



MILLIE BOBBY BROWN TURNS 16, REFLECTS ON 'INAPPROPRIATE COMMENTS' SHE'S FACED
pg 08

AFRICAN COUNTRIES AREN'T BORROWING TOO MUCH: THEY'RE PAYING TOO MUCH FOR DEBT
04

SZA SAYS SHE WON'T DO ANYMORE INTERVIEWS OR PHOTO SHOTS FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE
pg 08



Summit **TIMES**

Vol 05 | Issue 48 | Gangtok | Friday | 21 February 2020

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

LPG prices may come down next month: Pradhan

RAIPUR, FEB 20 (PTI): Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday said LPG prices may come down next month.

The Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Steel, who is on a two-day visit to Chhattisgarh, was talking to reporters on his arrival at the Swami Vivekananda Airport here.

Replying to a query about the constant rise in LPG prices, Pradhan said, "This is not true that the price (of LPG) is constantly increasing. This month it was hiked due to the international market. However, there are indications that the prices may come down next month."

During the winters, LPG consumption increases, which creates a pressure on the sector. This month, the price increased while next month it will reduce, he said.

Last week, cooking gas LPG price hiked by a steep Rs 144.5 per cylinder due to spurt in benchmark global rates of the fuel. However, to insulate the domestic users, the government almost doubled the subsidy it provides on the fuel to keep per cylinder outgo almost unchanged.

During his two-day tour, Pradhan will visit the Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) located in Durg district of the state and hold meetings with the plant officials, union representatives and others.

turn to pg 02

20 die in in TN bus tragedy; survivors shell-shocked

CHENNAI, FEB 20 (PTI): A road crash in Tamil Nadu early Thursday left 20 dead and 28 injured as a lorry collided with their bus reducing it to a mangled heap. Police said the accident occurred on the Salem-Kochi highway at Avinashi in Tirupur around 4 am as the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) bus was proceeding to Ernakulam from Bengaluru.

Tirupur is located about 450 km from here. Most of the passengers were asleep when the lorry crashed into the bus. The lorry driver, Ernakulam native Hemaraj, was arrested later.

The tiles-laden container lorry's tyre burst and it entered the wrong lane colliding with the bus, reducing the vehicle to a mangled heap, police said. The 20, including six women, died at the scene while the injured were admitted to hospitals in Tirupur and some referred to Coimbatore, police said.

Palakkad Superintendent of Police Siva Vikram said "It was a high speed collision. The

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 FEB:

Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum today submitted a two-point memorandum to Health Minister, Dr MK Sharma.

An SPYF team met the Minister at his official residence and submitted the memorandum which has the support of 10,000 signatures collected by the Forum in its tours across Sikkim while trying to understand the healthcare system here and detail what is required.

The two demands that make up the memorandum are complete implementation of Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) in all hospitals, including Primary Health Centres, PHSCs and

CHSCs, in Sikkim and provision of free medicine and other medical services for all the people of the State.

An SPYF press release informs that the Minister assured to fulfill demands unconditionally in the coming budget and asked for some time for fulfill the criteria of specialists.

The release informs that in a thorough discussion stretching for over three hours, SPYF members apprised the Minister about the miserable plight of the condition of the hospital across the state.

"SPYF members placed their two-point demand for which the organization has been waging the arduous struggle for over two years



now. Yet, except some minor improvements, no concrete change has been ob-

served in the ground zero," the release states. It is informed that the

Minister shared his roadmap for the work to be undertaken in the State

in the healthcare sector. The release adds that the Minister assured that

all the demands will be addressed and fulfilled in the coming Budget and that drastic change will be seen on ground in two months after the Budget.

As mentioned earlier, the Minister has sought for some more time to fully equip the hospitals with the required number of specialists like Anaesthetists and Radiologists.

"The Minister has assured that all the hospitals shall be equipped with the required number of nurses, junior doctors, medicines, machines etc as per the IPHS norms and all the services shall be provided free of cost to all the Citizens of the state," the release adds.

R&B Deptt donates Rs 13 lakhs to CM's Relief Fund for Chong landslide victims



GANGTOK, 20 FEB (IPR): The Roads & Bridges Department contributed a sum of Rs 13,47,908 to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to support landslide victims of Chong Village

of Yuksom, West Sikkim.

The amount was handed over to the Secretary to the Chief Minister, SD Dhakal at Tashiling Secretariat today by the Additional Director, Ac-

counts, Bhola Sharma.

The contribution has been made from the headquarters including a mechanical wing of the department and district offices.

State-level Special Olympics held

GANGTOK, 20 FEB (IPR): State-level Special Olympic 2020 for children with special needs under the inclusive education initiative was held here at West Point School Ground today.

The event was organized by Samagra Siksha unit of the Education Department.

Education Minister Kunga Nima Lepcha attended as the chief guest accompanied by Secretary, Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Kuber Bhandari, Joint Commissioner SJ&W Department, President of Special Olympic Bharat chapter, Sikkim president of Viklang Sahyat Samiti, Officers from Education Department,



coaches from National Sport organisation, IE coordinate and officers from Education department.

The main objective of the event has been to provide equitable platform and opportunity to the special children to home their talents as

well as mainstreaming them and bring awareness on the need to organise such events among the public.

Various sporting events like Blind cricket, Boccia (senior girls/boys & junior girls boys), football, Assistance walk for

blind etc were conducted during the day.

The event concluded with distribution of certificates & trophies to the winners and participants as well as token of appreciation to the officials and volunteers involving organising of the event.

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How Much Water Does Subramanian Swamy's Vow for Gorkhaland UT Hold?

JIWAN RAI

Darjeeling's romance with its first love Gorkhaland was more than on the ebb. With the disintegration of the GNLf leadership and the subsequent directionlessness of party workers, their aspiration lost its drive. The Kolkata establishment's distracting tricks flourished like the proverbial 'radish around the outhouse'. Much damage to the Gorkha morale was done by the blatant apathy shown by the BJP - despite Narendra Modi's (in)famous "Gorkha ka sapna, Mera sapna" statement in his Siliguri election campaign speech in April 2014. The carrot he dangled in front of his Gorkha supporters soon dried up and in the 2019 election campaign, Modi ji dangled a cheaper car-

rot of Scheduled Tribe recognition for Gorkhas. The identity-starved Gorkhas fell for it again and voted for BJP with the same Gorkha josh shown in support of Prashant Tamang- eons of year ago!

The country, Gorkhas included, woke up to the clamour of the CAA, NRC, NPR discourse after the 2019 elections. Again the promise of ST recognition paled into insignificance in front of national confusion over the citizenship issue. The Gorkhas resigned themselves to their fate (which they are habituated to do excellently well) and joined the muted audience of the CAA drama. Some bhakt Gorkhas, as they are sarcastically called by their detractors, are supporting it and the self-proclaimed 'non-bhacts' are opposing the Act. The rest are happy to be quiet.

Just when the graveyard of the Gorkhaland issue was becoming oblivious under the cover of grasses of confusion, hopelessness and complacency, Dr Subramanian Swamy started the process of weeding the grass. The issue, which has in all practical purposes become a dead rubber, has been brought to the fore, at least in the minds of some Gorkhas in the Hills.

The Swami supporting Gorkhas must know his political background well before raising their hopes too high. It was, of course, kind of him to speak up on the issue. He is the second most followed Indian politician after Modi on Twitter. However, his actual influence, even within the party, has been far from creditable. He has hardly been in sync with his party on major issues.

His entry into the Rajya Sabha as a BJP MP in April 2016 was memorable. After his swearing in on 26 April, he didn't bother to greet the leader of the house - the late Arun Jetley. He didn't like the man.

This was a precursor of what he was going to do. He began to exploit the Question Hour to the hilt. So much so, some of his comments were expunged. The Outlook wrote, "Undeterred, the newest BJP MP managed to insinuate culpability and criminality even before the august debate was over."

He was critical of the way the BJP government was handling the economy. He even twitted that the BJP was the new Congress. He initially opposed the Rafale Deal. Not surprisingly, the BJP never

turn to pg 02

Summit Times in Nepali

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Training of Panchayat Presidents, Panchayat Secretaries, Teachers and Swachhagrahis on Sujal and Swachh Gaon

GANGTOK, 20 FEB (IPR): As per instructions of the Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, GoI, the Directorate of Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin), Rural Development Department has carried out the training of Panchayat Presidents, Panchayat Secretaries, Teachers and Swachhagrahis on Sujal & Swachh Gaon from 06 Jan to 19 Feb, 2020. The training was imparted in 11 batches.

The ToT (for which the trainees comprised of Block Development Officers, District Coordinators for SBM(G), Field Facilitators from SIRD&PR and Assistant Engineers) for Sujal & Swachh Gaon was earlier conducted at SIRD& PR Karfector by the Ministry of Jal Shakti from 03-07 Sept, 2019.

The main objective of the training was to build capacity of Panchayat Presidents and Panchayat Secretaries to plan



and implement appropriate strategies for becoming a Sujal and Swachh Gaon; motivate them to take active leadership role in achieving this objective.

All 11 trainings ended with a field visit to see a twin-pit toilet which is a comparatively new technology in the state for

construction of toilets.

Principal Secretary, RDD, CS Rao, accompanied by Special Secretary-cum-Mission Director, Anil Raj Rai, SBM(G) and Deputy Secretary (San), Dinesh Sharma attended the valedictory function for the final batch of training held at SICUN on 19 Feb.

The Panchayat Presidents of Chumbong, Mangalbarey and Daramdin BACs made presentations on their Action Plans for Jal Jeewan Mission based on knowledge gained during the training.

The Principal Secretary, in his key note address, expressed grat-

itude towards the Panchayats and other trainees for having taken keen interest in the training.

He also expressed happiness on the amount of energy exhibited by the trainees in preparing the action plan for their GPUs. He requested all GPUs to involve all the stakeholders from

planning stage and preparation of Village Action Plan (VAP) with utmost care.

Further, all the master trainers were felicitated by the Principal Secretary, RDD as a token of gratitude for successful completion of 11 batches of trainings on Sujal & Swachh Gaon.

Court summons Barua, Chauhan

KOLKATA, FEB 20 (PTI): The internal wrangling in Bengal Chess Association took a legal twist after summons were issued to Grandmaster Dibyendu Barua and secretary of All India Chess Federation (AICF) Bharat Singh Chauhan for libel and slander against BCA secretary Atanu Lahiri.

The 10th Metropolitan Magistrate Court of Calcutta, in an order dated February 18, issued the summons to the duo under Section 500 read with Section 120B of the Indian Penal Code.

They have been directed to appear on March 31, according to the order circulated by BCA.

The development is likely to have an effect on the elections of AICF and BCA, both of which are being held under court orders.

Later, reacting to the development, Bengal's first GM Barua said he's yet to receive an official copy of the order, but added he has full faith in the judiciary and that the truth must prevail.

"I've just told the truth for the sake of Bengal chess players. I am aware of the consequences of the defamation case. I've full faith on the judiciary system. I also want a proper investigation into the case, truth must come out," Barua told PTI.

Chauhan and Barua are candidates for the post of secretary in AICF and BCA elections respectively.

Barua had accused BCA secretary Lahiri of corruption when the latter was on national duty as the coach of Indian Cadet Chess Championship in China last year.

Chauhan, too, had condemned Lahiri.

Barua had levelled various charges against Lahiri, including misuse of power as BCA secretary and conflict of interest with regard to a West Bengal government project to teach chess to tribal students in the state.

