



**KBS BANS AIRING BLACKPINK'S
'KILL THIS LOVE' MV**

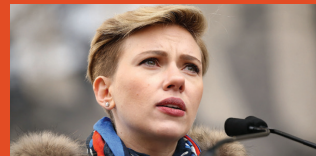
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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SHSC squad heads off for Junior Youth I-League U-15



**REBYNA RANA
GANGTOK, 28 APR:**

The Sikkim Himalayan Sporting Club squad is all set to participate in the Hero Junior Youth I-League U-15 2018-19 scheduled to be held at the Bidhannagar Municipal Sports Complex football ground in Kolkata.

A 24-strong SHSC team, including two coaches, Pranay Subba and MD Lepcha, and manager, Sonam Dadul Denzongpa, is scheduled to depart Monday for the

league. This is the second time that SHSC is participating in the league.

The Sikkim team's first match is scheduled for 03 May against Aizawl FC, after which they take on Maximus Prime Sports [Delhi] on 05 May, and on 07 May square off against Au Rajasthan FC. The winner of this group will for the next national round.

Speaking to media-persons here at Guards' Ground today, SHSC founder, Tenzing

Lamtha, informed that the tournament is being hosted under the AIFF grassroots level initiative.

"It has always been the aim of our club to provide platforms at the regional and national level to talented footballers of the State. Our club has been focusing on grassroots level football and give a chance to all the talent," he said.

SHSC had played in second division I-League previously, but could not

return to it in the following seasons due to funds constraints.

Mr Lamtha explains that they realised that it was difficult to sustain the club in second division I-League and hence adopted another strategy to get AIFF accreditation which allowed the club to play in youth and junior level national leagues.

"This way we can continue to send our young footballers to national level tournaments like this u-15 Ju-

nior League," he said.

Coach Pranay Subba said that the team is prepared well for the u-15 junior league.

"We have players from the SHSC hostel and also from different parts of the State. We wanted to give an opportunity to the best u-15 talent of our State as our aim is to promote all of them. Hence, we did not select the players only from our academy and we expect to do well in Kolkata," he said.

As temperatures rise, pre-monsoon rainfall records 27 pc dip: IMD

NEW DELHI, APR 28 (PTI):

Pre-monsoon rainfall from March to April, a phenomenon critical to agriculture in some parts of the country, has recorded 27 per cent deficiency, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The IMD recorded 43.3 millimetres of rainfall across the country from March 1 to April 24 as against the normal precipitation of 59.6 millimetres. This was 27 per cent less of the Long Period Average (LPA).

The highest deficiency of 38 per cent was recorded in the northwest India division of the IMD, which comprises states of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh.

This was followed by the Southern peninsula division comprising all five states of the South India and the Union Territory of Puducherry, Goa and coastal Maharashtra, where the deficiency recorded was 31 per cent, the IMD said.

East and northeast India division recorded 23 per cent deficiency.

The Central India division is the only one to have recorded more five per cent rainfall than the normal.

Pre-monsoon showers, thunderstorms and lightening have



killed more than 50 people in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan this month.

Several parts of India receive pre-monsoon rainfall which is critical for those regions. The phenomenon, which is usually from March to May end, is vital as it helps in bringing the temperatures down.

The situation also appears to be grim as large parts of the country have been witnessing heating and there has not been any major relief since April 17, said Mahesh Palawat, Vice President (Meteorology and Climate Change), Skymet.

One of the reasons for a pre-monsoon rainfall is excessive heating from March to June which several parts of the country witness.

The moisture from the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal aids in creation of thunderstorms, Mritunjay Mohapatra, Additional Direc-

tor General of the IMD said. "Pre-monsoon rainfall is important for horticulture crops in some parts of the country. In states like Odisha, ploughing is done in the pre-monsoon season," he said.

Laxman Singh Rathore, former Director General of the IMD, said in parts of northeast India and the Western Ghats, pre-monsoon rainfall is critical for plantation of crops.

There will be "moisture stress" in case of a deficit, he said.

Crops like sugarcane and cotton, planted in central India, survive on irrigation, but also require supplement of pre-monsoon rains, Rathore added. "In the forested regions of Himalayas, pre-monsoon rainfall is necessary for plantations like apple. Due to moisture, pre-monsoon rainfall also helps in minimising the occurrence of forest fires," he said.

Ukraine's president-elect offers passports to Russians

KIEV, APR 28 (AFP): President-elect Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed an offer by Vladimir Putin to provide passports to Ukrainians, and pledged instead to grant citizenship to Russians who "suffer" under the Kremlin's rule.

The Russian president on Saturday said Moscow was considering plans to make it easier for all Ukrainians to obtain Russian citizenship, after it earlier moved to grant passports in the country's separatist east.

Kiev has been fighting Moscow-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine since 2014 in a war that has killed 13,000.

Zelensky, a comedian who won Ukraine's presidential election last week, responded to Putin's offer by releasing a statement on Facebook late on Saturday.

"We know perfectly well what a Russian passport provides," he said, listing "the right to be arrested for a peaceful protest" and "the right not to have free and competitive elections."

He pledged instead to "give citizenship to representatives of all nations that suffer from authoritarian and corrupt regimes."

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Elated Sang Doma confident of doing well at Femina Miss India 2019

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 28 APR:**

Sang Doma Tamang shared her elation over receiving the opportunity to represent Sikkim at the upcoming fbb Colors Femina Miss India 2019. She was officially crowned Miss India Sikkim 2019 at an event held in Kolkata on 23 April. She will now represent the State in her dream event, Femina Miss India 2019, to be held in June in Mumbai.

Ms Tamang was mentored by Gangtok-based event organiser, Positude, after she finished Miss Sikkim 2018 organised by Positude in the top-five. She took part in the Miss India North East round held last month at Guwahati along with the



four other contestants from Sikkim and was shortlisted to represent Sikkim at the grand finale of fbb Colors Femina

Miss India 2019.

She will be leaving for a month-long grooming sessions for pageant on 07 May. 19-year-old Ms Ta-

mang is the daughter of Ugen and Phulmaya Tamang of Upper Shyari in East Sikkim. She completed her studies from Deorali Girls Senior Secondary School and is currently pursuing graduation in Education honours as a first year student at Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Tadong.

Speaking to media persons here this afternoon, Ms Tamang expressed her immense happiness on getting the opportunity to represent the State at the national event.

"It is a proud moment for me to be crowned Miss India Sikkim 2019. The competition is going to be even tougher from hereon and I will give my best to live my dream," she shared.

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Battling water woes of worst kind, 5 UP villages boycott elections

**ABHISHEK SHUKLA
LALITPUR (UP), APR 28 (PTI):**

Facing acute water shortage throughout the year owing to government apathy, voters of five villages in the Jhansi-Lalitpur constituency of Uttar Pradesh have threatened to boycott elections on April 29. Villagers complain that the administration has failed to make use of various water sources and dams present in the region, forcing five

villages in this district to face the worst water crisis every year.

They say the situation has also triggered migration of families to nearby urban centres.

"The villagers of Lalaun, Gulenda, Chakra, Kasa and Rajpur in Jhansi-Lalitpur constituency have decided to boycott the elections on April 29," Mahendra Singh, a villager from Gulenda, told PTI. These five villages have about 5,000

voters, he says. Singh says villagers are often forced to remain awake throughout the night, awaiting their turn to use hand pumps to fetch a bucket of water.

Lalitpur district comes under the Jhansi-Lalitpur seat which goes to polls on April 29. The area under the Bundelkhand region is prone to draughts and poor groundwater level as it has a predominant granite base, which does

not allow recharging of groundwater.

The Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh has four parliamentary seats, including Jhansi-Lalitpur, and 19 assembly constituencies. All these seats are currently held by the ruling BJP. Call it irony, Lalitpur district has 13 dams to harness seven rivers which flow through the region. "We have decided not to vote in the elections."

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500-year-old well discovered near gurdwara on Kartarpur corridor in Pak

M ZULQERNAIN

LAHORE, APR 28 (PTI): A 500-year-old well, believed to have been built during the lifetime of the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak Dev, has been discovered at the enclosure of a gurdwara on the Kartarpur corridor which will facilitate easy passage of Sikh pilgrims to the historic Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan.

The well was discovered while digging the enclosure of Gurdwara Dera Sahib Kartarpur, some 125 kilometres from Lahore, on the Kartarpur corridor, caretaker of gurdwara Sardar Gobind Singh told reporters. The 20-foot well, made of small red bricks and believed to have been built during the lifetime of Guru Nanak Dev, will be opened to the visitors after its restoration, he said.

“The well (Khu sahib) is a boon for the Sikh pilgrims who would flock to the place on Baisakhi and other occasions and take away its sweet water. The water of the well had healing quality,” Singh said.

“It will also be a great attraction for the Indian Sikhs due here on the 550th birth anniversary

of Baba Guru Nanak,” he said. The year 2019 marks the 550th birth anniversary year of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev, whose birthplace is Sri Nankana Sahib in Pakistan.

Last November, both India and Pakistan agreed to set up the Kartarpur corridor to link the historic Gurdwara Darbar Sahib - the final resting place of Guru Nanak - in Pakistani town of Kartarpur with Dera Baba Nanak in Punjab's Gurdaspur district.

Kartarpur Sahib is located in Pakistan's Narowal district across the river Ravi, about four kilometres from the Dera Baba Nanak shrine.

The corridor will facilitate visa-free travel of Indian Sikh pilgrims to the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur. Pakistan has committed to open the corridor in November this year on the occasion of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak.

“During the time of Baba Guru Nanak the water of this well was so sweet that the Sikh pilgrims believed that it was the gift of the founding leader and could rid them of ailments,” caretaker Singh said.

Battling water...

We have been seeking a solution to our water issues, but the district administration has been passing the buck,” Singh says.

He says a solution is not difficult as there is a rivulet which catches seepage water from Rajghat canal, making it brimming with water throughout the year.

“We are seeking a small lift canal (where water is pumped from lower area to canal on a higher land) from that rivulet to be brought here. It will help recharge groundwater and also solve our irrigation problem,” says the villager. Singh, who works as a contractor in Lalitpur district, says a survey was conducted to bring water from the rivulet by the previous Samajwadi Party government, but no progress was made in the matter under the present Yogi Adityanath government.

These villages also have a large concentration of Saharia tribals who were given over four acres of land by the government. While some of it is rocky, the remaining land also has limited use due to scarce water sources, prompting members of the community to migrate. Manibu (65) is one such Saharia tribal whose son and family moved to Indore where they do masonry, leaving behind the elderly parents in the village. “The only problem is water. If we get water, we can cultivate our land here,” she says.

Shiv Gopal of Parmarth, a voluntary organisation working in the field of water conservation, says water level rises during night time in the summers because of moisture from seepage coming from nearby water bodies. He says women wait for their chance to fetch water.

“The water can only be found at 50 feet depth which is basically surface water. Since the base is of granite, there is no groundwater in the region. During summer, this surface water, which is used up through hand pumps, also dries,” says Sanjay Singh, founder of Parmarth. He claims the entire situation is “man-made” because of poor planning and implementation of schemes.

“There are water sources and damns, but water is being diverted to power plants in the region. Farmers are not on the priority list of government officers here,” he adds.

Sanjay, who has been working on the issue of water scarcity in the region, says more creativity and study of the area can help frame better solutions to meet the water shortage. He cites the example of reviving 1,000-year-old huge ponds built by Chandela Kings. He also suggests building check dams to hold rainwater and small canals to divert water to small villages.

