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SummitTIMES

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Chamling calls on Governor with appeal to exempt Sikkim from CAA

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 DEC:**

A delegation of Sikkim Democratic Front party, led by former Chief Minister and SDF president, Pawan Chamling, called on Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad today at Raj Bhavan.

A press release informs, the delegation submitted a memorandum requesting for special exemption for the State of Sikkim from the extension and enforcement of the Citizenship [Amendment] Act, 2019 based on the special provision of Article 371F of the Constitution of India.

"The cause for apprehension which has been created in understanding of the matter among the people is because of the, "selective exemption of the extension and enforcement of the said Act" which has been provided to some of the North



Eastern States namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and some areas of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura based on the criteria such as, Tribal Autonomous District Council (TADC) and Inner Line Permit

(ILP) which are constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Whereas, Sikkim, which is also a part of the North Eastern States, has not been specifically referred to or mentioned as a State which falls un-

der the exempted category or exempted from the extension and enforcement of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019," the memorandum states.

The memorandum also expresses faith in the assurances given by

the Prime Minister and Union Home Minister that Sikkim will be exempted from the purview of CAA.

Responding to the delegation, the Governor assured to take up the

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Sikkim bags 7 National Awards in Rural Development

NEW DELHI, 19 DEC (IPR):

Rural Development Department, Government of Sikkim, bagged 8 National Awards in different categories in the National Award Ceremony organized by Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India at National Agriculture Science Complex, Pusa, New Delhi on 19 Dec, 2019.

The ceremony was chaired by Union Minister (RD &PR and Agriculture and Farmers Welfare), Narendra Singh Tomar along with Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India, Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti.

The team from Sikkim was led by Principal Secretary, Rural Development Department, CS Rao, along with the senior officials, awardees and delegates. The department received the following National Award from the Union Minister:

Overall best performance during 2018-19 in respect of training programmes and participants for hilly states was awarded to State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) - Sikkim and the award was received by Principal Sec-



retary, CS Rao, along with Director - SIRD - Sikkim, Bishal Mukhia.

The award for Best overall performance in terms of quality of roads inspected by NQMs (Weighted Average of the Quality Grading for ongoing, completed and maintenance works during the year 2018-19 for North East and Himalayan State was given to Sikkim Rural Roads Development Agency under RDD and was received by Principal Secretary, CS

Rao, along with Chief Engineer - RDD, LD Lamtha.

Sikkim bagged two Individual Awards for Field Functionaries for excellent work under PMAY-G. Under the Gram Panchayat category - the Award was conferred to Ward Panchayat, Bishnu Lal Thapa, Geyzing Omchung GPU while under Village Development Officer/Functionaries, the award was conferred to District Programme Officer, Prakash Subba, West District.

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Unnao rape case: Kuldeep Sengar to remain in jail for life; pay Rs 25L exemplary fine

NEW DELHI, DEC 20 (PTI): Former BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar, since expelled, will remain in jail for entire life for raping a woman in Unnao in 2017, a Delhi court said on Friday while sentencing him for life. District Judge Dharmesh Sharma also imposed an exemplary fine of Rs 25 lakh in the case and it has to be paid within a month.

"This court does not find any mitigating circumstance, Sengar was public servant and betrayed people's faith," the judge said while declining the plea for lenient approach in sentencing him. The conduct of 53-year-old Sengar was to intimidate the rape survivor, the court said.

It also directed that the rape survivor be paid an additional Rs 10 lakh as compensation to the mother of the victim. Besides, the court directed the CBI to continue assessing threat perception to the life and security of the survivor and her family members every three months.

It said they will continue to reside in rented accommodation made available by Delhi Commission for Women for one more year and directed the UP government to pay Rs 15,000 per month for the rent. The court had on Monday convicted Sengar for rape under the Indian Penal Code and the POCSO Act for offence by a public servant committing penetrative sexual assault against a child after holding the victim to be a minor in 2017.

The court had said the victim's testimony was "truthful and unblemished" against a "powerful person". The recent amendments made in August this year in the POCSO Act, which carries a provision of death penalty, did not come into effect as the incident took place in 2017 before the law was amended. The woman co-accused in the case Shashi Singh was acquitted of all charges saying that the CBI failed to prove that she was a co-conspirator with Sengar in the act of sexual assault committed upon the victim and "it appears that she herself was a victim of circumstances".

Convicting Sengar, under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the court said the CBI proved that the victim was a minor and he was rightly prosecuted under the special law.

The court had noted that it was proved by the prosecution that the movement of Sengar on the fateful day was not in sync with the movements of his three mobile SIM cards operating on his two mobile phones. It had said that after the victim wrote letter to the UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, several criminal cases were filed against her family and "imprints of Sengar" were visible in them.

The court had expressed surprise over the delay by the CBI in filing charge sheet in the gang rape case and said it had halted the progress against Sengar and Singh in the rape case.

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CS chairs coordination meet to synergise functioning of govt depts



GANGTOK, 20 DEC [IPR]: Chief Secretary SC Gupta chaired a coordination meeting of Heads of all Departments at Tashiling Secretariat today.

In his opening remarks, the Chief Secretary explained that the main purpose of the meeting was to bring about synergy in the day-to-day functioning of government departments and establish coordination, clarity and responses to specific directives.

While discussing department-wise issues, the

Chief Secretary made it loud and clear that proper official procedures specified in the Allocation of Business Rules for each Department should be followed in letter and spirit.

The meeting deliberated specific issues of each Department in detail based on the agenda of the meeting, namely manpower management, training, official appointments, follow-up on action taken after high-level meetings, issues concerning government land, property, and sister orga-

nizations, administrative control over field officers, housekeeping, follow up on information sought from the office of the Chief Secretary, Departmental websites, attendance, Cabinet notes, status of government vehicles, finance and planning, implementation of developmental programmes, issue of fake news, and legal matters.

Department specific issues were highlighted briefly by the concerned Heads of Departments to which directives were issued for compliance.

Unnao rape survivor's fight for justice tough

LUCKNOW, DEC 20 (PTI): The quest for justice for the Unnao rape survivor has been arduous. From police refusing to name the accused when the complaint was first filed to seeing her father tortured and killed, from her uncle being ensnared in an unrelated case to suffering an accident, which had clear marks of a conspiracy, the going was tough for her.

Over two years after she accused BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar of raping her in his home in UP's Unnao, the local strongman was handed down the life imprisonment till the remainder of his life. Sengar was found guilty of abducting and raping the woman in 2017, then a minor. Sengar, who represents Bangarmau assembly seat in Unnao district, was jailed after he was arrested on April 13, 2018, and the BJP subsequently expelled him from the party.

Five days before the arrest, the victim had tried to set herself ablaze near Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's residence in Lucknow to protest alleged police inaction against the MLA.

She also alleged her family had been threatened. Sengar, however, denied all allegations. Police said

the woman's family had alleged that two youths from their village kidnapped her on June 11, 2017, and that a case was registered on June 20 that year.

Based on her statement, three men were arrested for gangrape and offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act as the victim was 17 years old at that time.

Police alleged her father and uncle were criminals the father had 28 cases, including those of murder and robbery, against him, and the uncle had 15 cases, some filed as early as 1991. Subsequently, the woman said the MLA was a family friend and she and her siblings addressed him as "Bhaiyya".

On April 9, 2018, the day after the woman attempted to kill herself in Lucknow, her father died in judicial custody in Unnao jail, allegedly of injuries suffered in a brutal assault by supporters of the MLA six days before that. Four of Sengar's supporters were named in the FIR filed by the woman's family. The accused too filed an FIR against her father, who was booked under sections of the Arms Act and IPC.

The woman's family alleged that the MLA and his

supporters had tried to frame her father. It subsequently emerged the woman's father had been arrested on the same day the incident took place, while the four aides of the MLA were arrested only after he died in jail.

The post-mortem examination of the woman's father found 14 injuries on the body. It identified septicaemia or blood poisoning as the cause of death.

In the meantime, a video surfaced, showing the father alleging that the MLA's brother had beaten him in the presence of police. Six policemen were suspended and the following day (April 10, 2018) the MLA's brother, Atul Singh, was arrested.

A Special Investigation Team was formed on April 11, 2018, to probe the alleged rape. The same day, Sengar's wife Sangeeta met the UP DGP to plead for justice for her husband.

On April 12, 2018, police registered an FIR against Sengar under various sections of IPC and POCSO Act.

On Allahabad High Court directions, the probe was handed over to CBI, which arrested Sengar. On April 14, the probe agency arrested Shashi Singh, the woman who had allegedly

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Political parties and organizations unite as Sikkim Against CAA

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 DEC:**

A meeting of various apolitical parties and organisations of the State was held today to deliberate on issues related to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 here at Tadong. The meeting rejected the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and unanimously decided to form a forum 'Sikkim Against CAA' to take forward the movement. Sikkim Against CAA will be represented by all political parties and organisations present in the meeting as its members.

The meeting was attended by representatives from Sikkim Democratic Front, Sikkim Sangram Parishad, Sikkim Pradesh Congress Com-

mittee, Sikkim Republican Party, Hamro Sikkim Party, Sikkim Subject Committee, Limboo-Tamang Voluntary Committee, I AM 371F Campaign, Sikkim for Sikkim, Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum, Unite for Sikkim and concerned citizens.

A press release informs that Sikkim Against CAA has adopted a single point agenda to oppose CAA 2019 and the newly formed forum has also demand-

ed that the state government immediately implement Inner Line Permit to safeguard the rights and interests of the Sikkimese people.

"Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 is disastrous for the state of Sikkim. Hence, the SACAA seeks supports from the general public of Sikkim to take this movement further. SACAA shall be holding series of meetings in the coming days," the release states.

Anti-CAA stir: Violence rock multiple UP cities; thousands rally in Delhi

NEW DELHI, DEC 20 (PTI) Violent clashes with police rocked Uttar Pradesh from Gorakhpur to Bulandshahr on Friday while thousands rallied in the national capital with tricolour and 'Save Constitution' banners as protests raged across states against the amended citizenship law and the proposed NRC, prompting the government to indicate it was ready to accept suggestions

Sporadic violence was reported from parts of Delhi, Maharashtra and Karnataka-Kerala border areas as well, while authorities resorted to curbs on mobile internet and SMS services in various regions, including in parts of UP, Karnataka and the national capital. Some groups, however, offered roses to the police to underline peaceful nature of their protest

Additional security forces were deployed in all sensitive areas, including those where large-scale protests took place on Thursday that also saw at least three deaths including of two persons in police firing in Mangaluru. One person had died in Lucknow

The raging protests also saw some allies of the ruling BJP voicing their concerns. Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar asserted the National Register for Citizens will not be implemented in his state, while another BJP ally Lok Janshakti Party's president Chirag Paswan said the protests show the central government has "failed" to dispel confusion among a significant section of society

Holding a protest march in Maharashtra, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen

(AIMIM) alleged the Narendra Modi government wants to ensure only Hindus remain in India with its twin move of the new Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the proposed country-wide National Register of Citizens (NRC)

The Congress accused the Modi government of being responsible for widespread protests in the country and demanded the contentious citizenship law be repealed. The main opposition party also pitched for dialogue with protesters

A top official said the government is ready to accept suggestions, if any, from the people who are staging protests and asserted that various efforts were being made to clear doubts of the people about the new law

However, a top Home Ministry official said state governments have no powers to reject the implementation of the CAA and the National Population Register which is to be carried out next year. Chief ministers of West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have announced the CAA was "unconstitutional" and has no place in their respective states

The national capital remained heavily barricaded but prohibitory orders and closure of several metro stations could not stop thousands from rallying near Jama Masjid area, soon after Friday afternoon prayers. As the day drew to a close, the protesters gathered at India Gate and Central Park, while carrying tricolour and 'Save Constitution' banners and also raising slogans against what

they called attempts to divide the country on religious lines

Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad led one of the largest protests, despite being denied permission to hold a march. Giving the police a slip from being detained, he raised slogans and read out the preamble of Indian Constitution

The police was seen using drones to keep a vigil, while Delhi Metro gates were closed at some stations, including in the Old Delhi areas

Police also carried out a flag march in the north-east district which had witnessed violence on Sunday during continuing protests against the amended law, which seeks to grant speedier citizenship only to non-Muslims facing religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan

