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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sangay Lepcha sworn-in as Pro Tem Speaker

GANGTOK, 28 MAY (IPR): Sikkim Krantikari Morcha MLA from Yuksam Tashiding, Sangay Lepcha was administered the oath of office as the Pro Tem Speaker for Sikkim Legislative Assembly by the Governor, Ganga Prasad at New Raj Bhawan, today.

Earlier, the Chief Secretary sought permission of the Governor to proceed with the ceremony of swearing-in of Pro Tem Speaker and read out the warrant of appointment.

The Governor administered the oath to the

Pro Tem Speaker in the presence of the Chief Minister, PS Tamang (Golay), Council of Ministers, MLAs, Chief Secretary, HODs and other government officials.

After the ceremony was closed the Pro Tem Speaker was congratulated by the dignitaries with khadas.

Menstrual Hygiene Day observed in Gangtok



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 MAY:

Menstrual Hygiene Day was observed here today with different awareness activities on menstrual hygiene management for students at MG Marg.

The programme was jointly organised by the State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj and Zero Waste Himalayas. Menstrual Hygiene Day is marked every year on 28 May to highlight the importance of good menstrual hygiene management.

Priyadarshini Shrestha from Zero Waste Himalayas informed that a week-long festival 'Maasika Mahotsav' was celebrated from 21 May and culminated today on World's Men-

strual Hygiene Day and discussed on menstruation mainly to break the silence on this issue by creating awareness and to remove stigma related to this issue.

She stated that the stigma cannot be removed instantly but the conversation on this issue would help remove it gradually and this initiative has been taken to talk openly on this issue.

Ms Shrestha added that social taboo is just a one part of the discussion, and that hygiene was another important issue related to menstruation.

She pointed out that sanitary pads were full of chemicals and most were not aware about its harmful effects which pose a serious threat to our environment and health.

ASGEA thanks Govt for 5-day working week gift

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 MAY:

All Sikkim Government Employees Association [Group C & D] has conveyed its best wishes and congratulations to the new State Government led by Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay]. The association has also expressed gratitude towards the CM for declaring a 5-day working week in Sikkim. The Golay Government, it may be recalled, in its first policy decision, had announced all Saturdays as holidays for government offices and schools.

Addressing a press conference here this morning, ASGEA general secretary, Rapden Bhutia, said, "All employees are very happy and feeling honoured for this big respect shown to government employees by the CM without even a demand having been



placed for it."

On behalf of all employees of the government departments and PSUs, he expressed gratitude to the State government and especially the CM for this declaration and stated that this was in the interest of employees.

On the same, Mr Bhutia appealed to all govt employees to work sincerely and honestly

during the office hours, now set from 10 AM to 4:30 PM - to provide the best service to the State and its people.

"As the government has been working to take Sikkim to new heights of the development, it is the equal and collective responsibility of all employees to contribute to this process and provide the best service to the people of

Sikkim," he said.

The State Government notification announcing the 5-day working week regime explains that all Saturdays have been declared holidays "to provide 'care' and 'cure' to the Government employees."

The notification also warns that "strict action" will be taken against those not found in office during working hours.

UNDP-SDC training for govt officials for better spring-shed management

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 MAY:

A two-day capacity building training on Himalayan Hydro-Geology for Monitoring, Data Collection and Analysis on Spring-shed Management got underway here on 28 May under the UNDP-SDC Project Strengthening State Strategies for Climate Actions in collaboration with the Rural Management and Development Department. The training is being conducted by experts from the Advanced Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (ACWADAM), Pune, and supported by Helvetas Swiss Inter Cooperation. Officers and scientists from various departments like RMDD, DST&CC and LRDM and TMI are attending the training.

Considering the importance of increasing the capacity of the state government agencies on the depleting ground water sources in the Himalayan region, the UNDP-SDC project has been supporting a series of training programmes to increase the capacity and capabilities of the state officials for better management of spring water sources in the wake of climate change and

other anthropogenic pressures impacting the spring-sheds of the Himalayan region, an official press release informs.

While speaking at the inaugural session as chief guest, CS Rao, Secretary, RMDD, emphasized the need for ensuring water security to every household in the state and stressed the need for collective effort of the state govt officials, central govt agencies, knowledge of the local communities and also other competent agencies to develop in-depth knowledge and capacity on the hydrogeology with regard to the conservation of springs water sources of Himalayan region and more importantly the properties of underground aquifers.

In doing so, he emphasized the need of relevant inter-departmental cooperation as it involves the multidisciplinary areas of expertise of Science and Technology and Climate Change, Mines, Minerals and Geology, Water Resources including grassroots institutions like gram panchayats, NGOs with best technical support from international agencies like UNDP/SDC and other organizations.

He also called for starting the con-

cept of valuation of ecosystem services by introducing a nominal tax system by local panchayats so that it can help bring consciousness among the communities on sustainable use.

Sarika Pradhan, Additional Secretary, RMDD, spoke on the need of strengthening the spring-shed development programme (Dhara Vikash) through science and technology interventions.

In this connection, she stressed the need to increase the capacity of officials in the areas of geological processes, hydrogeology and the characteristics of different types of springs and also the characteristics of aquifers.

She also stressed the need to develop monitoring protocol and data collection so that the capacity of the state agencies is built to take up appropriate adaptation and restoration measures.

Dhiren Gopal Shrestha, Director, DST&CC, appealed to all the participants to acquire the best skills and knowledge on these subjects so that they can contribute positively towards better spring-shed management initiatives.

CEO-Sikkim thanks all for successful conduct of elections



GANGTOK, 28 MAY (IPR): Chief Electoral Officer, Sikkim, R Telang, today extended his "profound gratitude" to everyone involved for the "very successful and historic General Election 2019."

He was addressing a press conference here at the conference hall of Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Baluwakhani, today.

He thanked the voters for participating in large numbers and for their patience in waiting and participating in the gigantic exercise of voting and also reposing their faith in the smooth conduct of polling.

This year, with the addition to the postal ballot, the poll percentage was 81.69% He informed that a total of 315 VVPAT slip were counted and that 100% matched with the EVMS.

Mr Telang expressed his gratitude towards all the political parties for showing maturity and cooperation in the entire electoral process.

He thanked the Election Commission of India (ECI) for always guiding, monitoring and giving feedback in every step, supports extended by the Chief Secretary, Home Department and line departments.

He recalled contributions made by Health Department for keeping all health centers open on the poll day with necessary arrangements.

He acknowledged Power department

for ensuring adequate power supply in the polling centers as the poll was continued even after nightfall and counting as well.

The role of Police department was highly appreciated for smooth conduct of election. Ten Companies of CRPF were from outside the state and their contribution helped to a large extent in the election being successful and peaceful, he added.

Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare Department was also appreciated for providing Wheel chairs for Persons with Disability (PwD) voters, Braille voters slip for visually impaired voters etc. and also the BSNL was thanked for availing broadband services to help deal with the technical aspects and numerous uploads.

Printing department came out with fantastic job for printing of electoral roll, around ten numbers of booklets and ballot paper with secrecy and timely delivery.

He acknowledged Excise Deptt for their prohibition on sale of liquor during counting day and its seizure and Income Tax department for tight vigil and seizure of cash amount during the implementation of Model Code of Conduct.

The CEO also expressed his gratitude to all the staffs deputed

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RBI extends RTGS timing till 1800 hrs

MUMBAI, MAY 28 (PTI): Timings for fund transfer through RTGS have been extended by one-and-a-half hours to 1800 hrs for the general public from June 1, the Reserve Bank of India said Tuesday.

Under Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) System, there is a continuous and real-time settlement of fund-transfers, individually on a transaction by transaction basis (without netting).

The RTGS system is primarily meant for large value transactions. The minimum amount to be remitted through RTGS is Rs 2 lakh with no upper or maximum ceiling.

"It has been decided to extend the timings for customer transactions (initial cut-off) in RTGS from 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm," the RBI said in a notification.

The extended window for RTGS will be applicable from June 1.

Training on intensive dairy animal management

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:**

Sikkim Rural Livelihood Mission is conducting a five-day residential training program on "Intensive Dairy Animal Management" at Eastern Regional Demonstration and Training Centre, National Dairy Development Board, Siliguri from 27-31 May, 2019, a press release informs.

The training is being held in order to build the capacity of Pasu Sakhis.

There are 33 Pasu Sakhis undergoing training in various aspects of animal husbandry and dairy farming in both theory and practical mode. The training at NDDB centre is expected to give Pasu Sakhis of SHGs a window of opportunity and a bigger platform to learn and experience of a higher degree of



animal keeping and exposure to contemporary methods of animal dairy management.

The Commissioner/RMDD-cum-State Mission Director/SRLM, Dr P Senthil Kumar motivated the Pasu Sakhis to use the knowledge

gained in the program for promoting Animal Husbandry activities among the SHG members in their respective areas and also promote common AH livelihood groups to favor aggregated of economically viable quantity AH prod-

ucts in their respective areas to enable proper marketing linkage.

On return from the training, these Pasu Sakhis will provide all community level technical support to all dairy farmers of SHGs in order to improve them on dairy

management from the existing level and facilitate them to adopt scientific dairy farming with an aim to enhance their income. Deputy CEO and the State Mission Unit Officials provide all necessary support for smooth conduct of the training.

Mountain people come together for The Himalayan Cleanup



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:**

The Himalayan Cleanup (THC) is an annual event conducted on 26 May across the Himalayan states of India by the Integrated Mountain Initiative and Zero Waste Himalaya. It was initiated in 2018 in conjunction to the 'Beat Plastic Pollution' theme of World Environment Day. The main objective of the mass cleanup is to bring attention on the problem of waste in the mountains, specifically single use plastic waste, a press release informs.

In 2018, the Himalayan Cleanup cleaned up 250+ sites from the 12 Himalayan States, with participation of 15000+ volunteers mobilised by more than 200 organisations. It brought to fore the issue of waste in the mountains at the local, national and international level, through a day dedicated to cleaning up our mountains and understanding what is causing the mess. It highlighted the need for a mountain lens to waste management.

With the success of THC 2018; the solidarity and volunteerism across the 12 Himalayan States of India (IHR) and the focus it brought on waste, the cleanup was continued on May 26 across the IHR. This year the cleanup was organised across 10 Himalayan states with more 90 sites being cleaned up by around 80 organisations who mobilised around 5500 volunteers on 25-26 May, 2019.

Important sites that were cleaned up on the day were the Pangong Tso Lake in Leh (which at an altitude of 4,350 metres was the highest site cleaned), Tiger Hill and Mahakal Dara in Darjeeling, Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhnad, Seven Sisters Waterfall and Tashi View Point in Sikkim along with many others towns and villages in Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura.

The cleanup was organised following uniform protocols of conducting a waste audit and a brand audit after proper segregation of the collected waste was conducted. The main categories were PET bottles (water/ soft drink bottles/oil), Multilayered plastic (chips/biscuits/sweets/shampoo/gutka),

TetraPak cartons (juice, milk, lasi), Other plastic items (shampoo jars/buckets/containers), Single use plastic (plastic bags/straw/plastic spoons/plates/styrofoam cups and plates), Glass bottles, Tins/Cans and other metal items, Paper, Cloth/Textiles, Others. The different categories of waste were then counted by numbers and also weighed separately. Brand audit was conducted for the branded plastic items, as the top polluting companies emerged during the cleanup, volunteers also took pictures of those waste and post on social media tagging the companies.