The Parmarth founder also asserts that all these steps could have been taken using funds under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation scheme.

“MNREGA was a very effective scheme till 2012, but after the SP government and change in the central dispensation, its efficacy dipped because of corruption,” he alleges.

Sanjay's father was reportedly murdered in broad day light for fighting against corruption in MNREGA.

Similar was the fate of Rs 7,000 crore relief package for the region between 2010 and 2015. The funds helped to improve irrigation and tap water systems, but the package was later plagued by corruption, he says.

Sanjay and other villagers rue that such crucial issues are not finding a mention in the political discourse this election.

Baha'i international community 'concerned' over safety of its members in Yemen

NEW DELHI, APR 28 (PTI):

The Baha'i International Community (BIC), an organisation representing Baha'is, has expressed deep concern over the safety of all its members in Yemen following a Houthi prosecutor's "baseless" accusations against one of its members, who has appealed against his death sentence.

Hamed bin Haydara, detained since 2013, will face his appeal hearing on Tuesday in Houthi-controlled Sana'a.

The BIC is deeply concerned for the safety of all Baha'is in Yemen following the Houthi (an Islamic religious political armed movement) prosecutor's baseless accusations against a member of its community who is appealing his death sentence, a statement issued by them said.

Following a series of sham trials, Haydara was sentenced to death in 2018. The court further called for the confiscation of all assets owned by Baha'is and the dissolution of Baha'i institutions.

“We appeal to the good conscience of the judge and trust that he will have high regard for justice and the rule of law, and therefore not give credence to prosecutor's absurd allegations,” said Bani Dugal, Principal Representa-

tive, Baha'i International Community to the United Nations.

Hundreds of Baha'is face persecution on the basis of their religion in Houthi-controlled areas, it said.

Despite calls by the international community to cease the persecution and release the Baha'i prisoners, the prosecutor has outlined a series of false and irrelevant accusations against Haydara, the Yemeni Baha'i community, and the Baha'i faith itself, the statement said.

The prosecution alleges that the Baha'i faith, an independent world religion, was founded as a result of satanic thought, and that Haydara was intending to form a “national homeland for the Baha'i faith” on the Yemeni island of Socotra, and it has even threatened Haydara's lawyer, who is not a Baha'i, it said.

In 2018, 24 Baha'is were falsely accused of apostasy and espionage by a court in Houthi-controlled Sana'a.

Five of the 24 are currently imprisoned. Their case is being presided over by the same judge that sentenced Haydara to death.

The Baha'is of Yemen have long sought to contribute to the life of their country and their fellow citizens, the statement said.

Ukraine's president...

“But first and foremost to the Russian people who suffer most of all”. He said that one of the differences between Ukraine and Russia is that “we Ukrainians have freedom of speech, freedom of the media and the internet in our country.” A political novice, Zelensky has pledged to “reboot” peace talks with the separatists that also involve Russia and the West.

Putin has not congratulated Zelensky on his election, but said he is ready to talk with a new Ukrainian leadership and wants to “understand” the actor's position on the conflict. In his Facebook post, Zelensky warned Russia not to talk with Ukraine “in the language of threats or military or economic pressure.”

He previously called for more international sanctions against Moscow in response to Russia providing citizenship to residents of Ukraine's separatist east.

The EU also condemned Moscow's passport scheme, calling it a fresh assault on Ukraine's sovereignty and saying Russia sought to “destabilise” Ukraine after its presidential election. Putin's decree last week allows people living in Ukraine's unrecognised Donetsk and Lugansk breakaway republics to receive a Russian passport within three months of applying for one. Zelensky is due to take office by early June.

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Elated Sang...

She informed that the recently held zonal round was a learning experience for her and that she now knows which aspects she needs to work harder on.

“The zonal round has filled me with new energy and confidence and it has also given me a chance to work on my weaknesses. My smile and positive vibe are my strengths and I have been preparing hard to give my best in the grand finale to win the Miss India title and if not then to finish in the top five,” Ms Tamang said.

She expressed her gratitude to the entire family of Positude for constantly guiding her in this field. She said, “Positude is my second family and strength as it has identified my potential and then groomed it and has been constantly guiding me to reach this level. I would like to express my gratitude to CEO Gyurmila Bhutia and entire team of Positude for their support.”

She also shared her desire to see herself as a successful model and actress in the near future.

“I also want to give back to my State by supporting and guiding aspiring youth in this field to take them to the national and international levels,” she said.

Positude CEO, Ms Bhutia, stated that Sang Doma Tamang was like a child in the initial days of Miss Sikkim 2018 but her seriousness and dedication helped her grow fast.

“She is now more confident and mature and has been giving her best on every occasion. She has been working on every area with new confidence and energy. She will be a tough contestant at the fbb Colors Femina Miss India 2019,” she said.

She also expressed her satisfaction and happiness on models groomed by Positude doing well at the national and international levels.



East counting supervisors and assistants trained

GANGTOK, 28 APR (IPR): The first round of training of Counting Supervisors and Counting Assistants was held on 26 and

27 April at the East District Zilla Panchayat bhawan conference hall. Over 240 Counting Supervisors and Assistants attended

the training offered by resource persons Sunil Mothay, SDM/HQ and Yadav Krishna Sharma, DPO/EDZP.

Cyclonic storm 'Fani' to intensify into 'severe cyclonic storm': IMD

New Delhi/Chennai, Apr 28 (PTI): Cyclone 'Fani' is very likely to intensify into a “severe cyclonic storm” in the next 12 hours and further soar into a “very severe cyclonic storm” in the next 24 hours, the Cyclone Warning Division of the MeT department said on Sunday.

In its 1 pm bulletin, the Cyclone Warning Division said 'Fani' currently lays over 745 kilometres east-southeast of Trincomalee (Sri Lanka), 1,050 kilometres south-east of Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and 1,230 kilometres south-southeast of

Madhupatnam (Andhra Pradesh).

“It is very likely to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm during next 12 hours and into a very severe cyclonic storm during subsequent 24 hours,” the IMD said.

Heavy falls at isolated places are very likely over Kerala on April 29 and 30.

The system will not make landfall in Tamil Nadu, but may bring light rain in some northern parts, it said.

Earlier, it was expected to cause heavy rains in northern Tamil Nadu, including Chennai.

The Regional Meteorological Centre in Chennai said cyclone threat to Tamil Nadu has abated. “There is no chance of Fani crossing the Tamil Nadu coast,” Director of Area Cyclone Warning Centre S Balachandran told reporters in Chennai. Light to moderate rainfall are very likely at a few places over north coastal Andhra Pradesh and south coastal Odisha on May 2. It is likely to increase in intensity with heavy rainfall over coastal Odisha from May 3.

Strong winds with speed reaching 30-40 kmph gusting to 50 kmph

are likely to commence along and off the Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coast, Comorin area and Gulf of Mannar from Sunday. It will intensify a day later, the bulletin said.

“It is very likely to become squally with wind speed reaching 50-60 kmph and gusting to 70 kmph from morning of April 30 along north Tamilnadu, Puducherry and south Andhra Pradesh coasts. Strong wind with speed reaching 30-40 kmph and gusting to 50 kmph are likely to commence along and off Kerala coast from evening of April 28, it said.

72 Lok Sabha seats in 9 states go to polls in 4th phase on Monday

NEW DELHI, APR 28 (PTI): Polling will be held on Monday for the fourth phase of Lok Sabha election in 72 parliamentary constituencies spread across nine states.

The stakes are high for the ruling BJP and its allies as it had swept 56 of these seats in 2014, leaving just two for the Congress and the rest for other opposition parties such as the Trinamool Congress (six) and the Biju Janata Dal (six).

Voting will take place in 17 seats in Maharashtra, 13 each in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, eight in West Bengal, six each in Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, five in Bihar, three in Jharkhand and a part of the Anantnag constituency in Jammu and Kashmir.

Election in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP had cornered all but two of the total 54 seats in 2014, will begin in this phase. The Congress appeared to make a comeback, forming the governments in the states after last year's Assembly polls.

In the first three phases, voting has been held in 302 Lok Sabha constituencies, and 168 more seats will go to polls in the last three phases.

The fate of 961 candidates, including Union ministers Giriraj Singh, Subhash Bhamre, S S Ahluwalia and Babul Supriyo of the BJP and former Union ministers Salman Khurshid and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury of the Congress, will be decided by about 12.79 core voters in the fourth phase.

Among other key con-

testants in the fray are Kanhaiya Kumar (CPI), Baijayant Panda (BJP), Urmila Matondkar (Congress), Dimple Yadav (Samajwadi Party), Satabdi Roy (TMC) and Milind Deora (Congress).

The Election Commission has set up 1.40 lakh polling booths/stations and has made elaborate security arrangements.

In Maharashtra, where election will come to end with this phase, the opposition Congress is facing a tough task of reclaiming its lost base in north Maharashtra and Mumbai, while the NCP is trying to get a foothold in Thane district and Western Maharashtra. The BJP and its ally Shiv Sena had won all 17 seats in 2014.

Union minister Subhash Bhamre, and Congress leaders Milind Deora and Urmila Matondkar are among the 323 candidates in the fray in this phase.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's son, a member of erstwhile Jaipur royal family and two Union ministers are among 115 candidates whose fate will be decided on Monday.

Jodhpur became one of the most talked about seats in the Congress ruled state where Gehlot did massive campaigning for his son Vaibhav, pitted against sitting MP and Union minister of state Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. In Rajasthan, where the BJP had won all the seats in 2014, the Congress appeared to make a comeback, forming the government in the state with a narrow majority after last year's Assembly polls. In Uttar Pradesh,

most of these 13 seats are seeing a direct fight between the BJP and SP-BSP alliance with Kannauj being a matter of prestige for the SP. In 2014, the BJP won 12 of these 13 seats in the state. Only Kannauj, won by the Samajwadi Party, defied the Modi wave that year among them. Former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav's wife Dimple is seeking re-election from Kannauj. The Congress has a good presence in at least three of the constituencies -- Unnao (Annu Tandon), Farrukhabad (Salman Khurshid) and Kanpur (Sriprakash Jaiswal). In West Bengal, all the eight seats, which are spread across four districts, will see a four-cornered contest between Trinamool Congress, BJP, Congress and the Left Front.

In Odisha, where the state's ruling BJD won all six seats, the BJP is making concerted efforts to bag a few seats. Prominent among the hopefuls include BJP national vice-president Baijayant Panda (Kendrapara), who quit the BJD to join the party recently. Polling will also be held in 41 assembly seats in Odisha in this phase. In Bihar, the BJP and its allies are looking to retain all the five seats in the face of a spirited fight put up by the RJD-Congress alliance.

The cynosure of all eyes in this phase, however, is the Begusarai seat which will witness an electrifying contest between the political Left and the Right with CPI debutant Kanhaiya Kumar taking on firebrand BJP leader Giriraj Singh.

Pet dog saves farmer from cobra

Thanjavur, Apr 28 (PTI): In a heroic battle exemplifying its loyalty, a pet dog saved its master from a cobra, killing the venomous reptile and laying down its own life in the process at a village near here.

Seeing the five-foot long cobra about to attack Natarajan (50), a farmer of Vengarayankudikaadu village while on his way to his field, the dog 'Puppy' jumped to his rescue Saturday.

While the dog and the snake fought a pitched battle, the farmer rushed to his nearby house to fetch a stick to chase the reptile away.

But, by the time he could return, Puppy killed the snake, but tragically died due to bites suffered earlier, the farmer said.

