Soon after the kidnapping, a video went viral in which a cleric was purportedly shown solemnising the Nikah (marriage) of the two girls.

In a separate video, the minor girls can be seen saying that they accepted Islam of their own free will. In a Twitter post in Urdu on Sunday, Information Minister Chaudhry said that the prime minister has asked the Sindh chief minister to look into reports that the girls in question have been taken to Rahim Yar Khan in Punjab.

Chaudhry said the prime minister has also

ordered the Sindh and Punjab governments to devise a joint action plan in light of the incident, and to take concrete steps to prevent such incidents from happening again. "The minorities in Pakistan make up the white of our flag and all of our flag's colours are precious to us. Protection of our flag is our duty," he said. On Saturday, Chaudhry said that the government had taken notice of reports of the forced conversion and underage marriages of the two girls.

The Hindu community in Pakistan has carried out massive demonstrations calling for strict action to be taken against those responsible, while reminding Prime Minister Khan of his promises to the minorities of the country. Last year, Khan during his election campaign had said his party's agenda was to uplift the various religious groups across Pakistan and said they would take effective measures to prevent forced marriages of Hindu girls.

Sanjesh Dhanja, President of Pakistan Hindu

Sewa Welfare Trust, an NGO, earlier urged Prime Minister Khan to take note of the incident and prove to everyone that minorities were indeed safe and secure in Pakistan.

"The truth is minorities suffer from different sorts of persecution and the problem of young Hindu girls being kidnapped at gunpoint and forced to convert to Islam or get married to much older men is widespread in Sindh, he said.

Dhanja said the Hindu community had staged several sit-ins in Ghotki district after which police reluctantly registered FIR against the accused persons.

The Hindu community leaders have claimed that the accused belonged to the Kohbar and Malik tribes in the area.

Following the incident, an FIR was filed by the girls' brother, alleging that their father had an altercation with the accused sometime ago and on the eve of Holi they armed with pistols forcibly entered their home and took the sisters away.

NZ to hold national remembrance for Christchurch next Friday

CHRISTCHURCH (NEW ZEALAND), MAR 24 (AFP): New Zealand will hold a national remembrance service on March 29 for the victims of the Christchurch mosque massacre and their families, the prime minister's office announced on Sunday.

The interfaith service will take place in Christchurch two weeks after an Australian white supremacist shot and killed 50 Muslims who had arrived for Friday prayers at two mosques in the city on March 15.

"The national remembrance service provides an opportunity for Cantabrians (Christchurch-area residents), New Zealanders and people all around the world to come together as one to honour the victims of the terrorist attack," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said in a statement. "In the week since the unprecedented terror attack there has been an outpouring of grief and love in our country.

"The service will be a chance to once again show that New Zealanders are compassionate, inclusive and diverse, and that we will protect those values."

Macron looks to galvanise EU on China as Xi visits France

PARIS, MAR 24 (AFP): Chinese President Xi Jinping heads to the French Riviera on Sunday for the final leg of his European tour, as France's Emmanuel Macron looks to forge a united European front to contend with China's global ambitions.

Xi's trip will begin in the Mediterranean city of Nice and a stop in the nearby principality of Monaco before face-to-face talks with Macron. On Monday, the two leaders head to Paris for the official state visit, marking 55 years since Charles de Gaulle broke ranks with the West to establish diplomatic relations with the Communist nation.

A series of cooperation deals on nuclear power, aerospace and clean energy initiatives, some involving lucrative contracts, are expected to be signed.

But Xi's visit poses a particular challenge for Macron, who wants to deepen EU ties with China while also pushing back against Beijing's growing clout.

Europe's distrust of Huawei, which is poised to become the dominant player in next-generation telecom networks worldwide, is emblematic of the increasingly rocky relationship.

"We have a lot to do together in terms of climate action, in terms of multilateralism, but we also have to defend our own interests," Macron said in Brussels on Thursday.

He has lauded the EU's "awakening" to the challenges posed by China, which the bloc now labels a "rival" despite becoming Europe's biggest trading partner. "The real-

ity is that the world has changed significantly -- China is not the country it once was, and we are dealing with a very major partner," a Macron aide said ahead of Xi's visit. On Tuesday, Macron and Xi will be joined by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker to explore "points of convergence" ahead of an EU-China summit in Brussels next month.

