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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Budget session of Parliament may start from Jan 31

NEW DELHI, JAN 3 (PTI): The government is contemplating convening the Budget session of Parliament from January 31 and the Union budget is likely to be presented on February 1, sources said.

The final dates will be notified by the government after the Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs (CCPA) recommends the dates for the session. A meeting of the CCPA, which is headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, is likely to be held soon and the recommendations will be made thereafter.

The budget session will start with President Ram Nath Kovind's address to the joint sitting of Parliament and the Economic Survey is likely to be presented on the same day, the sources added.

The session is likely to continue till April, they said.

The budget session generally has a break of about a month during which the department related standing committees discuss the demand for grants.

B'desh nationals returning after NRC in Assam: BSF

SHILLONG, JAN 3 (PTI): The Border Security Force on Friday said that some Bangladesh nationals who had entered India are crossing over to their country following the NRC exercise in Assam.

An improving economic scenario in Bangladesh was also a reason for the return of its nationals from India, BSF Inspector General of Meghalaya frontier, Kuldeep Saini said.

There are fears among people in certain north eastern states that Bangladesh nationals could enter India following the enactment of Citizenship Amendment Bill, which assures citizenship to non-Muslims of that country.

The input that we are getting is the people from Bangladesh who had illegally crossed over to Bangladesh and were apprehended there, he said.

There are inputs that such movements have taken place in the past few months. We have also seen Bangladesh media reports quoting the director general of Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) on these movements, Saini said.

Elaborating, the BSF IG said that it was possible that Bangladeshis living in other parts of India are returning through

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NAMPRIKDANG NAMSOONG FESTIVAL

Despite election loss, have not abandoned Dzongu: CM

WANGCHUK BHUTIA DZONGU, 03 JAN: "Despite losing the election from Dzongu constituency, we have not abandoned Dzongu," said Chief Minister, PS Tamang while addressing the function at Namprikdang Namsoong festival in Dzongu today.

The people of Dzongu should not hesitate to ask and share their problems with the government, he added. He further added that the SKM party had included the "Care Dzongu Project" in their manifesto in the year 2014 for the development of Dzongu. The Dzongu is rich in culture and traditions and urged the young generation to work towards preserving it, he stated.

"I have already told the department that there should be extra five seats in CM's meritorious



scholarship scheme for Dzongu," he said.

He also announced that the 4 km road construction from Passing-

dang to Kayem in Upper Dzongu will be tendered within this month. The CM also announced the construction of foot sus-

pension bridge at Mantam Lake.

The CM today inaugurated the model village at Rhinghim in Mangan,

North Sikkim on his way to the Namprikdang Namsoong festival.

Delivering the welcome speech, president Nam-

prikdang Namsoong Celebration Committee, Nezing Lepcha underlined the importance of Namprikdang Namsoong festival.

In-charge Dzongu constituency, Chungkipo Lepcha highlighted the burning issues of Dzongu in terms of road connectivity.

The function was also addressed by IPR cum Agriculture Minister, Lok Nath Sharma.

Likewise, the patron-in-chief cum Minister Roads & Bridges Dept expressed his gratitude to the Chief Minister for attending the function for the people of Dzongu. He also added that the SKM government will undertake major development works in North Sikkim.

Also in the function, the celebration committee felicitated Padma Shri awardee, Sonam Tshering Lepcha and Dichen Ongmu Lepcha from Dzongu in sports. The CM also released the book written by Sonam Wangchuk Lepcha of Dzongu.

Cong to bring resolution against CAA implementation in Assam: Tarun Gogoi

GUWAHATI, JAN 3 (PTI): Former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on Friday said the Congress will bring a resolution during the special one-day session of the Assam Legislative Assembly on January 13 to ensure that the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is not implemented in the state.

The resolution will make a plea to ensure that the Assam Accord is not violated or diluted in any way by the CAA which should not be implemented in the state, Gogoi told reporters here.

"The Assam Accord must be implemented in letter and spirit and should not be diluted in any way. The CAA has violated the Accord and the Preamble of our Constitution, leading to widespread agitations across the country", he said.

The stir demanding CAA's withdrawal is not confined to Assam alone but even in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi constituency where Section 144 has been imposed, Gogoi said.

The special session of the state assembly has been called on January 13 for constitutional ratification of the extension of reservations for scheduled tribes and castes.

"There is no dispute on this ratification and we support it.

"If the ruling BJP brings the resolution against the implementation of CAA, we will support it but if they do not, then we will place it in the house", Gogoi, who is fourth term MLA, said.

Assam is passing through a critical period and this issue must be discussed in the house,

the former cm said.

Protests against the CAA in Assam is by all sections of people and has been democratic so far but the government led by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has adopted repressive measures to curb it, he said.

Congress members and other agitators are being put behind the bars with KMSS leader Akhil Gogoi arrested, handcuffed and the way he was treated as a criminal made the Assam Human Rights Commission take cognisance of it, he added.

The BJP has adopted a "double standard" on the foreigners' issue but "we are very clear that anyone who has come after March 24, 1971 should be detected and deported and this means even those who have come during our tenure".

The BJP accuses the Congress of doing vote bank politics on the issue but "when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was Prime Minister and I was the Chief Minister, they wanted to issue work permits to the illegal foreigners", he said.

"The BJP then wanted to give permits to both Hindus and Muslims but now they want to give it only to the Hindus", Gogoi added.

He accused the chief minister of betraying people of the state who had voted for him with love and trust, but now he does not listen to the voice of the people.

"He is the greatest betrayer. He was once given the title of 'Jatiya Nayak' (Peoples' Hero) but now he is considered as 'Jatiya Shatru' (Peoples' enemy)", the three time former chief minister said.

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Agriculture department to develop model villages in North Sikkim



MANGAN, 03 JAN (IPR): Department of Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim, adopted Ringhim, Nampatam, Malling ward under Ringhim Nampatam GPU and Pakshep ward under Singhik Sentam GPU,

as Model Villages in the North District.

Chief Minister of Sikkim, PS Tamang inaugurated the newly adopted Model Village in the presence of the Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture and AH&VS, Lok Nath Sharma, Minister-cum-Area MLA, Samdup Lepcha.

The inaugural ceremony also had the presence of the Cabinet Ministers including Arun Upreti, Sanjit Kharel, Karma Loday Bhutia, MN Sherpa, Bhim Hang Limboo, MLA Rhenock, Bishnu Kumar Khatiwara, MP (Lok Sabha), Indra Hang Subba, Political Secretary

to CM, Jacob Khaling, Pr Secretary, Agriculture and Horticulture Dept, R Telang, Secretary Horticulture, MT Sherpa, Secretary Agriculture, Rinzing C Bhutia, Secretary AH&VS, SB Subba, DC/N, Sr SP/N departmental officials and others.

'Crazy idea' fetches Stefan Hell the Nobel Prize

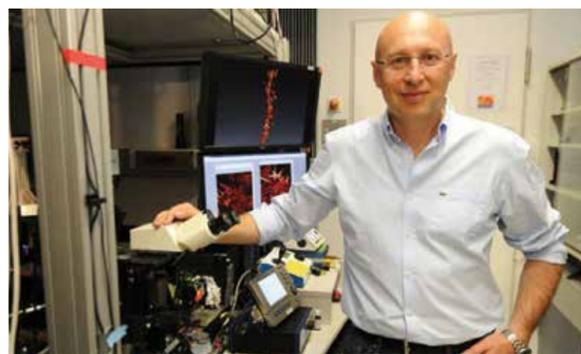
BENGALURU, JAN 3 (PTI): What German physicist Stefan Hell initially thought was a crazy idea of working on breaking the diffraction barrier in microscopy later fetched him the Nobel Prize in 2014.

The Nobel laureates work is significant as it could prove significant in finding remedies to incurable diseases like cancer and neuro-degenerative diseases.

At the 107th Indian Science Congress here on Friday, the German physicist shared his experience "Throughout the 20th century, scientists believed there is no way to get the highest spatial resolution that only was released," Hell told the audience.

"...But now, the development of this microscopy, which I'm responsible for, showed that this is not true.

You can go beyond that. You can have a higher spatial resolution, you can clearly see that



here there are filaments of resolve that are not resolved in a normal mode."

The microscopy he developed is significant as it has the ability to peep deep into the cells to show how they function.

He said it would enable one learn how cells work even at a fundamental level.

"And you don't forget every

disease no matter what it is.. infection, cancer, whatever, neuro-degenerative disease. In the end, it's a malfunctioning of the cell".

Once it is understood how cells work and how the proteins are arranged inside it and what they do, it would become easy to understand they malfunction, the scientist said.

"And I believe that over the

Sikkim shivers

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 JAN:

Weather today was uncomfortably cold all across Sikkim with Gangtok experiencing minimum 6.6 degree Celsius and maximum of 11.2 degree Celsius according to the Met Department.

Today's weather forecast for Tsomgo, put minimum temperature at -5 degree Celsius and maximum at 1 degree Celsius.

At Hanuman Tok, the Met Department's forecast said temperatures would hit a low of 3 degree Celsius and high of 9 degree Celsius.

The next few days will remain cold with temperatures expected to further drop on Saturday. Weather warning of hailstorm, thunderstorm and snowfall in few places has been issued by the Met Department.

coming years it will help us tremendously to understand diseases or to find remedies or to counteract them," Hell told the gathering. Giving an interesting anecdote, the Nobel laureate said he hit upon the idea while working for a startup company that had developed light microscopes for the inspection of computer chips.

His job was to measure the size of the computer chips.

Anxious to pursue fundamental physics, Hell ended up scanning the chips with microscopes of the 19th century, frustrating him, as he felt he was wasting his time.

Before he could slip into depression, it occurred to him that there could be some fundamental problem left in this in microscopy, such as breaking the diffraction barrier.

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Will have safeguards: Union minister on domicile issue

JAMMU, JAN 3 (PTI): Union minister Jitendra Singh hit out at those raking up the issue of safeguards as regards domicile in Jammu and Kashmir on Friday and said the region would have safeguards that were appropriate for a Union territory.

The Congress sought adequate legal and constitutional safeguards to protect the rights of the locals to land and jobs.

The National Conference (NC) also urged the government to clear the ambiguities regarding jobs, land and delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir. "We will have safeguards, which are appropriate for a Union territory," Singh said, addressing the officers of the Jammu and Kashmir government at a three-day training programme on the general fund rules here.

"Who told you that domicile and such provisions will not be safeguarded? Those raising such issues should be questioned as to why they denied people provisions (of the Centre for the benefit of people) for the last 72 years. They should first answer that," he added.

On delimitation, the minister said, "We will have delimitation also. Everything will happen. When it happens, do not resort to complaining. Those making a hue and cry will have problems that their constituencies have been reserved."

He said the land prices had gone up by 40 per cent in Jammu.

Referring to an advertisement issued by the high court, opening recruitment to aspirants from all over the country, Singh said within 24 hours, it was withdrawn.

"Nobody stuck to prestige. Could it have been possible during the days of the previous governments? We realised that this was anomalous unless rules were framed," he said.

NC's provincial president Devender Singh Rana urged the government to clear the ambiguities as regards jobs, land and delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Amidst a growing demand for domicile certificates and job protection following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, the Jammu and Kashmir unit of the ruling BJP assured people last month that their rights would be protected to the maximum permissible limits under the Constitution.

The government was already working to protect the rights of the locals as regards land ownership, industries and jobs, state BJP's chief spokesperson Sunil Sethi said in a statement here.

In an apparent reference to the Jammu and Kashmir National Panthers Party (JKNPP) and the Congress, who are demanding domicile certificates and job protection, he alleged that left without any logical stand and political issues, these parties were trying to incite people by making false and irresponsible statements.