News of Puppy fighting off a venomous reptile spread and residents gathered at the farmer's house to pay homage to his pet.

Natarajan, who turned emotional, picked up the dead dog, and held it close to his chest before giving it a tearful burial near his house, neighbours said.

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Why isn't govt asking RBI to reveal information about defaulters and banks' inspections: Cong

NEW DELHI, APR 28 (PTI): The Congress Sunday asked why the central government was not giving a one-line directive to the RBI to disclose information about annual inspection report of banks and list of wilful loan defaulters.

The party's remarks came after the Supreme Court on Friday gave the banking regulator "a last opportunity" to reveal these details under the RTI Act.

"Under Banking Regulation Act and RBI Act, it takes Government of India 15 seconds to direct the RBI to disclose... There are specific provisions of 35A, 35B and 35AA (of Banking Regulation Act) that gives this power to the central government...Why is the government not giving a one-line simple directive to disclose," asked Congress spokesperson Abhishek Many Singhvi.

Addressing a press conference here, he said, "The Supreme Court directed in 2015 that you must disclose. After that for four long years, the RBI under the direction of this government, clearly wanting to hide things, has procrastinated, has obstructed and has derailed, has avoided, and has given excuses." "Why is the RBI not disclosing...Is it protecting someone," he questioned.

Singhvi asked if the BJP was trying to protect "crony capitalists" whose names are in the list of RBI's wilful defaulters.

About wilful defaulters who are on the internal RBI list, he said, "Nobody is asking for them to be sent to jail. We are only asking for names... We (Congress) are not afraid of it, so why are you afraid?"

"We had told you a few weeks ago that within 5 years of this (BJP) government, the defaults and NPAs (non-performing assets) have increased...We ask the BJP to give information about all loan defaulters," he said.

On Friday, the top court made it clear that RBI was "duty-bound to furnish all information relating to inspection reports and other material" under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, except those which pertained to "matters of national economic interest".

On December 16, 2015, the apex court had asked the RBI to disclose such information under RTI Act. However, the regulator did not do so. Therefore, on Friday, the apex court said that the RBI is in "contempt of this court by exempting disclosure" of such information. However, the court granted RBI "a last opportunity" to rectify it.

Meanwhile, Singhvi also claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's use of caste references during the election campaign is a sign of nervousness.

Chiya Kavita discusses ChiChimira

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 APR:

In a unique initiative under the poets' collective, Chiya Kavita, a discussion on a collection of short stories, ChiChimira, by Nepali author, Yuva Baral, was held here at Rachna Books on Sunday.

The event, 'Chichimira Discourse', had Nepali litterateurs Sher Bahadur Karki, Prabin Rai 'Jumeli', Pempa Tamang and Sikkim University Nepali Department HoD Dr Kavita Lama on the panel.

Chichimira was released last year.



45-year-old Yuva Baral hails from Biring in East Sikkim and has several published works,

short stories and poems, to his credit.

During the discussion, panelists shared

their views on stories compiled in ChiChimira. They also appreciated the imagination of the author

displayed in the different themes he tackles in the 17 stories in the book.

ChiChimira, they underlined, was one of the best works in Indian Nepali literature.

On the occasion, the author thanked Chiya Kavita and the panelists for their participation in the event.

Chiya Kavita coordinator, Prabin Khaling, mentioned that the event was organized when they felt the absence of a culture of discussions on a book after its publication.

Gurung Tamu magazine released



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 APR:

A Gurung Tamu magazine, Tamu Chautari, published by Tamu Lochar Organising Committee of Begha, Dentam, was released here on Sunday. The magazine features literary works in Gurung, Nepali and English languages and has Kiran Gurung as editor.

The release programme, organised by Tamu Chautari Bimochan Ayojak Samiti, had Sikkim Akademi president, Padma Shree Kedar Gurung, as chief guest.

On the occasion, the organisers also felicitated 16 personalities from the Gurung community for contributions in their respective fields. The feted achievers are: singers Naren Gurung, CB Gurung and Bhanu Gurung, entrepreneur Devika Gurung, professional footballer Robin Gurung, boxer Vabiya Gurung, litterateurs TB Gurung and Rup Raj Gurung, yoga trainer Aradhana Gurung, fashion designer Omi Gurung, social worker Bhawani Pele Gurung, bodybuilder Arun

Gurung, runners Bharati Gurung and Joy Gurung, music director Kailash Gurung and comedian Dilip Gurung.

In his address, the chief guest pointed out that Gurung language has already been recognised by the State government as a State language and that it was now the responsibility of youth to power the development of Gurung language and literature.

He stressed the community needs to work together for the development of Gurung language and literature.

The Tamu Chautari editor, Kiran Gurung, in turn, spoke about the magazine and its contents and stressed the need for everyone to give continuity to this magazine through their support.

Likewise, Gurung language expert, Meghraj Gurung, delved on the condition of Gurung language in Sikkim while Amber Gurung presented a review of the magazine. The programme also featured a cultural presentation.

TMC moves EC over "The Great Khali" campaigning for BJP

KOLKATA, APR 28 (PTI): After the BJP accused the Trinamool Congress of inviting Bangladeshi actors in its campaign in the state, it is the TMC's turn to move the EC alleging that "American" wrestler "The Great Khali" had taken part in the electioneering of a saffron party nominee here.

The TMC has lodged a complaint with the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer that BJP's candidate for Jadavpur Lok Sabha constituency, Anupam Hazra, had taken the wrestler along while campaigning on April 26.

Dalip Singh Rana aka "The Great Khali" holds US citizenship and the BJP was trying to influence Indian voters by using his "celebrity status", the complaint said.

"A foreigner should not be allowed to influence the minds of the Indian electors as he has little or no knowledge as to who should be an ap-

propriate MP in India," the complaint lodged by the TMC said.

In an interview to the media, Khali had said, "Whenever he (Hazra) calls me, wherever I am called, I will make it. I have specially come from America to support my younger brother. I want to request everyone to cast their votes for him. Do not waste your votes. Anupam is a learned man, he knows your troubles and will be able to serve you better than anyone else."

The TMC urged the EC to take "strictest possible steps against Khali as well as the candidate".

BJP leader Mukul Roy, however, said Khali holds the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card and can work and live in India.

The OCI is an immigration status permitting a foreigner of Indian origin to live and work in India indefinitely.

Excellence in Journalism award for Ajay Agarwal

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 APR:

Gangtok-based journalist Ajay Agarwal of Sikkim Chronicle has been named for this year's 'Excellence in Journalism' award constituted by Sikkim Express in the memory of Late Ram Patro, the founding editor of the newspaper.

Mr Agarwal's name was unanimously endorsed by the Ram Patro Memorial Award Committee on Friday, a press release informs.

The award is presented annually to journalists in Sikkim and North Bengal who have made a visible social impact through their journalism. The award celebrates the torchbearers of media in the region as per the principles of Late Ram Patro, the release adds.

Similarly, the Ram Patro Memorial Award Committee also annually presents the 'Best Working Journalist in Sikkim Express & Himali Bela Award' to a staff reporter/correspondent working either in Sikkim Express or Himali Bela.



This year, the Ram Patro Memorial Award in this category is being presented to Sikkim Express staff reporter Isabella Gurung.

Isabella joined SIKKIM EXPRESS in December, 2016 and is based in Gangtok as a staff reporter. She hails from Dowhill, Kurseong and has a Masters in mass communications from Sikkim University. She mostly covers academics, arts &

literature, entertainment and social events.

The Ram Patro Memorial Award function is scheduled on May 17 at Gangtok.

Ram Karki, presently a member of Parliament and formerly a minister in Nepal government, has agreed to attend the awards function as the chief guest. He was also the associate editor of Himali Bela in the late 90s.

Senior journalist Karma Paljor, editor-in-chief of East Mojo, is attending the award function as the guest of honour.

Will ask EC to seek expenditure details of PM rallies: Mamata

KHEJURI/TAMLUK (WB), APR 28 (PTI): Accusing the BJP of doling out money to buy votes in the general election, West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee Sunday said her party will request the poll panel to seek an account of expenditure at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rallies.

Banerjee also demanded that Modi's candidature from Varanasi be cancelled, claiming that he has written "does not know" on many counts in his affidavit.

Addressing back-to-back rallies in East Midnapore, she said, "We will ask the Election Commission (EC) to keep an account of the spendings in the prime minister's public meetings. If the EC can seek details of expenditure from others, why not from him?"

The chief minister also alleged that the saffron party is doling out thousands of rupees to lure people to its rallies, while also buying votes.

Taking her diatribe against the prime minister to his homefront, she claimed that "all throughout his life, Modi never respected his mother or his wife."

"You shy away from giving your wife her due respect, what respect will you give to the people?" the CM said.

Maintaining that she has seen Modi's affidavit in his nomination papers, Banerjee said, "The PM has written that he does not know about his wife's movable and immovable assets. I don't like making such comments, but the level he has stooped to forced me to speak out," the TMC boss said.

She urged the Election Commission to carry out an investigation into the spendings of Modi's "colourful rally" in the holy town of Varanasi before filing his nomination. "This election is not (a test) for Mamata Banerjee, but for you (Modi). It is time for you to answer what you have done in five years," she said, insisting that the prime minister was busy touring the world during his tenure.

Maintaining that Modi is worse than Mohammed bin Tughlaq, the 14th century sultan of Delhi known for his whims, she said that the sudden demonetisation of high-value currency notes in November 2016 caused immense hardship to people, be it a housewife, farmer, worker or a small businessman.

Banerjee, whose aversion to communism and everything associated with it including the colour red is well-known, for once sought refuge in

Karl Marx to deride the BJP. Drawing from Marx's famous statement "religion is the opium of the masses", she said, "The BJP is using religion as opium to divert the attention of people from the non-performance of its government at the Centre. She, however, did not mince her words when it came to targeting the Left parties in the state.

"Those who wore red shirts earlier are now donning saffron kurtas in West Bengal," the TMC chief said, indicating that many BJP workers in the state are former CPI(M) cadres. The CM also iterated that Modi will ensure that there was no further election in the country if re-elected to power.

She charged the poll panel with "doing the bidding of the BJP".

Banerjee, whose party was accused of unleashing a reign of terror during the panchayat polls, insisted that it was her partymen who were killed during the elections in 2018.

"In Bengal, there is a democratically elected dispensation, but the BJP is trying to run a parallel government here. A retired officer is dictating terms to the serving officers, this is unconstitutional," she said, referring to the two special observers appointed by the EC to oversee polls in West Bengal.

Rangpo Lions begin Saheli programme for menstrual health

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 APR:

Lions Club of Rangpo, under its One District One Activity programme, launched its Saheli initiative at different schools in the area today.

Namita Chettri, the programme chairperson, explained that the Saheli initiative aims to raise awareness among girl students above 12 years of age about menstrual health and hygiene.

The Rangpo Lions aim to reach 3,000 students in the area, and yesterday, during

launch of the program, more than 300 students were made aware about menstrual health and hygiene.

Similar programmes were organised at Rangpo Secondary School, Jitlang Junior High School, Cheuribhotey Junior High School and Duga Secondary School on day-one.

Dr Dixca Poudyal was present as the main resource person. The Club also distributed sanitary napkins to all the students who participated in the program.

