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TOM HOLLAND WAS NOT ALLOWED TO TAKE PHOTOS WITH OTHER AVENGERS AT D23 BECAUSE OF SPIDER-MAN

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Bamboo products factory inaugurated at Temi Tea Estate



NAMCHI, 07 DEC (IPR): Agriculture Minister Loknath Sharma today inaugurated a Bamboo Products Factory at Temi Tea Estate. The Minister was accompanied by Temi Tea Managing Director Mirnalini Shrivastav, Consultant Horticulture Department (State Bamboo Mission), Tika Sharma, and Factory In-Charge, Shanti Rai. The Minister made a brief inspection of the manufacturing of products like joss sticks,

bamboo handicrafts, charcoal, broom, etc.

The MD explained how production is carried out and how the unit was helping address the employment crisis in the locality by giving youth an opportunity to earn handsome salaries.

The Minister expressed his pleasure upon conclusion of the inspection. He also assured his aid and assistance to help encourage the venture.

Sikkim Cong registers protest against CAB and NRC

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 07 DEC:

Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee President, Bharat Basnet, has registered a strong protest against the Citizen (Amendment) Bill and the National Register of Citizens being promoted by the NDA Government at the Centre. He asserted that the implementation of CAB and NRC would violate provisions of Article 371F of the Constitution and were against Sikkim Subjects.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Basnet argued that CAB and NRC were not in the interest of the people of Sikkim and asserted that the Centre should first understand the history of Sikkim.

He said that Sikkim was a country before 1975 and merged with India under an understanding. He added that Sikkim has been provided with the spe-

cial protection by Article 371F which continues to protect the Old Laws of Sikkim.

Mr Basnet mentioned that citizenship to the people of Sikkim was provided as per the Sikkim Subject Regulation Act, 1961 and that people registered in the Sikkim Subjects Register became citizens of India with the Merger. Since Sikkim already had its Sikkim Subjects Register, it would be wrong to impose the National Register of Citizens on them.

Lashing out at the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and its government, Mr Basnet pointed out that SKM had opposed CAB in its election campaign and should now remain steadfast in its stand and protest its extension to Sikkim.

The SKM Government has however failed to raise any voice against CAB since forming the government, he said.

Another daughter has lost her life while awaiting justice: Rahul on Unnao rape victim death

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI): Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday condoled the "heart-wrenching" death of the Unnao rape victim who was set ablaze and said another daughter has lost her life while awaiting justice.

The rape victim, who was airlifted to a Delhi hospital after she was set ablaze allegedly by five persons, including two men accused of raping her, died on Friday night.

"The saddening and heart-wrenching death of the innocent daughter of Unnao, that has shamed humanity, has left me angered and stunned. Another daughter has lost her life while awaiting justice and security," Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi. "In this hour of grief, I express my condolences to the victim's family," he tweeted with the hashtag 'Beti Ko Nyay Do'.

Case filed against Paswan over onion price rise

MUZAFFARPUR (BIHAR), DEC 7 (PTI): A criminal complaint case was filed against union minister Ram Vilas Paswan in Muzaffarpur Civil Court on Saturday for "misleading and cheating" people on the rise in the price of onions. The case was filed by a person named M Raju Nayyar, who claims to be a social worker, in the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate Surya Kant Tiwary who posted the matter for hearing on December 12.

Nayyar, a resident of Muzaffarpur town, in his complaint said that Paswan

has failed to check onion prices despite being the union minister for consumer affairs, food and public distribution.

The petitioner said that Paswan has misled people through his statement that price of the vegetable has gone up due to its black marketing.

The case was filed under Sections 420 (cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property), 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) and 379 (punishment for theft) of the Indian Penal Code.

AAP to hold protest against NRC at Jantar Mantar on Sunday

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI): The government's plans to implement NRC across the country is a "conspiracy" to target people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh claimed on Saturday.

The party will hold a protest on Sunday at the Jantar Mantar here against the BJP-led central government's plans, he said, adding that the demonstration will be led by the Aam Aadmi Party's purvanchali unit head Gopal Rai.

Purvanchalis are people from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh settled in the national capital and they play an important role in any election here. If the National Register of Citizens

(NRC) is implemented across India, where will people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar residing in different parts of the country for decades go as they would not be able to prove their residency before 1971, Singh, who is a Rajya Sabha member, said.

"Our purvanchali unit headed by Gopal Rai will sit on a protest at the Jantar Mantar on Sunday against the NRC's implementation which the government is planning to carry out in the whole country," he said.

Singh was also part of a meeting of opposition parties that was called to strategise on how to oppose the Citizen (Amendment) Bill in Parliament.

Press Club elects new office bearers

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 DEC:

Dainik Jagram correspondent Joseph Lepcha was today re-elected president of the Press Club of Sikkim along with SummitTimes editor, Puran Tamang, who was re-elected the general secretary.

Elections for the new executive committee of Press Club of Sikkim were held here at PCS office on Saturday.

Others elected today are Dilliram Dulal as the working president, Thakur Subedi, Bhawana Basnett and Dependra Dewan as vice-presidents, Naina Kala Pandey assistant treasurer and Sanjeev Tamang publicity secretary.

Earlier, Arpan Pradhan as treasurer, Sagar Chhetri as Secretary Sports, Dichen Ongmu as Secretary Culture and Homnath Dawari as Secretary Literary had been elected unopposed. The election was conducted under the supervision of



a three-member Election Committee headed by senior journalist, Bijay Bantawa, as chairperson and senior journalists Anita Niroula and Suman Gazmer as members. District Information Officer [East], Simon Sub-

ba, was present as election observer.

The declaration of the result was followed by presentation of certificates to the new executives who and their swearing-in by the Election Committee.

Justice can never be instant, loses its character when it becomes revenge: CJI

JODHPUR, DEC 7 (PTI): In the backdrop of the Hyderabad rape-murder incident and gunning down of the four accused in an alleged encounter, Chief Justice of India S A Bobde on Saturday said justice can never be instant and loses its character when it becomes revenge.

At the same time, he admitted that the recent events in the country have sparked off an old debate with new vigour, where there is no doubt that the criminal justice system must reconsider its position and attitude towards the time it takes to dispose of a case.

"But I don't think justice can ever be or ought to be instant, and justice must never ever take the form of revenge. I believe justice loses its character of justice if it becomes revenge," the CJI said during the inauguration of a new building of the Rajasthan High Court here.

The CJI's remarks came a day after the police claimed that all the four accused in the rape and murder of a young veterinarian in Hyderabad were shot dead in "retaliatory" firing by the cops when two of the accused opened fire at them after snatching their weapons and tried to escape from the site where they had been taken for a reconstruction of events as part of the investigation.

Addressing the event here, Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad urged the CJI and other senior judges to ensure that there is a mechanism to monitor quick disposal of rape cases, saying that the women of the country are under pain and distress and crying for justice.

"I would urge the CJI and other senior judge that now there must be a mechanism

to monitor the disposal of these cases so that India's stature as a proud country governed by rule of law must be restored at the earliest," Prasad said, and assured government funding for it.

The Hyderabad incident had sparked demands of swift punishment to rape convicts. The news of the 'encounter' killing led to celebrations in some quarters and concern in others.

The four accused were arrested on November 29 for allegedly raping and killing the 25-year-old veterinary doctor by smothering her and later burning her body, an incident that led to widespread outrage and brought back memories of the December 16, 2012 Nirbhaya case.

"The women of the country are under pain and distress. They are crying for justice," Prasad said.

The minister said there are 704 fast-track courts for heinous offences and others and the government is in the process of setting up 1,123 dedicated courts for POCSO and rape offences.

"In the law relating to women violence, we have already laid down capital punishment and other severe punishment including completion of trial in two months time," he added.

The Chief Justice of India, who spoke after the minister, stressed that as an institution, the judiciary must remain committed to making justice accessible to people by strengthening the existing avenues and evolving newer means to achieve an affordable, quick and satisfactory settlement

of disputes. "At the same time, we must be aware of the changes and perception about the judiciary," Justice Bobde said.

He said there is a need in the judiciary to invoke self-correcting measures but whether or not they should be publicised is a matter of debate.

"We have to devise methods for not only speeding up litigation but all together preventing it. There are laws which provide for pre-litigation mediation," he said, adding that there was a need to consider compulsory pre-litigation mediation.

Surprisingly, no courses were available for conferring a degree or diploma in mediation, he said. He also said the press conference held by four senior most judges of the apex court last year was just a self-corrective measure.

In an unprecedented move, Justices J Chelameswar, Ranjan Gogoi, M B Lokur and Kurien Joseph-- had on January 12, 2018, held a press conference, saying the situation in the top court was "not in order" and many "less than desirable" things had taken place.

Ranjan Gogoi later in the year had succeeded the then chief justice of India Dipak Misra.

"I believe the institution (judiciary) must correct itself and indeed it did during the time when the much-criticised press conference was held. It was nothing more than a self-corrective measure and I do not wish to justify it," Justice Bobde said.

The CJI further said, "All judges were eminent and Justice (Ranjan) Gogoi in particular showed great competence and led the judiciary from the front.

India now known as 'rape capital', says Rahul Gandhi

WAYANAD, DEC 7 (PTI):

Citing the increasing number of rape cases in the country, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said the international community was ridiculing the country and India was now known as the 'rape capital' of the world.

Winding up a three-day tour of his Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency, the Congress MP also lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said his (Modi's) entire political career was based on hatred and division and violence.

"The girls, sisters and mothers must be shocked when they read newspapers that every day a girl is raped or killed..."

The international community today ridicules India.

India is known as



the rape capital of the world," Gandhi said.

In an apparent reference to the rape case against UP BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar, he alleged that the Prime Minister had failed to react when the victim's car was hit by a truck.

"UP BJP MLA is involved in rape and PM hasn't said a word.

Her car is hit by a truck and PM doesn't say

a word...

Foreign nations are asking this question why the nation can't take care of its daughters," Gandhi said.

Directly attacking the Prime Minister, Gandhi said Modi represents the worst aspects of the country.

"We have a PM who believes in the ideology of hatred and violence. His entire political career

is based on hatred and division and violence.

He divides religions communities and languages, he insults culture. He doesn't understand economics.

Our people live in fear and discomfort," Gandhi said and urged the people of the country not to "underestimate" a their (peoples) strength to change the narrative of the nation.

The Wayanad MP had earlier in the day attacked the BJP led government for the alleged rise in violence across the country, particularly against women.

"You have seen the increase in violence across the country. Lawlessness, atrocities against women. Every day we read about a girl getting raped and molested.

Violence against mi-

nority communities and dalits is also increasing," Gandhi said at the opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) convention here.

Gandhi's remarks comes a day after Unnao rape victim, who was set ablaze, died at a hospital in Delhi and the recent incident of a young veterinarian being raped, killed and set ablaze in Hyderabad by four people.

The country's biggest strength, which used to be its economy, was now its biggest weakness, Gandhi said adding Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not have a concept of taking the country forward.

Gandhi visited various places during his three day tour, including the house of Shehla Sherin, who died of a snake bite last month.

Tourism Minister represents Sikkim at North East Food Show



SHILLONG, 07 DEC [IPR]: Tourism Minister BS Panth represented Sikkim at the North East Food Show held in Shillong from 04 to 06 December.

The showpiece event had Union Minister of State, Rameshwar Teli, as the chief guest. Mr Teli also announced a Food Park for the State of Sikkim.

On this, the Minis-

ter Panth expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards the Union Minister.

During the show, Mr Panth also mentioned that Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) can be setup in Sikkim and help the state generate employment on a large scale.

Yesterday, the final day of the event, Mr Panth

presented a souvenir to the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Konard Sangma, on behalf of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Golay].

The Food Show was a gala event and on the opening day of the event, Mr Panth also attended a dinner hosted by the Meghalaya Chief Minister. He also took part in various functions and entrepreneurs meetings.

