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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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GST Council cuts rates on 23 items, rationalises 28 pc slab

NEW DELHI, DEC 22 (PTI): In a relief to the common man, the GST Council Saturday cut rates on 23 commonly used goods and services, including TV screens, movie tickets and power banks.

The annual revenue implication of the rate cuts would be Rs 5,500 crore, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said.

The council rationalised the 28 per cent slab by bringing down the tax rate on seven items in the highest tax bracket, thereby leaving only 28 items in the slab.

Briefing reporters after the 31st GST Council meeting here, Jaitley said rate rationalisation is an ongoing process.

"28 per cent bracket is gradually moving to sunset... The next target will be rate rationalisation in cement as and when affordability improves," he said.

Now, the 28 per cent slab is restricted to only

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CM calls on all to remember the life and sacrifice of Teyongsi Sirijunga

GIALSHING, 22 DEC (IPR): Chief Minister Pawan Chamling attended the 114th birth anniversary celebrations of Teyongsi Sirijunga at Martam as chief guest accompanied by RM&DD Minister SB Subedi, HRDD Minister RB Subba, Health Minister AK Ghatani, Minister, MLAs, chairpersons and HODs of different departments.

Extending his warm wishes on the auspicious occasion, the Chief Minister extolled the contributions of Teyongsi Sirijunga and stressed that his life, deeds and sacrifice for the community need to be remembered by all, especially by the Limboo community.

He also mentioned that the youth of Sikkim need to learn from the example of Teyongsi Sirijunga and get inspired by the way he lived his life. He advised the youth of Sikkim to take this occasion to understand the past in order to build a better future.

They were advised



by the Chief Minister to learn from their elders and seek proper guidance from them in order to make Sikkim greater in every aspect.

The CM highlighted that the Teyongsi Sirijunga Study Center developed in West Sikkim was a homage to Teyongsi

Sirijunga's contributions towards the Limboo community and underlined that all should remember that Teyongsi Sirijunga was martyred for the sake of the Limboo way of life and that this supreme sacrifice has immortalized him.

The fact Limboo lan-

guage and culture continues to thrive is thanks to the efforts of Teyongsi Sirijunga and also stand testament to the fact that good will always prevail over evil and that justice will always triumph over injustice, the CM shared.

On the occasion, the CM also detailed all that

the State Government has done for the Limboo and Tamang communities and shared notable examples like the initiation of academic study in Limboo language, reservation in higher education, establishment of a study center, Scheduled

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Ask the critics what they have done for Limboos and Tamangs: Chamling

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 22 DEC:

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling today hit back against opposition parties on the Limboo-Tamang issues and stressed that the SDF Government has done a lot for the Limboo and Tamang communities by securing them Scheduled Tribes status and extending all privileges that accrue to them as STs that were in the State's power to provide. He also announced today that even if the Centre does not follow up on the pending demand of the State for reserved seats for the Limboos and Tamangs, five seats will be earmarked by SDF for election 2019.

He made these comments while addressing a function to mark the birth anniversary of Limboo visionary Teyongsi Sirijunga at Hee-Bermiok in West Sikkim.

Some of those now challenging the government's commitment to the two communities were once a part of the same government and even held influential posts, the CM pointed out. "Let me ask them now what extra they did for the two communities and why what



does not sit right with them now was okay when they were enjoying posts and perks?" the CM asked.

The CM said that the SDF party will approach the 2019 assembly elections with the call to save Sikkim from negative forces. It was now important for people to evaluate how the SDF Government has nurtured the State for the 25 years and seriously ponder over the disruptions that could happen if negativity wins.

"We will reserve 5 seats for the Limboo and Tamang communities in the next Assembly elections even if the Central Government does not consider the pending demand," he announced, adding that the people of Sikkim will now be entrusted with the onerous responsibility of making the right choice in the next elections.

Ibisbill spotted at Rangit amidst plastic pollution



GANGTOK, 22 DEC: SPOTTED!! The hard to spot Ibisbill, a migratory species that is found along the banks of Rangit during the winter months.

The joy of the birding group that comprised of the WWF team and teachers on sighting this very special bird was however very short lived as they came to realise that an alarming amount of plastic trash polluted the entire river stretch as far as the eye could see.

Styrofoam plates, broken beer bottles, plastic bottles, empty juice cartons, plastic straws and spoons, chappals, and plastic wrappers of all kinds were strewn along the river side below Majhitar Bridge, an area which is adjacent to the Kitam Bird Sanctuary, possibly by picnic

goers and visiting locals, and some brought down by the river.

A quick waste audit conducted by 23 school teachers from Darjeeling and Sikkim, who were there as part of a nature camp organised by WWF-India and Zero Waste Himalaya counted more than 100 plastic bottles and innumerable number of other plastic wrappers within a span of 15 minutes.

Plastic doesn't degrade, it only breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces to become microplastics, and will remain in the environment polluting forever. Here's a message from the teachers at the nature camp - "Arise, Awake or be forever fallen- Reduce plastic pollution!"

[recvd from Zero Waste Himalaya]

Sikkim Christmas Festival begins



NITESH R PRADHAN GANGTOK, 22 DEC:

Sikkim Christmas Festival, organised by the churches of Sikkim, marked its first session today at MG Marg here.

Upper-Burtuk MLA, DR Thapa, was present as the chief guest for the inaugural program accompanied by Gangtok Mayor, Shakti Singh Choudhary.

Secretary, Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, TT Bhutia, was also present in the program.

Chief Patron, Satish Rai, while addressing the function, stated

that all churches have come together to give a real Christmas taste to the people with a grand program.

The theme of the program is "peace, love and harmony".

He further thanked Chief Minister Pawan Chamling and the Government of Sikkim for supporting the event.

Popular singer Anju Panth from Nepal entertained the audience with her numbers today.

To showcase local talents and sharing the gospel message of God's love to the people of Sikkim is their motive behind organising

this festival, he added.

Many choir performances enthralled the audiences with riveting numbers.

All denominations of Christianity including Roman Catholic, Protestant and its varied factions took part in this grand function which featured many singers and dancers.

Mr Thapa wished everyone a Merry Christmas and stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, all religions and denominations enjoy equal rights.

25% jump in winter travel by Indians; Shillong and Darj among top growing destinations

MUMBAI, DEC 21 (PTI): There has been growth of up to 25 per cent in Indians travelling during winters compared to last year with beach destinations and deserts remaining popular during this season, according to industry experts.

"There has been a substantial increase in the number of people travelling during Christmas and New Year. We have witnessed about 25 per cent more Indians opting to travel during this period.

There has been a remarkable year-on-year increase in travel bookings from tier II and III cities for international travel," MakeMyTrip group CMO Sajanya Shrivastava told PTI here.

Beach destinations continued to be most sought after among international travellers, while domestic travellers are heading to beaches and desert, she said.

Destinations in north east India also registered significant growth this year, she added. Goa, Udaipur, Jaisalmer and Manali topped the list this Christmas and New Year holiday, while Shillong, Belgaum, Gokarna and Darjeeling are the top growing domestic destinations.

Meanwhile, Cox and Kings head, relationships, Karan Anand said domestic tours increased by 15 per cent this winter. Beach destinations including the Konkan region of Maharashtra, Goa and Andaman are trending the most followed by Rajasthan and snow

destinations such as Manali, Sonmarg, Patnitop, Kufri and Auli, he said.

"The demand for domestic snow destinations has been surging since the past few years mainly for the fun activities such as skiing, snowball fight, snow tubing and snowmobile safaris," he said.

This year, many travellers from India are also flying off for international destinations like New York, Finland, Austria, Budapest, Norway and Canada

during Christmas and New Year, he added. Hospitality company OYO said there has been an increase in bookings at beach destinations too such as Goa, Puri, Pondicherry, Port Blair, Alappuzha and Digha.

These destinations have seen a 66 per cent increase in bookings as compared to the 2017, winter holiday season.

Interestingly, colder destinations are witnessing an increasing trend of couples

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The GTA Chairman Gold Cup trophy was unveiled today at a special programme by Ravi Pradhan, chairman, Kalimpong Municipality, in the presence of Binay Tamang, BoA, GTA. The trophy, fashioned at the cost of Rs 6,42,000 includes 8 tolas of gold, it is informs. The final battle for the Cup is scheduled for 23 Dec at Mela Ground, Kalimpong, between traditional rivals East Bengal and Mohamaddan Sporting Club.

Gangtok on Sunday, 23 Dec

Temp: 10°C/06°C
Forecast: Sunny to partly cloudy with a little rain in the evening, then a shower in spots

Sunrise: 07:01 AM
Sunset: 03:49 PM

Acquittal of 22 in Sohrabuddin case CBI judge's last verdict

MUMBAI, DEC 22 (PTI): For special CBI Judge S J Sharma, acquitting all 22 accused in the alleged fake encounter killings of gangster Sohrabuddin Shaikh, his wife Kausar Bi and his aide Tulsi Prajapati on Friday, was the last judgement of his career.

"This is my last judgement...", said the judge, who is set to retire later this month, in his ruling. "It is unfortunate that a family (of victims) has lost a son, brother...But the evidences were not enough to show that these accused were authors of the crime."

The judge said he felt sorry for the families of Shaikh and Prajapati as "three lives were lost". But the system demands that the court go solely by evidence, he added.

All the accused, who were mostly police officials from Gujarat and Rajasthan, were out on bail during the years-long trial. The 13-year-old case saw several twists and turns, including 92 prosecution witnesses turning hostile. At one point, BJP president Amit Shah was also arrested briefly in 2010.

The three victims who were returning to Sangli in Maharashtra from Hyderabad in a bus were taken into custody by a police team on the night of November 22-23, 2005. The couple were taken in one vehicle and Prajapati in another.

The CBI, which was the prosecuting agency, said Shaikh was killed on November 26, 2005, allegedly by a joint team comprising Gujarat and Rajasthan police, and Kausar Bi three days later.

Prajapati, who was lodged in an Udaipur central jail, was killed in an encounter on the Gujarat-Rajasthan border on December 27, 2006.

Of the 22 accused, 21 are junior-level police officials from Gujarat and Rajasthan, who the CBI said were part of the teams that abducted the three and later killed them in staged encounters. The remaining accused was the owner of the farm house in Gujarat where Shaikh and Kausar Bi were illegally detained before they were killed.

"The prosecution has failed to put forth any documentary or substantive evidence to suggest or establish the conspiracy theory against the 22 accused. It has failed to establish all charges levelled against them. Hence all the accused stand acquitted", the judge said in his judgement. The court cannot rely solely on "circumstantial and hearsay evidence", he added.

Police said Sohrabuddin was linked with terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and was allegedly conspiring to assassinate Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was then the chief minister of Gujarat.

Foundation stone laid for Durga Panchayan Mandir



BIKAS CHETTRI NAMCHI, 22 DEC:

The foundation stone for a Durga Panchayan Mandir at Harrabotey under Poklok-Kamrang constituency was laid today in the presence of Zilla Panchayat LK Jogi, CE RMDD, Kewal Sharma, Social Worker, Arjun Rai, renowned writer Thiru Prashad Nepal, Zilla and ward Panchayat members and mandir committe members.

