



# SummitTIMES

# SKM accuses Minister GM Gurung of influencing postal ballot voters

*Submits petition to ECI demanding enquiry and FIR*

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 20 APR:** Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's complaints committee has submitted a petition to the Chief Election Commissioner of India and members of the Election Commission of India, New Delhi, with a request for an enquiry into Sikkim's postal ballot voters in New Delhi being influenced into voting for the ruling party by Minister GM Gurung. The party has also requested for an FIR to be registered in the matter.

SKM has accused Mr Gurung and a DSP rank officer of the 3rd Battalion of Indian Reserve

Battalion, Sikkim, posted in New Delhi of trying to bribe postal ballot voters and attempting to supply/ receive postal ballots.

The party has submitted the petition through the Chief Electoral Officer of the State Election Commission, Sikkim with copies to the Commissioner of Police, Delhi Police Headquarter and Director General of Police, Sikkim for enquiry and registration of FIR.

The petition was submitted by advocate Raghendra Kumar on behalf of members of SKM complaints committee.

The move comes in the wake of a video surfacing on social media in which Mr Gurung is seen being heckled and accused of attempting to bribe IRBn personnel for their postal ballot votes. The video is supposedly shot by an IRBn personnel who can be seen levelling these allegations against the Minister.

Meanwhile, Mr Gurung, on his Facebook

page has posted a screenshot of numerous calls he received from "IRB Delhi" which was why he had gone to meet them. The Minister is reportedly in Delhi for medical treatment.

Meanwhile, in the petition, SKM has alleged that votes cast through postal ballots have been completely compromised by SDF candidates in conspiracy with officers and employees with vested interests.

The party has also expressed dissatisfaction with the CEO Sikkim for only issuing an advisory on 18 April warning people against attempting to influence postal ballot voters. The advisory came after SKM submitted a representation on 16 Apr on illegal receipt of postal ballots by Police Inspectors and demanding action against them, the party has said.

SKM has said that it has not received any communication regarding any FIR or notice being issued or an enquiry

being initiated against officers named in the representation.

The party has further requested the Election Commission to "direct these personnel to be removed from their current places of posting as soon as possible and place them under attachment until the process of election is over and that they be not assigned any duty related to Election further."

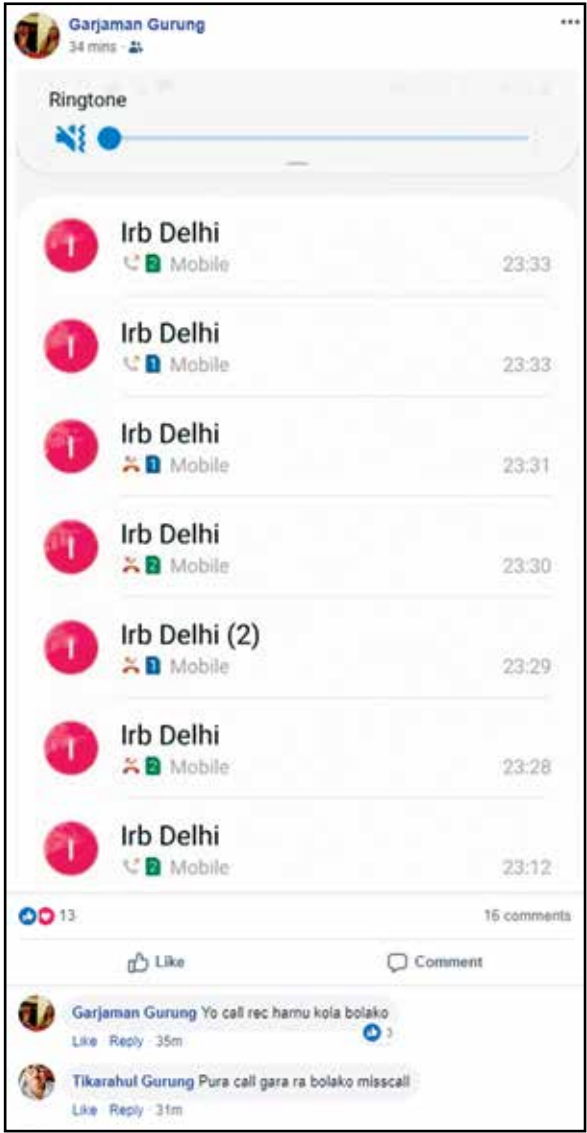
The petition also requests for the provision of a consolidated statement of total number of postal ballots issued [constituency-wise in every district till date and time in that regard] to the employees and other persons defined under Rule 17 of the Rules 1961, consolidated statement of all postal ballots received [constituency wise in every district till the date and time fixed in that regard] in the facilitation centre in all districts, provide the daily data of postal ballots received




by 3 PM of the day for each day constituency wise in every district till the date and time fixed in that regard and to provide the daily date of the postal ballots submitted in the Strong Room in the special trunks provided for the same for each day constituency-wise in every district.

The petition has also requested the ECI to di-

rect the CEO, Sikkim, as well as the Returning Officer, South District to get the FIR registered in this matter and for the early intervention in the matter and further requested DGP, Delhi and DGP, Sikkim to initiate an investigation on their own and take investigation to its logical conclusion and to take other action that may be desired under the law in that regard.



## Vice Chief of Army staff visits Trishakti corps and forward areas of Sikkim



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 20 APR:** Vice Chief of Army staff, Lt Gen, Devraj Anbu, visited Trishakti Corps and forward areas of Sikkim from 17 Apr to 18 Apr, 2019. On arrival at Sukna, Lt Gen Anbu was briefed by Lt Gen, CP Mohanty, GOC Trishakti Corps on the operational preparedness and prevailing situation on the borders, a press re-

lease informs. Thereafter, Lt Gen Anbu proceeded to East Sikkim to visit key forward posts, where he interacted with the troops and complimented them for their professionalism, commitment and dedication for maintaining round-the-clock vigil in sensitive border areas and upholding the sovereignty of the nation.

## Govt extends deadline for GST sales return to 23 Apr

**NEW DELHI, APR 20 (PTI):** The government has extended the last date for filing summary sales return, GSTR-3B, for March month by three days until April 23.

"Due date for filing GSTR-3B for the tax period March 2019 has been extended to April 23, 2019," a ticker on GST portal [gst.gov.in](http://gst.gov.in) said.

The last date for filing

summary sales return and payment of taxes for March is April 20, 2019.

AMRG & Associates Partner Rajat Mohan said, Glitches in GSTN is leading to frequent extensions in the filing of tax returns. Tax filers also need to improve the habit of filing at the last date, leading to burden on the servers resulting in the collapse of the same."

## Jet Airways employees seek President's intervention for salary dues, emergency funds to airline

New Delhi, Apr 20 (PTI): Employees of Jet Airways have written to President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking their intervention to recover outstanding dues as well as to expedite the process of emergency funds for the airline, which has shuttered its operations temporarily. Cash-starved Jet Airways, which has around 23,000 employees, has delayed payment of salaries to the employees, including pilots.

Amid uncertainty over the future course of the carrier, two employees' unions have now written to the President and the Prime Minister. In separate but similarly-worded letters this week, the Society for Welfare of Indian Pilots (SWIP) and Jet Aircraft Maintenance Engineers Welfare Association (JAMEWA) have requested help in clearing their outstanding salary dues.

"We request you to consider the situation with the urgency it

deserves and direct the management of Jet Airways (India) Ltd to expeditiously disburse all outstanding dues to affected employees. "We also urge you to expedite the process of emergency funding, as every minute and every decision is very critical in these testing times," one of the letters said.

After months of uncertainty, Jet Airways announced temporary suspension of its operations on April 17 as it failed to receive emergency funds from lenders.

The unions highlighted that a section of employees have not been paid their salaries on time for the last seven months and that the distressing situation was also brought to the notice of the Ministry of Labour and Employment in March. "The management of Jet Airways has gone back on its salary arrears payment schedule conveyed by mail dated December 7, 2018. The outstanding amount for pilots and engineers as of now is three

months salary (full salaries for the months of January, February and March), and for all other staff is one month's salary," the letter said.

Noting that employees did their best to keep up the highest standards of safety and professionalism in these trying times, the grouping said non-payment of salaries is causing extreme hardships to employees. "... even after all our efforts, we are not seeing any ray of hope and so it is our humble plea to take this matter under your guidance for an immediate action for the revival of the entire system," the letter said.

SWIP has around 1,200 members while JAMEWA represents more than 500 employees.

"We have also realised that along with our Jet Airways sinking, we are not only 23,000 employees who will be affected directly but a number of people who are running business or are associated with us some way or the other.

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## Situation in Bengal like Bihar 15 years ago: EC special observer

**KOLKATA, APR 20 (PTI):** Election Commission special observer, Ajay V Nayak Saturday said the situation in West Bengal is similar to what it was in Bihar around 15 years ago and had lead to the voters' demand for deployment of central forces in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

The people of West Bengal have lost faith in the state police and therefore their demand for deployment of central forces at all polling booths has increased, Nayak, who is the former Bihar chief electoral officer, said.

The situation in Bihar has improved and less number of central

*turn to pg02*

## Jurists differ on CJI sitting on bench to hear allegations against him

**NEW DELHI, APR 20 (PTI):** Should Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi have been part of the bench that heard the matter related to allegations of sexual harassment levelled against him by a woman. The question is being discussed by jurists even though the CJI opted out midway in the hearing and left it to the other two judges, who were nominated to be part of the bench, to take a call on passing the judicial order. While noted jurist Rakesh Dwivedi preferred to speak on record on the issue, other senior advocates agreed to express their views, but wished not to reveal their names.

Dwivedi termed as "unusual, extraordinary and unlawful" the hearing on allegations of sexual harassment against Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi by a bench headed by the CJI himself.

"My firm view is that the CJI should not have presided over the bench. It is a settled principle that no one should be a judge of his own cause," Dwivedi told PTI. He said that if the CJI wanted to clarify his position, he should have called a press conference.

"It is absolutely unusual, extraordinary and unlawful for him to sit through the proceedings and then not sign the order," he said. The senior lawyer also dealt with the issue of "indirect gagging" of media from reporting and termed the observations of the bench pertaining to allegations as "judicial terrorism".

A senior law officer said there was nothing wrong in the CJI sitting in the three-judge bench as he had already made it clear that he will not be a part of the judicial order which would be passed by the other two judges of the bench. The law officer said as judges cannot go to the press or communicate to the public, the "CJI wanted to justify himself" and "made the remarks while sitting on the bench which should be given publicity".

However, Justice Gogoi, before becoming the CJI, had along with three other senior-most judges of the Supreme Court held a controversial press conference on January 12, 2018. Justice Gogoi, along with justices J Chelameswar, Kurian Joseph and M B Lokur, all three since retired, held the press conference, virtually revolting against the then Chief Justice Dipak Misra by levelling a litany of allegations. Another senior advocate said the CJI should have kept himself away from the bench as the allegations were against him.

"Ideally, I would have respected the CJI's move if he had not involved himself in the bench," he said, adding

there was a need for taking the matter to the logical end. An attempt was made to contact some of the former chief justices of India on the issue, but they said they did not want to be drawn into the controversy.

"It is for you people to find out what is the truth and do whatever you feel like, but I have nothing to say," a former CJI said. Describing the allegations of sexual harassment against him as "unbelievable", Justice Gogoi convened an extraordinary hearing at the Supreme Court Saturday during which he said a "bigger force" was behind it and he would not stoop so low as to even deny these allegations.

In the hurriedly called hearing after the allegations cropped up, the apex court left it to the "wisdom of media" to show restraint and act responsibly so that independence of judiciary is not affected.

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## GJYM leader's vehicle vandalized in Kalimpong



### SUMMIT REPORT KALIMPONG, 20 APR:

A vehicle belonging to treasurer of Gorkha Janmukti Yuwa Morcha, Ashit Rai, was vandalized by some unknown miscreants at 11 mile,

Homes Fatak in Kalimpong today. The youth wing staged a protest at the Thana demanding immediate arrest of the culprits. They have blamed BJP and the Bimal Gurung faction for the attack.

### Jet Airways employees...

"Even the shops at the airports are facing a lull. Such a big airline going down will leave a huge vacuum behind. Passengers are already facing the brunt of it," they said.