Stakeholders Feedback Diwas on GST Returns held

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 DEC:

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs [CBIC] organised "Stakeholders Feedback Diwas of New GST Returns" as part of a nationwide program here today.

The feedback exercise was organized in the Office of the Assistant Commissioner, CGST and Central Excise, Gangtok Division as well as in Rangpo and Jorethang.

The sessions were attended by prominent tax payers, organizations and associates representing



tax payers, tax consultants, GST practitioners and traders, a press release informs.

The exercise was

aimed at obtaining direct feedback from the stakeholders on the new GST norms which will be rolled out on 01

April, 2020.

An outreach program for filing of new GST returns and Sabka Vishwas (Legal Dispute

Resolution) Scheme, 2019 had also been held on 06 Dec, 2019 at the Office of the Assistant Commissioner, CGST and Central Excise, Gangtok to familiarize tax payers.

The tax payers were also familiarized to the Sabka Vishwas (Legal Dispute Resolution) Scheme which is a onetime measure for liquidation of past disputes of Central Excise and Service Tax having unique feature like relief up to 70% in tax dues and complete waiver of interest, penalty and fine.

Rus Education celebrates Indian students pursuing medicine in Russia



SUMMIT REPORT

KOLKATA, 07 DEC:

In a bid to make medical education cost effective, Rus Education has launched scholarship schemes for students who wish to pursue Medicine. Rus Education specializes in helping students pursue MBBS in Russia, a press release informs.

Rus Education, in association with Russian

Center of Science & Culture, organizes "Festive Assembly of Indian Students Going for MBBS in Russia - Sobraniye" every year.

During this event, meritorious students are awarded various scholarships and this year, Rus Education introduced two new scholarships- "Samarthy" in the memory of former Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and Maitri Scholarship in the memory of former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

This year, Sobraniye received a gathering of around 800 students and their guardians from different parts of the country. Similar functions were organized at regional level in various offices of Rus Education in India.

Dhankhar shown black flags

LILUAH (WB), DEC 7 (PTI): West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar was shown black flags on Saturday evening by alleged Trinamool Congress members when he came to attend a pro-

gramme at a college at Liluah in Howrah district.

The alleged TMC workers also carried banners with slogans like 'Shame shame Governor' which they waved

at Dhankhar's convoy when it was entering the college.

The governor has been at loggerheads with the Mamata Banerjee government over several issues.

Thousands in Myanmar rally behind Suu Kyi ahead of Hague court date

NAYPYIDAW (MYAN-

MAR), DEC 7 (AFP): Thousands rallied in support of Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar Saturday, on the eve of her departure for the UN's top court to defend Myanmar against charges of genocide against Rohingya Muslims.

The raucous rally in the capital Naypyidaw came as China's foreign minister arrived for a visit at Suu Kyi's invitation.

Analysts say Beijing's permanent seat on the UN Security Council -- and its veto vote -- makes it a valuable ally as Myanmar faces intensifying scrutiny over its treatment of the Rohingya.

Once-lauded democracy champion Suu Kyi's shock decision to face the International Court of Justice (ICJ) next week to defend Myanmar against charges it committed genocide against the Muslim minority risks further damaging her al-

ready tattered overseas reputation.

But domestically "The Lady" remains revered, and the resolve of her supporters has only hardened in the lead-up to the ICJ hearing scheduled for December 10-12.

"We are proud of her taking accountability... by going to The Hague to protect the nation's image," shouted prominent writer Htin Lin Oo into a microphone in front of a banner emblazoned with the words "We stand with our leader".

"Our blood shall come together and unite us when it is important," he shouted to a cheering crowd, who hoisted colourful artwork of Suu Kyi in the air.

The ICJ lawsuit was brought by Gambia, a tiny, mainly Muslim West African state that alleges Myanmar breached the UN's Genocide Convention with its bloody 2017 crackdown on the

Rohingya.

Some 740,000 Rohingya fled into neighbouring Bangladesh, bringing with them accounts of widespread murder, rape and arson -- violence that UN investigators have branded as genocide.

But the Rohingya garner little sympathy within Myanmar, with many believing that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Myanmar insists abuse allegations are under investigation by its own committees -- panels which rights groups say have whitewashed the atrocities.

The military says the operations were justified to flush out Rohingya militants.

Win Swe, a Naypyidaw resident at the rally who was sporting a T-shirt with Suu Kyi's face on it, told AFP he will support his leader in "whatever she does".

Gamers, developers come together at DreamHack Delhi

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI):

With the 2nd edition of Dreamhack, gamers, esports enthusiasts, and developers have come together here for 72 hours of gaming competitions, LAN parties, and a perfect opportunity to connect and grow.

Organised esports company NODWIN Gaming and Viacom18, DreamHack Delhi opened at the NSIC Exhibition Ground on Friday with 400-seats LAN parties

and gaming competitions across titles like "CS:GO", "Super Smash Bro", "Tekken 7", and "PUBG" among others.

The three-day gaming festival will also see a classic collection of retro and table-top games where daily top scorers will be awarded from a prize pool of Rs 75,000 for retro games and Rs 1,000,00 for table-top games.

"At its core, gaming is about friendships

and stories. The bonds we make as friends with our common love for gaming. Nothing signifies that more than DreamHack and its two-decade journey.

"We at NODWIN Gaming and Viacom18 will put in all our effort to sculpt a DreamHack bigger and better than the last edition. There will be something for everyone at DreamHack Delhi. It'll be fun, it'll be a lot of fun," Ak-

shat Rathee, founder and MD, NODWIN Gaming, said.

Apart from its signature BYOC (Bring Your Own Computer) LAN parties, DreamHack Delhi will also feature BYOD (Bring Your Own Devices), where gamers can bring in their mobile phones and consoles to play on for three days.

The visitors can enjoy cosplay, live performances by renowned

artistes, signing sessions with pro players and a merchandise zone to get their hands on the latest gaming apparel and collectibles.

"We at DreamHack are happy to return to the great gaming country of India. Last year's festival in Mumbai was historical as it was the first DreamHack festival ever to be held in Asia," Marcus Lindmark, co-CEO of

DreamHack, said.

"India has a very strong gaming community, which we got to experience first hand during last year's event. This makes DreamHack Delhi a natural next step in our effort in making the DreamHack experience the perfect culmination of the gaming year in India," he added.

The DreamHack Delhi will come to an end on December 8.

Transgenders appeal to President to not give nod to bill

COIMBATORE, DEC 7 (PTI):

Terming the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill which was passed in the Rajya Sabha as regressive, a group of transgender activists Saturday appealed to the President not to give nod to the bill.

The representatives of LGBIQUA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual) groups, told a press conference that the bill undermined their rights.

The bill, they said, requires individuals who change their gender to give a 'proof of surgery' which was against the Supreme

Court order in the 2014 National Legal Services Authority vs Union of India case and also mandates a third person to declare the gender of an individual, they said.

The bill would put back transgender rights by 50 years, they said.

A theatre artiste and transgender activist A Revathi said the term 'third gender' was also problematic, which implied a hierarchy between genders and push them down further, Revathi said and insisted that they be called as Thirunar or transgender people.

On November

26, the Rajya Sabha passed the bill on protection of rights of transgenders after a motion to refer it to a select committee of the Upper House was defeated.

The Lok Sabha had passed the bill on August 5.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019, seeks to provide a mechanism for social, economic and educational empowerment of transgenders and was moved for consideration and passage in the Rajya Sabha by Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thawar Chand Gehlot on November 20.

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ANTHYESTHI KRIYA (SUDDHI KARYA)

Anthyesthi Kriya (Suddhi Karya) of our beloved sister Late Meena Gajmer who left for Paramdham on 30th November, 2019 falls on Friday, the 6th December, 2019. All relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers to the departed soul at our residence at Lingding Zero below Lingding Junior High School, ICAR - Lingding Road. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us in the hour of bereavement.



Narendra Gajmer, Chetan Gajmer (Younger brothers), Indira Gajmer, Pushpa Gajmer (Younger sisters), DK Gajmer, DB Gajmer (Cousin brothers).

Contact: 8101480557, 8768773529, 9735963493.

ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

13th days Anthyesthi Kriya of our beloved mother Late Mrs. Pushpa Darnal of Gangtok (Deorali) who left for her heavenly soul on 27th November, 2019 falls on 09th December, 2019.

Venue - Lexicon More Pathar Ghat Road, Ashiyana apartment, Matigara near Royal Academy school.

Contact No -

Ms. Karuna Rai Daughter

Mr. Lakshan Darnal (Elder Son) 9635831527

Mr. Mahesh Darnal (Younger Son) 9775438955

And all family members



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GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

Roadside plots for sale at Adampool, Ranipool-Rumtek highway.

For details contact: 9083826462

FLAT FOR RENT/LEASE

Fully furnished 3BHK flat available for rent/lease at Church Road near DPH. Roadside and five minutes walking distance from MG Marg.

For more details: 9083826462 /9832556698

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College.

Flat Land no cutting required. Price 30 Lakhs (negotiable).

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

Special handloom expo gets underway in Namchi



NAMCHI, 07 DEC [IPR]: A fortnight-long Special Handloom Event organised by Sikkim Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd was inaugurated by ASP South, Jayapandiyan J, at Central Park on Saturday. The event, sponsored by the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handloom), Ministry of Textiles, is being held from 07 to 21 Dec, 2019. The aim behind organising this expo is to provide a platform to weavers, sellers and

buyers to converge and create awareness on the handloom and handicrafts sector as an employment and income-generating sector. The inaugural function was also attended by South Zilla Adhyaksha, Tshering Dem Bhutia, Namchi Municipal Council councilors, Joint Director (M/S) DHH, KS Bhutia, Deputy Director Marketing DHH, TD Gyamtso, officials and staff and trainees of the Namchi Branch Centre DHH and local residents.

The chief guest accompanied by other guests also visited the stalls and interacted with the participants and expressed his delight over the array of handloom and handicrafts products being displayed for exhibition and sale from different parts of the country. The Special Handloom Expo is a pan-India programme and the expo here has 30 stalls from six states - Assam, Nagaland, Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Sikkim.

Interschool art competition in Gangtok



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 DEC: An interschool art competition organised by the Asian Institute of Design, Bengaluru, in collaboration with Shirdi Advertisers, Gangtok, was held here today. Over 50 students took part in the competition and the 1st position was bagged by Shyam Pradhan of Sai Prashanti Vidhya Mandir, Denzel

Moirangthem from TNA on second position and the 3rd position went to Chumit Lepcha of TNA. Gangtok MLA, YT Lepcha, was present as the chief guest and appreciated the effort of the organisers to inculcate a spirit of creativity among youngsters. He also urged all stakeholders, including the society and govern-

ment, to initiate all necessary interventions to make art an integral part of one's life. Congratulating all the winners and participants for taking keen interest in the arts, he assured all help to further promote the arts in Sikkim. Shirdi Advertisers' Rajshri Subba in turn shared that a string of such events were being planned.

Centre wanted to wreck my mental strength: Chidambaram

CHENNAI, DEC 7 (PTI): Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Saturday accused the Central government of trying to wreck his mental strength by imprisoning him in the INX Media case.

The former Minister, who spent 106 days in Delhi's Tihar jail, however, did not explicitly mention the case against him filed by the Enforcement Directorate or the CBI.

"I am not going to talk about the case. Why I was imprisoned? They thought of wrecking my mental strength and it will not happen any day.

If anybody had thought that I will fall, I will never fall as the Congress party and the Indian people's thirst for freedom are behind me... it is going to be a fight continuously," he told reporters here on his arrival from Delhi.

Chidambaram also accused the government of trying to wreck his physical health, adding they succeeded for about 10 days.

After the court's intervention and examination by doctors, "today (my) health has more or less improved fully," he said.

He claimed that the economy was moving towards the worst phase and cautioned the people to be on guard.



In the coming days, he would continuously "speak and write," he said.

On women's safety, Chidambaram said after he assumed charge as Finance Minister during the UPA regime, Rs 3,100 crore was allotted for the Nirbhaya fund and alleged that several states, including Tamil Nadu had not utilised it, which was regrettable.