The Durga Mandir there is regarded as one of the oldest Durga temples in the area with villagers informing that this place of worship has been visited by people of the area for more than a 100 years.

Committee member Riwati Sharma and Ganga Prashad Sharma further inform that they, along with the villagers have been trying to construct a proper temple here for the last 12 years, and now, after the assistance of the State government and from surrounding villagers, the project is taking off.

They further informed that construction of this Durga Mandir has been possible due to the noble contribution by land by the late Gawi Shanker Sharma and KB Rai.

The Durga Mandir Management Committee informs that the mandir would be constructed on a donation pattern and its work has started from today.

The Zilla Panchayat, in his address, wished a healthy construction and urged the devotees to involve themselves closely to ensure timely completion.

He also appreciated the initiative of mandir committee members and remarked that the society needs spiritual knowledge to build a healthy society and such noble work will also secure our culture and customs.

He also thanked the land donors and also assured to extend all possible help from the Zilla Panchayat towards the construction of the mandir.

On the occasion, youth of village presented a cultural performance.

Indian, Chinese armies conclude first military exercise post-Doklam

BEIJING, DEC 22 (PTI): Indian and Chinese troops on Saturday concluded the seventh round of counter terrorism military exercises in China's Chengdu city during which over 100-strong contingents from both nations conducted the drills while living and dining together to build up a sense of camaraderie. This year's 'Hand-in-Hand' exercises focussing on urban terrorism were significant as they were held after a gap of a year. The drills were not held last year following the 73-day military standoff at Doklam which ratcheted

up tensions between the two armies. The specially-designed drills were in keeping with the spirit of this year's summit at Wuhan between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping to improve relations between the two militaries.

The fortnight-long exercises concluded with mixed teams from both armies demonstrating seven rounds of different counter terrorism drills practiced by them since December 11.

State-run TV channel CGTN livestreamed the concluding ceremony and the exercises highlighting their significance.

The theme of the exercises which included live firing and demonstration of driving skills was to rescue hostages held by terrorists in an urban environment. The troops also showcased counter-terrorism tactics and skills, such as

combat firing, and rope bridge crossing. The 2016 exercises held in Pune had focussed on counter terrorism exercises in non-urban areas.

"During the exercises our soldiers and officers lived in the same rooms and ate on the same table," said an officer of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), briefing on the exercises in the CGTN telecast. The birthdays of a number of soldiers from both sides were also celebrated together.

The Indian contingent headed by Col Puneet Tomar took part in the exercises to foster closer ties between the two militaries which guard the 3,488-km Line of Actual Control (LAC).

China fielded its troops from the Tibetan military command. Each side deployed 113 troops and officers. The Indian contingent will leave for home on Sunday, the CGTN report said.

Uttarakhand: Good year for Kedarnath, the shrine not the movie

ALOK MISHRA

DEHRADUN, DEC 22 (PTI): Kedarnath, one of the char dhams' that draw lakhs of devotees to Uttarakhand every year, was in the news in 2018 for more than one reason. The year saw a major effort, monitored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to redevelop the pilgrimage site after the devastation caused by the 2013 flash floods.

After the floods, the number of pilgrims visiting the temple town dropped from three lakh to just 40,000 in 2014. This year, it is a record seven lakh.

But around the year-end, it was Kedarnath, the movie, which made news. Authorities in seven of the state's 13 districts banned the screening of the Hindu-Muslim love story set against the backdrop of the Kedarnath tragedy, after some Hindutva organisations protested that it promoted love jihad.

The year also saw a push by the state government to attract more investment, suspension of bureaucrats in an old corruption case, the death of a prominent politician and the passing

of a renowned environmentalist who sat on a fast to save the Ganga. A rural development and migration commission was set up in 2018 to address migration from the hill state, a challenge faced by successive governments. The commission submitted its first report in May, noting that over 700 villages were left with virtually no population due to migration over the last seven years.

Investment that helps generate employment for the local community could help stop this exodus, it is often felt. An investment summit, inaugurated by the prime minister in the state capital Dehradun, is claimed to have brought in big-ticket proposals worth over Rs 30,000 crore.

The summit followed weeks of lobbying by Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat and his cabinet colleagues at business centres across the country.

Uttarakhand BJP spokesman Munna Singh Chauhan claimed that the exercise has brought in more investment to the state than ever before. A big chunk of the investment in the state in its early years is credited to the

efforts of Narayan Dutt Tiwari, the first chief minister of Uttarakhand to complete a full term. He died this year in Delhi.

At the investors' summit, Modi talked about the state's unique combination of famous pilgrimage centres, scenic beauty, serene locations perfect for yoga and meditation and proximity to the national capital.

And he came up with a new expansion of an old acronym. He said Uttarakhand could emerge as India's first 'spiritual economic zone' (SEZ).

The BJP government continued to pursue an alleged Rs 300-crore scam over acquisition of land for widening of NH-74 between 2011 and 2016. Two senior IAS officers were suspended and more arrests made this year.

Though the government flags this as a reflection of its zero tolerance towards corruption, the opposition has been putting it in the dock every assembly session for the delay in the appointment of a Lokayukta for the state. The Bharatiya Janata Party had promised this before it came into power nearly two years



Teyongshi Sirijunga SawanTongnam celebrated in Singtam

YOGEN THATAL

SINGTAM, 22 DEC:

The 315th Teyongshi Sirijunga SawanTongnam was celebrated here in grand fashion with a special event organised by the Yakthung Yonjo Songjumvo at East Point School.

After offering flowers and ceremonial lamps to a portrait of Sirijunga, a rally was taken out from East Point School, covering Singtam bazar and all the way back to the venue. With men, women and children dressed in traditional costumes, it was a colourful sight to witness today.

Given that Sirijunga revived Lim-

boo literature and faith, it was apt that the entire function today was conducted in Limboo language.

As part of the celebrations, DFO Kamal Subba, Jt. Secretary Anita Subba, Joint Director Suchitra Subba and retired HM, Mohan Pradhan, were felicitated today.

The YSTS president, HB Subba, Swachh Bharat Brand Ambassador Prakash Subba, SHO Roshan Rai, Singtam Nagar Panchayat president SK Pradhan and Councilor Bhumi Subba and community members attended the celebration. The program was hosted by Sarita Subba and Gupta Subba proposed the vote of thanks.

Chasok Tongnam celebrated by Limboo Society



SUMMIT REPORT

JORETHANG, 22 DEC:

A Limboo society of Chisopani, Yuma Say Say Mee Chumbo (YSSMC), organised its "Chasok Tongnam" on the occasion of the 314th birth anniversary of Teyongsi Sirijunga in colourful manner today here at Ambotey Chisopani under Poklok Kamrang Constituency.

SDF's West District Publicity Incharge, PS Limboo, who is also advisor to the Sikkim Limboo Youth Association, was present as the chief guest accompanied by Ganesh Adhikari, NJMC Council-

lor, SR Subba, President (Yuma Samya Samzonglo) Namchi, concerned Zilla Panchayat and local people from different background.

While addressing the gathering, Mr PS Limboo mentioned that Sikkim was a peaceful state having no discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or faith.

He further mentioned that equal rights have been given to people to practice their religions and culture under the leadership of Chief Minister Pawan Chamling. He also officially released Yakthung

(Limboo) sample papers for classes X and XII (2018 - 2019).

Later, YSSMC felicitated Khaisum Rai for her social contributions.

Similarly, YSSMC president, Dhan Bdr Limboo, informed that the society was established in the year 2002 and thanked the State Govt for the financial support of Rs10 lakh for Mangheem construction.

The special attraction of the day was a beautiful cultural programme, felicitations, Dhan Nach, Limboo poetry recitals, Chabrung dance and flute performance.

back. The state became the first in the country to demand a Rashtra Mata (Mother of the Nation) status for the cow, passing a resolution in the assembly on this and forwarding it to the Centre.

But Mother Ganga continues to suffer, even if it is less polluted in the state than downstream.

IIT professor-turned-Ganga activist GD Agarwal passed away at a Rishikesh hospital after sitting on a fast for 110 days, protesting against pollution and dams that block the free flow of the river.

The state government put in a major effort to rejuvenate Rispana and Kosi rivers by carrying out a big tree plantation drive in their catchment areas.

Uttarakhand High Court delivered some landmark judgments this year, including one against cruelty to animals, saying they had rights similar to those enjoyed by humans. It also directed a major anti-encroachment drive.

Despite the district-level bans on screening Kedarnath, the state government is keen to see more films shot in the picturesque state.

‘Yes Pali ta’ released



**REBYNA RANA
GANGTOK, 22 DEC:**

Architect Kiran Rasaily launched, ‘Yes Pali ta’, a music album featuring Prashil Sharma and Pooja Kadel as models, here today.

The music video album has been directed by Deepak Dhakal, produced and composed by Khush Narayan Chettri, choreographed by Dilu Tamang and features

the voices of Biswadeep Chettri and Anita Rai.

The song was recorded at Strings Studio in Darjeeling. The music video album is all about the fun that Nepali songs provide and has a very retro feel to it harking back to the 80’s. “Yes Pali ta lane ho morilai” has a video set to it.

Mr Rasaily congratulated the entire crew of the album for their success.

He also assured to support the director of the Music video, Deepak Dhakal financially.

Meanwhile, guest of honour, movie director, CL Ghimerey, remarked that the album was good overall and the concept will be liked by the youth.

Director Deepak Dhakal also spoke about the album and thanked all for their support in making the album arrive.

RBI Guv involved in ‘corruption’, alleges Swamy

HYDERABAD, DEC 22 (PTI): BJP leader Subramanian Swamy Saturday alleged Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das was involved in corruption and termed his recent appointment to the top post as a “surprise”.

He did not give any details about the “corruption”, an allegation he has made in the past as well.

“The new governor of (RBI) is highly corrupt. I got him removed from the (Finance Ministry). I am calling Shaktikanta Das as a corrupt person. I am surprised that the man I got removed from the Finance Ministry for corruption was brought in as governor”, Swamy said at an interactive session at the Indian School of Business here.

Later, when reporters asked him who he thinks should head the RBI, Swamy, a Rajya Sabha member, named Indian Institute of Management Bangalore professor R Vaidyanathan.

“Professor R Vaidyanathan, former professor of finance (IIM-B), would have been much better. He is also old Sangh man. He is our man,” he said.

Das, who spearheaded the post-demonetisation normalisation of the economy, was named the new RBI governor on December 11, a day after incumbent Urjit Patel quit the post.

On being asked about the 2019 general elections, Swamy asserted that the Saffron party would come back to power as “there is no anti-incumbency” against the Narendra Modi government.

To a question on Congress president Rahul Gandhi, Swamy alleged he held a British citizenship and cannot become a prime minister, a charge already rejected by the former.

“...by the way Rahul Gandhi cannot be a prime minister because he is a citizen of Britain and his Indian citizenship will be cancelled, he won’t even be an MP,” he claimed.

Delhi’s air quality turns ‘severe’, conditions to prevail till Sunday: Authorities

NEW DELHI, DEC 22 (PTI): Delhi’s air quality deteriorated to the ‘severe’ category Saturday as a thick smog engulfed the national capital and prevented dispersion of pollutants, authorities said.