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SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

To Protect and to Promote

To secure the future, think beyond protection and quotas

Local protection is an important issue. It could also be argued that it is of more emotional significance than constructive intervention, but because people and their leaders feel so strongly about the issue, it becomes very important. Even the West, with its enviable unemployment rate despite the economic downturn, is passionately debating the pros and cons of outsourcing which, in its mind is taking jobs away to cheaper human resource destinations even though benefits of such cost cuts benefit cash-strapped consumers at home the most.

So yes, local protection evokes a passionate and emotional response from the people, and governments have to continuously appear to be prioritising it. There are, however, practical and logistic implications that should never be lost sight of and quality never allowed to be compromised. Opportunities that progressive and positive attitudes create should not be allowed to get drowned by the din of rhetoric. In a world growing increasingly ‘flat’ [to borrow the now dated term from Thomas L. Friedman], digging trenches only manages to keep opportunities out, shrinks the horizon and constricts development. The present times demand competitive edge, and prioritizing protectionism dulls this pre-requisite of making it in the world. Protect, yes, but also trust the inherent skills and potential of the young. The young have proven that they have what it takes to succeed and survive. Take for example the many young entrepreneurs that Sikkim can boast of now. They happened when the easier option of landing employment with the government became scarce and also less appealing. They applied themselves to enterprises, something that the ‘local’ talent pool was not considered very adept at till even a decade back. But look around now, the youth, who while in school, were being groomed for cushy bureaucracy or technical professions, have grown up quite well as hoteliers, restaurateurs, travel operators, small scale industrialists, respected professionals with national media, sportspersons... achievers.

Such successes probably happened because they grew up before obsessive protectionism invaded the public domain and made the young lazy. This of course does not go to say that job opportunities should not be protected for the people of the land, they should; but the policy makers have to strike the right balance where it is done in a way that does not lull future generations into a false sense of security and stops them from developing skills which make them world beaters. It is not easy, but a good beginning can be made with devising ways which reward healthy business practices. Investors who set up shop in Sikkim should conduct themselves better, encourage and invite more local employment on their own instead of being made to do so by way of legislations. They enjoy tax breaks and many other sops when they opt for Sikkim, not because Sikkim needs more factories, but because it rewards job creation. They have to understand and appreciate this fact. The young on the other hand should be groomed as competitors, not as beneficiaries-in-waiting. In times to come, it should be their skills that attract and retain investments and not lavish industrial policies alone. Various arms of the government will have to collaborate to make this possible. It is possible and the generation controlling the present owes it to the future.

vice delivery remains unaddressed. No surprises there since the Centre believes announcements are enough to claim delivery. Hence, performance continues to be gauged on input-centric indices in our country and also the State. Bureaucrats, as also the schemes they oversee, are rated on the basis of money spent, man-hours supposedly devoted and manpower deployed. The ARC had noticed this fault a decade ago and recommended that assessment be based on quantifiable output targets. This was a good idea, even if an obvious one, and a welcome relief from attitudes which focus only on “effort” [which are all about claims] and ignore the all important aspect of “impact” [as in results]. Schemes are evaluated and sustained [with release of subsequent funds] based on Utilization Certificates. Although Sikkim’s bureaucracy fares poorly even on this formality, as the Chief Minister and recently even the Chief Secretary admonished them for, should the ARC’s recommendation be adopted [along with its penal clauses on failure], development could attain an even steeper trajectory here upwards. More importantly, it would also fix accountability and embarrassments like complaints of delays even in routine official processes would not occur too frequently, and if they did, there would be a prescribed process to readdress them. After all, officials who do not report to even push files will not fare too well in service delivery either. Basically, the problem with the present model of evaluation [and thus also work culture] is that because it is “input centric” it makes no demands on the bureaucracy to remain true to its public service epithet. One of the biggest hurdles holding up effective decentralization of power, despite devolution of substantial responsibilities to the panchayat level, is that lay people still do not have an important enough say. While they can vote for change every five years, that is about the only control they have on delivery of development. They cannot touch the bureaucrats. And the babus can continue to talk down to them because when it comes evaluating their performance, it is based on data of inputs which they control along with the elected representatives [who become a part of the System the moment they get elected]. Should performances instead be evaluated on returns accrued on the inputs made, the end-recipients, that is the people, will have at least a deciding say because it will be their assessment of the effectiveness of administration’s ability to deliver that will decide which officers stay and who is shown the door. Yes, the ARC draft had also recommended that civil servants who continually fail to “perform” are compulsorily retired. The Departments will automatically become populated by “public servants” in the real sense of the term. Devolution of power would have been attained and job-satisfaction ensured for public servants who make the grade and every penny of the pay commission rewards would have been well earned. That said, 10 years since the idea was mooted, it has still not happened...



Ian McEwan’s Machines Like Me and the thorny issue of robot rights

JOSHUA JOWITT
THECONVERSATION.COM

Ian McEwan’s latest book, *Machines Like Me: A Novel* offers an alternative history: Britain has lost the Falklands War, Margaret Thatcher is waging an election campaign against Tony Benn and Alan Turing survived homophobic persecution to achieve breakthroughs in artificial intelligence.

The novel paints a picture of 1980s London that is at once familiar, but at the same time very different – and in doing so it raises some pressing questions. Central to the plot are the world’s first synthetic humans, put on sale for the public to buy. With this device, McEwan questions what it means to be human – if these machines are just like me, does that mean they have rights, like me?

It’s tempting to dismiss this as a ridiculous notion. When the question comes up with friends in the pub (usually after a few drinks), a common response is that we have human rights because we’re human. Robots aren’t human, so they can’t have the same rights as us. But if you think about this, it’s a circular argument. The same logic was used against women’s suffrage – they can’t have the vote, because they’re women. Slaves can’t have freedom, because they’re slaves. Machines can’t have rights, because they’re machines.

BEING HUMAN

But before this can be dismissed as whimsical science fiction, we need to think more about why humans have rights and what it means to be human in the first place. Some might highlight the importance of our births

– the fact that we are naturally procreated, whereas machines are made by humans. But if this is true, where does this leave the eight million people who have been born as a result of IVF treatment?

You could highlight our organic nature to sidestep this problem – we are biological beings, whereas machines are made of component parts. But this would mean that people with prosthetic limbs are “less human” – which is clearly not the case. Nor are people “less human” who have commonplace hip and knee replacements. Scientists at my own university have 3D printed the first artificial cornea, and this week Israeli scientists 3D printed an entire human heart. Nobody is suggesting that patients receiving these artificial organs are less human – even though they are no longer 100% organic.

Consciousness may also be a place to look – as humans are able to act on reasons beyond natural impulse or programming. But we are not alone in this ability – other animals can also engage in sophisticated planning and tool usage. And this argument would mean that babies and late-stage dementia patients are in effect “less human” because they lack this feature – which is clearly not the case.

Ultimately, all of these lines of argument have problems that only lead to deeper levels of abstraction. Maybe then what’s required is the ability to be open to a change in how we see the world and ourselves.

CONFLICT AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Although the level of machine consciousness portrayed by McEwan is, for the time

being, still fiction – many believe that it will be a reality by the end of the century. And as technology develops and machines become more like us, then they may also need to be recognised as having rights like us.

Alan Gewirth was a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. He claimed that the reasons humans have rights is because we are prospective agents, able to choose what to do beyond natural impulse or reflex. So if this autonomous agency is the foundation of our rights, and robots are also autonomous agents, consistency requires us to recognise that they too have the same basic rights to freedom and well-being that we claim for ourselves.

This is not to say that robot rights cannot be overridden – all rights conflicts lead to the rights of one party being prioritised over the other. It merely requires us to see that robots are equal parties in any rights dispute. Mistreating a robot agent would not be the same as mistreating a printer for example, it would be more similar to mistreating another human.

Granting legal rights to robots clearly remains a complicated subject, but experiences from other fields shows how the problem is only practical and that it can be overcome. Legal systems have recognised that things as diverse as idols, orangutans and even rivers can have rights – so why not robots? It’s clear then that, like McEwan, the law should start thinking about these questions now instead of playing catch-up once the robots have arrived.

[the writer is Teaching Fellow in Law, Newcastle University]

Imperfect and absurd, the modern literary heroine is a woman of our times

SALLY O'REILLY
theconversation.com

The way women are portrayed is changing. In film, *The Favourite* has won numerous awards and features three women, variously wild and untameable, as joint protagonists. Other movies such as *The Wife* and *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* show older or unlovely women as sympathetic leads. Brava! But what’s happening in fiction? What are readers looking for in their modern, made-up women?

In this period of widening gender equality, it seems the time is right for new portrayals of women in fiction. Readers are diverse, and want many different things, and various female “archetypes” have existed since storytelling began. Early tales included murderesses and proxy witches such as the Greek figure Medea and Grendel’s mother – who is nameless – from the Old English poem *Beowulf*.

There were deceiving femme fatales, such as the Sirens who lured sailors to shipwreck, tragic mistresses, including Dido and Cleopatra and poor, resourceful girls like Gretel in traditional fairy-tales.

These enduring archetypes have been customised and reimagined by each succeeding generation. Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath* is full of worldly wisdom and Shakespeare presented women who were wily and devious like Portia and Lady Macbeth as well as tricked and deceived like Juliet and Desdemona.

Victorian heroines like George Eliot’s Dorothea Brooke claimed their right to passion and equality – and in the 20th century female characters engaged with the world of work as well as matters of the heart, battling for self-determination. The eponymous heroine of Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is one example, setting out to impose her will on her impressionable students, though she is ultimately betrayed.

UNPREDICTABLE WOMEN

So where do we find ourselves now? One notable characteristic of the modern heroine is that her flaws are not only centre stage, they are celebrated. Jane Austen wondered if anyone but herself would like domineering Emma Woodhouse – but now every heroine worth her salt has as many vices as virtues. Women behaving badly fill the pages of books in every genre – from Katniss Everdene, the rebellious heroine of Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* to Frances Wray and Lilian Barber, the unlikely conspirators in Sarah Waters’ page-turning novel *The Paying Guests*.

There is also a recognition that female experience is as universal as male experience. The heroines of contemporary fiction reflect the rich diversity of female lives. Examples include Hortense Roberts, one of the main characters in Andrea Levy’s seminal novel *Small Island* who finds tenderness in

her bleak new homeland, and Elizabeth Strout’s astonishing *Olive Kitteridge*, whose true complexity is revealed in a narrative that spans decades. Their everyday experiences are compelling and heartrending.

Genres are blending and heroines are complicated. They are morally ambiguous and their behaviour is unpredictable. The doomed mistress is fighting back and taking on the characteristics of the proxy witch. This is demonstrated by the typical heroine of the new crime sub-genre domestic noir which focuses on women’s experience and emotions in the home and workplace. She may find herself married to the modern equivalent of Bluebeard, but he is unlikely to get away with murder. This is exemplified in novels like *Gone Girl* – Amy Dunne outsmarts her husband and excels in trickery, cunningly creating mantraps while seeming to be the perfect wife.

SCARRED, IMPERFECT OR ABSURD

Publishing’s latest passion is for redemptive, feel-good fiction, known as “up-lit”, and this also reinterprets existing tropes. Gail Honeyman’s lonely Eleanor Oliphant hits the vodka behind closed doors and attempts to conceal her dysfunctionality and traumatic childhood from the world, but is stronger and more able to grow than we first realise. One of the reasons for Eleanor’s wide appeal may be that she springs from a line of literary heroines – that of the spirited outsider.

Honeyman draws parallels between Eleanor and Jane Eyre, another abandoned child who finds her own path. Readers are engaged not only by Eleanor’s predicament, but by her determination to transcend disaster. Her most recent antecedent is Helen Fielding’s Chardonnay-swilling Bridget Jones, who is herself the direct descendant of Jane Austen’s best-loved heroine, Elizabeth Bennet.

