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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## Initiative to make govt school students 'future ready'

### HRDD-Microsoft MOU to equip students with new age tech capacity



SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 31 JAN:

The Human Resource Development Department signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Microsoft India here on Thursday. The main objective of the partnership is to enhance digital literacy

and build new age tech capacity among students and faculty at government schools here.

The agreement was signed between HRDD Director [Samagra Shiksha], Bhim Thatal, on behalf of the State government and by Microsoft

India Director-Advocacy, Dr Vinnie Jauhari, on behalf of the company in the presence of HRDD Minister, RB Subba, Additional Chief Secretary HRDD, GP Upadhyaya and other senior officials from HRDD and Microsoft India.

Initially, the agreement is for a period of one year and will be extended on mutual understanding between both parties.

As part of the collaboration, Microsoft will support the State in the integration of IT content

in the State board curriculum to build student capacity, whole school reform through the Microsoft Innovative School Programme, building teacher capacity through the Microsoft Educator Network and Innovative Educator Programme and enhancing digital literacy and digital citizenship.

On the occasion, the HRDD Minister stated that this initiative would chart an equipped future for the coming generations of the State. He expressed that this initiative was in continuation of the State government's effort to transform the education system.

He added that the agreement was to revamp the education system of Sikkim and to enhance digital literacy in government schools and to empower students and teachers.

Minister also detailed various areas and components

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## 67,000 new voters in Sikkim for Election 2019



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 31 JAN:

There are around 67,609 new voters entitled to participate in Elections 2019. While there were 3,70,770 electors in Sikkim in 2014, the number of registered voters here as of 31 Jan 2019 is 4,23,325. The 67,000-plus number arrives after one factors in the fact that 15,054 electors have passed away between 2014 and 2019.

On a rough estimate, the number of new female voters is marginally higher this time at 27,350

compared to 25,205 new male voters. Interestingly, there are two voters who have recorded themselves as belonging to the third gender.

It may be mentioned that between 2009 and 2014, there was an increase in voter numbers by a little over 70,000.

The final publication of the Electoral Roll with reference to 1 Feb 2019 as qualifying date was released today by Chief Electoral Officer, Sikkim, R Telang in a press conference organised by the office of the CEO, Sikkim,

at the conference hall of District Administration Centre, East.

Addressing the press conference, R Telang said that the hard copies of the Electoral Roll would be available in a few days and a copy each would be provided free of cost to all recognized political parties, while registered political parties and members of the public can obtain it from office of CEO or District Election Officer on payment of a nominal amount fixed by the Commission.

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## DSA approaches all political parties with Sherpa demands



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 31 JAN:

Denzong Sherpa Association (DSA) submitted a charter of its demands featuring land protection under Revenue Order No. 1 and a minimum four candidates from the community in the upcoming general elections to all political parties of Sikkim today.

This was part of a well-attended car rally participated in by representatives of different Sherpa Kyidugs and lay Sherpas from across Sikkim.

The car rally started from Singtam and ended in Gangtok after submitting the memorandum at different party's headquarters.

The delegation was well received by the party functionaries at the respective party offices, a DSA press release informs.

"We are hopeful that all the political parties will certainly take our demands into consideration and liberate Sherpa of Sikkim from historical injustice," a DSA press release states.

## SKM conducts car rally inviting people to its 7th anniv celebration



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 31 JAN:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha took out a car rally 'Sikkim Bachaw Abhiyan' in all four districts of the State on Thursday. The main objective of this rally was to highlight various issues of Sikkim and failure of the State government in different areas, informs an SKM press release.

The release informs that SKM is celebrating its 7th anniversary in a grand manner on 04 Feb at Rangpo Mining Ground so this day-long car rally has been conducted to invite people to be a part of the celebration.

## CBSE to provide counselling to students from Feb 1 to cope with exam stress

NEW DELHI, JAN 31

(PTI): The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will provide psychological counselling to students and parents from Friday to overcome exam-related stress, the board said Thursday.

The 22nd edition of the psychological counselling service, focusing on resolving issues related to exam stress, will end on April 4 and will be available between 8 am to 10 pm on all days, they added.

From this year, the CBSE has introduced the facility of Interactive Voice Response System on a toll-free number from where the students/parents/stakeholders

can obtain a pre-recorded useful information on tackling board exams which includes tips for better preparation, time and stress management, FAQs along with live tele-counselling services.

The CBSE telecounselling is offered by school principals and trained counsellors from within the CBSE affiliated schools located in and outside India, the board said, adding that it is a voluntary, free of cost service provided by the participants.

The board has roped in a total of 87 counsellors comprising 65 from India, two special educators and 22 from foreign schools.

For the first time, a

comprehensive audio-visual presentation titled 'Knowing Children Better' has been prepared and uploaded on CBSE website, the board said.

"The various topics deal with real time experiences and problems of adolescents with suggestive measures as coping strategies. The viewers can access the tab 'Counselling' at www.cbse.nic.in," the board added.

CBSE experts will answer queries of students through weekly question-answer columns to be published in major national newspapers during February and an online counselling will be available at counselling.cecbs@gmail.com.

## Pope says 'happy to write new page in history' with UAE visit

VATICAN CITY, JAN 31

(AFP): Pope Francis said he was looking to write a new page in the history of relations between religions with his visit to the United Arab Emirates from Sunday.

"I am happy ... to write on your dear land a new page in the relations between religions, confirming that we are brothers although different," he said in a video message to the Emirati people released Thursday.

In the message, in Italian but also dubbed into

Arabic, the pope thanked Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan for his invitation to participate in an interfaith meeting on "human fraternity" from February 3 to 5.

He said the visit would give him the opportunity to again see "friend and dear brother" Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the head of Egypt's top Sunni Muslim authority, whom he met on a visit in 2017. Francis has made boosting ties between Christianity and Islam a

cornerstone of his papacy. The pope said he believes the interfaith meeting reflects "the courage and willingness to affirm that faith in God unites rather than divides, brings together despite differences, and turns away from hostility and aversion".

Francis also said the United Arab Emirates was "a land that seeks to be a model of coexistence, human fraternity and the meeting of diverse civilisations and cultures, where many find a safe place to work and live freely in the respect for diversity".

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 31 JAN:

Hamro Sikkim Party and Bharatiya Janata Party held the second round of pre-poll alliance discussions today. A BJP press release informs that the HSP "has almost agreed with Sikkim BJP to work coordinately."

When contacted over the phone, Nitin Nabin, BJP in-charge of Sikkim, said that talks with HSP were held in a cordial atmosphere and some common issues were discussed at length. BJP and HSP have agreed to fight the upcoming assembly elections on common issues and that the final decision will arrive after discussions with the party high command, he added.

"They [HSP] have



common minimum program with BJP Sikkim chapter which they will manifest soon but they have few points to clear out before," the BJP press release informs.

The HSP spokesperson, Biraj Adhikari, informed that HSP has put forth five issues as

pre-requisites for an alliance. These are: Removal of SDF from NDA; Article 371-F to be protected; LT seat reservation in the legislative assembly; Removal of immigration tag from Sikkimese Nepalese; Reservation of Sikkimese-Nepali seats in the Assembly;

Scheduled Tribe status for the 11 left-out communities; and corruption-free Sikkim.

He adds that while there is consensus and agreement on almost all points, the BJP has to still clear its relationship with the SDF before an alliance can be finalized.

Mr Adhikari said that the BJP State In-charge assured to get back to HSP on the issues within four to five days.

Stating that the meeting was fruitful in terms of discussions, Mr Adhikari said that once BJP makes its stand clear, all other issues will resolve, adding that the Chamling government has been surviving on the Centre's blessings for the last two terms.

On earlier announced meeting with SKM scheduled for today, he said that the SKM party president was not available today due to his engagements outside the state. The meeting to explore an alliance with SKM will be held anytime after 04 February, he said.



# SDF campaign committee for Upper Tadong meets

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GNAGTOK, 31 JAN:**

A meeting of the constituency-level monitoring and campaign committee of Sikkim Democratic Front party for Upper Tadong constituency was held at the residence of former councillor Uday Lama here at Pani House on Thursday. The meeting was attended by the chairperson of the committee, Menlom Lepcha, councillor Mingma Lhamu and other leaders and workers of the party.

In his address, Mr Lepcha stated that Sikkim has witnessed unprecedented infrastructure and economic development due to the



visionary and successful leadership of Chief Minister Pawan Chamling. He mentioned that the daily wages of workers of Sikkim

was only Rs 60 which has been enhanced to Rs 300 at present.

Mr Lepcha mentioned about the various

unique programmes and initiatives of SDF government for the overall development of Sikkim. He urged the people to sup-

port SDF to continue the development of the State.

Councillor Mingma Lhamu mentioned about the successful implementation of One Family, One Job scheme of the State government in the area and added that the process to collect names of left out candidates was going on.

The meeting, which was conducted by former panchayat, Sudan Tamang, concluded with vote of thanks by youth convener, Sarad Lama. The meeting was also attended by general secretary Kiran Chettri, former councillor Uday Lama and secretary, Anand Gazmer along with SDF youth and chelis.

## Educational standard improvement classes conclude



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 31 JAN:**

One month Educational Standard Improvement Classes (Winter Coaching) for classes X & XII students organized by Teesta-IV HE Project, NHPC Limited in association with HRD Department, Government of Sikkim, concluded on 31 Jan, 2019.

A press release informs that 145 boys and girls from different schools of North Sikkim participated in these classes. Hostel facilities were provided to students for more focus and mitigating the hardship of daily. The classes were organised for boys in Govt. Girls Sr.

Sec. School, Mangan and for girls at Government Secondary School, Singhik, North Sikkim.

Speaking during the valedictory function, the chief guest, Ramesh Mukhiya, General Manager (I/c) Teesta-IV HE Project thanked the HRDD Department, resource persons, school management for their efforts and support for organising these Educational Standard Improvement classes.

He especially thanked the teachers (resource persons) for their sincere effort in preparing students for upcoming board examinations. He discussed ways to handle the examination stress

with students, teachers and parents and urged them to watch Prime Minister's programme "Pariksha Pe Charcha" for approaching examinations without any fear, choosing right career, facing failure, ect.

He interacted with the students and extended his best wishes to the students for the forthcoming Board Examinations. He also briefed about the role of NHPC in social development apart from generation of electricity to the students.

The event was also attended by NHPC officials, Sajan V Sabastian [Dy Director, HRDD] and Tempa Rinzing [Assistant Director].

## Election training for trainers and facilitators

**GANGTOK, 31 JAN [IPR]:** A three-day Training of Trainers and Facilitators (TTF) for the upcoming general election began at the conference hall of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer here today.

Nupur Purohit and B Majumdar are the resource persons from Hero Mindmine Institute, New Delhi, for the training being offered with the objective to empower people and enhance their professional skills and attitudes.

The Election Commission of India has set up the India International Institute of Democracy & Election



Management (IIIDEM) as its advanced training and resources wing.

IIIDEM is an initiative of the Commission towards fulfilling its high aspiration on de-

mocracy and election management.

The training had the participation of State Level Master Trainers, District Level Master Trainers and Assembly

Level Master Trainers of East and North districts.

Simultaneously, for South and West districts, the training is being held at SIRD, Karfector, South Sikkim.

## Memorial park for Ahom kings announced

**DHAKUAKHANA (ASSAM), JAN 31 (PTI):** The Assam government will set up a memorial park to preserve the rich legacy of the Ahom kings of Assam and cherish their contribution in building the Asamese society, Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal announced Thursday. Sonowal made the announcement at the central Me-Dam-Me-Phi celebration, traditionally celebrated by Ahom people on January 31 every year as a mark of respect for their ancestors, at Dhakuakhana in Lakhimpur district on Thursday.

Stressing on the contributions of the Ahom Kings to give distinct identity to the Assamese community, he said the state government was committed to follow their ideals in building a robust and resurgent Assam.

"The Ahom Kings gave a strong foundation to the Assamese community following the ideals of harmony, co-existence and mental strength. Their principles of governance remain the fountainhead of inspiration for the Assamese community," he said. The 600-year-long Ahom rule was among the golden periods in world history and still creates awe among the intelligentsia globally, Sonowal said.