"The Nirbhaya fund should be used and women's safety should be ensured."

Alleging that the entire country was turning into a killing field for the women, he said Uttar Pradesh, in particular, was becoming one.

Asserting that this must not happen, he said the onus of halting the trend hence lay not only on the government and women, but also men. "Every man should protect women," he said.

Asked about Union

Minister Prakash Javadekar's charge that he has violated his bail conditions, he said: "Prakash Javadekar does not know about the (Supreme Court) court's verdict and he also does not know what I had spoken."

Chidambaram walked out of prison on December 4 after the Supreme Court granted him bail in a money laundering case filed by the Enforcement Directorate linked to the INX Media.

The CBI, probing the corruption charge in the media case had registered a case on May 15, 2017.

The probe agency alleged irregularities in a Foreign Investment Promotion Board clearance granted to the INX Media group for receiving overseas funds of Rs 305 crore in 2007 during Chidambaram's tenure as finance minister. The ED lodged a money laundering case after that.

Odisha NGO team trains on Organic Farming at ICAR-NOFRI

GANGTOK, 07 DEC (PIB): ICAR-National Organic Farming Research Institute (ICAR-NOFRI), Tadong, organized a 3-day training on Organic Farming for team members of i-Concept Initiatives, an Odisha-based NGO, from 04 to 06 Dec.

This team of 13 members visited ICAR-NOFRI to receive training on organic farming technologies.

During the program, Joint Director, ICAR-NOFRI, Dr RK Avasthe, highlighted the importance of organic farming and urged i-Concept Initiatives to adopt organic farming on a large scale.

He also delved on the physico-chemical and microbiological properties of soil and soil health management for organic crop production.

Senior Scientist (Horticulture), Dr Ashish Yadav, in turn spoke on



the various skill development activities undertaken by ICAR-NOFRI, organic fruit production techniques and organic high value vegetable production techniques. He also coordinated the three-day training program.

Former CEO, Sikkim State Organic Certification Agency, Dr Yashoda Pradhan, discussed the

Organic Certification and Traceability processes.

During the training program, Senior Scientist (Agronomy), Dr Raghavendra Singh explained conservation agricultural practices for field crop production and 'Organic farming and organic production standards; Scientist SS (Plant Breeding), Dr Chandan Kapoor, deliberated on seed

production; Scientist SS (Horticulture), Dr Sudip Kumar Dutta on Organic production of tuber crops; Scientist SS (Agroforestry), Dr Matther Singh the Role of agroforestry for enhancement of crop production in organic farming; Scientist (Plant Pathology), Dr Chandramani Raj on Insect pest management in organic production

Mock exercise preps East dist for earthquake-triggered chemical hazards

GANGTOK, 07 DEC [IPR]: A mock exercise on chemical hazards led by an earthquake was conducted at Rangpo on Thursday under the supervision of the DC East, Raj Yadav. This was to refine disaster preparedness in East District.

The mock exercise was organized by Chemical and Industrial Disaster Management (CIDM) in coordination with Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority and District Disaster Management Authority, East.

A simulation scenario was created of an earthquake which leads to outbreak of chemicals from the storage of the IOCL Depot and LPG



bottling plant at Rangpo and was conducted at five locations in Rangpo to sensitize the companies and the public about such events.

The Incident Command Post was set up at the SDM Office with the

SDM Rangpo as the Incident Commandant. All HODs and other stakeholders reported there within 15 minutes of the simulated earthquake striking and the mock exercise began at 10:30am. During

the exercise, a scenario depicting an earthquake magnitude of 6.7 on the Richter Scale was created. A relief camp was set up at the Community Hall and the public was made aware of the mock exercise

through sirens and PA system.

NDRF, SDRF, Police, Fire, Civil Defence, Forest personnel and NYKS were the task force deployed in different locations and were successful to bring the situation under control within one and a half hours. This mock exercise was also witnessed by the head of CIDM, former member NDMA, Dr M Ahmed, and Brigadier BK Khanna, a mock drill expert.

The mock exercise was conducted to evaluate coordination between different departments and the ground staff to make the functioning of the relief and rescue operation faster, efficient and reliable in times of real time disasters.

Protesters heckle BJP ministers, MP at Unnao rape victim's village

UNNAO, DEC 7 (PTI): Protests were held on Saturday evening as UP ministers Swami Prasad Maurya and Kamal Rani Varun along with local BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj reached the village of the Unnao gangrape victim to meet her family.

A number of protesters including some local Congress leaders sustained injuries as police used force to disperse the crowd which gathered outside the residence of the victim and shouted 'Vaapas Jaao, Vapaas Jaao' (Go Back) and raised slo-

gans against the state government and Sakshi Maharaj.

The sloganeering continued for 15 minutes. Police used force against the protesters after which the two ministers and the MP could be taken to the victim's home, villagers said.

The 23-year-old rape victim who was airlifted to Delhi and admitted to Safdarjung Hospital with 90 per cent burns after being set afire by the accused died following a cardiac arrest at 11.40 pm on Friday.

The Mandalorian episode 5 theory: Those boots at the end belong to...

The latest episode of The Mandalorian ended with the introduction of a mysterious character. (Spoilers follow for episode 5, "The Gunslinger.") The final shot of Friday's installment of the Disney+ series showed a figure wearing black boots approach the discarded body of the assassin Fennec (Ming-Na Wen), who may or may not be dead.

But who is the figure? There's a whole galaxy of possibilities. The most obvious possibility is that it's former Imperial Governor Moff Gideon (Giancarlo Esposito) — a new Mandalorian character the show has yet to reveal this season. But here's another theory that's perhaps far-fetched, but also highly intriguing, and there's a bit of evidence to support it: Boba Fett.

This would be a huge reveal and rather perfect. Since the launch of The Mandalorian, fans have wondered why Disney didn't just do a show about

Boba Fett when the lead character was so clearly inspired by him. Having Pedro Pascal's Mando allows the show to create its own character with a different personality, and Pascal's take on a bounty hunter has been distinctive and engaging. But what if the plan was also to re-introduce Boba Fett as an antagonist for some Mando-vs.-Mando action? Pit our hero against the most formidable and popular bounty hunter in Star Wars? The move would also redeem what's been considered a "bad death" in the canon — many fans feel Boba Fett deserved a more fitting send-off than the abrupt and somewhat goofy way he was casually dispatched by Han Solo. The move also wouldn't be entirely unlike how Clone Wars — which is from this episode's writer and director, Dave Filoni — brought back Maul from his abrupt death to give him a more extensive final act.

AP govt cancels Rs 3.10-crore work on CM's residences

AMARAVATI, DEC 7 (PTI):

The Andhra Pradesh government has cancelled the proposed work worth Rs 3.10 crore at the residences of Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy as the opposition attacked him over the alleged lavish and wasteful expenditure.

Principal secretary to Transport, roads and buildings department M T Krishna Babu late Friday night issued formal orders cancelling the work sanctioned in the last two months.

Last month, the government issued an order sanctioning Rs 39 lakh for providing furniture at the Chief Ministers camp resi-

dence at Tadepalli here.

Another Rs 73 lakh was sanctioned for installation of aluminum doors and windows and miscellaneous works.

A sum of Rs 1.2 crore was sanctioned towards annual maintenance of the camp residence.

Another Rs 22.50 lakh was sanctioned for making alleged temporary arrangements like mobile toilets, coolers, PVC rain-proof pagodas surrounding the camp residence.


For Jagans residence at Lotus Pond in Hyderabad, Rs 24.50 lakh was sanctioned for providing security arrangements.

The main opposition

attacked the Chief Minister over the lavish and wasteful expenditure and alleged a sum of Rs 17 crore was being splurged on the CMs residence when the state was reeling under an acute financial crisis.

No official reason was given but in a sudden development the Principal Secretary issued a series of orders late Friday night cancelling the sanctioned work.

Official sources, however, said the work was cancelled on the instructions of the Chief Minister to ward off criticism about the extravagant spending.



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Disaster Management in Times of Climate Change

The two realities are best prepared for in tandem

Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management are relatively recent responsibilities shouldered on two departments in Sikkim – Climate Change to the Department of Science & Technology and Disaster Management to Land Revenue Department. The recognition of the two challenges as issues requiring round-the-year and official attention is welcome and maybe it is even time that the two developments were placed under the charge of a single authority. This would be worthwhile because it is now clear that a majority of the natural disasters in the future will be Climate Change triggered. It would thus make sense to make Climate Change Mitigation a part of disaster management. This, more so in the case of hill states like Sikkim which already flirt too often with natural disasters, the intensity of which will grow as climate begins to change more dramatically.

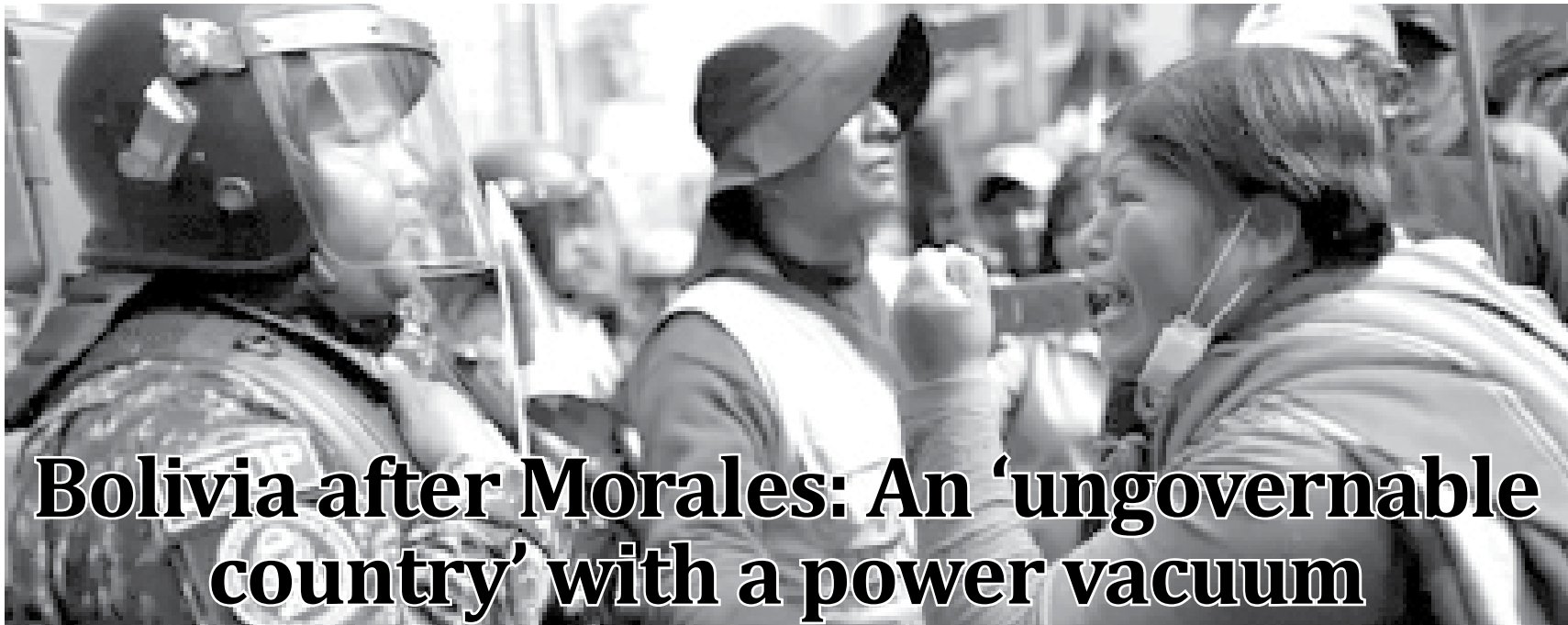
The impact of climate change is becoming increasingly evident in the polar caps and in the Himalayas. High mountain communities have noted that glaciers are retreating at unprecedented rates. The planet's extremities are canaries in the coal mines - alerting the rest of the world to the extent of the changes that are coming and we, because Sikkim holds that canary, should start getting more involved in the initiatives being undertaken to save the environment because that really is the only cushion to minimise climate change risk.