HCPC celebrates Golden Jubilee

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 JAN:

Himalayan Crusade Pentecostal Church (HCPC) of Jorethang organized its Golden Jubilee Celebration cum the Convention of 21st Sikkim Himalayan Crusade Pentecostal Church (SHCPC) here at Jorethang Senior Secondary School Ground under Zoom-Salghari constituency in South Sikkim, a press release informs.

During the program, Gangtok MLA, YT Lepcha was present as the chief guest and was accompanied by people from Nepal, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and entire Sikkim.

While addressing the program, the chief guest, YT Lepcha thanked the organising committee for



inviting him as the chief guest. He congratulated HCPC for completing 50 years with dedication.

The State Government is always supportive and treats all commu-

nities equally, he added.

It may be mentioned here that HCPC Jorethang Dara Gaon was established in 1970 by Rev Dr NB Rai.

Speaking at the func-

tion, Rev Dr NB Rai talked about the 50 year journey under his stewardship and acknowledged the contributors of Church Building.

Later, the souvenir

of HCPC was released by the chief guest, YT Lepcha.

During the program, HCPC also felicitated all the Pastors from different Churches.



Satpalji Maharaj visits Samdruptse

NAMCHI, 03 JAN (IPR): On the second day of his visit, Minister for Tourism, Irrigation, Minor Irrigation, Culture, Watershed Management and Indo-Nepal Uttarakhand River Projects, Government of Uttarakhand, Satpalji Maharaj along with his fami-

ly visited Samdruptse at Namchi and offered prayers.

Thereafter, the dignitaries proceeded towards Tathagata Tsal at Ravangla wherein they offered their obeisance and later on departed for West Sikkim.

Women are walking alongside men today: Gulzar



MUMBAI, JAN 3 (PTI): Women have come a long way from being in the backdrop in the industry, believes noted lyricist-writer Gulzar, who is full of admiration for daughter Meghna Gulzar for taking on challenging stories through her movies.

Gulzar, who has written the lyrics for the songs in his daughter's new film "Chhapaak", said the three women at the centre -- Deepika Padukone, Meghna and Laxmi Agarwal -- have something to say to the society through the movie, which deals with the story of an acid attack survivor.

"We should admire these girls. It is a movement in society and it is good that producers are involved in it, that they want to say this thing to society, to people. (It is all) thanks to Laxmi as this has come out from her, it is necessary," Gulzar told reporters here

at the song launch of "Chhappak" Shankar, Ehsaan and Loy have composed songs for "Chhapaak".

"You (Meghna) have never given me easy work and you have also not done any easy work. We had to put our heads together (for music). The way 'Chhappak' has been used is perfect. It has a sound effect," he added.

Gulzar, who is also credited with directing some of the best middle-of-the-road movies such as "Izzat", "Mausam", "Aandhi" and "Lekin", said he would hardly see women in technical field earlier, something that has undergone a drastic change over the years.

"...we would hardly see women in technical field other than as a hair-dresser but today, we have them as performers, writers, directors. And main characters are being played by women. I think it is a big

progress," he said.

"Earlier heroines were used (just) in songs or as props but today that is not the case. We have come a long way. Today, they are leading and it's a good thing."

Gulzar said as the father of a daughter he does not agree with the notion that daughters need more taking care of than sons.

"Usually, people are more concerned about a daughter than a son. The way our society functions, it is said that sons are always able to take care of themselves but who will take care of and protect the daughters?"

"(But) today, daughters have come forward so much. I am happy that I don't have to take care of them rather they take care of me. They are walking alongside men in society."

"Chhapaak", also featuring Vikrant Massey, is set to be released on January 10.

TRAU FC host Punjab in I-League

Imphal, Jan 3 (PTI): Tiddim Road Athletic Union (TRAU) FC will host Punjab FC in the I-League at the Khuman Lumpak Stadium here on Saturday.

TRAU have had a tough I-League debut, struggling in the bottom of the table after four fixtures.

They registered their solitary point against Real Kashmir FC in their previous match, where the Tiddim Road outfit displayed great character to come back from a goal down to score twice in a space of four minutes, only to be denied all three points by a Mason Robertson equaliser.

They displayed the same resilience against East Bengal, where they almost earned a point away from home at the Kalyani, but Marti Crespi scored an 89th minute winner to spoil their party.

If those performances are anything to go by, TRAU FC do have some upsets in store in their arsenal and going by their recent resurgence, Punjab FC could be in for a tricky away outing in Imphal.

Captain of TRAU FC, Princewill Emeka spoke about the previous results and mindset in the team. "It's a difficult sit-

uation for us, and we all know that. We've set out lot of plans to overturn the situation but only victory can do that for us. We need nothing less than three points in our upcoming games."

Punjab FC struggled away from home in their last match against Aizawl FC but were awarded a penalty deep into stoppage time, which was converted by Sergio Barboza junior.

The Ludhiana outfit, however, still remain one of the contenders for the coveted crown, and sit in second place, with goal difference separating them from the summit.

Punjab FC head coach Yan Law Punjab FC has already earned his reputation in the league with the sublime win against Chennai City FC and by using Dipanda Dicka in a completely new role.

"The boys have been doing well so far and we are in good momentum now. Second in the table is very good considering the bad start to our campaign.

"We are scoring many goals and also conceding unnecessary ones. We are working on strengthening our team defending so that it does not cost us valuable points as we are surely title contender.

Madras HC junks plea to remove Governor

CHENNAI, DEC 3 (PTI): The Madras High Court on Friday dismissed a plea seeking a direction to the Union government to remove Banwarilal Purohit as Tamil Nadu Governor for not passing orders on the Council of Ministers' advice to release the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. A Division Bench, comprising Justices M Sathyanarayanan and R Hemalatha dismissed the petition of president of Kanchipuram District Thanthai Periyar Dravidar Kazhagam, M Kannadasan.

The petitioner submitted that the Council of Ministers had passed a resolution on September 9, 2018, recommending and advising the Tamil Nadu Governor to order premature release of seven convicts.

Despite a lapse of nearly 15 months, the Governor was yet to take a call and therefore such 'inaction' amounted to violation of provisions of the Constitution, Kannadasan said He said he

had also submitted a representation to the union government on November 22, 2019, pointing out the 'inaction' on the part of the Governor and prayed for appropriate action to remove him and it was acknowledged on December 3, 2019.

The petitioner, alleging inaction on the part of Union government, filed the above writ petition. Home Ministry Officials had said the Governor has no power to release the seven convicts as recommended by the state government and would have to consult the Centre as per law.

Since the probe into the case was done by CBI, the Governor would have to consult the central government before taking a decision to remit or commute the sentence of the seven convicts, they had said. The AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu had recommended to the Governor to release the convicts, a move hailed by most political parties in the state.

Damage Control: SAI says it will take care of archers' boarding and lodging

NEW DELHI, JAN 3 (PTI): The Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Friday said it will arrange for the boarding and lodging of top recurve archers of the country who are currently in Pune to compete at the selection trials for the Tokyo Olympic Qualifiers starting on Saturday.

"The government will provide support as has been done for the national campers for the boarding and lodging of the men's and women's recurve archers competing at the trials in the Army Sports Institute (ASI)," the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said in a statement.

The Sports Ministry's decision came after some reports claimed that Olympians like Deepika Kumari, Bombayla Devi and Atanu Das were left to fend for themselves after arriving in Pune for the selection trials.

As per the reports, the

archers were left to arrange for their own boarding and lodging after arriving in Pune since SAI has made no such arrangement in the absence of a suspended Archery Association of India. Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju later took to his official twitter handle to confirm that the archers' boarding and lodging will be taken care of by the government.

"No athlete attending a national camp or trail will have to pay for boarding and lodging. The government will provide support, like in previous cases, to the men's and women's recurve archers competing at the trials in the Army Sports Institute (ASI), Pune, that starts on Jan 4," Rijiju wrote.

Deepika, Bombayla, Atanu and 21 other archers have been exempted from stage 2 trials as they were part of the stage 1 open trials held in August last year.

Cong to bring...

Responding to a query on Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Congress leader said, "forget him. He moves to whoever is in power. He is a professional singer who sings to the tune of those in power".

"The BJP's arrogance will bring them down. They are undemocratic and are determined to destroy the unity and integrity of the nation", he added.

Gogoi accused the BJP government of failing to protect the language and culture of the state, and added the country was in a mess- both politically and economically.

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee President Ripun Bora and Congress Legislature Party leader Debabrata Saikia were also present on the occasion.

B'desh...

Assam and Tripura due to their ethnic similarity with the people of the two states.

No official report has, however, been received from BGB on the issue so far and the reports "may not be 100 per cent true", he said.

Saini said that the economy of Bangladesh is growing at a good pace so infiltration of people of that country has gone down.

BSF Meghalaya frontier guards the longest stretch of Indo-Bangla border of 443 km. There are 125 border out posts in this stretch, which runs through diverse terrain. About 100 km of the border remains unfenced.

Saini said BSF has not received any instruction from the union home ministry or the external affairs ministry in respect of the CAA.

There has also been no change in the general rule of guarding the border following the coming into being of the Act, he added.

Crazy idea...

"I realised that breaking the diffraction barrier, that would be worthwhile working on. This is how I got to think about the problem, the Nobel laureate said.

He said working on breaking the diffraction barrier was a 'crazy idea' because textbooks said it never works.

To the audience of young students and budding scientists, Stefan Hell said people often ask him what the key to success is, to which his reply has always been: "Aim high, stay grounded."

And if you are lucky and have a good idea, you might even hit the bulls eye.

~ SummitTIMES ~
CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

Roadside plots for sale at Adampool, Ranipool-Rumtek highway.

For details contact: 9083826462

FLAT FOR RENT/LEASE

Fully furnished 3BHK flat available for rent/lease at Church Road near DPH. Roadside and five minutes walking distance from MG Marg.

For more details: 9083826462 /9832556698

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College. Flat Land no cutting required. Price 30 Lakhs (negotiable).

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

Through Her Lens: Call for submissions by women photographers

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 03 JAN:

Women from Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills are invited to submit images for a photography exhibition in Sikkim showcasing works solely by women artists. Titled, Through Her Lens, the exhibition is in collaboration with Zubaan Publishers Pvt Ltd., supported by Sasakawa Peace Foundation, under the Fragrance of Peace Project.

Selected works will be presented at a public exhibition in Namchi between 09 and 16 Feb, 2020, a press release informs.

Women currently residing and working in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills for the past two years are invited to respond to the open call by 20 Jan, 2020. Both aspiring and professional photographers are eligible to apply.

"We encourage amateur practitioners of all ages to participate and contribute to this learning and networking opportunity," the release states.

Submissions can be made on either of the two themes: 'memory' and 'migration'. The interpretation of the themes is entirely up to the photographer. There is no limitation on genre and images in any category including, but not restricted to, portrait, self-portrait, landscape, conceptual, studio, street etc. will be accepted by the jury.

In a wider bid to support creative and critical engagement in the region, Through Her Lens aims to explore new modes of participation with the audience by exhibiting in communal spaces around Namchi. This will also facilitate the local community to actively engage with the photographs and the artists.

The photography exhibition is part of a series of programmes to be held at Namchi in February 2020. Through various modes of discourse, we aim at understanding the lack of visibility of women photographers in the region (Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills)

and develop viable strategies to support and facilitate spaces and networks for women interested in pursuing a career in photography. A team of Zubaan research grantees

in India, Hindu BusinessLine, Tata Cliq etc. She has also worked on series of films with Mixed Media Productions, Solidarity Foundation and many more.

Zubaan Publishers Pvt Ltd is an independent publishing house based in New Delhi and has been a participant and chronicler of the women's movement in India and South Asia. It was set up in 2003 as an imprint of India's first feminist publishing house, Kali for Women, and continues to publish books on, for, by and about women in South Asia. For more information, please visit www.zubaanbooks.com.