BJP's West Sikkim unit fetes Sikkim-BJP prez



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 FEB: Recently re-appointed the Bharatiya Janata Party Sikkim Pradesh president, DB Chauhan, received a warm welcome from the West District Committee at a special programme held at Gyalshing party office on Thursday.

The programme was also attended by Gangtok MLA, YT Lepcha and senior BJP leaders and party workers of the State.

The press release in-

forms further that in his address, the newly elected president stated that BJP's politics was about overall development of the society, state and the country.

He assured to take the leaders and party workers together and not allow any injustice on them.

He appealed to the party workers to take the welfare schemes and programmes of the Centre to the people and reach out to sub-division offices, District Collector-

ates, government departments and the Ministry if needed to address issues of the people.

He informed that district-level, constituency-level and booth level offices of the party will be formed soon.

The release adds that the programme was also addressed by the Gangtok MLA, YT Lepcha, BJP's west Sikkim president Digam Subba and vice-president Karma Chuki Bhutia and BJP leader, SB Karki.

DRI seizes gold worth Rs 5.44 Crore

CHENNAI, FEB 20 (PTI): The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence has seized 12.6 kg gold worth Rs 5.44 crore from 18 passengers who arrived here from various countries, officials said on Thursday.

The DRI Chennai zonal unit picked up 18 passengers and two customs officials from the airport for questioning for allegedly having abetted the smuggling of the contraband.

These passengers had arrived from Malaysia, Colombo and Dubai on Wednesday, a press release said.

The officers also searched a residential

premise of a former Customs department tax assistant who was allegedly involved in coordinating the smuggling of gold, it said.

The DRI said as it was trying to take the passengers from the airport for questioning around 50 unidentified people started gathering and hurled abuses at the officials inside the airport.

"When the officers tried to escort the passengers into a bus, the mob started attacking the officers and during the melee two DRI officers were manhandled," the release said.

A complaint was filed at Airport police.

FC Goa stars dedicate historic feat to supporters

MARGAO, FEB 20 (PTI): FC Goa players on Thursday dedicated their qualification to the AFC Champions League to the supporters of the club.

The Gaurs sealed a historic place in the AFC Champions League on Wednesday with an emphatic 5-0 win over Jamshedpur.

In doing so, they became the first ever Indian team to qualify for the group stage of the Champions League.

The Men in Orange have been on a roll, delivering five wins on the trot.

The defending Super Cup champions seemed to have kicked into top gear this season, finishing the league stage with a club-record 39 points, thanks to 12 wins from their 18 games.

Leading the charge from the front has again been Ferran Corominas. The talismanic Spaniard has once more set the league on fire, thanks to his 14 goals from 15 games. And it was his early strike in the game against Jamshedpur FC that helped settle down any jangling nerves.

Speaking on the achievement, Coro said, "This one is for our supporters. From the moment I set foot on Indian soil, I have felt nothing but loved. We came so

close the last two seasons, and to finally be able to give this piece of joy back to our fans, I feel overjoyed."

'Balance', for the Gaurs has been a critical part of their success -- the philosophy that gets started with a steady diet of passes at the back -- find's defenders a crucial part of the process. In Mourta Fall, they have found not only a cornerstone to their defensive, but an aerial threat unlike any in the ISL.

"It was something we have been dreaming of ever since that spot was announced at the beginning of the season. Goans love football and they love us. They place a lot of trust on us.

"And now, I hope they will be able to enjoy some continental football. They have always had our back. I just want to say a big thank you," stated Mourta Fall, FC Goa's highest ever scoring defender.

For Mandar Rao Desai, the taste of success might be even greater. A native Goan and the current skipper of the side, the left-winger turned left-back has been with the side from the very first season.

"To be able to give this to the football-loving people of Goa, I feel immensely happy.

Mobilisation awareness for SHGs



SUMMIT REPORT

RANGPO, 20 FEB: A daylong awareness programme on mobilization of Self Help Groups was organised by ATMA West Sikkim at Naku-Chumbung village under Gyalshing Block today.

The programme was chaired by Joint Director Tshering Nor-

bu Bhutia who is also PD ATMA, Deputy Director Enchong Bhutia, Agriculture Inspector Pratap Tamang, ATM Pabitra Subba, Computer Programmer Tashi C Bhutia along with field functionaries of the ward and 60 representatives from different SHGs.

The programme began a welcome speech

by Agriculture Inspector, Soil Science.

The chairperson briefed the house about the role of ATMA in SHGs and about the technologies which can be beneficial to SHGs for doubling their incomes and about revolving funds.

The programme concluded with the distribution of soil health card.

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How Much..

gave him a role big enough to suit his intellectual brilliance. Swami was supposed to have told the BJP leaders in a light hearted spirit that 'keeping brilliant minds like him idle could prove dangerous. The prophesy did prove true in terms of the economy of the country. He could have probably done a better job.

The BJP government has too much on its plate right now. The declining economy, unprecedented unemployment issue, rising inflation, the CAA - the list is endless. How much traction can be gained by what Swamy says is not hard to predict. In a crisis situation, it is quite possible that Swamy's statement is a typical calculated move to distract the Gorkhas. Given the history of the role of cat's paw that he has played for the BJP, it could possibly be a shot at the WB chief minister, Mamta Banerjee, to divert her attention to the Gorkhaland issue.

However, I do not believe it personally. I am more inclined to think that it is purely his personal opinion. For a loose cannon like him, it is the typical outworking of his mind - towing a line that his party would never fulfil - neither in their wildest dreams nor their worst nightmares.

LPG prices...

He will also visit iron ore mines of the Bhilai Steel Plant in Dallirajhira town of neighbouring Balod district and lay the foundation of a beneficiation plant there.

"BSP holds an important place in our country's steel industry, especially for Indian Railways as it meets 98 per cent of the requirement of rail...How we can further improve the production capacity of the plant will be discussed with its officials during my visit," the Union minister said.

20 die in...

Palaniswami said he has asked the Tirupur administration to coordinate with their Palakkad counterparts, to expedite activities including sending the bodies of the deceased to Kerala.

Further, 23 people were seriously injured and were undergoing treatment while five others sustained simple injuries and were proceeding to Kerala, he said.

"I have directed the Tirupur collector and police officials there to set up a help centre to assist the relatives of the victims and also expedite the process of sending the bodies of the deceased by contacting Kerala officials," he said.

In Thiruvananthapuram, Vijayan deputed his cabinet colleagues-Transport Minister A K Saseendran and Agriculture Minister V S Sunilkumar, to Tirupur to coordinate relief operations, his office said.

The Kerala delegation later arrived in Tirupur. Saseendran, Sunilkumar, Palakkad MP V K Sreekanandan, and Alathur MP Ramya Haridas besides MLAs from Kerala are camping at Tirupur.

"The state government will provide a compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the bereaved families, Rs two lakh will be given within a week. The rest of the amount will be given following the procedures," Saseendran said.

"The families of the KSRTC employees will be given Rs 30 lakh each under the insurance scheme," he added.

The state government has also declared that it will take care of the medical expenses of the injured passengers. The health department has sent ambulances to Tirupur to bring back the bodies.

The accident left the survivors shell-shocked. Karishma, on her way to Ernakulam, said she was seated on the left side of the bus and was sleeping when the accident occurred.

"When I woke up suddenly, I saw many people running around and the injured being taken in ambulances," the woman told the media.

Alan, also from Kerala, said he was still finding it difficult to overcome the shock.

"I have sustained a minor injury on my leg. But my friend is injured on the nose and I am taking him to hospital," he said.

Jemin George, an injured passenger, said he suffered a cut on his lips and an injury to his forehead that required 10 stitches.

"I do not know what exactly happened. I was sleeping in a seat behind the driver's seat," he said, adding, he was referred to a hospital in Coimbatore.

A weeping woman passenger alleged the container lorry was overloaded and there were not many vehicles on the road.

She said the right side of the bus was damaged.

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Basibiyalo and Hamro Chahhar team from Mumbai to attend 200th episode of Kalimpong Basibiyalo

SUMMIT REPORT RONGPO, 20 FEB:

A team representing Basibiyalo and Hamro Chahhari from Mumbai will be attending the 200th episode of Kalimpong Basibiyalo which is to be held in

Namchi in April 2020.

The decision has been taken at the 22nd Mumbai Basibiyalo held recently.

Ram Singh Tiruva, a regular member of Mumbai Basibiyalo, informs that they are

in regular contact with the organizers of Kalimpong and Sikkim.

Mr Tiruva said that a cultural and literary program will be presented by the Mumbai team at the two-day national event being held in Namchi.

TDP chief, family declare net assets

AMARAVATI, FEB 20 (PTI): Telugu Desam Party chief N Chandrababu Naidu grew richer by about Rs 87 lakh as his net assets touched Rs 3.87 crore but his liabilities stood at Rs 5.13 crore on account of a housing loan.

His wife Bhuvaneshwari, who heads the family's Heritage business, saw an increase of over Rs 8 crore in her fortune with the net assets being Rs 39.58 crore.

Their son and MLC Nara Lokesh on Thursday declared the family's assets and liabilities, which has become an annual practice for the last nine years.

Interestingly, Lokesh said he became poorer by Rs 2 crore compared to last year as the value of his net assets shrunk to Rs 19 crore. He had liabilities to the tune of Rs 5.70 crore.

His son Devansh is now richer than Lokesh with net assets of Rs 19.42 crore without any

liabilities. Lokesh's wife Brahmani, who holds an executive position in Heritage, too became richer by over Rs 4.5 crore since last year, with net assets of Rs 11.51 crore.

"The value of these assets is disclosed at the rate at which they were bought and not the current market price as the present value could rise or fall based on several socio-economic factors," Lokesh told a press conference.

Nirvana Holdings, the family's investment company, too, saw an increase in its net assets from Rs 6.8 crore to Rs 9 crore but its liabilities stood at Rs 34.85 crore, according to Lokesh.

Lokesh also said none of the allegations of disproportionate assets against his family were proved.

We challenge anyone to prove if the Nara family had even one rupee more than its declared assets, he added.

SC to hear plea against grant of bail to Chinmayanand

NEW DELHI, FEB 20 (PTI): The Supreme Court Thursday said it would hear on February 24 the plea against the Allahabad High Court order granting bail to former BJP lawmaker Swami Chinmayanand in an alleged rape case lodged by a law student.

A bench, comprising Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant, took note of the submissions of senior advocate Colin Gonsalves that the appeal against the high court order be accorded an urgent hearing. The bench said it would consider hearing the appeal of the alleged victim next Monday.

The high court had on February 3 granted bail to Chinmayanand, a former Union minister who was arrested in a case of sexual exploitation of a woman studying law at a college run by his trust at Shahjahanpur in Uttar Pradesh.

"Both parties crossed their limits and at this stage, it is very difficult to adjudicate as to who exploited whom. In fact, both of them used each

other," the high court had observed while granting bail to Chinmayanand. Chinmayanand, whose trust runs the Shahjahanpur law college where the woman studied, was arrested on September 20 last year under section 376-C of the IPC, a charge short of rape.

The section is applied when someone in authority takes advantage of his official position to "induce or seduce" a woman to have sex with him.

In a parallel case, the woman was charged with trying to extort money from Chinmayanand, whom she had accused of rape.

The high court had granted her bail on December 4, last year also.

The Supreme Court had stepped in after the 23-year-old law student went missing for a few days in August last year after posting a video clip on social media, alleging sexual abuse.

A special investigation team of Uttar Pradesh Police, formed on the directions of the apex court, arrested Chinmayanand about a month later.