For disposal of the waste, all recyclables were given for recycling to the scrap dealers, and support from the Governments, Local bodies were sought for transport of the ultimate discards of the unsegregated waste to the nearest dumping site. Some resorted to make eco-bricks of multilayered plastic collected since there is no existing solution as yet. The Himalayan Cleanup was a zero waste event where no single use bottled water and packaged food was consumed by the volunteers.

The Himalayan level data generated forms valuable inputs to any policy level exercise and towards advocating for extended producer responsibility with companies whose products create maximum waste in the mountains.

The cleanup provided space for participants to get their hands dirty and reflect on the challenges of existing consumption patterns and waste so that they move towards sustainable lifestyles. With the campaign being conducted simultaneously across the mountain states, it generates enough participation and publicity to continue bringing the mountain's waste issues to the forefront of the nation's attention as well as influence community and local bodies waste management practices towards sustainability.

"I was shocked to discover how much waste we collected in such a short time, and this has made me very aware of my own action regarding the use of plastics now", reflected Sonam a volunteer who had joined the clean-

up at Tashi View Point.

Sikkim was a big part of The Himalayan Cleanup movement with cleanups organised at around 25 sites across the state with participation of various organisations, colleges and schools. At Tashi View Point, the cleanup was organised by the Zero Waste Himalaya along with participation of other organisations like WWF-India, ECOSSE, GB Pant Institute, ATREE, BNHS, Lingdok Nampong GPU and many other volunteers. PET bottles and multilayered plastics were collected in largest numbers, and littering between Ganesh Tok and Tashi View Point was rampant as observed by the volunteers. Waste was also observed to be dumped in large volumes by the Army establishments that were present in the same location, which was a major concern. The Gangtok Municipal Corporation extended support to the initiative with a garbage truck and safai karmacharis who took part in the cleanup activity.

The Green Rangers from NBBB College, Tadong cleaned up an area in Arithang where they observed open defecation to be a major challenge, that it made segregation of waste simply not possible. The Trash Thrashers was another group from SRM University that cleaned up at 5th Mile and also raised awareness about plastic pollution. Green Circle along with the community of Chongyek undertook a cleanliness drive at Chongyek Village.

Cleanups in North Sikkim were carried out by Lachen Tourism Development Committee at Lachen Village, while a major cleanup of the Seven Sisters Waterfalls was also carried out by Men Rongong GPU. In Namchi, Brothers on Wheels undertook a cleanup at the Helipad, while in Gyalshing, the Government College students organised a cleanliness drive around their college premises.

The data from the cleanup shall be compiled at a Himalayan level to generate an understanding on the types of plastic waste that are polluting the mountains, which should lead to improved and sustainable waste management solutions in the long run.

Mural installed in Guwahati to break taboo around menstruation



GUWAHATI, MAY 28 (PTI): To create awareness on menstrual hygiene and break the societal silence over the "taboo subject" of menstruation, a mural 'Bleed with dignity' was installed here on the World Menstrual Hygiene Day Tuesday.

The mural is blood red in colour with small white flowers. The slogan 'Bleed with dignity' is written on one side of it.

It is the brainchild of a Guwahati-based post-graduate student Bidisha Saikia who has started the #BleedwithDignity Campaign for making quality menstrual healthcare accessible to every girl.

Parijat Academy, a school, has collaborated with Bidisha and the mural, created by noted artist Neelim Mahanta, is installed in one of its walls.

Inaugurating the mural, Guwahati Municipal Corporation Commissioner Debeswar Malakar said, "Many girls in Assam still feel shy to ask for a sanitary pad. So, if pads are made available in schools through vending ma-

chines, it becomes easy for girls to access it. It also helps break the stigma around menstruation."

Malakar said it is also important to have similar vending machines installed in public places such as bus stands and railway stations.

Bidisha, 25, has been running a campaign for installation of sanitary pad vending machines in all government schools in the state.

The post-graduate student of social work said, "I find the silence surrounding the taboo subject of menstruation odd and ironic in a land like Assam."

Referring to goddess Kamakhya, she said, "My state has a culture of worshipping menstruating goddesses, and some communities even celebrate a girl's first period. Through my campaign, I want to end this silence and make quality menstrual healthcare accessible to every girl in my state." The Menstrual Hygiene Day was initiated by a German organisation in 2013 and it later spread to various parts of the world.

CEO-Sikkim...

during the electoral process including Returning Officers, Nodal Officers, Sector Magistrates, Sector Police Magistrates, FST and SST, EVM Commissioning Team, Presiding Officers, Polling Officers, BLOs and all supporting staff. He stated that every single individual participated wholeheartedly without any complaints and also acknowledged the hard work of all the officials deputed for election duty since the last few months.

Mr. Telang expressed thankfulness to the entire media fraternity for dissemination of correct information. He further elaborated on the various obstacles that they had to overcome in order to ensure that everything went according to the guidelines of the Election Commission of India.

Further he mentioned that the process of election started in the month of May 2018 with the preparation of electoral roll followed by series of steps in a proper order. He said that they faced tremendous pressure at the polling stations and also underwent numerous exercises with strengthening of management and adequate manpower.

The CEO stated that the whole election process was free and fair, without any personal bias and was conducted in the most transparent manner.

SIBLAC extends support to new Govt

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:**

Sikkimese Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee convenor, Tseten Tashi Bhutia, today announced that the organization would "support the new Government till it shows results."

The focus of the SKM Government, he said, should be to uphold the sanctity of Article 371F and protect it against any dilution.

Article 371F of the Constitution which accords Sikkim a special status within the Indian Union, Mr Bhutia said, needs to be understood and respected and protected since it provides protection to all Sikkimese.

"All the political rights of the Sikkimese Nepalis are secured in this Article. The leaders must talk about it and try and get it secured," he said, while stressing that the special cover provided to Sikkim by the Article should always be upheld.

"The sanctity of Article 371F must be respected by the centre, the state and the political parties," he said.

He also stressed that IAS, IPS and IFS officers posted in Sikkim must be made aware about the Article "so that everyone knows what and who are the Sikkimese people."

He also stated that government and parties must not misuse Article 371F.

Menstrual Hygiene Day observed at Lingi Payong School



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:**

With a view to raise awareness among students about Menstrual Hygiene, a programme was organised at Lingi Payong School on Tuesday, as per a press release.

The program was part of the world wide celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day (MHD). Teacher, Anusha Subba, who recently attended a similar awareness programme, shared the inputs with all the girl students of Class VI-X.

This was followed by a PowerPoint presenta-

tion on the topic by Jyoti Gurung who also shared about the latest developments in Menstrual Health and Hygiene. Goma Sharma spoke at length about various myths and taboos prevalent in our society regarding menstruation.

At the end of the programme, a small quiz was held for the students on Menstrual Health and Hygiene which was conducted by Pemkit Lepcha, Karuna Gautam and Prakash Subba.

Menstrual Hygiene Day (MHD) is observed every year on 28 May.

SUSA demands immediate termination of Prof Guha



**SHRAVAN CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 28 MAY:**

Sikkim University Students Association [SUSA] today organized a protest against Prof Silajit Guha, accused of sexually harassing students, demanding that Mr Guha's services be immediately terminated.

SUSA members raised slogans holding placards here at Sikkim University Sociology Department campus. Denial of the accusations by Mr Guha was the reason for the protest, it is learnt.

HOD of Mass Com Department, Sikkim University, Prof Guha has been accused of sexually harassing some of his students at a wedding held in Ranipool. Follow-

ing complaint registered by the victims, Prof Guha was suspended.

"Problems like this will continue to surface if the accused is not punished and the students association wants nothing else but immediate termination of Mr Guha's services," said president SUSA, Palsang Tamang today.

He also added, "If no action is taken against these culprits then this will encourage people to stay silent and this won't keep our daughters and sisters safe."

The university's Internal Complaints Committee is currently investigating the matter and final decision will be taken next month, it is informed.

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SRM aims to become QCI hub for e-learning and training

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 MAY: SRM University, Sikkim, signed an MOU with the Quality Control of India (QCI), Govt. of India, yesterday, to offer various quality learning modules. SRM University will now be the hub for e-learning and training of various courses offered by the QCI.

Deputy Director and In-charge of E-Quest, Ranvijay Bihari, was present for the meeting on behalf of Quality Control of India.

In his address he mentioned that this collaboration opened the door to numerous opportunities for the students and the university to meet the challenges of the world. He expressed his gratitude towards the university for having come



forward to accept it. Coordinator, Dr Nityasundar Nanda, HOD of Department of Management, introduced SRM University as a "dynamic institution" looking forward for such collaborations to increase the

quality and employability skills of its students.

Vice Chancellor, Prof Satish Kumar, welcomed the collaboration as a fruitful one and also historic since it was the first one signed with Govt. of India.

"Through this ven-

ture, the university looks forward to bringing in better professional growth and skills for the students. The certification by Quality Council of India holds greater value for the students too. To begin with, we will offer

tailor-made certificate programs provided by QCI but in the later stages we will add more programs from other fields and domains according to the requirements and trends in consultation with QCI," said the VC.

US lab scientist charged with lying about China contact

ALBUQUERQUE (NEW MEXICO), MAY 28 (AP): A scientist for a US laboratory in New Mexico is scheduled to appear in court Tuesday on accusations he lied about contacts with a state-run program in China that seeks to draw foreign-educated talent.

Prosecutors say 67-year-old Turab Lookman, of Los Alamos National Laboratory, had been asked on an employment questionnaire and by officials if he had been recruited by China's

Thousand Talents Program or applied to work there. He's accused in an indictment filed last week of falsely stating that he hadn't.

Federal prosecutors say the China program had been established to recruit people with access to and knowledge of foreign technology and intellectual property.

Court records did not yet list an attorney for Lookman. He faces up to five years in prison if convicted.

US walks out of UN arms control body in Venezuela protest

GENEVA, MAY 28 (AFP): The United States on Tuesday walked out of the UN's Conference on Disarmament as Venezuela assumed the body's rotating presidency, with Washington's envoy insisting he would not endure sessions led by "a rogue state."

"What you have going on inside there right now is a diatribe of propaganda," the US ambassador to the conference, Robert Wood, told reporters outside the council's chamber in Geneva.

"Whatever is discussed in there, whatever is decided, has absolutely no legitimacy because it is an illegitimate regime presiding over that body," he added, referring to the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Wood walked out immediately after Venezuela's ambassador to the United Nations in

Geneva, Jorge Valero, began addressing the conference to begin his presidency.

The US along with more than 50 other states have recognised Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido as acting president.

"A representative of Juan Guaido, the interim president, should be in this body, should be sitting in that chair right now," Wood said.

The Conference on Disarmament was previously a key UN forum for negotiating major arms control pacts.

But progress in the CD has been blocked for years over a series of diplomatic impasses.

Wood described the Venezuelan president as "another tragic day in the history of the CD," after Syria last year assumed the body's chair, which rotates on alphabetical order among member states.

Glam Miss Sikkim and Miss Teen next audition in Jorethang



REBYNA RANA GANGTOK, 28 MAY: After Gangtok and Namchi, the next round of auditions for Siana Glam World presents Glam Miss Sikkim and Miss Teen Sikkim, 2019,

will be held in Jorethang on 02 June. This was informed by Chairperson, Siana Glam World, Srijana Bista.