At the policy level, Sikkim has launched several measures aimed at preserving its environment and understanding where it stands on the climate change risk graph. These, however, remain typically [for Sikkim] top-down affairs and have come as government initiatives thus far. One doesn't see any private participation in drawing focus to the larger picture. Most NGOs and social organisations are involved in almost exclusively localised issues like garbage disposal and plantation works. While these are also necessary, Sikkim needs more who communicate in specifics and undertake studies on climate change impact in the State. There has unfortunately not been any concerted effort in Sikkim on this front thus far. While most people are familiar with climate change, very few are aware of how it is manifesting in Sikkim. The closest that the State has come to studying this is aspect is in the committee (or was it as commission?) set up to study the glaciers of Sikkim. It is not clear what came of this study although some glaciers on high melt have been kept under high watch now. Events like an occasional workshop-cum-orientation which announces that it will discuss climate change and disaster management do not really ever get into the specifics of climate change impact on Sikkim. Without making this change directly relevant to the people, efforts towards mitigation or management will remain funds-driven undertakings which, even if they are earnest, will remain superficial.

Climate Change manifests in both, subtle and overt ways, its slower encroachment not being noticed until it is too late and its more dramatic displays like GLOFs coming so suddenly and destructively that rescue and repairs distract from the causative factors. The dots are not connected and hence lessons are never learnt and preparation always compromised. Some years ago, an ambitious workshop-cum-orientation programme was held in Sikkim on "Climate Risk Management through Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation". Followed up in earnest, it could have marked a change in attitudes if it had only succeeded in acquainting stakeholders and line department officials to how climate change has already impacted Sikkim. Then, perhaps management and mitigation plans could have been more than the copy-paste speculative drafts that remain in circulation. The main problem in Sikkim's handling of climate change and even disaster management plans is that most people engaged for it work on generalised blueprints prepared elsewhere. Such blueprints should be seen as suggested frameworks to be filled out with Sikkim-specific data, traditional knowledge base and local know-how to deliver management and mitigation plans which actually deliver.

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Bolivia after Morales: An 'ungovernable country' with a power vacuum

MARTEN W. BRIENEN
THECONVERSATION.COM

Evo Morales is hardly Bolivia's first president to be ousted in a mass uprising.

Both of his immediate predecessors – Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa – resigned after waves of mass protest. So did at least seven other Bolivian presidents since 1870.

The power of the Bolivian people is so formidable that former president Mesa, upon resigning in 2005, declared the country "ungovernable."

Bolivia's new interim president, Jeanine Añez, may well echo the sentiment. Deadly protests have gripped Bolivia since she took power on Nov. 11, and Morales' socialist party, MAS, retains a two-thirds majority in both the lower and upper houses of Congress.

Añez, a former senator from Bolivia's weak opposition, has virtually no power. Her party stands little chance of passing legislation. And protests against her government continue.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Throughout Bolivian history, protests have been an important way indigenous people and rural peasants, long excluded from the halls of power, have made their voices heard.

Whether to force more equitable land distribution in the 1952 Bolivian National Revolution, demand the return of the coastal province conquered by Chile in 1883 or call for the nationalization of resources such as

oil and gas, these marginalized communities have often earned major concessions via protest.

As I have argued in my political analyses of the South American country, Bolivian government institutions are so weak that effective governance requires at the least some populist compromise.

Indigenous Bolivians organize massive marches, blocking roads into major urban centers to prevent food and fuel from entering and exploding dynamite to highlight their dismay. By paralyzing cities, including the seat of government, these indigenous protest strategies have effectively overwhelmed numerous Bolivian governments.

That's how Morales himself rose to power: He was the highly visible leader of the 2003 and 2005 protests that ousted his immediate predecessors.

A MILITARY MUTINY

The shocked tone of Morales' last press conference as president, held on Nov. 10, made clear his outrage at being on the receiving end of a similar mass mobilization.

Morales was forced to resign amid protest after he declared victory in Bolivia's contested Oct. 20 presidential election. Few doubt that he won the race, however. What was in dispute is whether he won by a margin of 10% – enough to avoid a runoff with his closest competitor, the former president Carlos Mesa, who 12 years ago resigned amid protests.

Morales and his most ardent supporters said he beat Mesa by just over 10%. Opposition parties, their supporters and the Organization of American States found the narrow margin suspicious and called for a new vote.

Morales eventually agreed amid wild protest, but not before a police mutiny encouraged violence against his political allies. The military announced that it would not use force to subdue anti-Morales protesters. Soldiers looked on as demonstrators looted and burned to the ground the houses of some MAS party members.

Ultimately, the police and military compelled Morales to resign. It was clear he had lost control.

COMPLETE PARALYSIS

Yet Morales opponents weren't necessarily eager to see Carlos Mesa, who still commands very little devotion, elected president. They just wanted Morales out. And though Morales' base has frayed somewhat over 14 years due to his government's pursuit of natural gas development in indigenous areas, he remains by far the most popular politician in Bolivia.

Morales is now leading by tweet from exile in Mexico, urging his supporters to wage their own mutiny against the new interim government and hinting at his return.

"[T]he struggle continues," he wrote in a Nov. 15 tweet that painted Bolivia's history as a fight between indigenous people and

the powers that would oppress them. "I will return and I will be millions."

Massive protests have virtually paralyzed Bolivia, as indigenous roadblocks keep food and fuel from La Paz and angry protesters attempt to march on the presidential palace itself. The city of Cochabamba and its surroundings are also rocked by violent protest. Thus far, Bolivian military and police have shot dead at least 14 people.

UNGOVERNABLE COUNTRY

While the new government has the support of both the Bolivian military and the police, this does not make the country governable.

Añez, ruling without a mandate, has only one real responsibility: to organize elections. The Congress has now voted on a plan to hold another presidential vote, although no date has been set, and Morales has agreed he will not be a candidate.

Setting new elections without Morales is a win for the opposition in Bolivia and a fundamental step toward restoring a semblance of normalcy.

But Morales' base is unlikely to simply accept the results, whatever they may be.

To paraphrase the Bolivian historian Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, the indigenous Bolivians who adore Morales are "oppressed but not defeated."

[the writer is Lecturer in Global Studies, Oklahoma State University]

Large-scale education tests often come with side effects

YUROU WANG & TRINA E. EMLER
theconversation.com

When results come out for big education tests like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which primarily measures 15-year-old students' knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics and science, the focus is often on which countries scored the highest.

The education systems of countries that do well on this test are often portrayed as models for the rest of the world. For example, the United Kingdom has committed \$54.2 million to help 8,000 schools adopt the math teaching methods of PISA's top performer, Shanghai, by 2020. The United Kingdom has adopted Chinese textbooks as well.

Some educators have found that there are problems with emulating the top PISA scorers. Big education tests – known as large-scale assessments in the education world – come, in our and our colleagues' research, with some serious and damaging side effects. Students in countries that did the best on the PISA – the results of which were released on Dec. 3 – often have lower well-being, as measured by students' satisfaction with life and school. Six out of the top 10 performing countries for reading have student well-being levels that are below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average.

This suggests to us the need to take a more critical look at what large-scale assessments like the PISA really show and why countries with high PISA scores also score low in well-being.

Another question is whether these tests should hold as much power as they do when it comes to shaping educational policy and practice, or judging the "quality" of one country's education system over another.

Here are a series of problems that have been shown to occur when too much emphasis is placed on the results of big education tests like the PISA.

DISTORTIONS

Big education tests can distort the definition of quality education. For example, high PISA-scoring educational systems, such as Singapore, Finland, Korea and Shanghai, are viewed as high-quality systems. But we think the quality of education is much more than any education test can assess.

Large-scale education tests can also distort what is actually taught in schools by narrowing it



to a limited number of assessed subjects: typically reading, math and, in some cases, science. Meanwhile, other subjects, such as music, art, social studies and languages, are overlooked.

Furthermore, these tests can distort instruction by inducing teachers to teach to the test. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which brought tests as accountability measures to U.S. schools, has led to an increase in instruction time on tested subjects. However, other essential skills, like creativity, problem-solving and organization of knowledge, have been neglected.

LEADS TO CORRUPTION AND CHEATING

Large-scale assessments create incentives and pressure that can lead to corruption and cheating. In 2019, for instance, 50 Americans were charged in a college admission scandal that involved cheating on college entrance exams as well as bribing their children's way into college.

The cheating is not limited to the U.S. In China, cheating on the National College Entrance Exam and large-scale assessments is a frequent occurrence.

AGGRAVATES INEQUITY

Large-scale assessments can be biased against students from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds and favor advantaged students. Take the SAT as an example. The scores have a strong positive correlation with family income, which means students from wealthier families score higher than those from lower-income families.

As a result, students from lower-income families are not afforded the same opportunities to attend college or end up attending a less prestigious college. This has long-term socioeconomic impact as graduation from college and pursuing advanced

degrees have notable differences in lifelong earning opportunities. The ability to attend top-tier colleges greatly increases the likelihood of graduation and being accepted for advanced degrees. When these opportunities are limited due to biased large-scale assessments and unequal opportunities, it may serve only to aggravate inequality and injustice.

In many countries, large-scale assessments are used as gatekeepers to access higher education. This leads parents, teachers, schools, media, policymakers and students to focus on high scores. Scores are then associated with the worthiness of students. When scores become equated with worth, it can demoralize and cause psychological damage to students as well as teachers and other stakeholders.

Exam-induced suicide has been reported in places such as Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and China. These countries also tend to be the high achievers on other large-scale assessments like the PISA.

POTENTIAL OVERLOOKED

Large-scale assessments can provide useful information for education policy, but overreliance on test results may cause problems. When the focus is on students' scores and countries' ranking, other important things, such as creativity, entrepreneurial thinking, social-emotional well-being and critical thinking, might be neglected. These treasured educational outcomes are things that large-scale assessments often fail to capture.

[Yurou Wang is Clinical Assistant Professor, University of Alabama; Trina E. Emler is University of Kansas]

Trailblazer basketball player Satnam fails dope test

NEW DELHI, DEC 6 (PTI): Satnam Singh Bhamara, the first Indian player to be drafted into an NBA team in 2015, has been provisionally suspended by the National Anti-Doping Agency after he failed a dope test last month.

The 23-year-old Punjab cager has failed an out-of-competition test conducted in Bangalore by the National Anti-Doping Agency during the preparatory camp for the South Asian Games.

He was provisionally suspended on November 19, according to the newsletter released by the NADA.

Bhamara pulled out of the 13th South Asian Games which began on December 1, citing personal reasons. The 7-foot-2-inch player was training at the SAI Centre, Bangalore for the South Asian Games.

The prohibited substance found from Bhamara's 'A' sample of his urine is not known.

According to NADA rules, an athlete has the right to request for the analysis of his/her 'B' Sample within seven working days of receiving the notice concerning Adverse Analytical Find-

ing of his/her 'A' Sample.

If his 'B' sample also returns positive, his case will be heard by the NADA's Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel which will decide whether to impose punishment or not. If Bhamara is found guilty of doping, he faces a maximum ban of four years for a first time offender.

However, it is not known whether Bhamara requested for the analysis of his 'B' sample.

Basketball Federation of India Chander Mukhi Sharma said he was not aware of Bhamara's doping issue as he has been out of station.

"I am not aware of this issue and I will be able to attend office only on December 15," Sharma told PTI.

Asked why the federation would not know of the doping issue for which the provisional suspension was handed on November 19, he said, "The letter from the NADA (to the BFI) must have come in a sealed envelope and I have not seen it.

"So, I don't know the prohibited substance found in the player's sample. Otherwise, the player

himself must be having the letter from the NADA and he must be knowing it."

Sharma said that Bhamara had written a letter to the BFI, saying that he would be pulling out of the South Asian Games due to some personal reasons.