The unions also flagged that air ticket prices are "sky rocketing".

A day after the airline suspended operations, hundreds of employees had gathered in the national capital seeking measures to revive the carrier, which has been in operation for nearly 26 years.

Domestic lenders have invited bids for selling stake in Jet Airways. On April 18, the lenders said they were "reasonably hopeful" that the bidding process for the airline would end successfully.

### Situation in Bengal...

forces at all the booths," he told newsmen in the office of the chief electoral officer here.

"I cannot understand that if people in Bihar were able to bring in a change in the atmosphere and situation there then why is this not happening in West Bengal," Nayak said in the presence of West Bengal chief electoral officer Ariz Aftab.

He said that in the third phase of polling on April 23 324 companies of central forces would be deployed to cover more than 92 per cent of the polling booths in five Lok Sabha constituencies.

Balurghat, Malda North, Malda South, Jangipur and Murshidabad parliamentary constituencies will go to the polls on April 23.

In the first phase on April 11 central forces were deployed in 51 per cent booths in Alipurduar and Cooch Behar parliamentary constituencies and 194 companies covered 80 per cent of the booths in Raiganj, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri in the second phase on April 18.

In the first phase there were reports of booth capturing, smashing of EVMs and intimidation. Similar incidents were reported in the second phase from Chopra in Darjeeling constituency and also from Islampur in Raiganj constituency. There were also reports of damage to the vehicle of sitting CPI-M MP Mohammed Salim at Raiganj.

Nayak said that no negligence was found after scrutiny of the pollings in the first phase elections and there will be no repoll in the constituencies where voting was held on the day.

The special observer, however, did not dismiss chances of repolling in some booths where polling was held in the second phase.

The EC has appointed Vivek Dubey as the special police observer for the Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal. Meanwhile, the EC has transferred Malda superintendent of police Arnab Ghosh and has brought in commanding officer of the second battalion of state armed police Ajoy Prasad in his place.

Sources said that Ghosh, who was reportedly close to the Trinamool Congress administration, was under the EC scanner.

The state BJP had a few days ago urged the EC to remove Ghosh.

### Jurists differ on...

Dwivedi, however, was critical of the judicial order. "They have not gagged the press but they have tried to make the suggestion. And, they have also preached us the issues without any inquiry. Without any inquiry, they have preached us this is scandalous and this and that.

"The observations made by the bench are not required. Media is always expected to do that. So media should be allowed to perform its duty according to its own wisdom freely and without any terrorism. There should be no judicial terrorism either on the media or on the lady," Dwivedi said.

He said that if the CJI was not part of the judicial order passed in the case then he should not have been on the bench at the first place.

"That makes no sense that you sit in the proceedings and you do not sign the order. What is this happening, why are you sitting then. That is why I am saying if you only wanted to clarify, you should have called a press conference and this whole proceeding was not required at all," the lawyer said.

Favouring an impartial inquiry into the whole saga, Dwivedi said merely because four portals have carried the story, pertaining to the allegation of an individual against the other, the independence of judiciary is not affected.

"This principle of independence of judiciary is something which pertains to separation of powers and it is vis-a-vis the Executive that the government should not interfere," he said.

The senior lawyer said that nobody denied that the woman was an employee and was "thrown out of the job" and this was a serious matter warranting an "impartial inquiry".

# SJA organises sensitization prog for media and advocates

### SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 20 APR:

Sikkim Judicial Academy [SJA] organised a sensitization programme for media persons and advocates here at its premises in Sokaythang today. The day-long programme witnessed healthy interactive sessions on different laws, acts and issues related to press and media.

The sensitization programme had Judge High Court of Sikkim, Justice Bhaskar Raj Pradhan, who is also the Judge-in-Charge of SJA, High Court of Sikkim Registrar, Karma Wangchuk Bhutia and Consulting Editor of Summit Times, Pema Wangchuk Dorjee as resource persons.



On the occasion, Justice Bhaskar Raj Pradhan stated that media plays an important role in shaping the society and stressed that independent journalism is crucial to build a better society. He also stressed

upon the need for accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, dignity, fairness, public accountability and humanity in journalism.

Talking about the growing problems of substance abuse and

child abuse in the state, he encouraged journalists to practice sensible and responsible reporting on these issues. He stressed that journalists should stay informed about their rights and issues to work effective-

ly for others.

In the technical session, Consulting Editor of Summit Times, Pema Wangchuk Dorjee spoke about the growth of journalism in the State. He also shared issues and problems faced by jour-

nalists in court reporting.

He expressed his happiness on the initiative taken by Sikkim Judicial Academy for organising this interactive session to address issues and problems facing journalists on different legal issues and court reporting.

Likewise, High Court of Sikkim Registrar, Karma Wangchuk Bhutia touched different Acts and issues related to press and media in his presentation through a 20-point questionnaire for media persons and advocates.

In the interactive session, which was chaired by Justice Bhaskar Raj Pradhan, journalists placed their queries and opinions.

## Indians rejoice as foundation stone laid for first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi

DUBAI, APR 20 (PTI):

Thousands of Indians on Saturday rejoiced and participated in the foundation stone laying ceremony of the first Hindu temple in UAE's capital Abu Dhabi. Mahant Swami Maharaj, spiritual head of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), which is constructing the temple, presided over the four-hour ceremony following which sanctified bricks were placed at the main pooja sthal (place of worship).

Indian Ambassador to UAE Navdeep Suri read out Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement on the occasion, congratulating the Gulf nation for this initiative.

On behalf of 130 crore Indians, it is my privilege to convey our greetings to my dear friend and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Suri quoted Prime Minister Modi as saying.

When complete, this temple will symbolise the universal human values and spiritual ethos that form a shared heritage of both India and the UAE, he said. Suri said that the temple embodies the timeless Vedic values of Vasudev Kutumbakam, the whole world is one family.

I am sure this temple will be a source of inspiration for the 33 lakh Indians residing in the UAE as well as of people from all other cultures, Suri quoted Prime Minister Modi as saying. The plan to build the temple in Abu Dhabi was approved by the Abu Dhabi government during Modi's first visit to the country in 2015. Priti Vaishnav, education and development expert, termed the temple as a well-deserved recognition of a thriving Indian community in the UAE.

This will also serve as a great venue for tourism from all over the world as these temples spearheaded by BAPS are amazing pieces of architecture as well as famous for their larger than life manifestation, Vaishnav said. The temple will be a cultural complex with art gallery, halls, library and gym. It will comprise of

seven towers representing the seven emirates in the UAE and come up on a 14-acre piece of land at Abu Mureikhah, close to the Abu Dhabi-Dubai highway.

The stones for the temple will be carved by temple artisans in India and assembled in the UAE. Bindu Suresh Chettur, prominent Indian lawyer, said this is a welcome development for the 3.3 million Indians living in the UAE and that it will help enhance people-to-people contact.

This country has always been a role model when it comes to giving respect to everyone. This step will further boost the relations between the two countries. Also, the BAPS temple architecture is very unique so it will add to the long list of marvellous architectures in the UAE, Chettur said.

Sajeev Purushothaman, spokesperson of the NRI cell of Bharatiya Janata Party, said, It's very significant and symbolic in this year of tolerance (being marked in the UAE). This temple is not just a place of worship, it is a place for human development and harmony to be created among communities.

Just after the Pope's visit (to the UAE), we have BAPS spiritual guru poojya mahant Maharaj Ji and being NRI, we are proud of this temple and request all NRIs to be a part of the making, he added. Sheikh Nahyan Mabararak Al Nahyan received Swami Maharaj and his delegation of Hindu priests at Al Maktoum International Airport on Thursday.

While interacting with Sheikh Nahyan, Swami Maharaj prayed for the good health and the prosperity of the rulers and people of the UAE. Swami Maharaj is the Spiritual Head of over 1,200 temples and 4,200 centers of spirituality worldwide. He guides the BAPS' social, spiritual, cultural, educational, health, disaster relief and other activities.

He is the sixth and present spiritual guru of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

## Legal Services Camp held at Kateng

NAMCHI, 20 APR (IPR):

District Legal Services Authority (South) and Taluk Legal Services Committee (South) in co-ordination with the Sikkim State Legal Services Authority organized a Legal Services Camp at Tamang Community Hall in Kateng, South Sikkim on 20 Apr, 2019.

The purpose of the program was to spread awareness about welfare legislation on various schemes and to strengthen the community's access to the schemes being implemented by the Legal Services Authority and other Departments of the Government.

The program aimed at identifying and connecting people to welfare schemes to ensure that fruits of the welfare schemes are passed to the eligible people. The program also looked upon understanding the legal needs of the people by addressing their legal problem and giving appropriate legal advice.

Today's program focused mainly on NALSA (Legal Services to the Workers in the Unorganized Sector) Scheme, 2015, NALSA (Legal Services to the Mentally ill and Mentally Disabled Persons) Scheme, 2015 and NALSA (Protection

and Enforcement of Tribal Rights), Scheme, 2015.

The program was launched by the Chairperson, DLSA (South), Jyoti Kharka in the presence of the Secretary DLSA (South), Urvashi Pradhan; Panel Advocates, Anjan Sharma and MD Tamang; Medical Officers from Namthang PHC, Dr Mingyur D Lasopa; KN Wangdi; SI, Namthang Police Outpost; DM Rasaily from Social Welfare Department (South); Basant Rai from Labour Department (South); Chedup Tamang, Panchayat President; Sarita Tamang; Anjali Tamang; and Uma Dahal,

Para-Legal Volunteers and the local gentries of Kateng, South Sikkim.

During the program, two video clips were shown to the public broadcasting the benefits of National Legal Services Authority and Sikkim State Legal Services Authority.

There were around 106 people who attended the program and 56 were the number of beneficiaries. The attendees interacted with the officers and representatives of the Departments present to address their problems and to procure appropriate advice and guidance.

## Literary Activity for senior students at Lingi Payong School

### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 APR:

Inter house literary activity titled "Comprehend and Reproduce" was organised for the students of Class IX and X at Lingi Payong School on Saturday, a press release informs.

In the activity, the students were given passage/extract, news to read, understand and reproduce in their own words. The competition was held for all three major languages viz English, Nepali and Hindi which was judged by teachers; Jyoti Gurung, Arjun Koi-



rala and YK Bhandari respectively.

Ralong House (Blue) emerged as the winner followed by Zemu house (Red), Gurudong-

mar house (Yellow) and Neytham house (Green) in second, third and fourth positions respectively.

The activity aimed at encouraging students

to develop their skills of understanding and their ability to express themselves in the best possible way, the release mentions.

## Foreign Secretary Gokhale to visit China for talks with Chinese FM

KJM VARMA

BEIJING, APR 20 (PTI):

Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale starts his two-day visit to China on Sunday during which he will hold talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi as both countries grapple with a host of issues, including Beijing's continuous attempts to block efforts to list Jaish-e-Mohammed's chief Masood Azhar as a "global terrorist".

Gokhale will be visiting China for regular consultations, the Indian Embassy here said on Saturday.

He is due to meet China's State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on April 22. His schedule here is being worked out, it said.

The visit of Gokhale, previously India's Ambassador to China before he took over as Foreign Secretary last year, is taking place amid close engagement between India and China following the February 14 Pulawama terror attack carried out by a Jaish-e-Mohammed

(JeM) terrorist in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed. Following the suicide attack, the US, the UK and France moved a proposal under the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to designate Pakistan-based Azhar as a "global terrorist". China stalled it for the fourth time by putting a technical hold on the resolution, a move India termed as disappointing.

China, while saying that the matter moved towards settlement, firmly opposed the issue to be taken up by the UNSC and instead wanted it to be resolved by the UN's 1267 committee on counter terrorism. Beijing also accused the US of attempting to scuttle the resolution of the issue by taking it to the UNSC.

China considers Pakistan as an "all-weather friend" and has given Islamabad billions of dollars in aid to support its ailing economy.

Gokhale's visit also coincides with China holding its biggest

international event the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) to showcase its trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in which the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project.

India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). While India is expected to skip the BRF meeting being held here from April 25-27, informed sources said there was no invitation from China to the leadership of India or at the Ministerial level to attend event.

