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Summit TIMES

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Preserve hard-won democracy: Chamling

44TH STATE DAY

SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 16 MAY:

Sikkim celebrated the 44th State Day here at Chintan Bhawan today with a programme attended by Governor Ganga Prasad as the chief guest and Chief Minister Pawan Chamling as the guest of honour.

On the occasion, LD Kazi Award for Democratic Rights was presented to Late Namgyal Tshering Euthenpa, which was received by his daughter Chumsey Doma. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh. Likewise, Jeevan Rakshak Padak Award 2018 was presented to Chandra Kumar Gurung for his act of bravery of saving the life of a man who accidentally

fell into Rani Khola.

Addressing the function, the Governor conveyed his best wishes to the people of Sikkim on the 44th State Day.

He mentioned that the State Day was a joyous occasion when the people of Sikkim can recall with pride, enthusiasm and satisfaction the multifarious and significant achievement made by the State Government during the past years.

Sikkim emerged as one of the best States in the country in a short period, he said further adding that even Prime Minister Narendra Modi has applauded the initiative and achievements of Sikkim in organic farming at different national and international platforms.



He also congratulated the Chief Secretary, State Election Commission, Chief Electoral Officer, District Election Officers and all officials and staff involved in conducting free, fair and peaceful elections.

In his address, the CM

stated that the people of Sikkim said that in the Referendum of 1975 only 2% of the population of Sikkim voted against the merger, which shows the willingness of Sikkimese people to be a part of the Indian Union.

He talked of the de-

velopments that the State has witnessed in 25 years of the Sikkim Democratic Front government.

"I have made lots of sacrifices in my life to provide comfort, happiness and qualitative life to the people of

Sikkim," the CM said.

He went on to allege that attempts have been made to disrupt peace and development of the State. On the same, he asserted that the people should have the feeling to serve, love and respect

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Two Indian climbers die on Kangchenjunga in Nepal

SHIRISH B PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, MAY 16 (PTI):

Two Indian climbers have died in Nepal due to high altitude sickness near the summit of Mount Kangchenjunga during an expedition to the world's third tallest peak, an official said Thursday.

Biplab Baidya (48) and Kuntal Karar (46) died Wednesday night above Camp IV after they were unable to continue their descent from near the 8,586-meter peak due to hypothermia and snowblindness.

"Biplab made it successfully to the summit point while Kuntal fell sick on his way and could not make it to the top. The Indian duo died while climbing down from the peak," Mira Acharaya, liaison officer at Nepal's Ministry of Tourism team deployed at the base camp, told PTI.

According to fellow climbers, the incident occurred when the duo were being brought to Camp IV from an altitude of 8,400 metres through a herculean rescue operation carried out by Project Possible team leader Nirmal 'Nims' Purja along with the fellow members.

"They succumbed to high altitude sickness," said Pasang Sherpa, Director of Peak Promotion Ltd, that carried out the expedition.

They were part of a five-member team of climbers from West Bengal, Sherpa said.

"Two Indian climbers and a German mountaineer who also suffered from serious frostbite will be evacuated from the high altitude camp as early as possible," he said.

Another climber from Chile is missing from above Camp IV of Mount Kangchenjunga since last evening.

Rodrigo Vivanco from Chile went missing on the descent after he reportedly made it to the summit late on Wednesday, Sherpa said, adding that a team has already left for Camp IV to conduct a search operation.

Mount Kangchenjunga is the third highest mountain in the world. It rises in a section of the Himalayas called Kangchenjunga Himal delimited in the west by the Tamur River, in the north by the Lhonak Chu and Jongsang La, and in the east by the Teesta River.

MP candidate launches 'I am 371F' campaign

SHRAVAN CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 16 MAY:

Independent Lok Sabha candidate, Passang G Sherpa has launched a campaign titled "I am 371F", to raise awareness on the importance of Article 371F. The main objective of this campaign is to reach out to every Sikkimese and apprise them about the intricacies of the special provisions guaranteed to Sikkim by the Indian constitution and to empower them to stand up and take a decision for the future of Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference here at Press Club of Sikkim today, Mr Sherpa said, "In order to resolve and redress the issues faced by Sikkim and to safeguard the present and future



of every Sikkimese, it is pertinent to sensitise every Sikkimese individual about their rights and duties as enshrined under Article 371F of the

Constitution of India."

"People of Sikkim cannot comprehend Article 371F and this has led to confusion and apprehension," he said.

He expressed that this social awareness campaign has been designed to uplift and empower the people of Sikkim through knowledge so they can participate in safeguarding the rights and future of Sikkim and its people.

He also mentioned that different activities like debate forums, awareness programs and other events will be organized under the campaign. The campaign will cover all communities and age groups, he said further adding that the campaign will begin with college and university students of Sikkim.

PM, Mamata locked in a blame game over vandalism of Vidyasagar statue in WB

MAU (UP)/MANDIRBARAZAR(WB), MAY 16 (PTI):

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee were on Thursday locked in a blame game over the vandalism of the bust of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in the violence at BJP chief Amit Shah's roadshow in Kolkata and traded barbs over building a new statue of the 19th century Bengali icon.

As the bitter campaign in the TMC-ruled West Bengal that was curtailed by a day headed to a close tonight, Modi said his government was committed towards Vidyasagar's vision and promised to install his grand statue at the same spot in Kolkata. Reject-

ing Modi's offer, Banerjee said Bengal does not need BJP's money and that the state has enough to rebuild the statue. "We do not seek alms from the BJP."

The prime minister and the Trinamool Congress(TMC) supremo also traded charges as to who was responsible for the vandalism of the bust.

While Modi said the bust was vandalised allegedly by "TMC goondas", Banerjee claimed it was BJP "hooligans" who had destroyed a heritage of the state.

"We have been witnessing the attitude of didi for long and now the country is also seeing it. Dedicated to the vision of Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar,

turn to pg02

How forces keep VIPs safe during campaign: Over 2,000 commandos, 120 officers, volumes of intel data

NEW DELHI, MAY 16 (PTI): Over 2,000 agile commandos on ground, 120 young supervisory officers, thousands of bullet rounds, first-aid kits and volumes of intelligence data sheets. This is what it takes for the central forces to ensure a watertight VIP security cover everyday to politicians campaigning across the country during the ongoing polls.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress president Rahul Gandhi are protected by the elite Special Protection Group (SPG), other prominent politicians are guarded by central forces like the NSG, CRPF, CISF and ITBP, as they travel thousands of kilometres each day canvassing for their parties. "In all, about 2,000 commandos are on ground and are rotated in shifts, apart from 120 young officers as party of the central security cover to the politicians. A huge amount of paraphernalia of logistics, weapons and intelligence and operational dossiers are put at their disposal everyday when the teams head out with their VIPs for campaigning in the country," a senior official in the VIP security establishment told PTI.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has been entrusted with the re-

sponsibility to guard 78 VIPs, including BJP President Amit Shah who is under their top category 'Z+' security cover.

Shah, the only one for whom an advance security liaison is done on the lines of SPG protectees, Wednesday said that it would have been difficult for him to survive an attack on his convoy during his road show in Kolkata had it not been for the CRPF cover.

Sources said the force has mobilised a team of officers in the ranks of Assistant Commandants and Deputy Commandants to carry out advance reconnaissance of the venues to be covered across the country by Shah, who faces serious security threats.

Over 54 such officers have been deployed in various parts of the country to keep a track of prominent protectees under the cover of the CRPF. They are assisted by ground units from 28 various bases of the force activated for the special task, they said.

These commandos of the country's largest paramilitary force also provide proximate security cover to Union ministers Nitin Gadkari, Ravi Shankar Prasad among others and are armed with sophisticated AK series and MP5

assault rifles, loaded magazines, pistols, mobile body armour and even ropes and sticks for crowd control and special circumstances.