"All the aspiring girls can come forward and live their dreams

to be in a place where you always wanted to be. We look forward to your participation as you are getting a very good opportunity in your own State," added Ms Bista.

Season's highest, the toll on Mt. Everest reaches 11



KATHMANDU, MAY 28 (PTI): With the death of a US climber on Mt. Everest, the toll at the world's highest mountain has touched its peak at 11, including four Indians, as the climbing season draws to a close.

Christopher John Kulish, 61, breathed his last on Monday after scaling Everest. Although, he came down to the South Cole safely in the Evening, he all of a sudden had heart stroke and died, Meera Acharya, senior official at the tourism department, told PTI.

Even as the number of deaths were put at 11 across the international media, the Nepal tourism ministry maintained the number at 9. The climbing season, which began on May 14, will come to an end on Friday.

Four Indians died on the Everest and two each died on Mt. Kanchanjunga and Mt. Makalu, bringing the total death toll of

malayas to 8. Indians have topped among the international climbers attempting to scale the Summit this spring with a total number of 78 of them getting permission.

After the end of the season, some crucial issues are likely to take the centre stage, including what many say traffic jam on the top of the world, The Kathmandu Post reported.

There was a record-breaking summit on May 22 with at least 220 climbers reaching the peak, Gyanendra Shrestha, the government liaison officer, said.

Mountaineers have suggested difficult weather conditions, a lack of experience and the growing commercialisation of expeditions as contributing factors to the backlog, the CNN reported.

During the week beginning May 20, crowds

in a queue to the summit, above the mountain's highest camp at 8,000 metres (26,247 feet). The summit of Mount Everest is 8,848 metres (29,029 feet) high.

Most people can only spend a matter of minutes at the summit without extra oxygen supplies, and the area where mountaineers have been delayed is known to many as the "death zone," the CNN report said.

Five people died on Everest in 2018.

In 2016 and 2017, the peak claimed lives of six and five climbers respectively.

In 2015, quake-triggered avalanches killed 20 climbers.

On April 18, 2014, there was an avalanche near Everest Base Camp which killed 16 Nepali guides. Rescuers pulled out 13 bodies and the remaining three were never recovered, Kathmandu Post report said.

Assam Rifles' ex-servicemen interaction on 30 May

GANGTOK, 28 MAY (PIB): Assam Rifles will be organizing an interaction with its ex-servicemen in Gangtok on 30 May.

The interaction will be held at Defence Auditorium, HQ 17 Mtn Div, Gangtok at 7:30am.

The aim of the interaction is to assist ex-servicemen and "Veer Naris" in resolution of their grievances, if any. It also

aims at enhancing their awareness with regard to latest policies and regulations as well as job opportunities.

Stalls will be put up by various branches of the Headquarters, Directorate General Assam Rifles, like Record Office, Pension Cell (UPAO), Assam Rifles Ex-Servicemen Association and Welfare and Rehabilita-

tion Board Directorate. Civil administration will also establish stalls like Banking Services, Agriculture and Horticultural departments, PAN Card and Aadhaar Card services.

Headquarters Directorate General Assam Rifles will also organise a medical camp during the interaction for the benefit of the ex-servicemen fraternity.

3 West Bengal MLAs, over 50 councillors join BJP

NEW DELHI, MAY 28 (PTI): Three West Bengal MLAs, including BJP leader Mukul Roy's son Subhrangshu Roy, and over 50 municipal councillors, most of them from the Trinamool Congress, joined the saffron party Tuesday as it works to consolidate its position in the state following its impressive show there in Lok Sabha polls.

The MLAs who joined the BJP at a press conference are TMC's Tusharkanti Bhattacharya and CPI(M)'s Debendra Nath Roy, besides Roy who was suspended from the state's ruling party for "anti-party" activities after the general elections results were announced.

BJP general secretary and its in-charge for the state affairs Kailash Vijaywargiya and Mukul Roy told reporters that more MLAs from the TMC, which is headed by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, will join the saffron party in the coming days.

Mukul Roy, once a Banerjee's confidant before falling out with her and joining the BJP in 2017, also mocked the chief minister over her claims that she wanted to resign following her party's less than expected show in the general elections, saying it is a "drama".

"She will stick to her chair at all costs till people decide to remove her," he said, claiming that in the assembly polls, which are due in 2021, her party will struggle to emerge to get the status of the opposition party.

The TMC had won 211 of the assembly's 294 seats in 2016. The BJP had won only three seats, but has since emerged as the principal challenger to her. A party needs to win at least 10 per cent of seats to be officially recognised as the main opposition party.

"People are fleeing the TMC to join the BJP. Many more will join in the coming weeks," Roy said.

With over 50 councillors joining the BJP, the party has got a majority in at least three municipal councils.

Vijaywargiya noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said in a speech during his campaign that over 40 TMC MLAs are in touch with the BJP and many regional party leaders are feeling suffocated due to Banerjee's "dictatorial" functioning.

"We want her government to continue till 2021, but if it falls due to her doing, then we cannot help it," he said in a swipe at her.

Prohibition again imposed in Mizoram after four years

AIZAWL, MAY 28 (PTI): Prohibition was again imposed in Mizoram after four years as the state government notified the prohibition act on Tuesday, a senior official said.

The Mizoram Liquor Prohibition Bill, 2019 was passed by the state Assembly on March 20 this year and Governor Prof Jagdish Mukhi has given his assent to the bill.

Excise and Narcotics department, Commissioner, Ngurchungnunga Sailo told PTI that the notification was issued by the state Law and Judicial department and published in the state government official gazette.

The prohibition law could not be notified earlier as the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) office, following instructions from the Election Commission of India prohibited notification and enforcement of the dry law till the end of election process on May 27 as the model code of conduct was in place.

The state government had earlier announced that the notification would be issued on April one.

While retail wine shops and bonded ware-

houses were already closed due to unavailability of liquor stocks, Tales and Spirits bar inside the Hotel Ritz in the heart of Aizawl was finally closed on Monday night.

With the powerful churches and community-based organisations favouring stringent prohibition law, Mizoram was virtually dry all the time since India's independence.

Though partial prohibition was in place the state government allowed opening of wine shops in 1984 under the provisions of the Mizoram Excise Act, 1973 but the wine shops and bars were closed from 1987 and partial prohibition continued.

The Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition Act, 1995 was legislated and enforced from February 20, 1997 till January 15, 2015, the day, the new law - Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition and Control Act, 2014) was notified.

With the new Mizoram National Front (MNF) government coming to power after the election to the state Assembly held on November 28 last year, the government changed its policy and moved towards imposition of dry law again.

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Embrace Plurality of Opinions

...even if mass media would have you shun them

Prime-Time on Indian TV news channels makes for stressful viewing with the shallow-jingoism and mock-conscientiousness of frowning celebrity anchors who have become caricatures of themselves or poor imitations of the bigger stars and the finger-pointing self-righteousness of party spokespersons who fulminate only to earn brownie points with their respective masters. While very little is achieved by way of informing the audience, the hypnotic spell of real-time quarrels entering homes gets the TRPs soaring, urgently dramatic music completing the experience and convincing people that something important is playing on TV. Since the suggestion of sensationalism can fool only for so long, occasionally, newsrooms manufacture sensational situations as well and almost always, they pander to the lowest common denominator of the ideology in power because they command the most brainwashed of lumpen elements to unleash and sustain another news cycle. The superficial nationalism of TV news crews was earlier focused on Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Arundhati Roy, and then moved to the likes of Kanhaiya and other left-leaning youth and now just rails against anyone who calls out the dangerous pontification that has come to define national discourse.

There will be those who will argue that the fact that these "targets" were rejected by the people of India in the recent elections, but that is not necessarily final because the idea of India persists and with it, hopefully, the ideas of amity, tolerance and secularism. That idea, however, remains under constant assault. Surf the news channels and it becomes apparent. Liberal thought was never challenged as openly and as aggressively as it is now in the public domain via the newsrooms. The experiment has been on for a while and is now about to become the new normal. That cannot be allowed to happen, and no, the chest-thumping bhakts screaming nationalism can only harm, not salvage the situation.

Moving on, most times, the media instigation plays circles around its own hyperbole, and occasionally they muddy the waters enough for pressing concerns to swim out of the public domain. Unfortunately, we have also become a nation where agenda is set by the belligerence of 24x7 TV news channels and the slew of soundbytes and studio fulmination often lead to ill-advised action and almost always succeed in distracting people from the core issues facing the nation. Every time that happens is a sad day for democracy, because the only attitudes being increasingly reinforced are intolerance, insensitivity and the impassivity of the mainstream which instigates so many mutinies in our country.

The idea of India was always to embrace plurality, not only of people and communities, but also views and opinions, increasingly however, the focus has been more on homogenising everything, starting from defining what is Indian to heckling multiplicity out of public discourse. For a long while it was the government which engaged in this exercise of compartmentalisation, but of late, mass media has joined the bandwagon as well, allowing vocabulary like "splittist, extremist, hardline, controversial, inflammatory" to infiltrate their reportage without adequate attention paid to how such identifiers can bias audiences towards a particular opinion. Has anyone noticed how the brainwashing efficacy of noise on TV has made even "liberal" a character flaw?

Responsible professionalism has fallen victim to the demands for sensationalism which is why the basic tenets of freedom and democracy need to be reiterated often. No one should have an issue with the fact that free citizens have a right to hold independent opinions and broadcast them. Even if one were to ignore the principles of democracy, it follows for civil people to realise that while everyone has the right to hold opinions and share them, none has the right to foist or force these opinions on anyone or instigate violence.

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How the new 'Aladdin' stacks up against a century of Hollywood stereotyping

EVELYN ALSULTANY
theconversation.com

Though critically acclaimed and widely beloved, the 1992 animated "Aladdin" feature had some serious issues with stereotyping.

Disney wanted to avoid repeating these same problems in the live action version of "Aladdin," which came out on May 24. So they sought advice from a Community Advisory Council comprised of Middle Eastern, South Asian and Muslim scholars, activists and creatives. I was asked to be a part of the group because of my expertise on representations of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. media.

The fact that a major studio wants to hear from the community reflects Hollywood's growing commitment to diversity.

But while the live action "Aladdin" does succeed in rectifying some aspects of Hollywood's long history of stereotyping and whitewashing Middle Easterners, it still leaves much to be desired.

MAGICAL GENIES AND LECHEROUS SHEIKHS

In his seminal 1978 book "Orientalism," literature professor Edward Said argued that Western cultures historically stereotyped the Middle East to justify exerting control over it.

Orientalism in Hollywood has a long history. Early Hollywood films such as "The Sheik" and "Arabian Nights" portrayed the Middle East as a monolithic fantasy land – a magical desert filled with genies, flying carpets and rich men living in opulent palaces with their harem girls.

While these depictions were arguably silly and harmless, they flattened the differences among Middle Eastern cultures, while portraying the region as backwards and in need of civilizing by the West.

Then came a series of Middle Eastern conflicts and wars: the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973, the Iran Hostage Crisis and the Gulf War. In American media, the exotic Middle East faded; replacing it were depictions of violence and ominous terrorists.

As media scholar Jack G. Shaheen observed, hundreds of Hollywood films over the last 50 years have linked Islam with holy war and terrorism, while depicting Muslims as either "hostile alien intruders" or "lecherous, oily sheikhs intent on using nuclear weapons."

CRINGEWORTHY MOMENTS IN THE ORIGINAL 'ALADDIN'

Against this backdrop, the Orientalism of Disney's 1992 animated "Aladdin" wasn't all that surprising.