Xi arrives in France from Italy, which has angered its EU partners by formally joining China's "new Silk Road" initiative for a string of maritime, rail and road connections aiming at expanding Chinese trade. Macron is expected to press his call for increased "reciprocity" regarding market access to China, in particular Beijing's demands that foreign companies hand over vital technological know-how in order to invest in the country.

"If we're going to talk about a new Silk Road, then it must be one that goes in both directions," Finance Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told BFM television on Friday.

Telecom giant Huawei is another fraught issue at the centre of a dispute over the rollout of crucial 5G mobile network infrastructure.

The US is pressuring European allies to not use the Huawei technology, saying it creates a security risk by potentially letting Beijing snoop on sensitive communications. Yet so far France has not ruled out using Huawei gear -- and Monaco has already signed a deal with the Chinese giant to roll out a 5G network as soon as this year.

Beijing has bristled at the suspicions, accusing Washington of trying to escalate President Donald Trump's trade battle with China. "China is hoping that Europe can show more autonomy (on Huawei), which would be better for future cooperation," said Xu Tiebing, a professor of international relations at China's Communication University in Beijing.

Despite the many sources of friction, France's goal is to engage China as a closer partner as Washington makes a pointed withdrawal from global affairs under Trump's "America First" policy.

For example, Macron may seek more Chinese support of the French-backed G5 Sahel force fighting Islamic extremists in Western Africa. China has been investing heavily in a diplomatic offensive across Africa, promising to help build infrastructure projects as part of the new Silk Road, officially called the Belt and Road Initiative.

Aides say Macron will press Xi to ensure such projects are fair and explore the participation of French companies amid allegations the deals could load African countries with unsustainable debt loads.

He is also expected to urge Xi to commit to the ambitious global bid to cut carbon emissions, though analysts note that China is still building dozens of coal-burning power plants. France also plans to voice concerns about rights abuses against China's Uighur Muslim minority, including allegations of mass internments in the restive Xinjiang province.



'Pati Patni Aur Woh' release preponed to December 6

Mumbai, Mar 24 (PTI): The makers of Kartik Aaryan-starrer "Pati Patni Aur Woh" Sunday announced their decision to prepone the release date of the film to December 6 this year.

The remake of the 1978 film was earlier scheduled to arrive in theatres on January 10, 2020.

The development came after it was announced of "Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior", featuring Ajay Devgn in the title role, was postponed for a January 10 release.

The film, which also stars Bhumi Pednekar and newcomer Ananya Pandey, will now face-off against period drama "Panipat", starring Arjun Kapoor, Sanjay Dutt and Kriti Sanon.

The original film revolved around a married couple Ranjeet (Sanjeev Kumar) and Sharada (Vidya Sinha) and how things change after he gets a promotion and secretary Nir-mala (Ranjeeta Kaur) enters his life.

The 1978 film was produced and directed by BR Chopra.

The remake version was embroiled in a controversy when Taapsee Pannu revealed that she was unceremoniously dropped from the film at the last minute without any clarification. Later, Pednekar was finalised for the role.

The new film is directed by Mudassir Aziz and produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Juno Chopra and Abhay Chopra.



Was told I wasn't good enough: Fatima Sana Shaikh

SHUBHA DUBEY

NEW DELHI, MAR 24 (PTI): She made a stunning debut with "Dangal", but Fatima Sana Shaikh says getting a perfect launch pad was not a cakewalk as people told her she did not have the "looks" of a heroine like Deepika Padukone and Katrina Kaif.

Fatima, who started her journey in the movies as a child actor with Kamal Haasan's 1997 film "Chachi 420", says the rejections shifted her focus from waiting for a conventional lead role to searching for a good character.

"I have been a child actor. I quit but making a comeback after that was difficult. I was not getting any work. People used to tell me I don't look like Deepika Padukone or Katrina Kaif. They said, since I didn't have the looks of a heroine, I should do whatever I'm offered. There have been many incidents where I was told that I was not good enough," Fatima told PTI in an interview.

The actor says her desire to perform in front of the camera was so strong that she did not pay heed to what people thought of her.

"I only had acting on my mind. The reason why I used to go for every audition was because I would get to perform in front of the camera, even if the set-up was small."