Delhi Mahila Congress chief and former president Pranab Mukherjee's daughter Sharmistha and some other members of the outfit were detained near Home Minister Amit Shah's residence during a protest against the new legislation

Near Jamia Millia Islamia, which had seen massive police crackdown on students on Sunday, hundreds of people were seen wearing white caps with "No CAA No NRC" written on them

However, it was Uttar Pradesh that saw violent clashes breaking out at multiple places, including Gorakhpur, Sambhal, Bhadohi, Bahraich, Farrukhabad, Bulandshahr and Firozabad, soon after Friday prayers as protesters hurled stones, torched vehicles and faced police action

Internet services remained suspended in about a dozen districts, including Aligarh, Mau, Azamgarh, Lucknow, Kanpur, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, Sambhal and Allahabad

In Gujarat, a mob pelted stones at the police outside a mosque in communally sensitive Hathikhana area of Vadodara city, objecting to video-shooting of namaz congregation, which the officials said was being done as a preventive measure in the wake of anti-CAA protests. Three persons were arrested while a senior official was injured in stone-pelting, the police said

In Maharashtra, mobs pelted stones at state transport buses in Beed, Nanded and Parbhani districts

In Kerala, police kept high vigil in northern districts in the wake of the killing of two persons in Mangaluru in neighbouring Karnataka. A series of protest marches and blocking of trains and buses took place in various parts of Kerala past midnight after the news emerged about the deaths

Anti-CAA protesters also blocked Karnataka state transport buses in Kozhikode and raised slogans against the Mangaluru police action. The Kerala Road Transport Corporation has suspended bus services to Mangaluru

A large number of Congress workers blocked roads and burnt tyres in Kozhikode, while a group of activists also burnt an effigy of Home Minister Amit Shah

Karnataka police, on the other hand, restricted entry to Mangaluru for those com-

ing from Kerala. At least 50 men and women who had arrived by a train from Kerala were taken into custody for trying to enter the city without identity cards

Some mediapersons were detained for entering the Government Wenlock hospital where the post-mortem of those killed in the police firing was underway. The journalists, who were from Kerala, were released later in the day

Police sources said protesters defying prohibitory orders attempted to lay siege to a police station in Mangaluru and tried to attack police personnel, following which force was used to disperse them

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa appealed to people to stay away from 'vested interests' indulging in rumour-mongering and assured his government's commitment to protect the rights of all citizens

However, mobile internet service resumed in Assam on court orders, ten days after it was banned during protests against the new law

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said he will talk to leaders of anti-citizenship law agitation and his government was committed to safeguard the rights and honour of the state's indigenous population.



Chamling calls...

matter at the appropriate forum in the interest of Sikkim and its people.

In the meanwhile, the Governor has expressed his happiness and credited Sikkimese from all walks of life for maintaining peace, harmony and order in the State in the wake of prevailing nationwide stir related with Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019.

He has further urged everyone to maintain brotherhood, harmony and peaceful co-existence which have remained the hallmark of Sikkimese way of life which will further safeguard the interest of the State and its people.

Sikkim bags...

Mahatma Gandhi NREGA Sikkim once again received 3 National Awards under State level Category and one under Gram Panchayat Category.

In The State category the State received the award level best performance in Transparency and Accountability and for Convergence and Livelihood Augmentation. It also received the best performing State award for implementation of the Geo-MGNREGA initiatives.

The Award for MGNREGA was received by Additional Secretary cum PD - MGNREGA, Sarika Pradhan, Director - Social Audit Unit - Sikkim, Dr BB Rai, Joint Secretary - MGNREGA, Rinchen D Bhutia, AD- MGNREGA, Dr Subash Dhakal and Sr Planning Coordinator - MGNREGA, Nima Tashi Bhutia.

While for the best performing Gram Panchayat Award - Parengaon Gram Panchyat was conferred the award and was received by Panchayat President, Pramila Rai along with Panchayat Member, Harka Man Rai and Additional Program Officer - Mangalbaria Block, Bikash Tamang.

In addition to the above 7 National Awards, the Sponsor Bank - State Bank of India - Sikkim also received the National Award for Timely wage payment under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA and the Award was received by Regional Manager - State Bank of India - Gangtok, Aftab Ahmad Mallick along with Deputy Manager, Arijit Chatterjee.

Earlier this year the department received two National Awards on Swachh Bharat Mission- Grameen Annual Award -2019 in the category 1) Swachh Bharat Puraskar- 1st in the country and 2) Swachh Survekshan Grameen Award- 2nd in North East. The Panchayati Raj directorate has also received 5 National Awards under the Panchayati Raj during the last few months. This 7 National Award for the second time adds up to a total of 14 National Award this year.

Principal Secretary - RDD, CS Rao, stated that the department is very grateful to the Chief Minister, PS Tamang and Minister - RDD, Sonam Lama for prioritising rural development in Sikkim and providing all support and guidance. He also congratulated all the Awardees and the officials and functionaries of RDD at the district, division, block and GP level for their tremendous effort and dedication.

He also extended thanks to GOI for recognizing the efforts being taken by the State Govt for providing better facilities and in capacity building among the Rural public.

District Level Inter School Energy Club Competition held at Rangpo



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 DEC:

District Level Inter School Energy Club Competition was organised by the State Designated Agency, Sikkim at Government Senior Secondary School Rangpo, East Sikkim on 19 Dec, 2019 to commemorate National Energy Conservation Day 2019.

Eight Energy Club Schools namely Dodak, Gor, Sudunglakha, Dalapchand, Salgari, Timbong, Sumbuk and Tingvong Senior & Secondary Schools participated in the Competition, a press release informs.

In the PowerPoint Presentation Competition, Pritika Rai, Government Senior Secondary School, Sumbuk, came first followed by Saurav Gurung, Government Secondary School, Sudunglakha and Sahara Hungma Subba, Government Sec. School Timbong, in second and third positions, respectively.

In Essay Writing, Ayush Sharma, Government Sec. School, Sudunglakha came first followed by Tarmit Lepcha,

Government Sec. School, Gor and Muskan Lepcha, Government Sec. School, Dodak in second and third positions, respectively.

In Elocution, Simran Rai, Government Sec. School, Salgari stood first followed by Diksha Sharma, Government Sec. School, Dalapchand and Kursongmit Lepcha, Government Sec. School, Gor in second and third positions, respectively.

In Skit, Government Sec. School, Dalapchand came first followed by Government Sec. School, Tingvong, Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim and Government Sec. School, Salgari in second and third positions, respectively.

The winners were awarded trophies, certificates and cash prizes.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Tshering Yangzum Bhutia, members of SDA and program was anchored by JE (SDA), Tek Maya Darjee.

On the occasion Principal Chief Engineer-Cum-Secretary, AB Rai, Power Department was the chief guest and vice president, Poonam Pradhan, Mamring GPU was the guest of honour.

Rhenock holds Gram Sabha on Gram Panchayat Development Plan

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 DEC:

Gram Panchayat Unit under Rhenock BAC organised Gram Sabha on Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) 2020-2025 at old food godown in Rhenock Bazaar on 19 December, a press release informs.

Panchayat President, Bhusan Adhikari chaired the Gram Sabha while Zilla Panchayats, Gram Panchayats, line department, standing committee, NGO representatives, and members of eight wards present.

The Gram Sabha started with National Anthem followed by briefing of special resolution by the Panchayat President through Pow-

er Point. Panchayats of each ward and members of Standing Committee placed suggestions and demands.

After Zero hour discussion Panchayat Inspector of ADC office Pakyong, Sunil Pradhan talked about 'Single use plastics' while BDO Rhenock and ADC Pakyong informed about GPDP five-year plan and Gram Sabha.

The Gram Sabha was attended by SDM Rongli, SDPO Pakyong, PI Rhenock Police Station, Officers and staff of different line departments, representatives of local NGO, AWW, ASHA, ward development society and Gram Sabha members of eight wards.

MUSS team meets CM



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 DEC:

A delegation of Manav Utthan Sewa Samiti, Sikkim met Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang at Namchi in South Sikkim on Friday. During the meeting, the delegation congratulated the CM for his victory in the by-election, informs a MUSS press release.

The release mentions that the delegation further apprised the CM regarding the upcoming

visit of MUSS founder, Satpalji Maharaj to Sikkim on 02 January and also apprised about ongoing spiritual and social activities of MUSS in Sikkim.

During the meeting the CM has assured to provide all possible support to the organization, the release adds.

MUSS delegation comprised of RB Bhandari, Purna Bahadur Yonzon, Bharat Pradhan, Kamal Subba, Sagar Moktan and MK Rai.

Unnao rape...

lured the victim to Sengar's home on June 4, 2017, when she alleged she was raped.

In May 2018, CBI booked Sengar and others for conspiracy to implicate the victim's father in a false case and arrested two policemen.

Sengar and Shashi were moved to Sitapur jail from Unnao.

On July 7, 2018, the CBI filed its first charge sheet against Atul Singh and four others in connection with the death of the woman's father.

On July 11, the CBI filed another charge sheet in the court of the Special Judicial Magistrate (CBI), Lucknow, accusing Sengar of committing rape and Shashi Singh of aiding him in the crime.

They were charged under various IPC sections including conspiracy, kidnapping and rape and under the POCSO Act.

On July 14, a third charge sheet was filed against Sengar and nine others for allegedly hatching a conspiracy and implicating the woman's father in an Arms Act case.

Five months after that, an FIR was filed against the victim, her mother, and uncle for allegedly forging documents submitted to police as proof the victim was a minor when she was raped.

In July 2019, the woman's uncle was convicted in a 19-year-old case of attempt to murder and sentenced to 10 years in prison by a district court.

On July 28 this year, the victim and her lawyer were critically injured, and her two aunts were killed after their car collided with a truck in Rae Bareilly. Police registered a murder case against Sengar after an uncle of the woman blamed him for the accident. The probe was taken up by CBI.

On October 11, after completing its investigation into the road accident, the CBI charged Sengar and an accomplice with criminal conspiracy and intimidating the rape survivor and her family, but dropped the charges under IPC sections related to murder and attempt to murder.

Two months later, a Delhi court convicted Sengar for rape under the IPC and the POCSO Act for offence by a public servant committing penetrative sexual assault against a child.

The CBI sought life imprisonment for Sengar, saying it was "a fight for justice of an individual against the system". On December 20, District Judge Dharmesh Sharma awarded life imprisonment to Sengar, who now appears all set to lose his membership of the state assembly.

Unnao rape case...

In a separate case, the same woman was allegedly gang raped later by three other persons on June 11, 2017 in Unnao. The trial is yet to commence in that case.

The court had found that the delay of two months and ten days in reporting the crime of rape to the police was satisfactorily explained by the survivor.

The court had also pulled up the CBI for the absence of women officer in conducting the probe "without bothering for the kind of harassment, anguish and re-victimisation that occurs for a victim of sexual assault".

Referring to the POCSO, the court had said there was "nothing wrong" with law but its ineffective implementation on ground and lack of human approach of officers concerned led to a situation where justice was delayed.

It said the CBI itself was not following the manual relating to investigation and prosecution.

On July 28 this year, the car of the rape survivor was hit by a truck and she was severely injured. The woman's two aunts were killed in the accident and her family had alleged foul play.

The trial in the other four cases -- framing of the rape survivor's father in illegal firearms case, his death in judicial custody, conspiracy of Sengar with others in the accident case and the separate gang rape case of the survivor by three others -- are going on in the court.

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

For more details: 9083826462 /9832556698

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General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College.

Flat Land no cutting required. Price 30 Lakhs (negotiable).

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LAND FOR SALE

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

Peace holds, protests continue in East and NE

KOLKATA/SHILLONG/GUWAHATI/PATNA, DEC 20 (PTI): The situation in the eastern and north eastern states, which were rocked by large scale protests against the amended Citizenship Act after the passage of the Bill in Parliament, was peaceful on Friday with no report of any demonstration or violence from any state in the region.

Peaceful protests and rallies against the amended citizenship law were held across West Bengal, where no major incidents of vandalism and arson, rail or road blockade were reported. Police continued raids and arrests in connection with cases related to the violence that rocked the state during the protests over the amended Citizenship Act and train services were partially restored in some sectors.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has been in the forefront of protests against the proposed NRC and the amended citizenship law said the agitation must continue till the Centre revokes the Act.