The opening song lyrics described a land "Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face" and declared, "It's barbaric, but hey, it's home!"

When the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee protested the lyrics, Disney removed the reference to cutting off ears in the home video version but left in the descriptor "barbaric."

Then there were the ways the characters were

depicted. As many have noted, the bad Arabs are ugly and have foreign accents while the good Arabs – Aladdin and Jasmine – possess European features and white American accents.

The film also continued the tradition of erasing distinctions between Middle Eastern cultures. For example, Jasmine, who is supposed to be from Agrabah – originally Baghdad but fictionalized because of the Gulf War in 1991 – has an Indian-named tiger, Rajah.

QUESTIONABLE PROGRESS

After 9/11, a spate of films emerged that reshaped many of the old terrorist tropes. But surprisingly, some positive representations of Middle Eastern and Muslim characters emerged.

In 2012, I published my book "Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11." In it, I detail the strategies that writers and producers used after 9/11 to offset stereotyping.

The most common one involved including a patriotic Middle Eastern or Muslim American to counterbalance depictions as terrorists. In the TV drama, "Homeland," for example, Fara Sherazi, an Iranian American Muslim CIA analyst, is killed by a Muslim terrorist, showing that "good" Muslim Americans are willing to die for the United States.

But this didn't change the fact that Middle Easterners and Muslims were, by and large, portrayed as threats to the West. Adding a 'good' Middle Eastern character doesn't do much to upend stereotypes when the vast majority are still appearing in stories about terrorism.

Another strategy also emerged: reverting to old Orientalist tropes of the exotic, romantic Middle East. Maybe writers and producers assumed that depicting the Middle East as exotic would be an improvement over associating it with terrorism.

The 2004 film "Hidalgo," for example, tells the story of an American cowboy who travels to the Arabian desert in 1891 to participate in a horse race. In classic Orientalist fashion, he saves the rich sheik's daughter from his evil, power-hungry nephew.

The 2017 movie "Victoria and Abdul" depicts an unlikely friendship between Queen Victoria and her Indian-Muslim servant, Abdul Karim. While the film does critique the racism and Islamophobia of 19th-century England, it also infantilizes and exoticizes Abdul.

Nonetheless, some glaring problems persisted. Jake Gyllenhaal was cast in the lead role of "The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time" (2010), while Christian Bale and Joel Edgerton were cast in "Exodus: Gods and Kings" (2014) as Egyptian characters.

Why were white actors assuming these roles?

When challenged, producer Ridley Scott infamously said that he can't "say that my lead actor is Mohammad so-and-so from such-and-such. I'm just not going to get it financed."

Does the new 'Aladdin' make strides?

Perhaps in a desire to avoid the mistakes of the past, Disney executives sought advice from cultural

consultants like me.

There's certainly some notable progress made in the live-action "Aladdin."

Egyptian Canadian actor Mena Massoud plays Aladdin. Given the dearth of people of Middle Eastern descent in lead roles, the significance of casting Massoud cannot be overstated. And despite the fact that some white extras had their skin darkened during filming, Disney did cast actors of Middle Eastern descent in most of the main roles.

Casting Indian British actress Naomi Scott as Jasmine was controversial; many hoped to see an Arab or Middle Eastern actress in this role and wondered whether casting someone of Indian descent would simply reinforce notions of "Oriental" interchangeability. Nonetheless, the film does note that Jasmine's mother is from another land.

The biggest problem with the 2019 "Aladdin" is that it perpetuates the trend of reverting to magical Orientalism – as if that's a noteworthy improvement over terrorist portrayals. In truth, it's not exactly a courageous move to trade explicit racism for clichéd exoticism.

To be fair, "Aladdin" distinguishes itself from "Hidalgo" and other Orientalist films of this trend by not revolving around the experiences of a white protagonist.

However, once again, characters with American accents are the "good guys" while those with non-American accents are mostly, but not entirely, "bad." And audiences today will be as hard pressed as those in 1992 – or 1922, for that matter – to identify any distinct Middle Eastern cultures beyond that of an overgeneralized "East." Belly dancing and Bollywood dancing, turbans and keffiyehs, Iranian and Arab accents all appear in the film interchangeably.

Just as making positive tweaks within a story about terrorism doesn't accomplish much, so does making positive tweaks within a story about the exotic East. Diversifying representations requires moving beyond these tired tropes and expanding the kinds of stories that are told.

"Aladdin," of course, is a fantastical tale, so questions about representational accuracy might seem overblown. It is also a really fun movie in which Mena Massoud, Naomi Scott and Will Smith all shine in their roles. But over the last century, Hollywood has produced over 900 films that stereotype Arabs and Muslims – a relentless drumbeat of stereotypes that influences public opinion and policies.

If there were 900 films that didn't portray Arabs, Iranians and Muslims as terrorists or revert to old Orientalist tropes, then films like "Aladdin" could be "just entertainment."

Until then, we'll just have to wait for the genie to let more nuanced and diverse portrayals out of the lamp.

[The writer is Associate Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity, University of Southern California]

Caster Semenya: the legal and ethical issues that should concern us all

STEVE CORNELIUS
theconversation.com

Early last year the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) introduced regulations requiring South African 800m Olympic champion Caster Semenya – and other middle distance runners with differences of sex development – to lower their naturally high levels of testosterone.

In February 2019 Semenya's legal team argued that the policy was invalid. But in May the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled that discrimination in sport is legal provided it is justified.

The way in which the IAAF has gone about dealing with Semenya raises serious legal and ethical concerns. And Semenya isn't the only athlete involved. This is an issue that goes beyond just the difference of sex development. It goes to the fundamental root of human dignity, of privacy of every athlete who participates at the World Championships.

There are ethical concerns about the way in which the research was conducted that led to the decision. The legal concerns revolve around serious fundamental rights concerns, in particular in the way a number of female athletes have been treated.

In a paper I wrote two years ago – "You can play as long as you don't win: Legal perspectives on the regulations pertaining to the participation of women with hyperandrogenism in women's athletics" – I explored the big ethical and legal problems I believe are involved in Semenya's case, as well as those of dozens of other women.

My view is that some women are being singled out because they are different. If Semenya looked different, if she was a blonde bombshell or if she didn't win, we wouldn't be having this debate today.

My big concern is that if this ruling by the Court for Arbitration in Sport remains unchallenged, this way of thinking and behaving might filter into the International Olympic Committee, the overarching body that regulates sport. That, in turn, will affect all its affiliations. These include the national Olympic committees and international federations like the IAAF and Fifa and the national associations under them.

THE ETHICS QUESTION

The first problem lies in the way in

which the World Anti-Doping Authority has behaved. The World Anti-Doping Authority and national anti-doping authorities – which operate parallel to the other sporting bodies – are supposed to be independent. The World Anti-Doping Authority should be a completely separate, independent body that checks on the sports federations to ensure they enforce anti-doping measures uniformly and in a correct manner.

In reality, this isn't the case.

This is how it works. At an event like the World Athletic Championships, it will be responsible for conducting the anti-doping tests. It will set up its own anti-doping control stations; collect the samples.

As part of the process athletes who enter agreements to participate in World Athletic Championships will also give consent to the World Anti-Doping Authority to conduct these tests. Part of that consent is also that the agency will, in terms of the rules, keep these samples for up to 10 years. They can re-test later for substances but they can also conduct research on anti-doping matters.

That's important.

What happened in practice was that in 2011 and 2013 the IAAF instructed athletes to give both urine and blood samples. The reason given was that they were developing what is called a biological passport. This is an athlete's biological profile that's developed over a period of time. A sudden anomaly could indicate that there's a doping or some other issue.

The problem is that IAAF passed these samples onto its medical team, the medical commission, which conducted its own research to determine the hormone levels of the athletes.

The argument being forwarded by the IAAF is that this is about doping. But the World Anti-Doping Agency ruled that the regulations on hyper-androgenism or difference of sex development have nothing to do with anti-doping.

This raises the question: if biological samples that have been collected for one purpose by one entity are passed onto another entity to do research for which consent has not been given, is this a lawful use of that sample?

The basis of modern ethical biological research and medical treatment is the Declaration of Helsinki. Though not an internationally legally binding docu-

ment, it's nevertheless set the standard for a lot of countries, including South Africa, that have developed their own biomedical laws.

In South Korea – where the tests took place – the Helsinki Declaration led to the adoption of the Bioethics and Safety Act. This states that to conduct any form of biomedical research you need the informed consent of the individuals. But none of the athletes – and I have spoken to a number who have participated at these championships – have been informed these samples could be used on hormone research.

Lots of countries have similar rules. For example Monaco, where the IAAF

that had been collected in spite of the lack of informed consent.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The second major issue relates to massive human rights concerns.

The rights I'm referring to are set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular Articles 2 and 8.

Let me begin with Article 8 which I believe should have been applied and was in fact raised before the court. It provides that everyone has the right to respect for private and family life. In the case of Solomakhin v Ukraine, for example, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that any compulsory medical intervention, even if it was of a



is based, has a strong requirement that there must be proper, informed consent.

One thing all of these laws have in common is that the consent can be withdrawn at any stage and there should be no penalty for that. And it's a criminal offence if one does not obtain the proper, informed consent.

This issue has been raised repeatedly with the IAAF throughout the process. But to no avail.

I'm still to see that there is a single form or indication that any athlete has been properly informed of the nature of the research conducted, who will conduct the research, what the possible consequences are, what it means for the athlete and how their identity is being protected in the process.

The IAAF has not been able to produce any of this. And the Court of Arbitration for Sport dismissed these arguments and considered all the evidence

minor importance, constituted an interference with this right.

Effectively coercing a healthy athlete into taking hormone treatment is certainly a compulsory medical intervention. They can argue that she has the choice. But there is no choice.

For its part, Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine provides that the interest of welfare of each human being takes precedence over the interest of society.

Even the IAAF's constitution, in article 3, gives a commitment to human rights with ethical values, while the Olympic Charter is against any form of discrimination and is for the promotion of women, equality of men and women, sport for all.

These have all been laid bare as empty promises.

[The writer is Professor of Private Law, University of Pretoria]

In post-poll muscle-flexing, CPI(M) cadres 'reclaim' over 150 party offices in West Bengal

NEW DELHI, MAY 28 (PTI): The CPI(M) has in the last four days reopened more than 150 of its offices in West Bengal which, it alleged, had been taken over forcibly by the ruling Trinamool Congress after the Left was ousted from power in the state in 2011.

Party offices in Bankura, Purulia, Coochbihar, Bardhaman, Hooghly, North 24 Parganas and Howrah among others have now not only been retaken by the CPI(M) cadres, but the party symbol is also being painted on them and party flags are flying atop the buildings, CPI(M) leaders claimed.

A senior CPI(M) Politburo member said that the party was reclaiming its offices because it was the first time since 2011 that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's TMC was "weak and vulnerable".

The TMC, which had won 35 of the 42 seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, managed only 22 this time as the BJP gained significantly, improving its strength from two to 18.

Though the TMC alleged that the BJP, which has emerged as the main opposition in the state in the Lok Sabha election, was helping the Left, the CPI(M) leaders denied it.



"We have recaptured our offices which had been taken away from us by the TMC. We have been able to do this because TMC has been weakened, its erosion is clear. Our people had been preparing to take over the offices," senior CPI(M) leader and Politburo member Nilotpal Basu told PTI.