Asked whether India would attend the event Indian Ambassador to China Vikram Misri told state-run Global Times last month "above all, connectivity initiatives must be pursued in a manner that respects sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity of nations. No country can participate in an initiative that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity".



## Singtam celebrates Hanuman Jayanti



**YOGEN THATAL SINGTAM, 20 APR:**

A huge rally was taken out from Thakurbari Mandir to Goshkhan dara in Singtam where hundreds of devotees and worshippers of Lord

Hanuman took part and welcomed the Hindu new year. With colour on people's faces and women in red sarees, Singtam Bazaar looked like it was celebrating Holi on Friday.

## After scrutiny, 7 left in fray for Ladakh LS seat

**JAMMU, APR 20 (PTI):** After the scrutiny of nomination papers Saturday, seven candidates were left in the fray for the Ladakh Lok Sabha constituency.

The last date for withdrawal of names is April 22 in the constituency that is going to the polls on May 6.

Besides candidates of the Congress and the BJP, five independents are also in the fray now.

According to election officials, the candidature of BJP's covering candidate Dorjay Angchuk was rejected during the scrutiny by returning officer Avny Lavasa.

While the BJP has fielded the current chief executive councillor (CEC) of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Tsering Namgyal, the Congress has given ticket to Rigzin Saplbar, a prominent Buddhist leader and a former CEC

of the Ladakh council.

The five candidates who are contesting as independents are Asgar Ali Karbalai, Sajjad Hussain, Kacho Mohammad Feroz, Tsering Namgyal and Asgar Ali.

Among the independents, Congress rebel and former MLA Asgar Ali Karbalia enjoys the backing of influential Imam Khomeni Memorial Trust, Kargil; while journalist-turned-politician Sajjad Hussain, has been supported by both the National Conference and the PDP. He also enjoys the support of influential Islamia School, Kargil.

Veteran leader Thupstan Chhewang had won the seat for the BJP in 2014 by a narrow margin of 36 votes, but resigned from the primary membership of the party in November last year, claiming that all promises made by it sounded like an "empty rhetoric".

## BJP would have fielded Godse as well: Cong on Pragya LS ticket



**MUMBAI, APR 20 (PTI):** The Maharashtra Congress Saturday lashed out at BJP for giving a Lok Sabha ticket to Malegaon blast accused Pragya Singh Thakur and claimed if Nathuram Godse, Mahatma Gandhi's assassin was alive, the ruling party would have fielded him as well.

Thakur, an accused in the case who is out on bail, is under fire for saying then Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad chief Karkare died in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack because she had cursed him for 'torturing' her when he probed the Malegaon blast as chief of the ATS.

Maharashtra Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant said, "The BJP is shamelessly supporting the candidature of a person who is accused of terrorism and anti-national activities."

"The BJP's star campaigners, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who are asking

votes on the sacrifices of soldiers, did not feel the need to apologise to the nation (post her comments)," he said.

He hit out at BJP for not removing Thakur despite the furore following her comments against Karkare, adding that it showed the BJP "supported" terrorism.

"After uproar from across the country, Thakur has apologised. The BJP is trying to save itself by saying it is her personal opinion. But the BJP cannot be absolved of its sins until Thakur is removed from the party and Modi apologises," he said.

"Help is provided to Thakur in court and almost no action against Sanatan shows the BJP's ideology. Looking at this, if Nathuram Godse was alive, the BJP would have given him candidature as well. In future, the BJP would field killers of Dr Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, MM Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh as well," Sawant claimed.

# 2 yrs on, Afrajlul killing still weighs on in Malda

**ANANYA SENGUPTA**

**SAIYDPUR (MALDA) APR 20 (PTI):** The killing of a labourer from Maldah in far-away Rajasthan almost two years ago weighs heavily on the minds of people of the district, which is heavily dependent on remittance from its male members working as construction labourers in other states, as it prepares to vote on April 23.

Mohammad Afrajlul, a labourer from Saiydpur village, was allegedly hacked and burnt to death by a man in December 2017. The attack was filmed on video, which shows the victim pleading for his life.

"The video is still there. People in the village still see it. I don't know what wrong he did, but I keep wondering was it his religion that killed him," asked Afrajlul's wife Gulbahar Bibi in her one-room house, with her youngest daughter Habiba and her grandchildren

sitting near her. Afrajlul's death stunned the district, whose extent of migration is such that the Farakka Express leaving Malda railway station every evening to ferry migrant workers to Delhi is popularly called the 'labour express'.

"There is not a family in this village, in fact the entire area, where someone or the other is not working as a labourer in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan or such places. There is nothing here -- no development, no jobs. If our children get killed over their religion, then there is no hope for us," said Mohammad Babul, whose three sons are currently in Delhi working at a construction site.

"I want my sons to be here. Whoever comes to power, should ensure that migration becomes a choice, not a necessity," he said.

For Afrajlul, who worked as a labourer for 20 years in Rajasthan, all

he had to show at the end of his life was Rs three lakh as compensation from the state government, a Rs 6000 job for his eldest daughter and a Rs 750 pension for his wife. "I have seen a lot of grief in my life, just when I thought I would get some peace, it all ended," Gulbahar said, recalling the phone call that brought her world crashing down.

Will she vote on April 23 when Malda Uttar and Malda Dakshin go to polls in the third phase of the elections? Does she expect anything from anyone this election?

"Why shouldn't I vote? It's my right. I will vote to do my bit. Even at a time when the video was viral and my family was suffering, not one leader from the BJP came to see us. In the past two years, no one from the party has come."

It is not just this village, but surrounding areas as well where the

fear of losing a loved one has made families call their sons home. "Many have come back like me. But I know I have to go back, as will the others. What will we do here? Roll bids with our sisters," asked Mohsin in nearby Babangram.

Just after the incident, locals recall migrant workers had come back in droves, many had even signed up for a one time grant of Rs 50,000 announced by the West Bengal chief minister urging them to return. However, their growing needs at home, insufficient financial security have driven them back.

"We have no hope, no expectations. Life will go on, there will be many more Afrajlul's, people will forget. These people will again come back in five years for our votes," said Babul, going back to his tea stall, "I can just pray hard everyday, that not one of them is my son."

## Mueller report shows 'no reasonable proof' of Russian meddling: Kremlin

**MOSCOW, APR 19 (AFP):** Russia on Friday once more dismissed the Mueller report, saying it failed to present clear evidence of any meddling by Moscow in the 2016 US election and called its impact on relations regrettable.

"As a whole the report as before does not present any reasonable proof at all that Russia allegedly meddled in the electoral process in the US," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists, saying it contained "no new information." Russia has consistently rejected any suggestion that it interfered in the election won by Donald Trump.

The politically explosive probe by Special Counsel Robert Mueller ruled that Trump's campaign did not criminally conspire with Russians to skew the election, and drew no conclusion on allegations of obstruction.

"We regret that documents of such quality have a direct influence on the development of US-Russian bilateral relations which are not in the best shape as it is," Peskov said.

He even suggested that US taxpayers should question why their money was spent on the lengthy probe with such a result.

"In our country, the Audit Chamber would probably take an interest in such a report: what did American taxpayers' money get spent on? But let the US taxpayers themselves ask that question," Peskov added.

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## AAP gives unconditional support to LDF in Kerala

**NEW DELHI, APR 20 (PTI):** The Aam Aadmi Party has extended unconditional support to all candidates of the Left Democratic Front in Kerala for the Lok Sabha elections, party leader Somnath Bharti said.

CPI(M) leader Nilotpal Basu thanked the AAP for the support.

"Our main aim is to remove the NDA and stop communal tension and polarisation done by them and in this direction, we are campaigning in different states. We thank the AAP for supporting us," he told reporters in a joint press conference with Bharti.

Meanwhile, the AAP

suspended its Kerala convener C R Neelakandan for allegedly announcing the party's support to the Congress in the southern state without any consultation with the party's political affairs committee.

Bharti said Neelakandan held a press conference in Kerala and said the AAP supports the candidates of the Congress in the state.

"That press conference was unauthorised and conducted without the knowledge or consultation of the Aam Aadmi Party. The AAP's political affairs committee has condemned his move and decided to suspend

Neelakandan from the primary membership of the party," he said.

AAP's New Delhi Lok Sabha candidate Brijesh Goyal hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent address at the Talkatora Stadium here, claiming that traders were extremely unhappy with Modi for not addressing their issues at the event.

Modi on Friday addressed a thanksgiving convention at the Talkatora Stadium organised by traders supporting the BJP to express their "gratitude" for various measures promised in the party manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls.

## Modi suffering from haratanka, trying to divide people on religious lines : Mamata

**PANIGHATA/BAGULA (WEST BENGAL), APR 20 (PTI):** West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee Saturday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is suffering from 'haratanka', a phobia of losing elections and is trying to win in the state by dividing the people on communal lines.

Modi is merely repeating words told to him by party cadres and is not cross checking the facts about Bengal, she said.

"He(Modi) knows that he will lose the elections and that is why his face has turned pale. He is now suffering from 'haratanka' and is uttering nonsense everyday thinking about losing in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, New Delhi, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha and others," she said at a rally held at Panighata in support of party candidate for Krishnanagar Lok Sabha constituency Mohua Moitra.

"I do not mind if BJP wins in Tripura but that will not give him (Modi) 543 seats. That is the reason he is roaming around in Bengal hoping to get votes by dividing people along Hindu-Muslim lines," Banerjee said.

"Do you know why is he (Modi) roaming in West Bengal? It's because the RSS has advised him to keep Mamata Banerjee under control. There is nobody who speaks against him other than Mamata," the combative TMC chief said.

Describing the ongoing Lok Sabha elections as a test for Modi and not for her, Banerjee said that it was not for him to question what she has done for West Bengal in the last five years. "It's my turn to ask him (Modi) about his achievements for the country during the last five years ...

And if I have not done anything for the state then the people will demand answers from me."

Keeping up her attack against the prime minister, Banerjee said "For four and half year you (Modi) have roamed around the world. You (Modi) have done nothing other than lynching the common people in the name of gau raksha."

Later addressing another gathering in Bagula in the Ranaghat Lok Sabha constituency in the same district for party candidate Rupali Biswas, widow of slain TMC MLA Satyajit Biswas, Banerjee

called Modi the "biggest liar" for accusing her of not allowing organising of Durga Pujas in the state.

"The prime minister should be given the award for being the biggest liar ... At least one lakh Durga Pujas are organised in West Bengal. People hold Lakshmi pujas, Saraswati pujas and Kali pujas in different formats in every household ... People worship as per their own will. There is a limit to speaking lies," she said. Referring to the I-T department sending notices to Durga Puja organisers in the state to furnish expenditure details incurred in festivities in 2018 as Rs 10000 had been given to them by her government, Banerjee questioned whether the BJP loved performing pujas.

Referring to Modi's claims that Banerjee had done nothing for Balurghat when she was the railway minister, Banerjee said he should stop lying. "If he can prove that I have not done anything for Balurghat as the railway minister then I will quit politics ... Tell me what has he done for West Bengal? Not a single train has been sanctioned for us," she said.



## GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM HOME DEPARTMENT GANGTOK

No: 17/Gen/Home

Dated: 17/04/2019

### NOTICE

Shri Kazi Gajmer, Driver of Home Department is absenting from his duty since 02/01/2019 without applying leave and his whereabouts are not known. He is, therefore, directed to report to Home Department within 10 days of publication of this notice failing which disciplinary action will be initiated against him. All his family members, friends and well wishers are requested to kindly convey the contain of this notice to him.

Sd/-

Under Secretary (Adm)

Home Department

R.O. No. 09/IPR/Pub/Class./19-20

Dated: 20.04.2019

### KUTSHE SHEGU

The 49 day Shegu of Lt. Meena Kumari Rai w/o Phur Shangey Sherpa who left for heavenly abode on 6 Mar, 2019 falls on 22 Apr, 2019.



All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Upper Phalidara. We also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude towards all those who extended their support during the time of bereavement.

Contact: 90833-85240, 89673-16501.