"The first Ahom king Chaolung Siu-Ka-Pha's (1228-1268) towering personality can be gauged from his vision to embrace the prevailing traditions, culture, heritage into the fold of his kingdom. He can be a unique role model for the youth to follow," he said.

## Free winter crash course at Singtam ends

**YOGEN THATAL**

**SINGTAM, 31 JAN:**

Organized by SDF Student Front of Khamdong, Singtam constituency, a month long winter crash course for the students of classes X-XII concluded on 30 Jan. The course had started from 02 Jan at the Archigios Preparatory School, Shanti Nagar.

More than hundred

students enrolled for the course. The students were guided by ex-students from Singtam SS School.

"It's a privilege and opportunity for us to guide and support the students who are like our brothers and sisters. There are many families who cannot afford tuitions and coaching as such. Since we

also belong from middle class families we understand how hard it is to manage the cost of coaching," said volunteer, Abik Pradhan.

"We are very grateful and thankful towards the government who provided us with this opportunity which helped us in many ways," shared a student who attended the camp.

## Nagaland govt, other organisations oppose citizenship bill

**DIMAPUR, JAN 31 (PTI):** The Nagaland government, along with a host of civil societies, tribal organisations, political parties and NGOs, on Thursday opposed the citizenship bill to "safeguard" the rights of the indigenous people of the north east.

During a consultative meeting convened by the state government here, a five-point resolution was adopted that expressed solidarity with the rest of the north east states, which have flagged concerns about the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill.

"Nagaland stands in solidarity with the rest of the region in order to safeguard the rights of the indigenous people of the region," members present at the meeting said.

Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and Deputy Chief Minister Y Patton attended the meeting along with members of political parties like the BJP, the NDPP, the NPP, the JD(U) and the NCP.

Prominent organisa-

tions in attendance were the Eastern Naga People's Organisation, the Naga Students' Federation, the Naga Mothers' Association, the Angami Public Organisation, the Yimchunger Tribal Council and the Zeliang People's Organisation, among others.

However, some apex bodies like the Naga Hoho, the Central Nagaland Tribes Council and the Nagaland Gaonborahs Federation refrained from attending the meeting.

The resolution stated that no non-indigenous person can claim rights and privileges in Nagaland as "we stand protected under the provisions of Article 371 (A) of the Constitution of India and the Inner Line Permit mechanism".

Any person who acquires Indian citizenship through the amended citizenship bill will be as "ineligible for acquiring property or settling down in Nagaland as other non-Nagas", it said.

The resolution further said that the Nagaland assembly should discuss about enforcing the Inner Line Permit regulations all over the state, including in Dimapur district.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, which was passed by Lok Sabha on January 8, seeks to provide Indian citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, after six years of residence in India even if they do not possess any documents.

Protests against it have rocked the north east, with those opposing it contending that it would harm the rights of the indigenous people.

On Tuesday, 10 political parties, most of which are members of the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), along with the saffron party's key ally in Bihar, the JD(U), unanimously decided to jointly oppose the bill.

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## TTF training held at SIRD



**JORETHANG, 31 JAN**

(IPR): A three-day Training for Trainers Facilitators (TTF) commenced at the conference hall of Sikkim Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Karfector today. This training is held under the direction of Election Commission of India (ECI), the resource person for the day were Nilay Majumdar and Sanjiv Deb from Hero Mindmine which is a part of Hero Group that provides various kinds of learning solutions to manifest better quality and enhanced productivity.

Present during the training were district level master trainers and nodal officers from West and South District.

The resource persons delved upon the objective of today's training

which they shared is a platform wherein the attendees can learn the ideals to become equipped master trainers. The resource person also spoke in-depth about the roles and responsibilities of the trainers and how they can impart valuable suggestion and knowledge to various kinds of gathering while conducting different types of exercise.

During the course of the training the gathering was displayed with a detailed PowerPoint presentation which touched upon topics namely that of designing, delivering and managing training. Additionally, a series of interactive activities was also held between the participants, so as to encourage better teamwork and co-ordination.

## 67,000 new voters...

The CEO further said that there could still be some additions and some deletions in the list till seven days prior to the filing of nominations. He shared that the total electors/voters as on date is 4,23,325 which includes 2,16,222 male voters and 2,07,103 female voters.

He informed that as on date, two persons are from the third gender and 2000 voters have identified themselves as PWD or Persons with Disabilities. He added that since the population profile of Sikkim is young, maximum voters fall within the age group of 18 to 45 years.

The CEO informed that a total of 16,012 voters have been added in the Summary Revision during the months of September and October 2018.

R Telang further informed that there will be 567 numbers of polling stations for the upcoming general elections, which includes 51 Sangha polling stations.

A soft copy each of the final Electoral Roll was handed over to representatives of recognised political parties by the CEO. A soft copy of the Electoral Roll was also handed over to Director, Printing & Stationeries Department for immediate publication.

The CEO said that it is also the voters' responsibility to check their names in the voters list. He informed that voters can check their names through three modes:

1. Visit the website [www.nvsp.in](http://www.nvsp.in)
2. Download Voter Helpline App on smart phones
3. Call Toll Free Number 1950. The number will be operational from 1 Feb 2019 and will be available between 9am to 6pm on all working days



# Connecting Champions concludes educational tour to Gujarat

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 31 JAN:**

A 12-day educational exposure visit to Gujarat Vidhyapith for meritorious students of the Maneybong – Dentam Constituency concluded recently with the 12-member team from Sikkim returning home with value added learning from the exposure program.

The program, a yearly initiative of 24hours Inspired, aims at exposing students from Sikkim to different parts of the country and engage these young minds with the young minds of students of other states, a press release informs.

“Connecting Champions is a yearly endeavor to engage young students from Sikkim to



students of other parts of the country. This time we selected Gujarat Vidhyapith as the host campus for the reason of inspiring our young minds to understand and value

the teachings and the lifestyle promoted by Mahatma Gandhiji. We are glad that the students have come back home with a sense of purpose,” says Dewaker Basnet,

Chief Learning Officer, 24hours Inspired.

24hours Inspired has been conducting the program for the last eight years and will continue to do so in the coming

years too, he stated.

Mr Basnet has thanked Minister, UD&HD and Food and Civil Supplies, NK Subba, for believing in the idea and sending students for

the exposure trip

Speaking about the exposure, Kaeshikka, a student of Hee-Yangthang Senior Secondary School says, “The best part of the exposure to Gujarat Vidhyapith was its simple living, high thinking philosophy. We had an opportunity to meet and engage with refined minds who gave us great lessons on life and living. Acts of kindness, respect and brotherhood was practiced in the institution and I felt that our trip was a great learning experience.”

The students spent six days in the institution and also had a chance to visit various places of historical significance in and around Gujarat.

## SICUN elects new Board of Directors headed by LP Kafley



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 31 JAN:**

Sikkim State Cooperative Union (SICUN) has elected its new Board of Directors which will be headed by LP Kafley as Chairperson, a press release informs. The new Board of Directors has been elected for a term of 5 years.

The elections were held during the 10th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of SICUN today. Members from all the districts voted to elect 03 representatives from district and the chairperson and vice chairperson were elected from among the 12 elected representatives, the release mentions.

The new Board also has Tashi Ongdup Lepcha as vice chairperson, BB Chamling as member (representative of West District), HB Rai as member (representative of South District), Aita Maya Rai as member (representative of East District), Bishnu Maya Manger as member (representative of South District), Hemant Kr. Dahal as member (representative of East District), HB Gurung as member (representative of East District), DK Rai as member (representative of South District), D Wangchuk Bhutia as member

(representative of West District), Tsh. Doma Bhutia as member (representative of North District) and Chodup Lepcha as member (representative of North District).

The meeting also approved the achievement Report and Audit Report of SICUN for the year 2017-18 as per the agenda of the meeting. The training calendar for the year 2019-20 and the budget plan of Rs 1, 66, 19,100 was also approved in the meeting.

The Department of Cooperation had deputed K. P. Sharma Joint Registrar as Returning Officer of the Election and Matrika Khatiwada Joint Registrar was the departmental representatives of the department for conducting AGM of SICUN under section 32 (1) of the Sikkim State Cooperative Act 1978.

The newly elected Board of Directors expressed gratitude to the outgoing Chairperson, SICUN, Ganesh Kr. Rai and all the Board members of the SICUN for their successful tenure. The newly elected Board of Directors unanimously conducted a Board Meeting after election and prepared a new roadmap for the progress of SICUN.

## Gujarat riots: Naroda Patiya massacre convict Babu Bajrangji in “bad shape”, cops tell SC

**New Delhi, Jan 31 (PTI):** Former Bajrang Dal leader Babu Bajrangji, sentenced to 21 years in jail in the Naroda Patiya massacre case in which 97 people were killed by a mob during the 2002 Gujarat riots, is in “bad shape” due to various ailments, the state government informed the Supreme Court Thursday in reply to his bail plea.

The state government said that medical reports suggests that Bajrangji has suffered a hundred percent vision loss besides various other ailments. A bench of Justices A M Khanwilkar and Ajay Rastogi asked the counsel for Gujarat government to file the medical reports on an affidavit as it needs to be taken on record.

Senior advocate R Basant, appearing for Bajrangji, said that he is seeking bail in the case on health grounds as he is now 100 per cent deaf and blind and suffers from various heart ailments. “Let them (Gujarat) file an affidavit. We will hear you on merit,” the bench said while posting the matter for further hearing next week.

Advocate Aparna Bhatt, appearing for Faridaben Abdul Kadar Khalifa who claims to be a victim of the Naroda Patiya massacre, said that they have moved an intervening application seeking to oppose the bail application of Bajrangji. The bench said it will consider the intervening application along with the bail application next week. On October

8 last year, the top court had sought reply from Gujarat Police on the bail plea of Bajrangji.

Bajrangji has claimed that he was in “unsound physical condition”, having permanent blindness and had undergone bypass surgery recently.

While seeking bail, he has also challenged the Gujarat High Court’s April 20 verdict in which his conviction in the case was upheld and the life term awarded to him by the trial court was reduced to 21 years’ rigorous imprisonment without remission.

On January 23, the top court had granted regular bail to four convicts in the Naroda Patiya massacre case - Umeshbhai Surabhai Bharwad, Rajkumar, Padmendarasinh Jaswantsinh Rajput and Harshad alias Mungda Jila Govind Chhara Parmar.

The Gujarat High Court had on April 20 last year upheld the conviction of 12 out of the 29 accused who were pronounced guilty on various charges by the trial court and had acquitted 17 others, including former BJP minister Maya Kodnani. The rioting had taken place on February 28, 2002, in the Naroda Patiya area of Ahmedabad where a mob had killed 97 people, most of them from a minority community.

The massacre had taken place a day after the torching of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra, killing 59 people and triggering state-wide riots.

## SC directs Sahara chief Subrata Roy to appear before it on Feb 28

**NEW DELHI, JAN 31 (PTI):** The Supreme Court Thursday directed Sahara group chief Subrata Roy to appear before it on February 28 for failing to deposit Rs 25,700 crore in the SEBI-Sahara case for returning investors’ money. The apex court said six months were given to Sahara by its last order to arrange the amount but what has transpired during the period has not inspired the confidence of the court.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi noted that the group has deposited only Rs 15,000 crore. The bench, also comprising Justices A K Sikri and S K Kaul, declined to give any further chance to Roy and other directors to comply with its previous orders.

It said it had decided to proceed with the matter so that the law takes its own course and directed Roy and other directors to appear before it personally on next date of hearing.



## HSP conducts door-to-door campaign at MG Marg

**REBYNA RANA  
GANGTOK, 31 JAN:**

Hamro Sikkim Party president, Dr Bina Basnet and vice president, Bhaichung Bhutia,

carried out a daylong door-to-door campaign in and around MG Marg, Gangtok today. The duo was also accompanied by party members during the campaign.

## The New Big WagonR launched in Sikkim



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 31 JAN:**

To impress customers with its bold design, enhanced space, comfort, next generation infotainment system and advanced K-series engine, Maruti Suzuki India’s 3rd generation Big New WagonR was launched here at Entel Motors on Wednesday.