Women who make their own rules are selling well in literary fiction too. In *Conversations with Friends*, Sally Rooney’s young Bohemians Frances and Bobbi are brimming with anarchic attitude, sharing “a contempt for the cultish pursuit of male physical dominance” and luxuriating in “shallow misery”. They lead unapologetically experimental lives, creating ripples of sexual confusion.

Following the various cases of male bullying and sexual harassment that have hit the headlines, it seems that fictional heroines reflect a mood of noncompliance with the world that men have organised. The 21st-century heroine may be scarred, imperfect or absurd. True love may be on the cards, but so might illicit sex. And while she may change in the course of the narrative, revealing strengths and strategies that surprise us, conformity is optional. Here’s to the good/bad heroine, long may she remain unredeemed.

[the writer is Lecturer in Creative Writing, The Open University]

With curb on illegal mining, out-of-job miners in West Bengal mull NOTA

PRADIPTA TAPADAR
ASANSOL/ RANIGANJ
(WB), APR 28 (PTI):

With a halt on illegal mining since the elections were announced, miners who work in hundreds of these high-risk narrow pits to dig out coal for a living have been jobless and say they will opt for NOTA when they go to vote on Monday as a mark of protest.

Mining, both legal and illegal, is common in the Raniganj-Asansol coal belt in West Bengal and in many cases, the coal mafia engage poor people in illegal work for a low wage.

But since the notification of elections and seizures taking place to curb illegal election funding, coal mafia operating in the areas have stopped operations throwing more than hundreds of these miners commonly known as "rat-hole miners" out of livelihood.

The story is more or less same in more than 3,500 illegal coal pits operating in the area which have either closed down due to excessive vigil or have slowed down the operations.

The out-of-job miners have decided to opt for NOTA as a mark of protest.

Sitting MP Babul Supriyo is pitted against Moon Moon Sen of the



TMC in the Monday's elections for the Asansol Lok Sabha seat.

According to officials of Eastern Coalfields Ltd (ECL), illegal mining is currently under check and has slowed down in the election season.

"Whenever we get any information, we are taking action," an ECL official told PTI.

According to sources, in about 3,500 illegal coal mines in Asansol-Raniganj area, at least 35,000 people are directly employed, while another 40,000 get indirect employment.

"After a hard day of work, we get Rs 80-100. We just manage two squares of meal a day. We don't want our children to engage in illegal mining. This is the only reliable source of income in the area as we neither

have agricultural land nor any proper industry. The government should ensure proper employment for us and education for our children," says miner Ashis Sardar (name changed), who is in his late forties.

Ranibala Munda, another miner, says that in the past few elections due to increased vigil, the coal mafia calls off operations for two-three months leading to serious levels of unemployment in the region.

"The government and the political parties are not bothered about us. But when the elections come, they will ensure these mines are closed down. What will we eat? How will we run our family? My entire family will opt for NOTA this time," says Munda.

Munda's view was

echoed by local contractor Raju (name changed), who manages the miners.

"In election season, political parties make big promises but don't fulfil them. We feel that this job should be legalised so that we get benefits and our children don't get into this business. We want education for our children, proper health facilities and a decent job to run our families. But our views have always been falling into deaf ears. So we would go for NOTA," he says.

Most of the miners who are thrown out of jobs claim they have been asked by various political parties to work for them in the poll season.

According to sources, illegal coal mining, which has a daily turnover running into crores is con-

sidered to be "parallel economy in the industrial town belt of Asansol and its surrounding areas".

Even as the illegal business continues to yield high profit, the benefits are hardly passed on to the miners who risk their lives to keep the business running.

Besides digging up plots, those engaged in illegal mining extract coal from mines abandoned by ECL. The coal extracted from these illegal mines sells for Rs 300-400 a tonne, whereas the miners get around Rs 80-100 after 12 hours of laborious work.

Illegal mining is said to be rampant in Barabani, Jamuria, Raniganj and Pandaveswar - which falls under Asansol. The large stretch of the Raniganj-Asansol coal belt

is in the control of coal mafia.

In last few years, there have been incidents of miners getting trapped in these mines and being killed.

A trade union leader, who did not wish to be named fearing backlash from the coal mafia syndicate, says if a miner is a local he is given Rs 1 lakh as compensation and if he is a tribal from a nearby state his family is given Rs 50,000.

"No one dares to question them or raise their voice or else they will be killed," he says.

The BJP alleges that the ruling TMC is in collusion with coal mafia.

"Everybody knows that the TMC and the local administration are in collusion with the coal mafia. It may have slowed down now but it will again gain momentum once the election is over," Supriyo says.

His views are also shared by former CPI (M) MP Bansagopal Chowdhury who says the money from pilfered coal runs is being used to oil TMC's election machinery.

Senior TMC minister and local MLA Moloy Ghatak terms these allegations baseless and politically motivated and denies the TMC's involvement in any illegal mining.

*Differently abled voters man
polling booth in Assam's Goalpara*

GOALPARA, APR 28 (PTI): In a first, the Goalpara administration in Assam appointed differently abled personnel in a booth, while also making arrangements to aid voters with disabilities in the other polling stations of the district, during the third phase of elections, an official said.

As part of its initiative to encourage female participation in the voting process, the officials also set up eight pink booths in the district, she said.

"A total of 1,931 differently abled voters were identified for the April 23 polls and transportation arrangements made accordingly to ensure that they get to exercise their franchise without any hassles," District Election Officer and Deputy Commissioner Varnali Deka said.

The administration also made provisions for separate queues of senior citizens, the bureaucrat said.

"We sensitised the polling personnel on the special needs of persons with disabilities and the elderly voters and taught them ways to handle the braille ballot papers to assist the visually

impaired," she told PTI on Sunday.

More than 800 anganwadi workers were deployed at the 277 booths in the district to assist the voters, she stated.

Deka also noted that one of the booths were successfully manned by differently abled poll personnel.

"All polling officers, including the presiding officer, in that booth had some or the other disabilities. But they did not their disability come in the way of their duties," she said.

The administration had set up four model polling stations in Goalpara, replete with necessary facilities - creche, children's playing zone, clean drinking water, sofa and chairs, she maintained.

"In all eight pink booths, the women personnel were gifted traditional Mekhela-sador as a token on appreciation for their efforts," Deka said.

In keeping with the request of the district administration, several business establishments and restaurants provided complimentary meal and substantial discounts to voters on April 23, during the third and final phase of polls in the state, Deka added.

FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS

The Sentiments of Voting

RONGNYOO LEPCHA

The sound of cicadas fill the early summer air as people lined up family by family. The scorching heat tiring the line as it was finally its turn to be the centre of people's complaints. The army alert for protection in case of any disturbance, as West Bengal went through the most crucial moment of selecting a new political power to represent the people. And for the people of the hills it's always been a crucial part to choose their representatives as the notion of identity is always attached. As People tend to face identity crisis as the people are treated differently than the rest of the state regarding their morphological features and the cultural spaces. So it becomes very important to choose a leader who can place their ideas firmly. But even within the communities ideas differ, and so does their choices.

People from all age group above eighteen were present. In places far from the main town especially in villages, people who had accessibility to vehicles volunteered for the travel of others so they can vote on time prior to that people had to cover a large amount of distance just to cast one vote. As the facilities increased the number of voters increased.

I remember walking down to the voting centre during the last election as there was no accessibility to road but with the road coming up this year we rode a car till the voting centre. The vehicle similarly ran the whole day bring in voters and taking them back and the person behind the wheels was willing to cast the last vote after all the eligible voters of the village had finished casting their precious votes.

In most villages the elderly and women were sent first for voting while the men stayed behind patiently waiting for their turn. People as old as 102 years old women turned up, people who couldn't see with old age, people who were differently abled, all sections came forth.

Voting is entirely an individual decision but sometimes things like community sentiments come into play. Obviously not everyone agree to it but most are washed into the tides of emotions and often take the path where the majority decides to walk. We cannot deny the fact that this exists in most scenario, as we are all affected by our surroundings. The older generation are much devoted



ed to voting as they have seen much more than us. They are also prove very loyal once they form alliance with one political party. Though some might not even know the names of the parties properly, they always remember the logo. Symbolism playing a crucial role in connecting people and politics. I still remember my grandparents showing the symbols with their hands as they used to go for voting in the past. The young are more tenacious as they tend to vote for the one who can make their future better.

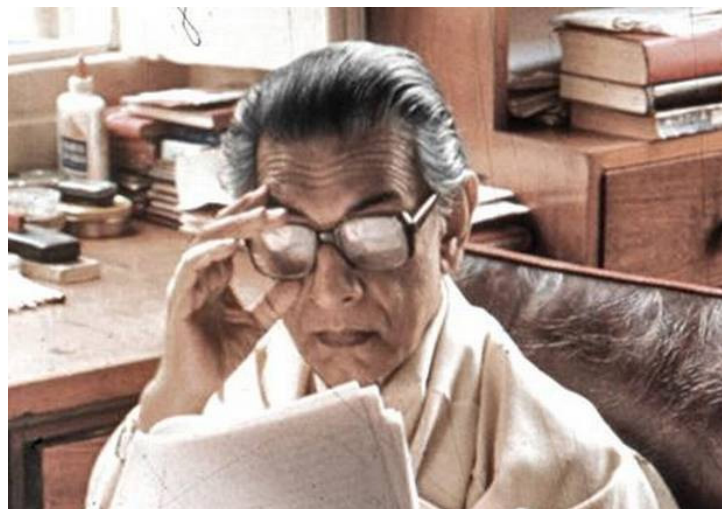
In the last few years the other side of the hills have faced both peace and chaos, precious time lost in struggle to secure the future. A future for which some even sacrificed themselves. Peace and prosperity obviously the ultimate goal. Voting was mostly peaceful with some exceptions as reports were out that the press vehicles came under attack in some parts. There is always going to be

something for people to channel their rage and dissatisfaction on and what better way to show it on the day of choosing a new political fertility to represent their voices.

The notion of identity also plays important role in the choices that people make. A sense of belonging is much stronger, beneficiaries hold a secondary position. Most were very secretive about their choice, some even diplomatic but deep down they know what they want. Even after Voting nobody is open about their choices.

Voting a collective decision, for a common goal. It's usually a mixture of sentiments and an unconventional decision making for me, as individual ideas and a collective comfort often tend to clash. And it's always pleasant to see all genre of eligible people coming out to make a collective decision and exercise the right democracy has given them.

Penguin launches Satyajit Ray library, to bring out 5 unpublished works



NEW DELHI, APR 28 (PTI): In some good news for Satyajit Ray fans, five previously unpublished titles of the master filmmaker author will be brought out from 2020 onwards.

Penguin Random House India has announced an association with the Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Archives (Satyajit Ray Society) and the legal estate of the Ray Family to publish these five titles under the aegis of The Penguin Ray Library.

These works consist of previously unpublished essays by Ray, Tarini Khuro translations by Ray and a lot of his illustrated works remain unseen till date among many others.

The Penguin Ray Library will give Ray's works a unique look of their own. Establishing a series with a distinct identity, these new titles will be presented in a special layout with quintessential aesthetics inspired by Ray's sensibilities. The Penguin Ray Library will be an endeavour to capture the brilliance of a Renaissance man and share his works

with a wider readership, Penguin said in a statement.