A 24x7 control room at a CRPF base in Noida remains in constant touch with a similar operational centre at the Ministry of Home Affairs in North Block that coordinates every move that these teams undertake and is in regular touch with them over the wireless and mobilephone. "VIP security is a game of sharp reflexes and nerves of steel. One has to be very very meticulous while rendering the VIP security task as there are virtually no second chances," the official said.

Commandos hailing from the local area are also deputed with these VIPs at times so that they are able to catch every murmur or voice that emerges from the crowd, he said.

They also carry first-aid kits to help the VIP in case of an injury, motion sickness or tiredness, the official said.

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), that has been entrusted with the security of 93 VIPs, has a tough job at hand as it has been recently asked to protect over a dozen new people in

West Bengal, most of whom are trying their luck at the hustings. About 40 officials have been deployed in supervisory roles to keep a track of the various protection teams that are out on field.

They camp in the local area and ensure the preparedness, logistics, food and other requirements of the commandos on move, the official said.

The prominent VIPs under the CISF cover are RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat (Z+), Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath (Z), Ministers of State in the Modi cabinet Mahesh Sharma and Manoj Sinha, former IPS officer and BJP candidate Bharti Ghosh and a host of other Lok Sabha candidates of the safe-

fron party in the state ruled by the TMC. The CISF VIP security unit has specially-trained personnel and they are called Special Security Group (SSG). The National Security Guard (NSG) has an all-time low of 13 VIPs under its cover but the task to guard them is very enduring as they include Union home minister Rajnath Singh, former Chief Minister like Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati and serving CMs like Yogi Adityanath and N Chandrababu Naidu, among others.

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Awareness cum sensitization program on AgDSM

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 MAY:

The Energy & Power Department, Government of Sikkim a State Designated Agency under Bureau of Energy Efficiency, Ministry of Power, Government of India had organized one-day awareness cum sensitization program on Agriculture Demand Side Management (AgDSM) to farmers and agriculture field officials at Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Gyalshing, West Sikkim on 15 May, 2019.

The chief guest was Sr scientist, TN Bhutia, KVK, Gyalshing and guest of honour, Chief Engineer (SDA), DN Khatiwara, Energy & Power Department, a press release informs.

The program was funded by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) Ministry of Power, Government of India. The



SDA, Sikkim had apprised Joint Director, Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) Tadong for support and active participation which was a fruitful and interactive session for farmers, the release mentions.

Subject Matter Specialists, Vidhan Pradhan and Roshni Silwal also presented PPT on organic farming and diseases affecting crops.

Farmers were informed about efficient use of power in Piggery,

Poultry farming, Rice mill processing, importance of earthing, Standard & Labelling of electrical appliances, etc. Farmers were also encouraged to use LED Bulb in place of incandescent bulb.

During the pro-

gramme, SDA also presented Power Point Presentation on energy conservation and Energy Conservation Act 2001.

The programme was attended by more than 100 farmers from West District.

Governor to visit South Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 MAY:

Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad will be on a two-day visit to South District starting 17 May, 2019, a press communiqué from Raj Bhavan informs.

On the first day of his tour, the Governor will be visiting Melli Bazaar, Melli Dara, Turuk and Sadam in South Sikkim. He is scheduled to interact with members of

the business community, farmers, government officials and local representatives along his route.

On the second day, the Governor will be visiting Kerabari, South Sikkim and other farm areas and also interact with farmers and stakeholders. He will also stopover at Yuksam Breweries at Melli on his return journey to Rangpo, the release mentions.

SKM delegation calls on Governor on State Day



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 MAY:

A three-member delegation of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, led by its president, PS Tamang [Golay], along with Keshu Agarwal and Bikash Basnet called on Governor Ganga Prasad at Raj

Bhavan, Gangtok today.

The objective of the visit was to greet the Governor on the occasion of the 44th State Day of Sikkim. The SKM president expressed gratitude to the Governor for peaceful conduct of the recently concluded elections.

Further, Mr Tamang while seeking the blessings of the Governor expressed that under the dynamic leadership and guidance of the Governor, the State will certainly reach new heights of development in the near future.

How forces...

The NSG has fine-tuned its security drills before Lok Sabha elections were declared and the 'black cats' are now armed with smart communication gadgets, body armour shields. They also conduct an advance recce of the venue for some VIPs like the home minister and others, the official said.

"The commando teams are pre-positioned when the VIP takes a flight or helicopter to travel from one place to the other. When one team securely leaves the VIP at point A, the other receives him when he lands at point B," the official explained.

A good number of VIP security

PM, Mamata...

our government will install a panchdhatu (made up of five metals) statue at the very spot and give a reply to TMC goondas," he said addressing a poll rally in Mau in Uttar Pradesh.

"The statue of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was broken by TMC goondas during the road show of BJP President Amit Shah. Those involved in this act should be given strong punishment," the prime minister said.

Addressing another rally at Mathurapur in West Bengal, Modi alleged that the West Bengal Police, in connivance with the state government, was trying to wipe out evidence of the vandalism.

He also repeated the charge that workers of the TMC was responsible.

"TMC goons are spreading violence, and they vandalised the statue of Vidyasagar. The way the state government erased proof of the Narada and Sarada scams, in the same manner, it is trying to remove evidence in this incident," he said.

"Those involved in the act of vandalising the statue should be given exemplary punishment."

Police officers are trying to wipe out the evidence of the incident in order to save the TMC goons, Modi alleged.

"The TMC and their goons have made Bengal a hell. Those involved

Health awareness program held at Singtam

YOGEN THATAL
SINGTAM, 16 MAY:

A team of consultants and experts from Kalimpong representing Orient Group of Marketing Pvt Ltd conducted a health awareness program here at Nepali Dharmasala today. The team was led by Health Expert cum consultant, Ashwin Chettri.

The program began with Mr Chettri conducting an open interaction session with the people present with the help of a PPT. He talked about various diseases, their causes

and treatment.

He talked about the treatment being offered by the company which is priced at Rs 800 per person.

The team comprised of Consultant cum Technician, Sunil Tamang along with Nima Lepcha and Dipankar Lama.

Founder of JVC Football Academy, Sanghey Bhutia, president Shanti Nagar Gaon Sudhar Samity, Krishna Chettri along with TB Pradhan and Kamal Gurung were amongst the volunteers present for the program.

Preserve hard...

the state by inculcating a sense of belonging and ownership. He further urged the people to deliver their responsibility towards the State and work in the interest of Sikkim.

He also urged the people to always ensure that Sikkim remain in safe hands. Sikkim got democracy after paying an expensive price so it should not be misused, he added.

The CM also reiterated the allegation of "shooters" being brought from outside the state by political parties and added that Darjeeling and Sikkim are being targeted by suicide bombers.

On the same, he directed the DGP of Sikkim Police to ensure safety and security of the people and their properties. He also congratulated Sikkim Police and government officials for conducting the polling peacefully and further directed the police to maintain law and order to avoid any post poll violence and to ensure the safety of the people.

The celebration also witnessed presentation of patriotic songs by students of Tadong Senior Secondary School and Deoralai Girls SSS and by Cultural Affairs & Heritage Department.

The function started with the welcome address by the Chief Secretary AK Shrivastava and concluded with the presentation of vote of thanks by the Secretary of Information and Public Relations Department, Sherap Shenga.

Pragya calls Godse "patriot", apologises later & retracts statement

BHOPAL, MAY 16 (PTI): BJP's Bhopal Lok Sabha seat candidate and Malegaon blast accused Pragya Singh Thakur Thursday kicked up a row as she called Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse a "patriot", but apologised for it hours later and withdrew the statement.