Fragrance of Peace is a collaborative project between the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) and Zubaan Publishers Pvt. Ltd. This project started with the objective to build networks and nurture solidarity through dialogue, literary exchange and peace-building within the Northeast region. It also aims to build a platform for artists, writers, journalists and researchers from the region to discuss, ideate and work on their regional specificities, and support these conversations by participating in literature festivals, book fairs and cultural events in different locations across India. For more information, please visit www.zubaanprojects.org/projects/fragrance-of-peace/.

Through Her Lens is curated by Mridu Rai, curator and Anushya Pradhan, assistant curator.

Submission details:

- Email submission to: herlens.exhibition@gmail.com
- Deadline: 20 January 2020
- Up to five images allowed
- Send a short description of the images
- Open for women currently residing / working in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills for the past two years
- Any genre of photography will be accepted

For more information: throughherlens.photo.blog.



will also be present during these events and we hope to have intensive discussions to see how photography and research can be used to develop new mediums of storytelling.

The jurors for Through Her Lens are Zubaan, photographer, Prashansa Gurung and curator Mridu Rai.

Prashansa Gurung is a Mumbai based storyteller who uses multiple mediums like writing, photography and films for her narratives, which primarily focus on social themes. She is the founder of Pictures Against Prejudice, an Indian queer art exhibition and has worked as a photographer at TimeOut Mumbai, Children's Film Society

Congress holds protests against CAA, NRC in Bengaluru



BENGALURU, JAN 3 (PTI): Protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act(CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) continued here on Friday with hundreds joining the agitation called by Congress legislator and former Minister B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan.

Though the protest date coincided with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's presence in the city to inaugurate the 107th session of the Indian Science Congress, it was held only at around 2 pm, hours after Modi departed for New Delhi. Several Muslim leaders had taken part in the protest rally held at Chamrajpete here, that was also attended by freedom fighter H S Dorewamy.

Addressing the gathering 102-year-old Dorewamy said, You are not Muslim, Im not a Hindu,

we all are Indians, we are fighting today as Indians. Zameer Ahmed Khan, in his speech, said, "Muslims of the country had chosen to live and die in India during partition, as this is our motherland."

Urging the Prime Minister to withdraw CAA and pointing out to the deaths during the protests in Uttar Pradesh and Mangaluru, he said, you (Modi) speak about Pakistan, we have nothing to do with Pakistan. You are Prime Minister of India Muslims of India are worried, you have to address our worries."

Questioning the need to prove citizenship, Khan said, Im four-time MLA and two-time Minister, it took me four months to get my certificates. I want to ask Prime Minister and Amit Shah, do you'll have the certificates of your father and

grandfather. Get your certificates first, then we will prove our certificates."

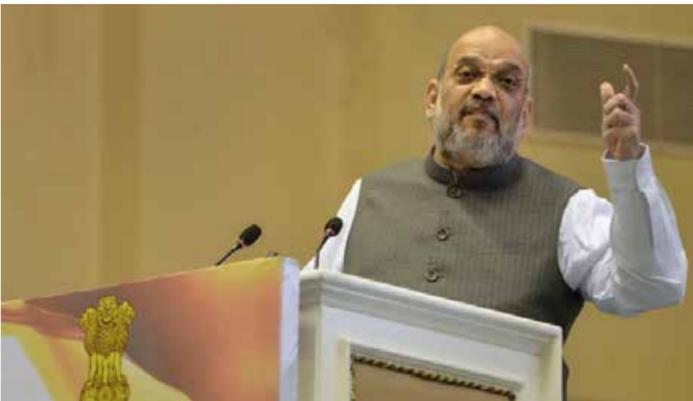
He further said there was no need for Muslims to worry as there is judiciary and courts for their protection.

"Organised a Protest against the Unconstitutional Act of NRC/ CAA/ NPR, against the Central BJP Government at Mompura Edgah (Mysore Road Edgah) in Chamrajpet Constituency Very Grateful to All Masjid Committee Members, Muslim & Dalith Leaders and other Organisations, Khan later tweeted.

Police had made elaborate arrangements to ensure no untoward incidents take place during the protests.

The protests had caused traffic chaos around the Chamrajpet and Mysore Road area.

Don't impose divisive agenda on country: Cong to Shah



NEW DELHI, JAN 3 (PTI): The Congress on Friday accused Home Minister Amit Shah of imposing a "conspiratorial and divisive agenda" on India and bringing the country to a 1947-like situation.

The Congress also told Shah that he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi continue to "abuse" opposition leaders even as NDA constituents and chief ministers of the ruling BJP are not accepting the amended Citizenship Act.

"Amit Shah ji. Modi ji and you have been made Prime Minister and Home Minister to work for the public welfare and generate livelihoods for them and not abuse opposition leaders like Rahul Gandhi.

"You have put the entire country in a situation like that in 1947 with your divisive and conspiratorial agenda...You should desist from slapping your conspiratorial and divisive agenda on the country," Congress's chief spokesperson Ran-

deep Surjewala said in a video posted on Twitter.

He alleged that NDA partners and BJP chief ministers are themselves not accepting the "divisive" CAA but Modi and Shah were "venting out their grouse" on the opposition by abusing them.

"Now your own partners and allies as also your chief minister of Assam Sabananda Sonowal have refused to accept and implement the divisive CAA. Why are you venting out your grouse on the opposition. You should first set your own house in order and then talk to the country and take on the opposition," the Congress leader said.

Tagging a news report in English about Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal not being ready to accept the CAA in his state, Surjewala tweeted in Hindi, "Your allies are not accepting the divisive CAA, your own chief ministers are not accepting the CAA. Should we send you a

Hindi translation".

Surjewala earlier dared Modi to dismiss the Assam chief minister from his own party for openly opposing the amended Citizenship Act and declare him an "anti-national" for doing so. "Mr Prime Minister, Stop fooling India! Your own CM is openly opposing CAA. Will you now declare him 'anti national'? I challenge you to dismiss him before criticising the opposition," he wrote on Twitter.

Sonowal gave a fresh twist to the debate over the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA), after he said in a tweet, "As a son of Assam, I will never settle foreigners in my state. This Sarbananda Sonowal will never allow this..."

The Congress has been attacking the BJP-led government over the CAA and its chief ministers have said they would not implement the new citizenship law in their states.

Winter coaching camp by Kumar Sporting



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 03 JAN:

Kumar Sporting, Sikkim A-Division Football Club, started 'winter coaching camp' for U-14 boys at Chongyek School ground. Man-

agement of the club and special guests were present during the kick-off of the coaching camp. Coach of the club, Sagar Rai, has been assigned as coach for the winter coaching camp.

VILLAGE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE
46-Barfung Jarong G.P.U.
South Sikkim- 737139
www.barfungjaronggu.com | barfungjaronggu@gmail.com | barfungjaronggu@gmail.com

NOTICE

This is to inform all that the nine days theater workshop cum acting course is going to be held at Gram Prashasan Kendra for age between 08-18 years old under CHILD FRIENDLY GPU from 4th to 12th January 2020.

Interested participants may apply for registration.

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM & CIVIL AVIATION
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
PARYATAN BHAWAN - TADONG
Phone No: 03592-232218, Fax No: 232216
Email: secy_tourism@yahoo.com

No. 940/DOT&CAV Dated: 18.1.2019

NOTICE

To
Mr. Kul Man Subba
R/o Timburong,
P.O. Timburong, West Sikkim.
You are hereby directed to pay the due rent arrears amounting to Rs.3,47,837/- (Rupees Three lakhs forty seven thousand eight hundred & thirty seven) only w.e.f April 2013 to October 2019 of Timburong Base Camp, West Sikkim.

The payment may be made in the office of the Additional Director, DOT&CAV, Pelling, West Sikkim within one month from the date of issue of this Notice, failing which appropriate action will be initiated against you.

Sd/-
Joint Secretary
DOT & CAV.

R.O. No. 314/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20 Dt. 03/01/2020

DATE: 03-01-2020

FIRST ROUND OF THE TOURNAMENT (SOUTH- WEST)
VENUES: NAMCHI SINGITHANG PLAYGROUND AND DENTAM PUBLIC PLAYGROUND

FIXTURE-II

Venue: Namchi Singithang Playground (South District Constituencies)

Tumin Lingee	6/1/2020; 1:30 PM	Burfung	6/1/2020; 11:30 AM
Melli	8/1/2020; 11:30 AM	Temi Namping	8/1/2020; 1:30 PM
Namchi Singithang	7/1/2020; 11:30 AM	Namthang Rateypani	7/1/2020; 1:30 PM
Rangang Yangang		Poklok Kamrang	

Venue: Dentam Public Playground (West District Constituencies)

Rinchenpong	6/1/2020; 11:30 AM	Gyalshing Bernyak	6/1/2020; 1:30 PM
Salghari Zoom	8/1/2020; 1:30 PM	Daramdin	8/1/2020 11:30 AM
Yoksam Tashiding	7/1/2020; 1:30 PM	Maneybong Dentam	7/1/2020; 11:30 AM
Yangthang		Soreng Chakung	

Note:

1. The first round matches will be played at Namchi Singithang and Dentam Public ground for South & West constituencies respectively.
2. The duration of the matches will be 35-10-35 minutes
3. Matches will be played as per FIFA Rules
4. Organizing committee reserve the right to reschedule the fixture (if required)
5. Every player should show their Voter ID Card at the time of Technical check up (if player is under 18 years than Aadhar Card)
6. Each Team should submit one constituency flag (6x4 feet) during registration.

HEALTH CARE, HUMAN SERVICES AND FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM, TASHILING SECRETARIAT
GANGTOK, SIKKIM - 737103.

Inviting Expression of Interest (EoI) For Health Insurance Policy Policy under proposed Su-Swastha Yojna for Government employees, Pensioners and their dependents.

Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, invites expression of interest (EoI) from registered private or public owned insurance companies incorporated under the Companies Act, in India and registered with the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India (IRDAI), for providing health insurance to Government employees, Pensioners and their dependents.

Interested companies may submit their EoI and the supporting documents in English, to the Principal Director I, Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, on or before 16/01/2020 (3:00 pm).

Purpose of the EoI is to solicit the views of insurance companies on the feasible coverage and package of services which could be provided. Based on the inputs received in the process. Request for Tender (RFT) will be issued inviting technical and financial bids for the scheme from EOI received companies. The scheme is proposed to be implemented from 1st April 2020.

Details of the scheme may be referred to in the website : sikkim.gov.in/tender.

Sd/-
Principal Secretary
Health and Family Welfare Department.

R.O. No. 312/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20 dt. 26.12.2019

Seize the Year

A New Year has begun, time for new resolutions

A New Year has begun and a very eventful year has closed. Year 2019 was special for Sikkim and apart from the obvious significance of the year in presenting a regime change, the year also experienced the highs of an election year and the lows of some bottom of the barrel politicking. Positive developments like the recognition secured for the State at the national and international levels continued with even the apparently negative events holding an optimistic feel to them. Unfortunately, the positive of Opposition bothering to put boots on the ground as against the previous routine of surviving via press releases has since given way to the Opposition not even bothering with press releases to stay relevant and the party in government already displaying the snootiness that power can infect with. The Opposition has not made any serious dents in the politics of things in Sikkim, but it is still early days into the present government and the Opposition has time at hand since the next assembly election is now an entire five-year cycle away. If they learn well, they might just make the democratic process that much more contesting in 2024, but given the hemorrhaging underway at present and the ennui that has set into the biggest Opposition camp does not have anyone holding their breath just yet. A test run will arrive soon when the panchayats get elected. How many parties make a play for it and who all make a concerted effort to woo the electorate will provide a good indication of how many are in the fray for the real rough and tumble of representative democracy and which "leaders" are just biding their time awaiting opportunities.