The state is not new to such muscle-flexing by cadres of rival parties post elections.

In 2011, following the loss of the Left Front in Assembly elections, its party offices were allegedly occupied by Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress whose activ-

ists replaced the hammer and sickle symbol with the TMC's twin flowers.

TMC leader Sisir Adhikari admitted that the Left has reclaimed some of its offices.

"The CPI(M) has managed to get back some of its party offices in the state with the help of the BJP. The BJP has got some seats and now they are using force and violence. They are definitely helping them. But its only a handful offices, nothing great," Adhikari said.

However, CPI(M) leader Basu dismissed claims that they were being helped by the BJP.

"BJP's IT cell is run-

ning a propaganda saying that the BJP is helping the CPI(M) to reclaim its offices in the state. It is a complete lie," he said.

BJP's Howrah Town district President Surajit Saha told PTI that there was no instruction from the party to help the CPI(M) reclaim their offices but conceded that TMC offices were being taken over by rival parties.

"We have received no such instruction from the party. However, I have heard that in many places TMC offices are being taken over by the CPI(M) and BJP. These things happens post poll," said Saha

when asked if the BJP cadres were helping the CPI (M) to "reclaim" their party offices.

A senior CPI(M) Politburo member took a jibe at the TMC, saying it was reaping the "fruits of coluding with the BJP".

"After the polls, the BJP has been systematically ransacking TMC offices in the state. Clashes have happened and in the chaos, the CPI(M) has recaptured its offices which had been earlier captured by the TMC goons. Why should the BJP help us? We have got them back on our own strength," another senior Politburo member told PTI.

BJP's Tasa and AGP's Baishya file nomination for RS election

GUWAHATI, MAY 28 (PTI): BJP's Kamakhya Prasad Tasa and its alliance partner Asom Gana Parishad's Birendra Prasad Baishya on Tuesday filed their nominations for the Rajya Sabha elections in Assam scheduled to be held on June 7, officials said.

Tasa and Baishya were named candidates for the two seats in the Upper House from Assam that will fall vacant as the term of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and another Congress Rajya Sabha MP Santius Kujur will end on June 14.

Both Tasa and Baishya filed their nominations

before Assam Legislative assembly's principal secretary Mrigendra Kumar Deka in the presence of Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, BJP state president Ranjeet Das, AGP president Atul Bora and convener of North Eastern Democratic Alliance (NEDA) Himanta Biswa Sarma, they said.

Tasa, a prominent face of the Tea tribe community, was a MP from Jorhat constituency in the outgoing Lok Sabha.

AGP veteran Birendra Prasad Baishya has been named earlier as the consensus candidate for the second Rajya Sabha seat of the ruling alliance partners.

The opposition Congress and AIUDF have decided not to put up any candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls as both parties do not have the required numbers to elect a Rajya Sabha MP from the state.

The last date for filing of nominations is May 31. Singh has been representing Assam in the Upper House for five terms since 1991.

The former prime minister and his wife Gursharan Kaur are voters in the Dispur Legislative Assembly constituency here and had exercised their franchise in the just concluded Lok Sabha elections.

Parties engage in blame game over post-result Tripura violence

AGARTALA, MAY 28 (PTI): Political leaders in Tripura engaged in a bitter spat Tuesday over the clashes that broke out in the state since the announcement of poll results on May 23, with the Congress pointing fingers at the BJP and the saffron party shifting the blame to the CPI(M).

Two persons were killed and several injured in the clashes that broke out in West Tripura and other parts of the state following the announcement of general election results.

The BJP claimed that the two victims were activists of the party, but the police said it had no information about their political affiliations.

Lambasting the saffron party, the Congress Tuesday claimed that its workers were attacked and intimidated by the BJP activists following the announcement of results on May 23.

The BJP has bagged the two parliamentary seats in the state by a comfortable margin.

Addressing a press meet here, senior Congress leader Subal Bhowmik sought the resignation of Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb over the "prevailing lawlessness"

in the state. The Congress leader had contested and lost the election to BJP's Pratima Bhowmik from West Tripura seat.

More than 25 Congress workers and supporters had to be admitted in hospitals, while over 500 party activists were forced to flee homes since violence broke out in the state on May 23, he said.

"The BJP has let loose unprecedented terror in the state. Around 550 activists were forced to flee homes, while 27 others have been admitted to hospitals.

"We demand Biplab Kumar Deb's resignation as law and order has collapsed in the state. He should take responsibility for the prevailing situation and resign," the Congress leader said.

Tapas Dey, the state unit vice-president of the Congress, said funds have been raised to treat the injured party workers and fight legal battles.

Dey also claimed that the police did not take action against the accused even after his party members filed several complaints in this regard.

"While Tripura Pradesh Committee president Pradyot Kishore

Debarman donated Rs 10 lakh, other activists and supporters also raised money for the treatment of injured. The fund will be used to fight legal battles too," he added. A senior police officer has confirmed on the condition of anonymity that over 100 complaints of clashes and violence have been lodged with various police stations in eight districts of the state.

He, however, could not cite reasons when asked why no one has been arrested as yet.

BJP spokesperson Nabendu Bhattacharya, on his part, said the claims made by the Congress were "baseless, imaginary and far from truth". "Our karykarts are not involved in violence. A group of CPI(M) cadres, posing as BJP workers, are creating turmoil in the state. They have also attacked people in minority-dominated localities to trigger communal tension," he said, squarely blaming the erstwhile ruling party for the violence.

The BJP spokesperson also insisted that two of its activists were murdered and more than 25 party supporters injured in the past five days.

Efforts on to discredit NRC updation process: pro-talks ULFA

Guwahati, May 28 (PTI): The pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) Tuesday claimed that efforts are on to discredit the updation NRC process and delegates from the state will present its "true picture" in the coming 41st session of the Human Rights Council of the UN.

At a time when the updation process of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is going on in the state, an "anti-Assam circle" is propagating misinformation in the ULFA (pro-talk) General Secretary Anup Chetia said.

"We strongly oppose such attempt to discredit the NRC process. To clarify doubts and present the true picture, the Khilonja Mancha Assam will send delegates to participate in the UN convention to be held at Geneva next month," he said.

Chetia was speaking at a press conference organised by the Khilonja Mancha Assam, a platform for the indigenous people of the state.

Assam, which had faced influx of people from Bangladesh since the early 20th century, is the only state having an NRC which was first prepared in 1951. It is now being updated under the supervision of the Supreme Court.

Chetia alleged that a strong "anti-Assam circle" is trying to obstruct the updation process of the historic document and for that, an attempt is being made to remove the Supreme Court Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi from the NRC Case.

Meghalaya govt to roll out online platform 'Meghamart': CS

SHILLONG, MAY 28 (PTI): Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma Tuesday said the state government will soon roll out 'Meghamart', an online platform to facilitate sale and purchase of over 10,000 products sourced from local entrepreneurs.

He said the state government will soon publish the procurement policy making it mandatory for government departments to source certain amount of their supplies from local entrepreneurs.

"The government would soon roll out 'MeghaMart', an online platform to facilitate the sale and purchase of products sourced from local entrepreneurs," he said at the launch of Muga Silk Mission here.

The chief minister said the government has already prepared a database comprising

2,000 enterprises and more than 10,000 products that will be available through the online platform.

The platform would have famous items from Meghalaya and these include the famous Muga silk, derived from the Muga silkworms, he said.

The chief minister said the Rs 130 crore 'Muga Mission' is one of the many mission mode interventions of the state government that is aimed at enhancing production, value addition and marketing of the famous Muga silk.

Meghalaya, which produces about 30 metric tonne of Muga silk, accounts for a fifth of the 108 metric tonne of muga silk produced in the country.

Linking the rich history and culture of NE region to the 'muga silk', Sangma said the identity of the region as a silk

producing province goes back to centuries.

According to the chief minister, the 'Muga Mission' is expected to provide leverages and directions to the Muga silk production with a funding of close to Rs 130 crore from multiple sources over a period of five years.

He also said that through the mission, the farmers will be able to connect with their buyers directly without the interference of middlemen.

Market tie up with industry partners, fashion houses and designers would give a major fillip to muga farmers with the increase in demand of muga silk from Meghalaya, he said.

Additional chief secretary K N Kumar said the state government has prepared a roadmap for implementation of the mission and an in-

vestment of around Rs 130 crore will be made in the next five years for area expansion, development of critical infrastructure, building of human capital and significant inputs for developing final finished products including its sale and marketing.

Kumar said the target output in the next four to five years would be 43 metric tonne, a significant increase of 13 metric tonne with monetary production value of the raw resources valued at around Rs 50 to Rs 70 crore.

Kumar said that a Muga Farmers' Training Centre would be set up at Resubelpara in North Garo Hills to facilitate scientific training and equip the farmers with the necessary skill sets.

The chief minister also released the Meghalaya Muga Mission Document during the function.

67 MLAs in Odisha Assembly facing criminal charges: Report

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 28 (PTI): Nearly half of the newly elected MLAs in the Odisha Assembly have criminal charges against them, an 11 per cent rise as compared to 2014, according to a report.

In the last election, 52 MLAs, constituting 35 per cent of the total Assembly members, were found to have declared criminal cases against them, said the joint report prepared by Odisha Election Watch (OEW)

and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

Ranjan Kumar Mohanty, the state convener of Odisha Election Watch, said 67 legislators in the new House are facing criminal cases as mentioned in their affidavits, 49 of them having serious charges against them, such as kidnapping, murder and attempt-to-murder.

"In the 2014 polls, 52 MLAs (35 per cent) of the total legislators were found to have been

facing criminal cases. This time it is 67 (46 per cent)," he added. The report maintained said that the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD has more number of newly elected MLAs with criminal cases.

At least 46 of 112 BJD MLAs elected during the just-concluded elections have mentioned criminal cases in the affidavits, 33 of them declaring serious criminal charges.

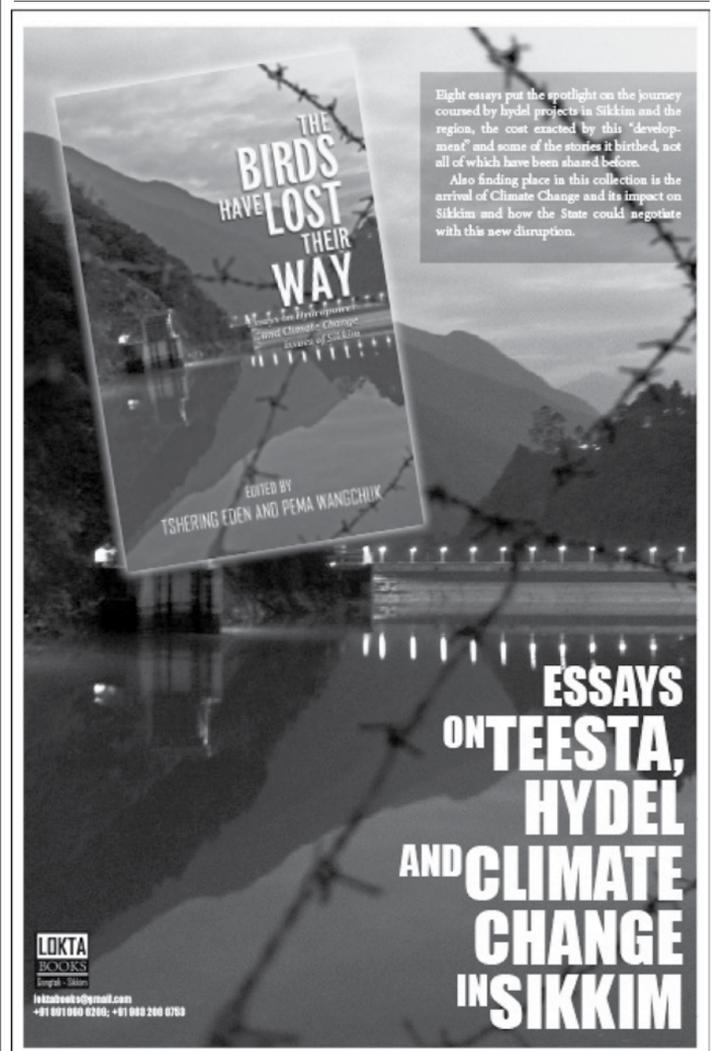
In the BJP, 14 of the 33 elected legislators have criminal cases, 10

of them encountering serious charges.