"We have no suspicion that Bhamara may be taking substances. He simply told us in a letter that he was having some personal problems and so he will not take part in the South Asian Games."

In 2015, Bhamara created history when he was picked in the NBA draft by Dallas Mavericks.

After returning to India for a year, Bhamara again created history in September 2018 by becoming the first Indian cager to play in the National Basketball League of Canada after signing a deal with St John's Edge.

He has represented India in major tournaments like Asian Championships, 2018 Commonwealth Games, and 2019 World Cup Qualifiers.

One of Wayalar rape accused thrashed by mob in Kerala

PALAKKAD, DEC 7 (PTI): An accused in the Wayalar rape and death case of two minor dalit sisters was on Saturday thrashed by a group of people following an altercation, police said.

M Madhu, the third accused in the case, who was acquitted recently by a lower court, allegedly got into an argument with the group near his house, the police said.

"The group allegedly called him (Madhu) a rapist when he came to his house from Coimbatore. The man used some vulgar expressions, words and picked up a fight with the locals following which he was thrashed," Palakkad po-

lice chief told PTI.

However, Madhu's mother told the media that the attackers were from Sangh Parivar, he said.

The accused has been admitted to the district hospital in Palakkad.

The police official further said a case has been registered against four people.

"We have also taken three of them into custody. The probe is on," police said.

The state government had recently ordered a judicial probe into the death of siblings by suicide after they were sexually exploited at Wayalar in Palakkad district.

The older child (13)

was found hanging in her house on January 13, 2017, while her nine-year-old sister died 52 days later in a similar manner.

Police had arrested four people, one of whom was acquitted in September this year, and the three others on October 25.

The accused were charged with abetment of suicide and rape, the police said.

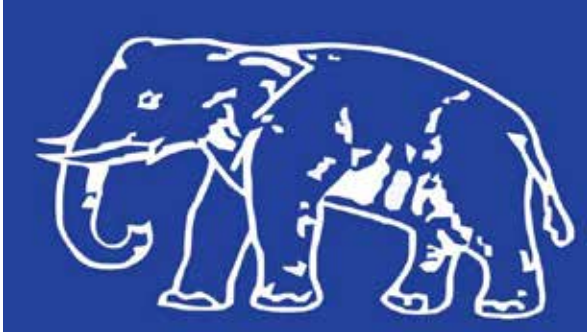
The POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) court in Palakkad, while acquitting the accused, had pulled up the investigation team, saying it did not present enough scientific evidence.

Citizenship Bill against concept of equality: BSP leader

ALIGARH, DEC 7 (PTI): Bahujan Samaj Party MP Kunwar Danish Ali here on Saturday said the Citizenship Amendment Bill violated foundational principles of the Constitution and was against the concept of equality.

The BSP leader said this during a programme held to mark his election to the AMU court -- governing body of the university -- from the parliament quota.

"The proposed Bill violates foundational principles of the Constitution of India and is an attack on the concept of equality as enshrined in its preamble," the leader



said, adding that his party would oppose the legislation.

He said his party shared the unanimous view that the Bill was being introduced simply to "divide people of India and divert their attention from real issues".

Addressing the

meeting, noted historian Prof Irfan Habib said, "The proposed Bill is an opportunity for opposition parties to join hands and stand up to ongoing attempts to trample democracy in India."

Habib said Maharashtra developments had shown the way to the rest of the country

9th edition of Delhi Comic Con from Dec 20

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI): Famous national and international artists, stand-up comedians, and, cosplay competitions will get the national capital buzzing at the 9th edition of Delhi Comic Con here.

The pop culture extravaganza is all set to unravel a roller coaster ride for the city's fandom community at the NSIC Grounds, Okhla from December 20.

Highlighting the event will be Melbourne-based digital artist Kode Abdo aka #Bosslogic; illustrator Chad Hardin, who works for DC Comics and Harley Quinn series; and Asian-American artist/designer Bernard Chang, who has illustrated books for Marvel and DC Comics, including X-Men, Deadpool, Superman, and Wonder Woman.

Joining them at the show will be leading Indian comic book publishers, illustrators and

writers like Abhijeet Kini, creator of "Angry Maushi"; Vivek Goel, creator of "Aghori" series; Sumit Kumar (Bakarmax), and creators of immensely popular Indian webcomics like Sailesh Gopalan (Brown Paperbag Comics), Bhagya Mathew (Awkwerrrd).

"Organising Comic Con in Delhi will always be close to my heart as we did our inaugural show in the city nine years ago. The city has the most enthusiastic comic book fans and cosplayers, who take this celebration of their beloved fandoms very seriously.

"This year we have some special guests, new launches, and experiential zones. This year, we wanted to align our Cosplay competitions to international formats, and we have introduced two new formats of cosplaying, which will certainly delight the city's fans,"



Jatin Varma, founder, Comic Con India, said.

The three-day event will introduce new cosplay formats with a total prize pool of Rs 4 lac this year.

The contest, organised in two categories, will give out prizes worth Rs 2 Lac each day of the show.

The first category, 'Indian Championship of Cosplay 2019 Delhi Qualifier', will see partic-

ipants compete online, thereafter, pre-selected participants will go through a stage display session and compete on 3 parameters - needlework, FX and armor.

Each day, the winners of the Delhi qualifier round will not only win awards but also qualify to participate in the 'Indian Championship of Cosplay 2020'.

The second contest format, 'Delhi Comic Con

register would lead to "hardships and misery" to the poorest sections of society, who would be "forced to run from pillar to post" to prove their nationality.

It would lead to public discontent cutting across religious identities, he said, adding that by targeting the minority community, the BJP government was "negating the basic principles of the democratic process".

Habib urged all opposition parties, especially the BSP and the Samajwadi Party, to set an example for the rest of the country by "reviving their alliance in UP".

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629 Pakistani girls sold as brides to China

LAHORE, DEC 7 (AP): Page after page, the names stack up: 629 girls and women from across Pakistan who were sold as brides to Chinese men and taken to China.

The list, obtained by The Associated Press, was compiled by Pakistani investigators determined to break up trafficking networks exploiting the country's poor and vulnerable.

The list gives the most concrete figure yet for the number of women caught up in the trafficking schemes since 2018.

But since the time it was put together in June, investigators' aggressive drive against the networks has largely ground to a halt. Officials with knowledge of the investigations say that is because of pressure from government officials fearful of hurting Pakistan's lucrative ties to Beijing.

The biggest case against traffickers has fallen apart. In October, a court in Faisalabad acquitted 31 Chinese nationals charged in connection with trafficking.

Several of the women who had initially been interviewed by police refused to testify because they were either threatened or bribed into silence, according to a

court official and a police investigator familiar with the case.

The two spoke on condition of anonymity because they feared retribution for speaking out.

At the same time, the government has sought to curtail investigations, putting "immense pressure" on officials from the Federal Investigation Agency pursuing trafficking networks, said Saleem Iqbal, a Christian activist who has helped parents rescue several young girls from China and prevented others from being sent there.

"Some (FIA officials) were even transferred," Iqbal said in an interview. "When we talk to Pakistani rulers, they don't pay any attention". Asked about the complaints, Pakistan's interior and foreign ministries refused to comment.

Several senior officials familiar with the events said investigations into trafficking have slowed, the investigators are frustrated, and Pakistani media have been pushed to curb their reporting on trafficking. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they feared reprisals.

"No one is doing anything to help these girls," one of the officials said.

"The whole racket is continuing, and it is growing. Why? Because they know they can get away with it. The authorities won't follow through, everyone is being pressured to not investigate. Trafficking is increasing now." He said he was speaking out "because I have to live with myself. Where is our humanity?" China's Foreign Ministry said it was unaware of the list.

"The two governments of China and Pakistan support the formation of happy families between their people on a voluntary basis in keeping with laws and regulations, while at the same time having zero tolerance for and resolutely fighting against any person engaging in illegal cross-border marriage behaviour," the ministry said in a statement faxed Monday to AP's Beijing bureau.

An AP investigation earlier this year revealed how Pakistan's Christian minority has become a new target of brokers who pay impoverished parents to marry off their daughters, some of them teenagers, to Chinese husbands who return with them to their homeland. Many of the brides are then isolated and abused

or forced into prostitution in China, often contacting home and pleading to be brought back.

The AP spoke to police and court officials and more than a dozen brides some of whom made it back to Pakistan, others who remained trapped in China as well as remorseful parents, neighbors, relatives and human rights workers.

Christians are targeted because they are one of the poorest communities in Muslim-majority Pakistan. The trafficking rings are made up of Chinese and Pakistani middlemen and include Christian ministers, mostly from small evangelical churches, who get bribes to urge their flock to sell their daughters.

Investigators have also turned up at least one Muslim cleric running a marriage bureau from his madrassa, or religious school.

Investigators put together the list of 629 women from Pakistan's integrated border management system, which digitally records travel documents at the country's airports. The information includes the brides' national identity numbers, their Chinese husbands' names and the dates of their marriages.

Hornbill festival is the ambassador of Nagaland: Singh

KOIHMA, DEC 7 (PTI): Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Saturday said Nagaland has become the ambassador of North East region to the whole of India through the Hornbill Festival.

Singh who visited the Hornbill festival ground here congratulated the Nagaland government for successfully hosting the festival for 20 years.

The Hornbill festival is held every year from December 1 to 10.

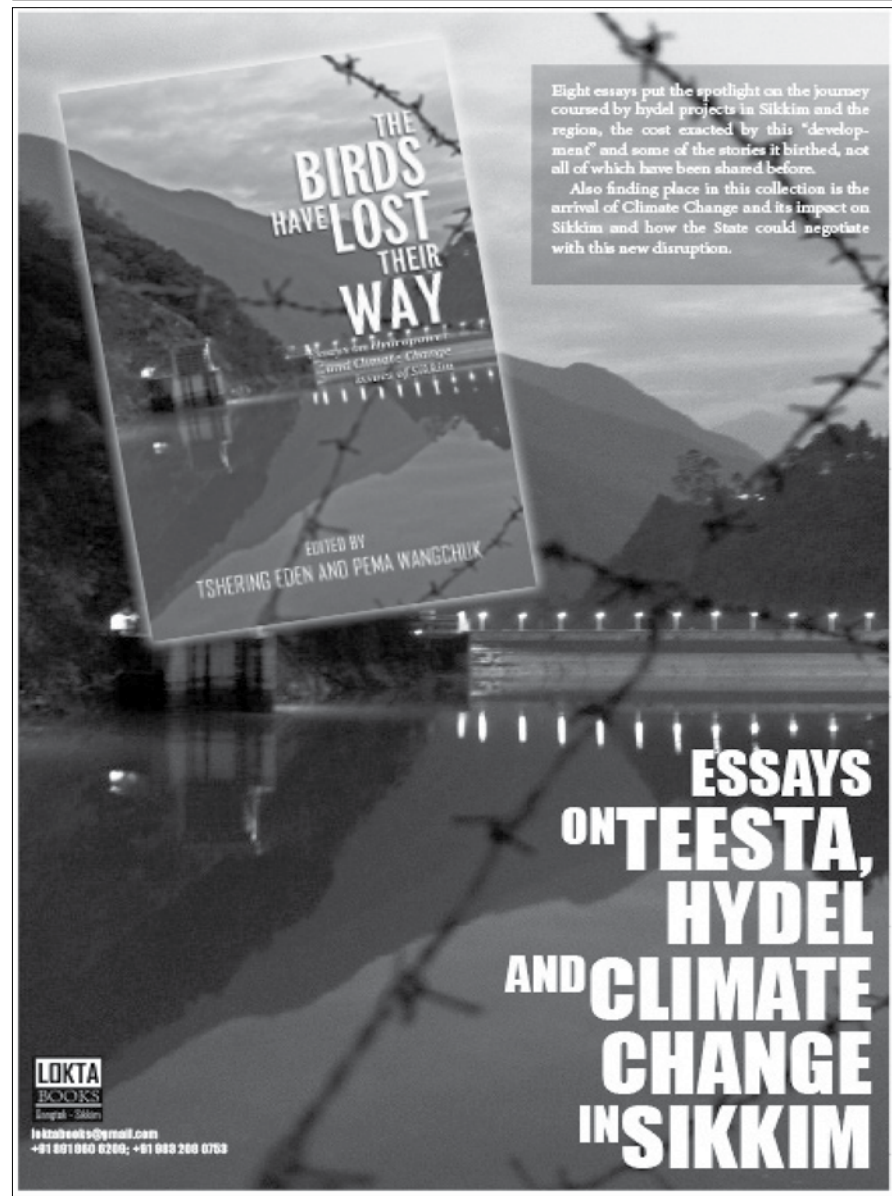
He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given highest priority towards the development of North East region by visiting the North East more than 30 times.