She also appealed to Prime Minister Modi and the Centre not to behave in a 'stubborn way' and concede to the democratic protest and withdraw the CAA and NRC.

In Shillong, the curfew was relaxed for 16 hours as protests subsided after the Assembly adopted a resolution on Thursday urging the



Centre to extend Inner Line Permit to the state under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Act, 1873, to safeguard the indigenous population.

The ILP if implemented in Meghalaya, would keep the state out of the purview of the amended citizenship law.

Curfew was eased from 5 am to 9 pm at Sadar and Lumdinggiri police station areas. Night curfew will, however, remain in force, an official said.

Internet services were restored on Friday in Assam, which was rocked by violence and large scale protests over the amendment, after nine days of its suspension.

Broadband services have resumed in the state from Wednesday and the indefinite curfew in various areas has been withdrawn or relaxed.

The Assam police urged people to be cautious while posting or

sharing information on the social media and said action will be taken as per law against those violating peace and harmony in the state.

As many as 99 cases have been registered in various police stations in Guwahati so far, and 112 people arrested on charges of rioting, vandalism, arson and attempt to murder, the police said.

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal allayed fears over the amended Citizenship Act and said he will not allow anyone to harm the rights and honour of the state's indigenous population.

He also clarified that no one will be able to move to Assam from Bangladesh by means of the amended Act and insisted that the number of applicants for citizenship would be "negligible".

"... Only those staying among us for decades (having fled Bangladesh)

due to religious persecution can apply for Indian citizenship," he said and maintained that a section of people were misleading others by claiming that 1.5 crore refugees from Bangladesh will be settled in the land of the indigenous people of Assam.

"It is certain that granting of citizenship cannot have any impact on our social construct. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord grants constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Asamese people," he said.

He also took out a peace rally at Nalbari, along with his ministers, including Himanta Biswa Sarma.

AASU, which spearheaded the agitation, took out a simultaneous rally in Nalbari calling it 'Bajra Ninad' (War Cry) and demanded that

the state government pressurise the Centre to revoke the CAA. Other organisations too took out rallies across Assam against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Silpi Samaj, the artists society which is at the forefront of the agitation along with AASU, organised a rally at Hajo in lower Assam, while a 'Raj Bhawan Chalo' was organised by All Assam Lawyers Association demanding the withdrawal of the Act. A torchlight procession was taken out on Friday evening by Sanmilita Songram Parishad, a platform of 51 organisations formed to demand the revocation of the Act.

In Patna, which witnessed violent protests against the amended Citizenship Act on December 15, the situation was peaceful. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar asserted that the National Register for Citizens will not be implemented in the state.

"Kaahe ka NRC? Bilkul laagu nahin hoga" (NRC, what for? Will not at all be implemented), Kumar, who heads a coalition government of the JD(U) with BJP, said to queries by journalists.

He became the first chief minister from the NDA camp to have voiced disapproval of the proposed move to have an all India NRC.

The opposition RJD has called a Bihar bandh against the amended Act on Saturday.

IHRC Sikkim holds coordination meeting



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 DEC:

International Human Rights Council Sikkim State organised a coordination meeting at Rangpo Tourist Lodge today.

A press release informs that the main motive of the meeting was to reshuffle its members, to welcome new members and to discuss cases of Human Rights violation.

The meeting decided to meet Superintendents of Police of Siliguri, Dar-

jeeling and Kalimpong to discuss the unnecessary harassment to Sikkim vehicles. The meeting has also sought measures to stop drug abuse in the state and bring awareness amongst taxi drivers on drug suppliers.

The new members were welcomed by the president and core committee consisting of 7 members was also formed in the meeting.

The meeting was attended by Sikkim presi-

dent IHRC, Ganesh Sharma, vice president, Ratan Subba, State In Charge, Choteylall Prasad, general secretary, Bal Bhadur Baraily, joint secretary, Kiran Kshetriya Thapa, South and West District In charge, Shrijana Subba, State Women's coordinators, Cheena Chhetri & Rebekah Limboo, Transport In-charge, Roshan Mangar, women social workers of Sikkim, Laxmi Pradhan and other members of IHRC Sikkim.

Trump seeks rapid exoneration in Senate after impeachment

WASHINGTON, DEC 20

(AFP): US President Donald Trump pressed his Republican allies Thursday to exert rigid control of his Senate trial and ensure a swift exoneration, a day after he was impeached in a historic rebuke by the House of Representatives.

A bitter fight looms over the coming trial, expected to begin as early as the second week of January, with Senate leaders already drawing battle lines over the evidence that will be allowed.

But its fate was left in limbo late Thursday when the Senate's powerful majority leader, Mitch McConnell signalled the standoff with Democrats over trial particulars would continue into the new year.

"We remain at an impasse on these logistics," McConnell said on the floor, as he announced the Senate had completed its business until January.

Trump seized on the uncertainty to attack House Democrats for seeking to demand key witnesses or dictate how

McConnell should run the process.

"I want an immediate trial!" he boomed on Twitter.

Trump is charged with abuse of office and obstruction of Congress but Democrats, who led the three-month House investigation, are threatening to delay sending the articles of impeachment to the Senate until they are reassured the process will be fair.

"I got Impeached last night without one Republican vote being cast with the Do Nothing Dems on their continuation of the greatest Witch Hunt in American history," Trump tweeted.

"Now the Do Nothing Party want to Do Nothing with the Articles & not deliver them to the Senate, but it's Senate's call!" Trump, the third president in US history to be impeached, suggested that the Democrats would "lose by default" if they decided not to show up at a date determined by the Senate.

The House voted along party lines Wednesday to charge Trump with abuse of

power for pressuring Ukraine's president to investigate his potential White House challenger in 2020, the veteran Democrat Joe Biden.

Lawmakers also approved a second article of impeachment, obstruction of the congressional probe into his Ukraine dealings. The vote leaves a permanent stain on Trump's legacy -- one that he appeared determined to mask with acquittal by the Senate.

At the White House Trump welcomed one of the two Democrats who voted against impeachment, congressman Jeff Van Drew, who announced he was switching parties to join the Republicans.

"You know what? It's a phony deal and they cheapen the word 'impeachment,'" Trump said.

"That should never again happen to another president." The Senate Republicans have a 53-47 majority that makes the math for clearing Trump straightforward -- conviction and removal would require a two-thirds guilty vote on either charge.

Minister makes surprise visit to Horticulture office at Rongli

RONGLI, 20 DEC [IPR]: Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma made a surprise visit to the Sub Divisional Level office of Horticulture Department at Rongli, East Sikkim, today.

He interacted with officials there, including Deputy Director T Chopel Bhutia, Horticulture Development Officer Benzamin Ruchal, Horticulture Inspector Rundra Mani Sharma and other staff and took details about the facilities and services available at

the office.

He also briefed employees appointed under One Family, One Job Scheme and spoke about the efforts of the State Government under the leadership of the Chief Minister to continue their entitlement and further urged them to be more dedicated and determined to fulfill their assigned tasks honestly and sincerely.

Earlier, the Minister attended Pre-Christmas celebrations at the Community Hall, Mela Taar, Rongli.



Tareng YC and Leezum Boys in semis of Gor School football tournament

SUMMIT REPORT

DIKCHU, 20 DEC:

Tareng Youth Club beat Samdong Sporting Club 1-0 in the quarterfinals of the Open Men's Football Tournament being held at Gor Secondary School here today.

In the second quarterfinal match of the day, Leezum Boys trounced DFA Passingdang 3-0.

Today's matches had Additional Secretary Agriculture Department, Annapurna Alley, as chief guest accompanied by General Secretary, Press Club of Sikkim, Puran Tamang, as guest of honor in the presence of Zilla Panchayat, Tshering Gyatso Lepcha, and Ward Panchayat Sangtok, Dawa Dorjee Lepcha.

SMIMS Prof's paper published in Nature Journal

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 DEC:

Assistant Professor, Department of Anatomy, Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences (SMIMS), Dr Polly Lama's research paper has been published in the prestigious and highly cited "Nature Journal".

The research paper, titled "Physical disruption of intervertebral disc promotes cell clustering and a degenerative phenotype," has been published in the 17 Dec, 2019 edition of Nature.

Nature is a British multidisciplinary scientific journal and is one of the most recognizable scien-



tific journals in the world.

The article in question delves in low back pain and intervertebral disc degeneration far beyond the superficial level and acknowledges the complexities of molecular re-modelling in diseases such as low back pain and its possible repair

strategies, a press release informs.

According to Dr. Lama, low back pain is one of the most common musculoskeletal complaints that affects millions of people worldwide. The etiology of low back pain is complex and at a molecular level is characterized by microarchitectural deterioration of the tissue, cells and extracellular matrix that leads to progressive degenerative changes, vicious cycle of chronic inflammatory responses, and is more severe following age-related injuries and diseases.

Vinayaka Missions Sikkim University holds fourth Convocation



GANGTOK, 20 DEC [IPR]: The 4th Convocation of Vinayaka Missions Sikkim University was held here at Chintan Bhawan today.

Education Minister Kunga Nima Lepcha presided over the event as the chief guest accompanied by Additional Chief Secretary, Education Department, GP Upadhyaya, Chairperson, Vinayaka Missions Sikkim University, Hemant Kumar Goyal, Vice Chancellor SS Hasan, Registrar K Sathasivam, representatives from SIBIN Group (RUSA Consultancy), teachers, parents and students.

199 graduates from VMSU were awarded degrees today.

The Education Minister presented awards to graduates of Department of Commerce, Computer Science, Environment and Ecology, Education, Nursing, BSc

Nursing, Pharmacy. Gold and Silver awards for academic excellence were also presented today.

In his address, the Minister congratulated the students on having entered a new phase in their lives and expressed joy on finding out that graduating students from Bhutan were also present at the event.

In this context, he remarked that Sikkim has truly become a state which attracts students from other regions.

The Minister told the students that self-motivation and self-discipline are necessary factors for personal and community development.

Students should take education as an opportunity to uplift the community instead of seeing merely as an employment opportunity, he added.

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Empowerment for Equality is a No Brainer

So why should only women fight for women's issues?

Despite a Supreme Court verdict, most of the women are still denied entry to Sabarimala temple. When the judgment arrived a year ago, it was welcomed by “women activists”. Every woman of menstruating age who has made failed attempts to offer prayers at Sabarimala and verify whether the State and the society will allow a Court verdict to be obeyed is introduced as an “activist.” The many voices getting heard on the issue are again of “women activists” and “well-meaning” men-folk. And therein lies one of the root causes of a variety of problems plaguing the country – this acceptance that women’s empowerment is the look-out of only these two segments.

It is unfortunate that gender equality battles are led almost exclusively by women, leading to this weird situation where even when women speak of equality, we, by and large, see them as being feminist. Even those who don’t see feminism as the handiwork of over-ambitious women, and may even support it, slot efforts towards equality as “feminist” moves. To see how embarrassingly offensive such responses, even if subconscious, are, compare it against the male equivalent for feminism – chauvinism. The dictionary definition of a Male Chauvinist reads: “A man whose behavior and attitude toward women indicate a belief that they are innately inferior to men”. By contrast, women, even when pursuing the basic right of equality (and not superiority), are seen as feminist. We have even co-opted grammar to perpetuate male superiority. The problem lies in this whole mentality in which even the language has been hamstrung in chauvinistic lexicon where the only female equivalent for a male “stud” is a “slut”. It is this subliminal conditioning of our minds that has injured us to the many depressing realities of our country. It is in this zombie-like acceptance that things have always been like this that the many woes of our society, and not only the ones regarding women, are born. It all starts at home with how we grow up getting used to the almost continuous reinforcement of gender biases. Before we know it, we have been brainwashed. So, when guests arrive, the son will tell the jokes and the daughter will serve water.