This is the fourth time this season that the air quality in the city has worsened to the ‘severe’ category. The first time the air quality dipped to this category this year was just two days before Diwali.

A day after Diwali, which fell on November 7, the air quality again slipped to the ‘severe’ category. The third time it slipped into this category was on December 12.

The overall air quality index (AQI) of the city stood at 421, which falls in the ‘severe’ category, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data showed.

An AQI between 100 to 200 comes under the ‘moderate’ category, 201 and 300 is considered ‘poor’, 301 and 400 ‘very poor’, while that between 401 and 500 is ‘severe’.

Twenty-eight areas of the national capital recorded ‘severe’ air quality, while seven recorded ‘very poor’ air quality, the

Pondy CM, Ministers to stage demo in Delhi on Jan 4 for statehood

PUDUCHERRY, DEC 22 (PTI): The ruling Congress and its allies in Puducherry would stage a demonstration in front of the Parliament in New Delhi on January 4 to press for their demand for statehood to the Union Territory.

PWD Minister and president of PCC A Namassivayam said in a press release here Saturday that the legislators of the ruling Congress, its ally the DMK and Left parties, Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi, MDMK, Indian Union Muslim League and Federation of the Students Associations among others would take part in the protest.

A decision to this effect was taken at a meeting of leaders of various parties convened by Chief Minister V Narayanasamy here Wednesday night, where concern was expressed

CPCB said.

Officials said they are closely monitoring the situation and if the conditions prevail for 48 hours then stringent action which include emergency measures like odd-even car rationing scheme, would be taken.

A ban on construction activities might be enforced if “severe” pollution level persists for 48 hours, the officials said.

In Delhi, the overall PM2.5 level fine particulate matter in the air with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometre was recorded at 296 and the PM10 level at 466, the CPCB said.

In NCR, Ghaziabad recorded the worst air quality at an AQI of 451. Noida recorded severe air quality while Faridabad’s pollution level remained in the very poor category, the CPCB said.

The Centre-run System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting (SAFAR) said the overall air quality over Delhi entered in the ‘severe’ zone this morning and is expected to remain in the same range until Sunday afternoon. It would then decline slowly and may touch the ‘very poor’ category.

over the Centre ‘slashing’ grants to the UT and the style of functioning of Lt Governor Kiran Bedi, who has been at loggerheads with Narayanasamy on various issues. Namassivayam claimed that the territorial government was presently struggling to implement public welfare schemes as the Union Territory was not a full-fledged state and its administration was totally under the control of the Centre.

“The separate identity of Puducherry cannot also be ensured because of this unique, amusing situation,” he added. He also recalled that despite resolutions pressing for statehood being adopted on several occasions on the floor of the territorial Assembly, the Centre was continuously rejecting the demand.

Hyundai opens service centre in Namchi

**SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 22 DEC:**

Grand news for Hyundai customers in South Sikkim as Hyundai opened its first authorised Service Centre at Royal Motors in Namchi. The service centre was inaugurated by Regional Parts and Service Head (East), A Sarkar, along with other Hyundai officials.

“A new horizon has opened for our customers in South Sikkim region as they can easily avail our services,” Mr Sarkar remarked at the inauguration.

He added, “We in Hyundai believe in the vision of lifetime partners in automobile and beyond. With the support of our customers we have become the most loved and trusted brand in the country”.

Customers can now



avail premium service facilities along with the genuine Hyundai parts and its Warranty facilities for all customers of south and other part of Sikkim.

He added that Hyundai

ai Motor India Ltd. (HML) has become a pioneer in customer service and has been ranked no.1 in the Customer Satisfaction Service survey conducted by JD Power for two consecutive times.

Speaking to this correspondent, owner of the service center, Kiran Zimba, thanked the Hyundai Motor Indian Ltd. for trusting a local youth to render service for the company motors.

He also thanked service head east, Mr Sarkar for his cooperation in bringing this service center to Namchi and assured to provide easy and convenient services to all Hyundai customers.

Riverine Elementary School celebrates annual day



**SUMMIT REPORT
SINGTAM, 21 DEC:**

Riverine Elementary School, Rongli, celebrated its annual function on 18 Dec at Community Hall, Melatar, Rongli, in grand style.

Kunzang Gyasto Bhutia, Everester-2008, State awardee and Sikkim Khel Samman awardee, was among the students as the chief guest on the occasion. Principal, Bikki

Rai, presented the Annual Day Report which highlighted the activities of the various departments and societies of the school as well the individual achievements of faculty members.

Students who had won laurels in academics and extracurricular activities were presented awards. Members of the administrative, school management committee and non-teach-

ing staff were also felicitated for their contributions to the school.

Students and teachers presented a cultural programme which was appreciated by all the present on the occasion.

The most memorable moments of the function were marked by the words of advice and appreciation by the chief guest is an address to the parents.

UAE will be India’s toughest challenge: Gouramangi

NEW DELHI, DEC 22 (PTI): Former India defender Gouramangi Singh on Saturday said hosts UAE will pose a serious threat to the country’s group stage campaign in the AFC Asian Cup football beginning from January 5.

“I would say UAE would be very strong. Their fans would also come in large numbers. Add to that, the team would be preparing to do well on home soil. I feel that will be our toughest match,” Singh said. In-

dian start their Asian Cup campaign on January 6 when they take on Thailand. They will play UAE on January 10 followed by the match against Bahrain on January 14.

“In the two remaining group matches against Thailand and Bahrain, I feel we stand a chance and it would all boil down to the performance on the day,” he said.

The 32-year-old, who scored India’s first goal in the AFC Asian Cup 2011 against Bahrain, believes the positive

result against China (0-0) in an international friendly in October will boost the confidence of the players.

“Malaysia got a favourable result against Thailand and Bahrain have been up and down with the national team in recent years so we don’t really know what to expect. “But at the same time, India achieved an away draw versus China and there is no reason to stay intimidated by them,” the centre-back said.

VVIP chopper case: ED arrests Michel, gets seven day custody

NEW DELHI, DEC 22 (PTI): Christian Michel, an alleged middleman extradited from Dubai recently, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate and sent to seven days custody of the agency over money laundering charges in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper scam after he was produced in a court here which denied bail in the related CBI case.

Michel, lodged in Tihar jail in the CBI case, was produced before Special Judge Arvind Kumar following a production warrant issued on the plea of ED which took him into custody inside the courtroom.

The court, which had earlier reserved order on his bail plea in the CBI case, said, “Considering the overall facts and circumstances, serious nature of allegations, gravity of offence and the fact that investigation is at a crucial stage, I do not consider it to be a fit case for grant of bail.”

The court had on December 19 reserved the order on Michel’s bail plea in the Rs 36,000-crore scam and sent him to judicial custody till December 28.

After arresting Michel in the alleged money laundering case, the ED sought his 15 day-custody from the court on Saturday.

Opposing defence counsel’s submission that the accused had already been quizzed by the CBI, the ED said there was a gap in the money trail being investigated by it and the CBI.

“We are two different agencies. It’s impossible to have a joint investigation in the ambit of the law. We need to stand on our own feet,” the ED said. The agency said that it needs to probe money laundering aspect of the chain of proceeds of crime and the properties brought with that money, all of which have to be identified and recovered.

“We are aware of an investigation of Euro 30 million. The CBI’s investigation is of more than Euro 37 million. We have to cover that gap,” the ED said. It alleged that two of the properties have been bought out of the ‘proceeds of crime’ and hence it is purely in the scope of money laundering.

“The money came and has been used through a hawala channel. It has not come through official channel. That has to be probed and he needs to be confronted in that regard. The co-accused persons have to be confronted with.

“Both channels -- one channel through which money came and the other through which it was used -- have to be unearthed. Money trail has to be identified. The nexus of Guido Haschke, Carlo Gerosa and Gautam Khaitan (the other accused) also have to be unearthed,” the agency said.

It said that the agency was forced to seek “open-ended non-bailable warrant (NBW)”.

Open-ended NBW does not carry a time limit for execution unlike non-bailable warrant.

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SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

This Festive Season, Let's Keep Safe

It is time to make precautions a habit

The year-end is festive season the world over, more so in Sikkim where the month of December is packed with festivals building up to the traditional send off of a year and the welcoming of the next. There is also the winter chill which is setting in strong, and that is bound to ratchet up the celebration quotient and festivities can be expected to be scaled commensurately high. This is also holiday season, and just as Sikkim residents move to warmer climes to end their year, the more adventurous tourists head here to the hills. This to and fro, however, has not been as strong this year, but maybe another round of snow, and things will pick up. This is after all the time for fun and frolic and on the lookout for the smallest excuses. However, for all the fun that a festive season promises, it also carries the potential for mishaps, especially those that occur on the roads. This, Sikkim should bear in mind, is also road accident season.

Several factors collaborate to mar the frolic of the season with unfortunate incidents. For one, the conflicting pressures of tourist bookings and celebration opportunities automatically contribute to speeding and reckless driving. Celebration binges also involve copious consumption and that never mixed well with road safety. This is also that time of the year when reflexes are dulled by the many layers of clothing and bulky jackets that are required; visibility is poor, and dew and frost are not safe driving surfaces. These are but some off-the-cuff references on what the driving conditions are like at this time of the year. To ensure that this festive season passes without mishap, the personnel who police the roads and individuals who travel in groups, should take adequate precautions at least as far as the obvious challenges are concerned. It is not too difficult to arrange for a driver who will not drink and drive, and it is not impossible to ensure that only the road worthy vehicles carry passengers. Remember, this is also picnic season, a celebration which, apart from being outdoors and in the winter sun, also involves overcrowded vehicles and distracting boisterousness - all the more reason to incorporate some advance precautions into the planning.

With the schools closed and the weather packing up, more Sikkimese will also be holidaying in the coming weeks and month. This means that there will be a lot of locked homes around Sikkim, and no one home has now become a magnet for burglars. With people huddled under blankets and glued to their televisions and smartphone distractions, breaking and entering will not even bother with keeping the noise down. Some precautions will be well advised. In fact, this, the people should insist upon. Beyond that, a Sikkim Police advisory on how to keep homes safe would be well advised and should be heeded.

Festivals are also about having fun and indulging, but here's hoping that Sikkim will do so responsibly and this festive season brings only good and positive tidings...

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Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Air pollution may be making us less intelligent

BARBARA MAHER
theconversation.com

Not only is air pollution bad for our lungs and heart, it turns out it could actually be making us less intelligent, too. A recent study found that in elderly people living in China, long-term exposure to air pollution may hinder cognitive performance (things like our ability to pay attention, to recall past knowledge and generate new information) in verbal and maths tests. As people age, the link between air pollution and their mental decline becomes stronger. The study also found men and less educated people were especially at risk, though the reason why is currently unknown.

We already have compelling evidence that air pollution - especially the tiniest, invisible particulates in pollution - damages the brain in both humans and animals. Traffic pollution is associated with dementia, delinquent behaviour in adolescents, and stunted brain development in children who attend highly polluted schools.

In animals, mice exposed to urban air pollution for four months showed reduced brain function and inflammatory responses in major brain regions. This meant the brain tissues changed in response to the harmful stimuli produced by the pollution.