The BJP distanced itself from her statement saying it did not agree with her, as "Mahatma Gandhi's killer cannot be a patriot".

This is the second time in a month that Pragya Singh has apologised for a controversial statement made by her.

Last month, she had stoked a controversy when she said that IPS officer Hemant Karkare had died during the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks as she had "cursed" him for torturing her. She had apologised for the controversial remark later and also retracted that statement.

Talking to a news channel in Agar Malwa in Madhya Pradesh on Thursday afternoon, Thakur said, "Nathuram Godse was a 'deshbhakt' (patriot), he is and will remain a 'deshbhakt'. Those calling him a terrorist should instead look at themselves. They will be given a befitting reply in this election."

She said this in response to a question over actor-turned politician Kamal Haasan's remark that free India's first terrorist was a Hindu", a



reference to Nathuram Godse. Pragya Singh was in Agar Malwa to take part in a road-show of Mahendra Solanki, BJP's candidate for Dewas Lok Sabha seat.

Hours later, her spokesperson and BJP leader Dr Hitesh Bajpai said that she has apologised for her remark.

"Pragya ji has apologised for her statement," Bajpai told PTI.

When asked whether she has apologised to the state BJP president, Rakesh Singh, Bajpai said, "That is not an issue, but she has apologised and took back her statement."

The Madhya Pradesh BJP distanced itself from her statement.

"BJP does not agree with her statement. The party will talk to her under what circumstances she gave the statement."

One who killed Mahatma Gandhi can't be a deshbhakt," state BJP media cell in-charge Lokendra Parashar said.

Condemning her statement, senior Con-

gress leader Digvijaya Singh said in Ujjain that praising Godse was not patriotism, but an "anti-national" act.

He also demanded an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP chief Amit Shah over her remarks.

"Narendra Modi ji, Amit Shah ji and BJP leaders from Madhya Pradesh should apologise to the country. I condemn the words used against the Father of the Nation. Nathuram Godse was a killer and eulogising him is not patriotism, but an anti-national act," the former Madhya Pradesh chief minister told reporters in Ujjain.

Kamal Haasan, while addressing an election campaign rally at Aravakurichi (Tamil Nadu) on May 12, had said, "I am not saying this because this is a Muslim-dominated area, but I am saying this before a statue of Gandhi. Free India's first terrorist was a Hindu, his name is Nathuram Godse. There it (terrorism, apparently) starts."

Mayawati, Akhilesh target Modi in Varanasi



VARANASI, MAY 16 (PTI): In yet another personal attack on the prime minister, BSP chief Mayawati Thursday said how can one expect Narendra Modi to respect women when he cannot do so for his wife.

Addressing an election rally here along with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and RLD's Ajit Singh, Mayawati targeted Modi and BJP president Amit Shah, saying the "government of guru and chela (disciple)" would be ousted from power on May 23, the day results of Lok Sabha polls would be announced.

The BSP again alleged that women in the BJP are scared of their husbands meeting the prime minister fearing they might also "abandon their wives".

"As the election is coming to an end Modi now remembers women and talk about giving them respect...How can one expect Modi, who cannot respect his wife, to do so for mothers and sisters," Mayawati said. She alleged Modi is

also "troubling" West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

In a press statement earlier this week, Mayawati had said, "I have come to know that in BJP, women leaders get scared when they see their husbands going near PM Modi. They fear that like Modi they might also abandon their wives."

"Under such circumstances, I request all the women of the country not to give their votes to such a person. This would also be their real respect to the deserted wife of Modiji," she had said. Addressing the rally in Varanasi, the BSP chief also questioned the prime minister on his caste. She claimed Modi has "lost his sleep" after it became clear that the BSP-SP-RLD grand-alliance was winning.

Varanasi, where Modi is pitted against alliance candidate Shalini Yadav, goes to poll in the seventh and last phase on May 19.

Addressing the rally, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said

that after May 23, the country will get a new prime minister.

He accused Modi of selling "false dreams" to the people and then "betraying" them.

He said the BJP and Modi had promised to transform Varanasi into Kyoto (city of Japan), but failed.

Modi was unable to clean the river Ganga though he had displaced boatmen from their places where they earned their livelihood, Yadav alleged.

Referring to sacked BSF jawan Tej Bahadur, the SP leader alleged how can one expect Modi to fight terrorists on the border when he could not contest election against a jawan.

Tej Bahadur's nomination was cancelled by the poll authorities.

He also criticised the BJP government in the state over encounter killings of history-sheeters.

RLD chief Ajit Singh alleged that Modi failed to provide jobs to youths and bulldozed institutions such as the CBI and the RBI.

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Kejriwal terms EC 'biased', asks why campaign in WB ordered to be stopped on Thursday night

NEW DELHI/MOGA, MAY 16 (PTI): Accusing the Election Commission of being "biased", Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asked why the poll panel ordered campaign to be stopped in West Bengal at 10 pm Thursday after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rallies in the state.

In the first such action in India's electoral history, the poll panel on Wednesday invoked Article 324 of the Constitution to end campaigning in nine West Bengal constituencies at 10 pm on Thursday, a day before its scheduled deadline, following violence between BJP and TMC workers in Kolkata on Tuesday.

Polling for the nine Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal will be held on May 19. During his election campaign at Moga in Punjab, Kejriwal told reporters that he strongly condemns the "attitude" of the EC.

"We strongly condemn the attitude of the Election Commission. Why was the campaign ordered to be stopped after Modiji's rallies. We have never seen this biased EC in the history of the country," the AAP national convener said.

Expressing his support to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, he hoped that the people of the state "will teach Modi a lesson in the polls". Meanwhile in New Delhi, Aam Aadmi Party volunteers joined in a protest Mobile Torch Rally in Chittaranjan Park area with a group of citizens to protest the violence in West Bengal.

AAP spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj, who participated in the protest, said, "What is happening in West Bengal is extremely serious and shows our democracy is in danger." "The Election Commission has failed in its impartiality test. Its oft-repeated slogan of level playing field has been reduced to a joke. If the situation was so serious that the EC felt campaigning had to be stopped then why was it not stopped immediately?" he posed.

"It is extremely shameful the bust of one of the greatest social reformers Shri Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar-ji was destroyed. There is video evidence that the BJP was behind this shameful act. All of us need to stand in solidarity with Mamata Banerjee and the people of West Bengal," he added.

BJP and TMC supporters Tuesday fought pitched battles on the streets of Kolkata during a massive road show by Amit Shah, who escaped unhurt but was forced to cut short the jamboree and had to be escorted to safety by the police.

Parts of the city plunged into a welter of violence as his convoy was attacked with stones by alleged TMC supporters from inside the hostel of Vidyasagar College, triggering a clash between supporters of the two parties.

MUSS distributes nutritious diet to children at STNM

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 16 MAY:

The members of Manav Uthan Sewa Samiti (MUSS), Gangtok Branch distributed nutritious diet to the children undergoing treatment in the Pediatric Ward of new STNM Hospital at Sochyekgang today. This was done as part of the golden jubilee celebration of Manav Dharma in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Terai, Dooars and neighbouring country of Bhutan, a press release informs.

The members led by Tehsil Incharge, Sadhvi Mahatma Gyan Baiji handed over nutritious diet to the ailing children and Hansh Herbal products to the parents of the children undergoing treatment.

The team was also



accompanied by MUSS Mangan Tehsil Incharge, Mahatma Vishraanti Baiji and Rangpo Tehsil Incharge, Mahatma Kritika Baiji. Mahatma Gyan Baiji in her brief address said that bodily ailments can be healed through dedi-

cated assistance from the doctors and nurses at the hospital but for curing the illness arising from mental status, we should take the help of spirituality. Stress, tension and negativity gives way to physical illness, hence

we need to make spirituality a way of life in order to protect ourselves from such illness, she said.