Ray was an ace designer, music composer, illustrator and a gifted writer. This association will celebrate his contribution to the world of art, literature, cinema and music and take his work to the next level - opening them up to new platforms and readers, it said.

Sandip Ray, member secretary of the Satyajit Ray Society and Ray's son, says, We are excited to be a part of vision that Penguin Random House has for perpetuating Ray's luminous legacy. The Penguin Ray Library and The Penguin Satyajit Ray Memorial Lecture are excellent platforms to introduce his works to new audiences.

Premanka Goswami, senior commissioning editor at Penguin Random House India, terms it a historical moment for the publishing house to be able to engage with Satyajit Ray's works in this way.

We have visualised the Penguin Ray Library to be a hallmark of the master's work as a confluence of aesthetic subtlety and creativity. The series of

new titles is a first step to building an enduring and meaningful relationship with Satyajit Ray Society and the Ray family, Goswami says.

Penguin is also collaborating with the Satyajit Ray Society to be a part of the annual lecture that is held in Ray's memory each year. This year, The Penguin Satyajit Ray Memorial Lecture, as it will be called hereon, was delivered by renowned filmmaker Tarun Majumdar Saturday.

Further establishing the lecture as one of the most prestigious cultural events of the year, Penguin will work collectively with the Ray society and family towards building the property further, as a true tribute to Ray's life and body of work.

Niti Kumar, senior vice president of Marketing (digital and communications) at Penguin Random House India says The Penguin Ray Library and The Penguin Satyajit Ray Memorial Lecture are the publishing house's gestures to commemorate the greatness of Ray.

Messi fires Barca to eighth La Liga title in 11 years

MADRID, APR 28 (AFP): Lionel Messi clinched an eighth La Liga title for Barcelona in 11 seasons on Saturday as he scored the only goal in a 1-0 win at home to Levante.

The Argentine star struck his league-leading 34th goal of the campaign after coming off the bench for the second half to help Barca wrap up the title with three games remaining.

Barca hold a nine-point lead over second-placed Atletico Madrid, but the Catalans cannot be overtaken thanks to their superior head-to-head record.

It is Barca's 26th league title and nudges them closer to Real Madrid's record of 33 in Spain.

"To win the title with a distance and gap is difficult with the rivals we have. We've done it two years in a row," Barca coach Ernesto Valverde told Movistar.

"We're happy and to see people enjoying it makes us proud. But we still have challenges ahead."

Valverde initially left Messi on the bench with Wednesday's Champions League semi-final first



leg against Liverpool in mind, but he replaced Philippe Coutinho at the break at the Camp Nou.

Coutinho and Luis Suarez pressed Levante goalkeeper Aitor Fernandez into action early on, the Brazilian coming closest to breaking the deadlock when his free-kick rattled the crossbar shortly before half-time.

He was sacrificed for Messi though, and it proved an inspired decision as the Argentine

swept in the winner on 62 minutes following a frantic scramble inside the Levante area.

The visitors, not yet safe from the threat of relegation, responded and put Barca on the defensive but were denied a last-gasp equaliser when the ball hit the post and rolled into the grateful arms of Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

"In the end he scored the goal. He always scores goals every-

where," Valverde said of Messi, who celebrated winning his 10th league crown.

- ATLETICO DELAY THE PARTY -

Atletico had delayed Barca's title party earlier in the day as they scraped past strugglers Real Valladolid 1-0 after surviving late VAR penalty drama.

Joaquin Fernandez's own goal put Atletico ahead midway through the second half, but they had to endure a nervy fi-

nal few minutes in which Jan Oblak had to be at his best and they survived a late VAR check over what looked like a clear Santiago Arias handball in the area.

"It's controversial, a ball that hits the hand and the referee's decision is to see if it's voluntary or not," said Saul Niguez, whose cross led to their fortunate winner.

Diego Simeone's side are nine points ahead of local rivals and reigning

European champions Real Madrid, who travel to Rayo Vallecano on Sunday amid increasing speculation they will respond to a disappointing season by swooping for Eden Hazard and Neymar.

"It's what we deserve, no more, no less. We've come so far," added Saul. "There were moments when we wanted to be first and others that I would say no, that's what we deserve."

Valladolid meanwhile stay 17th, just one point and a place away from the relegation zone after a match they will feel they were unlucky to lose.

Earlier on Saturday, Athletic Bilbao and Alaves did their chances of European football next season no favours with a 1-1 draw in the Basque Country.

Seventh-placed Bilbao are five points away from the Champions league places -- with Alaves a further three points back -- and could also see Valencia and Sevilla take the Europa league further away from them when they take on Eibar and Girona.

India could be third largest market for Amway in a decade

KOLKATA, APR 28 (PTI): India could become the third largest market for Amway in a decade, as the direct selling major embarks on a new omnichannel strategy later this year, a top company official said.

China tops Amway's global market with USD 2.5 billion in annual revenues, while India ranks seventh below Korea, the US, Japan, Thailand and Taiwan.

"India is already a key market, but holds a lot more potential to grow. We think it can become the third largest market for us in a decade," Amway global COO Michael J Cazer told PTI in an interview.

This was Cazer's first visit to West Bengal, a key market for

Amway India.

The USD-8.6 billion company will roll-out its omnichannel platform in the second half of 2019, with growing emphasis on the digital platform to fuel the next leg of growth.

"The forthcoming e-commerce platform (part of the omnichannel and digital strategy) will give an experience similar to retailers like Flipkart and Amazon," he said.

Cazer, however, said despite the emerging significance of the digital space, Amway's direct selling distribution model will remain as it is.

"Even for online sales, distributors' earnings will be protected. We will use a lot of algorithms to pass on the benefits

(commission) to the distributors, as they are the core pillar of interface with customers," he asserted.

Amway India's sales stand at about USD 300 million, and Cazer exuded confidence that the topline could touch USD 1 billion in a decade through a strong global and India-centric product portfolio, more distributors, better regulatory environment and digital footprint.

At least USD 15 million is lined up for investment in the near future for India operations, the senior Amway official said.

The company had recently introduced a herbal range for the Indian market under existing brands like 'Attitude', 'Nutralite' and 'Glider'.

Good to end home season on a high: Steve Smith



JAIPUR, APR 28 (PTI): Steve Smith is happy to have ended Rajasthan Royals' "home run" on a high after a seven-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad as he gears up to leave for Australia to take join national team's World Cup preparatory camp.

Rajasthan Royals kept slender hopes of IPL play-off qualifications alive with a seven wicket win over Sunrisers and are currently on sixth place with 10 points from 12 games.

"It was a good end to our home season, the boys pulled things back nicely. Playing together as a group and we're winning those key moments. We have been fortunate in the last few games," Smith said at the post-match press conference.

Rajasthan will be hoping for a favourable result to sneak in as the fourth team and Smith believes that his men can take it to the wire against Delhi Capitals in the last game in which he won't be available. Hopefully the boys will play well in Delhi as well."

"We need to continue winning and you never know. I have got one more to play in Bangalore, it'll be nice to finish on a winning note."

His elbow took a bit of pounding as he took an incredible catch running backwards to dismiss David Warner but Smith is hoping that the dive has not caused extensive damage ahead of the World Cup next month.

Smith had an elbow

surgery earlier this year and played with a heavily taped right elbow throughout the tournament.

"Hopefully, my arm is ok, it hurt initially because of the impact. I'll get to know more once the tape is off," Smith said after the match.

On the match, he praised Liam Livingstone for his attacking knock at the top of the order, which set the platform for a safe chase.

"Liam Livingstone was magnificent as he played with freedom and got us off to a good start. Samson finished things off nicely," the skipper said.

He also thanked the Jaipur crowd which he termed as "special and thanked them for their support".

India top medal tally at Beijing Shooting World Cup

BEIJING, APR 28 (PTI): India drew blank on the final day but still topped the chart for the second consecutive ISSF World Cup, third time in two years, by bagging three gold and a silver at the Beijing edition of the Rifle/Pistol event here.

India topped the medals tally ahead of hosts China (2 gold, 2 silver, 1 bronze), who won five medals in total.

In the last edition in New Delhi, India had jointly topped the standings with Hungary.

For India, while Anjum Moudgil and Young Divyansh Singh Panwar started the medal hunt

with a gold in the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team competition, the teenaged pair of Manu Bhaker and Saubrah Chaudhary backed them up with another yellow metal in the 10m Air Pistol Mixed Team Pistol event.

Divyansh then won India's first individual medal by clinching a silver in the men's 10m Air Rifle.

On Saturday, Abhishek Verma won India's third gold in men's 10m Air Pistol event.

The concluding day of the ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol Beijing 2019 edition however, belonged to two women legends of

the sport, two-time former Olympic champion Maria Grozdeva of Bulgaria and Croatian Rifle legend Snjezana Pejicic, who won the two scheduled finals of the day, the 25m Pistol and the 50m Rifle 3 Positions (3P).

In the first final on Sunday, the 46-year old Maria, champion in the 25m Pistol at the Sydney 2000 and Beijing 2004 Olympics, shot 36 in the final to beat a couple of young rising stars -- world number one Anna Korakaki of Greece and Veronika Major of Hungary, who was fresh from a double gold in the New Delhi World Cup.

Trump, US media in open war on annual dinner date

WASHINGTON, APR 28 (AFP): It's meant to be the annual Washington love-in, a dinner where White House journalists and the president yuk it up in a hotel ballroom.

But this Saturday, President Donald Trump stood up his dates.

Members of the White House Correspondents' Association, or WHCA, were decked out in bow ties and gowns at the downtown Washington Hilton.

Trump, however, was 685 miles (1100 kilometers) away in Green Bay, Wisconsin, for a rally with his baseball cap-wearing supporters.

As usual, he devoted portions of his speech - like most of his speeches - to haranguing the "fake news media" or "enemy of the people." "They are fakers," he said of the media to a typically boisterous crowd.

"I'll tell you, you know what sucks? Their ratings suck because people don't believe them." Back in Washington, the WHCA's president Olivier Knox told attendees he did not want to dwell on Trump - but called for a rejection of the president's rhetoric.

"Fake news and enemies of the people are not punchlines, pet names or presidential. And we should reject politically expedient assaults on the men and women whose hard work makes it possible to hold the powerful to account," he said.

Although there's nothing obligatory about attending WHCA dinners, presidents have usually done so at some point during their time in office since the inaugural version in 1921.

Ronald Reagan was the last absentee in 1981 and he had a decent excuse: being recently shot in an assassination attempt.

Trump, however, has boycotted what he calls the "boring" and "negative" party for three years in a row - his entire presidency so far.

The gala used to be a glamorous affair where hundreds of journalists, Hollywood celebrities and the president were entertained by a top-drawer comedian or other talent.

Now the celebs have

drained away and this year even the comedian was missing.

A presidential historian, Ron Chernow, delivered the main speech instead, in which he criticised what he described as an "insidious" and "relentless campaign against the very credibility of the news media."

Acknowledging that his speech was a shift from traditional headliners at the dinner, Chernow said: "We need them (comedians) now more than ever, during this surreal interlude in American life."

Underlining the snub, Trump ordered staff, including chief press secretary Sarah Sanders - who appeared onstage in Wisconsin - to also refuse invitations.

It's the latest shot in what the president sees as his war against a media machine refusing to give him fair coverage.

Trump's main weapon is Twitter, which he uses daily to reach some 60 million followers. Millions more follow him on other platforms.