We don't yet know which aspects of the air pollution particulate "cocktail" (such as the size, number or composition of particles) contribute most to reported brain deterioration. However, there's evidence that nanoscale pollution particles might be one cause.

These particles are around 2,000 times smaller than the diameter of a human hair, and can be moved around the body via the bloodstream after being inhaled. They may even reach the brain directly through the olfactory nerves that give the brain information about smell. This would let the particles bypass the blood-brain barrier, which normally protects the brain from harmful things circulating in the bloodstream.

Postmortem brain samples from people exposed to high levels of air pollution while living in Mexico City and Manchester, UK, displayed the typical signs of Alzheimer's disease. These included clumps of ab-

normal protein fragments (plaques) between nerve cells, inflammation, and an abundance of metal-rich nanoparticles (including iron, copper, nickel, platinum, and cobalt) in the brain.

The metal-rich nanoparticles found in these brain samples are similar to those found everywhere in urban air pollution, which form from burning oil and other fuel, and wear in engines and brakes. These toxic nanoparticles are often associated with other hazardous compounds, including polyaromatic hydrocarbons that occur naturally in fossil fuels, and can cause kidney and liver damage, and cancer.

Repeatedly inhaling nanoparticles found in air pollution may have a number of negative effects on the brain, including chronic inflammation of the brain's nerve cells. When we inhale air pollution, it



may activate the brain's immune cells, the microglia. Breathing air pollution may constantly activate the killing response in immune cells, which can allow dangerous molecules, known as reactive oxygen species, to form more often. High levels of these molecules could cause cell damage and cell death.

The presence of iron found in air pollution may speed up this process. Iron-rich (magnetite) nanoparticles are directly associated with plaques in the brain. Magnetite nanoparticles can also increase the toxicity of the abnormal proteins found at the centre of the plaques. Postmortem analysis of brains from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease patients shows that microglial activation is common in these neurodegenerative diseases.

The latest study of the link between air pollution and declining intelligence, alongside the evidence we already have for the link between air pollution and

dementia, makes the case for cutting down air pollution even more compelling. A combination of changes to vehicle technology, regulation and policy could provide a practical way to reduce the health burden of air pollution globally.

However, there are some things we can do to protect ourselves. Driving less and walking or cycling more can reduce pollution. If you have to use a car, driving smoothly without fierce acceleration or braking, and avoiding travel during rush hours, can reduce emissions. Keeping windows closed and recirculating air in the car might help to reduce pollution exposure during traffic jams as well.

But young children are among the most vulnerable because their brains are still developing. Many schools are located close to major roads, so substantially reducing air pollution is necessary. Planting specific tree species that are good at capturing particulates along roads or around schools could help.

Indoor pollution can also cause health problems, so ventilation is needed while cooking. Open fires (both indoors and outdoors) are a significant source of particulate pollution, with woodburning stoves producing a large percentage of outdoor air pollution in the winter. Using dry, well-seasoned wood, and an efficient ecodesign-rated stove is essential if you don't want to pollute the atmosphere around your home. If you live in a naturally-ventilated house next to a busy road, using living spaces at the back of the house or upstairs will reduce your pollution exposure daily.

Finally, what's good for your heart is good for your brain. Keeping your brain active and stimulated, eating a good diet rich in antioxidants, and keeping fit and active can all build up resilience. But as we don't yet know exactly the mechanisms by which pollution causes damage to our brains - and how, if possible, their effects might be reversed - the best way we can protect ourselves is to reduce or avoid pollution exposure as much as possible.

[the writer is Professor, Environmental science, Lancaster University]

How to avoid overspending: uncover the psychology behind why people buy

BRIAN HARMAN & JANINE BOSAK
theconversation.com

Between 40% and 80% of purchases are impulse buys. Marketers often get blamed for this, but while marketing tactics may be cynical, manipulative, and even deceptive, shoppers are generally wise to their ways.

Of greater concern, is the fact that up to 95% of our daily decisions are potentially determined by impulsive, unconscious processes. All too often, consumers are ignorant of the social influences and psychological states that make them vulnerable shoppers. In fact, most people entertain a costly illusion of invulnerability and consider themselves especially shrewd shoppers.

You can avoid spending too much by becoming more mindful of the factors that influence your shopping behaviours. Here are six factors which could cause you to overspend, along with some tips about how to counteract them.

1. SOCIAL PRESSURE

Human beings are very susceptible to social pressures. The cooperative and competitive behaviours, which have ensured our survival as a species, also nudge us to spend more than we need.

For example, the social norm of reciprocity obligates us to exchange gifts and good deeds at Christmas.

Competition also fuels consumption: sales reinforce a sense of scarcity, and use time constraints to provoke a fear of missing out among shoppers - even when they're buying online. Flash sales - such as Black Friday - create a herd mentality, which can provoke panic buying, hysteria or worse. Being aware of these pressures will minimise their effects and allow you to maintain a sense of perspective.

2. MORE ABSTRACT MONEY

The concept of money is a shared myth, powered by the human imagination. Our imagination has been instrumental in the rapid development of the species, allowing people to swap pieces of paper and bits of metal for things they want. From notes and coins, to debit and credit cards, and most recently phones and Fitbits, the human imagination accommodates increasingly abstract forms of money. This is dangerous.

These new forms of money ease the "pain of paying", reducing the level of guilt we feel when parting with money. It temporarily hides the financial repercussions of our purchases (the lower bank balance or lighter wallet). This leads people to splurge without keeping track of the true financial costs of their decisions. Using cash when shopping will increase the pain of paying and make you more sensitive

to how much you're spending. This, in turn, will ensure that you only spend money on the items you really want.

3. DECISION FATIGUE

Research suggests that people have limited reserves of willpower. As we make decisions throughout the day, this reserve becomes exhausted, resulting in "resource depletion". Resource depletion causes people to act impulsively. Doing shopping early in the day, and avoiding other sources of stress, such as big crowds, will mini-

thing makes you more likely to buy another since your goal-focused mindset remains active even after you bought what you intended. This is one of the reasons why people emerge from shopping centres burdened down with several bags, having gone in to buy one item.

Unfortunately, switching between different mindsets can deplete your mental resources and cause you to spend more. Making rules to guide your decisions before you go shopping can counteract the effects of these



mise the risk of resource depletion.

4. MINDSETS

Psychological states known as "mindsets", which influence perceptions and decision making, can also make people more likely to spend. They occur outside of our conscious awareness, when the thought processes we use in one situation are carried over and used to process information in the next.

Thinking positively in one situation can predispose a person to think positively in an unrelated situation - for example, generating supportive thoughts about giving to charity might prime a person to have positive thoughts about the bottle of detergent they see in an ad break a few minutes later. The makes them more likely to buy it.

Mindsets also influence shopping goals. People with a "deliberative mindset" are open minded and likely to review all their options, while people with an "implemental mindset" are more close-minded and goal-focused. An implemental mindset reduces procrastination and focuses people to pursue their buying goals. These goals could be explicitly stated in a shopping list or even activated unconsciously.

The implemental mindset can be dangerous, because it creates shopping momentum. This is when buying one

mindsets and reduce the risk of shopping momentum. For example, telling yourself that if a product is below a certain price, you will buy it, but if it costs more, you will not. Making a list and setting a budget will help you remember the old adage, "it is not a bargain unless you need it".

5. MAKING COMPARISONS

Shopping is essentially a three step process. First you ask yourself, "do I want to buy something?"; then, "how product is the best?"; and finally, "how will I buy the product?". But when people consider two possible purchases, it induces a "which-to-buy" mindset, which primes them to skip the first question, and makes them more likely to buy something.

6. THE HALO EFFECT

Using mental shortcuts help us navigate everyday life more efficiently. Yet these shortcuts can also lead to incorrect assumptions and costly mistakes. In the context of shopping, not all assumptions are bad. Indeed, some assumptions are central to marketing. For example, branding works because we assume that products under the one brand have a similar level of quality. The implemental mindset can be dangerous, because it creates shopping momentum. This is when buying

one thing makes you more likely to buy another since your goal-focused mindset remains active even after you bought what you intended. This is one of the reasons why people emerge from shopping centres burdened down with several bags, having gone in to buy one item.

Unfortunately, switching between different mindsets can deplete your mental resources and cause you to spend more. Making rules to guide your decisions before you go shopping can counteract the effects of these mindsets and reduce the risk of shopping momentum. For example, telling yourself that if a product is below a certain price, you will buy it, but if it costs more, you will not. Making a list and setting a budget will help you remember the old adage, "it is not a bargain unless you need it".

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But other assumptions are less reliable. The "halo effect" occurs when we make incorrect assumptions, which lead us to think positively about something. So, the eye catching deals we see in the front window often make us assume that the other in-store deals are equally valid and generous.

To counteract the halo effect, you need to come prepared. Knowing the recommended retail price (RRP) of products will ensure that you are not influenced by high anchor prices that give the impression of deep discounts. Remaining sceptical and calm will improve your decision making and reduce the risks of cognitive bias. This will likely be good for society, the environment and your pocket.

[Brian Harman is Lecturer in Marketing, De Montfort University; Janine Bosak is Associate Professor in Organisational Psychology, Dublin City University]

Meghalaya HC asks NEC to submit road report in 2 weeks

SHILLONG, DEC 22 (PTI): The Meghalaya High Court has directed the North Eastern Council (NEC) to prepare a detailed project report for the Borkhat - Sonapur road along the Indo-Bangladesh border in the state, within two weeks.

The road, in East Jaintia Hills district, was left unattended by successive state governments in the past owing to paucity of funds.

"We direct the Secretary, NEC, to ensure consideration to the DPR (Detailed Project Report) and decision thereon be taken within a period of two weeks," a division bench headed by Chief Justice Mohammad Yaqoob Mir said in its order Friday.

During the hearing, the PWD chief engineer in his affidavit informed that the DPR for construction of the road was submitted to the NEC on December 10.

The order also noted that the court was not intimated whether the secretary, NEC, has made any decision or not.

On the other hand, the affidavit filed by the commissioner and secretary, forest and environment department, revealed that in terms of the recommendation of the Standing Committee

of National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), there are certain principles to be followed which have been reflected in para 14 of the affidavit.

The bench has directed the Commissioner and Secretary to file a fresh affidavit which should clearly be in tune with the principles as to what measures they have taken for upgrading resurfacing of the road from Baghmara to Moheshkhola at Hatisia in South Garo Hills district.

Meanwhile, the amicus curiae (friend of the court) has also submitted a progress report saying that the road, starting from Shillong to Dawki near the Indo-Bangladesh border in East Khasi Hills district, is being repaired.

On his overall inspection, major portion of the road which was in bad shape, has been repaired except for the 93 to 97 km stretch (Myllem area), 107-108 km (Lait Lyngkot area), 127 to 129 km (starting from Pynursla Phlangshlan to Pynursla Market) and 131-154 km (Wawksing area).

Regarding the stretches that are yet to be repaired, the bench has directed the respondents to file the latest status on or before the next date of hearing which is scheduled after four weeks.

Time running out, hope CIL acts on our plea for spl pumps: Meghalaya CM on trapped miners

SHILLONG, DEC 22 (PTI): Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma Saturday said time was running out for the miners trapped inside a 370-foot illegal coal mine since December 13 and in its last ditch effort to save them, the state government has sought high-power submersible pumps from the Coal India Ltd.