Similarly, the affidavits of the newly elected Congress MLAs show that six of the nine elected to the Assembly have criminal charges against them, the report added.

Simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections were held in Odisha last month in four phases.

Polling in Patkura Assembly seat was countermanded following the death of a candidate.



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Kane in England squad for Nations League finals

LONDON, MAY 28 (AFP): Harry Kane was included in England's 23-man squad for next month's Nations League finals on Monday but Tottenham Hotspur teammates Harry Winks and Kieran Trippier were both left out.

Gareth Southgate, the England manager, has reduced his group from the list of 27 he named earlier this month, with Southampton's James Ward-Prowse and Nathan Redmond also sidelined.

England captain Kane, who has not played since suffering ankle ligament damage in April, was retained by the Southgate on the day he insisted he was "ready" for Spurs' clash with Liverpool in Saturday's Champions League final.

Kane has not played since suffering the injury in the first leg of Tottenham's quarter-final against Manchester City on April 9, which was also when Winks made his last appearance.

Spurs subsequently announced Winks had undergone groin surgery, although the midfielder said he hoped it was not the end of his season.

Trippier, a full-back, was a member of the England squad that made it to the semi-finals of last



year's World Cup and was an unused substitute in the Euro 2020 qualifiers against the Czech Republic and Montenegro in March.

Redmond was a surprise inclusion in Southgate's 27-man squad, having been overlooked since winning his only England cap in March 2017, with Ward-Prowse making just his second appearance against Montenegro.

England face the Netherlands in their Nations League semi-final in Guimarães, northern Portugal, a week on Thursday.

Seven players in

Southgate's 23 could potentially be involved in both the Champions League final in Madrid five days earlier and the Netherlands match.

'DIFFICULT DECISIONS'

"There have been some difficult decisions to make and we are obviously a little bit complicated with so many players involved in the Champions League as well but we are really excited by the squad and the players that are around it," said Southgate in a statement issued by the Football Association.

"Some players who have had really good fin-

ishes to the season like James Ward-Prowse and Nathan Redmond are staying with us for this period to train because although we have cut the squad to 23, we have still got two weeks to get through and two really big finals ahead.

"Harry Winks is a player we really like and that's a tough one because he has not played for a couple of months and we don't get to see him in training," added Southgate.

Meanwhile the former England international said right-back was "as hard a decision as we have had to make".

"Of course, Kieran Trippier has had such a big impact, he had such a brilliant World Cup. He has been a really valuable member of our squad and has a great attitude with us, real passion in playing for England but Trent (Alexander-Arnold) and Kyle (Walker) have finished the season so strongly.

"So it (right-back) is a position where we have got real competition for places." Portugal face Switzerland in the other semi-final the day before England's game, with both the final and third-place playoff taking place on Sunday, June 9.

England squad
Goalkeepers: Jack Butland (Stoke), Tom Heaton (Burnley), Jordan Pickford (Everton)
Defenders: Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool), Ben Chilwell (Leicester City), Joe Gomez (Liverpool), Michael Keane (Everton), Harry Maguire (Leicester), Danny Rose (Tottenham), John Stones (Manchester City), Kyle Walker (Manchester City)
Midfielders: Dele Alli (Tottenham), Ross Barkley (Chelsea), Fabian Delph (Manchester City), Eric Dier (Tottenham), Jordan Henderson (Liverpool), Jesse Lingard (Manchester United), Declan Rice (West Ham).

ATK sign Irish defender Carl McHugh



KOLKATA, MAY 28 (PTI): Former champions ATK on Tuesday announced the signing of Irish defender Carl McHugh, attacking midfielders Michael Soosairaj and Michael Regin for the upcoming Indian Super League season.

"McHugh is a very versatile and exciting player. His talent and his leadership skills will impact the team in a very positive way. I welcome him to the ATK family," head coach Antonio Lopez Habas said in a state-

ment. "Michael Soosairaj and Michael Regin are experienced players who have been playing competitive football in India. Their understanding of the game, their attacking style will add value to ATK," Habas added.

An Irish professional, McHugh plays for Scottish Premiership side Motherwell as a central defender as he will bolster the backline along with Englishman John Johnson, who has been retained by ATK from last season. Primarily a cen-

tral defender, McHugh can also be handy as a left back, and even as a midfielder.

Soosairaj and Regin are meant to form a formidable midfield pair with the experienced Manuel Lanzarote Bruno, who has been retained from last season.

Soosairaj, who scored four goals in 14 matches for Jamshedpur FC last season, has been signed for a contract of five years. Regin played as a midfielder for Chennai City in the I-League.

Australian greats tag West Indies, New Zealand as dark horse

MELBOURNE, MAY 28 (PTI): Hosts England and India head into the World Cup as firm favourites, but Australian greats like Allan Border and Brett Lee feel two-time champions West Indies and last edition's runners-up New Zealand would prove to be the dark horses.

"I look at the West Indies side and I think that's a very dangerous cricket team. If they get some momentum going they could be very, very dangerous. I know as the game gets shorter they get more dangerous, but I think the 50-over game suits them playing in England.

"I think their cricket is well-suited to that. Watch out for the West Indies," Border told cricket.com.au.

Former fast bowler Lee, meanwhile, has put his money on the Black Caps. He also said Afghanistan, who are featuring in just their second World Cup, will showcase some quality cricket.

"The dark horse would be New Zealand, but Afghanistan will play some good cricket. They probably don't have the batting that they would like but their bowling unit is outstanding," Lee said.

Former Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds has put his weight



behind the men from the Caribbean, saying the English grounds are well suited for big hitters like "Universe Boss" Chris Gayle.

"West Indies. I just think they've got a quiet little bit of confidence going on there at the moment. They've played pretty well of recent times. And Chris Gayle will be itching to potentially go out on a winning note. The grounds will suit the way he plays. They're my dark horse."

Australia's former national selector Mark Waugh also picked the Kane Williamson-led New Zealand for their ability to perform well in all departments.

"Probably New Zealand. They were in the last World Cup final. They're probably going to rely on a few players like Kane Williamson, Martin Guptill and Trent Boult but they always

seem to play well. They field well, they're disciplined, they run between wickets well, they're always well coached, always in for the fight. I think they could make the semis. They're probably the dark horse," Waugh said.

The 53-year-old opined that West Indies although have the batting firepower, they lack in bowling.

"The West Indies probably have the batting but not the bowling to be a threat. South Africa, I suppose, they're going to rely on Quinton de Kock, Faf du Plessis and maybe Kagiso Rabada. They'll be a threat but probably New Zealand will be a roughie."

The showpiece event, starting May 30, will see all 10 participating teams playing each other in a round robin manner with the top four sides qualifying for the semifinals.

Bowlers will be game changers in the World Cup, says Malinga



LONDON, MAY 28 (PTI): Batsmen may be constantly propelling their teams to high scores everyday but Sri Lanka veteran pacer Lasith Malinga believes that the bowlers will be the "game changers" in the upcoming World Cup despite the flowing runs.

"Cricket is going towards the batsmen but bowlers can change the game, they get the wickets and that wins a match," Malinga was quoted as saying by ICC Media after Sri Lanka's five-wicket defeat to Australia in their second warm-up game at Southampton on Monday night.

"Whoever has the skilful bowlers, in any condition on any pitch, will have the advantage in the team.

"Bowlers need to have a skill, then know how to analyse a game. They need to improve as quickly as they can and get confidence from their performances," he added.

The 35-year-old was a vital cog in the IPL franchise Mumbai Indians bowling unit this year, claiming 16 wickets to help his side win a record fourth title in the T20 cash-rich league.

"In the last couple of years, I have worked

on the variations and it boosts confidence, but situation analysis is very important," Malinga said.

His performance against Chennai Super Kings in the final, where he backed himself to bowl a slower delivery in the final ball and defend two runs, has underlined Malinga's status as one of the world's best death bowlers. "The team expects and I expect myself to know how to do this, if I want to be a match-winner I need to take wickets and if I feel that's a slower ball, I go for it. I have good confidence to bowl it."

After the warm-up match, everyone was surprised to see Malinga sharing tips with the Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis on how to deliver a slower ball.

"Variations is very important in the short-format game. During IPL also he (Stoinis) had wanted to know how I bowl (it)," Malinga revealed.

"I wanted to give him tips that's how cricket moves forward. Whoever wants to know, I will help them. I'll share tricks on how to bowl slow balls, which situation you will use it, why you want to use the slow one," he said.

Rizwan, Abid told to stay put in England as Pakistan's World Cup back-up players

KARACHI, MAY 28 (PTI): The Pakistan Cricket Board on the request of the national team management has decided to keep batsmen Muhammad Rizwan and Abid Ali in England for the duration of the World Cup as back-up players.

While wicketkeeper-batsman Rizwan did not make it to the final 15 for the World Cup despite scoring two hundreds against Australia

in the ODI series in the UAE, Abid was named in the preliminary squad which went to England but later dropped to accommodate hard-hitting batsman Asif Ali in the final squad.

The PCB, however, has now made arrangements for both players to remain in Birmingham on Board expenses to be made available in case of an injury to any player in the World Cup squad.

All-rounder Faheem Ashraf, also dropped from the final World Cup squad after being picked in the preliminary squad, has also been told to fly to England and remain there.

Faheem, as it is, will be in England after Eid, playing league cricket.

"But the expenses on keeping Rizwan and Abid in Birmingham will be taken care off by the Board," a source said.

World Cup win will unite the Caribbean people, feels Holder

LONDON, MAY 28 (PTI): A successful campaign at the World Cup will not only end a four-decade long drought but will also unite the people of the Caribbean, feels West Indies skipper Jason Holder. "It would mean a lot to us if we were to win it. It's something we've won before and it's always said in the Caribbean that if West Indies cricket is doing well then the West Indian people are happy," Holder told "The Guardian".

West Indies, who are the reigning Twenty20 champions, have a proud history at the ODI World Cup, winning the first two editions of the tournament in 1975 and 1979 and making the final of the third.

However, after struggling for nearly two decades, a few stunning wins against England in Tests recently lifted their spirits. "You saw it in the recent England series. Everywhere we went in the Caribbean, people were full of high praise for our efforts and winning performances. "Success on the cricket field puts a smile on West Indian faces. Seeing us succeed



and even dominate again gave the whole region a huge lift. Hopefully we can continue to bring the people of the region closer," the 27-year-old said.