The car is engineered and built on 5th generation HEARTECT platform that increases safety of occupants through effective absorption of impact and dispersion

of crash energy and assures stability. Use of 40% high tensile steel provides better strength, safety, rigidity and NVH (noise, vibration and harshness) performance. In addition to the well proven 1.0 L engine, the Big New WagonR comes with a stronger heart of 1.2 L engine that delivers powerful performance.

It offers excellent fuel efficiency for both the engine options: 21.5 km/l for 1.2 L variant and 22.5 km/l for 1.0 L variant, which is nearly 10% higher than the on-

going model.

Safety features include driver air bag, ABS (antilock braking system) with EBD (electronic brake force distribution), front seat belt reminder, speed alert system and rear parking sensors, meeting all applicable regulations including offset, side crash and pedestrian safety norms.

The price ranges from Rs 4.37 lakh to 5.87 lakh. The car comes in six colours - magma grey, silky silver, superior white, autumn orange, nutmeg brown and poolside blue.

## Courteney Cox joins Instagram in a ‘Friends’ reunion

**LOS ANGELES, JAN 31 (PTI):** “Friends” star Courteney Cox has joined Instagram. The actor made her foray into the photo and video-sharing social media platform on Tuesday. As her first post, Cox shared her picture with Ellen DeGeneres and “Friends” co-star Lisa Kudrow when the duo appeared

on the host’s show recently. “Hello Instagram! I’m here with a little help from my friends. Picture credit: Michael Rozman/Warner Bros,” she captioned the photo. On the show, Cox had told DeGeneres she felt it was time she join the social media platform. To her surprise the host had got

the set of Central Perk, the fictitious coffeehouse made famous on the long-running sitcom, recreated.

The host-comic also arranged to get the very orange couch on which the beloved characters - Monica, Rachel, Phoebe, Joey, Ross and Chandler - used to laze upon.

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### Before the Notary Public Darjeeling

I, Miss Sunanda Rai daughter of Late Sher Bahadur Rai, by religion Hindu, by nationality Indian, resident of Rungmook Tea Garden, P.O. Sonada, P.S. Jore-banglow, Dist. Darjeeling do hereby solemnly affirm and declare as under:-

1. That Late Sher Bahadur Rai was my father and in all my documents Adhar Card No. 9556/5265/5713 Election I.D. No. AVV12304465 the name of my father is correctly mentioned as Sher Bahadur Rai.
2. That due to inadvertence the name of my father in my Madhyamik Pariksha (secondary Exam. 2012 the name of my father is mentioned as Sufal Rai – Sufal is the nickname of my father.
3. That Sher Bahadur Rai and Sufal Rai is the same one identical person and was my father- Sufal is nick name and Sher Bahadur is the original name.
4. That I am swearing the affidavit to clarify the facts aforementioned.

Solemnly affirm by me on 19th January 2019.

Sunanda Rai  
Declarant.

### DECLARATION

I, Sunanda Rai resident of Rungmook Tea Garden, P.O. Sonada. P.S. Jorebanglow, dist Darjeeling hereby declare that my father Late Sher Bahadur Rai, that in all my documents Adhar Card No. 9556/5265/5713, Election ID no. AVV12304465 that my father name mentioned as Sher Bahadur Rai but in my Madhyamik Pariksha it was mentioned as Sufal Rai which is his nickname. I therefore declare and swear before the Notary Public, Darjeeling by affidavit no 21AB 026755 dt. 19.01.2019, that both Sufal Rai and Sher Bahadur Rai as the same and identical person i.e. my late father.

Sd/-  
Sunanda Rai(daughter)  
Declarant.



### GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

### FOOD SECURITY AND AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT KRISHI BHAWAN TADONG

No. 278/Agri./Engg

Dated: 25.01.2019

### MEASURES TO BE TAKEN BY STATE GOVERNMENT/ POWER TILLER MANUFACTURE/IMPORTER

In pursuance of the recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, the State Government is hereby directed to lay down following measures while empanelling the manufactures/importers for supply of Agriculture Machineries for central sector scheme “Sub Mission on Agriculture Mechanization” in the state of Sikkim with immediate effect.

- a. The manufactures/importer must ensure that they are authorized dealer available for the whole State as ours is a very small state compared to other states.
- b. The authorized dealer must have stock of spare parts, two numbers of service stations for North/East & South West districts.
- c. At least a week long duration training on all the control safety precautions, proper operation, minor repair, day to day maintenance & proper storage must be given in a cluster wise pattern i.e. for a cluster of 3-4 villages in a suitable location.
- d. State Government must conduct intensive awareness for popularizing the scheme on Mechanization.
- e. It must be insured that “Not for road use” as per CMVR guidelines must be displayed on the Power Tiller; no manufacture should be empanelled unless and until fulfills this criteria.
- f. A regular time to time field survey must be carried out by State Government on the condition of Power Tillers and the report in this regard must be submitted to DAC & FW.
- g. An online grievance mechanism along with its redressal mechanism in time bound matter must be developed by the State Government.
- h. It must be ensured that the country of origin is mentioned on the labeling plate of Power Tiller.
- j. The manufactures/importers that have been empanelled by GoI and registered in the Government farmers’ portal should be given opportunities to demonstrate their machineries so that the farmers can have wide range of machineries of their choice.

R.O. No. 635/IPR/Pub/Classi./18-19  
Date: 31.01.2019

Superintending Engineer  
FS&AD/HCCD Deptt.



# SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

## Committees Require Commitment

*Their failure in basic tasks snowballs into across the board deficiencies*

One understands that agencies and committees instituted by the government have only so much motivation, leeway or even interest in going after other agencies of the same establishment when it comes to fixing accountability. But something needs to be done if such committees are not delivering even on the basic task of keeping track or maintaining at least a semblance of an over-watch. The Annual Technical Report on Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies for the year ended 31 March 2016 by the Office of the Accountant General (Audit), Sikkim, tabled in the Legislative Assembly during the two-day session which concluded on Tuesday paints a rather dismal picture of the functioning of various committees constituted for smooth function of PRIs. And this is not the first time that such shortcomings have been flagged. In fact, the lethargy enumerated in the latest report have appeared in past reviews as well, but either no one is reading, or more worryingly, no one cares.

So, the State Government has constituted a string of such committees and appointed/ nominated people into them as well, but there is a big slip between the tasked assignments and performance on ground. For instance, anyone who lives in rural Sikkim would be aware of Social Audit-cum-Vigilance Committees which, on paper, are required to ensure that works are executed at Panchayat level as per estimate. They should also monitor the quality of works and are to be comprised of a “wide spectrum” of stakeholders, users and marginalized and vulnerable sections of society including women and senior citizens of the respective Gram Panchayats. The Audit Comment accompanying the report on “position of functioning” of this committee informs that it “simply certified” works executed by the GPs “without exercising any checks”. Adequate monitoring was not undertaken, hence quality of work “as envisaged in the estimate” was not ensured. As a result, the “certificate” issued by these committees were a “mere formality” so that payments could be released to the contractors. Then there are the important, but similarly inept Disaster Management Committees which have been found to be “largely ineffective” due to lack of training or involvement as a result of which “victims could not be given immediate relief at the time of need”. And really, when has anyone heard of the involvement of DMCs in the wake of any disaster in Sikkim. Sure, the district administration responds and delivers relief, but the disaster management committees surface only occasionally in press releases informing about meetings of drills. Then there is the Block Development Committee which might have a wider jurisdiction territorially than the Social Audit committees but that does not make them any more serious or effective. The Audit Comment for them refers to them as “largely non-functional”; this, due to absence of proper co-ordination among line departments, DPC and Block Office. And this comes at a cost because in its non-functionality, “identification, scrutiny, implementation of schemes and proper monitoring of schemes for overall development of the GP and Block could not be done”.

One would have thought that the State Government’s flagship CATCH programme and the State’s Total Sanitation status would have provided the required impetus to the Village Health Sanitation Committees to be better performing. But even that has not happened for these VHSCs which the Audit has found “not adequately functional”. Since these committees did not bother to carry out household surveys or analyse health issues and health conditions of the villages, sanitation facilities were not created adequately and community toilets were not maintained in hygienic condition. Everyone is aware of the result, now we also know why. There are, apparently, also District Technical Support Committees in Sikkim which are required to support the preparation of District Perspective Plans for each sector by coordinating with the PRIs and technical experts. What the Audit discovered was that estimates prepared by the GPs were not technically vetted by the DTSCs and this resulted in “deficiency in preparation of estimate and also execution of a number of works without preparation of estimates”. The litter abandoned and/ or over-budget projects across the state stand testimony to this. A frequent complaint received from the villages is of the lack of proper drinking water supply. Water Supply & Sanitation Committees exist for preparation of Village Action Plans deliver “source to mouth” water supply proposals. These committees have remained “largely ineffective” the Audit Comment puts on record but that is being polite since records show that preparation of proposal for submission to district authorities has not even been initiated.

In its recommendations to the State Government, the auditors have suggested that utilisation certificates be submitted in time to avoid delayed or short release of funds; financial management be strengthened to avoid diversion of funds and/ or extra and avoidable expenses; programme execution be strengthened and dedicated and effective monitoring systems be established. All of these can be achieved if only the already existing bouquet of committees were somehow convinced to their basic tasks effectively enough.

## Hope and anguish in a Mexican refugee shelter: Researcher records stories of Central American asylum seekers

STACEY WILSON-FORSBERG  
*theconversation.com*

This month, a caravan of nearly 1,000 Central American asylum seekers crossed Mexico’s southern border with Guatemala. They followed in the footsteps of more than 7,000 asylum seekers who passed through earlier in October.

The Northern Triangle Region of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras continues to experience endemic poverty, extremely high homicide rates and widespread gang activity. These dire circumstances drive migration flows to the north.

The United States, until recently, was the northern destination of choice for Central American asylum-seekers. It was a “promised land” where they would find personal security and economic prosperity.

In contrast with those in earlier caravans, these newcomers to Mexico are unlikely to embark on the futile 4,000-kilometre journey north to the United States. Mobility to the U.S. is becoming increasingly more dangerous and the U.S.-Mexico border is more difficult to cross at both official and unofficial ports of entry.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador directed officials at the Mexico-Guatemala border to distribute humanitarian visas to the newest caravan. The visas will allow the Central Americans to live and work in Mexican territory for one year while they navigate the country’s refugee determination process.

Central American asylum-seekers are now stranded in Mexico. The journey north has left them in a state of limbo, keeping them tacked down in a location where they did not intend to stay permanently.

### MEXICO ATTEMPTS TO FULFIL OBLIGATION TO REFUGEES

Mexico received 28,000 asylum claims in 2018 and 7,000 are backlogged from 2017. Its Law on Refugees is framed by the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees.

The Cartagena Declaration grants protection for people whose lives are threatened by generalized violence who would not be considered refugees under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

In this respect, Mexico is attempting to fulfil its international obligation to refugees. However, its refugee-protection system is massively under-resourced and unprepared to handle so many asylum cases.

### THE ART OF THE WAIT FOR ASYLUM

Asylum-seekers who hold humanitarian visas often reside in temporary migrant shelters called albergues. Mexico City is home to several albergues that divide guests by age and gender.

Over the past two years, I have conducted research at one of these shelters, Albergue Tochán in southwestern Mexico City. Tochán (nuestra casa, our home in Náhuatl) houses men who have experienced violence in their country of origin or along

their journey through Mexican territory.

Tochán responds to the basic needs of the men, including the provision of beds, clothing, meals and toiletries. The tall windowless structure with irregular architecture and steep stairways resembles a clean, warm, welcoming, albeit very cramped home. However, it runs over capacity with far fewer beds than guests.

While at the albergue, the men are free to come

claims would be rejected, resulting in official and permanent eviction from Mexico.

As days become weeks, and weeks turn into months, their notions of time and space need to be continually recalibrated as the wait drags on.