After top-10 high, Rajiv settles for 12th place in Race 2, Senthil crashes out

AMANPREET SINGH ADELAIDE, APR 28 (PTI):

A double points finish eluded Idemitsu Honda Racing India but Rajiv Sethu ensured that the team does not return empty-handed from Race 2 of the Australia round in ARRC with his 12th place finish here Sunday.

Rajiv added four points to his six from Race 1, taking the total to 10 in Asia production 250 class in the second round of the Asia Road Racing Championship (ARRC) at Bend Motorsport Park.

However, it turned out to be a nightmarish race for young Senthil Kumar, who crashed in the opening lap itself due to technical snag in his bike.

While Senthil was among points on his debut in Malaysia, the young Chennai rider was left dejected after technical issues, possibly related to engine, brought about a premature end to his race.

A crash on the second turn in the opening lap, involving Race 1 winner Fadly Andy Muhammad, caused chaos after Rajiv began from his best-ever 12th position on the grid.

While Andy flipped multiple times after jumping off his bike, the melee did not affect Rajiv much as he was riding in the middle group.

While he soon gained a place to get to 11th place in Lap 2 and maintained the position for five laps, Yamaha's Torreq Muhammad Faerozi overtook him in Lap 7.

Another crash happened and in order to avoid collision, Rajiv had to slow down but he recovered quickly to continue improving his lap time.

Rajiv tried hard to move forward but Faerozi and Muhammaed Muzakkir remained strong in their positions to deny the In-

dian his second consecutive top-10 finish.

"The start was good but it was more of a juggling after the crash. For five laps, I could stay with the front bunch and timing was also quick. It's a positive from this race though the overall result is disappointing for me," said the 21-year-old.

"I lost a bit of time due to high-side (avoiding crash). The next round will be at my second home (Thailand) and I am sure there is a surprise in store."

Senthil said he could not figure out what happened to the bike.

"The formation lap and the start was good but it stopped in the middle of the opening lap. The temperature was also new for me. I am improving with every race and there should be a better outing in the next round," said the soft-spoken 18-year-old.

Japan's Aiki Iyoshi won the race ahead of Thailand's Muklada Sarapuech and Busari Tatchakorn.

After Andy crashed out, Muklada appeared cruising but in Lap5 Iyoshi passed her and maintained the lead throughout.

Parbhu Nagaraj, who heads the Motorsport operations for Honda, said Rajiv did extremely well to recover and the team coach --- was also happy with the way he approached the race.

"Rajiv's lap timings have improved considerably. He was clocking 2:09 and it his best. Senthil too was unfortunate today but since he has also competed in Thailand during the Thai talent Cup, the familiarity with the track will help him.

"We are yet to find out what exactly is wrong with the bike. We are still investigating," Nagaraj said.

ably include segments where he encourages the crowd to boo the reporters covering the event.

For years, WHCA dinners were a chance to let the hair down in a notoriously serious town. Past performers include Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra and Barbra Streisand.

Since the 1980s, comedians have provided entertainment, making gentle and not-so-gentle fun, or "roasting," the centerpiece of the dinner.

Presidents were expected to give as good as they got. A standout moment was Obama's riff in 2011, when one of his comic targets in the VIP-packed audience was none other than Donald Trump.

Last year, though, the jokes fell flat with organisers.

Featured comedian Michelle Wolf tore into Sanders and caused as much offense as laughter. Even the WHCA thought it had gone too far, calling her routine "not in the spirit" of the occasion.

Wolf called the WHCA "cowards."

Iran: Exiting nuclear pact one of 'many options' after US sanctions



TEHRAN, APR 28 (AFP): Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said leaving the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is one of the "many options" Tehran has to retaliate against US sanctions, state media reported Sunday.

The United States has imposed a raft of sanctions against the Islamic republic since President Donald Trump withdrew last year from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal with world powers.

On Monday Washington announced an end to sanction waivers for buyers of Iranian crude oil, and earlier this month the US declared Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards a "foreign terrorist organisation".

"The Islamic republic has many options... (leaving) the NPT is one of them," Zarif said in remarks to Iranian reporters in New York aired by state television.

State news agency IRNA said Zarif was asked why he had not touted leaving the nuclear treaty as one of Iran's possible reactions during his trip as he had done so previously.

"The country's officials are deliberating" the different options and measures, Zarif replied, adding that the possibility of leaving the NPT was among those options.

He did not list the other options.

Iran has branded the US sanctions "illegal" and Zarif warned on Wednesday that there would be consequences should Iran be barred from selling its oil.

The 2015 Iran nuclear deal with six world powers -- Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany -- had given the Islamic republic sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme.

Chinese Prez Xi meets Imran Khan, calls for improvement of Indo-Pak relations

KJM VARMA

BEIJING, APR 28 (PTI): Chinese President Xi Jinping met Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday and expressed hope that Pakistan and India can meet each other halfway to improve their strained relations following the Pulwama terror attack by a JeM suicide bomber.

Both leaders also exchanged views on the situations in South Asia, an official Chinese statement here said about the meeting between Xi and Khan.

The India-Pakistan relations reportedly figured prominently in the meeting. Xi expressed hope that Pakistan and India can meet each other halfway and promote the stabilisation and improvement of India-Pakistan relations, it said.

Khan arrived in China on April 25 and attended China's 2nd Belt and Road Forum (BRF) held on April 26-27.

The BRF meeting was held to highlight the achievement of the trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) started by Xi in 2013 in which USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an important component.

India skipped the meeting for the second time, protesting over the CPEC which is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The Sunday's meeting between Xi and Khan was regarded significant



as it was held in the backdrop of heightened tensions between India and Pakistan following the February 14 Pulwama terror attack carried out by Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) which killed 40 Indian CRPF soldiers.

China had sent its Vice Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou to visit Pakistan in March as part of its efforts to ease the tensions.

Khan's meeting with Xi took place when China is under pressure at the United Nations over its repeated attempts to block efforts to declare Pakistan-based JeM leader Masood Azhar as a global terrorist.

Last month, China put a technical hold on a resolution put forth by the US, the UK and France at the UN's 1267 counterterrorism committee to

declare Azhar as a global terrorist.

The US later took the issue to the UN Security Council (UNSC) in a bid to pressure China to take a public stance on Azhar's issue instead of just putting up blocks at the 1267 committee.

China had expressed its firm opposition to the issue being taken to the UNSC, saying that the matter headed for settlement and blamed the US for scuttling it.

While there is no word here whether the Azhar issue figured in Xi's talks with Khan, officials say there is a sense of wariness on the part of Beijing to block India, the US and other countries' efforts to blacklist him at the UN on behalf of Pakistan.

Officials hoped that the issue could be resolved in the coming

weeks following Khan's visit to China.

Prior to his meeting with Xi, Khan called on Chinese Premier Li Keqiang during which the two countries signed a number of agreements. Earlier, he met Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan.

During Sunday's meeting, Xi expressed China's firm support to Pakistan to further the bilateral ties between the all-weather allies.

"Pakistan is China's all-weather strategic co-operative partner. China and Pakistan are 'iron friends' and have always firmly supported each other on issues concerning each other's core interests," Xi said.

China takes Pakistan as a priority in its diplomacy, he said.

"No matter how international and regional

situations change, China firmly supports Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and national dignity, choosing its own development path suited to its national conditions, combating terrorist and extremist forces, striving for a sound external security environment, and playing a constructive role in international and regional affairs," Xi said.

He said major progress had been made in bilateral cooperation in the construction of the CPEC, especially in areas such as finance, trade and other aspects, the statement said.

"In the next stage, China and Pakistan should make more efforts to advance the all-weather strategic cooperation," Xi said.

He called on both sides to deepen high-level contacts and mutual support, strengthen stra-

tegic communication and promote high-quality cooperation in production capacity, infrastructure construction, people's livelihood and trade within the framework of the BRI.

Khan said the CPEC had played an important role in Pakistan's economic development and the improvement of people's lives.

He said he believed more and more countries will support and participate in the cooperation under the BRI.

Pakistan is willing to consolidate its traditional friendship with China, deepen pragmatic co-operation and enhance communication and coordination with China in multilateral affairs, Khan was quoted as saying in the statement.

During his meeting, Khan spoke a few times about India-Pakistan relations and the prospects of peace between the two countries.

Addressing Pakistan and China Investment Forum in Beijing on Sunday, he expressed hope that the relations between the two neighbours will improve after the Indian general elections.

"We want to build a civilized relationship with our Eastern neighbour and there is a possibility that if we can resolve the Kashmir issue through dialogue, things can improve," he was quoted by state-run Radio Pakistan as saying.

Refugees, asylum seekers harassed in Sri Lanka after Easter Sunday blasts



COLOMBO, APR 28 (PTI): Nearly 1,600 refugees from about 15 countries, mostly from Pakistan, are facing threats and have been attacked in Sri Lanka following the Easter Sunday bombings which killed over 250 people, an official said Sunday.

Sri Lanka Sunday marked a week since the coordinated blasts hit three churches and three luxury hotels, killing 253 people and injuring over 500 others.

The Islamic State (ISIS) terror group has claimed the April 21 coordinated blasts, but the government has blamed the local Islamist extremist group National Thowheeth Jamaath (NTJ) for the attack.

There are about 1,600 of them from about 15 countries and from various religious beliefs. They had arrived here to avoid persecution in their own countries. A majority of them are Pakistani Christians, a welfare official working with the refugees said.

A majority of them were living in the western coastal town of Negombo where one of the Churches, St Sebastian's, came under attack by an ISIS-linked suicide bomber.

"They have come under attack and threats, some of them have been subject to physical violence. Their landlords have been pressed to evict them," the official said.

The moves to shift them elsewhere have been met with resistance by respective local politicians.

"At least 4 times they had been taken in buses out of Negombo only to be brought back due to protests," the official said.

He said the state protection for them and collaboration with the UN refugee agency were important.

"The government's public commitment is needed to explain the temporary nature of their stay and why we need to support and protect them," the official said.

Sporadic cases of anti-Muslim violence have been reported since the blasts.

A large number of Christian devotees from the Negombo area were killed in the St Sebastian's Church attack. A timely intervention by the head of Catholic Church Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith calmed the situation.

All Sunday masses were canceled due to the volatile security situation, resulting in one main mass by Cardinal Ranjith, the first Sunday since the attacks.

A total of 106 suspects, including a Tamil medium teacher and a school principal, have been arrested in connection with the Easter Sunday blasts, the police said.

Nine suicide bombers carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three churches and three luxury hotels on the Easter Sunday.

Sri Lanka on Saturday banned the NTJ and a splinter group linked to the ISIS.

According to Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry, the number of foreign nationals who have been identified as killed remained at 40, including 11 from India.

Sri Lanka has a population of 21 million which is a patchwork of ethnicities and religions, dominated by the Sinhalese Buddhist majority.

Muslims account for 10 per cent of the population and are the second-largest minority after Hindus. Around seven per cent of Sri Lankans are Christians.

Saudi royal advisor in Khashoggi trial no-show

WASHINGTON, APR 28 (AFP): Two top Saudi royal advisors have been linked to journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder. One has been labeled the "ring-leader" but questions are swirling over the absence of the other in the closed-door trial of 11 suspects, multiple sources told AFP.

Saudi prosecutors have said deputy intelligence chief Ahmed al-Assiri oversaw the Washington Post columnist's killing in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate last October and that he was advised by the royal court's media czar Saud al-Qahtani.

Both aides were part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's tight-knit inner circle and have formally been sacked over the killing but only Assiri has appeared in the five court hearings since January, according to four Western officials privy to the information.