### KUTSHE SHEGU

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



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

Lachhi Tamang (wife) and family members.  
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## Adventurous Future

*Schools in Sikkim could experiment with one more subject*

One of the more interesting enterprises of the skill development programme of the State Government was the adventure course the Sports & Youth Affairs Department took to different corners of the State and then handpicked some for onwards advanced training. The products of that initiative one gets to occasionally see bobbing across the Gangtok horizon on their paragliding runs. The original initiative was interesting since even youth in places still not on the tourism map were trained in adventure sports. And it was interesting not just for the skills imparted and the potential self-employment opportunities but also for the healthy adrenaline rush that the course introduced the young to. The skill development initiative appears to be dulling, and one has not really heard of future engagements on this line, but it would be worthwhile for the Human Resource Development Department to pick up from where the Sports & Youth Affairs Department left off – seriously consider introducing adventure sports as part of the regular curriculum of schools in Sikkim.

For one, such an experiment will not only involve the already trained youth gainfully, but could also contribute more to the future generations than half-baked computer classes or poorly defined environment sciences. The youth already trained in adventure sports should be invited to form clubs which could then open memberships to schools, essentially rural schools. They can charge a nominal membership fees and the students who sign up can be taken through the ropes of adventure options every fortnight. On longer breaks and vacations, these clubs could take students on proper treks or adventure sports excursions. Sounds simple enough and all it requires is for the HRDD to allow the trained youth to enter schools. It would have been wonderful if they also could be employed, but just access should do for now.

How does this help?

To begin with, the students get to do something exciting in school for once. That's a fine achievement in itself. The more important contribution would be the boost that confidence levels can receive with adventure sports. It is now an established fact and even management courses advise adventure sports to increase the confidence levels of trainees. The other advantage would be involvement. The students, when they trek through forests or climb rock faces or white water down the Teesta (wherever hydel projects still allow the river such a rush any more) will receive an intimate introduction to what Sikkim is. They will then learn to appreciate the environment more, care for it more, become more responsible towards it. Few textbooks can deliver these enhancements; it just might be worthwhile to make adventure sports an optional activity in schools here.

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# Thailand: the baffling mathematics that helps to keep the junta in power

ENZE HAN & SIRADA KHEMANITTHATHAI  
*theconversation.com*

Thailand's March general election was the first poll since the country's military deposed the government of Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014. And there are now fears that the ruling junta will manipulate the country's complex electoral code to achieve its own desired result.

Given the significant deterioration of domestic freedoms since the Thai military staged a coup d'état in 2014 and dissolved the elected government, there were low expectations for the election which took place, after considerable delay, on March 24.

And so the fact that the opposition Pheu Thai (PT) party, affiliated with Thailand's exiled former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister Yingluck Shinawatra, who was ousted in 2014, won the most number of seats – despite losing the popular vote to the military-backed Palang Pracharat (PP) party – came as a surprise. Thailand was further shocked when an anti-military coalition of six parties led by the PT announced it would form a coalition government.

### VOTE RIGGING?

The campaign, which kicked off in December 2018, was marked by fears that the junta, led by retired general Prayut Chan-o-cha, would rig the vote to ensure it maintained control of parliament. The military-backed party, Palang Pracharat (PP), which gained a total of 118 (of 500) seats but won more national votes than the PT, also announced that it should have the right to form the government.

Now all eyes are on the official result of the election, scheduled to be announced on May 9, after the coronation of the new king Rama X Vajiralongkorn earlier in the month. There are fears that the junta will influence that result by manipulating the complex mathematics involved in allocating seats in the lower house of parliament.

The 2017 constitution set up a bicameral parliament with 250 seats in the senate, or upper house, and 500 seats in the house of representatives, or lower house. The military already controls the senate, so the national election was for the lower house where 350 constituency seats are elected through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system, and 150 are filled through a closed party list.

The FPTP part is relatively straightforward, as there are 350 electoral constituencies in Thailand, and the candidate who wins the most votes in each one takes that seat. The method by which the 150 party-list seats are allocated, however, is considerably more confusing.

### A RIDDLE

Thailand's electoral system is a type of mixed member proportional representation system but

with only one ballot. Thus, unlike other mixed member proportional representation systems, such as the one used in German Bundestag elections – where people have two ballots, one for an individual and the other for a party – the Thai system only gives people one choice.

This means that a voter can only vote for a specific party if there is a candidate from that party standing for election in the voter's constituency area. So if a party does not send a representative to a constituency area, then that party cannot get any party-list votes.

This is problematic for smaller parties, which, due to budget constraints, can stand for only a few constituency areas. In PT's case, its candidates



stood for 250 of the 350 constituency areas because these are the ones that it believed it could win. For the remaining 100 constituency areas, its original plan was to use an allied party, Thai Raksa Chart (TRC).

But this plan was foiled after the TRC was banned when it nominated a royal princess as its prime ministerial candidate. The election commission chose to disqualify her on the basis that the royal family should not be involved in politics, and then banned the party from contesting the election.

Most voters in constituencies where PT did not nominate representatives, and who would otherwise have voted for the TRC, transferred their votes to the Future Forward Party (FFP) in the election, which unexpectedly became the third-biggest party and took a large share of the party-list seats.

### THE MATHS BIT

To calculate how the 150 party-list seats are allocated requires substantial mathematical skill – which is actually the whole point. By making it complex and opaque, the ruling junta has made the system incomprehensible to most voters.

It is based on a concept of expected number of representatives (ENR), which refers to the theo-

retical number a party should get in the 500-seat lower house as a proportion of the total number of countable ballots (TNCPB) nationwide. And yes, that is as complex as it sounds.

The ENR of a party is based on three components: the total number of votes a party gets (TNVP), the total number of countable ballots (TNCPB), and the total number of seats in the lower house (500), using the formula  $ENR = TNVP \times 500 / TNCPB$ . After the ENR is calculated, whether a party gets any seats on the party-list depends on the ratio between the ENR and the actual number of constituency seats a party has already got. So, if a party's number of constituency seats exceeds the

ENR, then that party cannot get

any more party-list ones.

In PT's case, the party has already won 137 constituency seats, but its ENR is only about 111 (PT won a total of 7,920,630 votes, and the total number countable ballots is around 35.5m). Thus, only those parties whose number of constituency seats is less than the ENR would be eligible for allocation of the party-list seats – and even the final distribution of those is highly complex.

### SMOKE AND MIRRORS

But all this complexity works in the ruling junta's favour. It would be a daunting challenge for the public to understand the intricacies of how their votes were counted, which would then reduce the accountability of the leadership.

It also seems the system has succeeded in fragmenting the political party status quo in Thailand. So far, at least 16 political parties appear to have won at least one seat in the parliament, which is a bad omen of future instability.

The opposition PT has announced that it has amassed around 255 votes from seven parties to form a coalition. But even if such a coalition government is formed, how effective it will be is any one's guess.

Similarly, if the military's allies manage to form the government, it will unlikely be any more stable, largely due to the relatively low number of lower-house seats the PP has won.

More importantly, the Thai prime minister must also be nominated by both the senate and the house of representatives combined. And given the military already controls 250 seats in the senate, it seems unlikely that PT will succeed in getting its candidate through.

Chaos, it seems, awaits.

[Enze Han is Associate Professor, University of Hong Kong; Sirada Khemanitthathai is PhD Candidate, SOAS, University of London]

# One year after Nicaraguan uprising, Ortega is back in control

BENJAMIN WADDELL  
*theconversation.com*

One year ago, Nicaragua's government was on the verge of collapse.

Protests against President Daniel Ortega exploded nationwide on April 19, 2018 after the government quietly passed a tax on retirees' pension checks. Demonstrators barricaded highways and main roads, paralyzing Nicaragua's economy.

By May 2018, 70% of Nicaraguans wanted Ortega – who has grown astonishingly rich ruling Central America's largest country – to resign.

"This is not a dialogue," student activist Lesther Alemán told Ortega during a May 2018 televised negotiation with the government. "This table is to negotiate your exit, and you know it very well because the people have demanded it."

Today, President Daniel Ortega is back in control. Alemán and hundreds of other opposition leaders fled the country. And at least 50,000 Nicaraguans, including dozens of reporters, have escaped to neighboring countries.

But for a few flare-ups of protest – all quickly and violently quashed – Nicaragua's "tropical spring" has lost its momentum. What happened?

### ORTEGA'S ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM

I am an American scholar who has researched Nicaraguan politics for years. When the political chaos forced my family and me to abandon Managua in June 2018, I felt fairly certain that Ortega's days were numbered.

In a democratic society, I might have been right. Since 1985, 70 percent of all democratically elected Latin American presidents who faced similarly sustained street protests were ultimately removed from office.

Ortega has defied these odds by becoming the kind of strongman leader he rebelled against as a hero of Nicaragua's 1979 Sandinista Revolution. Using calculated repression to crush dissent and anti-imperialist rhetoric to deflect blame, Ortega has actually strengthened his grip on power.

This is Ortega's third consecutive term as president and fifth time governing Nicaragua. He first came to power in the 1980s as head of the Sandinistas' post-revolution ruling junta and, in 1985, was elected president.

In 1990 Ortega lost to Violeta Chamorro, who ushered in 16 years of conservative government in left-leaning Nicaragua. Ortega returned to office in 2007.

Since then, Ortega has systematically concentrated power in the executive branch, stacking the supreme court with party loyalists, cracking down on press freedom and, in 2014, abolishing presidential term limits.

In 2016, Ortega won his third consecutive term with over 70% of the vote and made his wife, Rosario Murillo, his vice president. But just 30% of the Nicaraguan electorate turned out that year – the first sign that Ortega's popularity was waning.

Fifteen months later, thousands of anti-government demonstrations had nearly toppled his regime.

### "THEY WANTED ME DEAD OR ALIVE"

Ortega has mobilized all the power of the Nicaraguan state – a government he built from scratch in his mold – to survive.

The regime has sent riot police and pro-government paramilitaries to beat, shoot, terrorize and arrest protesters. Some political prisoners have been released, but hundreds are still in jail. There, say dissidents, they have been tortured with waterboarding, electric shocks and sexual

assault. Many report being forced to record self-incriminating videos.

After 20-year-old Lesther Alemán confronted Ortega on national TV last May, death threats poured in, forcing him into hiding and, eventually, exile. Alemán contends that the government offered US\$50,000 dollars for his capture.

"They wanted me dead or alive," he told me recently from his new home in the United States. "That was a before and after moment. Since then, nothing has been the same."

A majority of Nicaraguans agree. According to a Cid Gallup poll conducted in January, 74% say life has worsened over the past year; 66% disapprove of the government and 54% want Nicaragua's next presidential election moved up from 2021 to this year.

Only 25% of respondents align themselves with Ortega's Sandinista party.

### AN AMERICAN SCAPEGOAT

Still, the numbers show, Ortega retains remnants of his base.

Like his Venezuelan ally Nicolas Maduro, who blames the U.S. for his country's economic and humanitarian crisis, Ortega has rallied supporters by blaming United States for the popular uprising against him.

"The United States has poisoned our work through intervention, that's where the root of the problem lies," Ortega told the Venezuelan TV channel Telesur in July.

Ortega's claims appeal to deep anti-American sentiment resulting from the United States' repeated interference in Nicaragua's political affairs. These include a U.S. military occupation from 1912 to 1933 and, in the 1980s, the Reagan administration's clandestine financing of a bloody rebellion against Ortega himself.

Many people I interviewed believed that Nicaragua's revolt reflects Trump administration plotting – not

popular outrage at a corrupt and distant government.

"Why should we trust the United States?" a longtime Sandinista party member asked me during last April's demonstrations.

### US DEVELOPMENT AID

There's no evidence of direct U.S. involvement in Nicaragua's crisis.

Since it began, the Trump administration has punished Ortega's government for curbing civil liberties by severely limiting its access to international financial markets, and sanctioned members of his administration, including his wife.

For years, the United States Agency for International Development has also invested moderately in the country to "bolster democratic governance and expand educational opportunities." Between 2015 and 2018 Nicaraguan civil society groups received \$92 million in development aid – roughly equivalent to the aid sent to neighboring Central American countries. The National Endowment for Democracy – a private nonprofit foundation with close ties to the Department of State – has spent an additional \$4.1 million to strengthen democratic institutions in Nicaragua since 2014.

U.S.-funded projects include the civics workshop that Jeancarlo López, an engineering student turned dissident, took in 2017 at the Center for Development and Democracy.