Vikram Sarabhai Centenary Celebration at NESAC



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 20 FEB:

North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) of the Dept. Of Space, Govt. Of India, Umiam is organizing Vikram Sarabhai Centenary Celebration Programme on 25 and 26 February.

Students from different schools of Meghalaya have been invited to visit and experience the programme on Space Technology & its Applications of NESAC on 26 February.

Director NESAC, PLN

Raju, informs that there will be exhibitions of ISRO launch vehicles and satellite models, Display boards & Video shows on space related activities, Technology Demonstration of Basic Rocketry & Science and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) flights & Demonstration.

ISRO has also deployed 'Space on Wheels', an exhibition bus from Bengaluru to impart better exposure on Space programme of India to students in North eastern states.

NESAC has been identified as a nodal centre for implementing the Vikram Sarabhai Centenary Celebration Programme for all the eight North-Eastern states.

To mark the occasion of the birth centenary of the 'Father of Space Programme' in India, late Vikram Sarabhai, the NESAC Director has further appealed to all the Heads of Schools in Meghalaya to take this opportunity and send their students to visit NESAC on the occasion.

What surgical strike, tell people about it: Nath to Modi



CHHINDWARA (MP), FEB 20 (PTI): Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Thursday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to tell people something about the surgical strike, and sought to know why he does not speak about issues related to unemployed youths and farmers.

Nath also dared Modi to name at least one freedom fighter from his party- BJP. He was addressing people after inaugurating a shelter for stray cattle at Umarhar village here. "He (Modi) says that he carried out a surgical strike.

Which surgical strike?...Ninety thousand Pakistani jawans had surrendered during (former prime minister) Indira Gandhi's regime. Do you remember these things?

They don't talk about it," he said. "Tell the countrymen something about the surgical strike...Today you are talking about nationalism. Which lesson is being taught to us?" he asked.

"Modiji tell us the name of one freedom fighter in your party. There is no freedom fighter with them. And we are being taught nationalism!" he said.

"(You) want to divert attention. This jugglery, which has been played out too much, is now over," he said.

The elections in Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi have showed that people have understood Modi's jugglery, the chief minister added. "People can be misled once, but not often. What all is Modi-

ji talking? Our biggest challenge is the future of youths, who are the country's future," he said.

"But Modiji is not talking about young people...he does not talk about justice to farmers. Did you hear Modiji talk about youths and farmers in last six to eight months.

"Modiji used to talk about providing employment to two crore youths annually, but even two lakh youths haven't got employment. Modiji used to talk about turning farming into a profitable business," he added.

"I want to ask a question about it...But now you would start talking about Pakistan. Has he come to teach a lesson on Pakistan to us? Will he talk about Pakistan with us...with the Congress?" Nath asked.

Uphaar tragedy: SC dismisses curative plea by victims; no further jail term for Ansal brothers

NEW DELHI, FEB 20 (PTI): The Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed the curative petition filed by an association of the victims of the 1997 Uphaar cinema fire tragedy case, sparing the Ansal brothers further jail term.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice SA Bobde, and justices NV Ramana and Arun Mishra considered the curative plea by the Association for Victims of Uphaar Tragedy (AVUT) in-chamber and dismissed it.

"We have gone through the curative pe-

titions and the relevant documents. In our opinion, no case is made out.... Hence, the curative petition is dismissed," the bench said in its order.

On February 9, 2017, the apex court had by a 2:1 majority verdict given relief to 78-year-old Sushil Ansal considering his "advanced age-related complications" by awarding him the jail term which he had already served.

It had, however, asked his younger sibling Gopal Ansal to serve the remaining one year jail term in the case. The

AVUT, through its president Neelam Krishnamoorthy, had sought reconsideration of the verdict by filing the curative plea.

The apex court had in August 2015 allowed the Ansal to walk free and asked them to pay a fine of Rs 30 crore each.

On June 13, 1997, halfway through the screening of Hindi film "Border", a fire broke out in Uphaar Cinema, situated in Green Park area here. Fifty-nine people had died of asphyxia, while over 100 others were injured in the ensuing stampede.

SC order on commissioning of women enabling, will give clarity moving forward: Army chief

New Delhi, Feb 20 (PTI): Army Chief General M M Naravane on Thursday said the force has been championing gender equality and the Supreme Court order granting permanent commission to women officers will give it a lot of clarity moving forward.

The Supreme Court on Monday had directed that women officers in the Army be granted permanent commission and command postings.

"Indian Army does not discriminate any soldier based on religion, caste, creed, or even gender. The outlook of the Indian Army has been throughout like this and that is why we started inducting women officers as early as in 1993," Gen Naravane told reporters.

Indian Army has taken the initiative to induct women in rank and file, and the first batch of 100 women soldiers is undergoing training at Corps

of Military Police Centre and School, he said.

"The Supreme Court's decision is a welcome one as it brings out a sense of clarity and purpose to gainfully employ officers for better efficiency of the organisation. I must assure that everybody in the Indian Army including women officers will be given equal opportunity to contribute to the nation as also progress in their careers," he said hailing the verdict as enabling.

Letters are being sent to women officers asking whether they will prefer permanent commissioning, the Army chief said.

Speaking on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, Gen Naravane said terror incidents have seen a downturn and the Army is maintaining pressure on terror groups.

There is an external dimension to the decrease in cross-border

terrorism, he said, in oblique reference to the ongoing Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary.

Pakistan may have to rethink strategy as even China realised they cannot back their all-weather friend all the time, the Army chief said on the FATF plenary.

A sub-group of the global terror financing watchdog FATF on Tuesday recommended continuation of Pakistan in the 'Grey List' for its failure to check terror funding.

When asked on the health condition of hardline Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the army chief only said security forces are geared up to take care of any situation.

On the proposed creation of a theatre command exclusively for J&K, he said there will be detailed discussions before anything is finalised.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

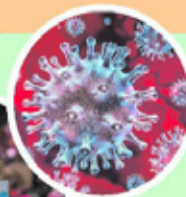
The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

Symptoms of nCoV

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccinations available as of now.
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.



Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome, and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

If you seek help, you may call :
-Toll free no. 104
District surveillance Officer
EAST : 7029372100
WEST : 9593297809
NORTH : 9641957468
SOUTH : 7407691463
New STNM
AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

The Employment Scenario

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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African countries aren't borrowing too much: they're paying too much for debt

MISHECK MUTIZE
theconversation.com

There is renewed concern about the sustainability of rising debt levels in many African countries. Much of this debt is being incurred through foreign currency denominated Eurobonds issued on international financial markets. The total value of Eurobonds issued between 2018 and 2019 was more than the value of all bonds sold between 2003 to 2016.

African governments are issuing and listing their Eurobonds on established international debt markets – usually London and Irish Stock Exchanges. African governments would venture offshore a lot less if domestic bond markets were active and liquid. But besides South Africa, African bond markets are largely underdeveloped with inactive and illiquid secondary markets. This makes it difficult to attract international investor participation locally.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) believes that African countries are on a Eurobond issuing spree and half of them are near or at distressed levels. It argues that African governments are piling on debt without evaluating the exchange rate risks and the real costs of repaying the debts.

But, in my view, the debt alarm being set off by international debt management organisations is exaggerated. The problem is not that African countries are borrowing too much, but rather they are paying too much interest. There are a number of reasons for this, including badly informed ratings by rating agencies, as well as the behaviour of issuers.

There are solutions. But these require African governments to stand up and take action.

DOING THE CALCULATIONS

There are two key elements that are taken into account in assessing a country's debt burden. One is the level of debt based on the ratio of debt to gross domestic product (GDP). The other is the cost of servicing the debt – interest payments.

Debt levels on the continent, for example, are on average way below the 100% debt-to-GDP ratio mark. But the impression created is that they are much higher. This exaggerated perception of African debt levels has resulted in countries paying higher interest rates on debt. The premiums are much higher than those paid by other countries. In my view these are not justified by the risk profile of African countries.

Save for four countries -- Cape Verde, Djibouti, Congo and Mozambique -- all the other African countries have debt-to-GDP ratio averaging 60%. A debt-to-GDP ratio of 60% is the IMF's and African Monetary Co-operation Program's threshold for prudent debt levels.

The scale of debt issuances in Africa amounts to only 1% of the continent's total GDP annually – whose average annual growth rate is 4%. In simple terms, this means the value of income generation is higher than the rate of government debt accumulation. These ratios give a snapshot of a country's fiscal sustainability.

On the contrary, the amount of interest expenditure has been disproportionate to the debt-to-

GDP ratio. Studies show that in developed economies, an increase of 1% in debt-to-GDP ratio is associated with an increase of between 0.02% and 0.03% in interest rates.

African governments are paying interest of 5% to 16% on 10-year government bonds, compared to near zero to negative rates in Europe and Ameri-



ca. On average, the interest repayment is the highest expenditure portion and remains the fastest growth expenditure in sub-Saharan Africa's fiscal budgets.

The rising interest rates on Africa's debt should be of major concern. African countries are short-changing themselves by accepting high yield curves in their Eurobond Initial Public Offerings. This unjustifiably cements the perception that they are high-risk issuers.

THE DRIVERS

The high interest rates are driven by several key factors. First, the mismatch between the short-term duration of the debt that African governments have taken on by issuing Eurobonds compared to the long-term nature of the infrastructure projects they propose to fund with the money raised through Eurobonds. The excessive need to attract investors is forcing African governments to borrow short-term to finance long-term projects.

Second, fungibility of Eurobonds proceeds – flexibility to be utilised for purposes other than the ones they were raised for – exposes the funds to the downside vulnerabilities of misappropriation and nonproductive expenditures.

Third, poor credit ratings as the majority of countries are in junk status. Credit ratings are pivotal in determination of both interest rates and the demand for bonds.

The weaknesses of rating agencies' risk assessments have widely been criticised. According to sovereign credit methodologies of the big three rating agencies, economic growth is a decisive factor in past sovereign credit events. There is a strong positive correlation between economic strength and credit worthiness. But in Africa high economic growth has not translated into better sovereign ratings.

Despite consistent positive economic growth averaging 3.6% among 32 rated African states, data show that the number of downgrades and negative outlooks are almost double that of upgrades and positive outlooks. This implies that African countries are now worse off than they previously were. This overlooks the continent's significant progress in governance, economic growth and human development over the past years.

Take Ethiopia. It has a current economic growth of 8.5% and has been hovering between 8%-11% for over 10 years. But it has not had a single upgrade activity from any of the three international rating agencies.

Senegal, one of Africa's most stable countries, experiencing three peaceful political transitions since its independence in 1960, has maintained an economic growth averaging 6% over the past 10 years. It still remains in junk status rating.

Some of what drives higher interest rates also rests with Africa governments. For example, a lack of sufficient information about the specific 'use of proceeds' in prospectuses during Eurobond Initial Public Offerings is magnifying the risk of fiscal indiscipline. It means that funds have no conditionalities or any lines of accountability.

It is also the case that governments use the money they raise on loss-making projects and nonproductive fiscal expenditure. Two examples illustrate the point: the failing Kuraz mega sugar project in Ethiopia was funded from the 2014 Eurobond as was the Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) which is failing to stimulate any new economic activity.