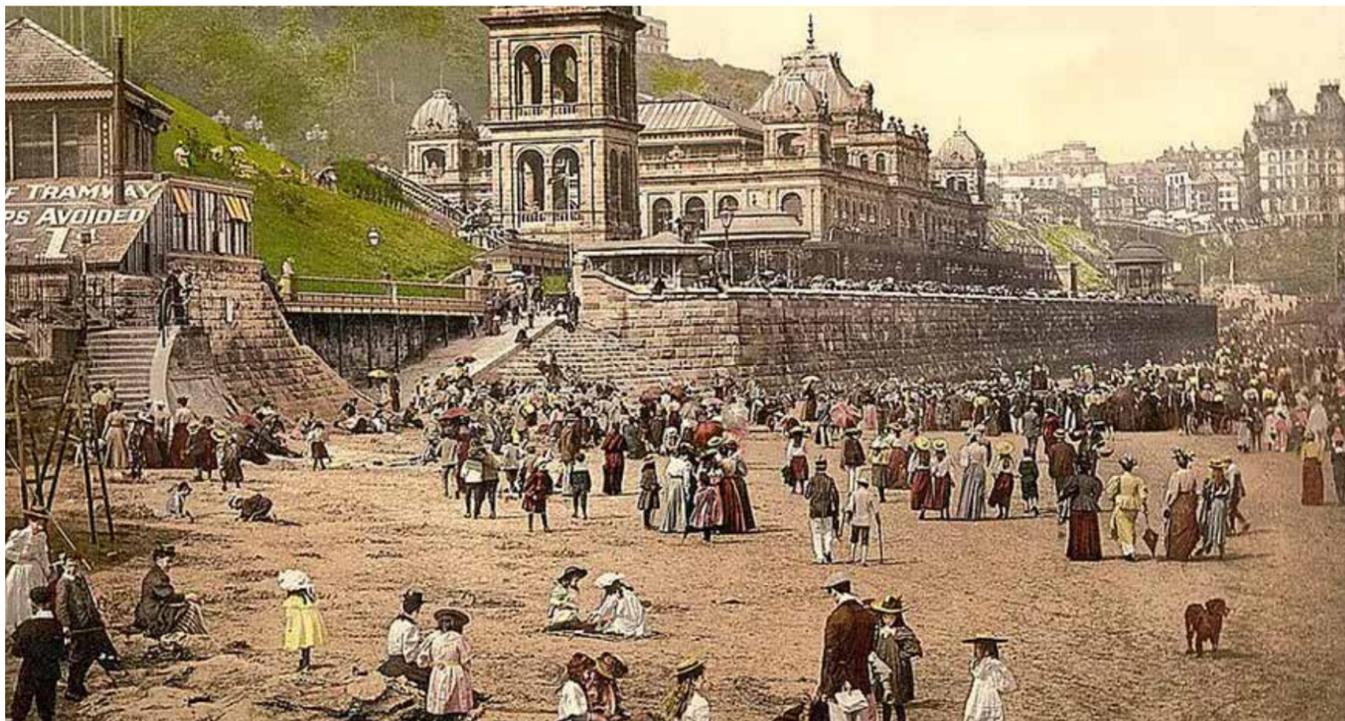
For the ruling Morcha, it has not been rattled by even Opposition rhetoric thus far, but should learn from how the Government in Delhi is being embarrassed by the people, to realize that power and people's endorsement are not the same and not always in sync. It should use the disarray in the Opposition camp to focus on what is important and use the absence of distractions to stay the course on some big ideas and communicating. The party in government might be young in official years, but its core team has been together in Opposition for nearly a decade and should leverage this trust and confidence to push through some real change and build on its cohesive core to take what might be politically risky positions but beneficial for Sikkim and the country in the long run. With the initial hiccups and apprehensions settled, now is also perhaps time for the party to give its office bearers a refresher course on the party and state's affairs.

In general, the past few years saw some substantial projects get rushed to inauguration even as some other stagnated in the wake of funds crunch and performance failures of departments and officers. Year 2019 has only just begun, and there is much that needs to be done and achieved. The new government has clarified that it will sustain the better interventions of the previous government and indications are that after years of running down the Organic Mission, it has come around to recognizing that this was always a good idea even though the implementation left a lot to be desired. The SKM Government could ensure the required course correction and hopefully it will do so by cleaning up the bureaucracy instead of dictating farmers and consumers as the babus had managed to convince the SDF Government to do. It is the executive arm that needs to have its knuckles rapped for Sikkim to secure its Organic potential and really, enough of this service-provider shallowness. How about some real policy-level intelligence? At the other end of the developmental spectrum are hydel projects. Hydel projects were never a pretty sight and with poor roads, dodgy engineering, fiscally imprudent banking and the 2011 earthquake, their fiscal robustness also came into question when deadlines were routinely missed and the gap between claims and delivery grew too wide to be explained away to "unforeseen" situations. Some of these projects, however, are now too close to being commissioned to be wished away, but future projects will face an uphill task, much to the delight to many in Sikkim. As for Organic Sikkim, the brand clearly carries value and huge potential, but one still awaits any real efforts at leveraging this status. Please bear in mind that the favourable brand-recall that Organic Sikkim enjoys at present will not hold for ever. Policy decisions in Sikkim have rarely lacked good intentions, but good intentions on their own are hardly ever sufficient. For these initiatives to be sustained and improved on this year, an honest appraisal will have to be undertaken. The beginning of the year is the best time for such an exercise because the budgets are almost spent, making new projects difficult to bankroll but the optimism is still high in the air to actually make it possible to accept mistakes and take criticism in the right spirit.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence.

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com



History of the two-day weekend offers lessons for today's calls for a four-day week

BRAD BEAVEN
theconversation.com

The idea of reducing the working week from an average of five days to four is gaining traction around the world. Businesses and politicians have been considering a switch to fewer, but more productive hours spent working. But the idea has also been derided.

As a historian of leisure, it strikes me that there are a number of parallels between debates today and those that took place in the 19th century when the weekend as we now know it was first introduced. Having Saturdays as well as Sundays off work is actually a relatively modern phenomenon.

Throughout the 19th century, government legislation reduced working hours in factories and prescribed regular breaks. But the weekend did not simply arise from government legislation – it was shaped by a combination of campaigns. Some were led by half-day holiday movements, others by trade unions, commercial leisure companies and employers themselves. The formation of the weekend in Britain was a piecemeal and uneven affair that had to overcome unofficial popular traditions that punctured the working week during the 19th century.

'SAINT MONDAY'

For much of the 19th century, for example, skilled artisan workers adopted their own work rhythms as they often hired workshop space and were responsible for producing items for their buyer on a weekly basis. This gave rise to the practice of "Saint Monday". While Saint Monday mimicked the religious Saint Day holidays, it was in fact an entirely secular practice, instigated by workers to provide an extended break in the working week.

They worked intensively from Tuesday to finish products by Saturday night so they could then enjoy Sunday as a legitimate holiday but also took Mondays off to recover from Saturday night and the previous day's excesses. By the mid-19th century, Saint Monday was a popular institution in British society. So much so that commercial leisure – like music halls, theatres and singing saloons – staged events on this unofficial holiday.

Workers in the early factory system also adopt-

ed the tradition of Saint Monday, despite manufacturers consistently opposing the practice, as it hurt productivity. But workers had a religious devotion to the unofficial holiday, which made it difficult for masters to break the habit. It continued to thrive into the 1870s and 1880s.

Nonetheless, religious bodies and trade unions were keen to instil a more formal holiday in the working week. Religious bodies argued that a break on Saturday would improve working class "mental and moral culture". For example, in 1862 Reverend George Heaviside captured the optimistic tone of many religious leaders when, writing in the Coventry Herald newspaper, he claimed a weekend would allow for a refreshed workforce and greater attendance at church on Sundays.

Trade unions, meanwhile, wanted to secure a more formalised break in the working week that did not rely on custom. Indeed, the creation of the weekend is still cited as a proud achievement in trade union history.

In 1842 a campaign group called the Early Closing Association was formed. It lobbied government to keep Saturday afternoon free for worker leisure in return for a full day's work on Monday. The association established branches in key manufacturing towns and its membership was drawn from local civic elites, manufacturers and the clergy. Employers were encouraged to establish half-day Saturdays as the Early Closing Association argued it would foster a sober and industrious workforce.

Trades unions and workers' temperance groups also saw the half-day Saturday as a vehicle to advance working class respectability. It was hoped they would shun drunkenness and brutal sports like cock fighting, which had traditionally been associated with Saint Monday.

For these campaigners, Saturday afternoon was singled out as the day in which the working classes could enjoy "rational recreation", a form of leisure designed to draw the worker from the public house and into elevating and educational pursuits. For example, in Birmingham during 1850s, the association wrote in the Daily News newspaper that Saturday afternoons would benefit men and women who could:

"Take a trip into the country, or those who take delight in gardening, or any other pursuit which requires daylight, could usefully employ their half Saturday, instead of working on the Sabbath; or they could employ their time in mental or physical improvements."

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

Across the country a burgeoning leisure industry saw the new half-day Saturday as a business opportunity. Train operators embraced the idea, charging reduced fares for day-trippers to the countryside on Saturday afternoons. With increasing numbers of employers adopting the half-day Saturday, theatres and music halls also switched their star entertainment from a Monday to Saturday afternoon.

Perhaps the most influential leisure activity to help forge the modern week was the decision to stage football matches on Saturday afternoon. The "Football Craze", as it was called, took off in the 1890s, just as the new working week was beginning to take shape. So Saturday afternoons became a very attractive holiday for workers, as it facilitated cheap excursions and new exciting forms of leisure.

The adoption of the modern weekend was neither swift nor uniform as, ultimately, the decision for a factory to adopt the half-day Saturday rested with the manufacturer. Campaigns for an established weekend had begun in the 1840s but it did not gain widespread adoption for another 50 years.

By the end of the 19th century, there was an irresistible pull towards marking out Saturday afternoon and Sunday as the weekend. While they had their different reasons, employers, religious groups, commercial leisure and workers all came to see Saturday afternoon as an advantageous break in the working week.

This laid the groundwork for the full 48-hour weekend as we now know it – although this was only established in the 1930s. Once again, it was embraced by employers who found that the full Saturday and Sunday break reduced absenteeism and improved efficiency.

[the writer is Professor of Social and Cultural History, University of Portsmouth]

The best way to ditch bad habits: what science can teach us

IAN HAMILTON & SALLY MARLOW
theconversation.com

It's a new year and many people are in the mood for making a fresh start. And that often means giving something up (cigarettes, alcohol, junk food). Unfortunately, the odds of sticking with new year resolutions are not good. Come February, 80% of people will have given up giving up. So what can we learn from the 20% who make it?

Some might just be lucky, but most – whether they realise it or not – will be using techniques based on scientific evidence. While you might feel you have little in common with people who overcome drug dependency, you can benefit from the techniques that have been shown to help this group.

THE TWO Ps

Perseverance underpins most stories of successful change, and it can take anywhere from six to 30 attempts to quit for those dependent on drugs to become abstinent. While these numbers might seem off putting, it's important to be realistic about the need to persevere. Incremental change is known to be superior to overly ambitious targets – ap-

pealing as they might be.

This leads to the second "p" – planning. Conventional wisdom suggests that planning improves the chances of success, but there is evidence that unplanned attempts to quit smoking can be just as successful. Good news for anyone embarking on an impromptu attempt to change.

So although spontaneous attempts can be successful for smokers, picking the right day to start changing other habits is likely to play a part. We know that motivation and energy fluctuate, so think about when you will have maximum levels of both. Starting well gives the initial encouragement needed to get to day two.