Any practice which discriminates people on the basis of gender, caste, community, color or faith should immediately repulse people. Revulsion can be the only response to news that women are being refused access because of their gender. But such news does not revile us anymore. Even when most of us do not agree with such practices, we do not feel offended enough because we have been conditioned at home, in school and in the work places to see women as somehow not equal. Worryingly, very few people are embarrassed for holding on to such attitudes. Of course, one could argue that most women are comfortable with such hierarchies, but those comfort levels are akin to the Stockholm Syndrome where a kidnapped person starts being grateful towards the kidnapper. What choice do they have? Give women economic and decision-making powers and see if they slip back to being submissive, all-suffering daughters, wives and daughter-in-laws. We need to change our vocabulary. Equality issues cannot be painted as empowerment because that is an already existing right that is being reinforced. Empowerment needs to be about much, much more. Attitudinally, we need to at least reach a level where we do not fight for just a quota in jobs or elected posts for women, but reach a place where we see ambition in women as normal. And the process, because the brainwashing started at home, needs to begin at home. Parents need to consciously repair the damage. Then we will have to move to schools, because it is there that the stereotypes, instead of getting demolished, are reinforced. We do this much, and we will not have to worry about the workplaces because “empowerment” would have happened by then. We could then reach a situation where, when a journalist needs to get feedback on the HC verdict on Haji Ali, does not call up only women groups, and can just step out and ask random people, all of whom will welcome it with headline-making phrases. We could reach a situation where, even when regressive mindsets try to deny women, they are forced to capitulate because the men, instead of waiting for women groups to file a case, instinctively boycott such places themselves. With patronage, by way of donations and presence, taken away, the offensive mindsets which look down on women will quickly become genuine liberals. And all of this is not about “empowering” women, it is about making the society more compassionate and responsive, because that is what we will achieve with such a turnaround in attitudes.

WRITE US:

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

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Should you avoid meat for good health? How to slice off the facts from the fiction

DARIUSH MOZAFFARIAN
theconversation.com

More than half of Americans who make New Year’s resolutions resolve to “eat healthier.” If you’re one, you might be confused about the role meat should play in your health.

It’s no wonder you’re confused. One group of scientists says that reducing red and processed meat is a top priority for your health and the planet’s. Another says these foods pose no problems for health. Some of your friends may say it depends, and that grass-fed beef and “nitrite-free” processed meats are fine. At the same time, plant-based meat alternatives are surging in popularity, but with uncertain health effects.

As a cardiologist and professor of nutrition, I’d like to clear up some of the confusion with five myths and five facts about meat.

First, the myths.

MYTH: Red meat is good for health

Long-term observational studies of heart disease, cancers or death and controlled trials of risk factors like blood cholesterol, glucose and inflammation suggest that modest intake of unprocessed red meat is relatively neutral for health. But, no major studies suggest that eating it provides benefits.

So, while an occasional serving of steak, lamb or pork may not worsen your health, it also won’t improve it. And, too much heme iron, which gives red meat its color, may explain why red meat increases risk of Type 2 diabetes. Eating red meat often, and eating processed meat even occasionally, is also strongly linked to colorectal cancer.

MYTH: You should prioritize lean meats

For decades, dietary guidance has focused on lean meats because of their lower fat, saturated fat and cholesterol contents. But these nutrients don’t have strong associations with heart attacks, cancers or other major health outcomes.

Other factors appear more important. Processed meats, such as bacon, sausage, salami and cold cuts, contain high levels of preservatives. Sodium, for example, raises blood pressure and stroke risk, while the body converts nitrites to cancer-causing nitrosamines. Lean or not, these products aren’t healthy.

MYTH: Focus on a ‘plant-based’ diet

“Plant-based” has quickly, but somewhat misleadingly, become a shorthand for “healthy.” First, not all animal-based foods are bad. Poultry and eggs appear relatively neutral. Dairy may have metabolic benefits, especially for reducing body fat and Type 2 diabetes. And, seafood is linked to sev-

eral health benefits.

Conversely, many of the worst foods are plant-based. Consider white rice, white bread, fries, refined breakfast cereals, cookies and so on. These foods are high in refined starch and sugar, representing 42% of all calories in the U.S., compared to about 5% of U.S. calories from unprocessed red meats, and 3% from processed meats.

Either a “plant-based” or omnivore diet is not healthy by default. It depends on what you choose to eat.

MYTH: Grass-fed beef is better for your health

Conventional livestock eat a combination of forage (grass, other greens, legumes) plus hay with added corn, soy, barley or grain. “Grass-fed,” or “pasture-raised,” livestock eat primarily, but not exclusively, forage. “Grass-finished” livestock should, in theory, only eat forage. But no agency regulates industry’s use of these terms. And “free range” describes where an animal lives, not what it eats.

“Grass-fed” may sound better, but no studies have compared health effects of eating grass-fed versus conventional beef. Nutrient analyses show very modest differences between grass-fed and conventionally raised livestock. You might eat grass-fed beef for personal, environmental or philosophical reasons. But don’t expect health benefits.

MYTH: Plant-based meat alternatives are healthier

Products like Impossible Burger and Beyond Meat are clearly better for the environment than conventionally raised beef, but their health effects remain uncertain. Most nutrients in plant-based alternatives are, by design, similar to meat. Using genetically engineered yeast, Impossible even adds heme iron. These products also pack a lot of salt. And, like many other ultra-processed foods, they may lead to higher calorie intake and weight gain.

SO, WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

FACT: Processed meats are bad for health

Processed meats contain problematic preservatives. Even those labeled “no nitrates or nitrites added” contain nitrite-rich fermented celery powder. A current petition by the Center for Science in the Public Interest asks the FDA to ban the misleading labeling.

Besides the sodium, nitrites and heme, processed meats can contain other carcinogens, produced by charring, smoking or high-temperature frying or grilling. These compounds may not only harm the person who eats these products; they can also cross the placenta and harm a fetus.

FACT: A meatless diet is not, by itself, a healthy diet

Most diet-related diseases are caused by too

few health-promoting foods like fruits, nuts, seeds, beans, vegetables, whole grains, plant oils, seafood and yogurt. Additional health problems come from too much soda and ultra-processed foods high in salt, refined starch or added sugar. Compared to these major factors, avoiding or occasionally eating unprocessed red meat, by itself, has modest health implications.

FACT: Beef production is devastating the environment

In terms of land use, water use, water pollution and greenhouse gases, unprocessed red meat production causes about five times the environmental impact of fish, dairy or poultry. This impact is about 20 times higher than that of eggs, nuts or legumes, and 45 to 75 times higher than the impact of fruits, vegetables or whole grains. A 2013 UN report concluded that livestock production creates about 15% of all global greenhouse gas emissions, with nearly half coming from beef alone.

FACT: Plant-based meats are better for the environment

Production of plant-based meat alternatives, compared to conventional beef, uses half the energy, one-tenth of the land and water, and produces 90% less greenhouse gas. But, no studies have yet compared plant-based meat alternatives to more natural, less processed options, such as mushrooms or tofu.

FACT: Many questions remain

Which preservatives or other toxins in processed meat cause the most harm? Can we eliminate them? In unprocessed red meats, what exactly increases risk of Type 2 diabetes? What innovations, like feeding cows special strains of seaweed or using regenerative grazing, can reduce the large environmental impacts of meat, even grass-fed beef? What are the health implications of grass-fed beef and plant-based meat alternatives?

Like much in science, the truth about meat is nuanced. Current evidence suggests that people shouldn’t eat unprocessed red meat more than once or twice a week. Grass-fed beef may be modestly better for the environment than traditional production, but environmental harms are still large. Data don’t support major health differences between grass fed and conventional beef.

Similarly, plant-based meat alternatives are better for the planet but not necessarily for our health. Fruits, nuts, beans, vegetables, plant oils and whole grains are still the best bet for both human and planetary health.

[the writer is Dean of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University]

Here’s what happens in the brain when we disagree

ANDREAS KAPPES & TALI SHAROT
theconversation.com

We’ve all been there. You are in the middle of a heated disagreement when you lose respect for the opposing party. Whether it is about the latest election or childcare, you feel like your considered arguments are not appreciated – perhaps even ignored. But did you ever wonder what exactly is happening in the mind of the person on the other side?

In a recent study, just published in *Nature Neuroscience*, we and our colleagues recorded people’s brain activity during disagreements to find out.

In our experiment, we asked 21 pairs of volunteers to make financial decisions. In particular, they each had to assess the value of real estates and bet money on their assessments. The more confident they were in their assessment, the more money they wagered.

Each volunteer lay in a brain imaging scanner while performing the task so we could record their brain activity. The two scanners were separated by a glass wall, and the volunteers were able to see the assessments and bets of the other person on their screen.

When volunteers agreed on the price of the real estate, each of them became more confident in their assessment, and they bet more money on it. That makes sense – if I agree with you then you feel more sure that you must be right. Each person’s brain activity also reflected the encoding of the confidence of their partner. In particular, activity of a brain region called the posterior medial frontal cortex, which we know is involved in cognitive dissonance, tracked the confidence of the partner. We found that the more confident one volunteer was, the more confident the

partner became, and vice versa.

However – and this is the interesting part – when people disagreed, their brains became less sensitive to the strength of others’ opinions. After disagreement, the posterior medial frontal cortex could no longer track the partner’s confidence. Consequently, the opinion of the dis-

contradictory opinions.

Our findings may shed light on some puzzling recent trends in society. For instance, over the last decade, climate scientists have expressed greater confidence that climate change is man-made. Yet, a survey by the Pew research centre shows that the percentage of Republicans

already oppose impeachment when testimonies are unsupportive of the president. But they will affect the conviction of those who are in favour of impeachment.

So how can we increase our chances of being heard by members of an opposing group? Our study lends new support to a “tried and tested recipe” (as Queen Elizabeth II recently put it while addressing a country divided over Brexit) – finding the common ground.

The strength of a carefully reasoned opinion is less likely to be registered when launching into a disagreement with a sturdy pile of evidence describing why we are right and the other side is wrong. But if we start from common ground – that is the parts of the problem we agree on – we will avoid being categorised as a “disputer” from the very beginning, making it more likely that the strength of our arguments will matter.

Take for example the attempt to alter the conviction of parents who refuse to vaccinate their children because they falsely believe vaccines are linked to autism. It has been shown that presenting strong evidence refuting the link does little to change their minds. Instead, focusing solely on the fact that vaccines protect children from potentially deadly disease – a statement that the parents can more easily agree with – can increase their intention to vaccinate their children by threefold.

So in the midst of that heated disagreement, try and remember that the key to change is often finding a shared belief or motive.

[Andreas Kappes is Lecturer, City, University of London; Tali Sharot is Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, UCL]



agreeing partner had little impact on people’s conviction that they were correct, regardless of whether the disagreeing partner was very sure in their assessment or not at all.

It was not the case that the volunteers were not paying attention to their partner when they disagreed with them. We know this because we tested our volunteers’ memory of their partners’ assessments and bets. Rather, it seems that contradictory opinions were more likely to be considered categorically wrong and therefore the strength of those opinions was unimportant.

A POLARISED SOCIETY

We suspect that when disagreements are about heated topics such as politics, people will be even less likely to take note of the strength of

who believe this notion to be true has dropped over the same period of time. While there are complex, multi-layered reasons for this specific trend, it may also be related to a bias in how the strength of other people’s opinions are encoded in our brain.

The findings can also be extrapolated to political current events. Take the recent impeachment hearings against US president Donald Trump. Our study suggests that whether a witness appears “calm, confident and in command of the facts” (as government official Bill Taylor was described when testifying during the hearings) or “unsteady and uncertain” (as the FBI chief Robert Muller was described when testifying about his special counsel investigation back in July) will matter little to those who

AMU students in hospital say police were ‘merciless’

ALIGARH (UP), DEC 20: Days after the violence at Aligarh Muslim university over the amended citizenship law, four students remain admitted at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital’s trauma centre on the campus, one of them with his hand amputated, a doctor said.

“I do not wish to say anything beyond the fact that I have lost my hand,” Mohammad Tariq, a PhD student, whose is being treated at the trauma centre told PTI.

Others alleged that the police had cracked down brutally on AMU students protesting peacefully against the Citizenship Amendment Bill. The police, however, said they faced stone-pelting by unruly protesters and had to resort to lathi-charge and tear gas to contain them.

AMU Vice Chancellor Tariq Mansoor has said he called the police into the campus after an angry mob of thousands collected inside.

The mob posed an imminent danger to the lives of the students and university property of the university,” he said in an open letter after Sunday’s violence. But he has also complained of excesses by police.

Still admitted at the trauma centre, undergrad-



uate Mohammad Tazeen, 19, alleged that he and several others faced a merciless attack by police.

He said he was dragged out of the AMU guest house number 3, thrashed there and again at the Malkhan Singh Hospital, where nearly 20 of us were taken in police vans supposedly for treatment.”