SOLUTIONS

African countries can act to address the rising interest burden, and to avert falling into a debt trap through the following mechanisms:

- Governments should use the money raised to fund profitable projects and use the profits from these projects to repay interest owed.
- Governments must take control of the bond issuance process during the bond structuring stage. They must exercise their choice of accepting or rejecting investors' bids. It is imperative for African countries to structure bonds with favourable yields and tenure. This process should not be entirely renounced to syndicates of lead-managers, originators and investment banks. The over-subscription of recent Eurobond issues – Eurobond issuances have been oversubscribed by three times on average – simply shows that demand is outweighing supply. Countries should manage lead issuance advisors to negotiate for the lowest interests possible to be saved from unnecessary costs.
- Governments should bargain for competitive interest rates and accept only favourable bids.
- Governments should borrow for productive expenditure and manage proceeds from international bonds more prudently with integrity and transparency.
- African countries should establish a continental position, adopt international standards and guidelines to establish lines of accountability in rating agencies. This will create a platform to enforce adherence to scientific rating methodology, rating appeals, regulating rating agencies and sufficient involvement of rated countries in the rating process.

[The writer is Lecturer of Finance, Graduate School of Business (GSB), University of Cape Town]

Weinstein trial begs a question: Why is the pain of women and minorities often ignored?

ANNE P. DEPRINCE & JENNIFER M. GÓMEZ
theconversation.com

The trial of media mogul Harvey Weinstein is "a test of sympathies" – and Weinstein wants yours.

For months, he has presented his pain to us, granting a hospital-room interview to catalog his suffering and using a walker on his way in and out of the courthouse. His defense team has argued he deserves your sympathy. They asked the judge to let Weinstein's surgeon testify to confirm their client is "hurt and enfeebled."

These requests for your compassion are reminders that sympathy is not automatic. Not everyone gets our sympathy when they show us their pain. Whose pain, then, are we most likely to see, believe and ultimately award our sympathy? And what do those tendencies mean for health outcomes and courtroom justice?

As trauma psychologists, we have spent a great deal of time researching the impact of violence and how survivors are treated when they disclose. One of us is a psychology professor and the other is an assistant professor of psychology. In studying trauma and intimate violence, we have learned much about whose pain is believed or disbelieved.

PAIN BIAS IN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Blacks who say they're in pain are

less likely to be believed than whites – this holds true whether those listening are laypeople or health care providers. That bias affects how the pain of black patients is managed and treated.

Along with Hispanics, blacks were less likely than whites to receive analgesia for acute pain in emergency departments. In the very places they should receive compassionate care, ethnic minority patients suffer untreated pain on top of the indignity of racism.

A person's gender also affects how we view their pain. A review of 77 studies found women were described as "hysterical, emotional, complaining, not wanting to get better, malingerers and fabricating the pain." Men? They were described as "stoic, in control." Perhaps men were seen as avoiding health care and making risky choices, but their pain was not blamed on them or their emotions.

BIAS WHEN SEEKING JUSTICE
In the aftermath of violence, perception of women's pain creates a conundrum. On the one hand, their experiences often get minimized or labeled as their fault. On the other hand, widely held myths about rape mean women have to exhibit their pain in the right way at the right time to be believed.

Consider this study: Researchers combed through police reports in sexual assault cases. A woman's lack of visible distress and injuries gave police reason enough to believe that

she wasn't assaulted across multiple cases. As a police officer described in another study, "When they're screaming and crying and, you know, and they're half-dressed and, you know, they're saying they got raped down here, then you know." Weinstein's defense team essentially followed the same line; they called witnesses to testify that his alleged victims appeared "normal" after the assault. Yet, women vary in how they react to sexual assault.

Sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom, in her essay "Black Girl Interrupted," describes it this way: "Women have the burden of proving not only the assault, but that they did not deserve to be assaulted." As with health care, black women are tasked with verifying that their pain matters.

Cultural betrayal trauma theory explains how marginalized women pay an additional price when they experience violence at the hands of marginalized men. This is within-group violence – for instance, when a black man sexually assaults a black woman or girl.

Implicit with that kind of violence is a cultural betrayal. The supposed solidarity between survivor and perpetrator against forces of discrimination is shattered.

To keep that perception intact, black women are expected to cover for black men who abuse them. So they suffer in silence – otherwise, the

black community, already harmed by racism, is impugned.

Author and survivor Chanel Miller's story suggests people often sympathize with assailants – in her case, a young white man, Brock Turner. As she recounts in her memoir: "I didn't know that if a woman was drunk when the violence occurred, she wouldn't be taken seriously. I didn't know if he was drunk when the violence happened, people would offer him sympathy." During the course of the prosecution, which resulted in Turner being found guilty on three counts, Miller wondered what behavior was acceptable for a victim: "If you're flat, you're apathetic. Too upbeat, you're suspect. If you weep, you're hysterical. Being too emotional made you unreliable. But being unemotional made you unaffected."

Weinstein and his defense team will keep making their case in the court of public opinion. Their requests are a reminder that sympathy is often given to the powerful but denied to those less privileged.

When they ask for it, all you need do is look around to see whose pain is being ignored or dismissed. Probably it will be a woman or person of color. Recognizing and believing their pain is essential to the work of healing and justice.

[Anne P. DePrince is Professor of Psychology, University of Denver; Jennifer M. Gómez is Assistant Professor, Wayne State University]

Pro-Left student bodies retain control in JU

KOLKATA, FEB 20 (PTI): Pro-Left student bodies retained their hold in two of the three faculties of the Jadavpur University, where results were declared on Thursday.

Counting of votes has been held up in another faculty where the SFI was leading before counting of votes was stopped there due to a technical reason, a university official said.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) which is contesting the polls for the first time in JU secured the second spot in the Engineering faculty relegating the SFI to the third position.

The Trinamool Chhatra Parishad, ruling TMC's student wing, is in the fourth position, the official said after the results were declared.

The We The Independents (WTI), another pro-Left student outfit, retained its control in the Science faculty securing all four central panel



seats. Each central panel has posts of a chairperson, a general secretary and two or three assistant general secretaries.

Counting of votes in the Arts faculty has been held up due to some technical problems and will be announced by late evening, the official said adding that the SFI is leading there.

Elections were held

in the university, known as a hotbed of Left-wing politics, on Wednesday after a gap of three years.

The JU official said the Democratic Students' Federation (DSF) won all the five central panel seats in the Engineering faculty.

While the DSF bagged 3,304 votes, the ABVP got 508 votes. The SFI and the TMCP secured 288 and 77 votes respec-

tively, the official said.

DSF leader Abhik said, "The results showed that JU students will never allow any divisive force to spread their ideology of hatred in the campus."

The RSS-affiliated ABVP which fielded its candidates for the first time in JU is yet to open its account. "We have secured the second position in Engineering faculty by

winning over 500 votes. This is our biggest gain," an ABVP leader said.

In the Arts Faculty, SFI was leading in all four central panel seats when counting was held up, the official said.

The SFI, ABVP, TMCP and the All India Students Association (AISA) are contesting for the four central panel seats in Arts faculty.

No intention to scrap Art 371: Shah assures Northeast



ITANAGAR, FEB 20 (PTI): Reaffirming the government's commitment to protecting the unique culture of the Northeast, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Thursday misinformation was spread after abrogation of Article 370 that identical fate awaited Article 371 in the region.

Most of the states that have special provisions under Article 371 are in the Northeast. These provisions are aimed at preserving their cultural heritage and custom-

ary laws. Addressing a gathering to mark the 34th foundation day of Arunachal Pradesh, Shah said the Northeast was only geographically united with the rest of India before 2014 when Narendra Modi assumed office of the prime minister.

"The real emotional integration of the region with the rest of the country happened only under the Modi government," he said.

Shah said, "Misinformation was spread after abrogation of Article 370,

which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, that Article 371 will also be scrapped. It will never happen. Nobody has any such intention."

Referring to the problems of militancy and inter-state boundary disputes in the region, the home minister said the Modi government was committed to their resolution.

"When we come to seek your votes in 2024, the Northeast will have been free from problems like militancy and inter-state strife," he said.

Six pilgrims from Nepal killed in TN road accident

SALEM/CHENNAI, FEB 20 (PTI): Six pilgrims from Nepal, including two women, were killed and 24 others injured in a road accident near Salem on Thursday, police said.

The accident happened on the Salem-Bengaluru highway after a bus rammed the minibus the pilgrims were travelling in when its driver

tried to swerve to the right near Omalur in the district, police said.

Chief Minister K Palaniswami condoled the death of the six pilgrims and said the accident happened in the early hours of Thursday when they were proceeding to Rajasthan from Kaniyakumari.

Speaking in the Tamil Nadu Assembly,

he said that the accident happened around 1 AM.

"Six Nepalis including two women travelling in the bus were killed," he said and expressed his condolences.

The injured have been admitted to hospital, he said, adding he has directed the Salem Collector to ensure they received the best medical treatment.

MotoGP world champ Marquez extends Honda contract till 2024

Paris, Feb 20 (AFP): MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez has extended his contract with Honda until the end of 2024, the Japanese team announced Thursday.

"Honda Racing Corporation are delighted to announce six-time MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez has signed a four-year extension of his contract and will continue to race with the factory team until at least

December 2024," the team said in a statement.

Marquez, 27, said he was "proud" to remain with the team who gave him his start in the sport.

"Honda gave me the opportunity to arrive in the MotoGP class with a factory bike in 2013," he said.

"Since the first year we have achieved success together and I am very happy to continue being part of the Honda family."

Air India extends suspension of its China flights till June 30

NEW DELHI, FEB 20 (PTI): As Chinese authorities try to contain the spread of the deadly novel coronavirus outbreak, Air India on Thursday announced that it is extending the suspension of its flights to the neighbouring country till June 30.

Last month, the national carrier had suspended its six weekly Delhi-Shanghai flights from January 31 to February 14. However, it did not restart the flight operations from February

15 onwards. The national carrier had also suspended its Delhi-Hong Kong flights due to the coronavirus epidemic that has killed more than 2,000 people in China till date.

"Flight operations on both routes -- Delhi-Shanghai and Delhi-Hong Kong -- have been suspended till June 30," an Air India spokesperson said on Thursday.

Earlier, IndiGo and SpiceJet had suspended their flight operations between India and China.

Blame game over suicide leads to murder in Bengal



MURSHIDABAD (WB), FEB 20 (PTI): The suicide of a 55-year-old woman prompted an attack on a family in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Thursday, leaving one person dead and four others injured, police said.

Baniruddin Sheikh, 45, was killed and four other members of his family were injured after they were attacked allegedly by their relatives in Swarnahathi village in Bharatpur police station area, an officer said.

The incident hap-

pened after Sheikh had blamed the alleged attackers for the death of his aunt, who died after allegedly consuming poison on Wednesday, he said.

A person has been arrested for the attack on Sheikh's family and a manhunt has been launched to nab the other suspects, the officer said.

The persons injured in the attack are being treated at Kandi Sub-divisional Hospital and their condition is stated to be stable, he added.

Question papers of Manipur class 11 board exams leaked

IMPHAL, FEB 20 (PTI): The Manipur state education board cancelled the class 11 final exams after question papers of at least five subjects were leaked, a senior official said on Thursday.

Question papers of Physics, Chemistry, Maths, Biology and Manipuri were leaked, Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur (COHSEM) secretary Ch Biren Singh told PTI.

The final exam-

inations, which began on February 17, of all streams of class 11 have been cancelled as "concrete evidence regarding the leakage" was found, COHSEM chairman L Mahendra said.

The council has instructed principals of all the affiliated schools to return the questions papers "in their original forms as collected" by February 24, he added.

Mahendra assured stern action against

those found responsible and said the principals who do not comply with the council's direction will be considered as individuals responsible for the leakage.