The success of Aamir Khan-starrer "Dangal", however, made things easier for Fatima as it gave her the option to choose.

"Before 'Dangal', I never had the chance to choose my projects. I even did 'Dangal' because that was my only option at that time. Every actor goes through this. That's how things function. But I am happy that post the film and especially after 'Thugs of Hindostan', I have the space to choose," she says.



Citing an example of Rajkumar Rao, her co-star from Anurag Basu's upcoming anthology, the actor says there is no formula for success.

"There is no single rule that applies to everyone. But now there are so many opportunities because of Netflix, Amazon and other platforms. Influx of different mediums has given actors a lot more options."

Fatima says even though her aim is to establish herself as a sought-after performer, she does not believe in planning "too much".

"Where I want to reach it might take two or maybe six years. But I am happy that at least I'm on my way. Before 'Thugs...' I was a very competitive person I would keep a check on who is wearing what and what they were doing. But I realised everybody has a different fate and there is no point in fol-

lowing anyone's journey," she adds.

The actor says like every artiste in the showbiz, she craves for the love of the audience, but believes it is close to impossible to be a "superstar" in the current times.

"The superstar era ended way back. After the 'Khans', I don't think we will ever have superstars. Now we all are accessible but earlier the stars were not. We could not search them on social media or follow their lives. We were able to connect with them through their films and interviews," she says.

Fatima adds the only way the actors of her generation could survive is by doing good work.

"The moment we do good work, we get appreciation and when we don't things go the other way. Actors like Deepika have been in the industry for so long, but it is now that people have realised she is a very good actor because of her choices."

Blush is the Hottest beauty trend in Korea this Spring

For years, blush has taken a back seat while the beauty world obsessed over straight brows, matte lips, blinding highlights and glittery aegyo-sal. Now, ladies are finally giving some love to the cheeks as blush is slowly but surely becoming a hot trend in South Korea and the rest of the world.

This new lease of life could be attributed to celebrities such as Lee Sung-Kyung and SNSD's Taeyeon, who are often photographed with flushed cheeks. Thus, giving them an overall innocent and fresh-faced look.

But do take note! The trick is not just in choosing the right shade of blush for your skin-tone. The new blush trend is all about the application method and placement of the product.

We have all been taught that blush should be applied at the apples of the cheeks and blended towards the ears. That would be the classic way to wear blush. However, we need to let go of this method in order to achieve this new trend. Instead, take a small fluffy blush brush and sweep the colour high on the cheeks, right on top of the cheek bones, where you would usually place highlight.

Diffuse the colour from the centre towards the temples and dust the remaining blush on the brush across the nose bridge for an authentic "flushed" look. It's important that



you start sheer, before slowly building the colour up as the trend is all about that soft-focus, hazy effect. Keep blending the edges so that it is not obvious where the blush starts and ends.

This method immediately brightens the complexion and creates a very healthy, fresh and youthful look. Extra points if you match your lip with your blush for a monochromatic look. Finish off the look by keeping the eyelids bare and add some brown mascara for definition. The trick is to let the blush be the centre of the show, thus making this simple makeup look perfect for everyday.

'Pagalpanti' to now release on November 22

MUMBAI, MAR 24 (PTI): The release of Anees Bazmee-directed film "Pagalpanti" has been preponed to November 22, the makers announced Sunday.

The film was earlier scheduled to release in December.

"Pagalpanti" features ensemble cast starring Anil Kapoor, John Abraham, Ileana D'Cruz, Arshad Warsi, Pulkit Samrat, Kriti Kharbanda, Urvashi Rautela and Saurabh Shukla.

According to a statement by the makers, the shooting of the film is underway in London.

The movie is produced by T-Series, Panorama Studios and co-produced by Aditya Chowksey and Sanjeev Joshi.



WE HEART LUCY! Lucy Hale is seen filming on location for Katy Keene on the Lower East Side in New York City.

ARIES: Bewitched, bothered and bewildered! The moon and enchanting Neptune are in cahoots this Saturday, ratcheting up your powers of attraction. Although your spellbinding energy will draw a captive audience, beam it like a laser—sharp and direct. A few random fans might be the type to develop (glug) expectations. The last thing you need right now is an awkward "didn't mean to lead you on" conversation.