He said he was part of a group of students peacefully holding a protest on Sunday night inside the campus near the Bab-e-Syed Gate, in solidarity with students at Delhi’s Jamia Millia University. He said the

students took refuge in the guest house when the police lobbed stun grenades and tear gas shells. They chased after the students and dragged him and four other students out, Tazeen told PTI.

The students were allegedly thrashed by policemen at the Malkhan Singh Hospital. They were refused water and policemen said they were anti-nationals should be sent to Pakistan, he alleged.

Next morning, a senior doctor arrived at Malkhan Singh Hospital, plastered his hands and referred him and the

others to the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College hospital, despite objections by policemen.

Most of the students sent there were discharged after immediate treatment. Dr Ehtisham, Chief Medical Officer at the JN Hospital’s trauma centre, said four students are still undergoing treatment there.

AMU Vice Chancellor Tariq Mansoor, who recently visited the hospital, said, “We are following up all the cases of serious injury.

He said Tariq, whose hands were amputated, will get the best possible

treatment anywhere in the country, or even abroad, to ensure that he is able to lead a normal life.

“Reports of police excesses have reached me and we will ensure that all such complaints are investigated by competent authorities,” he said.

The AMU students were protesting against the law that grants Indian Citizenship Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Jains who entered the country before 2015 after facing religious persecution in three neighbouring countries. Muslims are excluded from this list.

WB governor upset for not being informed of NPR stay

Kolkata, Dec 20 (PTI): West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankar on Friday expressed dismay for not being intimated about the state government’s decision to stay the preparation and updation of the National Population Register (NPR).

In a letter to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Dhankar said it is surprising that this decision was not communicated to him and it had come to his notice from what is being circulated in the public domain.

The West Bengal government on Monday stayed all activities relating to the preparation and updation of the NPR in the state, amid furore over the amended Citizenship Act.

The objective of the NPR is to create a comprehensive identity database of every usual resident in the country. The database would contain demographic as well as biometric particulars.

“No activity regarding NPR may be taken without prior clearance from the government....

Surprisingly, the communication was not forwarded to me and has come to my notice from what is being circulated in public domain”. Dhankar said, “In view of the serious policy issue involved, I hereby require you (Banerjee) to submit this matter for the consideration of the Council of Ministers.”

A top Home Ministry official in New Delhi, however, said no state can refuse to carry out the process of updating the NPR as it is done as per the Citizenship Act and the matter of citizenship is in the Union list.

The data for the NPR was collected in 2010 along with the houselisting phase of Census 2011. This data was updated during 2015 by conducting door to door survey. The digitisation of the updated information has been completed.

Now it had been decided to update the NPR along with the Houselisting phase of Census 2021. The West Bengal government has stayed this updation process.

Assam HC dismisses govt review petition against order to resume mobile internet services



GUWAHATI, DEC 20 (PTI): The Gauhati High Court on Friday dismissed a review petition filed by the Assam government against its order to resume mobile internet from Thursday evening.

Though the Gauhati High Court ordered to resume the service from 5 pm on Thursday, the government did not issue any instruction to the mobile operators to implement it.

Mobile internet ser-

vices were restored in Assam on Friday morning, ten days after it was suspended to prevent misuse of social media during protest against the contentious amended Citizenship Act. A Division Bench of Justices Manojit Bhuyan and Soumitra Saikia heard the arguments of the government and dismissed the review petition.

In the morning, the state government filed the review petition in

the Gauhati High Court and urged for an urgent listing.

Accepting the government’s plea, the HC listed the case for hearing on Friday afternoon.

The same bench had on Thursday directed

resumption of mobile internet from 5 pm yesterday after hearing four PILs filed by journalist Ajit Kumar Bhuyan and advocates Bonoshri Gogoi, Randeep Sharma and Debakanta Doley.

NRC, what for? Asks Nitish, asserting it would not be implemented “at all”

PATNA, DEC 20 (PTI): Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Friday asserted that National Register for Citizens will not be implemented in the state, putting at rest speculations raised by his JD(U) support to the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Kumar made this clear in a terse reply to queries from journalists who had sought his response on the proposed country-wide implementation of NRC, including Bihar, as stated by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on the floor of the Parliament.

“Kaahe ka NRC? Bilkul laagu nahin hoga” (NRC, what for? Will not at all be implemented), Kumar quipped as he sauntered towards his vehicle waving at the media persons who had been waiting outside an auditorium here seeking to know the stand of the

chief minister who was at the venue to address the 80th annual session of Indian Road Congress.

Notably, Kumar becomes the first chief minister from the NDA camp to have voiced disapproval of the proposed move to have an all India NRC which has triggered country-wide tension and protests.

Kumar is heading a coalition government with the BJP in Bihar.

In the recent past, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her counterparts in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, Naveen Patnaik and Jaganmohan Reddy respectively besides those in Congress-ruled states have spoken out against the proposed move which parties opposed to the BJP view as a move to polarize voters by triggering fears of disenfranchisement of

Muslims. Kumar, on his part, has been opposed to the NRC since the days when it was implemented only in Assam upon a Supreme Court order.

Known for choosing and timing his words after much deliberation, Kumar came out with his assertion on NRC a day after he had made it clear at a public meeting in Gaya that he would “guarantee” that under his watch the minorities were not treated unfairly.

His averments could be seen as a gesture aimed at, simultaneously, assuring elements within the JD(U) headed by him who apprehend the party losing out on its Muslim base after supporting the Citizenship Bill as well as detractors most notably RJD of arch rival Lalu Prasad who have sharpened their attacks on the chief minister in the wake of the recent developments.

Mobile internet ban lifted in Assam

GUWAHATI, DEC 20 (PTI): Mobile internet service resumed in Assam on Friday morning, the tenth day after it was banned during protests against the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Though the Gauhati High Court had ordered its restoration by 5 pm on Thursday, the state government had not issued any instruction to the mobile operators to implement the court directive.

“We did not receive any further communication from the government to continue with the ban, so we resumed the service for our customers,” a senior official of private operator Airtel told PTI.

Other operators like state-owned BSNL, Reliance Jio and Vodafone too have resumed their services.

Mobile and broadband internet services were suspended on the evening of December 11, following incidents of violence during protests against the amended Citizenship Act. Broadband

services have already resumed in the state from December 17.

Assam Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said on Thursday evening that mobile internet service would resume from Friday.

Earlier during the day, the Gauhati High Court had directed the Assam government to restore mobile internet service by 5 pm on Thursday.

A division bench of Justices Manojit Bhuyan and Saumitra Saikia gave the direction after hearing four PILs filed by journalist Ajit Kumar Bhuyan, and advocates Bonoshri Gogoi, Randeep Sharma and Debakanta Doley.

With resumption of mobile internet, hundreds of WhatsApp messages and social media notifications clogged the cell phones of users.

“With messages flooding my phone, it hanged several times. I had to restart it many times,” an avid user of social media platforms on mobile phone said.

Assam witnessed one of the worst violent

protests in its history with three rail stations, post office, bank, bus terminus, shops, dozens of vehicles and many other public properties being set ablaze or totally damaged.

Already five persons lost their lives in the violence that broke out in the state last week.

After the Rajya Sabha passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill last week, the state erupted in uncontrolled protests, in which agitators engaged in pitch battle in almost every major city or town, forcing the administration to impose curfew.

Several towns and cities were placed under indefinite curfew, including Guwahati, the epicentre of protests, besides Dibrugarh, Tezpur and Dhekiajuli.

Night curfew was imposed in Jorhat, Golaghat, Tinsukia and Charaideo districts.

With the situation returning to normalcy, curfew has been lifted from several cities and relaxed in the rest.

Sharif diagnosed with complicated heart disease, says personal physician

ISLAMABAD, DEC 20 (PTI): Ailing former Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif, under treatment in London, has been diagnosed with a complicated heart disease and will undergo further scans to finalise a treatment plan, his personal physician has said.

The 69-year-old PML-N supremo had left for London on November 19 in an air ambulance to seek medical treatment, a month after he was released on bail from a seven-year prison sentence for corruption.

In a tweet on Thursday, the three-time premier’s personal physician Adnan Malik said Sharif underwent comprehensive cardiovascular evaluation at the Royal Brompton & Harefield Hospital in London, the Dawn News reported.

Sharif is “diagnosed of complicated coronary artery/Ischemic Heart Disease with significant disease burden” and will undergo further scans before treatment

begins, he said.

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the narrowing or blockage of the coronary arteries due to which the heart doesn’t receive the blood it needs, leading to acute chest pain and, in some cases, a fatal heart attack.

Last week, PML-N spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb said doctors had advised that Sharif be shifted to the US for treatment.

According to media reports, Sharif’s family has contacted the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in the US for treatment of Sharif’s blocked carotid artery.

Earlier this month, his family sources said Sharif will likely fly to the US on December 16 for medical treatment of his ailment. However, his son, Hussain Nawaz, told reporters in London on Monday that it will be difficult to take his father to the US until his platelet count get stabilised.

Hussain said Sharif

contracted various diseases during his jail term in Pakistan.

Sharif was shifted from jail to the Services hospital in Lahore in October after his health condition deteriorated. Doctors then recommended him to get treatment abroad.

The Pakistan government allowed Sharif’s travel for medical reasons but put the condition that he submit an indemnity bond as a guarantee that he would return to the country after getting treatment. He, however, rejected the condition and challenged it in courts.

Sharif was granted bail by the Islamabad High Court on humanitarian grounds in the Al Azizia case and by the Lahore High Court in the ongoing Chaudhry Sugar Mills case, in which he is a suspect.

In November, he was allowed by the Lahore High Court to travel abroad for treatment without any bond.

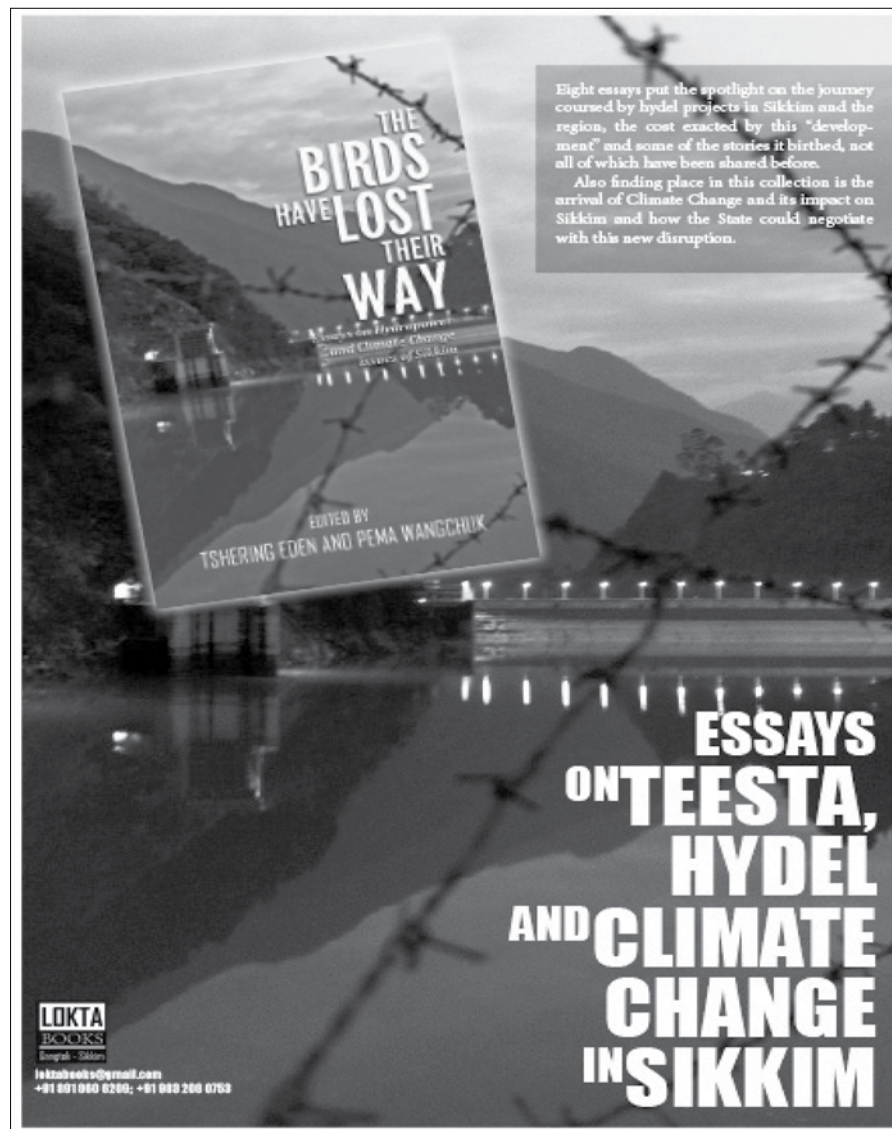
Pluralism core strength of nation, tweets Mamata



KOLKATA, DEC 20 (PTI): Calling upon people to stay united to fight divisive forces, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said pluralism was the core strength of this nation.