On the other hand, youth and Sewa Dal members of MUSS carried out massive cleanliness drive around old

STNM Hospital and MLA Hostel premises. The complex lacked proper care and cleanliness after the hospital was shifted to Sochyekgang. Huge piles of garbage were found in the premises, the release states.

Global USD 100 mn cybercrime gang busted



THE HAGUE, MAY 16 (AFP): US and European police said Thursday they have smashed a huge international cybercrime network that used Russian malware to steal USD 100 million (89 million euros) from tens of thousands of victims worldwide.

Prosecutions have been launched in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the United States over the scam, while five Russians charged in the US remain on the run, the EU police agency Europol said. The "organised crime network behind USD 100 million in malware attacks" targeted "more than 41,000 victims, primarily businesses and their financial institutions," Europol said.

Police in Germany and Bulgaria were also involved.

The cyber gang used GozNym malware to infect victims' computers, steal their online banking login details and then siphon money from their accounts.

The stolen money was then laundered in US and other accounts.

Scott Brady, the US Attorney General for the western district of Pennsylvania where the US indictment was unsealed, said the operation was an "unprecedented" international effort.

"Unsuspecting European and American victims thought they were clicking on a simple invoice, but were instead giving hackers access to their most sensitive information," Brady added.

The alleged leader of the GozNym criminal network, Alexander Konovlov, 35, of Tbilisi, who goes by the online name "NoNe", was arrested in the former Soviet state of Georgia, the US Department of Justice said.

His alleged technical assistant Marat Kazandjian, 31, aka "phant0m,"

was also arrested in Georgia.

Konovlov recruited hackers who advertised their services on "Russian-speaking online criminal forums", and eventually controlled the malware-infected computers of more than 41,000 victims, Europol said.

The five Russians charged in the US included the alleged developer of the malware, identified as Vladimir Gorin, but they cannot be extradited because Russia does not send suspects abroad.

Gorin "oversaw its creation, development, management and leasing to other cyber criminals" including the Georgian alleged leader of the group, Europol said.

One of the Russians, Viktor Eremenko, was arrested in Sri Lanka at the request of US authorities in 2017 but "through the intervention of the Russian government" was freed on bail, after which he fled to Russia.

Bulgarian Krasimir Nikolov was arrested and extradited to the United States in 2016 and has already pleaded guilty to the charges in the indictment, the DOJ said.

Ukrainian police meanwhile arrested Genady Kapkanov, 36, also known as "firestarter", on suspicion of hosting a so-called "Avalanche" network that provided services to more than 200 cybercriminals including the Georgians.

He allegedly fired an assault rifle through the door of his apartment at police, the DOJ said.

Europol announced the smashing of the Avalanche network in a major operation in 2016, saying that it had infected half a million computers in 188 countries.

The latest operation was a follow-up from that, Europol said.

Collection of Zines on exhibit at The People's Studio

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 16 MAY:

A collection of zines from across the country, curated by Karan Kaul, will be on exhibit at The People's Studio, ARTEM, Kazi Road from 17 May to 31 May, 2019. Zines are a form of independent publishing that has roots in the punk rock culture as well as the political space, a press release informs.

From the factories of Faridabad, the tea gardens of Darjeeling to art collectives in Leh, the zines bring stories from across India, along with the stories of independent art practitioners who are the makers of these published works, during the exhibit, "Medium as Message".

In his curatorial note, Kaul writes, "Medium as Message tries to move into the politics and poetics of displaying lost realities, present day dichotomies for a hopeful future through the hands of independent practitioners from India".

On 19 May, a workshop will be held by artist, Renuka Rajiv, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm on zine making. The theme



for the workshop will be "Reimagining Gangtok".

During the workshop, the participants will use inexpensive local materials to draw, make collages and use any other method of choice to make the zines. At the end of the workshop, each participant will leave the workshop with a copy of the book.

Rajiv studied digital video production at Sri-shti School of Art, Design and Technology in Ban-

galore and a Bachelor of Fine Arts (with Honours) majoring in printmaking at Victorian College of Art, Melbourne. Rajiv is also the recipient of the FICA Emerging Artist Award and Substation exhibition prize and City of Stonington Print Prize. To register for the workshop, an email can be sent to thepeoplesstudio.artem@gmail.com. The exhibit is open to all.

Pak court rejects bail pleas of 11 Chinese nationals in 'fake' marriage case

ISLAMABAD, MAY 16 (PTI): A court in Pakistan Thursday rejected the bail pleas of 11 Chinese nationals in a case linked to alleged fake marriages, forced prostitution and organ trade of Pakistani girls in China.

Judicial Magistrate Amir Raza rejected the bail pleas after listening to the arguments from both sides, Dawn newspaper reported.

The defence counsel, Saleem Ahmed Khan, contended that his clients were arrested in a fake case. "The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested the suspects after fabricating a story," the counsel said, adding that the Chinese nationals came to Pakistan for business purpose.

"There is no proof against the suspects on the record of the case," he claimed.

The counsel for the FIA, Munem Chaudhry, argued that the suspects deceived Pakistani girls

into fake marriages. They sexually exploited the girls after fake marriages, he argued. He requested the magistrate to reject the bail plea.

On May 8, the FIA had arrested 11 Chinese nationals in multiple raids at several locations in and around Lahore on a tip off. According to an FIA press release, the agency came to know through a victim about the suspected ring, which involves large sums of money changing hands for the contracting of fake marriages between vulnerable Pakistani women and Chinese men. The women were allegedly trafficked into prostitution in China.

The Pakistani woman said that some people in China were running a business of luring Pakistani women into China to force them into prostitution, and that the suspects were also running an organ trade racket, the FIA press release stated. Her family then in-

formed the FIA about the incident and a request was sent to the Pakistan High Commission in China, and the woman was repatriated to Pakistan.

Back home, the woman informed the FIA of the ringleader's residence in Lahore, after which raids were conducted and multiple arrests were made, the report said.

The Chinese Embassy in Islamabad has launched an investigation into 142 cross-border marriages that took place in 2018, a Chinese diplomat told UrduNews.

Deputy chief of mission at Chinese Embassy Lijian Zhao said that last year about 142 Pakistani women had applied for wedding visas after marrying Chinese nationals. This year, so far 140 Pakistani brides had applied for such visas, he added.

The embassy, the envoy said, had withheld at least 90 visa applications and alerted the Pakistani authorities.

Noida: 2,703 challans issued daily for road traffic violation since May 1

NOIDA (UP), MAY 16 (PTI): An average 659 people were penalised every day by Noida Traffic Police for riding two wheelers without helmet and 781 for driving without a seat belt between May 1 and 15, according to an official data released Thursday.

A total of 40,551 vehicles average 2,703 daily -- were challaned during the 15 days for violation of road traffic rules, the data by Traffic Police revealed.

As many as 9,887 people have been penalised for riding two wheelers without helmet and 11,727 for driving without seat belt during the fortnight, it stated.

"Owners of 3,205 vehicles made the due payments offline, leading to recovery of Rs 14.53 lakh, while owners of

6,416 vehicles opted for online modes for clearing dues, Rs 24.42 lakh, according to the data.

"Overall Rs 38.96 lakh were recovered from owners of 9,621 erring vehicles in penalty," it added.

The challans were part of Noida Traffic Police's sustained effort to check violation of road traffic rules and thereby ensuring safety on roads, an official said.