TAURUS: Are your friends being as supportive as possible about your relationship goals? Maybe you just want to vent about your S.O. or a bad date without getting an earful of unsolicited advice this Saturday. But don't assume they aren't being your champions if they point things out that you don't want to hear. There may be a reason they're feeling protective of you, Taurus—and it could be the way that YOU are presenting the story.

GEMINI: Variety is the spice of a Gemini's life, which means repetitive tasks can send you over the edge. Alas, some routines are unavoidable. Here's an idea: What if you reframed them as rituals? Paying the bills can be a gratitude ceremony, for example. Play music, light a scent-

ed candle and set yourself up with a mug of tea. With each payment you send off, give thanks for the funds that put a roof over your head and give you light throughout the house.

CANCER: Expand your reach, Cancer. The borders are open on Saturday, thanks to a cooperative angle between the moon and no-limits Neptune. Instead of targeting the same crowd, mingle in different circles both online and in real time. If you're on a dating app, try searching a few miles further from base. Seeking work or a new home?

LEO: Does something just feel "off"—or so very "on"? This Saturday, your intuition gets a razor-sharp reboot from the moon and Neptune. Don't ignore that little voice in your head, whether it's talking to you in a whisper or a scream. You owe it to yourself to investigate further. Hey Leo, you might just waltz into the opportunity of a lifetime. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but the Lion can handle the truth.

LIBRA: Having trouble sticking to your routines, Libra? Perhaps they've become

too punishing or impractical for your current lifestyle. You don't have to give up on your fitness goals just because you no longer have time for your favorite 90-minute class. Download an app with guided at-home yoga classes or effective 15-minute HIIT workouts. Pin some healthy recipe inspo while you're at it.

VIRGO: Saturday's alignment of the moon and enchanting Neptune blesses you with the gift of gab. Time to seal those deals, Virgo! You'll have people eating out of the palm of your hand. While you want to present everything in the most favorable light, don't get carried away with poetic license. Eventually people will find out if you've embellished the truth, and that can weaken their faith in you.

SCORPIO: Saturday's moon-Neptune formation punches your glamour card. Have fun being fashion-forward, even if you're just adding a dramatic accessory. If you're ready to freshen things up for spring, book the salon appointments and go comb the racks. You'll probably want to wait until Mercury turns direct on March 28 to make any lasting changes, but in the meanwhile, here's an idea: Begin by

shopping in your own closet with the aid of a professional stylist!

SAGITTARIUS: Ruby slippers? Check. Saturday could find even the most peripatetic Archer longing for a sense of home. Putting down roots doesn't mean giving up your beloved nomadic ways. As Sagittarius Joan Didion wrote, "You have to pick the places you don't walk away from." A stable base can be a powerful launching pad for your worldly explorations. This weekend, bring a little magic back to your nest, whether you're sprucing up the space with sacred touches or saving potential homes on Zillow!

CAPRICORN: Saturday's planets put a little pep into your step—and your sales pitch. Pause from productivity mode to drum up enthusiasm for your cause. People's motivation may be flagging, but that's nothing one of your spirited talks can't change. Presenting a new idea? Play up the positives FIRST, then you can bullet-point the potential pitfalls!

AQUARIUS: You're cleared for takeoff, Aquarius! Saturday's cosmic concord between the moon and no-limits Neptune will remove a

major obstacle from your path. Act swiftly but subtly. It's too soon to draw attention to your agenda; in fact, doing so today could rile up a competitor you didn't even know you had. Careful with your spending as you move toward this goal. It's inevitable that you'll have to shell out some cash, but comparison shopping will help you snag the best possible price. Stop and smell the roses on Sunday—and maybe write a blog post or poem about your experience!

PISCES: You're a powerful presence this Saturday, Pisces—just watch the heads swivel when you walk into the room! Use this influential energy to drum up support for one of your expansion plans. Money could flow in for a pet project, or you could convince your boss to let you work from home a couple days a week. Maybe you're hoping to sway your partner into an adventurous 2019 vacation like trekking the Camino de Santiago or exploring Mayan ruins. Instead of downplaying your desires, shoot for the moon! With expressive Mercury and your celestial guardian Neptune synced up in Pisces Sunday, you'll get some help with verbalizing your desires.