Taking to Twitter on the occasion of ‘International Human Solidarity Day’, she iterated that people should not be divided on the lines of religion or caste.

“On International Human Solidarity Day, let us celebrate our unity in diversity. This is our strength. Let us all work together to defeat the forces that seek to divide us along religious, casteist lines,” Banerjee, who had been at the forefront of protests against amended Citizenship Act and proposed nationwide NRC, tweeted.



Will bring energy, positivity to KKR like a 20-year-old: Tambe

TAPAN MOHANTA
KOLKATA, DEC 20 (PTI): He might be 48 but Mumbai leg-spinner Pravin Tambe doesn't feel a day older than 20 and says he will look to bring all his experience and energy for his new team Kolkata Knight Riders in the upcoming Indian Premier League.

On a day when youngsters went unsold at the IPL auctions here on Thursday, the former Rajasthan Royals leg-spinner, who was the oldest player in the list, was snapped up by Kolkata Knight Riders at his base price of Rs 20 lakh.

"I still play with a mindset like I am a 20-year-old young," Tambe, who has an 18-year-old son, told PTI from Mumbai.

"I will bring all my experience and energy to the team. And that positivity. I know that I can bring that, even if I'm with them not playing."

He doesn't feel that age will be an impediment. "People say many things but I keep doing my job and put in a lot of hardwork. I will like to do well in whatever role given to me be it in fielding or bowling. It's not to prove anything. If that was the case, I could not have played so long. I'm really excited to play for them," Tambe, who works as sports teacher at DY Patil, said.

"My family has supported me all these years. They keep inspiring me. KKR must have seen something in me to have bought me. I'm grateful to KKR team management. I want to give them back. If you get the support, you can go a long way," Tambe said.

While Tambe's passion for cricket still drives him crazy, his son has chosen academics and is now studying to become an engineer.

"My son never wanted to be a cricketer. He has chosen engineering as his profession."

It was Tambe, who clinched a hat-trick (3/26) against Kolkata Knight Riders to spin Rajasthan to victory by 10 runs in IPL 2014 in Ahmedabad.

"I distinctly remember the moment. I'm really proud to be playing for the same team now. It was a match-winning show and my dream now would be to give a similar match-winning performance for KKR," he said.

Tambe will look to fill in the void left by Pi-yush Chawla who was released by KKR and was bought by Chennai Super Kings at the auction.

"I knew I would fit in as a back-up player. They did not have many spinners left in the slot. I'm just focusing about performing well. I don't want to bother what people are talking about," said Tambe, knowing fully well that questions will be raised about logic behind buying a 48-year-old instead of a rookie who has future in this game.

"I never played cricket to achieve anything. I love this game and that's what has kept me going always," said Tambe, who was last in the news for reporting a corrupt approach from his erstwhile Mumbai Ranji Trophy teammate Hiken Shah.

Lionel Messi's enduring brilliance enthrals Guardian voting panel again

MARCUS CHRISTENSON
theGuardian

Lionel Messi returns to the top of the Guardian's top 100 male footballers list after losing out to Luka Modric and Cristiano Ronaldo in 2018. He did not win the Champions League, nor did he win the Copa América, but yet it still feels indisputably right to see the Argentinian genius selected as the very best in the world again.

It is the fifth time Messi has topped our list, which had a record number of judges again this year, 239 from 63 countries. We started the exercise in 2012 and Messi won the inaugural award as well as the year after, 2015 and 2017.

He remains, at 32, a joy to watch and there were, as always, breathtaking moments throughout the year, with the free-kick against Liverpool in the first Champions League semi-final and the winning goal against Atlético Madrid in La Liga in December only two examples.

Every single judge had Messi on their voting slip, compared to 235 for the second-placed Virgil van Dijk. The fact that the Barcelona No 10 was 20 places ahead of his nearest club-mate, Marc-André ter Stegen, speaks volumes of how he has somehow



become even more important for his side. Cristiano Ronaldo is out of the top two for the first time since we launched it and it may be a painful decline from here on in. He has done better than his former team-mate though, Luka Modric, who drops to 45th a year after he was crowned the best player in the world. Messi finished 309 points ahead of Van Dijk with the Dutchman almost 500 points in front of the third placed Sadio Mané. The Champions League win-

ners Liverpool have 10 players in the top 100. Jürgen Klopp's side had six on the list after losing the Champions League final to Real Madrid in 2018 but their triumph over Tottenham coupled with their relentless pursuit of the Premier League title has seen their marauding full-backs, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Andy Robertson, enter the list, together with Jordan Henderson, Georginio Wijnaldum and Fabinho. James Milner, strangely, drops out if

the top 100. Manchester City, however, top the list with 11 players while Brazil, winners of the Copa América, knock Spain off top stop when it comes to nationalities. Spain had had the most number of players on all our list from the start in 2012 but now find themselves in joint fifth. England are joint second, their highest ever position.

Young players keep banging on the door and this year we have, for the first time, two players on the list born on this side of the millennium, Erling Braut

Haaland and Jadon Sancho.

It was lovely to see Santi Cazorla return make the list for the first time since 2016, the wonderful playmaker returning from horrific injury problems to shine for Villarreal and even making a comeback for Spain. Zlatan Ibrahimovic is another player, and the oldest on the list, to return, his year at LA Galaxy winning enough votes to finish in 96th.

There is, as always, a lot of anger towards lists like these and there always seems to

be a bias towards the players who have done well in the period between August and November, with the voting closing in the beginning of December.

We also have the problem of players' whole careers being taken into account when it should be only the calendar year of 2019 that counts, hence Paul Pogba and Christian Eriksen, for example, finishing way higher than they really should be.

For me, as always, the players who finish between 100 and 200 are sometimes even more interesting than the ones who make it. Keylor Navas, for example, finished in 102nd and Paco Alcácer two places behind him in 104th, only 12 and 15 points from a place on the list. Dani Parejo, Fábian Ruiz and Luka Jovic were another three players who narrowly missed out. You can see all the votes that were cast and all the positions of all the players here.

Three-hundred and twenty-one players received votes this year, a testament to the broad variety and knowledge of our judges. But there can be only one winner and for the fifth time we raise our hat to the wonderful player that is Leo Messi. Let's see if anyone can unseat him in 2020.

CAC to be formed in next couple of days to appoint selectors: Ganguly



KOLKATA, DEC 20 (PTI): BCCI President Sourav Ganguly on Friday said that a Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) will be formed in the next couple of days to announce the new selection panel on a three-year tenure.

Ganguly said the CAC will be appointed only for one meeting to decide the selectors as the appointment of the men's head coach has already been done by the previous panel led by former captain Kapil Dev.

"The CAC will be appointed in a couple of days. It will only be for one meeting to appoint the selectors as the head coach has already been picked," Ganguly said on the sidelines of fantasy sports site 'My11Circle', of which he is a brand ambassador.

The tenure of the current selection panel head MSK Prasad has ended along with one another member, Gagan Khoda. Jatin Paranjpe, Sarandeep Singh and Devang Gandhi still have one year left in their tenure but there is speculation that they are unlikely to be retained.

The CAC's appointment has been a major point of contention because of conflict of interest issues.

Stalwarts like Sachin Tendulkar, VVS Laxman and even Kapil were accused of conflict of interest, prompting them to resign after being summoned by the BCCI Ethics Officer.

Ganguly, after taking charge as BCCI President

in October, admitted that accomplished cricketers were reluctant to take up positions in the CAC as they are apprehensive about being dragged into conflict of interest controversies.

Among other issues, Ganguly also spoke about the IPL auction where Australian fast bowler Pat Cummins was bought by Kolkata Knight Riders for Rs 15.50 crore, making him the most expensive foreign buy ever in IPL history.

Ganguly didn't agree that the price was too high for the Australian vice-captain.

"It has a lot to do with the demand. Especially these small auctions bringing players in go after go. Ben Stokes became a part of this small auction and that's why his value went through the roof (Rs 14.50 crore)," Ganguly said.

"KKR on this hard, green pitch at Eden where there's pace and bounce for the fast bowlers. I think there was a competition between Delhi Capitals and KKR till the last, and Delhi Capitals gave up after a certain point (Rs 15 crore). So, I think it's about supply and demand all the time," he opined.

Ganguly also picked his Fantasy XI side in which Indian skipper Virat Kohli was there along with Rohit Sharma and Aussie left-hander David Warner as the opening combination. Rishabh Pant was his preferred wicketkeeper.

Hyderabad FC look to exorcise ATK demons in home match

HYDERABAD, DEC 20 (PTI): Bottom-placed Hyderabad FC face a daunting task when they face ATK in their Indian Super League match at the GMC Balayogi Stadium here on Saturday.

Hyderabad FC are in desperate need for an upturn in form. The debutants have just four points from eight games. Phil Brown's team has just one point to show from their last five matches.

Their opponents ATK, on the other hand, are third on the table with 14 points from eight matches and could possibly go top of the table with a victory on Saturday.

But Hyderabad, who have just one win so far, need to put behind the demons from their previous clash earlier this season when Antonio Habas' side thumped them 5-0.

"I think if we look at the first game, we were humiliated that day. As a coach, I will never want that to happen again.



That day we weren't good enough with and without the ball. But now with eight or nine games down the line, we are a different team. We have a different thought process," said Brown.

Hyderabad have the worst defence this season -- conceding 17 goals from eight games -- while ATK have the best attack which has pumped in 16 goals. The Hyderabad defence, which is yet to keep a clean sheet this season, will brace themselves for a tough night against the

likes of Roy Krishna and David Williams.

But it is not just the defence that has troubled Hyderabad this season. Their attack has contributed just seven goals -- the second worst after Chennaiyin FC (5). But more importantly, they have scored just three goals at home. They have also never scored first in any of their matches so far -- the only team in the league to do so.

"If you consider the league table it is a concern where we are. But

we are hoping that in the second half of the season we will do something about it," said a hopeful Brown.

"And that is probably one of the main reasons Nestor (Gordillo) is being put in front and is available for his first game of the season. Now that I have my best players available, hopefully in the second half of the season, we will get more positive results."

The Kolkata-based side have no such issues, with their forwards scor-

ing almost at will. Moreover, the team will be smarting after a 1-2 loss to FC Goa in their previous match and will want to get back to winning ways.

"Three points against Hyderabad is very important. The Goa game is in the past for me. The match will be very very difficult. Hyderabad have good players and a good coach. They are waiting for this game for nine days. In this league, all matches are very competitive. A small decision or a small mistake will turn the scoreline," said Habas.

Habas' side, which is very organised, can wreak havoc in the opposition ranks with their counter-attacks. The pace of Roy Krishna, Williams, Michael Soosairaj and Prabir Das will come in handy, but more importantly, they have creativity in midfield with the likes of Javi Hernandez and Edu Garcia impressing.

Sharapova still has 'fire and motivation' despite 2019 misery

ABU DHABI, DEC 20 (AFP): Maria Sharapova insisted that she still has the "internal fire and motivation" to compete professionally, despite the lingering shoulder problem that kept her out of action for long stretches this season.

The former world number one was only able to play in eight events in 2019, contesting just 15 matches in total.

The Russian five-time major champion made her first on-court appearance since her US Open first round exit in August in an exhibition in Abu Dhabi on Thursday, where she fought back from a break down in each set to defeat Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic 6-4, 7-5.

"Any chance that I get to come out and play competitively is a really good day because I just haven't played a lot," Sharapova told reporters at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship.

"Definitely I'm coming out of this match happy that I was out there again and it can only get better from here."