Waiting defines their identity. Some of the men reported no longer knowing who they are anymore or what they are waiting for. They described feeling “useless,” “not even human,” “impotent,” “power-



and go. They use computers equipped with internet, watch television at specified hours and they adhere to a strict schedule of household chores.

I interviewed 15 of these men over many hours while accompanying them in daily activities, and visiting with my undergraduate students.

As a researcher, I can’t help the thousands of Central Americans who are stranded in Mexico. But, I can help tell their stories. I believe stories can bring some humanity to a population that has been vilified and rendered nameless by recent political discourse.

### THEY WANT TO BE REMEMBERED

Refugee determination procedures create many uncertainties and anxieties. Asylum-seekers often find themselves in situations of indefinite and unpredictable waiting.

Research has shown that the long wait for asylum in a host country can cause more stress and mental anguish than the events that happened before the refugee claimants went into exile.

The men at Tochán spoke about their current reality and described their daily activities, frustrations and coping mechanisms. They narrated their hopes and aspirations for the future, and they detailed the abuses they endured in the past.

The men were keen to talk — they want their stories to be documented. Many asked that they be identified in publications so that they could leave a piece of themselves behind in case they did not survive deportation back to Central America.

The men spoke about their sense of exclusion in a new territory. They worried that their asylum

less,” like a “beggar” and living “half lives.”

Anxiety, uncertainty and lack of control over one’s life and future are clearly factors inherent to the collective experience of the men at Tochán.

### FINDING UNITY IN ART

The men have been busy.

Multiple activities guide the men’s days. They attend Sunday morning mass and afternoon soccer matches, and they craft and sell wooden artesanías, masks and paintings.

They paint enormous colourful murals that cover virtually every surface of the albergue and throughout the surrounding neighbourhood.

With the assistance of local artists, the director of Albergue Tochán has introduced art as therapy and as a source of income. While hesitant at first, the men have gradually found ways to express and distract themselves through art while they navigate daily, weekly and monthly waiting for the legal validation of their refugee status.

Through art, asylum-seekers have been provided the opportunity to share and learn from each other.

While painting together, they find a level of comfort and unity as they learn to trust and rely on each other.

As their initial dream of reaching the United States deteriorates during the long wait at the albergue, the men learn to embrace a Mexican hope: the possibility of staying in a new location while waiting for an uncertain future.

[the writer is Associate Professor Human Rights & Human Diversity, Wilfrid Laurier University]

## How to train 21st century engineers for tech discoveries

PAULO GARCIA  
*theconversation.com*

The year is 1985. Portable CD players like the Sony Discman are the epitome of consumer technology: a battery-operated device that allows you to listen to music anywhere (provided you brought the CDs as well).

A recent graduate from electronics and computer engineering programs understands how the portable CD player works. They cannot build it without the precision tools and materials, but they can certainly design it: they understand how audio is encoded onto a CD’s surface, the mechanics of reading those data and the signal processing hardware and software that transform them into sound.

The year is 2019. The smartphone is the epitome of consumer technology. A marvel of complex hardware: integrated circuits that handle wireless communication, graphics processing, a microprocessor more powerful than those found in home computers in 1985. Layers upon layers of software, from a complex operating system to applications powered by virtual machines. A device an engineering graduate does not understand.

### THE SLOWER PACE OF ENGINEERING EDUCATION

Technology has surpassed technological education. There are so many concepts, techniques and tools that an engineering graduate should know, but there isn’t enough time. This is not a novel insight, but it is getting worse, and this gap between education and market demand has serious consequences.

Students are less motivated, as they realize the gap between what they are learning and the technology they use will not be bridged over four years of undergraduate education. Employers are frustrated because they want graduates to have mastery over the latest programming language or design methodology. And yet, engineering curricula have

changed little over the past 30 years. Oh yes, we’ve modernized our labs and we’re no longer teaching obsolete programming languages, but the bulk of the knowledge is the same.

### TEACHING THE BASICS

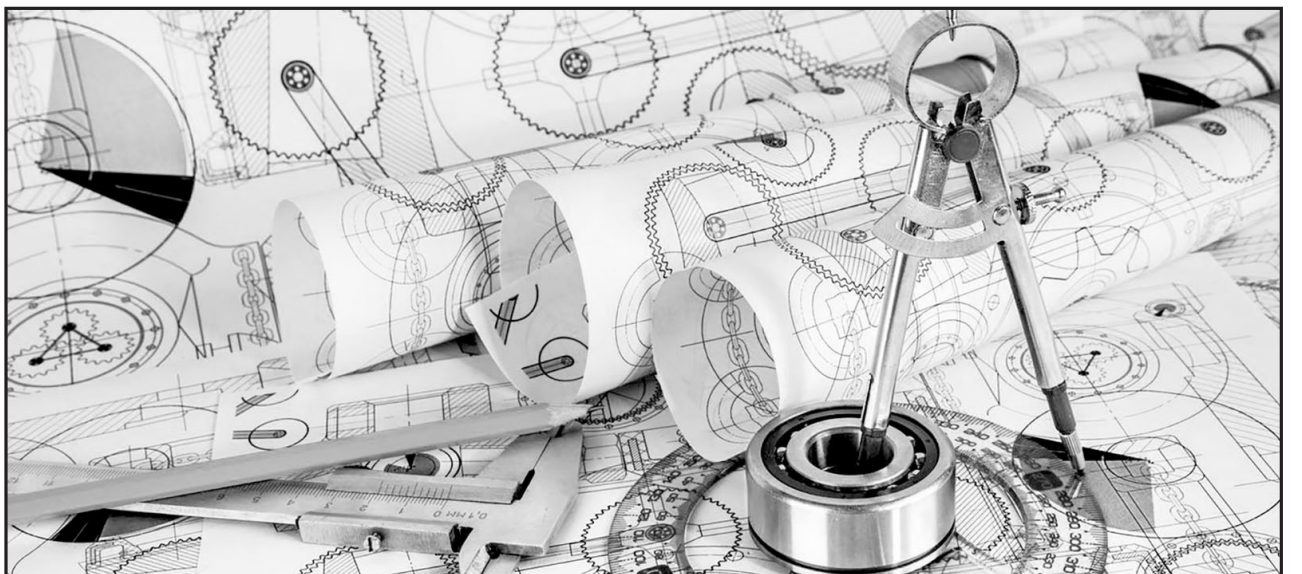
Curricula remained more or less the same for good reason: we need to teach the basics. We could educate

much, pedagogical approaches certainly have. We’re moving towards an academic approach where student/faculty interactions are no longer limited to the classroom. For example, the Discovery Centre at Carleton University provides undergraduate students with opportunities to participate in research and engage with

also ensure a strong foundational knowledge of the basics that can support them throughout their careers.

### CONNECTING CURRICULA

We are moving towards connected curricula, where the boundaries between teaching and learning, research, outreach and community engagement are starting to disappear. We believe this



towards market requirements and teach only the latest programming languages or make students memorize the meaning of the latest buzzwords — but that would be a disservice. This would equip our graduates with the skills required for the next five years, but it would also prevent them from growing beyond that. We want to equip students with the knowledge and the skills to be life-long learners, which is the only way to survive in a technological profession.

But how to balance these conflicting requirements: graduate readiness versus strong foundations? The answer is twofold.

First, we need to change how students learn by fostering inclusion of students in research and mentoring towards continuing education. We’re doing this: whilst the content of engineering curricula have not changed

communities of other disciplines to address common real-world issues from the perspective of their program areas. More programs and initiatives aimed at offering diverse learning experiences are underway.

Second, we must realize that undergraduate degrees alone are not enough to train tomorrow’s engineers. We are designing more and more master’s programs that will provide advanced training across several sub-fields, from Biomedical Engineering to Embedded Systems. Within these, education paths are less and less linear, allowing students to select more refined specializations. For example, the Department of Systems and Computer Engineering offers several graduate specializations within its master’s programs, to develop fine-grained expertise in students’ sub-field of choice. The programmes

is the path to train 21st century engineers who will have to develop technology, not in isolation, but within a complex social fabric: think bitcoin or autonomous cars. But we need to deal with the societal aspects that are involved: the economic and personal strain on students who will have to take more advanced degrees, for more years, for longer hours. This will require joint efforts between universities and government.

For the most part, engineering schools are still teaching the same things they were teaching 30 years ago. Now, students are learning them differently, and that makes all the difference. Technology is still surpassing technological education. But we are moving towards better pedagogy.

We’ll catch up.

[the writer is Assistant Professor, Carleton University]



CPI(M) will intensify movement against Citizenship Bill: Das

AGARTALA, JAN 31 (PTI): The opposition CPI(M) in Tripura Thursday announced to intensify its movement against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill.

“Our party has decided to intensify movement against the Citizenship Amendment bill because it is divisive and the Narendra Modi Government in the Centre is trying to divide people of the country on religious line,” CPI(M) state party secretary Gautam Das told reporters.

He said the CPI(M) has decided to organise rally, procession and mass sit-in nationwide on February 4 demanding scrapping of the bill.

“We would organise protests and rallies on February 4 as part of nationwide programme. Besides, we have decided to intensify movement in our state, because people of the state would face lot of problems if the bill is passed,” Das said.

He said peace prevailed in the north eastern region before the bill was proposed by the Central government, but the situation turned “volatile” in the region after the bill was introduced.

“People of the N-E region came on the streets to protest the bill, because they would be the most sufferer if the bill is passed in Rajya Sabha. The bill must be scrapped,” Das said.

On Wednesday, a newly formed political platform of six indigenous political parties of the state -‘Committee for Movement against citizenship Amendment Bill’, organised a protest rally at Khumulwng, about 20 km from here against the Citizenship Amendment Bill.

Experts share experience on women-led conservation projects

GUWAHATI, JAN 31 (PTI): Seventy women environmentalists from 11 countries converged in the city to share their experience on women’s participation in conservation projects.

The ongoing ‘Fourth Women in Nature Network (WiNN)’ event, being held in India for the first time, provided opportunities to environmentalists for sharing the lessons learned from such conservation projects in India and around the world, WiNN’s founding member, Leanne E Alonso, told PTI on Thursday. “The objectives of the

event are to link women working on the management of natural resources at a global level, to support women who are just starting to enter the environmental field and to create a global learning network,” she said.

Alonso hoped that this event will provide ideas and connections that will help the participants become leaders in their communities and create conditions for the future generation of environmental leaders.

The conclave has been organised by WiNN in partnership

with Aaaryank, an environment organisation, Kamrup district administration, Kamrup police and Assam Forest Department

Speakers and panelists from India, along with women from other countries, including Argentina, Bhutan, Guyana, Nepal, Vietnam, Myanmar, Mexico, Sri Lanka and the US are participating in the programme.

WiNN’s India Director and Green Oscar winner, Purnima Barman, said that without participation of women, conservation will be

a difficult task and the role of women should be strengthened in conservation efforts.

Barman spearheads a community programme to conserve the endangered Greater Adjutant Stork (GAS) in three villages of Assam’s Kamrup district by raising the ‘Hargila Army’ of women who are leading the way to conserve an endangered bird and to strengthen their leadership in the community.

More than 50 of these rural women conservationists also attended the four-day event which ended on Thursday.

12-hr Assam bandh hit life in 4 Bodo-dominated districts



GUWAHATI, JAN 31 (PTI): The 12-hour Assam Bandh called by the NDFB on Thursday to protest against the life sentence awarded to its president Ranjan Daimary and nine others affected normal life in the four Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD).

There was, however, no report of any untoward incident, police said. The bandh, which began at 5 am, brought life to a standstill in Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts with all shops and business establishments remaining closed and vehicular traf-

fic remained off the roads.

These four districts were Bodo dominated and comprise the BTAD. The day being a local holiday it had no affect in the attendance in the government offices, schools, colleges and other educational institutes.

There was no report of train services being affected.

The impact of the bandh was not much in the Brahmaputra valley while in the Barak Valley it failed to evoke any response.

The bandh has been called to protest against the life sentence

awarded to NDFB chief Daimari and nine others by a CBI special court on Wednesday in the 2008 Assam serial blast case that had claimed 88 lives.