The district administration had said on Tuesday that riders of two-wheelers will not be allowed fuel at filling stations in Noida and Greater Noida if found without helmet. It had also warned cancellation of driving license of offenders and arrest of those flouting the norms and misbehaving with the staff at filling stations.

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State Day

Sikkim as a part of India

Yesterday was State Day, the day marking 44 years of Sikkim as a part of the Indian Union, time then for a quick recap of events which led to the first State Day back in 1975.

The decade of the Seventies began in Sikkim with a groundswell of aspirations for democracy and a heightened political consciousness among the people. This was not the first time that such sentiments coursed through Sikkim, and similar moments had arrived in the previous decades as well. However, like with most historic occasions, several things had to come together at the right moment for Sikkim to make history and set on course a new destiny.

The right combination of popular leaders, a supportive Delhi and a weakened palace led to the signing of the Tripartite Agreement of 08 May, 1973, with the Government of India, leader of the political parties of Sikkim and the Chogyal as signatories. Nar Bahadur Khatiwada, feted with the Sikkim Ratna on State Day some years back, was a successful youth leader of the movement for democracy in Sikkim and will be able to better explain the passion which inspired the Sikkimese at the time. He will hopefully do that some day, but for now, suffice to say that at the root of the upsurge was a general belief that the elections to the State Council in 1973 were rigged by the palace. Soon, there was anarchy on the streets, police stations even in remote Sikkim were being attacked and the Chogyal invited the Indian Political Officer to take over the administration. The Tripartite Agreement envisaged the Chogyal as a constitutional head, and set things up for the establishment of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights, independent judiciary and universal adult franchise. As much as this set in place the parity formula for the first Assembly, a system which did not survive when the next election came along, adult suffrage was also a major victory for the subjects, and when the Sikkimese were given their first chance to vote in a democratic environment [in April 1974], the voters gravitated towards the person they saw as the leader of democratic movement in Sikkim – Lhendup Dorji Kazi, whose Sikkim Congress cornered 31 of the 32 Assembly seats.

The Tripartite Agreement, however, did not hold for long. Its provisions were being ignored and sidestepped within a year, or so the elected representatives believed. On 10 April, 1975, the Sikkim Assembly met for an emergency session and agreed that the Chogyal was violating the provisions of the Agreement and abolished the institution of the Chogyal and resolved to become a constituent unit of India. The Statement of Objects and Reasons appended to the 38th Amendment Bill of 1975 [which subsequently became Article 371F of the Constitution] records that the Sikkim Assembly, on 10 April, 1975, "...inter alia, noted the persistent harmful activities of the Chogyal which aimed at undermining the responsible democratic Government set up..." The Assembly then submitted its Resolution to the people for approval.

What Sikkim today calls the "Referendum" is referred to as "a special opinion poll" conducted by the Government of Sikkim. This "Opinion Poll" was held within four days of the Assembly's resolution and 61,133 of Sikkim's approximately 97,000 voters shared their opinion – 59,637 in favour of the Resolution and 1,496 against it and this high turnout and the presence of Indian paramilitary forces in Sikkim continue to feed speculations about the veracity of this "opinion poll". Be that as it may, the verdict of the people was communicated to India on 15 April and the then Chief Minister and his Council of Ministers were in Delhi the very next day. On 19 April, the amendment to the Constitution was moved and Sikkim became a full-fledged State of India on 16 May, 1975.

With the passage of the Act, Sikkim became the 22nd state of the Indian Union, the institution of the Chogyal was formally abolished and provisions of the Indo-Sikkim Treaty, Tripartite Agreement and the Government of India Act, 1974 were made inoperative. Sikkim's identity within India was to be decided by provisions of Article 371F.

Article 371F is a powerful tool providing Sikkim with its special status within the Indian Union. Unfortunately, it has also become just convenient dodge to rake up the past. The Act was inserted into the Constitution to guide Sikkim's future, not nail it down to the past. One reason why it is not taken as seriously as it should is because Sikkim has been unable to remind Delhi what the Act is all about. Delhi, of course, with larger states to keep happy, rarely does its homework and bulldozes all over Sikkim. What people need to appreciate is that Article 371F has none of the incongruities of Article 370 and boasts near watertight provisions which allow Sikkim to remain unique while also wholly a part of India. It is a progressive Act and that is how it should be used, not as a political slogan to confuse people or to whip up nostalgia for an imagined utopia.

The Conspicuous Absence of Women in India's Labour Force

SMRITI SHARMA
theconversation.com

India's rapid economic growth has been accompanied by falling fertility rates and higher educational attainment among women. These advances often lead to an increase in women entering the labour force, but there has been a surprising decline on this front in India. Less than 30% of working-age women are currently in work compared to nearly 80% of men in India.

The conspicuous absence of women in India's labour force is part of a wider issue the country is facing when it comes to jobs growth. But the fact that it is affecting women more than men is a worrying trend for India, which tends to rank poorly in UN rankings like the Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index, and has historically had low shares of women participating in the labour market. Plus, the number of women working has been gradually falling over the last 30 years.

There are a number of reasons for this, ranging from a lack of jobs growth in female-friendly sectors such as manufacturing, to more women staying in education for longer, and persisting stigma surrounding the idea of women working. As India grapples with boosting the number of jobs available to people – and young people especially – it must ensure it does not leave women behind in the process.

GLOBAL TRENDS

It is useful to understand India's experience against the global landscape. According to the latest estimates from the UN's International Labour Organisation, the worldwide labour force participation rate in 2018 for women aged 15-64 was 53% while it was 80.6% for similarly aged men. Since 1990, participation rates for both groups have shown an overall decline around the world.

There are, however, variations in these global trends. The number of women working in high in-

come countries went up between 1990 and 2018, largely due to policies like better parental leave, subsidised childcare, and flexibility in jobs. But in South Asia's low and middle income countries, the number of women working has declined.

In India, female labour force participation fell from 35% in 1990 to 27% in 2018. India fares better than its neighbour Pakistan (where the rate increased from 14% to 25% over the same period). But it lags behind Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, and other countries at similar stages of growth and development.

There are regional and demographic differences across the country. Rural women have higher participation rates than their urban counterparts. Married women, less educated women, and women from higher castes are less likely to participate in the labour market.

REASONS FOR THE DROP

Both economic and cultural reasons explain women falling out of India's labour force. The latest evidence suggests that the number of jobs in India is on the decline. This is a significant structural problem for a country with a burgeoning young population. In particular, India has struggled to create labour-intensive manufacturing jobs, many of which favour women. This is in contrast to countries such as Bangladesh that experienced a booming export-led manufacturing sector that led to more employment opportunities for women.

The number of women staying in education in both urban and rural areas has increased, keeping them out of the workforce for longer. But, even when this is accounted for, the numbers of women working remains below India's peers. For men, greater education leads to higher participation in the labour force.

Across India, there are cultural expectations that married women should not work and that they should prioritise housework and care work. A survey on social attitudes in 2016 found that around 40-60% of men and women believe mar-

ried women should not work if the husband earns reasonably well.

Another factor keeping women out of the workforce is the wider problem of violence against women. New work finds that sexual violence and an unsafe environment for women also stops them seeking paid work outside their homes – this is especially the case for Muslim and lower-caste women.

REVERSING THE DECLINE

Gender equality is an important development objective in and of itself. Research shows that when women work they have greater agency and voice and the poorer representation of women in paid work has negative consequences for their bargaining power within their households. Plus, increasing the number of women in work is important for any country's economic growth, leading to better productivity and improving prospects for future generations.

There are a number of ways to boost the number of women working. Tackling the cultural reasons that result in women leaving the workforce could be one such way. Changing social norms about gender equity and women's work is paramount, and this is where awareness programmes and affirmative action policies may help alleviate gender stereotypes. The 2017 Maternity Benefit Act, by increasing paid maternity leave, may also help to limit the drop-out of women from work after motherhood. Access to subsidised childcare may also free up time for women to engage in the labour force.