LEARN FROM LAPSING

Having a lapse shouldn't be viewed as a failure or used as an excuse to give up. It can be tempting to view change in a binary way – success or failure. Instead, view a lapse as an opportunity to gain insight, reflecting as honestly as possible on why the lapse happened and how this could be avoided or counteracted on the next attempt at change. Research has repeatedly shown us that these processes are crucial for changing ingrained habits, so much so that in the world of addiction, treatment is often

referred to as "relapse prevention", to acknowledge that treatment is as much about preventing the negative as it is accentuating the positive.

High levels of self-efficacy (a belief and confidence in personal ability) when trying to change behaviour predict ultimate success. Factors that increase self-efficacy include self-talk ("I can do this"), previous success at changing other behaviour or habits, and affirmations from others.

Cultural differences can influence how comfortable and skilled an affirmation is. The way Americans routinely affirm each other is in contrast to those in the UK who tend to be suspicious of affirmations.

Believing change is possible can be undermined by "anticipatory anxiety" – when a person expects and fears withdrawal symptoms when changing a habit, such as smoking. The anticipated discomfort is usually greater than the actual experience but can paralyse any attempt to test reality. Rather than focusing on what you are losing by giving up smoking (or alcohol, think of what you will gain (more money, better sleep)). A useful exercise to help assess personal benefits is the decision balance sheet.

Tell someone what you plan to do,

you won't want to let them or yourself down. Weight Watchers employ this type of social contract in some ways to encourage but also as a deterrent to relapse. Shame and guilt are powerful emotions that most people will try to avoid.

So when it comes to adopting a scientific approach to change, the evidence provides some helpful tips. Be prepared for several change attempts, don't be too ambitious, don't keep your change a secret and allow yourself to be complimented and encouraged.

Finally, today might be the right day to start. If you've only just decided, with motivation and energy on your side, your chances of ditching that bad habit are just as good as those who've spent weeks preparing. Making a change is relatively easy for most of us, maintaining that change is evidently a lot tougher. So while some might be lucky enough to make a change and stick to it, most of us will have to keep trying, the science suggests we'll get there in the end.

[Ian Hamilton is Associate Professor, Addiction and Mental Health, University of York; Sally Marlow is Addictions Researcher, King's College London]

Govt won't budge an inch on CAA: Amit Shah

JODHPUR(RA), JAN 3 (PTI): Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the government will not budge an inch on its decision to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act despite the opposition's misinformation campaign.

Launching an "awareness programme", he said the Congress was misleading Muslims over the Act and challenged party leader Rahul Gandhi to a discussion if he has read the law.

The BJP will take out 500 rallies across the country, beginning Saturday to reach out to three crore people, he said.

Shah, who is also the BJP president, said the party had to launch this programme because of the misinformation spread by the opposition parties on the amended law.

Let all these parties come together. The Bharatiya Janata Party is not going back an inch on the CAA, he said at the meeting held in Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's assembly constituency.

The home minister said it is shameful that the Congress is criticising the sacrifice of great sons of the country, like Veer Savarkar, for the sake of its vote bank.

The remark comes amid a row over the distribution of a booklet against the Hindutva icon at a camp held by Congress-affiliated Seva Dal in Madhya Pradesh. But Shah did not directly refer to it.

Opposition parties have criticised the



amendment that allows non-Muslims an easier path to citizenship if they came to India from three neighbouring countries before 2015 after facing religious persecution.

The law is not against the minorities," Shah said.

"There is no provision in the Citizenship Amendment Act to take anyone's citizenship away but it is a law to grant citizenship," he added.

"We have not kept out any religion. We are giving citizenship to minorities of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan whether they are Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi or Christian," he said.

He challenged Congress leader Rahul to a discussion on the law.

Rahul baba if you have read the law come anywhere for a discussion (charcha). If you haven't read it, I will get it translated into Italian, he said, in a swipe at his Italian-origin mother

Sonia Gandhi. Shah said Congress leaders too had in the past talked about granting citizenship to those who faced religious persecution in neighbouring countries, but the party did not implement the suggestions due to the fear of losing its vote bank.

But Prime Minister Narendra Modi has protected the human rights and honour of millions of refugees who came to India, the BJP leader said.

"Mahatma Gandhi had made the promise. Was he communal? Former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had also said in Parliament that citizenship will be granted to Hindus or Sikhs who have come. Were they communal?" he said.

"These refugee brothers were millionaires and today they have no place to live. There they had many bighas of land and here they have nothing to eat," Shah said. He said

that percentage of the minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh has declined while the minorities in India are living with honour.

The opposition is against granting citizenship to those refugees who have come to India after facing atrocities, and whose property and jobs were taken away, he said.

He referred to the pact between Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's Liaquat Ali Khan on the protection of minorities after Partition.

"Now, we will execute the Nehru-Liaquat agreement. This is the rule of Narendra Modi, no one has to fear. PM Modi government is going to give citizenship to all of you and make you feel proud of being an Indian, he said in a remark apparently directed at the migrants.

I want to say that the refugees who have come from those countries are from India only," he added.

ed. He said the Congress, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Aam Aadmi Party and the Communists are opposing the law.

Shah said it is hard to understand why West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is opposing citizenship to Bengali-speaking Hindus and Dalits living in West Bengal. "There is no need to fear from Didi. I want to say that refugees living in Bengal will not have to face any atrocities. You will be granted citizenship with honour," he said.

Shah also hit out at Ashok Gehlot, saying the BJP has implemented the promise mentioned in the election manifesto of his Congress government in Rajasthan.

He said the chief minister should stop protesting against the CAA and be concerned about the deaths of infants at Kota's JK Lon Hospital, where 100 children died in December.

PFI rally denied permission by West Bengal Police

KOLKATA, JAN 3 (PTI): Radical Islamic outfit Popular Front of India (PFI) was on Friday denied permission for its anti-citizenship law rally scheduled on January 5 in West Bengal's Murshidabad district, a senior police officer said.

The Kerala-based organisation, following the denial of approval, decided to "postpone its meeting for

the time being," PFI West Bengal general secretary Manirul Sheikh said.

"They (PFI) had applied for permission to hold a rally in Murshidabad district on January 5. However, we haven't given them approval," the senior officer said.

Meanwhile, TMC MP Abu Taher Khan lodged a police complaint against the PFI for en-

tering his name in the list of speakers for the January 5 rally, without seeking his consent.

The Uttar Pradesh government has recently written to the Union Home Minister, seeking a ban on the organisation for its alleged involvement in violence across the state during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

SpiceJet announces eight new flights

MUMBAI, JAN 3 (PTI): Budget carrier SpiceJet on Friday announced the launch of eight new flights, including one on Ahmedabad-Jeddah routes, starting next month.

The new flights on the domestic routes will strengthen connectivity across western and southern India, SpiceJet said in a release.

A mix of both 189-seater Boeing 737s as well as 90-seater regional jets Bombardier Q400s will operate

these new flights, it said. SpiceJet is the first domestic carrier to offer direct connectivity to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia from Ahmedabad, it said adding Ahmedabad's international connectivity is expected to get a major boost with the new flight, which will commence operations from February 20.

In addition to this, the Gurugram-based airline has also introduced daily flights on the Ahmedabad-Hyderabad route besides enhancing its operations with additional

frequencies on sectors like Bengaluru Chennai Bengaluru (sixth frequency), Bengaluru Vijayawada Bengaluru (fourth frequency), said the release.

These flights will operate daily except on Tuesdays, it added. SpiceJet currently operates on an average 630 flights per day to 64 destinations, including 10 international ones with a fleet of 114 passenger planes, comprising 82 Boeing 737s and 32 Bombardier Q-400s.

Nepal elephant festival scrutinised for beauty and bruises

SAURAHA (NEPAL), JAN 3 (AFP): Hundreds cheered as the three beauty contest finalists strolled out into the middle of the grounds and raised their painted trunks to the judges -- symbols of all that is admired and de-nounced at Nepal's annual elephant festival.

With her toe nails painted red and a lotus on her trunk, 35-year-old Buffkali took the trophy at the end of the nine-day festival that ended Friday.

But while elephants were judged on how well they were decorated and groomed, officials were also meant to check their heads and ears for signs of beatings.

Many outsiders were also looking for signs of abuse at the festival, which has been held in the Chitwan district, home to Nepal's most

important conservation area and a lucrative tourist destination, since 2004. Elephants are worshipped as the Hindu god Ganesh in Nepal and big crowds attended the festival -- where over 25 of the creatures took part in football, polo and races, as well as the beauty pageant and a picnic where they were served bananas and sugarcane.

Deepak Bhattarai, chairman of the local hotel association that organises the festival, told AFP the event aims to highlight elephants' "relationship with humans" and to become more "elephant friendly" every year. "It is exciting. I brought my son here to watch the elephants, you don't get to see them like this every day," said one visitor Sheetal Karki.

But the festival has also come under fire for

abuse, with mahouts using sticks or bullhooks to force the elephants to play. Surajan Shrestha of the local Animal Rights Club said activists have been working with organisers to ease concerns and had eliminated the use of bullhooks during games this year.

"But we can still see abuse off the field ... I hope our campaign will pressure the organisers to take steps to improve (the festival)," he said.

"It's 2020 - the Chitwan authorities need to stop treating elephants like it's 1820," said Jason Baker, a vice president of PETA in a statement on Thursday. "They should focus tourism on the amazing local culture and leave animals alone," he added. "It's impossible to ride elephants and force them to play these meaningless 'games' without abuse."

Kerala CM writes to 11 Chief Ministers on CAA

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN 3 (PTI): Days after the Kerala Assembly passed a resolution on repealing the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday wrote to his counterparts in 11 states on the need to save secularism and democracy.

In a letter to the chief ministers, including Mamata Banerjee and Arvind Kejriwal, Vijayan said, "Apprehensions have arisen among large sections of our society consequent to the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019.

The need of the hour is unity among all Indians who wish to protect and preserve our cherished values of democracy and secularism, he said.

The Kerala Assembly on Tuesday passed a resolution demanding scrapping of CAA, amid raging countrywide protests against the legislation.

The ruling CPI(M)-LDF and the Opposition Congress led UDF supported the resolution while BJP's lone MLA and former Union minister O Rajagopal's was the only dissenting voice in the one-day special session.

Verbal spat between Babul Supriyo and Muslim student

KOLKATA, JAN 3 (PTI): A verbal spat has erupted between union minister Babul Supriyo and a Muslim college student in which he has threatened on social media to pack off the youth to "his own country" for his post seeking to know the BJP MP's "education level".

The student, Mustafizur Rahman said on Friday that he wanted nothing but an "unconditional apology" in public from the BJP leader.

The union minister returned the fire by accusing Rahman of being a "serial offender" the fire and saying that he "does not need to apologize to fools".

Supriyo also said that his comments had nothing to do with the student's religion.

The matter came to light on December 26 when Supriyo shared a post on the social media advocating CAA and criticised the act of a female JU student, who tore up the first page of the contentious legislation at the annual convocation of the university while receiving her gold medal on December 24.

The next day Rahman commented on Supriyo's Facebook post and questioned the educational qualifications of Supriyo and BJP state president Dilip Ghosh.

"Babul-da (dada) how educated are people like you can be gauged from the fact that your mentor (state president) Dilip Ghosh spots gold in cow milk," Rahman said in his comment on Supriyo's post. To this Supriyo retorted "Mustafizur Rahman let me first pack you off to your country, then will send the reply in post card". The comment triggered a wave of protests.

Rahman, who is a final year student of chemistry at a college at Ilambazar in Birbhum district, in a prompt rejoinder said, "I am in possession of enough proof about my identity as Indian and Benga-



li. You don't know how to respect Bengalis and still you are the MP of the state.... Are you drinking cow urine regularly?"