Holder, who is West Indies' youngest captain, believes that the return of big hitter Chris Gayle can boost the confidence of the side.

"Chris is an excellent individual. Prior to the England series, I said I've never batted with him in a one-day game. Lo and behold I went in and he was at the crease. He gave me a big hug, and that meant a lot personally. He was an outstanding man of the series."

"I batted with him when he got that 162. I'm sure the many batting partners Chris has had over the years would say it's a great spectacle to see him flay bowlers all over the park

He can really fire us to the heights in this tournament."

West Indies were saved the blushes after heavy rain helped them qualify for the World Cup by the narrowest of margins against Scotland.

"I never once thought it could slip away. We felt in control most of the games but, yes, it was a different dynamic. We had never played a qualifier tournament to reach a World Cup before.

"Adding to the competition we had furious opposition who wanted to take us down. We also didn't know much about them and it was a different challenge. Credit to our boys for coming through some high-pressure situations. We held our nerve and the cricket we've played this year gives me real confidence," Holder said.

Great position to be in as compared to 10 months ago: Finch

SOUTHAMPTON, MAY 28 (PTI): Australia have put behind a disappointing year, which saw them losing back-to-back series besides facing a ball-tampering scandal, and skipper Aaron Finch is relieved to see the team in great position at the moment as compared to 10 months ago.

The defending champions could not have asked for a better preparation going into the World Cup, commencing on May 30 in UK, as they won both their warm-up games against England and Sri Lanka. "It is a

great position to be in when compared to where we were ten months ago; it is great when guys keep jumping up to fill positions," Finch said after Monday's warm-up match here against Sri Lanka, which Australia won by five wickets.

The Australian team was in complete turmoil a year ago after the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa, involving Steve Smith and David Warner. The two batsman were handed a year-long ban from international cricket.

Australia also lost the

ODI series against England and South Africa, and a home Test series against India for the first time ever. This year, however, the Aussies managed to get their act together as they registered a come-from-behind 3-2 ODI series win against India, and then blanked Pakistan 5-0.

"We have been as a group since May 1, and we are still doing our basics really well," said Finch.

Australia will begin their World Cup campaign against Afghanistan on June 1 in Bristol.

Chinese tourism to US drops for 1st time in 15 years

DETROIT (US), MAY 28 (AP): After more than a decade of rapid growth, Chinese travel to the U.S. is falling. And that has cities, malls and other tourist spots scrambling to reverse the trend.

Travel from China to the U.S. fell 5.7% in 2018 to 2.9 million visitors, according to the National Travel and Tourism Office, which collects data from U.S. Customs forms. It was the first time since 2003 that Chinese travel to the U.S. slipped from the prior year.

Friction between the U.S. and China is one reason for the slowdown. The Trump administration first imposed tariffs on Chinese solar panels and washing machines in January 2018, and the trade war has escalated from there. The U.S. now has a 25 per cent tariff on USD 200 billion worth of Chinese imports, while China has retaliated with tariffs on USD 60 billion of U.S. imports.

Last summer, China issued a travel warning for the U.S., telling its citizens to beware of shootings, robberies and high costs for medical care. The U.S. shot back with its own warning about travel to China.

Wang Haixia, who works at an international trade company in Beijing, traveled to the U.S. in May for her sister's graduation. She and her



family planned to spend 10 days in Illinois and New York.

Wang says she might have stayed longer but doesn't want to contribute to the U.S. economy amid the trade war.

"I cannot cancel this trip because I promised my sister I would go to her commencement," she said. "My relatives will contribute more than 100,000 yuan to America just staying for 10 days, and that's enough." There are other reasons behind the slowdown. Economic uncertainty in China has travelers at the lower end of the market vacationing closer to home, says Wolfgang Georg Arlt, director of the Chinese Outbound Tourism Research Institute,

which found that 56 per cent of travelers leaving China in the last three months of 2018 went to Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan compared with 50 per cent in 2017.

Those who do travel farther are seeking out more exotic destinations like Croatia, Morocco and Nepal.

China's travel to the U.S. had already been moderating from its breakneck pace earlier this decade. In 2000, 249,000 Chinese visited the U.S. That tripled to 802,000 by 2010, then tripled again by 2015, in part because of higher incomes, better long-haul flight connections and an easing of visa restrictions, according to McKinsey, the

consulting firm. The U.S. welcomed more than 3 million Chinese visitors in 2016 and 2017. But year-over-year growth edged up just 4 per cent in 2017, the slowest pace in more than a decade.

Most industry-watchers agree that any downturn is temporary, since China's middle class will only continue to expand. The U.S. government forecasts Chinese tourism will grow 2% this year to 3.3 million visitors, and will reach 4.1 million visitors in 2023.

"Even if the Chinese economy cools, it's still going to continue to be a very good source of growth for the travel industry," said David

Huether, senior vice president of research for the U.S. Travel Association.

In general, international travel to the U.S. has been declining. Overall data for 2018 hasn't been released yet, but international travel fell 2% in 2016 and was flat in 2017.

But because China commands some of the highest tourism traffic to the U.S., any falloff will be felt by destinations that have come to rely on Chinese spending power. In 2017, the country had the fifth highest number of U.S.-bound tourists, behind Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom and Japan. Ten years earlier, China wasn't even on the top 10 list, falling

behind countries like Germany, France, South Korea and Australia, according to the National Travel and Tourism Office.

China didn't crack the top 10 list until 2011 and has been climbing ever since. Spending by Chinese visitors which doesn't include students ballooned more than 600 per cent between 2008 and 2016, to nearly 18.9 billion. In 2017, that fell by 1 per cent to USD 18.8 billion, or about 12% of overall tourism spending.

To hold onto those dollars, experts say the tourism industry must do more to keep up with Chinese travelers and their changing needs.

Larry Yu, a professor of hospitality management at George Washington University, notes that Chinese tourists particularly younger ones are increasingly planning trips using social media apps like WeChat and are less likely to book through big tour groups. They have also rapidly adopted smartphone-based payment systems. Destinations should invest in those technologies now if they want to continue attracting Chinese tourists, says David Becker, former CEO of Attract China, a New York-based travel consultancy.

"A lot of companies looked at the Chinese market as easy money, but we have to be relevant to the Chinese," Becker said. Attract China, for instance, has helped luxury stores in Manhattan incorporate Jeenie, a live translation app, and add Alipay and WeChat Pay for mobile payments.

Others have also been stepping up their efforts. The Beverly Center mall in Los Angeles used to cater to busloads of Chinese tourists. Now, it's focusing on small groups of less than 10 VIP shoppers, says Susan Vance, the mall's marketing and sponsorship director. The mall has also pushed stores to offer China UnionPay, a digital payment service. More than 100 stores now have it, Vance says, up from three in 2014.

Pak downplays India's decision not to invite Imran for Modi's inauguration; pitches for dialogue

KARACHI, MAY 28 (PTI): Pakistan has tried to downplay India's decision not to invite Imran Khan for Narendra Modi's swearing-in on Thursday, saying the Indian Prime Minister's "internal politics" does not permit him to extend an invitation to his Pakistani counterpart.

The government on Monday announced in New Delhi that it has invited leaders from BIMSTEC countries to Prime Minister Modi's inauguration, leaving out Pakistan, which is not a member of the regional grouping.

The BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) comprises Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.

Reacting to reports that India has not invited Pakistan Prime Minister Khan to Prime Minister Modi's inauguration, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said a meeting for the sake of dialogue to find a solution to the Kashmir issue, as well as Siachen and Sir Creek disputes, would have been a significant measure instead of attending the swearing-in ceremony.

"His (Prime Minister Modi's) entire focus (during the election campaign) was on Pakistan-bashing. It was unwise to expect that he can get rid of this narrative (soon)," Qureshi was quoted as saying by Dawn news. "India's internal politics did not permit him to extend an invitation," he said.

In 2014, then Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif had attended Prime Minister Modi's swearing-in held on May 26 in New Delhi when the leaders of SAARC countries were invited.

Speaking to Geo News on Monday, Qureshi said Modi had congratulated Khan after he won the general election last year and wrote a letter as well.

Prime Minister Khan, breaking the ice in bilateral ties, spoke to his Indian counterpart Modi on Sunday and expressed his desire to work together for the betterment of their peoples. "Relations between the countries were based on reciprocity and PM Khan had congratulated Mr Modi as a goodwill gesture," the Pakistani foreign minister said.

"Finding a new way (to resume dialogue) is also essential for them (India). If he (Modi) wants development of this region... the only way is to sit with Pakistan to find a solution. "It is in the interest of Pakistan to defuse tensions... Pakistan did not create tension," Qureshi said.

Prime Minister Modi on Thursday led his Bharatiya Janata Party to a landmark victory for a second five-year term in office, winning 303 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha. Tensions flared up between India and Pakistan after a suicide bomber of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM) killed 40 CRPF personnel in Kashmir's Pulwama district on February 14.

Amid mounting outrage, the Indian Air Force (IAF) carried out a counter-terror operation, hitting the biggest JeM training camp in Balakot, deep inside Pakistan on February 26. The next day, Pakistan Air Force retaliated and downed a MiG-21 in an aerial combat and captured an IAF pilot, who was handed over to India.

Malaysia to send back plastic waste to foreign nations



PORT KLANG, MAY 28 (AP): Malaysia will send back some 3,000 metric tons (3,300 tons) of non-recyclable plastic waste to countries such as the US, UK, Canada and Australia in a move to avoid becoming a dumping ground for rich nations, Environment Minister Yeo Bee Yin said Tuesday.

Yeo said Malaysia and many developing countries have become new targets after China banned the import of plastic waste last year.

Last week, the Philippines said it would ship back dozens of containers of garbage which were illegally shipped to the country from Canada in 2013 to 2014.

Yeo said 60 containers stacked with contaminated waste were smuggled in en route to illegal processing facilities in Malaysia and will be sent back to their countries of origin.

Ten of the containers are due to be shipped back within two weeks, she said, as she showed reporters contents of the waste at a port outside Kuala Lumpur.

The displayed items included cables from the UK, contaminated milk cartons from Australia and compact discs from Bangladesh, as well as bales of electronic and household waste from the U., Canada, Japan, Saudi Arabia and China.

Yeo said the waste from China appeared to be garbage from France and other countries that

had been rerouted after a ban imposed by China.

In one case alone, Yeo said a UK recycling company exported more than 50,000 metric tons (55,000 tons) of plastic waste in about 1,000 containers to Malaysia over the past two years.

"This is probably just the tip of the iceberg (due) to the banning of plastic waste by China," Yeo told a news conference. "Malaysia will not be a dumping ground to the world... we will fight back. Even though we are a small country, we can't be bullied by developed countries."

The government has clamped down on dozens of illegal plastic recycling facilities that had mushroomed across the country, shuttering more than 150 plants since last July. Earlier this month, the government also sent back five containers of waste to Spain.

Yeo said China's plastic waste ban had "opened the eyes of the world to see that we have a huge garbage and recycling problem." Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has threatened to forcibly ship back dozens of containers of garbage to Canada and his government recalled its ambassador and consuls in Canada over Ottawa's failure to comply with a May 15 deadline to take back the garbage.

Canadian Environment Minister Catherine McKenna said the Canadian government

had awarded a contract to French shipping giant Bollore Logistics Canada that calls for the return of 69 containers filled with household waste and electronic garbage to Canada by the end of June. The Philippines, however, rejected Canada's plan. Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the government will proceed with a plan to look for a private shipping company to rapidly transport the garbage to Canadian territory.