At a more structural level, the next government faces a tough task of reforming the economy to create more jobs. When it does so, it must take into account India's growing gender employment gap and specifically think about jobs for women, if it wants to reduce this gap and help boost the country's economy.

[the writer is Lecturer in Economics, Newcastle University]



WhatsApp hacked and bugs in Intel chips: what you need to know to protect yourself

ROBERT MERKEL
theconversation.com

It's been a day of high-profile security incidents.

First there was news the popular WhatsApp messenger app was hacked. Updated versions of WhatsApp have been released, which you should install if you're one of the more than one billion people who use the app.

There was also news of several security flaws in the majority of Intel processors, found in many of the world's desktop, laptop and server computers.

Software patches to prevent exploitation of these hardware flaws have been released by several vendors, including Microsoft. You should install security updates from vendors promptly, including these.

WHATSAPP HACK REVEALED

The WhatsApp news was revealed first by the Financial Times, which says the bug was used in an attempt to access content on the phone of a UK-based human rights lawyer.

The lawyer reported unusual activity on his phone to the Citizen Lab, an academic research centre that focuses on digital espionage. The centre then contacted WhatsApp, which had independently noted signs of some kind of hack and put in place preliminary preventative measures in its network infrastructure.

When asked by the Financial Times how many users were attacked using this vulnerability, a WhatsApp spokesperson said "a number in the dozens would not be inaccurate".

Facebook, the corporate parent of WhatsApp, has issued a technical notice about the vulnerability, saying versions of WhatsApp for iOS, Android, Windows Phone (and the lesser-known Tizen platform used in Samsung smart watches) were affected.

EVADING END-TO-END ENCRYPTION

Messages and calls on WhatsApp are end-to-

end encrypted, which means they are practically invulnerable to being read while in transit.

The only way an attacker can gain access to the contents of WhatsApp messages and calls is at either end, on the sending or receiving device.

Unfortunately, in this case, by modifying the sequence of data sent to a phone to initiate a call, an attacker could take over the WhatsApp application running on the device.

This would cause it to do whatever the attacker wishes, which could include sending the unscrambled WhatsApp messages directly to the attacker.

While on its own the vulnerability does not appear to give the attackers full access to everything on a target phone, it could well be used in combination with other vulnerabilities to gain full access and control.

SUSPICIONS FALL ON NSO GROUP

Unlike the Intel processor flaws, which were discovered by academic and commercial researchers and are not known to have been used for hacking to date, the WhatsApp security bug was discovered because of hacking activity.

The Financial Times attributes the hacking attempts using the bug to software developed by the NSO Group.

Facebook, while not naming NSO, told the Financial Times:

"[...] the attack has all the hallmarks of a private company known to work with governments to deliver spyware that reportedly takes over the functions of mobile phone operating systems."

NSO Group is an Israel-based company that sells intelligence-gathering software – essentially, mobile phone spyware – to governments around the world.

Software sold by NSO Group has previously been implicated in attempts to spy on an Emirati human rights activist, Mexican journalists, and

other civil society targets.

The UK human rights lawyer targeted using the WhatsApp bug was representing the Mexican journalists previously allegedly targeted using NSO Group software.

WE'RE NOT LIKELY TARGETS

While this particular bug is no longer a problem if you've updated WhatsApp, in general there is relatively little an average citizen targeted by this kind of spyware can do about it.

This genre of bug-exploiting spyware is highly unlikely to be used by anyone other than governments, and then only to target a relatively small number of people. But the lawyer in this latest case says he does not know who is behind his WhatsApp hack.

Sooner or later, the use of spyware is inevitably detected, and the bug used to install it is found and fixed. The more phones are attacked, the quicker this will occur.

In the Australian context, software bugs are not the only means available to law enforcement to access encrypted messaging.

The controversial Access and Assistance legislation, approved late last year, contains provisions that can require software and hardware developers to provide assistance to law enforcement and intelligence agencies to access communications, including those secured with end-to-end encryption.

The use of this kind of spyware – sold to countries with dubious human rights credentials, and used to target activists, journalists and lawyers – is disturbing.

I have previously argued that the international trade in such powerful tools should be curtailed. But fortunately, as insidious as they are, their reach is limited and likely to remain so.

[the writer is Lecturer in Software Engineering, Monash University]

Mamata rejects PM's offer to install new bust of Vidyasagar



MANDIRBAZAR/DIAMOND HARBOUR(WB), MAY 16 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Thursday rejected Prime Minister Narendra Modi's offer to install a new bust of social reformer Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar at the same spot where it was vandalised saying that Bengal has the money for it.

She said that it were BJP "hooligans" who had destroyed a heritage of the state by breaking the bust in the the violence during BJP Amit Shah's roadshow.

It is a matter of shame for Bengalis that the bust of Vidyasagar was vandalised, she said at a poll rally at Mandirbazar in support of Trin-

amool Lok Sabha candidate C M Jatua.

"Bengal does not seek alms from BJP. We have the money for a new bust of Vidyasagar, who was part of Bengal Renaissance. Don't you (BJP) feel ashamed saying that Bengal has been reduced to a state of being a pauper".

Banerjee was referring to a comment by Shah at a poll rally at Canning earlier this week in which he had said that under Banerjee government "sonar(golden) Bangla has become kangal(pauper) Bangla".

The prime minister said at a poll rally at Mau in Uttar Pradesh that his government is committed towards Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's

vision and promised to install his grand statue made of "panch dhatu" (five metals) at the same spot where it was vandalised by "TMC goondas".

Hitting back, the fieriest TMC supremo called Modi is a liar, the "like of which was never seen in the country".

"He (Modi) should squat holding his ears for destroying a heritage of the state," she said.

"The media has shown how Vidyasagar's bust was broken.

Bengalis' pride is hurt that they will not spare BJP. They will not give it (BJP) a single vote It will be very surprising if Modi gets a single vote from Bengalis," Banerjee claimed.

Nine Lok Sabha seats

in south Bengal will go to the polls in the last phase.

Banerjee accused the prime minister for holding a public meeting in a nearby area on land owned by a person who runs an unlicensed micro-finance institution.

"I am going to file a case against the person who owns the land. Is BJP getting a share of the pie from him? I have come to know that the person is raising crores," she said.

She alleged that the BJP is spreading fake messages on the social media and warned the voters not to fall prey to it.

Later speaking at another rally at Diamond Harbour, from where her nephew Abhishek Baner-

jee is seeking re-election, Banerjee said BJP has developed a sense of fear of losing the elections.

"As the last phase of elections is approaching you (Modi) have become mad and are talking nonsense.

"Modi had promised to usher in achhe din but see how the prices of diesel, gas and petrol are being increased. The government is going to close down companies like Burn Standard, BSNL and AirIndia if it comes to power.... The BJP government is now killing adivasis and minorities.

"Narendra Modi you are a fascist, a torturer and you should go," she said.

Regretting the Election Commission (EC)'s decision to declare today the last day of campaigning before Sunday's last phase of elections, Banerjee said "I thought the EC is impartial but it seems it is sold to BJP. I am ready if I have to go to jail for saying this".

Banerjee said in the last six phases of the general elections Modi's votes have touched the bottom. "Modi has already lost the elections".

She urged the Trinamool Congress workers to be careful so that miscreants were not able to tamper with the EVMs which are kept now in the strongrooms.

Huge quantity of 'explosive materials' recovered in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, MAY 16 (PTI): A day after a grenade blast here injured 12 persons, Guwahati Police on Thursday recovered huge amount of suspected explosive materials along with arms and ammunition from a house.