The youth has received the support from a number of netizens and organisations like 'Jatiya Bangla Sammelan' after screenshots of the comments went viral on social media since December 27.

He told PTI, "I had merely made a comment whether people like Babul Supriyo and Dilip Ghosh have the authority to make adverse comments about the individual decision of a gold medalist to protest against CAA at the annual convocation of an educational institution."

Referring to the stinging remarks by the union minister against him, Rahman said "It was an outrageous comment by a minister who has taken the oath to protect the Constitution. He cannot discriminate 130 crore Indians on the basis of cast and religion.

"I was born and brought up here. I only demand an unequivocal public apology from him on social media and through statement - nothing less nothing more," he said. Reacting to the youth's demand for apology, Supriyo claimed that Rahman is a "serial offender" on social media.

"He (Rahman) could have told me whatever he wanted to.

I had made the comment with a

pinch of a salt. Those who are fools won't understand my comment. It has nothing to do with Hindus or Muslims. I don't need to apologize to fools," Supriyo said.

"Why did he (Rahman) bring in Dilip Ghosh in the conversation? Whoever makes abusive comment on my Facebook or Twitter page I just block that person. I have blocked Rahman too," he said.

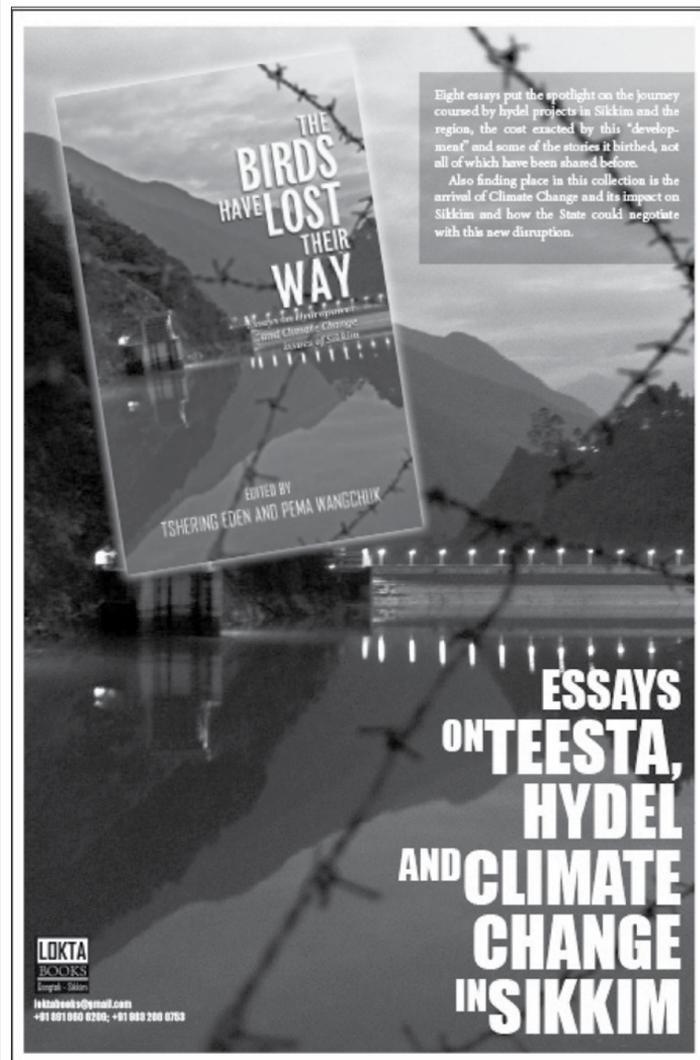
Ghosh had courted controversy in November 2019 for saying that Indian cow milk contains traces of gold and that is the reason the colour is yellow. He later sought to justify it by saying it was backed by conclusions of research taking place in foreign countries.

Jatiya Bangla Sammelan, which promotes the cause of the Bengali community, organised a protest rally at Jadavpur area of the city on Thursday in protest against Supriyo's comments and burnt an effigy of the Asansol MP. "We have undertaken a signature campaign in protest against the venomous comment of Babul Supriyo and will submit a letter with the signatures to Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar very soon," Siddhabrata Das of the outfit told PTI on Friday.

"We will urge the governor to forward the letter to the Centre to let it know how pained and anguished the people of Bengal are over Babul Supriyo's comments," he added.

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Moldova anthem gaffe mars ATP Cup in Australia

SYDNEY, JAN 3 (AFP): ATP Cup organisers were left red-faced on Friday by playing the wrong national anthem for a player from Moldova, a small landlocked country in eastern Europe.

The embarrassing gaffe occurred ahead of the opening singles tie in Sydney of the heavily-promoted new team event as Moldova's Alexander Cozbinov faced Belgium's Steve Darcis.

Tournament officials told AFP the Romanian anthem was played instead.

"At the start of the Moldova v Belgium match we mistakenly played the wrong national anthem for Moldova," the ATP admitted.

"We are sincerely sorry and have apologised personally to Team Moldova."

Cozbinov, who lost in three tough sets, played down the mishap "I think putting on the wrong anthem for us is not a big deal. But it wasn't that hard to pick the right anthem," he told AFP.

"Moldova and Romania have the same flag so probably that's why they made a mistake. Hopefully next time it's going to be the right one."

His opponent Darcis said he was not aware of the mistake at the time.

"I didn't know, I was just surprised that they were not so much into it," he said.

"I believe it's bad." Moldova, bordered by Romania and Ukraine, was one of the last countries to qualify for the inaugural team event being played in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth.

They are spearheaded by world number 46 Radu Albot, who broke new ground in 2019 by becoming his country's first ATP Tour title winner at Delray Beach.

He is joined by Cozbinov, ranked 818, Egor Matvievici and Dmitrii Baskov in a group that also features Britain, Belgium and Bulgaria.

The ATP Cup has 24 nations split into six groups across the three cities, with eight teams emerging from the round-robin to compete in a knockout phase in Sydney until one country is left standing.

Tennis and cricket stars get behind Australia bushfire relief

SYDNEY, JAN 3 (AFP): Tennis and cricket stars spearheaded by Nick Kyrgios and Chris Lynn on Friday pledged support for victims of bushfires raging around Australia, donating cash for every ace or six they hit.

The blazes have claimed 18 lives and forced mass evacuations, with the country bracing for a weekend heat wave expected to fan the deadly infernos.

Kyrgios, a controversial figure with a bad boy reputation, has been at the forefront of rallying support and pledged Aus 200 (US 140) for each ace he serves across the Australian summer of tennis, starting with the ATP Cup which began Friday.

"I'm kicking off the support for those affected by the fires. I'll be donating 200 per ace that I hit across all the events I play this summer," tweeted the 24-year-old, who was handed a 16-week suspended ban in September after a series of outbursts.

His Australian teammate at the inaugural ATP Cup Alex de Minaur went one better.

"I like this, I will go 250 per ace, just because I don't think I'll be hitting as many aces as you mate," he replied, with Australian veteran Samantha Stosur also pledging 200 per ace.



Kyrgios, who will also play the Kooyong Classic and the Australian Open this month, on Thursday issued a call for fundraisers for victims of the fires, which prompted Australia's tennis chief Craig Tiley to get on board.

"We want to help these communities in a meaningful way and will announce a

number of fund raising and support initiatives that will be rolled out across the ATP Cup, Australian Open and other events over the coming weeks," said Tiley.

The fires have been a big talking point ahead of the 24-team ATP Cup, which is being staged in Brisbane, Perth and Sydney with top names in-

cluding Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal playing.

- EXTRA MOTIVATION -

Tournament director Tom Lerner announced that each ace served at the 10-day event would deliver Aus 100 to bushfire relief.

The initiative is forecast to raise around Aus 150,000, with more than 1,500 aces ex-

pected to be sent down over the duration of the January 3-12 tournament.

"Most of the players are already keen to score aces and win a quick point, and having the chance to raise money for the bushfire appeal will give them that extra bit of motivation," he said.

There are fears that smoke

haze could impact the tournament in Sydney, with officials relying on on-site medical experts to monitor air quality, although there were no concerns on Friday.

The third cricket Test in Sydney between Australia and New Zealand is also monitoring for smoke, with players wearing black armbands Friday as a mark of respect for those who have died.

Two of the biggest hitters in the game, Lynn and Glenn Maxwell, announced they would donate 250 for every six they smash during the ongoing Big Bash League Twenty20 tournament.

"Hey Guys, for every six I hit in this years Big Bash League I will donate 250 towards the Red Cross Bushfire Appeal," tweeted Lynn.

"It is special to see so many athletes from various sports getting in behind the real heroes who are fighting to save lives and properties around our country."

Maxwell, back in action after a short mental health sabbatical, replied: "Love it Lynn!! I'll match you on 250 per six I hit in this years BBL." D'Arcy Short, who was last week added to Australia's squad for their upcoming one-day tour of India, also jumped on board with the same commitment.

Chile's Niemann grabs Tournament of Champions lead



LOS ANGELES, JAN 3 (AFP): Chile's Joaquin Niemann, riding the confidence-boost of a Presidents Cup appearance, fired seven birdies in a seven-under par 66 on Thursday to take a one-shot first-round lead in the US PGA Tour Tournament of Champions.

Niemann didn't win a match in the International team's Presidents Cup loss to the United

States at Royal Melbourne last month, but the 21-year-old said the week was a valuable learning experience.

"I think the Presidents Cup was huge for me, for my career, for my future," Niemann said.

"I think during that week I learned a lot, I was with the best players in the world, I was teammates with Adam Scott. I talked

a lot with them. It was an unbelievable week."

Niemann, whose six-shot win at The Greenbrier in September secured his spot in the winner's only Tournament of Champions, showed plenty of confidence on the par-73 Plantation course at Kapalua, Hawaii.

He rolled in a 31-foot birdie putt for his first birdie of the day

at the fourth, and his remaining six birdies were all from within 11 feet. He missed just one green in regulation, and got up and down for par to head into the second round with a one-shot lead over world number four Justin Thomas.

Thomas also played without a bogey, grabbing five of his six birdies on the back nine to take sole possession of second place on 67.

Americans Matt Kuchar and Rickie Fowler shared third on 68, with defending champion Xander Schauffele heading a group of five players on 69.

Only nine players in the 34-man field were over par in Thursday's light breezes -- which were expected to be replaced by gusty winds on Friday.

Despite the relatively benign conditions, it was an eventful day for two-time tournament winner Dustin Johnson.

The former world number one's one-under par 72 included five birdies and an eagle along with a double-bogey seven at the par-five ninth and four bogeys.

AICF calls meeting on Feb 9 to elect new office-bearers



Chennai, Jan 3 (PTI): The conflict-ridden All India Chess Federation (AICF) has called for a special general body meeting on February 9 in Ahmedabad to elect new office-bearers.

AICF Secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan has called for the meeting.

According to the notice, retired Supreme Court judge Justice Arijit Pasayat will be the Returning Officer for the elections.

The polls will be held to elect the president, six vice presidents, one honorary secretary, six joint secretaries and one treasurer.

"1. Elections to the office-bearers for the term 2020-2023 for the following posts. One President, Six Vice-Presidents, One Hon Secretary, Six Joint Secretaries and One Treasurer. 2. To pass appropriate resolutions after the new office-bearers are elected, 3. Any other matter with the permission of the Chair," the notice read.

The notice said 13 state associations -- Bihar, Meghalaya, Gujarat, Delhi, Chandigarh, Uttaranchal, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka, Nagaland, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Assam -- had called for the meeting with an agenda to hold the elections.

The February 9 gen-

eral body meeting comes after the three meetings held in December (on 14, 22 and 28) last year.