While she wouldn't reveal too many details about the state of her shoulder injury, she did say she "felt fine" after her clash with Tomljanovic, while keeping her expectations in check having been sidelined for nearly

four months. Sharapova plans on travelling Down Under for next month's Australian Open but confirmed she will not be playing the Olympic Games in Tokyo. With many question marks still surrounding her form and her shoulder, she's unsure what her 2020 calendar will look like.

"I think that will be one of the biggest challenges for the new year, it's to have a set schedule," said the 32-year-old.

"I definitely look forward to going to Australia and seeing how things go, see how the body holds up there."

- 'IN AWE OF NADAL' -

"It's tough to tell, I've barely played any events last year. The start and stopping was one of the most challenging parts of the year as well, just when you think I got going a little bit I had to tone it down and stop and then just keep training. Although it seems I haven't played actually I've been working a lot."

The US-based Russian will fly home for Christmas, then compete in a couple of exhibition matches in Hawaii, before heading to Australia where she plans on playing a warm-up event ahead of the opening Grand Slam of the season in Melbourne.

Asked how she's been able to maintain

her spirits during her lengthy struggle with injuries, Sharapova added: "I really love what I do. I think you see it when I am on the court, when I do have the chance to compete, I really enjoy being there. I really have a great purpose for what I do."

"I have goals and dreams for life after tennis, but I still have that internal fire and motivation. Really, all on my mind when I wake up is getting into my sports gear and going out and working to be a better tennis player." Now down at 131 in the world rankings, Sharapova insists she hasn't considered retirement from the sport just yet, and realises injuries are part of every athlete's life. She said she takes inspiration from Rafael Nadal, who has had his fair share of injuries himself.

"I'm in awe of his whole career. I think a lot of it is being really smart strategically about his schedule."

"From his point of view, he likes a lot of matches to feel confident, but you need to be healthy in order to do that, so you have to make the right decisions and that's certainly something that I can learn from him," she said of the Spanish world number one and 19-time major winner who is also competing at the UAE tournament.

No relief in sight from Australian bushfire crisis as toll from catastrophic blazes rises



KATE LYONS
SYDNEY, 20 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Australia is braced for another day of “catastrophic” fires on Saturday, with people urged to delay travel to holiday destinations, as soaring temperatures and strong winds led to further loss of life and homes on Friday.

The warnings come as Australian temperature records continued to tumble, with the country recording its three hottest days ever on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

In South Australia, one person died in a vehicle crash in the fire zone on Friday and another is unaccounted for, and four South Australian firefighters were treated for burns and smoke inhalation as the service was called to more than 120 fires.

Eight other people have been killed as a result of the fires during this fire season, which began well before the beginning of summer, including two volunteer firefighters who died as they were returning from

fighting a fire near Buxton, south-west of Sydney, on Thursday night.

Geoffrey Keaton, 32, and Andrew O’Dwyer, 36, died when a tree fell into the path of their tanker, causing it to roll, as they were travelling in a convoy. Both men left behind partners and infant children.

“They’re ordinary, everyday individuals – like you and I – that go out and simply want to serve and protect and make a difference in their local community,” said the New South Wales rural fire service commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons. “And they don’t ever go out in the knowledge that they might not come home from that shift.”

South Australia had its worst fire danger day of the summer so far on Friday as a combination of extremely high temperatures – reaching close to 50C in some parts of the state – and strong winds were followed by huge thunderstorms, which presented the potential for thousands of lightning strikes that could ignite further

blazes.

There were multiple reports of homes and other buildings on fire in the worst blaze, at Cudlee Creek. More than 100 fires are currently burning across NSW and half of them are not contained, including the “megafire” in Gaspers Mountain, north-west of Sydney, that has been burning for almost two months and has so far destroyed more than 350,000 hectares.

Temperatures in much of NSW are expected to rise to the mid-40s on Saturday, which, combined with strong winds and intensely dry conditions, has led fire chiefs to warn people that fires could break out very quickly, destroying homes and endangering lives before emergency services could reach them.

“Do not put yourself in harm’s way tomorrow,” warned Rob Rogers, deputy commissioner of the NSW rural fire service on Friday. “We cannot guarantee to get firetrucks to you ... Don’t expect a fire truck, don’t

expect a plane, don’t wait for a warning.”

Since this year’s fire season began, 800 dwellings have been lost in NSW alone, with fire chiefs warning it was inevitable that more homes would be destroyed on Saturday.

“I think that’s a fairly sure thing that we will lose homes somewhere tomorrow. It would be a miracle if we didn’t,” said Rogers.

At a joint press conference, Rogers and the NSW police deputy commissioner, Gary Worboys, also issued stark warnings to people planning on driving around the state on Saturday, the first day of NSW’s summer school holidays, saying their fear was that people would become stuck in cars along highways in heavy traffic as fire fronts closed in. “People should consider staying at home tomorrow and make their travel arrangements for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday,” said Worboys. “They still have time in terms of Christmas Day. Tomorrow will be a diffi-

cult day.”

Many of the fires burning around Sydney are in popular holiday destinations, including the Blue Mountains to Sydney’s west, the central coast to the north and the Shoalhaven and Illawarra regions to the south. Sections of key roads out of Sydney will be closed tomorrow.

Residents in four towns in Victoria were urged to leave their homes immediately on Friday as two bushfires raged out of control.

Thick smoke also continued to blanket the east of the country, including Australia’s largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, on Friday, prompting health warnings for residents.

Political pressure on the prime minister also mounted on Friday, with Scott Morrison apologising for going on holiday while Australia was in the grip of an extended bushfire crisis.

“I deeply regret any offence caused to any of the many Australians affected by the terrible bushfires by my taking leave with family at this time,” Morrison said.

Morrison later confirmed the holiday was in Hawaii, seeking to explain the trip’s secrecy by suggesting he had tried to give his daughters “a bit of a surprise”, despite several reporters stating the prime minister’s office had denied reports he was in Hawaii after he and his family had arrived.

Michael McCormack has served as acting prime minister since Monday, declaring his hometown of Wagga Wagga was the nation’s capital, while Morrison copped bad press for his holiday.

Britain’s new parliament votes on Johnson’s Brexit deal

LONDON, DEC 20 (AFP): Britain’s freshly-elected parliament prepared on Friday to move past years of partisan wrangling and initially approve Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s divorce deal with the EU. The all-but-certain outcome in the lower House of Commons will help Johnson on his way towards meeting his winning campaign promise to “get Brexit done” on January 31.

But it will also push London and Brussels closer to another cliff edge at the end of 2020 that might disrupt decades of unfettered trade.

A snap election last week put Johnson’s Conservatives in control of parliament and dispelled doubts over whether Britain would become the first nation to leave the European Union.

A final vote on Johnson’s separation terms will come when lawmakers return from their Christmas break early next month.

But Britain will enter the holiday season closer to legal and economic independence from Brussels than it has been at any point since the 2016 Brexit referendum on Britain’s near half-century EU membership.

Johnson has the freedom and power to shape Britain’s future that his predecessor Theresa May never had during her troubled three-year term.

“Today we will deliver on the promise we made to the people and get the Brexit vote wrapped up for Christmas,” Johnson said.

“Now MPs will start the process of passing the bill. Then, at the beginning of the new decade, at the beginning of a new dawn for our country, our parliamentarians will return to Westminster to immediately finish the job, take us out of the EU on January 31 and move this country forward. “After years of delay and rancour in parliament, we will deliver certainty and hard-working businesses and people across this country will have a firm foundation on which to plan for the future.”

Britain’s nervous financial market

rejoiced when Johnson’s governing Conservatives secured an comprehensive majority in the 650-member House of Commons.

The healthy margin appeared to remove the possibility of more months of political uncertainty and chaos -- and of Britain crashing out of the bloc without any arrangements for what comes next.

But the pound fell back to its pre-election levels when Johnson introduced a series of small but potentially consequential changes into the official Withdrawal Agreement Bill.

Britain’s formal departure on January 31 had been due to be followed by an 11-month transition period during which things would stay pretty much as they are now.

The sides are supposed to use the time to negotiate a comprehensive new agreement covering everything from trade to security and data protection.

EU officials warn that such deals usually take years to hammer out.

But Johnson ruled out the possibility of asking for a deadline extension in the version of the bill before parliament on Friday.

“A Minister of the Crown may not agree... to an extension of the implementation period,” the bill now says.

Analysts note that little prevents Johnson from pushing a new law through parliament removing that firm deadline should negotiations veer dangerously off track.

It also puts psychological pressure on European officials to back off some of their stiffer demands on London and seek a limited deal that leaves some big issues unresolved.

“The UK could get a (free trade agreement) done with the EU by end of 2020,” May’s former Brexit adviser Raoul Ruparel said.

“But it would be a narrow and shallow one.” The EU’s chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said on Tuesday that the bloc “will do the maximum” to meet the end-of-2020 deadline.

Seafarer abandoned for three years off UAE will be home in time for Christmas

KAREN MCVEIGH

DUBAI, 20 DEC

[THEGUARDIAN]: For the past three years, Vikash Mishra, a merchant seaman from Mumbai, has been stranded on a rusting cargo ship at sea in the United Arab Emirates, thousands of miles from his young family, after being abandoned by the vessel’s owner.

His 39-month ordeal, which he describes as “mental torture”, was covered by the Guardian in July, when conditions in the busy shipping lane became so dangerous after the vessel developed engine failure that he and three crew members feared for their lives.

His wages went unpaid and he and the others were forced to sleep outside in searing heat at the mercy of cockroaches and mosquitoes. Mishra’s case echoes that of Captain Ayyappan Swaminathan, an Indian captain whose abandonment by the same company, Elite Way Marine Services, a UAE firm, was highlighted by the Guardian in April.

The pair are just two of more than 5,000 seafarers recorded as abandoned by their vessel owners by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Labour Organisation since 2004.

But today, after three long years with few supplies, scant means of communication and a trail of broken promises from the ship’s owners, Mishra, 34, the second engineer on the Tamim Aldar, has finally had the news he has been waiting for. He has been paid 80% of his wages and hopes to be home for

Christmas. Mishra, who is now in Dubai maritime city port, said via a WhatsApp audio message: “We are very lucky. So many people are abandoned here, without salary, without anything. After 39 months, I can go home and see my family.

“When I came here, my daughter Tanya was eight months old. She will be four this month. I have been away three Christmases.” Mishra said his son, Tanmay, said to him: “I will tell Santa Claus: Please, I don’t want a gift. Just send my father home.” Mishra thanked the Guardian for helping to highlight his plight and that of other abandoned seafarers.

He and his three fellow crew members from the Tamim Aldar, Arsu Lobo, a chief engineer from India, Tesfa Michael and Welday Mehari Ayra, both Eritrean, are the last of the 36 seamen who were abandoned in several vessels in the Gulf by Elite Way Marine Services. They were effectively forced to continue work on board without pay, in order to keep the ships safe. The rest were successfully repatriated, with Ayyappan reunited with his family in June.

At one point, Mishra and the other seamen were so afraid for their lives they abandoned the Tamim Aldar, and attempted to travel the 25 nautical miles to port in a lifeboat before being forced back to their vessel and warned they faced jail. In August, Mishra and the others were persuaded by another company, Mubarak Marine, to return to Dubai, where they are now living on a

barge. Mishra was paid 8,000 UAE Dirhams, about \$2,000 (£1,500), which he has sent to his family, who are heavily in debt. In the last few days, Mishra was given 80% of the US\$78,000 he was owed. The IMO and human rights groups have compared rising abandonment cases to forced labour or modern slavery.

The past three years have seen a dramatic rise in abandonment cases – with the UAE one of the worst countries involved. This year, more than 50% of 474 men abandoned – 254 seamen – have not received their wages, their cases unresolved, according to the IMO.

At least 40 vessels have been recorded as abandoned this year; 44 in 2018, and 55 in 2017, compared to 12 to 17 cases a year in the previous five years. The IMO says the rise is partly to do with better reporting and greater protections afforded to seafarers under an amendment in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) in 2017. Under the convention, seafarers abandoned and unpaid for two months can claim their wages via mandatory insurance.

The UAE, where 90% of the labour force are migrant workers, is not a signatory of the MLC, which also insists on union rights. Last year, the country banned Elite Way Marine Services from operating in its waters and is planning new legislation to protect seafarers. The new law, not yet on the statute book, would allow the authorities to arrest abandoned vessels, sell them and prioritise seafarers instead of debtors.