"Authorities of private institutions found guilty will have their affiliation cancelled," he said, adding that the council will announce new dates for the exams soon.

The exams were earlier scheduled to end on March 26.

Rare migratory bird sighted in Uttarakhand's Mukteshwar

PITHORAGARH (UTTARAKHAND), FEB 20 (PTI):

A pair of rufous-backed redstart, a rare migratory bird also known as the eversmann's redstart, was sighted for the first time in Uttarakhand during a bird walk, according to a senior ecologist here.

The bird walk was organised as part of an year long nature guide training programme in Mukteshwar by NGOs Centre for Ecological Development and Research (CEDAR) and Titli Trust with

the support of the state's forest department.

K Ramnarayan, who led the bird walk and has more than 20 years of experience in the field, said the pair was spotted in the farms and orchards of Mukteshwar.

We observed the pair (a male and a female) for around 80-85 minutes during which they flew out of sight and came back, making it possible for us to photograph them, he said.

The bird is found in the mountains of central Asia and southern Sibe-

ria but migrates downhill to warmer climes including India during winter, the ecologist pointed out.

The bird has only 536 sightings worldwide including 23 in India but none in Uttarakhand, he claimed adding that this is the first sighting of the bird in the state.

We followed all the rules of ethical bird watching and captured the pictures of the pair on our DSLR cameras," Ramnarayan, who lives in Sarمول village of Pithoragarh district's Muniari, said.

Sarita Mor seals gold medal at Asian Championships



NEW DELHI, FEB 20 (PTI): Indian wrestler Sarita Mor eked out a 3-2 win over Battsetseg Atlantsetseg of Mongolia in the women's 59kg final to clinch the gold medal at the Asian Championships here on Thursday.

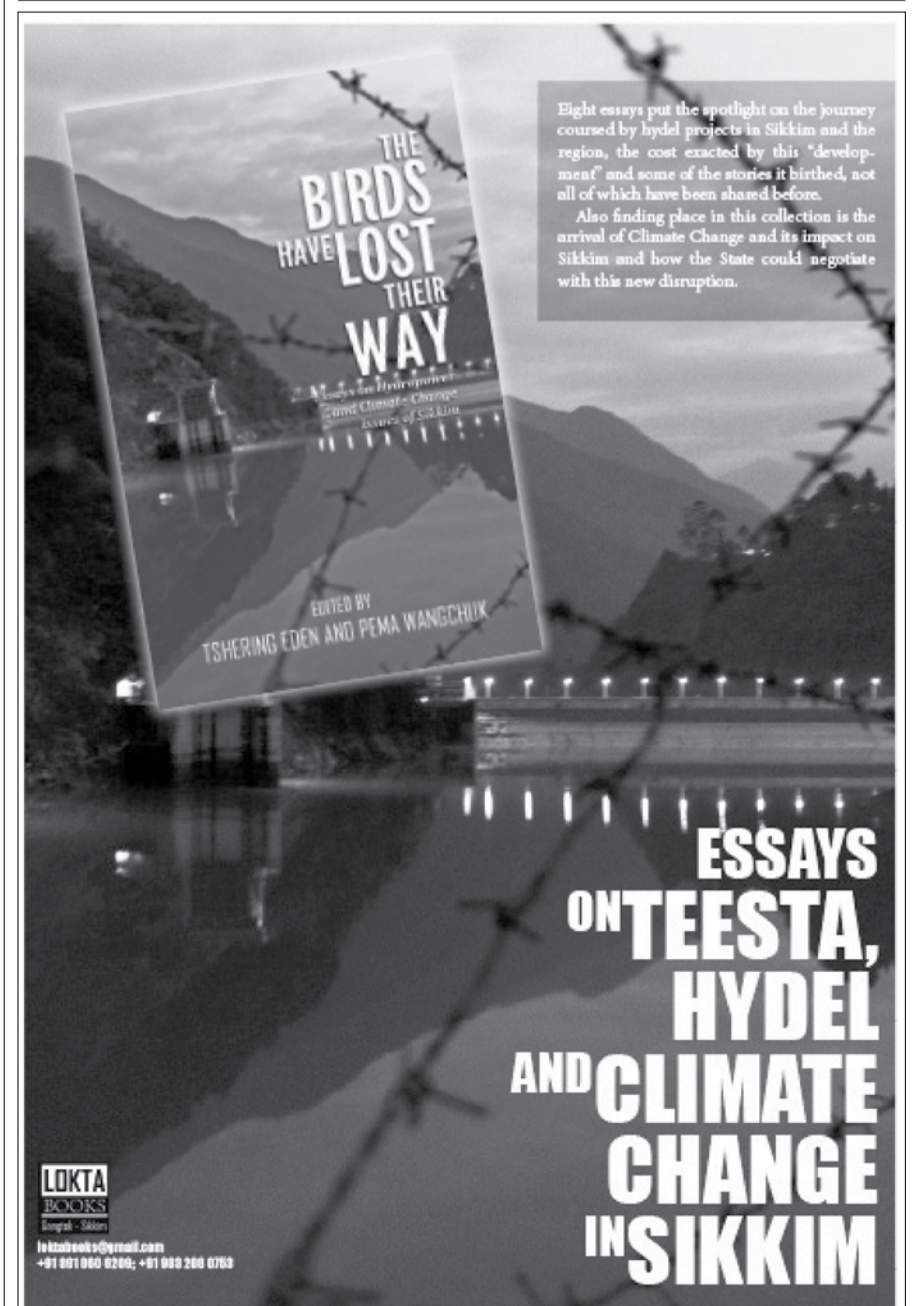
The 23-year-old edged out Atlantsetseg in the summit clash at the

KD Jadhav Indoor stadium here. Pinki (55kg) and Divya Kakran (68kg) had also won gold on Thursday.

Sarita, competing in her first Asian event since winning a silver in 2017 in 58kg, won her first two bouts by technical superiority against Madina Bakbergenova

(Kazakhstan) and Nazira Marsbekkyzy (Kyrgyzstan) before winning 10-3 against Japan's Yuumi Kon.

Navjot Kaur became the first Indian woman to win a gold medal at the Asian Championships when she triumphed in 2018 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in 65kg.



Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey caused by hydel projects in Sikkim and the region, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before.

Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

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Australia favourites but India no pushovers: Mithali

New Delhi, Feb 20 (PTI): The seasoned Mithali Raj has declared Australia as favourites to win Friday's Women's T20 World Cup opener against India in what she expects to be a high-scoring and "very close" game.

"Australia go in as favourites, but India will be no pushover. They have some very talented players and I think it will be a very close, high-scoring game," Mithali wrote in a column for ICC.

"Both teams have exciting players, particular in the batting units, and it will be a case of whoever can score the runs that their country need on the day.

"I do think Australia have the advantage because of their T20 record and have a slightly better chance of winning the first game against India," she added.

Female stars emerging as role models has been the "biggest change" in women's cricket's journey from near-anonymity to stardom, feels Mithali, who grew up idolising her male counterparts.



When Mithali started out in 1999, women's cricket was almost an unknown entity, a far cry

from what it is on the eve of the T20 World Cup in Australia where the opening contest between

India and the hosts is expected to witness sellout crowds. "Back in my day, we only had male players

as inspiration because that's all we used to see on the television. Today a young girl can have a role model in the form of a female cricketer and I think that's the biggest change I have seen," Mithali wrote.

She recalled the changes the women's game has seen since she played her first ODI more than 20 years ago.

"The biggest difference is people are now aware of what's going on with their national team. When I broke the world record for the highest individual Test score in 2002, people didn't know about it unless they were going out to buy the newspapers." The veteran added, "We used to travel to different places all over the world to play but barely got any time to acclimatise.

"There was no travel or daily allowance, nor a physio or strength and conditioning trainer to look out for a fitness. We travelled to matches with just our head coach and manager and just didn't have any form of cushioning.

'Reserve'oir of Memories: Shastri back for another Test at the Basin

WELLINGTON, FEB 20 (PTI): Ravi Shastri is not exactly an emotional man but even the "khadoos" Mumbaikar in him couldn't help but become nostalgic as he entered the Basin Reserve ground where India will play a Test against New Zealand from Friday.

And why not? Friday, the 21st does hold a very special place in India coach's heart.

Exactly 39 summers back, a wide-eyed 19-year-old teenager Shastri became India's "Test Cap No 151" at the Basin Reserve on a cold windy day when the gangly six-footer had to wear three old fashioned cable knit sweaters.

"It was 39 years. They say what goes around comes around. Tomorrow,

Same day same ground same team same city I made my Test match debut 39 years ago. Unreal," Shastri tweeted as he stood there looking at wooden benches and white grilled picket fence that have survived the test of time.

"The dressing room is still the same. No change," the head coach was seen telling people.

Incidentally, Shastri was flown to New Zealand on SOS basis after Dilip Doshi had got injured during the tour of Australia.

The 19 year-old was playing the Ranji Trophy quarter-final in Kanpur and according to a report published in 'Mid Day' newspaper, Shastri got the news of his maiden national call-up from the

gate-keeper of the guest house where the Mumbai team was put up.

For someone, whose experience of playing fast bowling at the domestic level was confined to military medium pace of Madan Lal, a gritty 19 coming in at No.10 wasn't all that bad. But it was his left-arm spin that impressed one and all on a seaming track as he ended with figures of 3/54 and 3 for 9.

India lost that Test match by 62 runs but net gain was a gritty all-rounder, who served the national team for the next 11 years across 80 Tests and 150 ODIs.

Sitting in that old Basin pavilion or taking a walk, the head coach would like his wards to change the script come Friday.

Everything to play for in Mumbai showdown

MUMBAI, FEB 20 (PTI): A place in the Hero Indian Super League playoffs is on the line as Mumbai City FC lock horns against Chennaiyin FC at the Mumbai Football Arena here on Friday.

A win will ensure qualification for either side, making it a virtual do-or-die clash. Mumbai City are fourth right now with 26 points from 17 matches and cannot afford any result other than a win against Owen Coyle's side who are fifth with 25 points.

However, even a draw will do for Chennaiyin FC who have played a game less than Mumbai.

A win will definitely take Chennaiyin through, but a draw also keeps their fate in their own hands, with an away game against NorthEast United FC coming up next week. A loss will put Chennaiyin out of contention which raises the stakes further. Odisha, placed sixth, will also be keen on the outcome on Friday with anything other than a draw set to knock them out.

The advantage for Mumbai is the fact that they are playing at home. They have won their last three home matches and Jorge Costa will hope to make it four in a row on Friday. In what is a huge

boost to their chances, centre-forward Amine Chermi is back from suspension and will team up with Diego Carlos and Modou Sougou up front.

The pace of the front three will be crucial to Mumbai's gameplan as Costa relies on counter-attacks to hurt opposition.

"The good thing is that tomorrow's game depends on us. If we win it, we will be inside the top four for sure. I have 90-95 minutes to win one game and I'm sure that we will do it. We are doing our best everyday hoping that tomorrow finally we can say that we are in the top four," said Costa.

However, he will need his defence and midfield to be organised against a Chennaiyin side who have been in prolific form up front. The centre-back pairing of Pratik Chaudhari and Mato Grgic will need to be on their toes against Nerijus Valskis and Rafael Crivellaro.

Valskis and Crivellaro are the two most potent weapons that Chennaiyin have in the arsenal and Coyle will hope their guile and threat make the difference in what is their most important game of the season so far. "We have a number of players who

we count on. Then obviously there is Valskis and Crivellaro on top to provide us that quality upfront. We have good individual players, but our strength is we play as a group. That will probably see us through," asserted Coyle.