At the meeting on December 28 in Bhopal, the AICF decided to conduct the special general body meeting on February 9 during which the elections would be held.

The faction led by the AICF President P R Venketrama Raja had met in Chennai last month during which it was decided to hold the elections on February 10 in the city.

Chauhan told PTI that the notice was given as per the decision taken at the December 28 general body meeting.

Chauhan and the Federation President Venketrama Raja have been at loggerheads over various issues.

Chauhan said there was no hurdle in holding the general body meet in Ahmedabad even though the AICF is headquartered in Chennai.

Meanwhile, AICF Treasurer Kishore M Bandekar, who belongs to the Venketrama Raja faction, said general body meets of the Federation are held in the city where it is headquartered.

He also accused Chauhan of calling for meeting as and when he wanted and said the February 9 meeting called by him was not valid.

I am hopeful of best-ever Olympics in Tokyo: Gopichand

NEW DELHI, JAN 3 (PTI): India's top players, including P V Sindhu, may not be going through the best of times, but national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand is still hopeful of a best-ever Olympics outing in Tokyo.

"We have had some good performances in the last couple of Olympics. This time we will go into the Olympics with a world champion in our team (Sindhu), and hopefully, with some good preparations, we can come back with better performances than what we have had in the previous Games," said Gopichand.

Sindhu is currently the reigning women's singles world champion having clinched the title by beating Nozomi Okuhara of Japan at Basel, Switzerland in August last year.

Gopichand, who has produced two Olympic medallists -- Saina Nehwal (bronze in 2012)



and Sindhu (silver in 2016) -- lauded the Government of India's Khelo India Youth Games event, saying the initiative provides great exposure to young athletes of the country.

"An event like Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) which has all sports together gives a great exposure to athletes. It's something I am very happy about. And in general, the Khelo India programme, whether it's the scholar-

ships or the accredited

academies, helps in portraying a positive picture for sport," he said.

The 46-year-old, who won the prestigious All England Open Badminton Championships at Birmingham in 2001, said the experience of competing in KIYG will help young shuttlers immensely.

"I've been very lucky to watch the Delhi and Pune (Khelo India) Games. From a Khelo India Games perspective, I think what the Government of India is doing

is very very impressive. It's very nice for young athletes to get a chance to perform under top international conditions," Gopichand said.

"This experience will definitely help the youth in a big way. From an overall sporting culture perspective, I think this is unique."

Talking about the attributes which he looks at while spotting talent, Gopichand said: "Badminton is a sport which is very physical, but also very skill-based. For

us, mental attitude and physical attributes play a very important role.

"When we look at young players, we look at their potential to play at the highest level coupled with the mental strength which is very important to perform at the highest level."

The third edition of the competition will be held in Guwahati from January 10 to 22.

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Russia halts oil supplies to Belarus amid economic talks

MINSK (BELARUS), JAN 3 (AP): Russia has halted oil supplies to Belarus after the two countries failed to renegotiate a contract amid talks on further improving economic ties.

Belarus' state-owned Belneftekhim oil company said Friday that Moscow has stopped supplying crude oil to the country's refineries until contracts for this year are drawn up.

The two Belarusian refineries were operating at low capacity, running on reserves from last year.

Russian oil company Transneft, which operates the Russian pipelines in Belarus, confirmed the supplies were suspended.

Oil transit to Europe remains unaffected. Natural gas supplies were not affected. Belarus has been relying on cheap energy and loans from Russia for more than a quarter century.

The Kremlin has recently increased pressure on its ally, raising



energy prices and cutting subsidies.

It argued that Belarus should accept closer economic integration if it wants to continue receiving energy resources at Russia's domestic prices.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko held

two rounds of talks in December, but failed to reach an agreement on deeper integration and on oil and gas prices.

Putin said Russia was not ready to subsidize energy supplies without a closer economic integration with Belarus, and Lukashenko insisted he would not sign off on

the integration until the issues with oil and gas supplies were resolved.

In late December, the Belarusian leader ordered the country's government to look for alternative oil suppliers.

There are concerns in Belarus that the economic discussions are a plot by Russia to swallow up

Belarus those concerns have been fueled by Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula and its support for separatist insurgents in eastern Ukraine.

Lukashenko repeatedly rejected the idea, vowing that his country would never become part of Russia.

Forex reserves hit record high at \$457.46 billion

MUMBAI, JAN 3 (PTI): The country's foreign exchange reserves swelled by USD 2.520 billion to touch a record high of USD 457.468 billion in the week to December 27, according to RBI data.

In the previous week, the reserves rose to USD 454.948 billion after increasing by USD 456 million.

In the reporting week, the increase in reserves was mainly on account of a gain in foreign currency assets, major component of the overall reserves, which surged by USD 2.203 billion to USD 424.936 billion, the data released by the Re-

serve Bank on Friday showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and the yen held in the forex reserves.

During the week, gold reserves increased by USD 260 million to USD 27.392 billion.

The special drawing rights with the International Monetary Fund dipped by USD 2 million to USD 1.441 billion.

The country's reserve position with the Fund, however, increased by USD 58 million to USD 3.7 billion, the data showed.

Soleimani killing 'irreparable blow' for Tehran: exiled opposition



PARIS, JAN 3 (AFP): The killing of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani in a US strike is an "irreparable blow" for Iran's Islamic regime, the leader of a Paris-based exiled opposition group said Friday.

Soleimani was killed earlier Friday in a strike at Baghdad's international airport, prompting Tehran to vow "revenge" and dramatically upping the stakes in bitter tensions between Tehran and Washington.

The killing is an "irreparable blow for the regime of the mullahs," Maryam Rajavi, the head of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), said in a statement issued in Paris.

"It is now time to expel the mullahs from the region, in particular Iraq, Syria and Lebanon," she added.

Rajavi accused Soleimani of being "one of the biggest criminals in Iran's history" and "personally implicated in the massacre of thousands of people in the region."

"With his elimination, the process of overthrowing the mullahs' regime will be greatly accelerated," she added.

The NCRI, the political wing of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI), has long pressed for the overthrow for the Iranian regime from its Paris base. Its leaders had joined forces with Iran's revolutionary founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to overthrow the shah in 1979, but the two sides rapidly fell out and the PMOI leaders fled the country.

The Mujahedin fought alongside Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980-1988 war with Iran, which led to them being declared "traitors" by Tehran.

Rajavi repeated the group's claim that as many as 1,500 people were killed in recent nationwide protests in Iran -- a figure denied by Tehran -- and said it was time for the international community to stop a policy of "appeasement" with Tehran.

Tens of thousands rally in Iran capital against US 'crimes'

TEHRAN, JAN 3 (AFP): Tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Tehran to protest against American "crimes", an AFP correspondent reported, after US strikes killed a top Iranian commander in Baghdad Friday.

Chanting "Death to America" and holding up portraits of the slain commander, Qasem Soleimani, the demonstrators filled streets for several blocks in central Tehran after Friday prayers.

Alonso aims to make history as Dakar Rally heads to Saudi

JEDDAH (SAUDI ARABIA), JAN 3 (AFP): Spanish driver Fernando Alonso is aiming to create history as the first Formula One world champion to win the Dakar Rally when the 12-day marathon gets underway in Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

Alonso, who won the F1 championship with Renault in 2005 and 2006, is one of 351 starters in this year's 7,500-kilometre race which has moved from South America to Saudi Arabia, both venues a long way from the original 1979 route between Paris and the Senegalese capital Dakar.

Among the starters will be motorbikes, quad bikes and trucks but Alonso, who will have five-time bike champion Marc Coma navigating his Toyota, will be in the car category as he bids to become one of the greatest all-round drivers of all time.

Apart from his success in F1, the 38-year-old Spaniard has also won the Le Mans 24-hour race and has singled out the Indianapolis 500 as his priority for 2020.

He describes Dakar as "the biggest challenge of my career."

Alonso is not the first F1 driver to take part in the race.

The Belgian Jacky Ickx, a winner of eight

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps confirmed the commander of its Quds Force foreign operations arm had been killed by US forces in Baghdad.

Women and men, many of them elderly, took part in the procession, some holding up portraits of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"The axis of any evil is America, the motto of religion and the Koran is death to America," they

said in unison.

"O leader of our revolution, condolences, condolences." State news agency IRNA said there were similar demonstrations in the cities of Arak, Bojnourd, Hamedan, Hormozgan, Sanandaj, Semnan, Shiraz and Yazd.

News of the death of Soleimani, one of Iran's most popular public figures, also saw people hold impromptu gatherings in his central hometown of Kerman.

grand prix and six-time winner of Le Mans, won Dakar in 1983 and came second in 1986 and 1989.

Frenchman Patrick Tamba, who had two wins in his 114 grand prix, came third in 1988 and 1989.

Given the treacherous conditions - long stretches of sand dunes - Alonso is not overly confident of challenging for victory, noting that even the nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb was unable to deliver when he raced the Dakar.

Loeb won 13 stages but could only finish second in 2017 and third in 2019.

"If Loeb still hasn't won the Dakar, imagine me, who is coming from asphalt," Alonso told RTVE.

"I think the goal is more to approach the rally as an enriching experience for us."

- Peterhansel & Despres -

Fellow Toyota driver Nasser Al-Attiyah is a more likely candidate, not least because the Qatari is a three-time winner and reigning champion.

"Give me some sand and I'm happy," Al-Attiyah told dakar.com.

He will be pressed, however, by the Minis of Carlos Sainz and 'Monsieur Dakar' aka Stephane Peterhansel who has won 13 Dakars

Britain temperature records tumbled in 2019

PARIS, JAN 3 (AFP): Britain recorded its highest ever summer and winter temperatures in 2019, ending one of the hottest decades in history, the Met Office said Friday.

As much of northern Europe sweltered in a July heatwave, the mercury hit 38.7 Celsius (101 Fahrenheit) in the east of England, marking Britain's highest daily maximum temperature on record.

In February, temperatures in London hit 21.2C, a record high for winter.

2019 also saw Britain's record highest minimum winter temperature, 13.9C in the Scottish Highlands.

Overall, the decade

to 2019 saw eight high temperature records smashed, compared with one low temperature record.

"It is notable how many of these extreme records have been set in the most recent decade and how many more of them are reflecting high-rather than low-temperature extremes," said Mark McCarthy, head of the National Climate Information Centre.

He said the records were "a consequence of our warming climate".

Britain's warmer and wetter than average year fits a global pattern of rising temperatures as the pace of man-made climate change quickens.

Russia last month said 2019 was its hottest year ever recorded.

Globally, several countries from Australia to Poland saw temperature records broken.

The United Nations said last decade was the hottest in history, and all four of the hottest year's worldwide have come in the last four years.

Earth has already warmed 1.1C since pre-industrial times due to greenhouse gas emissions from burning coal, oil and gas.

In order to avert climate disaster, the UN says global carbon emissions need to fall 7.6 per cent annually to 2030. They are in fact rising year-on-year.

Bus crash kills 19, injures dozens on Myanmar-Thai border



YANGON, JAN 3 (AFP): A head-on collision between a bus and a car in mountains on the Myanmar-Thai border killed 19 and left more than 30 injured on Friday.

Images posted by local media showed the bus upside down after it span off the road and plummeted down a steep bank at a spot notorious for traffic accidents.

Myanmar Social Rescue Group vice-chairman Aung Myint told AFP the express bus had been travelling from Yangon Friday morning when it careered into an

oncoming car after its brakes failed.

"The bus plunged off the mountain, killing 18 and injuring 33 outright," he said by phone, adding the number included the car's seven passengers who all lost their lives.

A doctor at Myawady hospital confirmed that one critically-injured woman later died, bringing the toll to 19.