He said the state government has written to the Coal India seeking their special pumps (high-power submersible pumps) to aid the rescue of the 15 miners in Lumthari area of East Jaintia Hills district.

"We are running out of time and I hope they respond to the request. We are waiting," he said.

The miners were trapped after water from the nearby Lytein river gushed into the illegal



rat-hole mine at Ksan area in Lumthari village.

Operations to rescue the trapped miners entered its 10th day on Saturday. Over a 100 personnel from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and the State Disaster Response

Force (SDRF) are at the site, alongside the state police.

As of now, two pumps have been working in tandem, but "there was little impact on the water level since the water from the nearby Lytein river has got into the

mine," district SP S Nongtynger said.

He added that efforts over the past nine days have failed to produce the desired results and the rescue workers are now hoping for a miracle to see the trapped miners alive.

On December 13, around 20 miners entered the 370-foot mine at about 8 am. After reaching the bottom of the pit, the miners entered the horizontal manholes, often termed as 'rat-holes', as each just about fits one person to get in.

According to villagers, one of the diggers could have accidentally punctured the walls of the cave and the river water gushed in immediately, trapping the miners inside.

Only five persons managed to climb out of the mine. Of them, two are locals and the police are after the remaining three who had fled to West Garo Hills district.

One person has been arrested in the case so far and the police are on the lookout for the mine

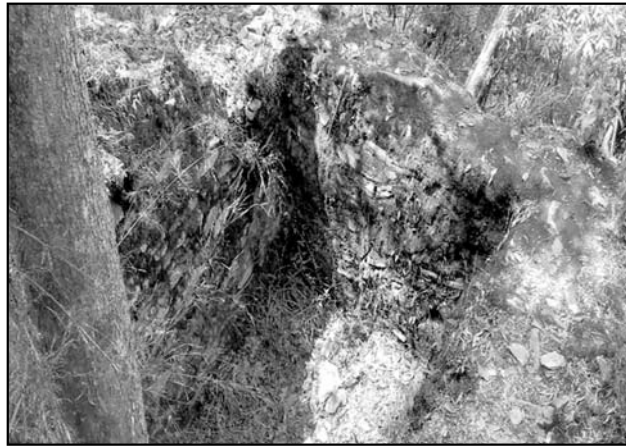
owner, the SP said.

The arrested person, identified as Krip Chullet, was allegedly involved in hiring labourers, overseeing the work and sending them down the shaft.

The Meghalaya government had sought the Union Home Ministry's help to rescue the miners. The NDRF teams, which are involved in the rescue operation, had earlier suggested the district administration to ask the Oil & Natural Gas Corporation to deploy submersible water pumps to reduce the water level.

In 2014, the National Green Tribunal had imposed a ban in Meghalaya on rat-hole coal mining, a technique that entails digging small vertical pits to reach the mineral pockets.

FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS



Pendam Gadi and its dilemmas

MONGFING LEPCHA

A newspaper article in Sikkim Express dated 21 April 2017 titled, "Nishani Kali statue to be built at Gadi hill top" claimed that "Gadi is famous for its ruined fort of the former Nepali Mulkazi Damodar Pande."

According to the article, "a 54 feet copper statue of Goddess Kali would be installed atop Gadi hill in central Pendam east district. The Nishani Kali statue would be constructed in 18th century fort to promote Pendam as a tourism destination."

The article also adds that "the project will create tourism opportunities for Padam with locals engaging in homestays and travel business." Now, the only problem is that the Pendam fort or Padam Gree, as the Lepchas call it, is believed to be built by the Lepcha Pano (king), Pano Gaebboo Achyok.

Om visiting the site, we could see the renovation work carried out by the Tourism Department of Sikkim. There were two distinct rooms; the walls had been cemented to bind the walls together to prevent them from further erosion. There were wooden seats in the middle of the rooms and stone stairs connecting one room to another also had been refurbished. The walls of the fort had been remodeled and there is a shrine below the fort.

The rooms had many corners, small and big, which seemed unusual to the design of any fort or residential setting. The corners of the room were shaped into a funnel and the ends were projecting forward with a small opening at the bottom of each funnel. These either served as attacking points for soldiers to hide and ambush their enemies or as a drainage system to allow the rain water to run off rather than accumulate inside the fort rooms.

The structure of the fort is comparatively different to other forts belonging to Pano Gaebboo Achyok in the neighboring area or any other forts in Sikkim. The fort stretched over a large area, more like a boundary demarcating the frontiers of the fort. A little uphill to the fort is a flat ground and a little further is another set of walls, again renovated by the tourism department finished with a trident at the gates, a religious symbol. The walls extend further down to a small view point. The view point gives a clear view of Pedong, in Kalimpong where Damsang Gree, another fort of Pano Gaebboo Achyok, is situated.

A little further exploration took us to another part of the fort which was a little aloof from the main structure, a part left untouched. This part of the fort

showed a lot of resemblance to the forts of Damsang and Dalim in Kalimpong. There was a long wall and a small room attached to it. The room was below the ground; a store room perhaps. There are also evidences of more extended walls which are now covered in vegetation.

Now, the Lepcha community strongly believes that Pendam Gree was built by their leaders but they do not have any documentation to prove it. OT Gawlogmoo had written about Pendam Gree in a

Damodar Pande. If he captured parts of Sikkim they should have built many other forts on their way. Whereas, if we look into Lepcha history, Pano Gaebboo Achyok has many forts in Kalimpong and on the borders of Sikkim and there is a strong possibility that he had extended his territories to the fringes of Sikkim closer to Kalimpong, for example Pakyong and Pendam as they lie closer to Pedong, the headquarters of the last Lepcha king.

Pakyong also had a fort that was taken away by a landslide recently.

So, looking into these accounts, all the forts both from Kalimpong, Pakyong and Pendam connects like dots. We cannot discount the earlier part of history before the Tibetans or the Nepalese invasions. We also cannot ignore the part played by the Bhutia and the Nepali communities in the construction of Sikkim history.

On one hand, the fort at Pendam is said to be built by the Nepali general on the other hand the Lepchas claim to be the fort of their king. There are many arguments about the origin of the "Gadi" but there is no scientific study to justify any of the claims. Since both communities equally believe in their claims, and it would be difficult to prove either of them wrong since both communities have developed a deep sense of belonging to the area and the fort, any manipulation and interfering with these may result in hurting communal sentiments.

Taking this into account, there is already a temple in the area and constructing the statue of Goddess Kali would be a blow to the Lepcha community and their sense of history, leaving a scar in the identity of the community.

Tourism is flourishing in Sikkim, but should not be at the cost of a threat towards a community and their heritage. The promotion of the place by constructing a 54 feet statue of Goddess Kali will surely bring in more tourists but that will also lead to pollution, clearance of vegetation from the area and even loss of some species of plants from the area. Sikkim is already home to many beautiful structures and statues, stunning embellishments that enriches the state alongside its natural jewels, but decorating the state at the cost of the identity of a community whose sentiments are attached to the place since before the concepts of tourism and politics arrived, is something one should give deeper thought to.

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

PM to flag off 1st train on longest rail-road bridge on Dec 25

NILADRI SEKHAR DUTTA

BOGIBEEL (ASSAM), DEC 22 (PTI): The first passenger train passing through the Bogibeel bridge will be flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, marking the opening of the country's longest rail-cum-road bridge.

The Tinsukia-Naharlagun Intercity Express will run five days a week. The 4.9-km bridge will cut down the train-travel time between Tinsukia in Assam to Naharlagun town of Arunachal Pradesh by more than 10 hours.

"It will take five-and-a-half hours compared to the 15-20 hours it currently takes. Passengers had to change trains multiple times and take a long-winded route," Northeast Frontier Railway spokesperson Nitin Bhat-tacharya said.

The 14-coach chair-car train will depart from Tinsukia at 4 pm and reach Naharlagun at 9.15 pm. It will depart from Naharlagun at 6:30 am the next day

and reach Tinsukia at 11 am, the spokesperson said.

The Bogibeel bridge connects the south bank of the Brahmaputra river in Assam's Dibrugarh district with Silapathar in Dhemaji district, bordering Arunachal Pradesh.

The bridge and the train will be a boon for the people of Dhemaji as major hospitals, medical colleges and airport are in Dibrugarh, the third-largest city in the Northeast. It will also help the people of Itanagar as it is just over 15 km from Naharlagun, the spokesperson added.

Modi will flag off the train after inaugurating the Bogibeel bridge on December 25, the birth anniversary of late prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and observed as the 'Good Governance Day' by the Centre.

The bridge is part of the infrastructure projects planned by India to improve logistics along the border in Arunachal Pradesh.

23 killed in Nepal bus accident

SHIRISH B PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, DEC 22 (PTI): A bus carrying college students and their teachers back from an educational trip veered off a mountainous road and plunged into a ravine in Nepal, killing 23 people and injuring 14 others.

The fatal crash occurred on Friday when the bus was returning from Kapurkot in Salyan district.

According to the District Police Office, Dang, there were 37 persons 34 students, two teachers and a diver, on the

ill-fated bus, which drove off the road and fell some 700 metres down near Ramri village, about 400 kilometres west of the capital Kathmandu.

Fourteen persons, including five women, were injured in the incident.

The students and instructors from Krishna Sen Ichhuk Polytechnic Institute had been visiting a farm for their botany project, The Kathmandu Post reported.

Poor road infrastructure and reckless driving are the leading causes of accidents in Nepal.

Time to bring focus back on cricket: Mithali

KOLKATA, DEC 22 (PTI):

Gearing up for the New Zealand tour, Indian women's ODI captain Mithali Raj Saturday stressed on the need to bring focus back on cricket after hogging the limelight for the wrong reasons following a controversial ending to their World T20 campaign.

Mithali was in the news after falling out with Ramesh Powar, who was the coach of the team at the recently held women's World T20 in the Caribbean where she was dropped for the semifinal against England.

Their spat became public after both wrote to the BCCI and their respective letters got leaked.

But the selectors have reposed their faith on Mithali who retained her place in the T20 squad and captaincy for next month's tour to New Zealand. "The way things panned out was obviously not in a very good taste. It affected everybody in a different level, in a different way," Mithali said during a promotional event here.

"Now I am sure things are settled and we should give more spotlight on the sport, on the players and in the team."

Mithali said she and her family had to endure a lot of stress after her controversial ouster from the team.

"I can only say that the last few days were very stressful for me and my parents. And also for people around me, especially the way it panned out," she said.

"It definitely did put women's cricket in the spotlight which was not needed. When you talk about non cricketing issues and not the team the focus goes away from the sport."

"Now that we have a tour (vs New Zealand), it's time that we move forward. Look forward and be more positive going forward."

The rift between T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur and ODI captain Mithali was out in the open and the team was sharply divided into camps.

Asked if she would go along well with Harmanpreet, Mithali said: "We will see. When the 15 individual players come together with the support staff, it's a huge and big family."