Interestingly, leading Chennaiyin's defence is former Mumbai captain Lucian Goian who would love to keep a clean-sheet against his former team.

Chennaiyin are coming off a confidence-boosting 3-1 win over ATK in Kolkata and have the wind in their sails. The team is on a six-game unbeaten run and now stand on the cusp of qualification, something that looked unlikely when Coyle took over the side early December.

"In terms of fighting for our lives, we have been doing that for three months. Since I came to the club. Everybody thought we had no chance. We have been under pressure to win the last 10 games," said Coyle.

Mumbai, on the other hand, are coming off a loss to FC Goa but will do everything in their power to ensure Chennaiyin's remarkable turnaround does not have a fairytale ending.

PCB chief hints at Pakistan giving up Asia Cup hosting rights



KARACHI, FEB 19 (PTI): Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Ehsan Mani on Wednesday indicated that the country might give up its hosting rights for the Asia Cup T20 tournament this year.

Speaking at the launch of the Pakistan Super League trophy at the National Stadium, Mani said that venue of the Asia Cup would be decided after taking into account the majority view of all the stake-holders in the Asian Cricket Council.

"We have to ensure that earnings of the associate members are not

affected. It is not so much about the full members but about the associate members," Mani said.

The ACC is due to meet in first week of March where Mani said venues and other details of the Asia Cup would be finalised. Mani's statement comes in the backdrop of India's refusal to travel to Pakistan for the tournament and insistence on playing its share of matches at a neutral venue.

India has not toured Pakistan since 2008 while it has also not played a full Test bilateral series with Paki-

stan since 2007 due to strained political and diplomatic relations. Pakistan did visit India in 2012 to play a short limited-overs series.

Wasim Khan, the Chief Executive Officer of the PCB, also indicated that Pakistan would be willing to forego its hosting rights if it can't hold the full tournament at home. He said most a neutral venue acceptable to all teams would be finalised.

The last Asia Cup in 2018 was held in UAE after the Indian board said it couldn't host Pakistan in India.

Aeroflot Open: Indian GMs Adhiban, Sethuraman open with victories

MOSCOW, FEB 20 (PTI): Indian Grand Masters B Adhiban and S P Sethuraman were among the winners in the opening round games of 'A' Group at the Aeroflot Open chess tournament here.

Top seed Vladislav Artemiev (Elo rating 2728), the highly-rated 21-year-old Russian, began his campaign in style with a victory over Velimir Ivic in 51 moves late on Wednesday.

Adhiban (Elo 2654), the sixth seed, defeated Sergey Grigoriants in 35 moves, while the 12th-seeded Sethuraman put it past young compatriot and GM Raunak Sadhwani in 43 moves.

There were victories for other Indian players, including N R Visakh, Karthikeyan Murali, Deep Sengupta and Bharath Subramaniyam. Young

GM R Praggnanandhaa was, however, held to a draw by Stefan Pogosyan in his opener.

There are a bunch of 25 Indians, including 14 Grand Masters, participating in the 'A' group.

The nine-round Aeroflot Open concludes on February 27. In the 34th Cannes Open tournament in France, young Indian GM D Gukesh is in joint second spot with four others, including compatriot G B Harshvardhan, with 3.5 points after four rounds.

Important results: Aeroflot Open 'A' group: B Adhiban beat Sergey Grigoriants; S P Sethuraman beat Raunak Sadhwani; R Praggnanandhaa drew with Stefan Pogosyan; Vladislav Artemiev (Russia) beat Velimir Ivic; Sandipan Chanda drew with Sanan Sjugirov.

India ready to 'taste' Kiwi flavoured pace in opening Test

KUSHAN SARKAR

WELLINGTON, FEB 20 (PTI): India's battle-hardened cricketers are ready for their toughest challenge of the World Test Championship till date as they face formidable hosts New Zealand on a spicy Basin Reserve track in the series-opener beginning here on Friday.

Virat Kohli's top-ranked team, with 360 points in its kitty, is certainly the favourite on paper but the Black Caps under Kane Williamson are experts at wearing down opposition with their patience on pitches which turn flat as the game progresses.

The last time New Zealand lost a series at home was back in March 2017 and since then have won five (10 Tests) in familiar conditions.

For New Zealand, it is time to pick up pieces after their 0-3 drubbing in Australia while the current Indian team would love to reassert that they are the best when it comes to winning in adverse conditions like they did in Australia last year.

The open Basin Reserve ground has always been challenging for both batsmen and

bowlers due to cross winds.

And the new opening pair of Prithvi Shaw and Mayank Agarwal will have its task cut out against a top class seam attack comprising Trent Boult, Tim Southee, and Kyle Jamieson, who in all likelihood will make his debut. However, the absence of left arm speedster Neil Wagner, who could have created awkward angles with his short balls, will provide some respite for the Indian middle-order. Wagner is on a break to welcome his first child.

New Zealand named their 12 on the day and it will be a choice between seamer all-rounder Daryl Mitchell or slow left-arm orthodox Ajaz Patel. In an open ground with overcast conditions expected, captain Kohli will not mind winning the toss and unleash Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami on the home team.

Even Kohli admitted that his men would need to have tons of patience once the track eases out as Williamson's team is known to the play waiting game.

"It doesn't matter how much patience opposition has, we

have to show more patience. We can't really prepare in a manner where New Zealand show more patience and put pressure on us," skipper Kohli made his intentions clear during a media interaction.

While New Zealand are expected to go with four frontline pacers and may be a fifth seamer in all-rounder Colin de Grandhomme, the Indian team management might be tempted to try out Ravichandran Ashwin, who purely as a spinner, has more variety compared to left-arm orthodox of Ravindra Jadeja.

The wind factor in Wellington is an issue that captains need to deal with and Kohli is no different as he will have to judiciously choose ends for his bowlers.

"If breeze is blowing across the ground, who is more effective with inswinger or outswingers, these things you think as a captain," said Kohli.

The return of Trent Boult for New Zealand and Ishant for India, from their respective injuries will certainly bolster both the sides. For India, Cheteshwar

Pujara, Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane will have to be the foil around Shaw, Agarwal and Vihari with their techniques being tested.

"As a batsman, you need to think that ball might not travel in the air a lot more when you are hitting against the wind. So you need to be prepared to run a lot more which we experienced last time and if you have a light bat, you are in trouble.

"You need to be firm with your stance and where your bat is as it can really swing around," added Kohli, who is India's best batsman by a mile.

Teams: India (First 12): Virat Kohli (captain), Mayank Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari, Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja.

New Zealand (12): Kane Williamson (c), Tom Blundell, Trent Boult, Colin de Grandhomme, Kyle Jamieson, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Ajaz Patel, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, BJ Watling.

Match Starts: 4 am IST.

PCB suspends Akmal pending anti-corruption investigation

KARACHI, FEB 20 (PTI): Umar Akmal's flatter-to-deceive career took another hit on Thursday when the Pakistan Cricket Board suspended the batsman with immediate effect, pending an anti-corruption investigation.

The PCB, however, did not get into the specifics of the breach committed by Akmal.

"The Pakistan Cricket Board today suspended Umar Akmal with immediate effect...he cannot take part in any cricket-related activity pending the investigation being carried out by PCB's Anti-Corruption Unit," the Board said in a statement. "As this is an ongoing

investigation, the PCB will not make any further comments," it said.

Akmal was suspended hours before his PSL team Quetta Gladiators was to take on Islamabad in the opening match of the 2020 edition on Thursday.

"Quetta Gladiators are allowed to apply for Umar Akmal's replacement in the HBL Pakistan Super League 2020," the PCB added.

He is the younger brother of former Pakistan wicketkeeper-batsman Kamran Akmal, who played 53 Tests, 58 T20s, 157 ODIs, and cousin of current captain Babar Azam.

The 29-year-old, who

last played for Pakistan in October, has featured in 16 Tests, 121 ODIs and 84 T20s, scoring 1003, 3194 and 1690 runs respectively.

Akmal, who promised a lot after making a hundred in New Zealand on his Test debut, has failed to live up to the high expectations that came with some fine performances early in his career. Constant run-ins with the authorities have also marred his stop-start career.

Earlier this month, Akmal had escaped a PCB ban for allegedly making crude remarks to a trainer during a fitness test at the National Cricket Academy in Lahore.

Lesotho PM to be charged with murder of estranged wife: police

LESOTHO, 20 FEB: Lesotho Prime Minister Thomas Thabane is expected on Friday to be charged with the murder of his estranged wife, who was gunned down two days before his inauguration in 2017, police said Thursday.

"It has been agreed with his lawyer that he will appear (in court) and he will be formally charged with... murder," Deputy Police Commissioner Paseka Mokete told AFP.

Lilopelo Thabane, who was 58, was killed by unknown assailants on the outskirts of the capital Maseru in June 2017, two days before the premier, now aged 80, took office.

The couple had been embroiled in bitter divorce proceedings when Lilopelo was murdered in front of her home in the capital Maseru.

Her death shook the tiny mountainous kingdom of Lesotho, which is entirely surrounded by South Africa.

"It has to be understood that it does not necessarily mean he was there but that he was acting in common purpose," Mokete said.

On Tuesday, Thabane's current wife Mae-saiah Thabane, 42, appeared in court charged with the same murder of her rival.

"She was charged (with murder) under common purpose even though she did not pull the trigger but people she was acting in consent with pulled the trigger," said Mokete by phone.

Civil rights groups demand restoration of Art 370

NEW DELHI, FEB 20 (PTI): Scores of people from different organisations, including AISA and AIDWA, gathered at Jantar Mantar here on Thursday demanding restoration of Article 370 of the Constitution.

They expressed solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir and demanded that the government restore the provision that gave full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

The programme was held by organisations AIDWA, AISA, ANHAD, DASAM, DSG, DTF, IPTA, Khudai Khidmatgar, NAPM, NFIW, OBR India, PIPFPD, RYA, Sangwari, SFI, Youth Alliance for Peace.

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Investigators see 'xenophobic motive' behind Germany shootings

GERMANY, 20 FEB: German investigators said Thursday they suspected a "xenophobic motive" behind shootings at a shisha bar and a cafe that left 10 dead overnight in the city of Hanau.

Hours after police found the suspected gunman dead at his home in the early hours of Thursday following a huge manhunt, federal counter-terror prosecutors took over the case.

The probe was of "particular importance" and there were "signs of a xenophobic motive", a spokesman for the prosecutors told AFP.

Sources close to the investigation confirmed media reports that text and video material was found at the home of the perpetrator, who media reported was a 43-year-old man identified only as Tobias R. King's College London counter-terrorism expert Peter Neumann tweeted of the text that it contained "various, but mostly extreme right views, with a do-it-yourself ideology cobbled together out of parts found on the internet".

"The pattern is clear, and not at all new," he added.

Meanwhile media including public broadcaster ARD reported that a second body



discovered at the property belonged to the man's mother.

A dozen shots - The attacks occurred at two bars in Hanau, about 20 kilometres (12 miles) from Frankfurt, where armed police quickly fanned out and police helicopters roamed the sky in the search for those responsible for the bloodshed.

The first attack occurred at a bar in the Heumarkt district in central Hanau around 10 pm (2100 GMT), reports said.