Myawady town in Karen state is one of the key land border points between Myanmar and Thailand with hundreds of traders crossing daily in both directions. "A

lot of accidents happen here," Aung Myint said about the site of the accident, where the highway comprises a series of steep switchbacks as it cuts through the thickly-forested mountain range.

Myanmar's road safety standards lag behind neighbours in the region and crashes are common.

An accident last week in neighbouring Mon state killed 10 people while 15 pilgrims returning from a Buddhist festival in October died when their truck plunged from a cliff in Shan state to the north.

Congress not notified ahead of Soleimani killing: senior US lawmaker

WASHINGTON, JAN 3 (AFP): US lawmakers were not told in advance of the attack ordered by President Donald Trump that killed a top Iranian military commander, a senior House Democrat said late Thursday.

The strike conducted in Iraq against Iran's

Qasem Soleimani "went forward with no notification or consultation with Congress," House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Eliot Engel said in a statement.

Soleimani was "the mastermind of immense violence" who has "the blood of Americans on

his hands," the Democratic lawmaker said.

But "to push ahead with an action of this gravity without involving Congress raises serious legal problems and is an affront to Congress's powers as a coequal branch of government," Engel added.

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You'll Never Guess Which New MCU Characters Will Debut In Doctor Strange 2

Doctor Strange 2 is called Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness, which is an awesome sequel title. It will be jam-packed with, well, multiverse madness as well as tie-ins to Disney+ series WandaVision and Loki. And apparently it will feature the debuts of some new Marvel Cinematic Universe characters. Which ones? You'll never guess.

Seriously. That's what Marvel Studios boss Kevin Feige says. You won't be able to guess. Sounds like a dare to me -- never underestimate Marvel Comics fans!

Here's what Kevin Feige said during a recent panel talk at the New York Film Academy. He was asked about how the MCU decides to introduce certain characters:

Sometimes you're choosing the title hero, you're choosing which main character or main team you want to bring to the screen and often-times, it's as you're making and developing the movie [asking] 'Who will come into it?' and 'Who will fit into it?' The next Doctor Strange film, for instance, features some new MCU characters that will be making their debut in that movie you won't expect or won't guess who it is, but we found a cool way to make it work because we want to make a particular type of movie there and there was a character we always wanted to do something with who will fit really well there.

OK, so he first says "new MCU characters" and then later specifies one in particular that will fit well in the Doctor Strange sequel. Who? If we won't expect or guess them, then I imagine they aren't the previously announced characters

getting their own Disney+ series -- Ms. Marvel, Moon Knight, and She-Hulk. It was previously confirmed that all three will be appearing on the big screen in MCU movies after their Disney+ debuts, which are expected in 2021 or later. No specific dates yet. (Both The Falcon and the Winter Soldier and WandaVision are coming in 2020, which is great news.)

fun way. The Disney+ series just before Doctor Strange 2 should be Loki. The movies right after Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness are Spider-Man 3 -- which could obviously benefit from a multiverse angle, especially if it's going to be the last movie before Sony grabs Tom Holland for an entirely new set of movies -- and Thor: Love and Thunder.



At this point, we can't talk about Marvel movies without also talking about the Disney+ shows, much to the consternation of Marvel fans who don't have Disney+ yet. Kevin Feige previously said WandaVision would have "repercussions for the entire future of Phase 4 of the MCU."

He also previously said this about Doctor Strange 2:

The multiverse is the next step in the evolution of the MCU, and Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness is gonna crack it wide open in ways that will have repercussions for a Disney+ series just before it, that's not WandaVision, and for movies just after it in a big,

But now is your chance to show off your Marvel Comics knowledge. Kevin Feige doesn't think you'll expect or guess what new MCU characters are coming in Doctor Strange 2. Maybe he's just testing fans, or maybe he's going to throw deep cut curveballs that genuinely stump everyone. But if you have ideas on who could show up in Doctor Strange 2, speak now or forever wish you had.

Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness, directed once again by Scott Derrickson, is currently scheduled for release in theaters on May 7, 2021. Keep up with everything heading to the big screen this year with our 2020 movie release date schedule.

Martin Scorsese almost stopped making films after 'The Aviator'



NEW YORK, JAN 3 (PTI): Martin Scorsese has revealed that he almost quit filmmaking after his 2005 directorial "The Aviator" but eventually chose to stick around.

In a profile piece for The New York Times, the veteran filmmaker, who has delivered yet-another masterpiece with "The Irishman", said he felt "drained" after working on 1995 mob drama "Casino". The newspaper noted that Scorsese was fed up of "butting heads" with studio executives who wanted the running times of his movies "shortened".

And by the time of 2005 movie "The Aviator", which featured his frequent collaborator Leonardo DiCaprio as Howard Hughes, Scorsese sort of made up his mind to leave the business.

"The last two weeks of

editing and mixing 'The Aviator', I had left the business from the stress. I said if this is the way you have to make films then I'm not going to do it anymore," the filmmaker said.

After that experience, Scorsese came to believe that the traditional Hollywood studios are his "mortal enemies".

"It's like being in a bunker and you're firing out in all directions. You begin to realise you're not speaking the same language anymore, so you can't make pictures anymore," he added.

That is probably why Scorsese chose to make "The Irishman" with streamer Netflix. The film, featuring the trinity of veteran actors Robert De Niro, Al Pacino and Joe Pesci, had a runtime of 3 hours and 3 minutes.

Tarantino places Nolan's 'Dunkirk' at 2nd on his best films of decade list

LOS ANGELES, JAN 3 (PTI): Quentin Tarantino has heaped praises on Christopher Nolan's 2017 war drama "Dunkirk" which he says is number two in his list of best films of the last decade.

During a recent episode of The Ringer's "Rewatchables" podcast, Tarantino said he is compiling a list of best movies made during 2010s and therefore is revisiting a number of films for that purpose.

"Dunkirk", a triptych exploring three stories from the perspective of air, land and sea, is set around the Dunkirk evacuation of British troops during World War II.

Tarantino said the film was initially placed seventh but rose to second spot after he rewatched it a couple of times. He said the movie came across as a spectacle to him and delivered an absolute emotional experience.

"I had an interesting experience with it the first couple of times. The first time I saw it, I don't know what I was thinking the first time. I just dealt with the spectacle of it all. I couldn't deal with anything else but the spectacle of it all. I liked the movie, but the spectacle almost numbed me to the experience.

"I don't think I felt anything emotional. I was awed by it. But I didn't know what I was awed by... It wasn't until the third time that I could see past the spectacle and into the people the story is about. I finally could see through the trees a little bit," the director explained. Tarantino is yet to reveal his full list.

At the 2018 Academy Awards, "Dunkirk" was nominated for eight Oscars and won best sound editing, best sound mixing, and best film editing.

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ENJOYING SOME WAVES! The actress, Laura Dern is in good spirits while on vacation in Hawaii.

Bhumi Pednekar to have a special appearance in 'Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan'

MUMBAI, JAN 3 (PTI): Actor Bhumi Pednekar is set to make a cameo appearance in Ayushmann Khurrana-starrer "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan".

Bhumi and Ayushmann featured as the lead pair in 2017's "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan".

"Bhumi is a part of 'Shubh Mangal Saavdhan' family and we couldn't imagine making 'Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan' without her. She has a very special appearance in the narrative and we are extremely happy to have her on board," Colour Yellow Productions' Anand L Rai said in a statement.

The 30-year-old actor has already shot for the film over a two-day schedule in Varanasi.

Bhushan Kumar, who is also producing the movie through his banner T Series, said the team was delighted to have Bhumi on board.

"We are delighted to have Bhumi join the cast as a special appearance in the film. Bhumi's association is one that adds value to the

storyline, she is an amazing actor and I am glad she is part of our film," he said.

"Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan", a family



entertainer that talks about love, relationships, and homosexuality, also features Neena Gupta, Gajraj Rao, Jeetendra Kumar and Maanvi Gargoo in pivotal roles.

Directed by Hitesh Kewalya, the film will hit the theatres on February 21.

ARIES: Your head and heart may be in a conflict. The answer to which way to go from here doesn't have to be this complex. Word for the wise: follow your heart. Once you commit to doing what you are best at, what feels in alignment, the abundance you desire will flow into your existence. Some of you may be thinking fondly about the places you visited in the last year.

Tip: Have the courage to follow your heart's true desire.

TAURUS: Let me tell you a little story about Brandon Stanton. He had a successful career in trading bonds but he gave that up because all he wanted to do was photograph about 10,000 people in New York. Who gives up a great job to photograph other people, right? But if he hadn't, the Humans of New York photoblog would not have been born.

Tip: Follow your heart's true desires.

GEMINI: Making your way to the top is only the first step, Gemini. The real challenge is, staying there season after season. Two words: patience and persistence. Remember, you are just getting started. When

you find yourself debating between quality and quantity, choose the former—always.

Tip: Work hard and smart.

CANCER: If you're a freelancer, work-at-home entrepreneur or a small business owner, this is your time to shine. Continue to create from a space of love and leave the rest to the Universe. Trust and surrender are the magic words that will help you reach new heights. Those who are heading bigger organisations should take a cue from the smaller one. Remember, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Tip: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

LEO: The circumstances call for you to use your diplomacy and gift of communication wisely. Think of yourself as the messenger, the emissary, not the enemy. As you facilitate negotiations with the people in the organisation, make sure to leave your pride aside. Yes, that means accepting your mistakes wherever necessary and keeping the highest good in mind.

Tip: Communicate wisely and clearly.

VIRGO: It is said when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. How this holds true for where you are right now, Virgo! The Universe is holding space for you to be mentored by a wise elder. Be grateful for the guidance that's coming through. A change in perspective could be the answer to navigating the tricky terrain and bringing about a monumental change in your circumstances.

Tip: The wise words of your mentor could help you see the situation in a different light.

LIBRA: Here's to 3am friends who offer both relationship advice and tequila shots to make you forget your woes, friends who throw shade at you for your lifestyle choices and encourage you to wake up at the crack of dawn for a run, and the ones who indulge your wanderlust by joining you for an adventure halfway across the world.

Tip: Celebrate your Motley Crew.

SCORPIO: An idea is merely an idea until you put it into practice. What this day calls for: a greater degree of innovation and initiative. How can you set the stage for positive change? Scorpio, you are being guided by

your higher self at every step. Some of you could be thinking about investing in an idea of your own or taking the entrepreneurial route.

Tip: Plant your seeds with intention.

SAGITTARIUS: The lion does not concern himself with the opinions of the lamb. You are already the leader of the pack, Sagittarius. Don't let the demon of self-doubt salt the game for you. Does that mean you are going to be at war with those around? Not if you don't want to. Instead of imposing your views on others, give them the facts. The manner in which you communicate the truth will make all the difference here.

Tip: Let go of the demon of self-doubt.

CAPRICORN: There are two types of people in this world: those who wait for things to happen and those who make things happen. As you reclaim your power this year, you begin to realise your ability to attract opportunities that will ultimately lead to success. Seize the day, Capricorn! A question you want to ask yourself before you progress to the next stage: 'What are the ways in which I have been limiting myself?'

The time to move beyond the self-imposed prison is now.

Tip: Make room for expansion.

AQUARIUS: The time for enterprise and risk-taking is here, Aquarius. This new year demands a new you—one who strikes gold by seizing opportunities when the right time. Given that the territory you are venturing into is unknown, there are things you do not know. At times like these, it is best to be spontaneous and follow the cosmic cues. Remember, it's okay to trip and fall once in a while. Failure will teach things success never will.

Tip: Seize the day.

PISCES: Pay attention to the pathways that are opening up for you. The answer to 'which way do I go?' can be found by turning inwards. Don't let self-doubt be the reason you miss out on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Saying yes to one thing could mean saying no to another. Does that have to be such a bad thing? Recognise the things in your life that have served their purpose.

Tip: Let your higher self assist you in making this choice.