Philippine officials were assessing separate shipments from Hong Kong and Australia which environmental activists said allegedly contained garbage and should be sent back to their points of origin.

In Port Klang, Yeo said citizens in rich nations diligently separate their waste for recycling, but the garbage ended up being dumped in developing nations where they are recycled illegally, causing environmental and health hazards, she said.

"We urge the developed countries to review their management of plastic waste and stop shipping the garbage out to the developing countries," she said, calling such practices "unfair and uncivilized." Yeo vowed to take action against Malaysian companies illegally importing used plastic, calling them "traitors to the country's sustainability."

Pak's nukes make its defence 'invincible', says Sharif from jail

LAHORE, MAY 28 (PTI): As Pakistan Tuesday marked the 21st anniversary of its atomic tests, jailed former prime minister Nawaz Sharif said that his decision to make the country a nuclear power has made its defence "invincible." On May 28, 1998 Pakistan carried out five nuclear tests at Chaghi in Balochistan province during Sharif's tenure as prime minister. The day is since observed as Youm-e-Takbeer in Pakistan.

Pakistan's nuclear tests came days after India successfully carried out the atomic tests in Pokhran on May 11.

"May 28 is an unforgettable day in the history of Pakistan. On this day, the defence of the country was made invincible when Pakistan emerged on the world map as a nuclear power," 69-year-old Sharif, supremo of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), said in a message which was shared on his party's Twitter handle.

"Youm-e-Takbeer is a day of nation's honour. A sign of nation's unprecedented bravery, it also gives a message to the country's enemies that there would be dire consequences in case of any misadventure against Pakistan," he said in the message from the Kot Lakhpat jail where he is currently undergoing a seven-year-sentence in a corruption case.

Sharif said his government was threatened with economic sanctions in case of the atomic tests. He also said that Pakistan was offered billions of dollars for not conducting the tests. "But I accepted all the challenges and went

ahead with the tests," he said. The PML-N chief claimed that external forces hatched conspiracies against him for making the country an economic power for his approval of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor due to which he was being punished - first forced to go on exile and later sentenced to jail. "In the solitary confinement, I assure the nation that I will never compromise on the constitutional rights of the people, people's right to vote and country's security and sovereignty," he said.

Sharif has been serving a seven-year prison term at the jail since December 24, 2018 when an accountability court convicted him in one of the three corruption cases filed in the wake of the apex court's July 28, 2017 order in Panama Papers case.



Becoming a sex symbol at young age haunted me: Lisa Ray

MUMBAI, MAY 28 (PTI): Lisa Ray says she does not like being boxed into a certain identity and this is why being known as a sex symbol at the age of 16 still haunts her.

The actor, who released her memoir "Close to the Bone", hopes people will understand her better after reading about her journey.

"I hate to be labelled and put into boxes but I had to deal with it since a young age because I was a sex symbol at the age of 16. It was completely unanticipated.

"To suddenly become this figure for an entire nation and on top of that, to look much older, that has haunted me my entire life up until now," she told reporters.

The model-actor, who overcame multiple myeloma, a cancer of the white blood cells, said the book should not be read just as a cancer memoir because it gives a glimpse into her journey right from the beginning of her fame.

"A lot of people will understand how I have this ambivalent relationship with my career, how I am an accidental actress, how I always had one foot in and one foot out of it and how I believe that I have been underestimated only because of the way I look. Although, I don't believe they shouldn't be at odds with each other."

The Indo-Canadian actor, 47, said while at the peak of her career, she was

grappling through a personal tragedy as her mother had met with an accident, leaving her wheelchair-bound.

"I understood at a very young age - I was 16 then - that all the aspects that you call success -- name, fame and mon-

would have been "extinguished" by "conforming to mainstream standards."

The actor said "Close to the Bone", published by Harper Collins, may have begun as a starting point to talk about her disease but it gave her a chance to



talk about her life. "I do cover my cancer experiences but that come much later. Having said that, cancer was the launching pad for writing this memoir because initially that's why

I was approached to write this...

"When I sat down and thought about it, I realised that I couldn't write about my disease in isolation from the rest of my life because everything is connected with what came before."

ey -- they don't solve the questions of the soul. "So, my ambitions became different. My goal wasn't to become famous. That explains a lot of my choices, all the projects I said no to because I really understood that my answers were not waiting at the end of it."

Lisa, who featured in films like "Water" and "Kasoor", said a part of her



SUNDAY FUNDAY IN SPAIN! The father-and-son duo, David Beckham & Romeo Beckham exit their hotel in Sevilla, Spain to watch a football match.

My kids know about my dancing skills more from their friends: Madhuri Dixit

MUMBAI, MAY 28 (PTI): Actor Madhuri Dixit says her children are often amused to learn that she can pull off any dance style.

The actor believes she has a "natural affinity" towards dance since the age of three.

"My children love to see me dance. But I think they know more from friends, that 'your mom is a good dancer' than actually knowing it first hand!

"My son comes and asks me, 'mom do you know hip hop?' I told him to watch 'Kay Sera Sera'. He came back and said 'wow, you're a cool mom now!'" Madhuri told PTI. The 52-year-old actor says dance has been such a huge part of her life that she cannot imagine a life without it. "I never realised 'oh I am a good dancer', I used to just love dance and I was shameless about it. I could dance in a train, outside, anywhere. Once my mom sat me down and said 'please stop, people will start throwing money!'"

"I can't imagine my life without my dance and the acting. It has taught me discipline, grace, passion, to be true to the profession, and the spirituality of it. It has also taught me to be honest in my personal life. I can't be anything but be grateful about everything."

Madhuri will next be seen judging season

two of Colors dance reality show "Dance Deewane", along with film director Shashank Khaitan and choreographer Tushar Kalia.

The show gives opportunity to three different generations kids, youth and seniors to



compete and win. The actor says as a judge, she is conscious that she shouldn't be "harsh" towards any contestant.

"If you're harsh with someone, it discourages them. I always want to be positive and encouraging, whether it's a small child or the first generation. In our society, the attitude is 'you're more than 50 years old, why are you dancing, let the kids dance.'"

"That's not right. They should have their own lives and talents. Why can't they show that off. I have to keep all that in mind when I'm judging them."

Jason Momoa remembers broke days while shooting for 'Game of Thrones'



LOS ANGELES, MAY 28 (PTI): Actor Jason Momoa, who played Khal Drogo in the first season of "Game of Thrones", says he and his friend drove around Ireland during a break while shooting the fantasy drama as they were too broke to fly home.

Momoa, 39, shared an Instagram image from his time on the show. "So homesick. Looking through my phone I found this," he captioned the picture.

"It was an amazing simple moment with my best friend (Brian Andrew Mendoza). While filming GOT we had

a lil break We were to (sic) broke to fly home so we rented a panel van aka UHAUL in Belfast and drove around beautiful amazing IRELAND searching for the greatest pint of Guinness. Turns out it's perfect everywhere. So many wonderful people and stories I treasure those times. It was the simplest moments I remember the most," the actor wrote.

I still miss my family. Been a long road and I feel like I'm just getting started," he added. "Game of Thrones" recently ended after eight seasons.

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ARIES: Are you still hanging on to THAT one, Aries? Under today's moon-Neptune connection, you can finally surrender and free yourself a toxic tie. You don't have to justify wrongdoing, but through forgiveness, you release yourself from being controlled and limited by resentment. Have you developed self-protective armor in response to a past hurt?

TAURUS: Supportive friends surround you today, Taurus, so reach out if you're feeling overwhelmed. An act of kindness from your inner circle could touch your heart, reminding you that it's the people in your life, not the material stuff, that really matters. Make sure you put the same caring energy out there, too. When someone is struggling, your first instinct might be to dish out tough love.

GEMINI: Hello, influencer! Your creative ideas are welcome at the boardroom table today, so share those unconventional visions. The moon and imaginative Neptune meet in Pisces, your tenth house of career, aligning ambition and inspiration.

Your ability to "think different" could make you stand out from the crowd, tapping you as a thought leader among your cohorts.

CANCER: Ask, believe, receive. Today, the soulful moon unites with intuitive Neptune in Pisces and your broad-minded ninth house. This is the day to imagine what you want, because you can magnetize your dreams to you through creative visualization. The ninth house is all about expansion, so don't just aim for the "safe," low-hanging fruit. Go bigger, Cancer! Feeling out of touch with your power to manifest? Try writing up a gratitude list. When you recall all the things you're thankful for, you'll begin to attract more abundance.

LEO: You SAY that you want happiness, love and freedom, but do you actually believe that your desires are possible, Leo? Today's moon-Neptune conjunction in your mystical eighth house encourages you to examine your own limiting beliefs. Since you may need tangible proof to REALLY change

your mind, hunt for people who are living the life you want for yourself.

VIRGO: Relationships can be hard work, we know, we know. But they can also be a haven from stress and struggle so stop telling yourself that you don't need people. Today, the moon and compassionate Neptune align in Pisces and your partnership house. The tranquilizing effect can be beneficial to your bonds with the ones who matter most. Soften your stance with your partner, and be gentler in your interactions with close friends.

LIBRA: Pampering and self-care are hi-pri items on your agenda and today's stars give you a free pass to luxuriate as only a Libra can. With the moon and sensual Neptune aligned in Pisces and your sixth house of wellbeing, look for healthy ways to indulge. Dip into the steam room after your work-out or spend the evening getting soaked and scrubbed at a traditional Korean spa.

SCORPIO: Still musing over the weekend's romantic escapades? Don't rush to "back to business" mode. Today, the moon

and quixotic Neptune embrace in your fifth house of passion, adding a sensual spin to your agenda. An attraction could spark, or you could be feeling especially amorous. Nobody to side up to (yet)? Get glamorous for yourself, Scorpio.

SAGITTARIUS: Home is where your heart is today, as the moon conjoins with sensual Neptune in your domestic fourth house. If you must trek into the office, bring the cozy vibes with you. Keep an open-door policy so coworkers can plop down and share tales of their weekends. (That expense report can wait).

CAPRICORN: Straight to the point? Not today, Capricorn. The reflective moon and compassionate Neptune meet in Pisces, your communication house. Doling out tough love and stern reprimands will get you nowhere. Validating the other person's emotions and experience? That will help you feel connected. Sometimes, a person just needs to be heard before you rush them into problem-solving mode. Instead of being empathic, be empathetic. Catch yourself if you're being too hardcore, and dial back the intensity.

AQUARIUS: Sprinkle some practical magic into your Monday as the moon and psychic Neptune aligned in your pragmatic second house. Neuroscience is starting to show that our thoughts and intentions CAN shape our reality. Cultivating a mindset of abundance could attract legit prosperity for you, Aquarius. If you've gotten caught in scarcity thinking, shift your mindset. Clear your space of blocks: unpaid bills, parking tickets, a cluttered inbox of unanswered emails. Out with the old means making room for new opportunity to fly in.

PISCES: BWant effortlessness and ease as a way of life? Stop swimming upstream and go with the flow. The moon and your ruling planet Neptune align in Pisces, sharpening your intuition and giving you the astrological It Factor today. You're radiant and magnetic, so make that "big ask" now while your powers of persuasion are this irresistible. This is the day to forward one of your personal goals, and you won't have to struggle to do it. You could turn heads without even trying, too, as Neptune gives you extra dazzle.