A gunman reportedly rang the doorbell and shot at people in the smoking section,

Bar. Three people were killed outside the building, local media said, with witnesses reporting hearing a dozen shots. A silver Mercedes-Benz covered by what looked like a survival blanket could be seen behind a police cordon and surrounded by officers outside the Arena Bar, with shattered glass on the ground.

'Horror scenario' - The mayor of Hanau, Claus Kaminsky, told Bild that it had been "a terrible night".

"You could not imagine a worse night. It will of course keep us busy for a long, long

time and remain a sad memory. "I am deeply moved," he said. "Just the fact that eight people have lost their lives has shaken me up. But I ask all citizens not to speculate.

"The police must have the chance to clear up the situation and investigate -- until then, we should wait with prudence, no matter how hard this may be."

Katja Leikert, the MP for the region, said it was "a real horror scenario".

"On this dreadful night for Hanau, I would like to express my deepest condolences to

the relatives of those killed. I hope the injured will recover quickly," she said.

Germany has been targeted in recent years by several extremist attacks, one of which killed 12 people in the heart of Berlin in December 2016. Far-right attacks have become a particular concern for German authorities.

In October, a deadly anti-Semitic gun attack in the eastern city of Halle on the holy day of Yom Kippur underscored the rising threat of neo-Nazi violence. The rampage, in which two people were shot dead, was streamed live.

Last June, conservative politician Walter Luebecke, an advocate of a liberal refugee policy, was shot at his home.

On Friday police arrested 12 members of a German extreme right group believed to have been plotting "shocking" large-scale attacks on mosques similar to the ones carried out in New Zealand last year.

German-Turkish Islamic organisation Itib, which funds around 900 mosques in Germany, called for greater protections for Muslims in the country, saying they "no longer feel safe" in Germany.

Media that smears, insults China must pay the price: China on expulsion of 3 WSJ journalists

BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, FEB 20 (PTI): China on Thursday defended expelling three foreign journalists of the Wall Street Journal, saying that media which insults, smears the country and support racial discrimination "must pay the price".

China on Wednesday expelled three journalists of the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) following an article in the newspaper titled China Is the Real Sick Man of Asia by Walter Russell Mead published on February 3 as the country was fighting an all-out war against the coronavirus outbreak that has killed over 2,000 people.

China's Foreign Ministry revoked the press cards of three WSJ journalists (two Americans and one Australian) and asked them to leave the country within five days.

The move had come less than a day after US officials announced they would be treating five major Chinese state-run media companies -- Xinhua, China Global Television Network, China Ra-

dio International, China Daily and People's Daily -- as effective extensions of the Chinese government. Asked whether the expulsion was solely because of the headline of the article or in retaliation to US government's decision to list five Chinese official media outlets as foreign missions, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang told during an online media briefing that those media who blatantly insult China, supports racial discrimination and maliciously smear China must pay the price.

I also responded to the US announcement of designating five Chinese media organisations as foreign missions yesterday (Wednesday). We reserve the right to make further responses, he said.

The expulsion of the three journalists was condemned by the US, saying mature and responsible countries understand that a free press reports facts and expresses opinion.

Geng also attacked US Secretary of State Mike

Pompeo for condemning the WSJ scribes' expulsions and his call to China to not restrict freedom of speech. This is not an issue of freedom of speech as Pompeo claimed. The WSJ published an article that smeared China with a racially discriminatory title, which reflects the abandonment of basic facts and professional ethics. It has triggered huge indignation and condemnation from China and the larger international community, he said.

As a self-proclaimed champion of freedom of speech, does Pompeo believe such freedom entails publishing a racist, discriminatory and insulting article with no apologies whatsoever?, Geng asked.

I want to ask Pompeo this question if you think the WSJ has the right to insult others arbitrarily, do those got insulted have the right to fight back?," he said.

William Lewis, the publisher of the Journal and the CEO of WSJ parent company Dow Jones, expressed "regret" in a statement hours after

the expulsions were announced. Lewis said that the opinion and news divisions of the Journal are separate entities.

"The news department's role is to provide facts and analysis, while the Opinion department's role is to provide opinion and commentary. They are separately staffed," Lewis said.

"Our opinion pages regularly publish articles with opinions that people disagree - or agree with - and it was not our intention to cause offense with the headline on the piece.

However, this has clearly caused upset and concern amongst the Chinese people, which we regret," he added.

About Lewis' statement expressing regret, Geng said: As we speak, the journal still hasn't realigned the severity of its mistake. It has neither made an official apology publicly nor held anyone accountable. We urge it to treat our concerns seriously and respond to our demands. We reserve the right to take further measures.

Pompeo meets Saudi king in talks focused on Iranian threats

RIYADH, FEB 20 (AP): US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Saudi Arabia's King Salman on Thursday in a visit focused primarily on discussing shared security concerns about regional rival Iran.

Ahead of his arrival in the capital Riyadh, Pompeo said he'd also raise with the Saudi leadership concerns about human rights and the cases of dual Saudi-American citizens who are either imprisoned in the kingdom or barred from traveling abroad.

Following his meeting at the royal palace with the king, Pompeo headed to a Saudi air base where some 2,500 US troops are stationed in response to threats from Iran.

The US military presence in the kingdom at the Prince Sultan Air

Base includes a squadron of US Air Force F-15E fighters that fly daily missions over Iraq and Syria and two American Patriot missile batteries prepared to knock down any Iranian attack against the Saudi kingdom.

American troops were sent to Saudi Arabia last summer as part of the Trump administration's efforts to beef up the United States' military presence in the Middle East in response to escalating tensions between Washington and Tehran following President Donald Trump's decision to pull the US out of Iran's nuclear agreement with world powers and impose sanctions on the country.

Saudi Arabia and the US have blamed Iran for an attack last summer against Saudi oil facilities

that temporarily halved the kingdom's daily crude production. Iran denies involvement and its allied Yemeni rebel Houthi group says they were behind the attack.

Saudi Arabia is a decades-long US ally, but that relationship was rocked by the 2018 killing of Saudi dissident and Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Congress has also harshly criticized Saudi Arabia for its war in Yemen, which has led to the world's worst humanitarian disaster.

The kingdom, however, remains the biggest buyer of US military arms and its young Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has cultivated a relationship with Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser

on Mideast policy, Jared Kushner.

Pompeo has said the US is prepared to come to the table to talk with Iran, but is not rushing to do so.

The pressure campaign continues. It's not just an economic pressure campaign, it's diplomatic pressures, isolation through diplomacy, as well, he told reporters before arriving in Saudi Arabia from Ethiopia on Wednesday.

During his time in Riyadh, Pompeo also met Thursday with a group of Saudi women business leaders at the residence of Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the US, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud. Pompeo departs Friday for Oman, a close U.S. ally that has ties with both Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Virus fears weigh on European stock markets

Coronavirus fears weighed on European stock markets Thursday despite China reporting a big drop in new cases and easing borrowing costs to cushion the epidemic's economic impact.

Traders have been betting on central banks, particularly China's, doing what it takes to keep their economies chugging along as the new coronavirus hits corporate earnings and economic growth.

In a widely anticipated move, the People's Bank of China (PBoC) lowered its one-year and five-year loan prime rates as policymakers seek to reduce the impact of the virus-fuelled slowdown on companies and households.

But the moves were "not nearly enough," said Stephen Innes of AxiCorp. "The PBoC needs to exceed the market expectations, not hit them in this environment," he said.

"If the PBoC made a bigger splash, the market would have reacted more favourably" than the 1.8-percent gain Thursday for Shanghai's main stocks index.

Sentiment had improved in recent days amid growing hopes that the impact of the virus -- which has killed more than 2,100 people and infected over 74,000, mostly in China -- will be short-lived.

China reported a big drop in new cases on Thursday, fuelling hopes the epidemic is nearing its peak.

In the best-case scenario, the economic hit from the epidemic in China will be short-lived, but it comes as the global economy remains fragile, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said Wednesday.

Overnight gains on Wall Street boosted Asian equities at the start of trading before gains evaporated.

European stock markets were slightly lower approaching the half-way mark, with a rebound for British retail sales

failing to ignite the pound and London's benchmark FTSE 100 stocks index.

Elsewhere Thursday, oil prices were mixed as traders assess the virus' impact on demand for crude in China, the world's biggest importer and consumer of the commodity.

Oil traders were tracking also unrest in crude-producing nation Libya.

The country's unity government has announced it is halting its participation in UN talks aimed at brokering a lasting ceasefire in the war-torn country where a fragile truce has been repeatedly violated.

- Key figures around 1100 GMT - London - FTSE 100: DOWN 0.1 percent at 7,450.39 points

Frankfurt - DAX 30: DOWN 0.1 percent at 13,774.98

Paris - CAC 40: DOWN 0.2 percent at 6,098.18

EURO STOXX 50: DOWN 0.4 percent at 3,851.42

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: UP 0.3 percent at 23,479.15 (close)

Shanghai - Composite: UP 1.8 percent at 3,030.15 (close)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng: DOWN 0.2 percent at 27,609.16 (close) New York - Dow: UP 0.4 percent to 29,348.03 (close)

Euro/dollar: DOWN at \$1.0792 from \$1.0805 at 2200 GMT

Pound/dollar: DOWN at \$1.2879 from \$1.2920

Euro/pound: UP at 83.79 pence from 83.63 pence

Dollar/yen: UP at 112.10 from 111.37

Brent Crude: DOWN 0.1 percent at \$59.04 per barrel

West Texas Intermediate: UP 0.3 percent at \$53.47 per barrel

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STARSTRUCK SELF! The actor, Chris Pratt is seen posing with his Hollywood Star while out on the Walk of Fame in Los Angeles.

Dev Patel to star in financial thriller 'Flash Crash'

LOS ANGELES, FEB 20 (PTI): British-Indian actor Dev Patel will feature in the big screen adaptation of "Flash Crash", a dramatic thriller set in the UK stock market.

The movie, a See-Saw Films and New Regency project, is based on "Flash Crash: A Trading Savant, a Global Manhunt, and the Most Mysterious Market Crash in History", an upcoming book by Bloomberg journalist Liam Vaughan.

Vaughan's book details the 2010 crash in the film, which Patel will also executive produce, reported Variety.

"Flash Crash" revolves around Navinder Singh Sarao, an outsider who found a way to beat the stock market and made millions working from a bedroom in his parents' small suburban home on the outskirts of London.

Jonathan Perera is attached to write the screenplay.

See-Saw Films' Iain Canning and Emile Sherman and Arnon Milchan of New Regency are attached as producers.

"Navinder Sarao's story struck us deeply. He's an unlikely but also complex hero who exposed the manipulations at the heart of the global financial system. We're so pleased to be bringing it to life with our friends at New Regency, and to continue our relationship with Dev Patel after the success of 'Lion,'" Canning and Sherman said.

Patel will next be seen in Armando Iannucci's "The Personal History of David Copperfield" and "The Green Knight", directed by David Lowery.

A Rohit Shetty action thriller on Ayushmann Khurrana's wishlist

BY JUSTIN RAO

MUMBAI, FEB 20 (PTI): There are all kinds of movies in Ayushmann Khurrana's varied filmography but the National Award-winning actor now hopes to do an out-and-out action thriller in Rohit Shetty style. Ayushmann has made a name for himself with quirky stories set in small town India and in his latest "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan", he plays one of the two men in a relationship.

A crowded release calendar notwithstanding, the actor said he will go wherever an interesting script takes him as he does not believe in dos and don'ts.

"Engaging people for two hours in a theatre is most important. It could be a vanilla subject, but it'll work if the film as a whole works. Right now, I'm looking for an action thriller. I'd love to work with Rohit Shetty, though it's a completely different zone for me," Ayushmann told PTI in an interview.