"The things we learned were the basic things you should learn in school about human rights and democracy," he said.

Despite Ortega's continued rule, exiled dissident Lesther Alemán remains hopeful that Nicaragua's opposition will triumph.

"Ortega labeled us terrorists," he said. "But the truth is hard to hide."

[the writer is Associate Professor of Sociology, Fort Lewis College]



# Tale of the Hullock Gibbons

**CK LEPCHA**  
Since I have this ‘nerdy’ habit of visiting museums of the places I visit, we visited the District Museum, Tura, Meghalaya. Located in the first floor of an office building in a spacious hall, hundreds of artefacts were all housed inside this room. There were cupboards and cabinets with glass covers so the items were visible and protected. There were traditional dresses on mannequins, model houses, hunting



implements, musical instruments, jewelry, coins and almost everything one could find in a museum. It was a rich collection of artefacts poorly displayed in one big hall. Besides the fact that it did not seem to value the importance of each item by pil-

ing them in a haphazard manner, they also did not allow photography in the museum. In a time and age, when photo uploads in social media draws more attention to the place, they were fine without; which also meant that I could not take any photographs inside the museum. But I did manage to take an interesting picture at the entrance of the museum titled, ‘the tale of the hullock gibbons’.

Legend has it that the hullock gibbons were one of the martial tribes of the Garo fold. After winning a war, they forgot to thank the gods because they were really hungry and climbed trees and started eating the fruits. The gods were not happy about their negligence and ordered them to be tree creatures henceforth. Instantaneously, they transformed into the hairy gibbons they are today. The folktale is often key to the understanding of our world around us. It gives us an idea of the social, political, religious and ecological landscape of that time. It further tells us of the interesting continuity between humans and non-humans in our environment. It takes the focus away from humans and narrates the existence of gibbons in Garo Hills. I thoroughly enjoyed this tale because only the day before we had visited the Selbagre Hullock Gibbon reserve and actually met some gibbons there. Located 40kms from Tura inside a thick forest and an emerald stream, these gibbons popularly



known as ‘Huro’ have found home in this rehabilitation center. These gibbons have probably lived in Garo hills for a long time till humans settled and started rearing them in their homes. It is reported that villagers would illegally keep these gibbons in their homes not understanding that these gibbons were the 25 most endangered primate species in the world. So the center intervenes and brings them to the rehabilitation center, takes care of them before releasing them back to the forest. The center has thus created an awareness about these primates as local youth are known to volunteer rescuing and rehabilitating these huros. Each gibbon had its own ‘cage’ home with their name tags as we got to play a bit with Shand, a young male gibbon. Shand was taken out of his cage in a blue plastic basket and fed milk as we tried to hold his hand too. He was a shy guy and grasped my fingers with his soft hand. In no time, he had climbed my shoulder and the possible fear of an ape on top of me could



not even develop. Shand was already my friend but he had to go back to his cage. This encounter was educational because our attitude towards gibbons and primates are so distant and petrifying. They belong either to the zoo or on national geographic channels, not in our neighborhoods. But the reserve was changing that outlook slowly but surely as they did their bit in preserving and conserving the environment. Another conservation activity that

caught my attention in Garo hills were the numerous fish sanctuaries we visited. Traditionally they have a fish pond/river with tons of fish belonging to a member of the community. The deal however is that person takes care of the pond but villagers are not allowed to fish nor sell these fishes except once a year. So on that special day, anyone can fish, eat, sell the fishes allowing a traditional way of conserving their fishes and their ponds. Their conservation tactics are unmatched in the littlest things in their environment and I know that Garo Hills have been nominated by the center for the UNESCO World Heritage Site as a mixed-

site category. Mixed site comprises of both natural and cultural significance and I highly recommend them for it. When I was in Garo hills, few people had mentioned that they had looked up to Khangchendzonga National Park world heritage site as their model and hoped Garo hills would be next. My time in Garo hills had convinced me that it was a living heritage site whether approved by UNESCO or not.

## EC nodal officer yet to be traced

**KRISHNAGAR (WB), APR 20 (PTI):** The Election Commission's nodal officer who has gone missing from his office here since Thursday afternoon is yet to be traced, Nadia District Magistrate Sumit Gupta said Saturday. The 30-year-old officer, Arnab Roy, was in-charge of EVMs and VVPATs for the Ranaghat parliamentary constituency.

The Nadia administration has lodged a missing complaint with the Kotwali police station at Krishnagar. Roy's wife, Anisha Jash, also lodged a missing diary with the police on Thursday night.

"We are yet to spot our officer. The search is on for him," Gupta told PTI. Gupta rubbished rumours that Roy was spotted in Asansol, his hometown, in Paschim Bardhaman district. "We have shared his photographs on social networking sites, with the police of other districts, with the media and with adjoining states. There is no news of him," he said. Asked whether the officer was suffering from any psychological problem due to work-related stress, Gupta said, "I do not have any idea about that." "But we have come to know about an earlier incident when Roy had gone missing for two days. He was a joint block development officer (BDO) then," the district magistrate said.

Rumours were rife that Roy had an altercation with the district magistrate a few days ago. Gupta, however, denied it. On Thursday, Roy had left for work from his official residence and went to Bipradas Choudhury Polytechnic College, his current place of work. He went missing from there. His vehicle was found parked outside the college. Both of his mobile phones are switched off and the police traced their last location near Shantipur, around 18 km from Krishnagar.

Roy's wife dismissed that her husband was "depressed". "I want to clarify that my husband was not depressed at all. He was absolutely normal and was not tensed with anything and I will like to stress that we have been in a healthy relationship," she told reporters after meeting police officers here Saturday morning. The Ranaghat parliamentary constituency, considered to be a stronghold of the Trinamool Congress, will go to polls on April 29, during the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

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## FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS

# Seeing voting from a different perspective

**MONGFING LEPCHA**  
Election is one crucial time that decides who the leader of the states and the nation will be. It is the time when people get to decide who they want as their leader who can lead them to a brighter tomorrow. The decision is merely based on the precious votes of the people. Vote or voting is the choice of the people put forward in a more formalised form to avoid chaos. Right from the time when the democratic way of choosing the leader started to till now the method of voting is being transformed periodically. Now it is more in a digitized form where the voters just have to click a button and their choices will be saved for counting. This year is the year of election which has come after five years and the news regarding election is everywhere. I, personally have been hearing about election since the mid of last year and by the beginning of this year the talk of election and its campaigning had already started like a wildfire.

In Sikkim, the date of election voting was 11th of April and the fire of election had engulfed the state already. When voting date was close enough, I could see the state all colourful with different colours of flags hoisted in every corners, rooftops, shops, vehicles, etc. of the state. I could hear groups of people praising the names of their leaders, people showcasing their views on different political parties and what not. For a moment everything turned into election which for me was boringly interesting.

In one hand I was literally tired of hearing about election but on the other it was interesting to know that people are becoming more aware of the political situation of the state as well as nation.

When the day finally arrived, all of us went to our respective polling booths

to cast our votes and based on that I thought of writing something out of the experience I had on the day of voting. I beforehand would like to mention that this article does not contain any political views which might disappoint some readers. This is rather seeing voting through non political sights which I did while standing on a que waiting for my turn to cast my precious vote which came only after 3 hours.

Thanks to the wonderful super sunny weather that standing in que felt nothing less than trying to get a bucket of water in the desert. I had no option but to look at other people and the reflection of election on them. I had gone to the polling booth as early as possible thinking It would be quicker and easier



but after reaching the booth I found out that there were so many more who had come thinking the same and ended in a long que.

But I was not disheartened, instead I stood where the que had ended and soon after there were many more standing after me. I looked around and first thing that caught my eyes were the different sets of people who had gathered around. Some were senior citizens who were in a way obligated to come and were totally unaware of the digital system for which they were being assisted by the volunteers or their own relatives. There were women with in-



fant's who seemed tired and weary and just wanted it to be over so that they could take some rest as their infants would not stop nagging probably due to the weather too. There were people who had strong idea about the political scenario of the state and they seemed more calm and observant kinds. The village leaders were busy with their own obligatory duties and were trying their best not to fail in their duties. I was standing behind a group of young voters who all were probably voting for the first time. They seemed to have less idea about politics which is in a way obvious but somehow they were also interested in casting their votes. They were the ones talking about everything except politics. There were different queues for ladies and gents. Since, it was taking forever to get the turn, most people were already hungry which included me standing for the

past 3 hours. I surely do not have any idea of who casted their votes where but I surely know one thing that the canteen near the polling booth earned more than what they had expected.

While standing in que I realised that the meaning and importance of voting is always divided accordingly based on the different sets of people. For elderly people it is merely an obligation because of the fact that they have seen and survived both pre and post democratic phase; for the adults who have more understanding of the political situation which is based on their experiences, voting is more about casting their hopes on leaders who can stay up with the promises, for youths who are in their rational phase it is more about supporting the visions of the parties that matches with theirs and for the young voters it is their first contribution towards democracy.

The booth served as a platform where people with different visions and ideas gathered around to fulfil their duty as citizens of the nation's state by participating in the voting but they were also the people who had different reasons behind voting. Be the reason be political, non political, ethical, social or humanitarian but as citizens of the nation they did not fail in fulfilling their duty and that is something which should always be encouraged and appreciated because that is what that keeps the game of democracy burning otherwise democracy will remain nothing but a word.

[the writer is Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University]



**SRH aim to maintain winning momentum against under-pressure KKR**

**HYDERABAD, APR 20 (PTI):** A top-heavy Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to tame an Andre Russell-reliant Kolkata Knight Riders in a high pressure clash of the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Both teams have eight points though SRH have played one match less. The hosts snapped their three-match losing streak with a win over table leaders CSK and KKR now need to do the same having lost their last four games.

The race to play-offs is heating up and both sides know the value of a win on Sunday.

A rampaging Russell and Nitish Rana almost pulled off a miraculous win on Friday night after the KKR top-order left them with too much to do in the death overs. Russell even questioned the team's decision to send him lower down the order when the likes of Robin Uthappa struggled.

There is little doubt that the KKR think tank will be working overtime to get back to winning ways.

The hosts too have concerns of their own, mainly their over-reliance on openers David Warner and Jonny Bairstow, who will be leaving at the end of the week to join England's World Cup.

When the opening duo has fired, SRH have done well but on other occasions the middle-order has let them down. The World Cup-bound Vijay Shankar is due for a big score and so is captain Kane Williamson.

However, Bairstow defended his team's middle-order batsmen.

"We have got some fantastic players in our middle-order and David and I have done a fairly good job at the top. There are players who are in the World Cup team. Yusuf Pathan's records speak for itself. There is a reason why they have done so well in the last couple of years," said Bairstow.

Asked on how they plan to tackle the Russell threat, he added: "We could bowl someone like Rashid (Khan) or Sandeep (Sharma), who executes slower balls so well. Russell is playing well, no doubt but at the same time he is still human, he can still get out."

"If we can concentrate on what we do well, if are able to play the way we did against Chennai (Super Kings) the other day, and put on a complete performance together then we should be in a good place. The pitch has been brilliant here," Bairstow added.

# CSK aim to seal play-off berth against RCB

**BD NARAYANKAR**  
**BENGALURU, APRIL 20 (PTI):** Chennai Super Kings will be expected to shrug off a rare loss and effectively seal a play-off berth against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Defending champions CSK, who lost to SRH in the previous game for only their second loss this season, will get to 16 points with a win at the Chinnaswamy and it should be enough to guarantee a place in the top-four.

Their leader M S Dhoni missed the game against SRH due to a stiff back but will probably be fit for the game on Sunday.

"Probably he will play in the next game against RCB," stand-in skipper Suresh Raina had said after the loss to SRH.

Following the tournament opener between CSK and RCB in Chen-



nai, both teams have had contrasting campaigns. While CSK have lived up to their reputation again, RCB continue to under-perform.

No doubt, RCB will be fired up after the win against KKR at Kolkata on Friday night when

they finally managed to defend despite a brutal assault from Andre Russell and Nitish Rana. It was only their second win in nine games in the season so far though they it still kept them mathematically alive in the tournament.

RCB could also take a cue from a similar situation in 2016 when they had lost five of their first seven games, but ended up in the playoffs after winning six of their last seven matches.