Ranjan Daimary formed an outfit Bodo Security Force in 1986 and in 1994, changed its name to National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Its objective was to secure a Bodoland state in the areas north of the river Brahmaputra in Assam. The NDFB is under a ceasefire agreement with the Assam and Union Government since May 2005.

Ranganadi Hydro Electric project to shut down for 3 months from February: Minister



ITANAGAR, JAN 31 (PTI): The Ranganadi Hydro Electric project (RHEP) in Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh will stop production of electricity for three months due to repair and maintenance of the project, state Power Minister Tamiya Tago said Thursday.

The RHEP located at Yazali with a installed capacity of 405 mega watt power, will stop production from February 1 to April 30 this year for repair work at the tunnel, which has reportedly developed leakage, Tago told reporters here.

With the shutting down of the project owned by the North East Electrical Power Corporation Ltd (NEEPCO), Arunachal Pradesh would face power shortage to the tune of 60 MW daily, officials said.

The average peak demand of power in the state per day is 100 mw, excluding five districts Tawang, Anjaw, Upper Siang, Dibang Valley and

Shi-Yomi, which are dependent on local generation of power, Power Department Chief Engineer (Western Zone) Gumdo Doji said.

“To overcome the shortfall of 60 mw power, Chief Minister Pema Khandu and I wrote to the Union Minister of State for Power to allocate additional power from Central sector power generating stations and after much persuasion, the ministry allocated 30 mw of power from Unchahar-I Therma Power Plant of NTPC to the state on round the clock basis for three months,” the minister informed.

Taga added that the NEEPCO had also consented to allocate regular 34 mw of power of Meghalaya for 5.30 hours regularly for three months.

“The NEEPCO will provide 10 MW power from Kathalguri gas power station in Assam and 24 MW from Agartala gas thermal combined cycle power project in

Tripura which were meant for Meghalaya,” the minister disclosed.

“The state power department on Wednesday inked power purchase agreements with NTPC Ltd for 30 MW and NEEPCO for 34 MW for three months involving an expenditure of Rs 28.27 crore,” Taga informed.

“In case of any exigency on real time basis, the department can draw to an extent of 12 per cent of scheduled quantum of power,” the Power minister said and appealed to the people to cooperate with the department during the period.

Responding to questions why NEEPCO has decided to shut down the project when board exams are approaching along with general elections, Taga said that due to leakage in the tunnel, NEEPCO had decided to go for the shut down as it is a lean season and repair works would be much easier as the flow of water in the river is less.

Mizoram sends drug rehab staff to Chennai for 9-day training

Aizawl, Jan 31 (PTI): As part of its initiative to combat substance abuse, the Mizoram government Thursday sent 30 staff members of various de-addiction centres in the state to a well-known rehabilitation centre in Chennai for nine-day intensive training.

The 30 chosen members would receive lessons and guidance in clinical duties and medical and psychological

handling of patients at TTK Hospital in Chennai, an official statement said.

The ruling MNF, as promised in the poll manifesto, was determined to eradicate the problems of drug addiction in the state, it asserted.

A detailed road map has been prepared to build new de-addiction centres, while strengthening the existing ones, the statement maintained. “More such steps

would be taken in this direction in this northeastern state, where drug addiction has become a serious problem coupled with the spread of HIV/AIDS,” it added. At least 1,504 people, including 171 women, have died due to drug abuse in Mizoram since 1984, according to government records.

Last year, 36 people reportedly succumbed to heroin addiction in the state.

CPI(M)says man died of starvation, Tripura govt denies claim

AGARTALA, JAN 31 (PTI): The opposition CPI(M) in Tripura Thursday alleged that a tribal man recently died due to starvation in Dhalai district’s Purba Gobindabari village, where people have been apparently struggling to make ends meet owing to acute shortage of food, drinking water and jobs.

Deputy Chief Minister Jishnu Debbarman, however, dismissed the allegations and said the claims were “politically motivated”.

A six-member delegation of the CPI(M), led by Leader of Opposition and former chief minister Manik Sarkar, on Wednesday visited Purba Gobindabari, a tribal hamlet in Longterai subdivision of the district, after receiving reports of food crisis in the area, a senior party leader said.

Radhacharan Debbarma, the state secretariat member of the CPI(M), said the delegation, of which he was a part along with MLAs Ratan Bhowmik, Mubassar Ali, visited the house

of Japanda Tripura, a 78-year-old tribal man who died on January 18 in Purba Gobindabari village allegedly due to starvation.

“The family consisted of eight members, including Tripura’s son, daughter-in-law and five children. The family members told us that they were facing acute shortage of food and drinking water for the past three months and no jobs were available under government schemes.

“Japanda Tripura ate nothing for four days and died of starvation,” he told reporters.

Debbarma, who is also the chief executive member of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), said the family apparently received NREGA payment of Rs 1,500 on December 10, but after that there was no work for any of the members.

“Of Rs 1500, the family had to clear their debts and buy rice and dal. As there was no job available, Japanda had to die for want of food,”

he claimed.

The tribals in the district subsist on forest produce, harvest of Jhum cultivation and jobs under different government schemes, the senior CPI(M) leader said. The villagers collect ‘Arjun flowers’ from the forest and sell it in the market to make a living, but its rate recently dropped from Rs 25 to Rs 8, he said. Arjun flowers are primarily used to make broomsticks.

“Three months beginning from December is a lean period and people living in the hilly areas face acute drinking water crisis. Last year, the Left Front government had distributed water in tankers. But this year, no such arrangements were made. So people were drinking contaminated water from rivulets,” Debbarma claimed.

The chief of the tribal council also said that many remote tribal hamlets, he visited recently, are struggling to put up with a similar crisis. “We have decided to meet Chief Minis-

ter Biplab Kumar Deb soon and apprise him of the situation. We will request him to take measures on war footing to save the people,” he added.

In June last year, Jitendra Chowdhury, a parliamentarian and a tribal leader of the CPI(M), had alleged that tribals from Dhalai district were migrating to Bangladesh for collecting forest produce in the wake of food crisis.

A delegation, led by him, submitted a memorandum to the chief minister, seeking appropriate measures.

Deputy Chief Minister Jishnu Debbarman, when asked about the allegations, said it was far from truth.

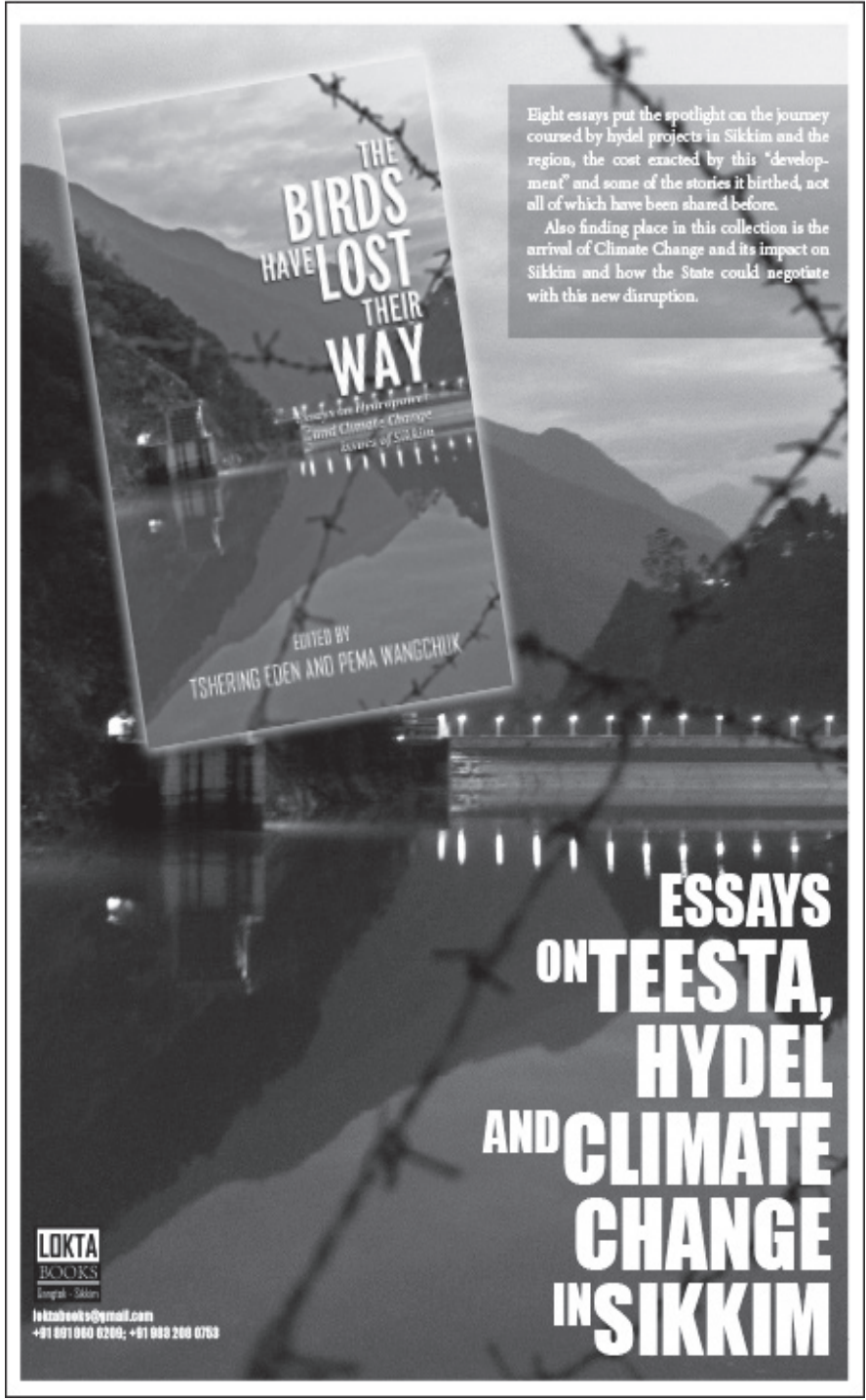
“Man days under MGNREGA have been increased to support poor tribal families. The allegations made were far from truth and politically motivated,” he said.

Talking about the migration claims, he said the government had checked the matter with appropriate agencies and found it to be “incorrect”.

WB oppn parties demand deployment of central forces during LS polls

Kolkata, Jan 31 (PTI): The opposition parties in West Bengal on Thursday, during a meeting with the ECI’s full bench, demanded heavy deployment of central forces in the state during the upcoming Lok Sabha polls to ensure a free and fair election. The full bench of the Election Commission of India (ECI), led by Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, met representatives of various political parties.

Besides leaders of the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), those of opposition parties such as the BJP, the CPI(M) and the Congress called on the ECI’s top bosses at a five-star hotel in central Kolkata. “We demanded heavy deployment of central forces to ensure free and fair polls. They should be deployed in each and every booth of the state and the central forces should not be under the control of the district police. Those police officials act as per the orders of TMC leaders,” BJP delegation leader Mukul Roy said.





Sole survivors:  
Qatar  
plot Japan  
ambush in  
Asian final

Abu Dhabi, Jan 31 (AFP): While Japan have the Asian Cup pedigree, Qatar's over-achieving players might just feel that their name is on the trophy after a record-breaking run to their first-ever final. Against the backdrop of simmering political tension, the Qatari players were pelted with plastic bottles -- and even shoes -- by furious local fans in a 4-0 semi-final thrashing of the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi.

After surviving that ordeal, the 2022 World Cup hosts believe they have nothing to fear from Japan. "We have already realised a dream that the whole country had," said striker Almoez Ali, who equalled Ali Daei's record of eight goals in a single Asian Cup against the hosts on Tuesday.

"We will need patience in the final but if we are patient, we have a chance of being champions." Japan, who captured the last of their record four Asian titles in 2011, upset tournament favourites Iran 3-0 in Monday's first semi-final and appear to be peaking at just the right time.

After threatening to bore crowds to death in their first five games, the Blue Samurai go into Friday's final in the UAE capital unbeaten in 11 matches since Hajime Moriyasu took over as coach after last year's World Cup. Yuya Osako's controversial second-half double floored Iran, and consequently Moriyasu's new-look Japan are suddenly being tipped to go all the way.