Breakthrough year for Neeraj, Hima but familiar dope shame hits Indian athletics

PHILEM DIPAK SINGH

NEW DELHI, DEC 22 (PTI):

Javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra's obsessive pursuit of excellence and a new-found sprint sensation in Hima Das gave Indian athletics audacious Olympic hopes but familiar dope shame kept things in perspective in an eventful 2018.

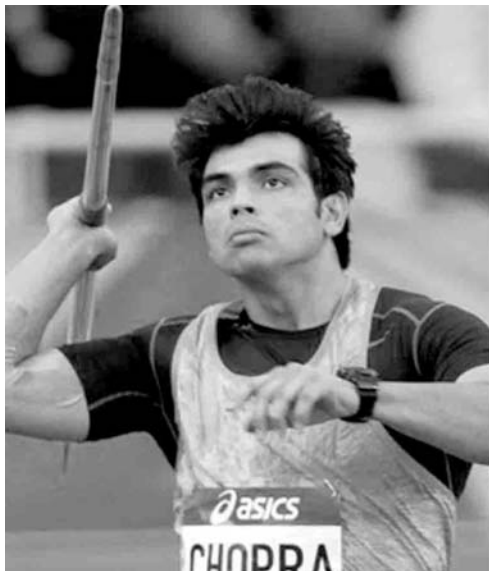
If 2016 announced his arrival on the world scene with a junior world record, the 20-year-old Neeraj emerged as a serious Olympic medal contender with a series of impressive throws which fetched him a gold each in the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games.

The dashing six-footer from Khandra Village in Panipat rose to celebrity status, breaking his own national record twice during the year. The last one of 88.06m won him a gold in the Asian Games and catapulted him to the world's elite.

If Neeraj was the cynosure of all eyes, Hima also carved out a slice of history by becoming the first Indian woman athlete to win a gold at the world level. She clinched the top spot in the women's 400m final race in the IAAF World Under-20 Athletics Championships in Finland.

No woman before Hima won a gold in a World Championship at any level, be it youth, junior or senior. She is also the first Indian to win a gold in a track event at the world level.

Neeraj, on the other hand, continued to live upto the promise he showed two years ago. Neeraj finished fourth



in the prestigious Diamond League Series by accumulating 17 points, a feat never achieved by an Indian thus far in an elite field which featured best of the world.

India now has a truly world-class athlete in Neeraj and with age on his side, he could well become the first Indian athlete to win an Olympic medal in the 2020 Tokyo Games. With a former world record holder, Uwe Hohn of Czech Republic, as his coach, Neeraj now aims to breach the 90m mark this year. He ended the season at world number six.

"It's possible (for Neeraj to throw 90m). He is a great talent and has a great, bright future. He has the qualities of becoming an elite thrower. He

is way ahead of me," said Rio Olympics silver medalist Julius Yego of Kenya.

In the prestigious Diamond League Final in Zurich where he competed three days after the Asian Games campaign, Chopra missed the bronze by a whisker as reigning Olympic champion Thomas Roehler of Germany pipped him by a mere three centimeters with his final throw.

Hima too enjoyed a consistently good year.

The 18-year-old from Assam's Dhing village became a star overnight as she kept improving her timing through the year, culminating into a national record time of 50.79 seconds while winning silver in the Asian Games.

Hima's rise to a top quar-

termiler has been nothing short of phenomenal considering that she has already run sub 51 sec at 18 years of age and that too after just a dozen of competitive races since late 2016. But her road to becoming an international elite will not be easy as the field is highly competitive. She ended the season at world number 23 and second in Asia.

The two youngsters were not the only ones scripting history. Triple jumper Arpinder Singh became the first Indian to clinch a medal in the IAAF Continental Cup with a bronze.

On the domestic front, Jinson Johnson smashed the legendary Sriram Singh's 42-year-old 800m record, the oldest in Indian athletics, by clocking 45.65 seconds during the National Inter State Senior Athletics Championships. Dutee Chand (women's 100m), Mohd. Anas (men's 400m) and Jinson Johnson (men's 1500m) and Murali Sreeshanker (men's long jump) were among the Indians who created national records during the year.

Overall, it was a satisfactory year for Indian athletics with a 19-medal haul (7 gold, 10 silver, 2 bronze) in the Asian Games in Jakarta, their best ever performance since the 1978 Bangkok Games, and the third best ever.

In the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, the 1 gold, 1 silver and 1 bronze show was the same as in 2014 edition. But yet another dope shame came to haunt Indian

athletics at the fag end of the season with five athletes, including Asian champion quarter-miler Nirmala Sheoran, returning positive tests for banned substances.

Apart from Sheoran, middle-distance runners Sanjivani Yadav, Jhuma Khatun, discus thrower Sandeep Kumari, shot putter Naveen tested positive for banned substances in tests conducted by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) at its Montreal laboratory.

This came after the same samples returned negative results in tests conducted by the National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL).

Distance runner Naveen Dagar was also thrown out of Asian Games team after testing positive. Earlier, KT Irfan and Rakesh Babu were thrown out of the Commonwealth Games for violating the event's 'No Syringe' policy.

The year also saw the retirement of veteran discus thrower Vikas Gowda after competing at the highest level for more than 15 years during which he became the first and only Indian male to win Commonwealth Games medals in the discipline. Gowda, who holds the national record of 66.28m (achieved in 2012), is one of the most decorated Indian athletes, having won gold in the 2013 and 2015 Asian Championships.

He also won silver in the 2010 Commonwealth Games and a gold in the 2014 Glasgow CWG. In the Asian Games, he won a bronze in 2010 and a silver in 2014. He took part in the 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016 Olympics.

Former players slam ICC's Perth pitch rating

MELBOURNE, DEC 22 (PTI):

Former Test cricketers Mitchell Johnson and Michael Vaughan have slammed the ICC for giving an 'average' rating to the Perth Stadium pitch, which hosted India's second Test against Australia.

Match referee Ranjan Madugalle on Friday rated the pitch at Perth Stadium as 'average', the lowest pass mark provided by the ICC when they assess the pitch and outfield of Test grounds.

Australia had defeated India by 146 runs on the fifth and final day of the second Test at the Perth Stadium.

"Nothing wrong with it. It was exciting to watch a contest between bat and ball for a change and not these dull flat



tracks being served up constantly. I'd actually be interested in knowing what a good pitch is? Hope for another exciting test at the MCG," Johnson wrote on his twitter handle.

Vaughan also took to Twitter to criticise ICC's decision.

"And they wonder why Test Match cricket is struggling .. Was a tremendously exciting pitch which had a bit for every-

one .. Should be more like this IMO..."

The ICC's rating is presumably due to the uneven bounce that became more prevalent later in the match.

However, Johnson disagreed.

"Inconsistent bounce use to happen a lot, the pitch is supposed to deteriorate. Is it any different to a pitch that spins a metre or more & stays low?," he wrote.

The Perth pitch saw some sharp bounce with one Mohammed Shami delivery hitting Australian opener Aaron Finch's right glove, forcing him to retire hurt.

Usman Khawaja and Tim Paine were also dismissed in Australia's second innings by balls

that reared sharply off a good length. However, Khawaja's 72 after India skipper Virat Kohli's 123 in the first innings proved there were runs on offer in the wicket.

At the start of the year, the ICC introduced a disciplinary system in a bid to improve the standard of pitches around the world and can provide six ratings very good, good, average, below average, poor and unfit when rating Test venues.

The third Test between India and Australia will be held at the MCG, which had received a 'poor' rating last year and there will be a lot of focus on new MCG curator Matthew Page this week.

Over 8 lakh people died of cancer in India this year: Anupriya Patel

New Delhi, Dec 21 (PTI):

An estimated 8,01,374 people died of cancer this year as compared to 7,66,348 deaths from the disease in 2017, Minister of State for Health, Anupriya Patel told the Lok Sabha Friday.

Citing the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) cancer registry data report, she also said that an estimated 15,86,571 cases of cancer have so far been reported this year.

According to the data submitted to the Parliament, the estimated incidence of cancer cases was 15,17,426 in 2017, 14,51,417 in 2016 and 13,88,397 in 2015.

The estimated mortal-



ity of cancer cases in India was 73,2921 in 2016, 70,1007 in 2015 and 67,0541 in 2014, it said.

The ICMR's cancer registry data report titled 'Three-year Report of Population Based Cancer Registries: 2012-2014, Bengaluru, 2016' noted that the estimated number of incidence of cancer cases in the country was increasing, the min-

ister told the Lok Sabha. She said the government was implementing the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) under the National Health Mission (NHM) to support the states and Union Territories for interventions up to district level.

The focus is on the three common cancers-- oral, breast and cervical, she said.

In addition, population-based prevention, control, screening and management for hypertension, diabetes and common cancers is also being implemented in more than 200 districts under NHM, Patel added.

Modi 'unmade' India: Yaswant Sinha in no-holds-barred book

NEW DELHI, DEC 22 (PTI):

GDP numbers are misleading, RBI's autonomy is in extreme danger and demonetisation is the biggest banking scam, former finance minister Yashwant Sinha claims in his new book.

He also says that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's idea of self-employment is a "distraction from the more serious issue of unemployment and underemployment". Sinha, who has been quite vocal about the government's policies since the past couple of years, quit the BJP in April. Party leaders have been dismissing his allegations on several issues with BJP chief Amit Shah once asking if people should believe the ministers or those "who did not get jobs".

According to Sinha, Modi blew a golden opportunity to send the economy soaring to new heights.

"He could have fixed the UPA's legacy issues and fundamentally raised India from a poor country to a middle-income country, but he squandered the chance," he says,

adding his book demonstrates how "Modi unmade India".

Though the book "India Unmade: How the Modi Government Broke the Economy" is a critique of the NDA government's economic management, Sinha says he has not always been a critic of Modi.

"Nor do I have a personal vendetta against him for not appointing me minister or giving me some other post, as some people incorrectly speculate. In fact, the truth is that I recognised his mettle early on and was one of the first senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders to say he should be made the party's prime ministerial candidate in the 2014 elections," he claims.

He has been severely critical of Modi on demonetisation, jobs, GDP figures and Make in India among others policies and programmes.

"The Modi government's lasting legacy will be the catastrophe that was the demonetisation of high-denomination currency on November 8, 2016," he argues.

"Demonetisation was a whimsical decision that served no purpose of governance. It did, however, provide Modi with a populist campaign plank of having taken tough decisions to nab the corrupt rich. His decision paid a rich electoral dividend in Uttar Pradesh in 2017. But as far as the constantly shifting governance objectives of demonetisation went, it was a big zero," he says.

On the second anniversary of demonetisation, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had said that demonetisation resulted in increasing the tax base and a higher tax collection (both direct and indirect) for the government, thereby improving its fiscal health. He had also clarified that the real purpose of demonetisation was not the confiscation of cash but to bring it to the formal economy and make the holders pay tax.

On Make in India, Sinha writes, "The malaise of Indian industry during Modi's tenure is typified by his most famous flagship scheme,

Make in India. It is his biggest failure; it is also an unoriginal idea. It is nothing more than a revival of the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council that the UPA set up in 2004, whose first chairman was V Krishnamurthy."

He also says that the growth rates were seemed to have been recalibrated to make the government's economic management look good, with an average rate of 7.35 per cent over its first four years.