In the absence of indisposed AB de Villiers

on Friday, Virat Kohli took it all upon himself to post a big total and in the process scored his first century of the season. With AB expected to be back, RCB will be aiming to please their loyal fans with a victory at last on their home ground.

Despite the arrival of Dale Steyn, their bowling remains a worry as it was evident at the Eden Gardens where Russell and Rana almost pulled off the impossible after KKR needed 113 off the last six overs. The hosts just fell short by 10 runs as Moeen Ali saved the day for RCB with both bat and ball, having defended 24 in the final over.

On the other hand, CSK will fancy themselves against RCB and sail into the play-offs. Dhoni, who has scored 230 runs in eight games including two half-centuries, will hold the key once again.

The star bowler for CSK this season has been 40-year-old Imran Tahir, who has taken 13 wickets. The South African import has executed his skipper's plans brilliantly.

Squads  
Royal Challengers Bangalore: Virat Kohli

(captain), Parthiv Patel, AB de Villiers, Colin de Grandhomme, Umesh Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Moeen Ali, Shimron Hetmyer, Dale Steyn, Shivam Dube, Mohammed Siraj, Navdeep Saini, Devdutt Padikkal, Himmat Singh, Milind Kumar, Gurkeerat Singh Mann, Heinrich Klaasen, Pawan Negi, Washington Sundar, Akshdeep Nath, Prayas Ray Barman, Kulwant Khejroliya, Tim Southee.

Chennai Super Kings: MS Dhoni (captain & WK), Suresh Raina, Ambati Rayudu, Shane Watson, Faf du Plessis, Murali Vijay, Kedar Jadhav, Sam Billings, Ravindra Jadeja, Dhruv Shorey, Chaitanya Bishnoi, Rituraj Gaikwad, Dwayne Bravo, Karn Sharma, Imran Tahir, Harbhajan Singh, Mitchell Santner, Shardul Thakur, Mohit Sharma, K M Asif, Deepak Chahar, N Jagadeesan (wk), Scott Kugeleijn.

Match starts 8pm.

## Pandya, Rahul fined Rs 20 lakh each for making sexist comments

**NEW DELHI, APR 20 (PTI):** Hardik Pandya and K L Rahul were on Saturday fined Rs 20 lakh each by the BCCI Ombudsman D K Jain for their sexist comments on a popular TV show, ending an infamous saga that dented the reputation of the two India cricketers.

In the order published on the official BCCI website, Jain wrote that no further action will be taken against Pandya and Rahul, who had missed five ODIs while serving their provisional suspension, and tendered an unconditional apology for making loose comments on women.

Instead, he directed the World Cup-bound players to pay a fine of Rs 20 lakh each that included a payment of Rs 1 lakh each to "each of the most deserving widows of 10 constables in para-military forces who have lost their lives while on duty, through 'Bharat Ke Veer App'". Jain also instructed them to deposit Rs 10 lakh each in the fund "created by the Cricket Association for the blind".

All payments are to be made within four weeks from the date of the order -- April 19, 2019 -- failing which "the BCCI may deduct the amount from their match fees".

"I have no hesitation in observing that the remarks made by the player, even by his own admissions, did offend sensitivities, which ought to have been avoided. Hence, he must make amends," Jain stated in the order.

"Taking into consideration all these aspects, in particular the fact that the player has tendered an apology for the incident without seeking to justify his action, has acknowledged his duty to the society and expressed his willingness to hold himself to the higher standards expected of him and has missed five ODIs, in the interest of justice and fair play, (the fine) would suffice."

Pandya, 25, and Rahul, 27, deposed before the Supreme Court-appointed Ombudsman earlier this month and

were awaiting their fate even after being named in India's World Cup squad on Monday.

With their fate finally decided, they both can fully focus on the game now ahead of the World Cup beginning May 30 in the UK. They both are doing well for their respective IPL teams at the moment.

Pandya and Rahul were provisionally suspended by the Committee of Administrators (CoA) for their remarks and were asked to return home in the middle of the Australia tour.

They had become subjects of nationwide criticism following their outrageous comments on a Talk show, aired in the first week of January.

The two tendered unconditional apologies and their ban was provisionally lifted pending an inquiry. Once Jain assumed his role, the CoA handed over the matter to the Ombudsman.

Pandya and Rahul have also spoken publicly on the incident, recalling one of the toughest phases of their respective careers.

All-rounder Pandya is expected to play an important role for India in the World Cup while the in-form Rahul is in the squad as a reserve opener though he has also played in the middle-order. Pandya has represented India in 11 Tests, 45 ODIs and 38 T20 Internationals while Rahul has played 34 Tests, 14 ODIs and 27 T20 Internationals.

In the order, Jain also wrote why Indian cricketers need to be mindful of their conduct.

"The cricketers wield immense influence in the society, especially the youth, who look upon them as role models... These impressionable young adults try to emulate not only their style of play but also their conduct and demeanour. Therefore, they cannot be unmindful of the impact of their casual and off the cuff remarks."

The CoA also felt that the players had received sufficient penalty, stated the order.

## Rahane sacked as Royals captain in middle of IPL, Smith given leadership charge

**JAIPUR, APR 20 (PTI):** Former Australian captain Steve Smith on Saturday replaced Ajinkya Rahane as Rajasthan Royals skipper, hoping the mid-season switch will revive their disappointing campaign so far in the IPL.

Smith, who is back in action after serving a one-year ban for his role in the ball-tampering scandal, has been made the leader of the team once again. The announcement was made ahead of Royals' clash against Mumbai Indians here.

The hosts, who have lost six out of their eight games, need to win at least five of their remaining six matches to have any chance of making the play-offs.

Smith was also named captain before the start of the 2018 edition but in the wake of the ball-tampering incident, it was decided that Rahane would lead the



team in the Australian's forced absence.

"Rajasthan Royals will be led by the Australian batsman Steven Smith for the upcoming matches of the IPL. Ajinkya Rahane did a fantastic job in leading the team to the playoffs last year, however, the franchisee now thinks a fresh approach is needed to bring their 2019 campaign back on track. "Steve has

always been part of the leadership team within RR and Rahane will continue to be a key voice in the side, therefore the Royals see this as a small restructuring process to secure the results required to move up the table," said the team in a statement.

However, Smith is expected to be available until May 1 but by then, the team would have

played majority of its league games.

Star players Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler would also be leaving next week to join England's World Cup camp.

Smith has made 186 runs in seven games at 37.20 with 73 being his highest.

Rahane, on the other hand, has scored 201 runs at 25.12 including a top-score of 70.

## Depleted India hope for substantial medals but unlikely to match 2017 success in Asian C'ships

**DOHA, APR 20 (PTI):** A severely depleted Indian contingent is unlikely to repeat its unprecedented top-of-the-table finish in the last edition but is still expected to win a substantial number of medals when the Asian Athletics Championships begins here on Sunday.

India had finished on top of the table with a record-breaking haul of 29 medals (12 gold, 5 silver, 12 bronze) in the 2017 Championships held in Bhubaneswar. China had finished second with 20 medals.

But this time, the 42-member Indian team is not expected to achieve that kind of a success with several athletes, including star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, missing out of the continental flagship event due to various reasons, including injuries.

The biggest name in Indian athletics, Neeraj has suffered an elbow sprain during practice in Patiala and he is not defending the title he had won in 2017. National record holders Dharun Ayyasamy (men's 400m Hurdles), M Sreesankar (men's long jump) and Asian Games 800m gold medallist Manjit Singh were also not named in the team due to injuries.

Triple jumper Arpinder

Singh, training in the USA, did just 16.34m in the Federation Cup (against qualification standard of 16.50m) and later said he's focusing on the World Championships to be held at the same venue in September-October. Veteran Sudha Singh, who won a gold in the women's 3000m steeplechase in 2017, was named in the team despite missing the Federation Cup -- which served as the qualifying event -- as well as the confirmatory trials, but the Sports Ministry has refused to clear her name.

Her tickets to Doha were booked and the Athletics Federation of India made a request to clear her name but the Sports Ministry did not budge.

"The Sports Ministry has refused to clear her name despite the AFI making another request," a well-placed source told PTI on condition of anonymity.

Another athlete who won two gold in 2017, Govindan Lakshman (men's 5000m and 1000m) was not picked as he could not finish on the podium in the Federation Cup.

The number of medals as well as gold count is certain to come down from the last edition. This will also be a climb

down from the high at the Jakarta Asian Games last year, when the country won 19 medals including seven gold.

The first day on Sunday will decide eight gold medals and from the Indian perspective the women's 400m race will be the most anticipated one. Sprint sensation Hima Das will be running in the preliminary round in the morning while the final will be held in the evening.

Bahrain's Salwa Naser will start as the overwhelming favourite to take the gold in the women's quartermile event. She had beaten Hima comfortably in the Asian Games 400m final. She was second in world lists last year (49.08s).

Hima has not been at her best after she took a break to prepare for her exams before coming back to win the Federation Cup with a 52.88 seconds.

Other Indians in the fray are Annu Rani and Kumari Sharmila in women's javelin throw final, Parul Chaudhary and Sanjivani Jadhav in women's 5000m final, Avinash Sable and Shankar Lal Swami in men's 3000m steeplechase final and Gavit Murali Kumar and Abhishek Pal in men's 10000m final.

This Asian Championships

is crucial as the gold medallist gets the automatic qualification for the World Championships. This competition is also an ideal platform to accumulate ranking points if an athlete fails to achieve the stiff entry standards prescribed by the international federation.

Jonson Johnson (1500m), Tejinder Pal Singh Toor (men's shot put) and women's 4x400m relay team could be considered as gold medal contenders. National record holder quarter-miler Muhammed Anas is not expected to win gold but can bag a medal.

Anas was not at his best during the Federation Cup last month as he was running a few months after suffering a leg injury in an accident.

No one has crossed 20.0m in the shot put in Asia this season except Tejinder. That makes the Asian Games champion the favourite to take the gold.

Dutee, a double silver winner at the Jakarta Asian Games, is also a medal contender in women's 100m. She will be up against the likes of Wei Yongli of China and Kazakhstan's Olga Saffronikova, who had won a silver in 2017. Dutee had won a bronze in 2017.

**Bus boys: Man City stars pay for 26 coaches to take fans to Wembley**

**MANCHESTER, APRIL 19 (AFP):** Manchester City players will pay for 26 coaches to take fans to Wembley next month for the FA Cup final, the club announced on Friday.

"The support from our fans throughout the season has been nothing short of incredible. Travelling to so many games in league and cup competitions, both home and away, is not easy to do and is something that every player in our squad values and appreciates," said captain Vincent Kompany. City, who have already won the Community Shield and League Cup at Wembley this season, will face Watford in the FA Cup final at the London venue on May 18.

By that time, they may also be Premier League champions although their hopes of winning the Champions League were dashed in an epic quarter-final loss to Tottenham in midweek.

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# Czech PM says won't resign if indicted over EU fraud

**PRAGUE, APR 20 (AFP):** Czech billionaire Prime Minister Andrej Babis said Saturday he would not resign if indicted for his alleged role in a two-million-euro EU subsidy fraud.

Police this week recommended that Babis be indicted over the case which could see him and several others, including family members, spending five to ten years in prison. "I would not resign because I have been saying from the beginning that this is a political process," Babis told the DNES broadsheet which he owns.

The 64-year-old agro-chemicals mogul pegged by Forbes as the second-wealthiest Czech is suspected of abusing EU funds to build the luxury Stork Nest resort and farm near Prague in 2007.

He allegedly took the farm out of his sprawling Agrofert food, chemicals and media holding to make it eligible for a subsidy awarded to small companies before eventually putting it back.

Charged by police in 2017, Babis and several others -- including his



wife, brother-in-law and daughter -- are suspected of subsidy fraud and harming the EU's financial interests.

"If I weren't in politics, nobody would have heard about the Stork Nest," Babis told DNES.

"People keep plotting affairs against me, delving into the past. This affair is 12 years old," he said, calling charges against his family "incred-

ible filth". President Milos Zeman, who could remove the embattled prime minister, said Thursday he would not do so.

"An indicted prime minister is not a sentenced prime minister," said the 74-year-old pro-Russian, pro-Chinese veteran leftwinger and a staunch Babis ally.