More than 60 dead in latest Syria clashes



BEIRUT, DEC 20 (AFP): Clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed groups in the country’s last major opposition bastion have killed more than 60 on both sides in the past 24 hours despite UN calls for de-escalation, a war monitoring group said Friday.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 38 jihadists and allied rebels had been killed in battles with regime forces in the northwestern province of Idlib since Thursday night.

The fighting near the jihadist-held town of Maaret al-Numan also killed 23 Syrian regime loyalists, the Observatory said.

Russian warplanes, meanwhile, pounded areas around Maaret al-Numan and the nearby town of Saraqib with a series of air strikes,

according to the war monitor. The flare-up triggered a wave of displacement from nearby areas, said an AFP correspondent there.

Yasser Ibrahim al-Dandal said he was fleeing with his family to olive groves in northern Idlib, where they would sleep out in the open.

“Hundreds of rockets hit Maarat al-Numan,” he told AFP. “The situation is very bad.”

The Idlib region, which is home to some three million people including many displaced by Syria’s civil war, is controlled by the country’s former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The Damascus regime has repeatedly vowed to take back control of it.

Pro-government forces launched a blistering offensive against the region in April, killing

China loyalist takes helm in Macao amid trouble in Hong Kong

MACAO, DEC 20 (AP): Beijing loyalist Ho Iat Seng was inaugurated Friday as China’s chief executive in the tiny gambling enclave of Macao, which unlike neighboring Hong Kong has remained free of pro-democracy protests.

The 62-year-old businessman read his oath of office in front of Chinese leader Xi Jinping at a ceremony Friday morning.

Both men delivered speeches stressing the importance of the “one country, two systems” framework under which the former Portuguese colony has been ruled since its handover to China in 1999.

Unlike in Hong Kong, where months of anti-government protests have wracked the former British colony, Macao has remained overwhelmingly calm, a reflection of its close ties to and economic dependence on mainland China.

Harry Potter Fans Sound Off Following JK Rowling's Controversial Tweet

If you head to social media right now, you will see a familiar name trending. JK Rowling, the author who helmed the Harry Potter franchise, has made headlines for a post she made earlier today. The author left many fans stunned when she openly shared support for Maya Forstater, a researcher who was let go from her job after saying people cannot change their biological sex. And as you can see below, the Internet is not having it with Rowling today.

The whole ordeal began when news first broke of Forstater's ordeal. The researcher worked at the Centre for Global Development as a fellow. She was let go after making comments which many interpreted as disparaging the trans community, and Forstater recently lost her court case which challenge her termination.

This dismissal is what led Rowling to share her support of Forstater on Twitter. The author put up a brief message which reads "Dress however you please. Call yourself whatever you like. Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you. Live your best life in peace and security. But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real? #IStandWithMaya #ThisIsNotADrill"

Shortly after the message went up, social media lit up with reactions to the

post. Fans of Rowling and Harry Potter admitted their dismay at the opinion. Celebrities like Jameela Jamil defended the LGBTQ community in light of the pushback and was joined by GLAAD who said Rowling's statements "put trans people at risk."

know and support trans people to speak up and support their fundamental right to be treated equally and fairly," the organization shared (via Variety).

As you can see in the slides below, fans are struggling to come to terms with the post shared by Rowling. This tweet is just



"J.K. Rowling, whose books gave kids hope that they could work together to create a better world, has now aligned herself with an anti-science ideology that denies the basic humanity of people who are transgender," says Ramos in a statement. "Trans men, trans women, and non-binary people are not a threat, and to imply otherwise puts trans people at risk. Now is the time for allies who

one of several by the author which raised eyebrows, but this seems to be the most offensive to fans thus far. And if Rowling hopes to bounce back from this message, fans are hoping the Harry Potter creator offers them a good apologize.

What do you make of this controversy? Let me know in the comments or hit me up on Twitter @MeganPetersCB to talk all things comics and anime!

Lady Gaga Can't Remember When She Last Bathed

With 2020 right around the corner, Lady Gaga is letting her followers and fans know that there's something major in the works — but that it's distracting her from things, like taking a shower. In a tweet, she implied that she's hard at work on new material between her Las Vegas shows and winning Academy Awards. With a simple hashtag, she let all the little monsters know that big news is on the way. After her shower joke (we hope it's a joke) she added #LG6.

"My assistant: when's the last time you bathed," Gaga tweeted. "Me: I don't remember."

Fans have been eagerly awaiting new material from Gaga. Her last non-A Star Is Born album, Joanne, was released in 2016. Before that, in 2014, she released

Cheek to Cheek, an album of duets with Tony Bennett, so fans are definitely hoping for more Gaga originals. She told everyone during an appearance with YouTube's NikkieTutorials that she wasn't ever going to give up music.

"More music, not retiring any time soon ... all kinds of different music," she said. "I wanna do more movies, I wanna have babies and I want to continue to build the behemoth that is Haus Laboratories into the makeup company of my dreams."

In that interview, she mentioned that she can get distracted when inspiration strikes, which could explain the lack of showering. "I'm living my inspirations right now, in this moment," she said. "When I get inspired, I do things right away."

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'Tenet' First Trailer: Christopher Nolan Returns With a Time-Bending Espionage Epic

Select U.S. audiences got to see the first teaser for Christopher Nolan's "Tenet" in front of screenings of "Hobbs & Shaw" this summer, and now months later Warner Bros. has finally made the tentpole's official first trailer available online. Like all of Nolan's first trailers, the "Tenet" teaser is selling an ambitious scope and a mind-bending narrative. Is Nolan back in "Memento" and "Inception" storytelling mode? The trailer will surely gets fans buzzing.

"Tenet" stars John David Washington in his biggest role to date after breaking out in Spike Lee's "BlackKkLansman." From the look of it, Washington appears to be playing a detective investigating some kind of unusual case. The film's high profile supporting cast includes Robert Pattinson, Elizabeth Debicki, Nolan regular Michael Caine, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Kenneth Branagh, Dimple Kapadia, and Clémence Poésy. Nolan is reuniting with his "Interstellar" and "Dunkirk" cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema on "Tenet." "Dunkirk" earned Hoytema an Oscar nomination for Best Cinematographer, while Nolan competed for Best Director. Nolan has hired Oscar-winning "Black Panther" composer Ludwig Göransson to handle the original score, rather than his usual collaborator Hans Zimmer.

The reported budget on "Tenet" is over \$220 million, which would make it the most expensive original film of Nolan's career so far. The filmmaker earned some of his best reviews yet with his last feature, the WWII survival thriller "Dunkirk." The drama grossed \$526 million worldwide and earned eight Oscar nominations and three wins: Best Sound Editing, Best Sound Mixing, and Best Film Editing.



CHRISTMAS WITH KATY! Singer, Katy Perry joined Amazon in Delivering Smiles this holiday season at Boys & Girls Clubs of metro Los Angeles – Bell Gardens Clubhouse.

Bill Burr Wants Everyone To Know That He Didn't Drop Baby Yoda (Even Though He Did)

One of the unexpected delights of The Mandalorian is the number of comedians who have popped up during season one, including Brian Posehn, Horatio Sanz, Amy Sedaris, and Bill Burr, who played Mayfeld in episode six "The Prisoner." The Boston-centric comedian got the role, despite his aversion to Star Wars, after running into showrunner Jon Favreau at a birthday party. As Burr recently told The Last Laugh podcast:

"[Favreau] was like, 'Hey, I'm doing this Star Wars thing, would you wanna do something?' And I was like, 'I kinda always made fun of it.'"

Burr seemed concerned that the optics of him joining a Star Wars project would look iffy, but Favreau saw it a different way. "I think that'd be funny. I think your fans would get a kick out of the fact, if you went into that thing," he recalled Favreau saying. "Then I went in there, and they were shooting it like a Spaghetti Western. And I was immediately so psyched to be a part of it."

Now that the episode has aired, Burr

wants to make one thing clear: he did NOT drop Baby Yoda, our nation's new mascot, despite all evidence to the contrary. "Alright, so here's the deal, I didn't drop the Baby Yoda," he said on an episode of his Monday Morn-



ing Podcast. "The f*cking robot dude came out of hyperspace and he didn't tell anybody. Alright? Until you're in hyperspace holding a f*cking baby and some robot — like that's not unsettling enough — is driving the f*cking thing and slams on the brakes, let's see how you do. Walk a mile in my f*cking space slippers before you f*cking come at me." Burr was joking around, but people really are "breaking [his] balls" on Twitter.

ARIES: Do not let the ways of the world make you bitter and angry, Aries. Deception is a tool used by cowards. So the only way to win is to not play at all. The stress you are experiencing right now is a sign you are letting the underhanded behaviour affect you in a negative manner. Learn to walk away from toxic environments, people and situations. Tip: Sometimes the only way to win is to not play at all.

TAURUS: "...When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in." Haruki Murakami's words paint a vivid picture of where you are in your journey right now. The transformation didn't always make sense to you, especially when you were in the cocoon stage of your existence. But you pushed through it anyway. Tip: You are on the other side of this transformation.

GEMINI: Joseph Campbell once said, "Your sacred space is where you can find yourself over and over again." Let his words inspire you to retreat into your magical burrow, Gemini. A laboratory where you can

let your inner creative genius reclaim their reins. Your masterpiece is still in its early stages, not quite ready to make its big debut. Tip: The magic you're looking for is within you.

CANCER: Your enthusiasm is nothing short of infectious, lighting up your path as you move from one achievement to the next. People are drawn to you for a reason, Cancer. They want to collaborate with you so they can be a part of the big magic. Share the love freely but not without a few boundaries in place. A little birdie tells me that the circle has a few demotors as well. Tip: Draw boundaries where necessary.

LEO: "At the centre of your being, you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want." Meditate on these words by Lao Tzu as you realign with your soul's purpose. If there is anything your experiences have taught you, it's that the real journey is within. Given your reflective mood, you may or may not be able to get in touch with your social side. Tip: The real journey is within.

VIRGO: This feeling of bliss you are cur-

rently experiencing is a result of all that self-work, Virgo. Getting in touch with your inner god(ess) has helped you realise that the reins of your life have always been in your own hands. You have the ability to achieve whatever you want as long as you operate from a space of unconditional love and faith. Continue to walk the path of transformation, knowing that you will ultimately manifest rewards you seek. Tip: Shine your light.

LIBRA: "You are either supporting the vision or supporting division," said Saji Ijiyemi. Which team are you playing for, Libra? Do you swear by 'collaboration over competition' as your mantra? Once you stop operating from the ego self, you will be able to realise that each person on this team is willingly and passionately working towards the same vision. See how you can bring about greater degree of synergy into the workforce. Tip: Trust the team effort.

SCORPIO: The greater the desire, the more effort you will need to put in. Get down and dirty with your work, Scorpio.

There is no way out of this. But don't make the mistake of assuming you have to do it all on your own. The true test of a leader is their ability to delegate the tasks at hand to the right people. Build a strong team consisting of individuals who share your vision.

SAGITTARIUS: All that hard work is finally bearing fruit. The late nights turning into early days are paying off in a way that you did not even imagine. Open yourself to the abundance and prosperity are knocking at your door. But this phase of your career isn't about the big money only. Tip: This is a period of financial rewards.

CAPRICORN: There is no need to peer into the crystal ball. Continue to walk down the chosen path knowing the information you need will be revealed to you in due course of time. Sometimes, you just have to trust your inner compass, magickal one. Some of you are being asked to raise the question: 'What do I feel the most passionate about?' You don't have to turn your life upside down when your subconscious gives you the answer.

Tip: Trust your inner compass.

AQUARIUS: The Roman philosopher Seneca proposed, "Everything that exceeds the bounds of moderation has an unstable foundation." How do you feel about his theory and where do you need to readjust? No excesses of any kind. You're being asked to find inner balance, starting now. Some of you need to apply the rule of moderation to your diet plan as well. Guilty of introducing dietary restrictions every now and then only to furiously binge on the thing you've been trying to cut off? Tip: Choose the middle path.

PISCES: Are you stuck because of the lack of options or your refusal to make big changes? What you've chosen right now is safe and comfortable. But it's also mind-numbing to the point that it will cause stagnation. The cards are reminding you that your passion is the fuel that will bring about immense transformation. Step into unfamiliar territories. Trust yourself to take a risk. Tip: Let go of your false sense of security and follow your heart.