"We talked about going to war before we came out here," said captain Maya Yoshida, part of the Japan side which scooped the title eight years ago. "We're all fighting hard together for it."

- CLINICAL JAPAN - Japan have never lost an Asian Cup final, while Qatar's defence have kept a record six clean sheets. Though finely poised, the Qataris have yet to face a team as clinical as Japan -- or one with as much tactical nous.

However, their progress has been truly remarkable given the abuse Qatar have suffered from local fans because of the long-running Gulf blockade of the tiny, energy-rich state.

# Liverpool held in title blow, Chelsea humiliated

LONDON, JAN 31 (AFP): Liverpool wasted a chance to take complete control of the Premier League title race as Leicester earned a 1-1 draw against the leaders, while Chelsea's bid for a top-four finish was rocked by a humiliating 4-0 thrashing at Bournemouth.

After second-placed Manchester City lost at Newcastle on Tuesday, Jurgen Klopp's side would have moved seven points clear at the top with a win over Leicester.

But Liverpool, chasing a first English title since 1990, had to settle for a frustrating draw on Wednesday that left them five points ahead of champions City.

"We put Leicester under pressure but we were unlucky with the goal in the last second before half-time. You have to take it how it is," Klopp said.

Following a warm-weather training break in Dubai, Liverpool were ahead in the third minute at snowy Anfield.

Senegal winger Sadio Mane wriggled through the Leicester defence and slotted a clinical finish into the far corner for his 11th goal of the season.

Liverpool's quickest league goal since April 2016 had the Kop belting out songs of praise for their former manager Rafael Benitez, who mas-termined Newcastle's victory against City.

But Liverpool quickly lost their rhythm and Leicester defender Harry Maguire punished sloppy marking from Virgil van Dijk to meet Ben Chilwell's header with a



close-range finish on the stroke of half-time.

Liverpool appealed in vain for what looked a clear penalty when Naby Keita went down under a challenge from Ricardo Pereira.

"It was probably the clearest penalty situation we have had. You will have to ask the ref why he didn't give it," Klopp fumed on BT Sport.

It took a superb save from Alisson Becker to stop Roberto Firmino scoring an own goal as Liverpool were forced to settle for a point that gave City fresh hope.

At Dean Court, Chelsea suffered a second successive defeat that left their bid to qualify for the Champions League under severe threat.

The Blues, winners in just one of their last four league games, drop down to fifth place -- below Arsenal on goals scored -- with Man-

chester United only two points behind in sixth.

"We reacted very badly. We stopped being a team. Everybody tried to solve the problem in an individual way. I can't understand why after a good first half," Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri said.

"Maybe it's my fault because I'm not able to motivate this group of players. I don't know why. I have to understand very soon." Not for the first time this season, Sarri's team lacked a cutting edge, even with Gonzalo Higuain making his Premier League debut following the Argentine striker's loan move from Juventus.

Bournemouth made them pay in the 47th minute when Josh King converted a David Brooks pass.

- FURIOUS FANS - Brooks added to Sar-

ri's woes in the 63rd minute as the Bournemouth winger eased past the flat-footed David Luiz to lash in the second goal.

Chelsea's fans were furious, chanting "you don't know what you're doing" at Sarri when he substituted Higuain.

But the misery wasn't over for Chelsea, who conceded again in the 75th minute when King struck, before Charlie Daniels netted in stoppage time to condemn the west Londoners to their heaviest league loss in over two decades.

Tottenham staged a late fightback to close the gap on Manchester City to two points with a 2-1 win over Watford.

After a miserable week that saw Tottenham knocked out of the FA and League Cups, Mauricio Pochettino's third-placed side lifted the gloom at Wembley. Watford took the

lead in the 38th minute after the latest mistake from error-prone keeper Hugo Lloris.

Lloris completely missed his attempt to catch a corner and Watford defender Craig Cathcart headed into the empty net.

But Son Heung-Min was back in the Tottenham side for the first time since January 13, having missed three games while on duty for South Korea at the Asia Cup.

Son spared Tottenham further indignity as he pounced to drive in the 80th-minute equaliser. Fernando Llorente completed the turnaround when he headed the 87th-minute winner from a Danny Rose cross.

Southampton rescued a crucial 1-1 draw against fellow strugglers Crystal Palace, who had goalscorer Wilfried Zaha sent off at St Mary's.

## De Kock assault sinks Pakistan in series decider

CAPE TOWN, JAN 30 (AFP): Opening batsman Quinton de Kock launched an assault on Pakistan's bowlers to set up a series-clinching win for South Africa in the fifth and final one-day international at Newlands on Wednesday.

De Kock slammed 83 off 58 balls as South Africa chased down a target of 241 with seven wickets and ten overs to spare to seal a 3-2 series win.

"Quinny made it easy for the rest of the batters," said South African captain Faf du Plessis, who said he was "extremely happy" with the way his team had played.

"Our best performance came tonight in a crunch game," said Du Plessis. "The bowling was excellent and the fielding was real-

ly good. And when Quinny plays like he did tonight he's extremely difficult to bowl to."

While man-of-the-match De Kock sealed the win with his dazzling strokeplay, South Africa's bowlers played a significant role by restricting Pakistan to 240 for eight despite an aggressive 70 by Fakhar Zaman.

While Zaman was at the crease, Pakistan were on course for a big total. He was fourth out after a 73-ball innings when the total was 128 in the 25th over. But the scoring rate slowed after his dismissal, with only 49 runs scored in the next 15 overs.

"Our top three batters got starts and we wanted them to capitalise," said Pakistan stand-in captain Shoaib Malik, who has temporarily taken the role

from Sarfraz Ahmed after the wicketkeeper was banned for making a racist remark about Andile Phehlukwayo. "White-ball cricket is all about the first three batters." Malik congratulated opening batsman Imam-ul-Haq, who was named man of the series after scoring 271 runs at an average of 54.20 in five innings. "He is improving day by day," said Malik. Malik said he believed Pakistan were making good progress ahead of the World Cup in England and Wales, which starts on May 30.

"A good sign for Pakistan cricket is that we are fighting to the last ball. We are going forward." Imad Wasim, batting at number eight, gave the innings late impetus, hitting 47 not out off 31 balls. He struck sixes off

Dale Steyn and Kagiso Rabada in the last two overs.

Medium-paced all-rounders Dwaine Pretorius and Phehlukwayo both took two wickets in a disciplined South African bowling performance.

The left-handed Zaman hit ten fours in making his first half-century after a sequence of low scores in both the Tests and the ODIs.

He was dropped on 20 when he slashed Rabada to Hashim Amla, who could not hold a sharp, chest-high chance.

Fellow left-hander De Kock went for his shots from the start of South Africa's innings and had a let-off in the third over with his score on 12 when a mis-hit against Usman Shinwari looped to cover.

## Boult's fifer hands NZ consolation win over India in 4th ODI

HAMILTON, JAN 31 (PTI): India seemed shorn of their aura in the absence of talismanic skipper Virat Kohli as New Zealand pulled off a stunning eight-wicket win in the fourth cricket one-dayer to halt the visiting side's domination here Thursday.

With run-machine Kohli rested after the side claimed an unbeatable 3-0 lead in the five-match series, India's much-vaunted batting was dismissed for its seventh lowest ODI total -- 92 in 30.5 overs here -- after Trent Boult (5/21) dished out a deadly opening spell.

It was also the lowest total posted by any side on this venue, the previous lowest of 122 also against India's name.

With the series already out of their grasp after India won the first three games, Boult wreaked havoc with the new ball and in Colin de Grandhomme's (3/26) company utilised the swinging conditions at the Seddon Park.

"Never expected this to happen. (But) games like this happen...We've got ourselves to blame for this," said India's stand-in captain Rohit Sharma.

In the absence of Kohli and an injured Mahendra Singh Dhoni, the Indian batting unit found the going tough against the Kiwi bowling attack.

India's lowest ODI total is 54 against Sri Lanka at Sharjah in 2000. It was also India's second lowest total in ODIs against New Zealand, having somehow managed to surpass the 88 scored at Dambulla.

Bowling his 10 overs at a stretch, Boult troubled the Indian batsmen with both ways movement to return with impressive figures of 5 for 21, while Grandhomme gave him perfect support from the other end after New Zealand won the toss and elected to bowl.

While chasing, even though New Zealand lost Martin Guptill (14) and skipper Kane Williamson (11) early to Bhuvneshwar Kumar

(2/25), the hosts completed the formalities in 14.4 overs with eight wickets in hand.

Henry Nicholls (30 not out) and Ross Taylor (37 not out) then completed the easy task for the Kiwis without any further damage.

Earlier, the pitch didn't seem unplayable but the Indian batsmen failed to apply themselves against the swing bowling of Boult and Grandhomme.

Only four Indian batsmen -- Shikhar Dhawan (13), Hardik Pandya (16), Kuldeep Yadav (15) and Yuzvendra Chahal (18 not out) -- posted double digit scores.

Dhawan's search for big runs continued and he was the first to depart, caught plumb in front of the wicket by Boult in the sixth over.

Rohit, who is leading India in the last two matches of the series in the absence of Kohli, didn't have a happy outing on his 200th ODI and was caught by Boult off his own bowling an over later.

Grandhomme then joined the party and dismissed both Ambati Rayudu and Dinesh Karthik for ducks in a span of four balls in the 11th over.

A lot was expected from debutant Shubman Gill (9) but pressure got the better of him as he got out like Rohit, caught by Boult off his own bowling.

Reeling at 33 for 5, India desperately needed the experience of Kohli or Dhoni to bail the team out but in the duo's absence, the onus was on Pandya and Kedar Jadhav to do the repair job.

But it was not to be as wickets kept tumbling with Boult ripping apart India's line-up, dismissing both Jadhav and Pandya in quick succession.

Struggling at 55 for 8, Chahal and Kuldeep shared 25 runs for the ninth wicket to take India close to the 100-run mark before being shot out in 30.5 overs.

The match of the series is on Sunday in Wellington.

## Coca-Cola enters 5-year partnership with ICC

GURGAON, JAN 31 (PTI): Beverages major Coca cola Thursday announced a partnership with the International Cricket council (ICC) for next five years, till 2023.

The cola major is entering into the cricket space to be the world-wide non-alcoholic partner for the global cricketing body.

The move would help the company, which is building a consumer centric portfolio around the globe, T Krishnakumar, President Coca-Cola India and South West Asia said here.

The company, however, did not disclose the financial details of the deal.

The five-year partnership will cover all ICC events around the world, including the ICC Men's

cricket world cup 2019 in England and ICC's men's and women's T20 world cup in Australia in 2020 and 2021 in New Zealand respectively.

"It's our pleasure to welcome Coca-Cola on board as an ICC partner for next five years. As one of the biggest sports (cricket) with more than one billion fans, we are delighted to be partner with Coca-Cola," said ICC Chief Executive David Richardson.

Krishnakumar said,"in the lines of our long history of partnering with major sports globally, our strategic partnership with ICC, reinforces our long standing commitment to refresh sports fans."

Rival PepsiCo was one of the ground sponsors of ICC world cup 2015.

## Language is my friend, fiction my first love: Arundhati Roy

MERAJ BHAT

NEW DELHI, JAN 31 (PTI): She writes poetic prose, employs redolent metaphors and evokes utmost admiration for her novelistic virtues. Arundhati Roy is anything but a boring author. The 1997 Booker Prize-winner, who is equally at ease writing scathing essays, says she is a "disciplined writer" whose heart lies in fiction as it is a "connective tissue" between many things which are sometimes looked at or studied in isolation.

"Much of my non-fiction writing is an argument, but fiction is where you create a universe through which you invite a reader to walk. It is much more complex. For me, it is the most satisfying thing. When I write fiction, I feel like I am using all my skills, it delights me the most," Roy told

PTI in an interview.

"It is only fiction that transcends what is increasingly being divided into subjects. Fiction is the connective tissue between so many things which are sometimes looked at or studied in isolation. It allows you not to isolate things," she said. Best known for her debut novel "The God of Small Things" which won the 1997 Man Booker Prize and catapulted her into fame, Roy came out with her second work of fiction "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" in 2017 after a hiatus of twenty years.