A couple has also been taken into custody for interrogation in this regard, police sources said.

Police started search operations at the house in Panjabari locality of the city and recovered large quantities of materials used in making bombs, arms and ammunition, a laptop and other incriminating goods, they said.

A forensic team has also reached the spot and is carrying out investigation.

"We can only confirm that suspected explosive materials have been recovered during the search operations," a senior police officer present at the site told PTI.

Police sources said that the house was taken on rent about a month back by a woman and a person, "suspected to be a pro-talk ULFA militant",

used to visit her.

When asked, Guwahati Police Commissioner Deepak Kumar declined to divulge details. "We are investigating the case and are on the right track. We are on the lead," he said.

At least 12 persons, including two SSB personnel and a woman, were injured in the grenade blast in front of a shopping mall in the heart of the city on Wednesday evening.

Guwahati Police Commissioner Deepak Kumar told PTI that two persons riding a motorcycle hurled the grenade in front of the shopping mall located at arterial R G Baruah Road just opposite the state zoo around 8 pm on Wednesday.

Visiting the spot, DGP Kuladhar Saikia had said that a police barricade was set up in front of the mall to conduct routine checks of vehicles, and it is suspected the grenade was hurled aiming the police party.

The SSB jawans were on patrolling duty with Assam Police personnel near the barricade.

Local TV channels re-

ported that ULFA(I) chief Paresh Baruah claimed responsibility for the blast, but the police refused to confirm it, saying a detailed investigation will bring out the truth.

A high-level security meeting has been convened on Thursday evening between the administration, police and the owners of the malls, the Kamakhya temple management committee, other units of different temples and in-charges of prominent places, officials said.

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal strongly condemned the incident and asked the DGP to carry out a thorough probe to nab the culprits immediately. "Nobody would be allowed to commit such heinous crimes and strong action would be against those behind this dastardly act," he had said.

The blast took place hours after Sonowal chaired a high-level security review meeting on Wednesday with the top brass of the Home Department, including police.

Meghalaya govt approves setting up of Farmers' Commission

SHILLONG, MAY 16 (PTI): The Meghalaya government Thursday approved setting up of a commission to look into the problem faced by farmers. State cabinet approved the proposal made by the Agriculture Department to set up the Farmers' Commission in line with the resolution passed at the 'farmers' parliament', deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong said.

The 'farmers' parliament', first of its kind in the country, was organised here last December and was attended by scientists, bureaucrats, apart from farmers, to discuss issues related to the agri situation in the state. Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma had then announced setting up of the commission to address concerns of the farming community.

The deputy chief minister also said the

government was planning to observe 2020 as a year for farmers. The state cabinet Thursday also approved a draft policy on persons with disabilities. The policy is as per the national policy for empowerment of persons with disabilities, Tynsong said, adding that it is in regards to their rights for reservations in education and jobs.

Talking to reporters, Tynsong also said that Sangma will be meeting Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal in June to discuss development projects along the interstate- border and find a resolution to the border dispute between the two states.

The last meeting between chief ministers of the two states was held on April 1, 2017.

It will be the first meeting after the BJP-backed Meghalaya Democratic Alliance stormed

to power in March last year. Tynsong said, during the meeting the recent skirmishes in Ri-Bhoi district leading to the arrest of Michael Warjri, a general secretary of the Hima Nongspung -- areas under the jurisdiction of a tribal chieftain -- will also been taken up.

A mob of about 100 people from Assam had last week allegedly ransacked Warjri's home in Balakhawa village along the inter-state border under Ri-Bhoi district.

Warjri had taken the Assam government to court for trying to construct a road and this enraged the people from Assam which led to the attack, according to officials. He was subsequently arrested by Assam police and released on bail.

Skirmishes have often been reported along the disputed inter-state border of Meghalaya and Assam.

Mamata takes out protest march against vandalism

KOLKATA, MAR 15 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Wednesday conducted a protest march against the vandalism during BJP president Amit Shah's roadshow in the city on Tuesday. Accompanied by leading intellectuals of the city, Banerjee walked for about 6 km from the Gandhi Bhavan in Belegata to Shyambazar five-point crossing in north Kolkata area in the northern part of the city.

TMC supporters who took part in the march shouted slogans against Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and condemned shattering of the bust of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

Kolkata witnessed wide-spread violence during BJP president Amit Shah's massive road

show Tuesday. A bust of 19th century Bengali icon Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was vandalised during the violence.

Carrying posters and replicas of Vidyasagar's bust, TMC cadres demanded immediate arrest of the culprits involved in the vandalism.

Banerjee and several top TMC leaders have changed profile pictures of their Facebook and Twitter profiles with photo of Vidyasagar on Wednesday to protest desecration of the bust of the great social reformer. Trinamool Congress's official profile on Twitter and Facebook was also changed with an image of Vidyasagar.

The vandalism took place at Vidyasagar College, an institution named after the icon.

Omar backs Mamata, says TMC will sweep polls in WB

SRINAGAR, MAY 16 (PTI): National Conference leader Omar Abdullah Thursday said BJP's attempt to "polarise" the electorate in West Bengal will come to nothing as the Trinamool Congress will sweep the Lok Sabha polls in the state.

"The BJP can team up with the EC in West Bengal, they can have a tailor-made campaign designed to fragment & polarise the electorate, they can have all their model code violations overlooked. None of it will matter because on the 23rd @MamataOfficial didi will sweep West

Bengal," Abdullah said in a tweet, tagging West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister was apparently referring to the violence in Kolkata during BJP president Amit Shah's visit the other day. He was alluding May 23 when the results of Lok Sabha polls would be declared.

Other opposition leaders and parties have also supported Banerjee as she protested against the Election Commission's decision to cut short the duration of poll campaign in the state in the wake of the violence.

Nepalese going abroad via India to require an NOC for immigration clearance

SHIRISH B. PRADHAN KATHMANDU, MAY 16 (PTI): Nepali nationals wishing to fly out to any other country via India would require a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Nepalese Embassy in New Delhi for clearance from the Indian immigration, according to a notice issued by the police here.

The applicants need to submit an application letter to the Nepali Embassy stating the reason

of travel along with the visa of that country, a copy of passport, air ticket and past travel history except India. Those going abroad for employment purposes need to furnish an employment permit issued by the department of foreign employment, police said, quoting a statement issued by the Nepali embassy in New Delhi.

Nepali students and entrepreneurs based in India would require to

furnish documents related to their professions along with other documents to obtain NOC prior to travelling abroad via New Delhi, the Himalayan Times reported.

The Nepalese Embassy would then issue the NOC after scrutinising all the documents, it said.

There are 4 million Nepalese working and studying in India, according to the Nepal foreign ministry.

Former Kolkata Police chief Rajeev Kumar reports to MHA, day after being relieved from duty by EC

NEW DELHI, MAY 16 (PTI): Senior IPS officer and former Kolkata Police chief Rajeev Kumar on Thursday reported at the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), a day after he was relieved from duty in West Bengal by the Election Commission, officials said.

Kumar, who was involved in a face-off with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in connection with the agency's investigation in Saradha and Rose Valley chit fund scams, was on Wednesday removed as Additional Director General, CID, in West Bengal for allegedly failing to control the incidents of violence in the state.

He was directed to report to the Home Ministry, the cadre controlling authority for the Indian Police Service (IPS) officers, by the Commission, the officials said.

The officer came in time and reported to MHA this morning. Currently, he is on attachment with the Home Ministry as per the Election Commission's order.