Singh, the Union Minister of Development of North Eastern Region hoped that Nagaland through the Hornbill festival will become the "torchbearer" of the new cultural journey of North East.

Union Sports and Youth Affairs Minister

Kiren Rijiju who also visited the festival ground on Saturday said the Hornbill festival is not only a celebration of festival but the spirit depicting the rich cultural heritage of Naga people.

"People across the world have started to study the Hornbill festival," he said, adding that the Hornbill festival is a rare occasion where everyone can enjoy the ethnicity of the Nagas at one place.



Marcus Rashford can take cue from Sterling's development at City

JONATHAN LIEW
theconversation.com
For a moment all is stillness. Marcus Rashford grinds to a halt. Old Trafford pauses with him. Rashford waits. There's a wiggle of the toes. And then the explosion.

Rashford's second goal against Tottenham on Wednesday night was, in many ways, a distillation of everything he does best. As Serge Aurier closed him down on the left flank, Rashford paused for an instant, waiting for his opponent to commit. A twitch of the boot was enough to convince Aurier that Rashford was planning to cut inside. And in that moment, with a conjuror's cunning, Rashford was away: knocking the ball through Aurier's legs, sprinting past him, burning around the outside of Moussa Sissoko – himself an exceptionally quick player – and eventually drawing the foul from which he would convert United's winning penalty.

The pledge, the turn, the prestige. It was a goal of raw athleticism and outrageous smarts, of skill and patience and pure, facetious mastery. The penalty was Rashford's second goal

of the evening, having peppered Paulo Gazzaniga with shots all night, and as United moved back into the top six for the first time since September, the consensus appeared to be that Rashford, with 12 goals in his last 13 games for club and country, is on the verge of something. The question, as he prepares to step out at the Etihad Stadium for the 179th Manchester derby, is what.

This will be Rashford's eighth Manchester derby and he is yet to produce a display to match the impact of his first, in 2016, when he marked a 1-0 United win at the Etihad with the only goal of the game. Nevertheless he is a player for the big occasion: 17 of his 36 Premier League goals have come against City, Liverpool, Tottenham, Chelsea, Arsenal and Leicester, by common consent United's six strongest opponents. Whatever the opposite of a flat-track bully is, that's Rashford.

And yet, for all the talk of a breakthrough – he's never scored more than 10 league goals in a season and currently has nine – this is a



campaign that has only recently kicked into life. For the first two months of the season Rashford's vague listlessness seemed to mirror United's. At one point he went on a run of one goal in 12 games.

This remains, in many ways, the hit on Rashford: a tendency towards inconsistency, curious lapses in focus, a paucity of options for breaking down deep-set defences. What is interesting is that these were exactly the same criticisms being levelled at one of his opponents on Saturday

evening.

Rashford turned 22 just over a month ago. Raheem Sterling turns 24 on Sunday, and provides a salutary lesson in how a promising young player propels himself to the next level. When Sterling was the age Rashford is now, he had scored 23 goals in 114 league games – a rate of roughly one in five – and won nothing except the League Cup. Ever since, 51 in 126 – a rate of two in five – and two Premier League titles. The pressing issue is whether Rashford's purple patch is just that or the begin-

nings of a Sterling-esque metamorphosis that will see him convert his rich, base-metal promise into reliable, trophy-winning excellence.

Of course, the comparison is not a perfect one. Rashford and Sterling may both cut in off the left flank with pace, sharp one-tvos and a keen nose for goal, but they are subtly different in many ways. Rashford is taller and stronger than Sterling, a better header of the ball, possesses a cleaner and more powerful shot and a more reliable set piece. In

virtually every other area, however, you would probably take Sterling over him, a testament to the way in which he has matured and honed his game over the last couple of seasons under Pep Guardiola.

Can Rashford grow in the same way under Ole Gunnar Solskjær that Sterling has under Guardiola? It's not a process we should assume he can undertake on his own: players do not simply develop automatically, like house plants left in a sunny window. Sterling owes his improvement not only to his ferocious

work ethic but to the little details and snatches of advice that make the good players great: when to take on his man and when to recycle, timing and positioning, composure, whether to trap a ball with the outside of a foot or take it in his stride.

Rashford, meanwhile, is still a player who owes his goals to intuition and individual flourishes as much as careful plotting. This, perhaps, explains why his record is so good against better teams, where space is more plentiful, counterattacks a more useful tactic and games far more likely to turn on a single moment of brilliance. But it also highlights the biggest area of opportunity in his game: movement, reading buildup, finding himself in the positions to score the ugly goals that have swollen Sterling's output.

Will he get that sort of help at United? Solskjær's comments after the Tottenham game, underlining Rashford's "courage" and "directness", describing him like a striker who looked as if he were "in the playground with his mates", suggested he sees Rashford's gift in largely discrete, indi-

vidualistic terms rather than as part of a more cultivated development. In short: he is good and, if he is happy, he'll carry on being good. The hope is that behind closed doors, Solskjær is offering Rashford the sort of bespoke insights that made him himself such a devilishly shrewd striker.

And perhaps the wider moral here is one of patience. Sterling did not suddenly start banging them in as soon as he turned 22: improvement came in stages, by degrees, a slow melting of potential. Likewise Rashford is a striker who has spent much of his career in a struggling team, oscillating between the No 9 and the left-wing position, and who, despite playing more than 100 league games, is a month younger than Tammy Abraham.

No player's career goes in a straight line. And for any footballer of great promise there's a point just before the big explosion, just before he takes the plunge, when nothing very much seems to be happening. A shimmy here, a shimmy there. You wonder which way he's going to go. And for a moment all is stillness.

Atletico title hopes suffer another blow after Villarreal draw

MADRID, DEC 7 (AFP): Atletico Madrid's title hopes look to be all-but over after a goalless draw away at Villarreal raised further doubts about their progress under coach Diego Simeone.

After losing at home to Barcelona last weekend, another slip means Atletico are now five points behind Barca and Real Madrid in La Liga, despite having played two games more.

It means by the time Simeone's side head into the Christmas break, the gap could have stretched to double figures and that will be hard to close, especially given they play both Barcelona and Real Madrid away from home in the second half of the season.

Asked if Atletico are



too far adrift, Simeone said: "What worries me is winning games and then everything will look different."

But familiar failings in attack proved their undoing at la Ceramica, where Villarreal, who climb to 12th, were fully deserving of their point and could easily have

snatched a victory too.

"It's normal that when you create so many chances without scoring, the players get anxious," said Simeone.

"We have to stay calm."

Atletico came into the game with 25 points from their first 15 league games, their lowest tally

at that stage since Simeone took charge in 2011.

Their remarkable title triumph three years later, not to mention two Champions League finals, means Simeone is still held in high-esteem but after an expensive summer, questions are being asked about the club's direction of travel.

Simeone has said this is a transition season for the team but there will be no excuses if they fail to make the last 16 of the Champions League on Wednesday. Only a win at home to Lokomotiv Moscow will guarantee their qualification.

Spain coach Luis Enrique was among those in the crowd treated to a frantic opening 20 minutes that offered chances for both sides as Villarreal's Samuel Chukwueze saw an early shot fly over and Gerard Moreno headed wide.

Joao Felix, signed for a record 126 million euros from Benfica last summer, looked Atletico's most likely source of a goal and he hit the post after a driving run

through midfield before scooping high when he should have done better.

Villarreal were far from over-awed though and almost punished Renan Lodi for giving the ball away cheaply in midfield, only for Chukwueze again to blaze over.

Felix was at the heart of everything for Atletico going forward in the second half as he cut inside from the left but saw his shot palmed away and then then pulled back for Saul, who failed to finish.

Yet the best chance fell to Lodi with 10 minutes left as Felix picked him out with a cross to the back post. The ball bounced in front of Lodi but he could only cushion the ball high and over the crossbar.

Sam Kerr the best player in the world? Tell us something we don't know

SAMANTHA LEWIS
theconversation.com

Across all the years I've watched Sam Kerr play football, there's one moment that stands out as a true illustration of her character, as an example of why she's been voted The Guardian's Best Female Footballer of 2019.

It's not a goal, or a back-flip celebration, or a gesture of kindness towards a fan. It's a moment of failure. One of the biggest in her career, perhaps, and one that feels more significant in hindsight.

In July, at the Allianz Riviera stadium in Nice, Australia were knocked out of the World Cup by Norway. Kerr, whose name had become synonymous with goal scoring in the months leading into the tournament, had missed the Matildas' first penalty. Her teammates soon followed, their shootout plan collapsing like a sandcastle whose foundations had crumbled and slid away beneath them.

The moment I remember, though, came fifteen minutes later. The stadium had largely emptied except for a few hundred Australia fans who'd gathered near the sideline to applaud their players, some of whom were farewelling their World Cup journeys for the last time.

But Kerr didn't join them. She sat alone out in the middle of the pitch, her knees pulled up to her chest, her head hidden from view. She was the shape of defeat: the hunched, exhausted shoulders of someone who had been carrying something heavy for years, who'd done all she could but realised it still wasn't enough.

That moment flooded back to me when Chelsea FC announced they'd signed Kerr on

a two-and-a-half-year deal, likely making her the most expensive female footballer ever. And that announcement came while this failure was still fresh in our memories, when the eyes of the world were trained upon her and she'd fallen short, both of their expectations and of her own.

Sam Kerr has been The Sam Kerr of her respective teams for years. Sky Blue FC, Perth Glory, Chicago Red Stars, the Matildas — these teams have largely revolved around what the striker has offered them. Australian and American fans who've watched Kerr set goal-scoring records only to break them again the following season know that she has stood head-and-shoulders above most of her colleagues. But she's had little to show for it by way of team success. Two championship finals without a trophy was her final contribution to the W-League and the NWSL before setting off for English shores.

It's this remarkable rise that has resulted in years' worth of backlash from fans and players alike when Kerr has been snubbed by international football's top gongs. Her omission from global football's most coveted awards has always felt like a glitch, a flaw in the voting system itself; a consequence, perhaps, of European and World Cup myopia. To the Australian and American audiences who have watched her since her meteoric rise began in 2016, Kerr has always been destined for greatness, the kind of player about whom clichés are written. She's the big fish in the small pond, if that pond also included habitual World Cup winners and Fifa Player of the Year recipients.

Batters did their job, but bowlers lacked discipline and execution: Pollard

HYDERABAD, DEC 7 (PTI): West Indies captain Kieron Pollard lauded his batsmen for putting up a good show but came down hard on the bowlers for failing to defend 200-plus score against India in the first T20 International of the three-match series here.

West Indies posted a challenging 207 for 5 but Virat Kohli stamped his authority with a career-best 94 not out as India pulled off their highest successful run chase in a T20 International, overhauling the target in 18.4 overs.

India, thus, took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

"I think we batted pretty well. We scored above 200 runs which more often than not you take that. But discipline in bowling and execution let us down tonight," Pollard said at the post-match press conference on Friday night.

"We gave 23 extras, 14 or 15 of those wide deliveries, so when you look at that, those were extra balls and extra



overs. When you give a class team like India these many extra deliveries, you are destined for trouble.