The prime minister's populist ANO movement leads a minority coalition

government with left-wing Social Democrats.

It also has tacit backing from the Communists -- a first in the post-Communist country's history.

Late last year, the government survived a confidence vote after media reported that Babis aides had taken his son Andrej Babis Jr. to Russian-occupied Crimea against the son's wishes to hinder the fraud probe. ANO

currently has the highest backing by far of any Czech party, despite the Stork Nest affair and allegations that Babis was a Communist secret police agent in the 1980s.

ANO was credited with 33 percent backing in a March-April poll by the Kantar CZ agency for Czech Television, ahead of the second-placed Pirates party with 19 percent.

## Democrats subpoena Mueller report amid calls for impeachment

**WASHINGTON, APR 20 (AP):** The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee issued a subpoena Friday for special counsel Robert Mueller's full report as Democrats intensified their investigation of President Donald Trump, but leaders stopped short of liberal demands for impeachment proceedings.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has insisted on a methodical, step-by-step approach to the House's oversight of the Trump administration, and she refuses to consider impeachment without public support, including from Republicans, which seems unlikely.

But in light of Mueller's findings, Democratic leaders are under mounting pressure from the party's rising stars, deep-pocketed donors and even a presidential contender to seize the moment as a jumping-off point for trying to remove Trump from office.

Speaking Friday in Belfast as Pelosi wrapped up a congressional visit to Ireland, she declined to signal action beyond Congress' role as a check and balance for the White House. "Let me assure you that whatever the issue and challenge we face, the Congress of the United States will honour its oath of office to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States to protect our democracy," she told reporters. "We believe that the first article Article 1, the legislative branch has the responsibility of oversight of our democracy, and we will exercise that."

That approach isn't enough for some liberals who see in Trump's actions not just a president unfit for office but evidence of obstruction se-

rious enough that Mueller said he could not declare Trump exonerated.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is now signed on to an impeachment resolution from fellow Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, bringing new energy to the effort. Senator Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass, a presidential candidate, said Friday the House "should initiate impeachment proceedings against the president." And billionaire Tom Steyer, a leading advocate of impeachment, has grown impatient with the House's pace of investigations and wants televised hearings to focus Americans' attention on Trump.

"Let's get the show on the road," Steyer said in an interview Friday. "The Mueller report very clearly outlined obstruction by the president and basically said, I can't do anything about it, it's up to Congress to hold the president accountable." Democrats, though, may see greater power in pursuing an investigative effort, leaving impeachment on the shelf as a break-glass option.

The Judiciary chairman, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, says he expects the Justice Department to comply with the committee's subpoena for the full report by May 1. That's the same day Attorney General William Barr is to testify before a Senate committee and one day before Barr is to appear before Nadler's panel. Nadler also has summoned Mueller to testify by May 23. "It now falls to Congress to determine the full scope of that alleged misconduct and to decide what steps we must take going forward," Nadler said.

## Egyptians vote in referendum to extend Sisi's rule

**CAIRO, APR 20 (AFP):** Egyptians voted Saturday in a referendum that aims to cement the rule of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the former coup leader who presents himself as a rock of stability in a turbulent region. Voters were being asked to back amendments to the constitution to allow Sisi, 64, to run for another six-year term while boosting his control over the judiciary and giving the military even greater influence in political life.

The three-day referendum bucks the trend of North Africa's mini-Arab Spring, in which mass pro-democracy protests this month swept away veteran presidents in Algeria and Sudan.

Sisi himself was among the first to vote when polls opened, casting his ballot in the up-market Cairo suburb of Heliopolis. In Shubra, a working-class neighbourhood of the capital, dozens of voters, mostly women carrying their children, queued outside a polling station in the local high school.

In Cairo, troops and police were deployed in numbers although the interior ministry denied to give any nationwide figures. Egypt is still battling a jihadist insurgency based in the Sinai Peninsula that has seen attacks in Cairo and other cities.

Sisi has argued that he needs longer to complete the job of restoring security and stability after the turmoil that followed the overthrow of veteran autocrat Hosni Mubarak in the Arab Spring of 2011.

Out on the streets, his supporters waved flags bearing their campaign motto: "Do the Right," as they pressed passers-by to turn out and vote 'Yes'.

At a polling station in Manyal, a Cairo suburb



overlooking the Nile, Mohamed Abdel Salam, 45, told AFP he was voting enthusiastically in support of the changes.

"I don't care about the presidential terms," he said. "Sisi could stay forever as long as he's doing his job... and he has already done a lot". Sisi won his first term as president in 2014, a year after he led the army in overthrowing elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi following mass protests against his single turbulent in power.

Standing virtually unopposed after the disqualification or withdrawal of all realistic challengers, he was re-elected in March 2018 with more than 97 per cent. Both elections drew heavy criticism from human rights groups as they were accompanied by swingeing crackdowns on dissent -- both Islamist and secular.

Human Rights Watch also took issue with the referendum on extending Sisi's rule, saying the "constitutional amendments" would "entrench repression".

In a statement Saturday, the New York-based watchdog criticised the "grossly unfree, rights-abusive environment" of the vote.

For the past few weeks, Egypt's streets have been awash with banners and billboards urging citizens to "Do the right thing" and vote

"Yes", while popular folk singers have exhorted voters to go to the polls.

A DJ blared loud patriotic songs extolling the virtues of Egypt under Sisi's leadership, including a new song called "I adore Egypt" by iconic Lebanese diva Nancy Ajram. But not everyone is upbeat about the changes. Sporting casual attire, a mid-thirties voter at another polling station in the capital told AFP: "We are all staff in the same company and we were instructed by management to go vote."

"I want to say 'No'... on extending the presidential terms and the amendments related to the judiciary," he said declining to give his name for fear of repercussions.

He pointed to his bosses nearby who were making sure employees were voting. "Even if I say 'No', they (the authorities) are still going to do what they want in the end," he added despondently.

Earlier in the week, parliament overwhelmingly endorsed the constitutional changes, which also include the creation of a second parliamentary chamber and a quota ensuring at least 25 per cent of lawmakers are women. Think-tank the Soufan Center said the main effect of the referendum would be to "solidify Sisi's grip on the Egyptian political regime" in a country that "has become even more autocratic than it was under Mubarak".

## Bhopal gas tragedy among world's "major industrial accidents" of 20th century: UN report

**YOSHITA SINGH UNITED NATIONS, APR 20 (PTI):** The 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy which killed thousands of people is among the world's "major industrial accidents" of the 20th century, a UN report has said, warning that 2.78 million workers die from occupational accidents and work-related diseases each year.

The report released by the the UN labour agency International Labour Organization (ILO) said in 1984, at least 30 tons of methyl isocyanate gas, which was released from the Union Carbide pesticide plant in the Madhya Pradesh capital, affected more than 600,000 workers and nearby inhabitants.

"The Government figures estimate that there have been 15,000 deaths as a result of the disaster over the years. Toxic material remains and thousands of survivors and their descendants have suffered from respiratory diseases and from damage to internal organs and immune systems," it said.

The report titled "The Safety and Health at the Heart of the Future of Work - Building on 100 years of experience" said the Bhopal disaster was among the world's "major industrial accidents after 1919". Among the other nine major industrial disasters after 1919 listed in the report are the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear disasters as well as the Rana Plaza building collapse. In the Chernobyl disaster in April 1986, one of four nuclear reactors at the Chernobyl power station in Ukraine exploded, releasing at least 100 times more radiation than the atom bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

The explosion killed 31 people immediately and thousands of people in the aftermath.

"The number of casualties in the region increases every year due to long term effects in-

cluding a sharp increase in thyroid cancer," the report said. Following a major 9.0 magnitude earthquake and tsunami which struck north-eastern Japan in March 2011, the Fukushima nuclear power plants experienced equipment failures which caused a series of explosions, fires and radiation releases, causing injuries to plant workers and emergency responders, it said.

In one of the worst industrial disasters in Bangladesh, the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka collapsed in April 2013. The building, which housed five garment factories, killed at least 1,132 people and injured more than 2,500. According to recent estimates released by the ILO, each year 2.78 million workers die from occupational accidents and work-related diseases (of which 2.4 million are disease-related).

An additional 374 million workers suffer from non-fatal occupational accidents. It is estimated that lost work days globally represent almost four per cent of the world's GDP, and in some countries, this rises to six per cent or more.

The report attributes stress, excessively-long working hours and disease to worker casualty every year, underlining ILO's message that no paid work should threaten a worker's wellbeing, safety or life.

The agency also identified several new or existing occupational risks of growing concern, that affect women more than men. These include modern working practices overall, world population growth, increased digital connectivity and climate change, which are believed to account for losses of almost four per cent of the global economy.

"The world of work has changed, we're working differently, we're working longer hours, we're using more technology," ILO's Manal Azzi

told UN News.

"The report says 36 per cent of workers are working excessive long hours, meaning more than 48 hours per week," she said.

Noting that "people are increasingly asked to produce more and more, they have no time to rest," Azzi highlighted that women are particularly at risk because they tend to be the primary carer for children or parents and lack the time to exercise. "Not only do you work when you're at your office but then you're working at home as well," Azzi said, adding that "so it's a lot of sedentary work and that affects cardiovascular diseases as well".

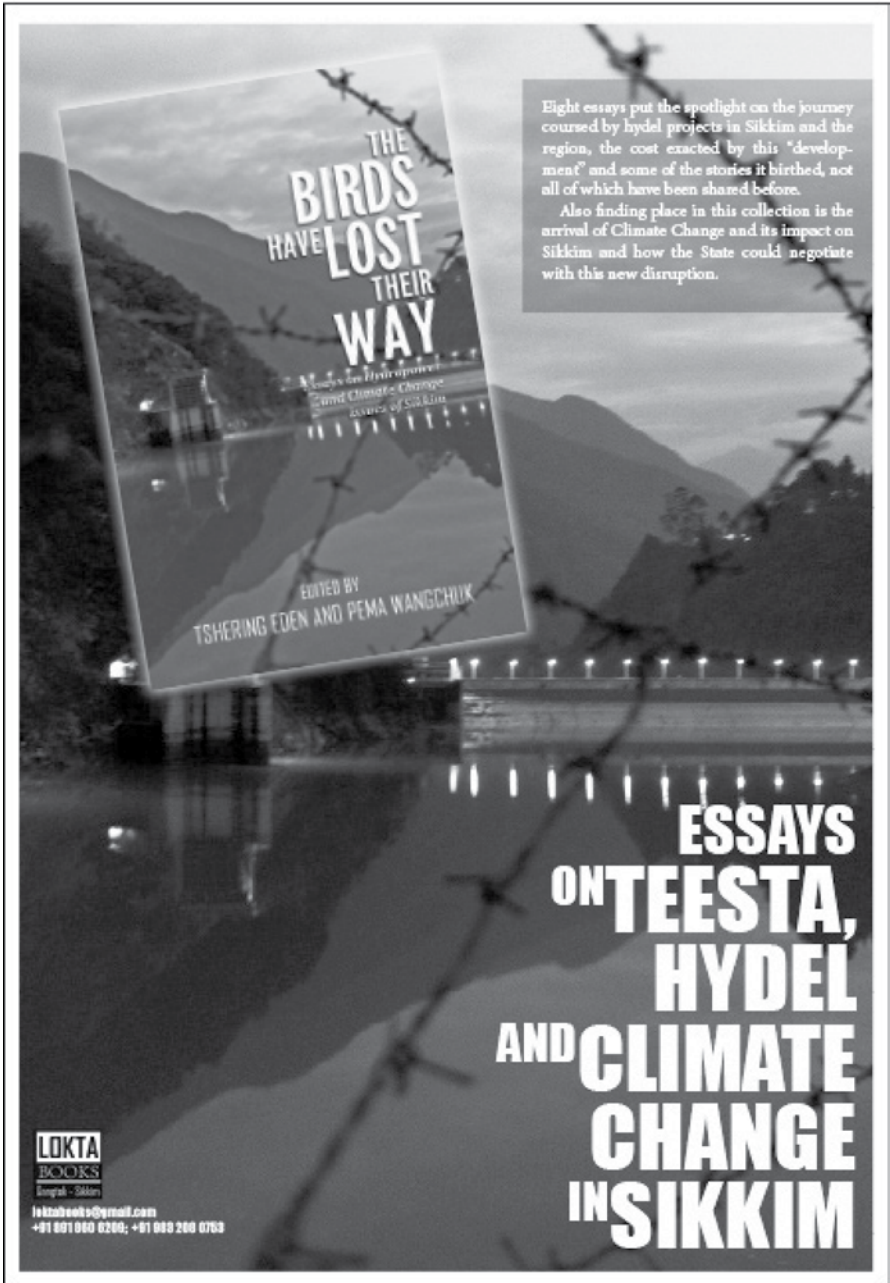
The greatest proportion of work-related deaths 86 per cent come from disease, according to the ILO, with some 6,500 people a day dying from occupational diseases, compared to 1,000 from fatal occupational accidents.