The jobs Modi mentioned like 'pakoda' sellers, autorickshaw drivers, tea-stall boys and newspaper deliverers are all in the informal sector and are nobody's idea of an aspirational job, he says.

He terms GDP figures as way below India's potential. "But then India is the only country in the world that grows at 7.35 per cent, without investment, without industrial growth, without agricultural growth. Just like magic," he writes in a sarcastic vein.

The GST concept, he says, is

good because it is simple and will lead to lower prices because there won't be any tax on tax; there'll be tax set-offs at every stage; and it will widen the tax net for transactions. "It is a better tax, but Modi-Jaitley botched it up at its very beginning. That GST has been tweaked 200 times already and over 400 notifications and 100 circulars and FAQs have been issued since its launch is standing testimony to the folly of the Modi-Jaitley team."

Sinha says that UPA's management of the economy was also flawed.

"When the global financial crisis hit us, the (UPA) government decided to focus on increasing consumption demand, and it began reducing or even eliminating some excise duties.

"This, along with the debt waiver and MNREGA, was meant to put money in people's pockets to encourage consumption demand. Yet all these welfare measures hardly encouraged productive activity

and did not increase investment," he writes.

The Modi government, according to him, had everything going for it on all fronts; it had the kind of opportunity few governments have had in independent India's history, yet it squandered its mandate. "In summation, the Modi government is just about event management. He is the best in creating false impressions. In the process, Modi has given India its 'lost half-decade'. Elect him again and by 2024 it will be a lost decade," he warns.

The book, published by Juggernaut, is co-authored by journalist Aditya Sinha.

So, why is the need for the book?

"Over the last fifty-five months, the Modi government has dished out a stunning continuum of untruths and boasts about its economic management, performance and accomplishments. It thus becomes essential to speak truth to power, and so it is my job that this book be a statement of fact."

Somalia blast kills at least 16 near presidential palace



NAIROBI (KENYA), DEC 22 (AP): An explosives-packed vehicle detonated at a military checkpoint near Somalia's presidential palace, killing at least 16 people and wounding more than 20 others, police said.

The al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab extremist group, which often targets Mogadishu, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Those killed include

three staffers from the London-based Universal TV station, including prominent journalist Awil Dahir Salad, said police Capt. Mohamed Hussein, who gave the toll of dead and wounded.

The bomber targeted the checkpoint near the rear entrance of the heavily fortified palace, Hussein said. A lawmaker and a deputy mayor of Mogadishu were among

those wounded, he said.

Soldiers also were among the dead, Col. Ahmed Mohamud said.

The blast and a second, smaller one nearby appeared to target those heading to work on what was a business day in the Horn of Africa nation.

A plume of smoke rose over the capital as ambulances rushed to the scene.

"At first I saw a ve-

hicle driving to and fro, then we tried to stop people walking here and there, and then in the blink of an eye the vehicle exploded, causing havoc," traffic police officer Mohamed Harun told The Associated Press.

Al-Shabab, the most active Islamic extremist group in sub-Saharan Africa, was pushed out of Mogadishu years ago but continues to

control large parts of rural southern and central Somalia.

The US military, which partners with Somali forces and a 20,000-strong African Union peacekeeping mission, has greatly increased airstrikes against al-Shabab under the Trump administration. At least 47 U.S. strikes have been carried out this year.

Wickremesinghe acknowledges differences with Sirisena on ministerial appointments

COLOMBO, DEC 22 (PTI): Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has acknowledged that there are some differences of opinion with President Maithripala Sirisena on the ministerial appointments, but he is confident that the issues will be resolved.

President Sirisena on Thursday named a 30-member Cabinet while reportedly rejecting some of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's nominees and retained control over the security forces and police, indicating that the power tussle between them is far from over.

Wickremesinghe on Friday slammed media,

saying some had reported a "fake list" claiming they were nominated for ministry portfolios but had not been approved by the President, Colombo Gazette reported.

He said that some media had claimed that Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) member Wijith Wijayamuni Zoysa was in the list of MPs nominated for ministerial posts.

The Prime Minister, however, insisted that Zoysa was not on the list. Wickremesinghe said that some media were attempting to mislead the public and action must be taken against them.

He called for a debate next month on media which were reporting

false information. The Prime Minister said that while there were some differences of opinion with the President on the Ministerial appointments, he was confident the issues will be resolved. He said he will make a statement in the House on how the Cabinet was appointed.

The new Cabinet was appointed after an unexpected delay of three days since Wickremesinghe was sworn in as Prime Minister on December 16 following weeks of political crisis that led to government dysfunction.

The Cabinet formation was delayed as Sirisena reportedly did not agree with some nomi-

nees from the list submitted by Wickremesinghe. Sirisena, who holds the Defence and Mahaweli Development and Environment Ministry portfolios, has retained his control over the police, which is investigating an alleged plot to kill him.

The plot widened the gulf between Sirisena and Wickremesinghe. On October 26, Sirisena sacked prime minister Wickremesinghe and installed Rajapaksa in his place, triggering an unprecedented constitutional crisis. Sirisena also dissolved the 225-member Parliament and called for a snap election on January 5. He publicly vowed not to reinstate Wickremesinghe.

Pak PM raised Kashmir issue with UN chief: UN spokesman

YOSHITA SINGH UNITED NATIONS, DEC 22 (PTI): Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan telephoned UN chief Antonio Guterres and raised the issue of Kashmir, a UN spokesman has said.

Stephane Dujarric, the spokesman for the UN Secretary General, did not give further details about the conversation between Khan and Guterres.

When asked by PTI to comment on India's strong retort to Khan that Pakistan should mind its own business and that Kashmir is an integral part of India, Dujarric said, "Our position on Kashmir has been reiterated. There is an observatory group as mandated by the Security Council."

He was referring to the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP).

Dujarric added that the Pakistani Prime Minister wanted to speak to the Secretary-General.

"It's only normal that the Secretary-General speak to Heads of Gov-



ernments and Heads of State and, as I said, I can confirm that the call took place and that the Prime Minister raised the issue of Kashmir," Dujarric said.

In a set of recent tweets, Khan said that "Kashmiris must be allowed to decide their future". He also tweeted that Pakistan would raise the issue of India's alleged human rights violations at the United Nations.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar in response said that "the statements coming out from their side demonstrates the insincerity and duplicity".

The UNMOGIP was established in January 1949 and currently has a total of 118 UN and civilian staff. Following the India-Pakistan war in 1971 and a subsequent ceasefire agreement of December 17 of that year, the tasks of UNMOGIP have been to observe, to the extent possible, developments pertaining to the strict observance of the ceasefire and to report there on to the Secretary-General.

India has maintained that UNMOGIP has outlived its utility and is irrelevant after the Simla Agreement and the consequent establishment of the Line of Control (LoC).

US govt partially shuts as Congress, Trump fail to reach deal

WASHINGTON, DEC 22 (AFP): The US government began a Christmas shutdown early Saturday, after Congress adjourned without passing a federal spending bill or addressing President Donald Trump's demand for money to build a border wall.

Operations for several key agencies ceased at 12:01 am Saturday (5:01 GMT), despite last-ditch talks that continued on Capitol Hill between White House officials and congressional leaders in both parties.

Trump has dug in on his demand for USD 5 billion for construction of a wall on the US border with Mexico.

Democrats are staunchly opposed, and the absence of an elusive deal means federal funds for dozens of agencies lapsed when the clock struck midnight on Friday. The shutdown is the third this year and it remained unclear how long it would last.

Trump expressed hope late Friday night that it "will not last long," after earlier saying he was ready for just that.

The optics are bad, as 800,000 federal employees will be either furloughed or forced to work without pay in the run-up to the Christmas holiday. But the prospect of a large portion of government workers going without paychecks was not enough to spur lawmakers or the president to action.

The House of Representatives adjourned just before 7:00 pm Friday, with no moves taken to avert a shutdown, and the Senate closed up shop an hour later.

Both are due back in session at noon Saturday.

About three-quarters of the government, including the military and the Department of Health and Human Services, is fully funded until the end of September 2019, leaving 25 per cent unfunded as of Saturday.

Most NASA employees will be sent home, as will Commerce Depart-

ment workers and many at the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, Agriculture and State. National parks will remain open, but most park staff will stay home.

While most critical security functions will be operational, the effects of the budget wrangling and uncertainty have cast an air of chaos over the capital, which is also reeling from the resignation announcement Thursday by Defence Secretary Jim Mattis.

Wall Street ended its worst week in a decade with more bruising losses Friday.

And the inability of Washington to accomplish one of its most basic tasks -- keeping the government up and running -- has caused deep embarrassment and anxiety.

"It's up to the Democrats whether or not we have a shutdown tonight," Trump said earlier Friday, blaming political opponents for the crisis. "I hope we don't," the president added, but "we're totally prepared for a very long shutdown."

Senators told reporters that congressional leaders from both parties were negotiating behind the scenes with White House officials including Vice President Mike Pence, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, and incoming chief of staff Mick Mulvaney.

The power trio shuttled from one side of the Capitol to the other, seeking a breakthrough with Republicans and Democrats. It did not come on Friday.

Should they eventually strike a deal, it could swiftly clear Congress and reach the president's desk, said Senate Republican Bob Corker.

"Now Republicans and Democrats both own the success or failure to fund government."

One focus of discussion was the USD 1.6 billion in border security funding that was a part of pending Senate legislation, number two Senate Republican John Cornyn

told AFP. But conservatives in the House would likely balk at that figure.

"There's no agreement," congressman Mark Meadows, chairman of the House Freedom Caucus of ultra-conservatives, told reporters as he left a closed-door meeting on the Capitol's Senate side.

"There's a whole lot of numbers being thrown around," but a maximum USD 1.6 billion for border security "is not acceptable," Cornyn suggested the art of the deal was less about grandstanding and more about a logical compromise to break the impasse. "The House is at five (billion dollars for border security)," the Democrats are at zero," he said.

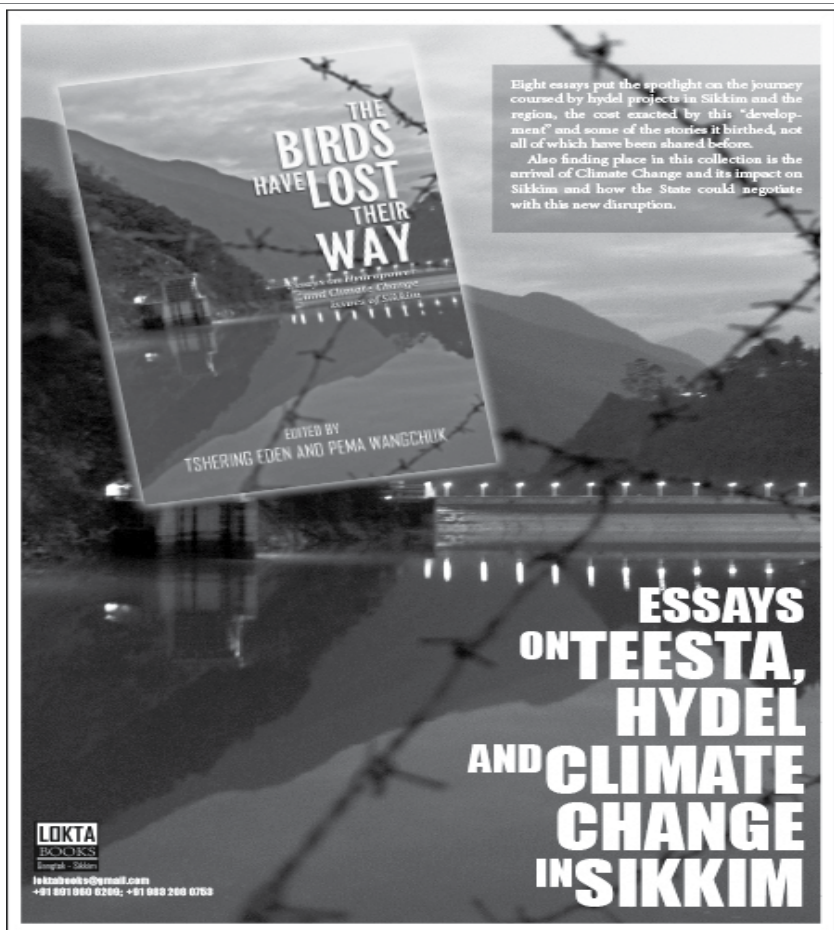
"It doesn't sound like that's rocket science to come up with a figure."