"No balls are something we stress on in terms of non-negotiable and we bowled a couple of them tonight. It's something we need to look on."

However, instead of dwelling on the negatives, Pollard preferred to look at the positives that came out of the match.

"You can find negatives out of every situation but life is about positivity, life is about going forward and looking to improve. I must commend the batters the way they went out and executed," he said.

"I don't think dew played much of a part. Obviously, it was a good batting track. That's what the fans want to see, they want runs, they want sixes and they got that. It's just a matter of execution. But it's a long

series and it's a matter of looking at the positives and improve our game.

"(Shimron) Hetmyer getting back into runs, Brandon King scoring some runs, so it's exciting times for us. You won't get everything right overnight but it is a work in progress and I am a pretty contended captain."

For the first time, the third umpire has been entrusted with the responsibility of calling front foot no balls by the

ICC in the ongoing T20 series and subsequent ODIs between India and the West Indies on a trial basis.

And the third umpire did intervene on three occasions during the first T20 here with all the decisions going against the West Indies.

"It is what it is, some things you can't control. I can't control what they do or what rules they bring into cricket. So to me that's not a bother and I am not going to fuss

about fight over that," the West Indies captain said about the ICC's new rule.

"We need to control what's in our hands and that's playing cricket. We need to keep our foot behind the line, if we do that the umpire upstairs won't come into play."

On way to his unbeaten 94, Kohli hit six fours and as many sixes from the 50 balls that he faced. After hitting Kesrick Williams for a six in the 16th over, a fired up Indian captain also used his bat as an imaginary notebook to "tick" the bowler's name off.

Asked about Kohli's gesture, Pollard said: "He is an animated character, a great batsman and he continues to show the world that he is a world class batsman."

"His theatrics or whatever, it comes as part and parcel of the game. Sometimes you have to be like that to pump yourself to score runs and so I am fine with it."

The second game will be played in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday.

Mexico, US, Canada trade talks continue in Washington



WASHINGTON, DEC 7

(AP): Mexico's top trade negotiator wrapped up an 11-hour meeting with his US counterpart Friday night, saying they had not finalized a new trade agreement for Mexico, United States and Canada. "We are working on all the issues. It is not easy, but we are working well, Jesus Seade told reporters as he left the office of U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer.

He said they might meet again Saturday. Canadian Deputy

Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland participated in the talks, as well as U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in an indirect way, Seade said.

The United States, Mexico and Canada agreed last year to replace the 25-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement with the new U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

It needs approval by legislators in each country, and only Mexico's Congress has ratified the deal so far.

Australia braces for heatwave as more than 100 fires burn



Out of control bushfires forced residents in eastern Australia to flee their homes on Saturday, as other parts of the country braced for a heatwave due next week.

Bushfires are common in the country but scientists say this year's season has come earlier and with more intensi-

ty due to a prolonged drought and climatic conditions fuelled by global warming.

Scorching temperatures have tipped above 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) close to where a fire was burning on the outskirts of Brisbane in Queensland state, with residents in

three suburbs told to "leave immediately".

"Conditions are now very dangerous and fire-

fighters may soon be unable to prevent the fire advancing," the Queensland Fire Authorities warned. "The fire may pose a threat to all lives directly in its path."

A shipping container full of fireworks exploded as the fire raged, authorities said. There were no immediate reports of injuries from the explosion.

More than 100 fires were burning across Australia's east Saturday, including a "mega fire" burning north of Sydney.

After combining with other bushfires Friday the huge blaze is now under control but continued to burn across 250,000 hectares within an hour's drive of Australia's largest city. Sydney has been engulfed in toxic smoke for weeks and occasionally sprinkled with snow-like embers.

The pilot of a helicopter supporting the fire efforts was lucky to escape

with just minor injuries after crashing about 200 kilometres north of the city Saturday.

Easing conditions overnight provided brief respite in New South Wales state and allowed for controlled burning to prevent future damage during the anticipated heatwave.

But firefighters remained on high alert as blustery winds threatened to fan unpredictable flames.

Authorities Saturday were bracing for more dire conditions next week when temperatures in parts of the state are expected to tip over 40 degrees Celsius.

"So a lot of work ahead over the coming days, particularly in anticipation of what is expected to be another

heatwave coming into Tuesday," state fire service commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons told national broadcaster ABC.

A drought has left much of eastern Australia tinder-dry and spot fires have raged every day for the past three months.

More than 600 homes have been destroyed and six people have died since the crisis began in September.

That is many fewer than Australia's deadliest recent fire season in 2009 when almost 200 people died, but 2019's toll so far belies the scale of devastation.

An estimated two million hectares have burned -- the size of some small countries -- across a region spanning hundreds of kilometres (miles).

No let-up in French strikes with fresh turmoil awaited

PARIS, DEC 7 (AFP): France was on Saturday expecting its most serious nationwide strike in years to paralyse the country over the week-end, with unions warning the turmoil would last well into next week.

The challenge thrown to President Emmanuel Macron over his plans for radical pension reform has seen hundreds of thousands take to the streets and key transport services brought to a standstill.

The strikes, which began on Thursday, have recalled the winter of 1995, when three weeks of huge stoppages forced a social policy U-turn by the then-government.

Unions have vowed a second series of mass demonstrations nationwide on Tuesday after big rallies on Thursday and there is expected to be little easing of the transport freezes over the coming days.

Macron was widely believed to have ridden out the challenge posed by the "yellow vests" whose weekly Saturday protests against inequality in France have shaken the government over the last year.

But the yellow vests have also sought to utilise the momentum of the strike movement and



are expected to hold protests across France this Saturday.

With Macron seeking for now to rise above the fray, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe insisted that the government would not abandon the plan even if it was prepared to bring it in more gradually.

He said the government would work with trade unions to introduce a single points-based pension scheme that would require the French to "work a bit longer" and replace dozens of more advantageous plans currently enjoyed by public-sector workers.

But the premier emphasised that the changes, which he said would be unveiled on Wednesday, were going to be introduced "progressively, without harshness".

The SNCF rail operator has warned that disruption at the weekend will be at the same level as the last

two days with just 10-15 percent of high-speed and regional trains running.

The Paris metro will remain severely disrupted with nine lines entirely shut, five only partially and just the driverless 1 and 14 lines working normally.

Many cancellations are also expected on the international Eurostar and Thalys services.

Air travel, which has been less impacted by the strikes, is expected to return closer to normal with air traffic restrictions now dropped by civil aviation authorities.

The walkout is the latest test of Macron's mettle after months of protests from teachers, hospital workers, police and firefighters, capping a year of social unrest triggered by the yellow vest movement.

Unions say Macron's proposal for a single pension system would force millions of people in both the public and pri-

vate sectors to work well beyond the official retirement age of 62.

At least 800,000 took part in rallies around the country on Thursday, according to the interior ministry -- one of the biggest demonstrations of union strength in nearly a decade.

Another day of strikes and rallies has been called for Tuesday, a day after union leaders are to meet again with government officials over the pension reform.

While most of the rallies Thursday were peaceful, police fired tear gas to disperse dozens of black-clad protesters smashing windows and throwing stones during the Paris march, with one construction trailer set on fire.

Several dozen people were arrested, and three journalists were injured after reportedly being hit by tear gas or stun grenades, including a Turkish journalist who was struck in the face.

Trump calls on World Bank to stop lending to China



WASHINGTON, DEC 7

(AFP): US President Donald Trump lashed out at the World Bank on Friday, blaming the international financial institution for lending money to China.

"Why is the World Bank loaning money to China? Can this be possible? China has plenty of money, and if they don't, they create it. STOP!" Trump wrote on Twitter.

The president was reiterating a position long held by his administration, including David Malpass when he was a

Treasury Department official prior to his election as the current head of the World Bank.

Trump's message on the World Bank was also echoed by his treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, who told a House of Representatives committee on Thursday that the United States "has objected" to the institution's multi-year programme of loans and projects in China.

That programme was nonetheless adopted on Thursday. It plans to reduce its lending to China.

The programme "reflects the evolution of our relationship with China," Martin Raiser, World Bank Country Director for China, said on Thursday. "Our engagement will be increasingly selective."

But the reduction is not enough for Washington, which argues that the world's second-largest economy is rich enough to finance itself and not depend on loans from the World Bank, which is supposed to bring financial resources to poor countries.

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Elon Musk cleared of defamation over 'pedo guy' tweet

LOS ANGELES, DEC 7

(AFP): Tesla co-founder Elon Musk has been cleared of defamation by a jury in Los Angeles over a tweet in which he labeled a British caver "pedo guy." The jury deliberated less than an hour before ruling in favor of Musk and clearing him of any liability in the high-profile case that pitted him against Vernon Unsworth.

Unsworth had sought USD 190 million in damages from the tech billionaire, arguing that his reputation had been damaged by the tweet.

Musk hugged his lawyer on hearing the verdict, telling reporters afterwards on Friday: "My faith in humanity has been restored."

Unsworth's attorney, Lin Wood, had told jurors in closing arguments that the USD 190 million he was seeking for his client would amount to "a hard slap on the wrist" for Musk and would prevent him "from ever planting a nuclear bomb in the life of another individual."

Describing the 48-year-old entrepreneur as a "billionaire



bully," Wood said Unsworth was a man of modest means whose life had been upended by the much-publicized row.

Musk's outburst against Unsworth followed an interview in which the 64-year-old caver dismissed Musk's offer of a mini-submarine to rescue young soccer players trapped in a cave in Thailand in July 2018.

Unsworth at the time said Musk's offer was nothing but a PR stunt -- a claim he maintained during the trial -- and had suggested he "stick his submarine where it hurts."

In court testimony, Musk said the "pedo guy"

tweet he shared with his 22 million followers was an off-the-cuff insult and did not mean he was accusing Unsworth -- a financial consultant who splits his time between Britain and Thailand -- of being a pedophile.

He apologized on Twitter for his outburst and again during his testimony.

He insisted during questioning that he was simply reacting to Unsworth's "unprovoked" comments and claimed that "pedo guy" was a term widely used in South Africa, where he grew up.

Musk's attorney Alex Spiro told jurors in his closing argument Friday

that the case boils down to "an argument between two people," and argued that Unsworth was trying to profit from the row.

"This was just an insult," Spiro said. "Plaintiff is taking one of those insults and putting it in the spotlight." The attorney insisted that it was Unsworth who picked a fight and his client had simply pushed back with a tweet he later regretted.

"Elon Musk doesn't like that tweet, shareholders don't like the tweet, Elon Musk's mom doesn't like the tweet," Spiro said while underlining that nowhere was the word pedophile mentioned specifically.

Protesters clash with police as Chile unrest enters 50th day

Protesters clashed with police as thousands took to the streets of Chile's capital Friday for a demonstration that marked 50 days since the outbreak of the country's worst civil unrest in decades.

Furious Chileans have for weeks been protesting social and economic inequality, and against an entrenched political elite that comes from a small number of the wealthiest families in the country, among other issues.

The crisis is the worst in three decades of Chilean democracy and has led to 26 deaths and more than 12,000 injuries, according to the Organization of American States, with another 20,600 people detained.

As with every Friday since protests began on October 18, thousands gathered at Plaza Italia in the center of Santiago to wave flags, sing and dance in a show of opposition President Sebastian Pinera's conservative government.

Protesters held up a huge Chilean flag with

a closed eye, a symbol of the 300 people who have suffered optical injuries during confrontations with police.

Some demonstrators armed with stones and Molotov cocktails clashed with police, who scattered them with tear gas and water cannon.

Officers erected

barricades around the square later in the evening.

Chile's unrest began with a demonstration against a price hike on metro tickets in Santiago, which spiraled into violent protests across the country.

Lawmakers in Chile's National Congress last month

agreed to hold a referendum on updating the country's constitution, in force since 1980 and enacted by the former military junta of Augusto Pinochet.

Protesters have demanded the charter be changed to establish the state's responsibility to provide education and healthcare.