The greatest causes of mortality are circulatory diseases (31 per cent), work-related cancers (26 per cent) and respiratory diseases (17 per cent).

"As well as the economic cost we must recognise the immeasurable human suffering such illnesses and accidents cause. These are all-the-more tragic because they are largely preventable," Azzi said.

Launched during the ILO's centenary year and ahead of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work on April 28, the report underlines the life-saving value of promoting prevention, to save lives and encourage healthy working environments.

"Serious consideration should also be given to the recommendation of the ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work, that occupational safety and health be recognised as a fundamental principle and right at work," Azzi said.







**WORKING ON HER FITNESS!**  
The “Crown” singer Kelly Rowland smiles and waves after a workout in Beverly Hills.

## Roman Polanski sues Academy to get membership reinstated

**LOS ANGELES, APR 20 (PTI):** Oscar-winning director Roman Polanski is suing the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to get back his membership.

The move comes nearly a year after the filmmaker was booted out of the Academy, along with comic Bill Cosby, as a result of the organisation's Standards of Conduct enacted post the Harvey Weinstein sexual harassment scandal.

Polanski has admitted to having sex with a 13-year-old girl after plying her with champagne and pills in 1978 at actor Jack Nicholson's house. He fled the US to avoid jail and continues to be a fugitive in the country though he won a best director's Oscar for his Holocaust film “The Pianist” in 2003. Someone else accepted the award on his behalf.

The director claims he left the country because the



judge who was handling his case decades ago promised him he would serve 90 days of psychiatric evaluation, but instead was going to sentence him to 50 years in prison.

Legal counsel for Polanski, Harland Braun on Friday filed a petition for writ of administrative mandamus, asking an LA judge to force the Academy to reinstate him as

a member in good standing.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Braun argues that although the Academy let Polanski petition for reconsideration, it failed to give him an opportunity to be heard on the matter, which he contends is a violation of its policies.

“The Academy committed a prejudicial abuse of discretion in that the Academy failed to proceed in a manner required by law, the Academy's expulsion decision is not supported by the findings, and the Academy's findings are not supported by the evidence,” writes Braun.

A representative for the Academy, however, said the organisation maintains its stand on the matter.

“The procedures taken to expel Polanski were fair and reasonable. The Academy stands behind its decision as appropriate,” the spokesperson said.

## ‘The Conjuring’

**team condoles death of Lorraine Warren**

**LOS ANGELES, APR 20 (PTI):** Actors Vera Farmiga, Patrick Wilson and director James Wan have paid their respects to paranormal investigator Lorraine Warren, whose several ghost-hunting cases with her late husband, inspired the trio's “The Conjuring” film series.

On Friday, Lorraine's son-in-law, Tony Spera, shared the news of her death on the Facebook page for the New England Society for Psychic Research, which Lorraine co-founded with her husband Ed Warren in 1952.

“It is with deep sadness that I must announce that Lorraine Warren has passed away. She died peacefully in her sleep at home last night. The family requests that you respect their privacy at this time,” Spera said in a statement.

Farmiga played Lorraine and Wilson essayed the role of Ed in Wan's 2013 horror movie “The Conjuring”. The film was a smash-hit success at the global box office, raking in over USD 310 million against a budget of USD 20 million. A follow-up, which released in 2016, was an equally big hit.

In a Facebook post, the director said he is “deeply saddened” after hearing about Lorraine's death.

“She was truly one of the sweetest, loving and caring person I've ever met -- beaming with the brightest spirit. I feel very fortunate to have met her, gotten to know her and her wonderful family, and I'm truly honoured to have been the one to showcase a slice of her incredible life story to the world.

“For someone who spent her whole life dealing with the afterlife, she gave me the impression she was never fazed by death. Maybe it's knowing that there's something more after our time is over on this earth,” Wan wrote.

He added that there will never be “another Lorraine Warren” as she was “truly one of a kind”.

Farmiga posted a couple of pictures of her with Lorraine and in an accompanying post, the actor said she is “grateful” to have portrayed her in Wan's films.

“My dear friend Lorraine Warren has passed. From a deep feeling of sorrow, a deep feeling of gratitude emerges. I was so blessed to have known her and am honoured to portray her.

“She lived her life in grace and cheerfulness. She wore a helmet of salvation, she dawned her sword, compassion and took a shield of faith. Righteousness was her breastplate, and she has touched my life so. Love you Lorraine. You're waltz-



ing with Ed now,” she wrote. Wilson shared a picture of his with Farmiga and Lorraine, adding the team has lost a “friend and inspiration”. “The heavens will surely burn a little brighter tonight. We lost a friend and an inspiration. I will miss the stories, the laughter, and the guidance. Rest In Peace, Sweet Lorraine. Tell Ed I said hello,” he tweeted.

During their 61 years of marriage, the Warrens investigated over 10,000 cases in the US and abroad, often writing about their experiences.

Their success in paranormal cases led to the creation of a shared horror universe, which also includes the “Annabelle” series and two spin-offs -- “The Nun” and “The Curse of La Llorona”.

## ‘Mental Hai Kya’ makers say the film celebrates individuality, doesn't offend



**MUMBAI, APR 20 (PTI):** Makers of Kangana Ranaut and Rajkummar Rao starrer “Mental Hai Kya” on Saturday denied that the film discriminates against people battling mental health issues and in fact encourages the audience to “embrace their individuality”.

The response from the production house Balaji Motion Pictures comes a day after the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) wrote a letter to the censor board to object against the film's recently released posters.

In a letter addressed to CBFC chairperson Prasoon Joshi, the IPS had also objected to the title of the movie and said it was “discriminative, stigmatising, degrading and inhuman in projecting mental disorders and persons who suffer from mental disorders.”

The production banner countered that the film aims to celebrate distinctiveness.

“The makers of the film, believe that their movie - ‘Mental Hai Kya’ will encourage people to embrace their individuality and distinctiveness.

“Mental Hai Kya’ starring Kangana Ranaut and Rajkummar Rao marks the coming together of some of the most talented and responsible media personalities, who in no way intend to hurt anyone's sentiments,” the statement read.

The IPS had also demanded to censor any sequence in the film which violates the rights of persons with mental disorder.

The makers, however, said it is a “fictional thriller genre feature film meant to entertain audiences”.

“It does not offend, discriminate or disregard any person. In fact the film is a mainstream entertainer which makes a larger point,” the statement further read.

## Isaac Hempstead Wright explains his creepy stare in ‘Game of Thrones’



**LOS ANGELES, APR 20 (PTI):** “Game of Thrones” star Isaac Hempstead Wright has given an insight into his character, Bran Stark's infamous stare, something which is in line to his duality as ‘The Three-Eyed Raven’.

The 20-year-old actor said he is good at the “intense stare” as he is “completely blind” during filming.

“I don't have my glasses and I don't have contact lenses. I need them to see,” Wright said in an appearance on “Jimmy Kimmel Live” show.

He recalled an instance during shooting the HBO show when Sophie Turner, who plays his on-screen sister Sansa, praised his creepy expression.

Wright recounted, “She said, ‘Isaac, your stare is like you're staring into my soul,’ and I was like, ‘I can't see you. That's why’.

**ARIES:** Your birthday season draws to a close this Saturday as the Sun leaves your sign, shifting into Taurus and your practical second house of work and money. It's time to roll up your sleeves and get down to business! Ease your way into this transition by incorporating daily practices like better budgeting and catching up on bills as opposed to trying to overhaul everything at once.

**TAURUS:** The Sun beams into Taurus from Saturday until May 20, igniting your birthday season and all kinds of fresh starts. Put the bubbly on ice, Bull—this calls for a celebration! For the next four weeks, put your own agenda first. You may be resurfacing after doing some deep inner work, closing important chapters and creating space for all the exciting new things to enter your sphere.

**GEMINI:** Draw the blinds and hang the Do Not Disturb sign. This Saturday, the Sun slips into Taurus and your twelfth house of rest and closure, giving you cosmic permission to channel your inner hermit. For the next four weeks, the power of saying no will go a long

way. Use this cycle for deep healing if you've struggled to release a painful situation. Since the twelfth house rules the subconscious, you might benefit from seeing a therapist or energy healer. Steer clear of draining energy vampires.

**CANCER:** Come out, come out! On Saturday, the Sun zips into Taurus and your eleventh house of group activity, sparking synergies with new friends and business contacts. Use this cosmic mojo to spread your social-butterfly wings, hitting new scenes in your area or expanding your online following to widen your reach.

**LEO:** Set your sights on that brass ring! This Saturday, the Sun enters Taurus and ignites your career zone until May 20. For the next four weeks, lean all the way into your loftiest goals. Flaunt your sign's natural leadership skills and rub elbows with industry leaders and VIPs. Since el Sol will gift you with added charisma, there's no need to downplay your ambitions.

**LIBRA:** On Saturday, the sizzling Sun slides into Taurus and your sultry eighth house, cranking up the spring fever. Until May 20,

your superpower is drawing sexy admirers like moths to a flame. But adding another notch to your Gucci belt isn't the end goal here since the eighth house is all about playing for keeps. Single Libras are far more interested forming an intense and lasting bond with someone special.

**VIRGO:** The devil's in the details, Virgo, but that doesn't mean you should get lost in them. Yes, your meticulous sign loves to read between the lines, but sometimes you risk missing the big picture by being so fastidious. On Saturday, the Sun soars into your visionary ninth house, broadening your horizons and encouraging higher-minded thinking. This transit stokes your wanderlust.

**SCORPIO:** This Saturday, the Sun slides into your seventh house of committed partnerships, activating your urge to merge. But does your highly selective sign need to lower the bar just a little? Nobody will ever meet ALL your criteria. You could do yourself a disservice by dismissing someone over a few petty flaws. For the next four weeks, bring more balance to friendships, romance and business alliances.

**SAGITTARIUS:** Hang up your hedonist's hat, Archer. After a wild and carefree month of excess, the Sun glides into Taurus and your healthy sixth house from Saturday until May 20. Skip the extra Americano and opt for a matcha latte or fresh smoothie for clean, green energy. Fill your plate with fresh veggies and cut back on animal products, excess salt and sugar. Incorporate more self-care into your regimen: daily movement, massage, acupuncture or even a trip to the spa!

**CAPRICORN:** Lights, camera, action! This Saturday, the confident Sun blasts into Taurus and your passionate fifth house, setting the stage for romance and fame. But don't expect it to happen while you hide in the shadows, Cap. You're going to have to step out in a big way before May 20, wearing your heart on your sleeve and unabashedly expressing yourself. Work this cosmic charisma to your advantage and turn up the charm dial to maximum. You could find yourself in front of some serious power players during this phase,

and you'll want to be ready for anything! **AQUARIUS:** Spring awakening! More like a mini hibernation. Chez Aquarius has never looked so appealing. After a social month, the Sun decamps to Taurus and your cozy fourth house, activating your domestic bliss until May 20. You've been on the go and are nearly running on empty, but thankfully the stars give you permission to unwind and nest. Spruce up your digs so you can feel more at home. Then invite your close friends over for dinner instead of going out every night!

**PISCES:** How well do you really know your neighborhood, Pisces? On Saturday, the Sun glides into your community-oriented third house and encourages you to explore fresh terrain in your own backyard. For the next four weeks, locally sourced is the name of the game. Hang up your car keys and explore your town by foot or go check out an up-and-coming district. Chat up fellow residents at the coffee shop, see an art exhibit or peruse the culture listings for what's happening near you.