The second novel which was longlisted for the 2017 Man Booker Prize has been received well and is already translated into nearly 50 languages, including Hindi and

Urdu. The Hindi and Urdu translations of Roy's second novel have been done by Rajkamal Prakashan Samuh. They will be launched on February 2. Manglesh Dabral has done the Hindi translation "Aapar Khushi ka Gharana" and Arjumand Ara's Urdu translation is titled "Bepanah Shadmani Ki Mumlikat".

"The response was far beyond my expectation. For me, it has been years of experimenting with a form of novel, and which I knew was complex and cannot be consumed in one read," Roy said.

Noting that her experiment with a new form was "intentional", the 57-year-old author said she attempted to write something which would satisfy her "own complicated mind".

"I have never been somebody who wants to deliver

what is expected of me. For me, the more important thing was my own ambitions as a fiction writer. I am sure some people were disappointed, but writing is not about satisfying everybody. It is your own inquiry that you have to follow," she said. "This was an attempt to deal with something more complex. 'The God of Small Things' is about a family and people understand those coordinates, whereas 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness' starts out with a shattered heart, it starts out with people who are strange to normal people... It is a more complex book and needs many many readings," she said. Roy, who is quite often extolled for her lyrical description, credits renowned writers like William Shakespeare and



# Muse: Myanmar’s militia-run, billion-dollar gateway to China



**MUSE (MYANMAR), JAN 31 (AFP):** With tinted windows and their militia name emblazoned on the side of their Ford truck, “Pan Say” fighters cruise the sleazy streets of Muse, Myanmar’s main gateway to China and awash with weapons and cash from casinos, drugs and sex.

Ten armed groups run the Shan State border town of Muse, which is separated by a shallow river from the gleaming towers of its Chinese counterpart, Ruili.

All are under the tutelage of the same patron: Myanmar’s army.

China and Myanmar have an agreement not to station troops along their border.

Instead, Myanmar’s army uses the militias as proxies in a long-running conflict between the central state and ethnic rebel groups who operate in the area, including the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Taung National Liberation Army (TNLA).

A fiendishly complicated, decades-old struggle for money, trade,

resources and ethnic identity is playing out in Muse.

The Pan Say militia gave AFP a rare snapshot of the shifting alliances and rivalries which have defined Myanmar’s frontier areas since its independence in 1948.

Each militia “looks after its own business ... and we look after ours”, a senior Pan Say member told AFP as a batch of 30 fresh recruits dressed in fatigues trained in a compound.

They have joined one of Muse’s largest militias, which boasts several hundred men, armed with M-16 rifles and Kalashnikovs.

Pan Say insists it is funded by its own jade mines, cigarette factories and karaoke bars, denying knowledge of narcotics or other illegal activities that prosper along the border.

Like other Muse militias, Pan Say accepted a deal in 2009 to come under the military’s control in exchange for a degree of autonomy.

As a result, an uneasy truce exists be-

tween the militias, who have agreed not to engage in combat unless ordered by the military.

The fighters cast themselves as unconventional but necessary keepers of the peace, accusing the rebel groups they fight against of extortion and racketeering.

Experts are less generous in their definition.

The “wasps’ nest of militias” are as much behind the town’s illicit economy as the rebels, says independent analyst David Mathieson.

“They drive around toting machine guns, running casinos, peddling yaba (low-grade methamphetamine), all as subcontractors of local security for the Myanmar military.”

Either way the money keeps flowing.

Legal trade through the town -- rice, fish and electrical goods -- totalled USD 1 billion between October and December, half of the entire country’s land border trade, according to official figures.

But the riches made from the vast quantities

of meth, opium, illegal animal parts and jade -- as well as women being sold into marriage in China -- are likely to dwarf those figures.

Myanmar is now one of the world’s largest sources of meth, with precursor chemicals from China feeding labs peppering the restive eastern borderlands, according to the UN’s drug and crime agency.

Lorries rumble in both directions along a dirt road to illegal crossing points just outside Muse, under the watchful eye of militiamen of various stripes.

Inside the town, barbed wire-clad walls and stern, gun-wielding guards protect a plethora of casinos, which are suspected of laundering money from both sides of the border.

Hotel rooms offer piles of condoms, while drug dealers buzz around the low-budget brothels, which give the town its reputation for sleaze, serving a transient population of border merchants and long-distance drivers.

And prospects are looking even better for Muse’s nefarious trades.

Routes between Muse and Myanmar’s west coast are set to improve as investment pours in under China’s so-called “Belt and Road” strategy of boosting the infrastructure of key trade partners.

Better transport routes could well give a boost to the town’s “illicit profiteering” -- at least in the short-term -- a recent report by International Crisis Group (ICG) predicts.

While money flows through Muse, little trickles down to its people.

Instead they run a daily gauntlet between the militias, rebels, drug addicts and petty criminals.

“We’re scared to go out at night,” says builder and father of two Kyaw Zin Latt, 23, who recently moved from the country’s south for work.

An NGO provides one of the town’s few life-line public services -- a fleet of ambulances.

They retrieved casualties from an attack on a bridge near the border last May, in which 19 people were killed, including 15 civilians.

The offensive by ethnic rebel group the TNLA descended into an eight-hour stand-off with the Pan Say militia.

“A police officer was shot dead beside this building,” says the NGO founder Thauang Tun, as he drives cautiously over the bridge.

It is now defended by the army, two different militia groups and the police. But outnumbered and outgunned, the cops languish far down Muse’s pyramid of power.

“There are places that are too dangerous for us to go by ourselves,” one police officer laments.



**WASHINGTON, JAN 31 (AFP):** The Kabul government is steadily losing its grip over parts of Afghanistan even as American forces intensify their air campaign against insurgent groups, a US government watchdog said Thursday.

The latest grim assessment of Afghanistan’s security situation comes as the US pursues talks with the Taliban and urgently seeks a way out of the 17-year war.

Numbers provided by Resolute Support, the US-led NATO mission in Afghanistan, show that as of October 31, only 63.5 per cent of Afghans are living in areas controlled or influenced by the Kabul government -- down from 65.2 per cent the previous quarter.

According to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which compiled the data, the decrease came as Kabul’s control or influence over Afghan districts dropped.

SIGAR said just 53.8 per cent of Afghanistan’s 407 districts are in government hands, and experts on Afghanistan say the number is lower still.

Instead of looking at population metrics, the Pentagon in a response to SIGAR said it is more important to “focus on the principal goal of the strategy of concluding the war in Afghanistan on terms favourable to Afghanistan and the United States.”

Officials pointed to ongoing talks between

the Taliban and US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who this week said he had sealed the outlines of a peace deal.

Highlighting the ongoing security crisis, SIGAR said the US has dramatically increased air strikes, dropping 6,823 bombs in the first 11 months of 2018.

The “figure was already 56 per cent higher than the total number of munitions released in 2017 (4,361), and is more than five times the total in 2016,” SIGAR said in its report.

Meanwhile, the strength of Afghan security forces has continued to dwindle, and currently stands at 308,693 personnel. That means only 87.7 per cent of positions are filled, the lowest level since January 2015.

Afghan forces have suffered staggering losses since they assumed responsibility for their country’s security four years ago.

President Ashraf Ghani last week said 45,000 security forces have been killed since he took office in September 2014.

NATO combat forces pulled out at the end of that year, and observers say the losses may not be sustainable.

Officials say President Donald Trump has decided to pull half of America’s forces from Afghanistan.

The Pentagon insisted the numbers in SIGAR’s report do not necessarily reflect poorly

on his strategy to find an end to the conflict.

“Measures of population control are not indicative of effectiveness of the South Asia strategy or of progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan,” the Pentagon said, according to SIGAR.

Khalilzad has provided few specifics about a potential deal with the Taliban, but the militants are believed to have promised not to provide shelter again to foreign extremists.

However, the Taliban have so far refused another key US demand -- that they talk to the internationally recognized government in Kabul, which the insurgents view as American “puppets.” Ghani has warned against rushing into a deal, citing violence following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

Acting Defence Secretary Patrick Shanahan said Tuesday that he saw “some very encouraging possibilities” in Khalilzad’s negotiations.

“But we need to give them time and space,” Shanahan said.

Ryan Crocker, a former US ambassador to multiple nations including Afghanistan, said in an opinion piece in The Washington Post that US negotiations with the Taliban are akin to “surrender.”

“The Taliban will offer any number of commitments, knowing that when we are gone and the Taliban is back, we will have no means of enforcing any of them,” Crocker wrote.

## Indian arrested in US on charges of fraud

**WASHINGTON, JAN 31 (PTI):** An Indian has been arrested in the US on charges of fraud for stealing at least USD 800,000 from more than 400 victims, mostly of Indian descent, through a provisional “credit” scheme.

Kishore Babu Ammisetti, 30, who has been charged by federal criminal complaint with fraud offenses stemming from an alleged provisional credit scheme, was arrested on January 25.

Ammisetti, appeared before US Magistrate Judge Donna Martinez in Hartford, Connecticut on Wednesday. He was ordered detained. Federal prosecutors said that Ammisetti entered the US in 2013 on a student visa, which was revoked in 2014.

Ammisetti used Facebook Marketplace and other media to victimise individuals, primarily of Indian decent, who advertised items for sale or rooms for rent.

Through this scheme, Ammisetti would contact a victim to express interest in purchasing an item or renting a room. He would then gather the victim’s bank account in-

formation and other personal information under the guise of making a deposit to the victim’s bank account. He also would offer to provide a “deposit” directly into the victim’s account via a Peer-to-Peer (P2P) transfer.

Ammisetti would then contact the victim’s bank and, posing as the victim, would claim to have made an ATM deposit that did not register on the victim’s bank account, complaint alleges.

While researching the “unregistered deposit”, the bank would credit the victim’s account with a provisional credit, it said. Ammisetti would then contact the victim and claim that the provisional credit to the victim’s bank account was a mistaken transfer by Ammisetti to the victim’s account. He would then request either a full or partial refund of that money, which the victim would provide via a P2P transfer. After the bank determined that there was no unregistered deposit to the victim’s account, the funds provided as a provisional credit would be removed from the account, federal prosecutors said.

## New H-1B visa filing rule to give priority to workers with advanced degrees from US

**WASHINGTON, JAN 31 (PTI):** The US has announced a new H-1B visa filing rule from April under which priority would be given to foreign workers with advanced degrees from American universities, a decision that could impact professionals who received higher education in countries like India and China.

The H-1B visa, popular among Indian IT professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

The final rule reverses the order by which the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) selects H-1B petitions under the regular cap and the advanced degree exemption.

Among other things, it introduces an electronic registration requirement for petitioners seeking to file H-1B cap-subject petitions.

To be published in the Federal Register on Thursday, the new rule will go into effect on April 1, though the electronic registration requirement will be suspended for the fiscal year (FY) 2020 cap season, the USCIS said.

“These simple and smart changes are a positive benefit for employers, the foreign workers they seek to employ, and the agency’s adjudicators, helping the H-1B visa programme work better,” said USCIS Director Francis Cissna.

Early this month, President Donald Trump said that he wants to bring in changes in the H-1B visa systems so that holders of these visas can stay in the country and accelerate their path to citizenship. The new registration system, once implemented, will lower overall costs for employers and increase government efficiency, he said.

Cissna said the USCIS is also furthering Trump’s goal of improving the immigration system by making a simple adjustment to the H-1B cap selection process.

As a result, US employers seeking to employ foreign workers with a US master’s or higher degree will have a greater chance of selection in the H-1B lottery in years of excess demand for new H-1B visas, Cissna said Effective from April 1, the USCIS will first select

H-1B petitions (or registrations, once the registration requirement is implemented) submitted on behalf of all beneficiaries, including those that may be eligible for the advanced degree exemption. Thereafter the USCIS will select from the remaining eligible petitions, a number projected to reach the advanced degree exemption.

Changing the order in which the USCIS counts these allocations will likely increase the number of petitions for beneficiaries with a master’s or higher degree from a US institution of higher education to be selected under the H-1B numerical allocations, a media statement said.