Trump reversed course Thursday and rejected a measure that had unanimously passed the Senate and was under House consideration.

It would have extended government funding until February 8, but contained no money for a border wall, a pet project Trump has fought for since his presidential campaign. Democrats painted Trump as the Grinch who stole the year-end deal.

"This #shutdown is brought to you by @POTUS & @HouseGOP," congresswoman Kathleen Rice tweeted. "Instead of passing the Senate's funding bill, they decided to hold this country hostage."

With lawmakers like Meadows and prominent conservative commentators demanding that the president stick to his campaign promises, Trump doubled down on his wall. The House swiftly passed a bill that fulfilled the president's demands. It included USD 5.7 billion in wall funding, and USD 7.8 billion in disaster relief. But it stalled at the first hurdle in the Senate. Trump was scheduled to fly to Florida Friday for his Christmas break, but he postponed the trip to help salvage a deal.



I want to be challenged as an actor: Ali Asgar

Actor-comedian Ali Asgar's popularity as a flamboyant grandmother from "Comedy Nights with Kapil" is his most famous performance but the actor says he is ready to ditch the costume if given a challenging role.

The actor the success of 'Dadi' has been a blessing but also limiting to a certain extent.

"An image is being built about me that I like doing only female characters and that it is my comfort zone. The day I get an exciting role, I will leave this (female) costume. I am hungry for good roles. I want to be challenged as an actor, I want to work hard on a character," Ali told PTI.

The actor said he has no complaints that female characters have become his identity but breaking out of a set image is important for him.

"I am not complaining, I don't want to blame anybody. I keep acting in films, I did one called 'Amaavas', it will release in January, I did 'Judwaa 2', hosted award shows, where I am Ali Asgar playing different male parts.

"Only because people are saying I am playing female parts doesn't mean I take up daily soaps, where

I would get to play a male character. I don't want to do that," he said. Citing example of a show called "Woh Teri Bhabhi Hai Pagle", a sitcom, where he played the role of a gangster, Ali said the idea sounded good on paper but failed in its execution.

"It was a bad experience in terms of content. I used to force

myself to go on shoot. I don't want to repeat that. I don't want people to say that my work was not good."

The actor is back to playing a female character yet again in a stand up-comedy and talk show "Kanpur Wale Khuranas", headlined by Sunil Grover.

"In a reality show the format more or less remains the same. In this new show, the family tree is different. The rela-



tionship between the characters is different and that makes the show interesting and creates laughter. Also, this time I am playing a male character as well on the show," Ali added.

The Star Plus show is scheduled for eight episodes and began airing from December 15.

Idris Elba says film version of 'Luther' is in works



LONDON, DEC 21 (PTI): Actor Idris Elba has revealed that a movie version of his hit series "Luther" is being planned.

The actor confirmed that writer-creator Neil Cross is working on the script for the film.

"We are really advancing on getting a movie version (of the show) up on the screen. Neil is beaver away on writing this thing, and I think the remit for the film is to scale it up," Elba said.

According to Indiewire, the actor was speaking at the launch of the fifth season of the series.

Elba, 46, believes "Luther" has "all the ingredients to echo" films such as David Fincher's 1995 neo-noir crime

thriller, "Seven". "Luther" has all the ingredients to echo those classic films of the 90s like 'Seven' and 'Along Came a Spider' and I think what we would like to do is use that blueprint to create 'Luther' the film," he said.

"I think what we would like to do is use that blueprint to create Luther: the film. It will be more murder, more Volvos, more frowning Luther... Essentially we just want to try to take it to a much bigger audience and scale, and perhaps international as well," he added.

The season five of "Luther", comprising four episode, will also see the return of Ruth Wilson, Dermot Crowley, Michael Smiley and Patrick Malahide.

Nicki Minaj's New Boyfriend Gets Her Name Tattooed on His Neck



Nicki Minaj's new boyfriend is proving his loyalty to the rapper in a big way.

Kenneth Petty is now sporting a large tattoo of Nicki's name on his neck and Nicki couldn't be happier. She revealed the new ink, which happens to be his first, in a video shared to her Instagram on Friday night.

In the video of the pair, Minaj asks, "Did your tat hurt?"

He replies, "Nah." Nicki then casually fixes her hair as she stares into the camera.

The rapper, née Onika Tonya Maraj, captioned the close-up of the tattoo, "Did ya tat hurt zaddy? his first tat—frontin like it didn't sting"

The couple's relationship appears to be moving at a fast pace since they only recently went public with their romance. Nicki revealed her new beau to her 96.6 million Instagram followers on Instagram on Dec. 10, when she shared a PDA-filled pic of the pair.



OUT AND ABOUT! Fresh faced beauty Selena Gomez is seen looking comfortable during a day out in L.A.

Dangal, Maacher Jhol to be screened at India-China Film Festival



Bollywood star Amir Khan's 'Dangal', Bengali film 'Maacher Jhol' and Chinese movie 'CZ12' will be among seven films that will be screened at the India-China Film Festival being organised here from Saturday.

In order to strengthen people-to-people connect and deepen cultural understanding between the two countries, the India-China Film Festival will be organised during the first India-China High Level Mechanism on Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges from December 22-24. The three-day festival will be

organised at the Siri Fort Auditorium by the Directorate of Film Festivals, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

A total of seven films -- four Chinese and three Indian films -- will be screened during the festival, an official statement said.

The opening film of the festival will be 'CZ12' also known as 'Chinese Zodiac'.

The list of Indian films to be screened were 'Dangal' (Hindi), 'Maacher Jhol' (Bengali) and 'Ventilator' (Marathi). All the films will carry English subtitles.

ARIES: Toss another Yule log on the fire. Cozytime starts NOW as the moon nestles into Cancer and warms your domestic zone all weekend. On Saturday, la luna will be full, which could highlight issues that need to be sorted out with your family, biological or chosen. Don't wait to deal until you're gathered for the holidays next week. But avoid having conversations when you're feeling prickly or sensitive.

TAURUS: It's "friend appreciation" weekend as the Cancer moon beams into your social sector. Bull. Saturday's full moon could illuminate one member of the Taurus tribe who has gone above and beyond in 2018. How can you thank this special soul: a curated gift, an invite to join your family under the tree next week, a special brunch, your treat? Since this lunar lift highlights neighborhood activities, consider shopping local for any last-minute items on your list. If you have your hands full with holiday prep, there's no need to spiral into a stress meltdown.

GEMINI: Visions of cashmere throws and over-the-knee boots may be danc-

ing through your head this weekend as the Cancer moon lounges in your decadent second house. But this lunar lift is as sensual as it is sensible, so when la luna is full-on Saturday, give your books a thorough look. Before you race off on that eleventh-hour gift-shopping spree—or blow a paycheck on an outfit for NYE—get clear about what and who you owe.

CANCER: This weekend, you get to play Santa...to yourself! With the moon in Cancer jingling in your house of self-love, extend the giving spirit to your own life. As the zodiac's nurturer, you'd hand someone the reindeer sweater off your back. But you don't have to shiver in the cold to be generous. Saturday's full moon helps you gracefully bow out of obligations that don't feed your soul.

LEO: What do you want to send UP the chimney and out of your life, Leo? Saturday's full moon in Cancer illuminates your twelfth house, emphasizing closure and healing. Saying goodbye to something you've outgrown could be the gift that keeps on giving—especially if you've

been pouring energy into someone who has proven to be a bottomless pit of need. 'Tis the season to give to the needy, not the greedy! La lune lingers on in Cancer through Sunday, and thanks to a boost from visual Venus and soulful Neptune, you could literally clean house. Burn the sage wand and remove any objects that have a negative charge. While you're at it, how about creating an area for journaling and meditation?

VIRGO: Even as you're hanging the last ornaments on the Christmas tree, you may be struck by flashes of genius throughout the weekend as the moon sets off sparks in Cancer and your innovative eleventh house. On Saturday, la luna will be full, which could inspire you to play social director for the upcoming festivities. While the holiday menu may be locked and loaded, how about the accompanying entertainment?

LIBRA: You don't have to wait until Monday to revel in the joy of seasonal customs. With the Cancer moon working its magic in your traditional tenth house all

weekend, you're all about bonding with your brood—and providing a warm and comfortable atmosphere for your inner circle. But wait, Libra, are you behind schedule on things like cooking, gift-wrapping and setting up your place for guests?

SCORPIO: Forget cuddling on the couch or staring at snowdrifts all weekend. Beeline to your laptop and scour for supersaver fares and standby flights! On Saturday, the year's only full moon in Cancer cranks up your wanderlust. Who knows? You could be ringing in 2019 from a tropical resort—or flying there tomorrow. Let spontaneity be your guide, even while close to home.

SAGITTARIUS: On, Vixen! With the Cancer moon in your erotic eighth house all weekend—and blossoming into a full moon on Saturday—you're the sultriest reindeer of all. Spend some one-on-one time with the person who makes your heart beat at a supersonic rate. Don't know anyone who fits that category? You could meet them in the two weeks to follow, so start right-swiping...selectively.

CAPRICORN: How about a little unstructured playtime, Capricorn? You probably can't scrap your ENTIRE itinerary to be spontaneous, but note: The moon will be hovering in Cancer and your decadent and romantic seventh house all weekend. Some good old-fashioned fun with your favorite plus-one will keep you in bright spirits as you power through the last bits of present-shopping, cooking, decorating or whatever else is on your to-do list!

AQUARIUS: Step away from the gingerbread house and bundle up for a stroll through the snowdrifts. Saturday's full moon in Cancer activates your sixth house of healthy living. Denying yourself decadence simply won't work at this time of year.

PISCES: Cupid's riding shotgun to Santa all weekend long, so open up the chimney AND your heart. The loving feelings start flowing in on Saturday as the full moon in Cancer electrifies your festive, flamboyant fifth house. Don a piece from the "glam apparel" category and sneak away for a pre-holiday soiree or fancy cocktails with friends (or a date)!