The actor has been on a golden run that started with 2017's "Bareilly Ki Barfi" to his last release, "Bala" but there has not been enough time to pause and process.

"I live in the present but my eyes are always on the future. I'm just thinking 'what's next' and I'm always excited. The kind of subjects I'm getting these days, they're incredible. I've this FOMO (fear of missing out), I want to be the first one to do a particular subject. This fear always makes me reach out for newer subjects," he said.

It is not always that good scripts come one's way, sometimes one has to stick their neck out and seek out movies that matter, said Ayushmann citing the example of Sriram Raghavan's "Andhadhun" for which he earned a National Award and Anubhav Sinha's "Article 15". "There should be no shame in asking for work, for films, even if you are an established actor who wants to work with a filmmaker on a particular subject," he said.

The actor's hunger for interesting films also made him "instantly say yes" for his latest, "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan."

A follow-up to the actor's 2017 hit "Shubh Mangal Savdhaan", the film is one of the few films that explores same-sex relationships in mainstream Hindi cinema.

Ayushmann looks at the film as an "induction about homosexuality for the masses" and not so much a gay love story.

"We aren't delving so much in what's happening between the two (men), it's the reaction of the family when they come to know that their son is gay. But this treatment was important because it's the first step. We can't directly climb on the 10th step because people are still jittery about the subject," he said. Backed by Aanand L Rai, the film is directed by Hitesh Kewalya. Ayushmann said the tone of the film is intentionally over the top.

"People should come for entertainment and leave with a message. If we manage to transform even one homophobic person that will be a victory for the film."

"This is just the first step, I'm sure in the future, we will see films which are hardcore gay love stories. This one is a conversation starter." Representation of homosexuality in Bollywood films has often been criticised for being a caricature, rarely sensitive and mostly played for laughs.

The 35-year-old recognises that and said the team was clear they didn't want to make being gay a caricature.

"It was a big no. We have seen stereotypical gay characters on screen, most of them are sidekicks, playing heroine's best friend. In this film, they are the protagonists. My character is confident about his sexuality, who doesn't care what society thinks, while the other character is in the closet and is scared. We have shown both the sides." The makers found it tough to cast an actor opposite Ayushmann, until they zeroed in on Jitendra.

Ayushmann said it wasn't because the other actors were reluctant to play a homosexual on screen but because his role was more "heroic." "I think my lines were more flamboyant. The character has bold dialogues, is the one shouting from the building wearing a Superman cape. My character is more heroic. So probably that could be a reason. "Though I feel the other character has a better arc. He is closeted, fights the family and comes out in the open. If I was not seven films old, I would have done the other character."

Millie Bobby Brown turns 16, reflects on 'inappropriate comments' she's faced

Actress Millie Bobby Brown turned 16 on Wednesday, and took the pivotal birthday as a time to reflect on some of the struggles she's endured since rocketing to stardom in recent years.

In an Instagram video set to Justin Bieber's "Changes," headlines like "When did Millie Bobby Brown go through the change???" (Menopause) flash on screen, interspersed with paparazzi video of the Stranger Things star.

In the caption, Brown calls for change "for not only this generation but the next," saying children of the world deserve more "kindness and support." She goes on to say that "the inaccuracy, inappropriate comments, sexualization, and unnecessary insults" from stories with headlines like the ones in the video "ultimately have resulted in pain and insecurity" for her.

Midway through, the video begins to show a happier side of Brown, ending with footage of her blowing out birthday candles. Similarly, the back half of Brown's caption states that she will never be defeated. After calling for change and expressing hoping that the video gives her followers insight into what she deals with behind the scenes, Brown concludes her message with a promise: "I'll always find a way to smile."

In response to her Instagram post, Brown's Stranger Things costar Noah Schnapp commented, "happy bday millie this year is gonna

be your year. AGAIN. here's to 16 years old!" Fellow actress Yara Shahidi added, "Sending all the love to you and join you as a change maker and giver of kindness," while singer Lauren Jauregui wrote, "Send you so much



love angel!! Happy Birthday!! Keep thriving and being exactly who you need to be."

In addition to Stranger Things season 4, which recently released a teaser showing the return of a major character, Brown can next be seen in Godzilla vs. Kong, in theaters this fall.

Mahershala Ali to star in Apple drama 'Swan Song'

LOS ANGELES, FEB 20 (PTI): Two-time Academy Award winner Mahershala Ali is heading to Apple for the feature film "Swan Song".

According to Deadline, the movie will be written and directed by Oscar winner Benjamin Cleary.

Ali will star as Milo in the genre-bending drama set in the near future, exploring how far someone will go to build a happier life for the people they love. Apple is

producing the project with Anonymous Content.

Cleary, who won the best live action short Oscar for his 2015 film "Stutterer", said collaborating with Ali is a dream come true.

"I've been developing 'Swan Song' for a while and when I sat down with Apple it was immediately clear they completely understood my vision. "Once Mahershala agreed to join us I knew we had something really spe-

cial. To be making this movie with Mahershala and Anonymous at Apple is an absolute dream," the director said of Ali who won best supporting actor for "Moonlight" (2017) and "Green Book" (2019).

Adam Shulman and Jacob Perlin will back the project on behalf of Anonymous Content, along with Ali.

"Swan Song" will go into production in spring and also receive a release in cinema halls.

SZA Says She Won't Do Anymore Interviews or Photo Shoots for the Rest of Her Life



SZA took to Twitter on Wednesday to make a surprising announcement about her relationship with the media.

"Not doing any videos Interviews or photos for the rest of my life," the TDE songstress wrote. "Lol don't ask"

Though SZA didn't explain what led to the decision, her tweet was posted just hours after Rolling Stone unveiled the cover for its second annual Women Shaping the Future issue. SZA appeared on the cover alongside Megan Thee Stallion and Normani, both of whom promoted the issue on their respective Instagrams. As of Wednesday night, SZA had not shared the cover on any of her social media accounts, leading some fans to believe she

was unhappy with the issue. SZA did, however, give a shout out to Meg and Normani, insisting it was an honor to work with them.

SZA went on to speak about her mental health and her ongoing battle with anxiety. The 29-year-old told her followers that her struggles had very little to do with outside opinion, and primarily stemmed from her inner thoughts.

While some fans responded with messages of support, others tried to dismiss SZA's statements as "annoying" and questioned why anxiety was such a big issue among "new celebs." SZA responded to the latter comment:

SZA is expected to drop her sophomore album—the follow-up to 2017's Ctrl—later this year.

ARIES: You're in the mood to put your money where you can see it—hanging in your closet! This is the time to reinvent your sartorial game. Instead of splurging mindlessly, invest in timeless pieces that will help you make a statement. While you're at it, step out of your comfort zone and surprise yourself a little. Some of you may be in the mood to experiment with your mane, as well. Visit your most trusted hairdresser and ask them to suggest a style that is in alignment with the person you are becoming, rather than the person you used to be. Tip: It's time to reinvent your style. **TAURUS:** Make a choice already, Taurus! So many lives are dependent on the decision you are about to make, and you really don't want to keep the others hanging. Having a hard time deciding the best way forward? Truth is, you aren't paying attention to what your inner voice is telling you. So, bring out those noise-cancelling headphones and listen to your guides. Tip: Your inner voice is always guiding you. **GEMINI:** What if the world really is a play and we're just actors who have been hired to enact our parts? There is no need to take the drama seriously, Gemini. Learn to observe what is taking place from the sidelines. This will help you realise that nothing is inherently good or bad. It is our perception that colours are reality.

A little bit of self enquiry will also assist you at this point. Replace 'why is this happening to me?' with 'what is it trying to teach me?' Integrating the soul lessons will prove to be a turning point. Tip: Learn to become an observer of your circumstances. **CANCER:** Where's your optimism, Cancer? That sullen face is so last decade. The cards are urging you to change your vibration as you consciously align yourself with your bliss. Yes, there are people who have disappointed you, and circumstances that have worked against you. But, nothing is inherently good or bad. It is our perception that alters our experience. So, acknowledge the learnings and integrate the soul lessons. The only thing you need to keep in mind as you move forward: your happiness is dependent solely on yourself. Tip: You are not a victim of your circumstances. **LEO:** Not your circus, not your monkeys, Leo. Remember what you came here for, and that the drama that's unfolding is not a part of it. Make your point and then disengage. You don't want this to turn into a vicious argument. In the realm of work and career, you're being asked to focus on the big vision. How and where have you strayed? It's not too late to make your way back to plan A.

Tip: Focus on the bigger picture. **VIRGO:** Are things falling apart or simply coming together? Save the drama for your mama, Virgo. It's true that you've been to hell and back, but marinating in your miseries isn't going to help your cause. As for the glitches in your interpersonal relationships, remember there is nothing that communication cannot solve. Tip: Talk things out instead of imagining the worst. **LIBRA:** After a period of back and forth, you're finally on the same page about the future of this relationship. Don't get ahead of yourself, Libra! They're not going down on one knee or popping the question, but they're definitely in the mood to explore something long-term. However, just when they start to show a little more interest, your attraction towards them begins to wane. Let's blame it on that famous indecisive gene of yours, shall we? When in doubt, call a trusted friend who's got their feet on the ground. Tip: Make the right decisions, wild one. **SCORPIO:** There's only so much you can pour from an empty cup! Just because you have known that for a while, doesn't mean you have always been able to put yourself first. But something within you is changing for the better and it's reminding you that you matter. Make

self-care a priority, Scorpio. Know that this will give you a greater degree of control (if there is such a thing) over your life and everything around. Birth and fertility are also important themes for you right now. Thinking about bringing your own into this world? The time is right. Tip: Let's work on that inner glow! **SAGITTARIUS:** Do you feel that every time you move closer to them, they move further away from you? And every time they take a step towards you, you somehow hit the panic button? This runner and chaser dynamic is getting a little old, Sagittarius. The cards are asking you to act like an adult and talk about your true feelings. Being vulnerable can only be a good thing. Given that they are mirroring you, your actions are likely to inspire them to open up, too. Tip: Beware of playing out the runner-chaser dynamic. **CAPRICORN:** They say 'God is in the detail'. But in your case, the devil is starting to make an appearance, Capricorn. Be aware of how you are allowing your obsessive nature to get the better of you. How you are setting yourself up for failure with expectations you will never be able to live up to. You are perfect just the way you are and you have multiple milestones to your credit. So, come back to the present

moment and give yourself the pat on the back you deserve. Tip: Don't let your obsessive nature become the cause of your dissatisfaction. **AQUARIUS:** Aquarius, is the fight as big a deal as you are making it? Do you really want to hold on to the resentment that is in turn blocking the stream of creativity and consciousness? Sometimes, you just have to overlook the small things in favour of the big picture. Words of wisdom courtesy Calvin (of Calvin and Hobbes, duh!) to change your perspective: "If people sat outside and looked at the stars each night, I bet they'd live a lot differently. When you look into infinity, you realise there are more important things than what people do all day." Tip: Let go of the small things. **PISCES:** The aches and pains aren't going anywhere unless you decide to release them. A good ol' Thai massage is the perfect way to turn that frown upside down, Pisces. Who says you have to wait until Saturday for a self-care day? Some of you may be in the mood to take a wellness vacation out of this. Check in to your favourite spa resort or head to the hills for a quiet time. A walk in nature or a sunrise yoga session promise to be just as therapeutic. Tip: Prioritise self-care.