Specifically, the change will result in an estimated increase of up to 16 per cent (or 5,340 workers) in the number of selected petitions for H-1B beneficiaries with a master’s degree or higher from a US institution of higher education.

The USCIS will begin accepting H-1B cap petitions for fiscal 2020 on April 1, 2019. The reverse selection order will apply to petitions filed for the FY 2020 H-1B cap season.







**COMFY COZY! The newlywed supermodel Hailey Baldwin bundled up in head-to-toe nude knitwear while stepping out in NYC.**

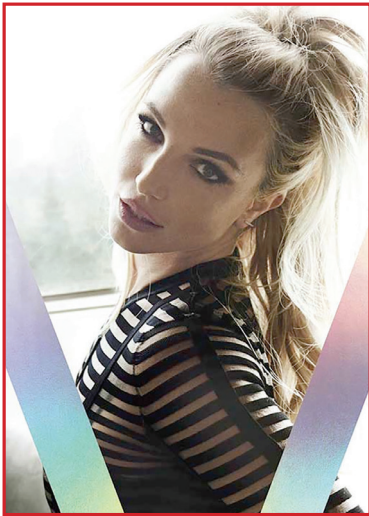
## Britney Spears to make cameo in horror comedy 'Corporate Animals'

**LOS ANGELES, JAN 31 (PTI):** Pop star Britney Spears is returning to the big screen one more time with a cameo in horror comedy "Corporate Animals". According to Los Angeles Times, the singer will feature as herself in the film, featuring Demi Moore and Ed Helms.

The film's director Patrick Brice made the revelation at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival on Monday.

"One of our characters -- Calum Worthy's character, Aidan -- is obsessed with Britney Spears, and there's a runner of him as he's going crazy thinking that he is hearing Britney speaking to him from the walls. "Through a series of connections we were able to get 10 minutes of her time to record this, which was so awesome," Brice said. The film premiered at the festival on Tuesday.

Previously, Spears has made a series of cameos in films such as "Fahrenheit 9/11" and "Austin Powers in Goldmember". She also starred in Shonda Rhimes-written comedy drama "Crossroads" (2002).



## BTS' V has released a new single

It's finally here! V, from Korean super boy band BTS, has just dropped his new single.

Released on 30 January, the track is a self-composed tune that the boy band member has been working on as a special gift for his fans. Titled "Scenery", the song is beautifully soulful ballad about love featuring V's husky vocals and a piano accompaniment reportedly also played by the musician himself.

Since its release, the song has already racked up 4.77 million plays (and counting) on Soundcloud already. The singer first announced that he would releasing this special single at the 28th Seoul Music Awards

for the BTS ARMY, and followed up soon after with this tweet (see above) that came with a short video, captioned "self-composed song"



on 24 January. He also reportedly took the cover photo for the track by himself too.

# Thackeray movie review

**Thackeray movie cast:** Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Amrita Rao

**Thackeray movie director:** Abhijit Panse

**Thackeray movie rating:** Two stars

Thackeray is a wor-shipful home video in the guise of a full-length feature film, in which everything is seen solely through the eyes of the man who started life as a testy, outspoken cartoonist, and who, overcome by the 'unfairness' of 'Marathi manooos' having to deal with migrants in their home-state Maharashtra, went on to form the Shiv Sena, a political party whose 'reactions against actions' helped changed the face of nation.

You cannot expect any subtleties in a film like this (its producer is a member of the Shiv Sena), which conveniently terms some of its portions, 'kalpanik natya rupantar'. In Nawazuddin Siddiqui's impersonation of the pipe-smoking, beer-swilling Bal Keshav Thackeray, the Shiv Sena beliefs are delivered with the force of a sledge-hammer: Gujaratis, Parsis, South Indians, and job-seekers from other states, have taken over Maharashtra, so out goes the demeaning slogan — 'hatao lungi, bajaao pungli'. The murder of a communist leader takes place in a suitably atmospheric sequence: violence against anyone

who doesn't fall in line is fine. The Emergency was okay only because the country would finally be disciplined (Mrs Indira Gandhi is shown to soften towards the Shiv Sena supremo after a long face-to-face meeting, which a conniving non-Maratha in her cabinet al-

most didn't allow to take place). There's no hope for the Muslims, because every time there's a hand held towards them, they bite it, so, hello, Hindutva.

The film opens with Balasaheb facing trial in a court-room which has a judge with a South Indian accent, and a lawyer

who is made to mouth tough questions, only so that Thackeray can shut him up with smart reversals, which then becomes the last word on the subject. All demagogues are expert at pitch-

ing their point-of-view as the only truth, and Thackeray has no trouble in proudly terming himself the 'Hitler of Maharashtra', as he was the only one with the best interests of 'his people' at heart.

Is he an enemy of democracy? What democracy, asks the man in the dock with a righteous smirk, when there is no 'nyay' for the people of this country, when people are dying because there is no law and order?

Irony doesn't just die when Thackeray mouths these things. Almost every moment in the movie is a death of irony, the biggest of them being that Nawazuddin Siddiqui, an outsider on both counts of community and religion, plays Balasaheb Thackeray. That Nawaz plays him with flair and conviction, spewing his brand of persuasive polarisation only to

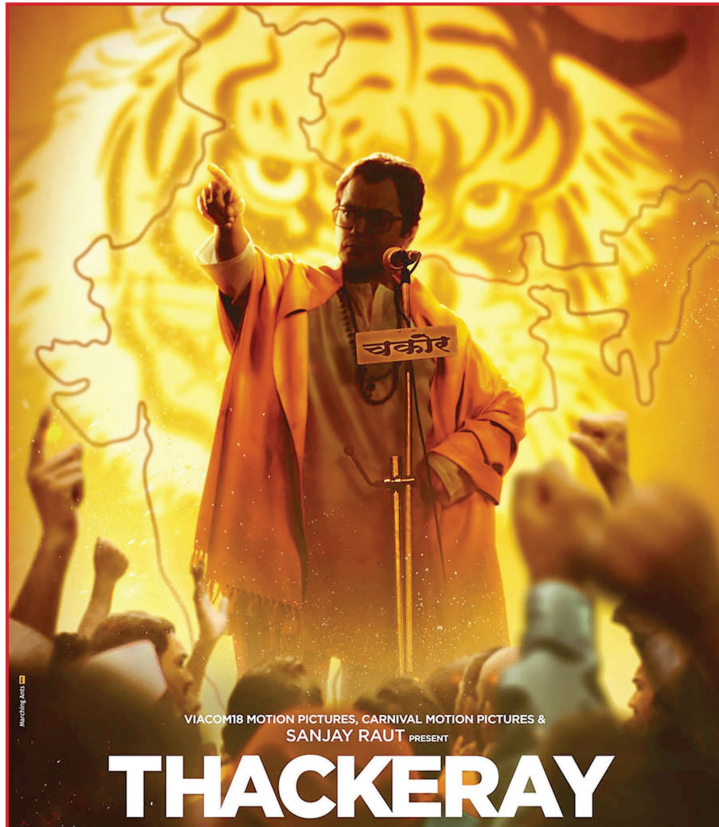
make it appear as the most reasonable thing, is the deepest cut. We have real heroes in the new season of Roadies: Rannvijay Singha

That this film, which makes a hero out of man who normalized politics based on division, finds vocal adherents other than the card-carrying members of his party (in the selec-

tive cherry-picking process, there is no mention of the breaking away of nephew Raj Thackeray and the formation of his Navnirman Sena, as well as the second wave of retaliatory riots in which thousands of Muslims were killed in Bombay in 1993) says something for the times we are living in.

When Thackeray says, 'we didn't destroy any masjid; we only moved it away', several cheers went up in the theatre I was in. I

watched this film swinging between unease and admiration: the former for how easy it is to create rabid, bloody difference amongst people and create a lasting legacy, and the latter for just how well a skilled actor can portray a man who prided himself on kindling that difference.



**ARIES:** Truth doesn't have to hurt, Aries, as today's mashup of the emo moon and diplomatic Venus in your candid ninth house reminds you. While you definitely want to be honest and get an important point across, you can do that compassionately. Before you speak to this person, rehearse the words you plan to say in front of a mirror, and imagine someone else is saying that to YOU!

**TAURUS:** As a nurturing and peace-loving Taurus, it's easy for you to assume the persona that you think people want from you. And while that can be tempting bait, it doesn't make for deep and lasting interpersonal connections. Today, as the emo moon aligns with your ruler, enchanting Venus, in your soulful eighth house, drop the mask.

**GEMINI:** Careful what you wish for today, Gem! Your hopes and dreams can be easily manifested under an exact conjunction of the intuitive moon and nimble Venus in your partnership house. You'll be able to discuss emotional issues that have been hard to put into words, and, at the same time, you'll have the ability to listen without get-

ting defensive, thanks to Venus's analytical approach.

**CANCER:** Hardly a news flash, but the only real power you have is in the present! If you got sidetracked in the clouds daydreaming about the future—or lost in the weeds reflecting on things that are over—you can get back to the here and now with some purposeful movement. It doesn't matter whether you do yoga, go ice-skating, take a brisk hike or dance around your living room.

**LEO:** You can keep drama at bay today with one simple cue: being authentic. That shouldn't be all that hard, not with the emo moon in cahoots with diplomatic Venus in your fifth house of romance, theatrics and creativity. While your instinct may be to avoid arguments, there are times that you can't "pretend away" a conflict. No two people are going to agree on everything. The hallmark of a mature relationship is how calmly and dispassionately you can work it out.

**VIRGO:** You can bury the hatchet with a relative, roommate or someone in your inner circle today, Virgo—but only if you're truly

willing to forgive (if not forget). Extending an olive branch won't be that hard under the peace-seeking alignment of the moon and Venus, but you may struggle to fully release any residual resentment. The trick is to stop trying to change people.

**LIBRA:** If you're not 100 percent content with the communication channels in some of your key relationships, Libra, don't be too quick to blame others. Your romantic sign loves to be pursued, but when people get too close, your indecisive side may kick in and you can quickly become a ghost. Any meaningful connection requires care and feeding. Under today's mashup of the emo moon and your ruler, loving Venus, in your articulate third house, evaluate how effusive (or not) you've been.

**SCORPIO:** Today, you can move the needle on a frozen bottom line by doing something different—namely, shifting out of sleep mode and getting proactive. There are basically three ways to increase your wealth, Scorpio (excluding winning the Powerball): earn more, spend less and make your money work harder for you!

**SAGITTARIUS:** Do you feel stuck, Sagittarius, or like everyone else is getting ahead while you're locked in neutral? Part of that, no doubt, comes from your super-high expectations of yourself. But another reason might be that you're not as clear about where you want to go as you could be. You can't manifest something if you don't know exactly what you want. Under today's illuminating alignment of the intuitive moon and creatrix Venus, focus on your hopes and dreams and loftiest visions. Write down three concrete things you can do to get closer to them, and then take the first step before your head hits the pillow tonight!

**CAPRICORN:** You may be tempted to force a situation to resolution, but that would be like trying to push a baby bird to leave the nest and fly before it's ready. Don't mistake a shortage of action for a lack of interest. Movement is happening, but it may not be visible—yet. Under today's healing mashup of the intuitive moon and gentle Venus in your introspective twelfth house, do your best to accept things for what they are.

You'll know when you need to put the spurs to someone's side. Until then, let things develop organically.

**AQUARIUS:** Branch out, Aquarius! You love your go-to squad, but your circle of influence could also use some fresh blood. The best way to "force" yourself to meet new people or interact in a group is by not have a friend crutch to lean on. Today, as the intuitive moon syncs up with convivial Venus in your community-spirited eleventh house, you can widen your social horizons easily and comfortably.

**PISCES:** To the top! You won't need to plead your case with any junior execs today, Pisces—not with the moon and enchanting Venus linked up in your tenth house of career ambition and success. You'll have the ear of the higher-ups, so make sure your elevator pitch is polished and perfected. This is also a good day to peacefully talk through any issues you've been having with clients or colleagues. But don't air that laundry in public. Take it to someone's office or a conference room, and if you can't find one, go to a coffee shop.