"Qahtani is not among the 11 facing trial," one of the officials told AFP.

"What does his absence mean? Are the Saudis keen to protect him or discipline him separately? No one knows." The kingdom's public prosecutor last November indicted 11 unnamed suspects, including five who could face the death penalty over the murder.

Diplomats from the UN Security Council's permanent members -- the US, Britain, France, China, Russia -- as well as Turkey are allowed to attend as observers of the legal proceedings that are held

entirely in Arabic.

They are not allowed to bring interpreters and are usually summoned at short notice, the sources said.

A representative of the Khashoggi family -- which this month rejected reports of a settlement with the Saudi government -- has attended at least one court session, they said.

Maher Mutreb, an intelligence operative who frequently traveled with the crown prince on foreign tours, forensic expert Salah al-Tubaigy and Fahaad al-Balawi, a member of the Saudi royal guard, are among the 11 on trial who could face the death penalty, the officials said.

The defendants are allowed legal counsel.

Many of them have defended themselves in court by saying they were carrying out orders by Assiri, describing him as the "ringleader" of the operation, according to the officials.

The kingdom's media ministry did not respond to AFP's request for comment. The defendants' lawyers could also not be reached.

Assiri, lionized in Saudi military ranks as a war hero, does not face the death penalty, the Western officials added.

Believed to have previously worked closely with US intelligence, he is also not named in two American sanctions lists of Saudis implicated in the murder.

Qahtani, who led fiery social media campaigns against critics of the kingdom and was seen as a conduit to the crown prince, is on both lists.

UAE gives birth certificate to girl born to Hindu father and Muslim mother

DUBAI, APR 28 (PTI): In probably the first, the UAE government has given birth certificate to a nine-month old girl who was born to an Indian Hindu father and a Muslim mother, setting aside the country's marriage rules for expatriates during the Year of Tolerance, according to a media report.

As per the marriage rules for expatriates in

UAE, a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man.

Sharjah-based expat Kiran Babu and Sanam Saboo Siddique, who got married in Kerala in 2016, faced an unusual situation when their daughter was born in July 2018, the Khaleej Times reported.

"I have an Abu Dhabi

visa. I get my insurance coverage there and got my wife admitted to Medeor 24X7 Hospital in the emirate. But after the baby's delivery, the birth certificate was rejected as I am a Hindu," Babu said.

"I, then applied for a no-objection certificate through the court. The trial went on for four months but my case was rejected," he added.





ON THE GO! Jet setter Padma Lakshmi is spotted arriving at LAX for an outbound flight.

Childhood memories helped Tessa Thompson's performance in 'Little Woods'



LOS ANGELES, APR 28 (PTI): Actor Tessa Thompson says she drew inspiration from her childhood memories for her character in the upcoming film, "Little Woods".

The Nia DaCosta-directed film features Thompson and Lily James as two estranged sisters from North Dakota who are driven to extremes when their mother dies, leaving them with one week to pay back her mortgage.

In an interview with Collider, Thompson said things would have been less "confusing" for her if the film had released when she was young.

"It is also my experience. My half-sister, who I grew up and who has my heart, is white,

and I'm me. We grew up in an experience where people were like, 'You're what?! How do you relate to each other?' To see that on screen and normalised was huge for me.

"If I had seen depictions like that when I was little, it would have probably helped me navigate all of the confusion that I felt around being at public schools and being one of the only brown people in that space, and looking across at my sister and feeling alienated because we didn't look alike. There were just so many things about this project that meant a lot to me," she added.

Thompson was last seen in "Avengers: Endgame". She will also be seen in "Men In Black: International".

KBS bans airing BLACKPINK's 'Kill This Love' MV

Blackpink's 'Kill This Love' music video has been taking the world by storm, breaking records left and right.

However, if you are in Korea, it is likely that you won't be able to catch the epic music video airing on the South Korean television channel, KBS. It was revealed that KBS has actually banned BLACKPINK's 'Kill This Love' and deemed it unfit for broadcast.

For those who have caught the music video, you might be wondering why they would ban such a visually arresting video from airing, especially at the height of BLACKPINK's popularity. The reason given is rather surprising. 'Kill This Love' is banned for a specific scene where Rose was driving a car without a seatbelt.

According to KBS, they deemed the scene to be violating traffic laws and encouraging driving without a seatbelt, which is against the law in South Korea. 'Kill

This Love' is not the only music video to be banned from broadcast. Park Bom's '4:44,' Kim Dong-Han's 'Focus,' and Cho

lowed to be edited to omit parts that are deemed to be violating broadcast laws and then resubmitted for a review. Only



Jung-Min's 'Ready Q' are also banned from broadcast. The music videos are al-

lowed to be edited to omit parts that are deemed to be violating broadcast laws and then resubmitted for a review. Only when it is approved then the music video is allowed to be aired for the public.

Scarlett Johansson might take political plunge 'some time in future'



LOS ANGELES, APR 28 (PTI): Actor Scarlett Johansson says she will not rule out the possibility of her entering politics "some time in the future".

The 34-year-old actor is one of the most politically active Hollywood celebrities and never minced her words when it comes to important issues.

Discussing her activism during an interview with Variety, Johansson said she harbours political aspirations. "Maybe some time in the future. I think the greatest way to effect change is in local politics. Maybe at some point in the distant future I will feel that calling, but I just haven't," the actor said.

Johansson currently stars as superhero Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow in "Avengers: Endgame".

She is also set to headline a stand-alone based on her Marvel character.

Gary Sinise joins Mark Wahlberg in 'Good Joe Bell'

LOS ANGELES, APR 28 (PTI): Actor Gary Sinise has boarded the cast of Mark Wahlberg-starrer "Good Joe Bell".

The 64-year-old actor, best known for starring in films such as "Forrest Gump" and "Mission to Mars", joins Wahlberg, Connie Britton and Reid Miller in the new film.

The movie will be directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green from a script by "Brokeback Mountain" scribes Diana Ossana and Larry McMurtry,

reported Deadline.

It tells the true story of Oregonian father Joe Bell (Wahlberg), who sets out on a walk across America with his son, Jadin (Miller).

The project will be produced by Daniela Taplin Lundberg of Stay Gold, Riva Marker, Jake Gyllenhaal of Nine Stories, Eva Maria Daniels of Vision Chaos, Cary Fukunaga of Parliament of Owls, Ryan Ahrens of Argent Pictures, Wahlberg and Stephen Levinson.

David Bowers tapped for 'Rugrats' live-action movie

LOS ANGELES, APR 28 (PTI): "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" director David Bowers has been roped in to helm "Rugrats" live-action movie.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the film is being produced by Karen Rosenfelt.

The Nickelodeon and Paramount film will see CG babies moving around in CG diapers on the screen.

"Rugrats" was the popular Nicktoon show that ran from 1991 and into the 2000s, centering on a group of toddlers,

led by a one-year-old named Tommy Pickles, who, at least in their minds, have the most amazing adventures.

David Goodman wrote the script for the new film.

The feature follows a trio of animated movies released between 1998 and 2003.

Besides Tommy, other original characters Chuckie Finster, twins Phil and Lil DeVille, and Angelica Pickle will be featured, along with new entrants.

The film is set to be released on January 29, 2021.

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ARIES: Does it feel like you're hosting an internal tug of war, Aries? Heads up: There might not be a clear winner this Saturday. Blame it on an irresolvable clash between driven Mars and hazy Neptune pulling you between productivity and escape. Just when you get to the sweetest part of your little daydream, reality comes banging on your door, perhaps in the form of a stressful email or appointment.

TAURUS: Social pressure may be strong this Saturday, but before you reflexively say yes to an invitation, think about what you actually want to do. Neptune in your social sector lends a dreamy quality to the day, but because it's clashing with agitator Mars, you could spend more time playing referee than enjoying the chill vibes—especially if a disruptive person is demanding attention.

GEMINI: Speak your piece on Saturday, Gemini—just don't get your hopes up TOO high. Passionate Mars is firing up your sign, but he's getting derailed by nebulous Neptune in your career corner. You may have a clear sense of what you want to accomplish, but the

decision makers might not ready to green-light your big idea.

CANCER: Keep it real, Cancer! It'll be easy to get carried away with a "genius" idea on Saturday, but, um, how credible is it? You may have a tough time distinguishing the practical from the fanciful thanks to a tangled angle between pushy Mars in your hazy twelfth house and nebulous Neptune. It's great to give your imagination free rein, but you don't want to fall out of the saddle.

LEO: Friend or frenemy? You might not be able to take people at their word this Saturday, Leo—which isn't being cynical, just self-protective! A tricky clash involving aggressive Mars in your teamwork zone and nebulous Neptune in your secretive eighth house makes it difficult to get to the truth of a situation. Someone may have a hidden agenda—or just something to hide. Either way, don't believe everything you hear, regardless of how sincere or persuasive a person may seem.

LIBRA: Home is where your Libran heart is today. Share the love with your closest com-

panions, nurturing your relationships with random acts of kindness. Channel the domestic vibes at the office, bringing in a batch of gluten-free muffins or little succulents for everyone's desk. If someone dear to you has been struggling, lend them your ear and listen without interrupting or judging.

VIRGO: You're on a direct path to the finish line, but what's up with all the distractions? With dynamo Mars tearing up your career corner, you're a Virgo on a mission! But Saturday, as the red planet clashes with hazy Neptune in your partnership nook, people can be uncooperative (or flaky)—and that's putting it kindly. Do what you can to get others on-board, spelling out instructions explicitly. But before it turns into a mission impossible, put the collaborative stuff on hold and focus on the things you CAN control. On Sunday, make it your mission to banish stress from your body.

SCORPIO: Generosity is a wonderful thing, but are you expecting something in return for your noble act of goodwill? As the moon links up with first Saturn and then Pluto, take a hard look at your magnanimity. If you're placing

expectations on other people, you're setting the stage for resentment. Practice giving without secretly hoping you'll get something in return.

SAGITTARIUS: Romance is anything but clear on Saturday, thanks to a befuddling square between lusty Mars and illusory Neptune in your passion zones. You could be ready to go all in with someone only to get crickets every time you reach out. Or maybe you're the one being chased, and you can't get over your ambivalence. The day is marked by strong flirtation and big promises, but commitments are harder to come by! **CAPRICORN:** Are you suffering needlessly by working yourself to the bone? Sure, your tireless ambition and persistence reaps great success, but it doesn't have to be such a struggle either. Today, the Capricorn moon connects to (first) pragmatic Saturn, your ruler, and then penetrating Pluto, encouraging you to reach for the low-hanging fruit and simplify your goal-setting!

AQUARIUS: Pit's hard for you to say no, Aquarius, but will saying yes drain you?

Set firm boundaries with a needy friend or loved one as the moon gets in step with (first) stern Saturn and then moody Pluto. Watch for temptation to dive in for the rescue; save the hero act for another time. You don't have to dismiss this person entirely. Show your support by asking poignant questions to help them draw their own conclusions. There's only so much hand-holding and coddling you can do before resentment ensues. Empower them to figure this out on their own!

PISCES: Don't overplan your schedule on Saturday, Pisces: You could get derailed before your second mug of matcha! With Neptune in your sign clashing with aggro Mars in your home sector, chaos may ensue. Certain relatives (or roomies) might be dialing up the drama as you're trying to calm things down. Accept the fact that you're just one person and there's only so much you can do in a day. If people try to rope you into doing more, sweetly explain that you love 'em dearly, but you simply have other commitments (like, your own!).