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OMG! The Bombshell star, Margot Robbie looks surprised during the panel for Birds of Prey at CCXP19 in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Tom Holland Was Not Allowed to Take Photos With Other Avengers at D23 Because of Spider-Man

This month will see the release of *Spies in Disguise*, the new animated feature that is set to star Tom Holland, Will Smith, and Karen Gillan. This week, Holland stopped by Jimmy Kimmel Live to promote the movie and talk about the recent drama between Sony and Marvel over *Spider-Man*. After a month of thinking Holland wouldn't be allowed back in the MCU, the two companies finally reached an agreement back in October. During the interview, Holland revealed that a drunken phone call with Disney CEO Bob Iger was part of the reason they were able to reach a deal. Holland said he gave an emotional plea for the companies to work things out, especially after an upsetting time at D23 Expo. Apparently, Holland wasn't allowed to pose for photos with his Marvel co-stars at the convention.

"We were at D23, which is the big Disney convention and the news had come out and I was obviously devastated," Holland explained. "I was really upset, and my mom and all my friends were there taking Marvel pictures and I was like (frowns) not allowed to be in them and it was awful."

"It was not the best day," he added.

Thankfully, Sony and Disney worked things out and not only will *Spider-Man 3* still be a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but Holland is also expected to show up in another MCU movie down the line.

Currently, Holland is working on *Cherry*, a new film from *Avengers: Endgame* directors, Joe and Anthony Russo. The film is being adapted from the book of the same name and



follows "an Army medic suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder" who "becomes a serial bank robber after an addiction to drugs puts him in debt."

Spies in Disguise hits theaters on Christmas Day, *Cherry* is expected to be released sometime in 2020, and *Spider-Man 3* will hit theaters on July 16, 2021. Other upcoming Marvel Studios projects include *Black Widow* on May 1, 2020, *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* in Fall 2020, *The Eternals* on November 6, 2020, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* on February 12, 2021, *WandaVision* in Spring 2021, *Loki* in Spring 2021, *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* on May 7, 2021, *What If...?* in Summer 2021, *Hawkeye* in Fall 2021, *Thor: Love and Thunder* on November 5, 2021, and *Black Panther 2* on May 6, 2022. Marvel Studios Disney+ series without release dates include *Ms. Marvel*, *Moon Knight*, and *She-Hulk*.

'Aladdin' spin-off in works at Disney Plus

Los Angeles, Dec 7 (PTI): Disney is moving ahead with an "Aladdin" spin-off, which will centre on actor Billy Magnussen's character Prince Anders.

According to Variety, the studio is actively developing the project for its recently launched streaming service, Disney+. Magnussen will reprise the role of the haughty Prince Anders, who was one of Princess Jasmine's suitors in the 2019 film. The studio has roped in Jordan Dunn and Michael Kvamme to pen the script the project. The spin-off will be produced by Dan Lin and Jonathan through their banner Rideback company. Ryan Halprin will serve as executive producer.

"Aladdin" featured Mena Massoud as Aladdin, Will Smith as the Genie, Naomi Scott as Jasmine and Marwan Kenzari as Jafar. The film, directed by Guy Ritchie, made over USD 1 billion at the global box office upon its release in May.

Cinema is cinema: George Miller on Marvel-Scorsese debate

LOS ANGELES, DEC 7 (PTI):

Filmmaker George Miller is the latest Hollywood veteran to weigh in on Martin Scorsese's criticism of Marvel movies, saying cinema as a broad field has room for every kind of film.

In an interview with *Deadline*, the "Mad Max: Fury Road" helmer defended the existence of superhero and franchise cinema.

"I watch all of them. To be honest, in terms of this debate, cinema is cinema and it's a very broad church. The test, ultimately, is what it means to the audience.

"There's a great quote I saw that applies to all we do. It was from the Swahili storytellers. Each time they finished a story they would say, The story has been told. If it was bad, it was my fault because I am the storyteller. And if it was good, it belongs to everybody," Miller said.

He said it is a "mistake" and "a kind of hubris" to dismiss a blockbuster film as "clever marketing".

"There's more happening there, and it's our obligation as storytellers to really try and understand it. To me, it's all cinema. I don't think you can ghettoise it and say, oh this is cinema or that is cinema. It applies to all the arts, to literature, the performing arts, painting and music, in all its form.

"It's such a broad spectrum, a wide range and to say that anyone is more significant or more important than the other, is missing the



point. It's one big mosaic and each bit of work fits into it," Miller added.

Scorsese had stirred up a debate in October by branding superhero films as "theme park experience" and "not cinema" while promoting "The Irishman", which started streaming on Netflix from November 28.

He later elaborated on his comment in a New York Times op-ed, saying he was not questioning the talent of the people behind superhero films but the absence of "revelation, mystery or genuine emotional danger" in the movies.

The director had to turn to Netflix as he was not able to raise funds through the Hollywood studio system for "The Irishman" despite the presence of Robert De Niro, Al Pacino and Joe Pesci.

Committed to spread Bhojpuri around the world: Manoj Tiwari

GURDIP SINGH

SINGAPORE, DEC 7 (PTI): BJP MP and actor Manoj Tiwari says the status of Bhojpuri culture is being raised globally and the government is committed towards promoting the language.

Speaking at the International Bhojpuri Film Awards here on Friday, Tiwari noted that the Bhojpuri language is spoken by some 250 million people in India and a significant number of Indian diaspora residing in 12 countries.

"We feel that people who have moved abroad should stay connected with their roots and it is one of our aspirations to reach out to them. We are committed to spread this regional language worldwide," the actor said.

"Bhojpuri is spoken in 12 countries, including Fiji, Guyana and Trinidad, where our people have migrated some 200 years ago.

Aubrey Plaza to once again host Spirit Awards

LOS ANGELES, DEC 6 (PTI):

Actor Aubrey Plaza is set to return as the host for Film Independent Spirit Awards.

The announcement was made by Film Independent in a statement posted on its official website.

"Like all great independent film performances, this one deserves a sequel. The people have spoken. Bow down to your host," Plaza, who previously emceed the 2019 ceremony, said.

The awards seeks to honour the best of independent cinema, which otherwise never gets its due at other ceremonies.

HBO hands out series order to drama about 1980's LA Lakers

LOS ANGELES, DEC 7 (PTI):

HBO has given a series order to its upcoming drama about the 1980s Los Angeles Lakers basketball team. The yet-untitled project hails from Adam McKay, the critically-acclaimed director of movies such as "Vice" and "The Big Short", according to The Hollywood Reporter.

The hour-long drama will chronicle the professional and personal lives of the 1980s-era Lakers.

It is based based on Jeff Pearlman's non-fiction book "Showtime: Magic, Kareem, Riley, and the Los Angeles Lakers Dynasty of the 1980s". Max Borenstein has penned the

script. McKay has directed and executive produced the pilot episode of the series. It will feature Jason Clarke as Laker legend Jerry West, the team's general manager for much of the '80s; John C. Reilly as team owner Jerry Buss; Quincy Isaiah as Earvin "Magic" Johnson; and former UC-Berkeley basketball player Solomon Hughes as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Kevin Messick, Borenstein and Jim Hecht, who co-wrote the story, will also executive produce the show alongside Jason Shuman and Scott Stephens. Rodney Barnes is co-executive producer.

Aries:

If things are not going the way you expected, then it is best to retreat for a while and return with a fresh perspective. This will help you understand their side of the story and process your own emotions. Take this as a wonderful opportunity to get to know yourself better, Aries. Finding peace within is the key to attracting somebody who will help raise your vibrations even higher. In some cases, your time apart could bring your attention to the cracks. Maybe you aren't as compatible after all.

Taurus:

In his 1750 book, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one's self." Your thoughts exactly, Taurus. Today, you're being called to traverse inwards; to get in touch with the Universe within, which in turn will connect you with the Universe without. This is the secret to navigating your life's journey in a better, more evolved manner.

Gemini:

Often, people use their own hurt as an excuse to hurt other people in the hope that they may find healing. Be mindful of where you are operating from, Gemini. Are your words or actions piercing a sword through someone's heart? It does not matter who is at fault, hurting another, especially

someone you value, will just create more pain for your own self. Today, you're being asked to choose love, kindness and compassion. Tap into your inner Buddha and be the bigger person.

Tip: Treat yourself with kindness and compassion.

Cancer:

The truth is, they want the same things as you. But they may not be in a space to offer the kind of commitment you're looking for. Don't give up on what you have just yet—not without having a conversation first. Be direct about what you desire and ask them where they are at. Truth, honesty and integrity will lay the foundation for a solid relationship.

Tip: Have an open and honest conversation about your desires.

Leo:

Word for the day: apricity, meaning the warmth of the sun on a cold winter day. Such a pity to be indoors, Leo! Take your laptop and work outside. Even better, curate a picnic basket with all the things you love and get your soul crew together. Ditto for coupled lions who are looking for date ideas. There is something about rolling in freshly cut grass that promises to rekindle your inner fire.

Tip: An outdoor picnic would be the perfect way to spend the afternoon.

Virgo:

The thing about emotional baggage is that it sel-

dom makes for a pretty accessory. See how and where you need to let go, Virgo. A simple cleansing and purging ritual would be to write them a letter—an open and honest one. You don't have to send it to them if you don't want to (I suggest you don't). Once you've poured your heart, offer your words to the sacred fire with the intention of freeing yourself. Finally,

Libra:

The truth is, they want the same things as you. But they're not ready to go from 0 to 10 immediately—and that can only be a good thing. This week, focus on getting to know them better. Focus on building a connection outside of the bedroom. For starters, ask them about their Saturday/Sunday morning rituals and see how you can be a part of it. Alternatively, you can ask them to join yours. A run in the park followed by a scrumptious breakfast could be the perfect way to get your feel-good hormones flowing.

Scorpio:

A John Lennon classic to describe where you are in your soulmate journey: "Love is like a precious plant. You can't just accept it and leave it in the cupboard or think it's going to get on by itself. You've got to keep watering it. You've got to really look after it and nurture it." Scorpio, you're learning the importance of patience and compromise. Things

may or may not be looking picture perfect at the moment, but you have a sneaking suspicion they will be. This chapter of your life also calls for a greater degree of acceptance. Let them know they are valued and appreciated for who they are, and not just for who they were or who they will be.

Sagittarius:

Cosmic truth: you just have to keep focusing on what you are manifesting and leave the 'how' and the 'why' to the Universe. Sagittarius, don't let the energy of self-doubt come in the way of the blessing you are inviting into your life. Ditto for the limitations that convince you you are not deserving of love. Everything will turn out better than you can imagine in due course of time. For now, breathe easy and focus on grounding your energy.

Tip: You deserve the happily-ever-after you have been dreaming about.

Capricorn:

Kun fayakun means 'be, and it is'. Let this beautiful Arabic phrase remind you of your power to create the life and the love you want for yourself. Continue to act from a space of infinite possibilities rather than limitations. Know that everything you desire and deserve—including the abundance you are working towards—will come to you in due course of time. Leave the smaller details of how it will come about to the Universe, and continue to follow

the cosmic cues.

Tip: We live in a world of infinite possibilities.

Aquarius:

"There is a passion inside you, a unique talent that gives meaning to your days and drives you to share the best of yourself until the very end. If you don't know what your ikigai is yet, as Viktor Frankl says, "your mission is to discover it." Here's some new-age wisdom (from the bestseller, *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*) for you to consider, Aquarius. Your journey right now involves awakening to the many gifts you have hidden inside you, and to actively seek avenues that allow you to share them. Growth and expansion will be major themes for you in the coming months. The real question is: do you dare?

Tip: Awaken to your sacred purpose.

Pisces:

"I guess sometimes the greatest memories are made in the most unlikely of places, further proof that spontaneity is more rewarding than a meticulously planned life," wrote J.A. Redmerski. How do you want the rest of your life to look like, Pisces? Do you want to play by the rules and stick to the tried and tested? The Universe wants you to shake things up a little, especially when it comes to your personal life. Surprise yourself by being spontaneous.