In an unprecedented move, the Election Com-

mission had on Wednesday invoked Article 324 and ordered campaigning in nine West Bengal constituencies to end at 10 PM on Thursday, a day before its scheduled deadline, in the wake of violence between BJP and TMC workers in Kolkata. The constituencies where campaigning has been curtailed are -- Dum Dum, Barasat, Basirhat, Jaynagar, Mathurapur, Diamond Harbour, Jadavpur, Kolkata Dakshin and Kolkata Uttar. Polling will be held in all these constituencies on May 19.

The vandalism of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's bust and clashes during BJP chief Amit Shah's road show in Kolkata on Tuesday triggered a fierce blame game between BJP and the Trinamool Congress.

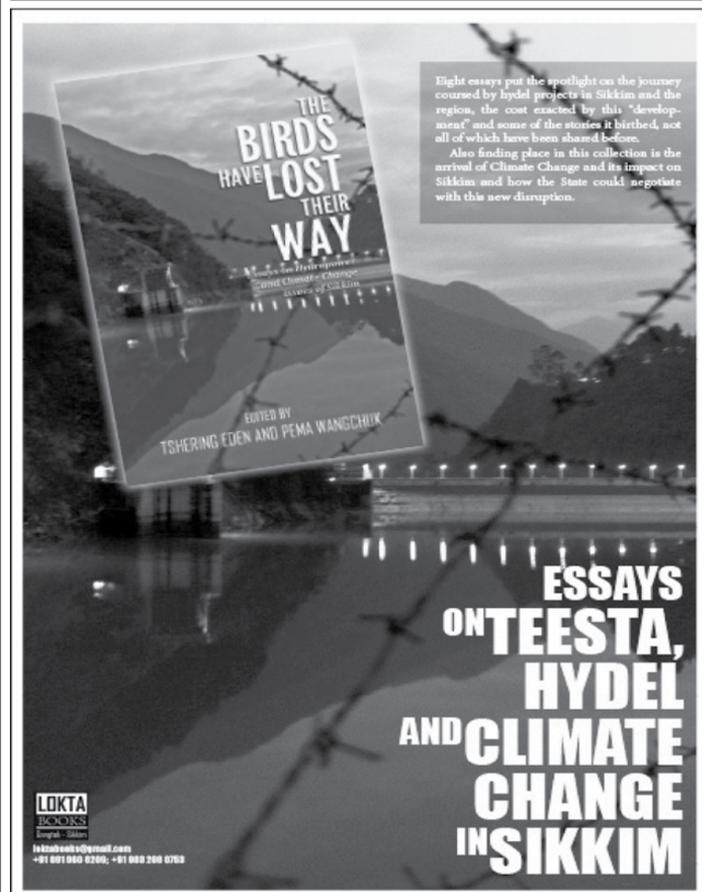
Shah, at a press conference, had alleged that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's TMC was involved in vandalising the bust and unleashing violence during his road show as part of a "conspiracy" to blame the BJP. On its part, the TMC released videos to claim that "BJP goons"

damaged the statue of Vidyasagar and said the videos not only establish what the saffron party did, but proved that Shah is a "liar" and a "dhokebaaz" (betrayer).

The Election Commission had on Wednesday also ordered the removal of Principal Secretary (Home) Atri Bhattacharya and Kumar from their postings. Kumar was questioned by the CBI in February this year in connection with its probe in multi-crore Saradha chit fund case.

A team of CBI officers was stopped from entering the residence of Kumar, when he was Kolkata Police chief on February 3 when they had gone to question him in connection with the Saradha and Rose Valley scam cases. The move had led to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee staging a dharna in the heart of the city, protesting against "the attack on constitutional norms".

The CBI had, however, questioned Kumar for several days in Shillong from February 9 following a Supreme Court order.



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Tiger set for early charge with Koepka, Molinari at PGA

BETHPAGE (UNITED STATES), MAY 16 (AFP): Tiger Woods, coming off a Masters victory that snapped an 11-year major win drought, begins his quest for a 16th major title Thursday at the 101st PGA Championship.

The 43-year-old American superstar's electrifying triumph last month at Augusta National has made him the focus of attention at formidable Bethpage Black, the same course where Woods won the 2002 US Open. "I feel great. I'm excited to get out there," Woods said.

"This is going to be a long week the way the golf course is set up and potentially could play. This could be a hell of a championship."

A victory would match Woods with Sam Snead for the all-time US PGA win record at 82 and move him two shy of the all-time major win record of 18 set by Jack Nicklaus -- as well as put Woods halfway to a calendar Grand Slam for the first time since 2002.

Sixth-ranked Woods starts off the 10th tee at 8:24 a.m. (1224 GMT) alongside defending champion and two-time US Open winner Brooks Koepka and reigning British Open champion Francesco Molinari of Italy.

"I'm just looking forward to playing with him. It'll be interesting," Koepka said of Woods. "We really haven't been paired together too much, especially over the last couple years." Koepka held off Woods to win last year's PGA at Bellerive while Molinari denied Woods last year to win the Claret Jug at Carnoustie.

"When I started I wasn't even dreaming of playing against Tiger," Molinari said. "I feel lucky enough to have played with him many times now in many important moments."

Finding the fairways will be crucial over the 7,549-yard, par-70 layout as sloping greens firm up from rain. "In order to win this one, driving is going to be at the forefront," Woods said.

"You've got to hit it not only straight but you've got to hit it far."

Woods, nagged for years by back pain before 2017 spinal fusion surgery, has not played competitively since the Masters, making this only the sixth time in his career he has played back-to-back majors.

He skipped a planned nine-hole practice round Wednesday for rest, having done a five-hour in-depth tour of the course last week and played nine holes early Monday.

"There's definitely going to be a component to stamina as the week goes on," Woods said. "Four days over a tough championship that is mentally and physically taxing takes its toll."

"I need to give myself the best chance to win the events I play in... Sometimes that can be taking a little bit more breaks here and there, making sure I'm able to give it my best."

Premier League set to splash the cash as transfer window opens

LONDON, MAY 16 (AFP): Manchester City have not yet held their victory parade after edging Liverpool in a thrilling Premier League title race but already they are plotting for next season.

The champions are not alone.

A huge summer splurge on transfer fees is likely after Premier League spending fell last year, in part due to a short window for clubs to complete their business between the end of the World Cup and a new transfer deadline, which fell before the season began.

The Premier League's transfer deadline will again come before most of the rest of Europe, on August 8, meaning clubs cannot afford to waste time.

The window for domestic deals opens on Thursday. International transfers can be completed from June 11.

AFP Sports looks at where each of the top six are set to strengthen.

MANCHESTER CITY

The champions may have claimed a remarkable 198 points over two title-winning campaigns, but Pep Guardiola promised they will come back stronger next season and are likely to invest heavily for a variety of reasons.

A potential transfer ban due to a FIFA investigation over the recruitment of foreign minors and third-par-



ty ownership means this may be City's last chance to sign players for at least 18 months.

City could also face a season's ban from the Champions League by UEFA over financial fair play irregularities. If imposed, the sanction would likely be enforced for the 2020/21 campaign, giving City another chance next season to win the competition for the first time.

Atletico Madrid's Rodri, who has a 70-million-euro buyout clause, has reportedly been targeted as the long-term replacement for 34-year-old Fernandinho in the holding midfield role.

A centre-back is also

thought to be a priority, with City among clubs chasing Ajax wonderkid Matthijs de Ligt. Nicolas Otamendi and, perhaps, captain Vincent Kompany could depart.

LIVERPOOL

Liverpool were the biggest Premier League spenders by a distance last summer and their 170-million euro investment was richly rewarded with the third-highest Premier League points tally ever and a return to the Champions League final.

No such splurge is expected at Anfield this summer as Klopp fine-tunes to dislodge City.

Alberto Moreno and Daniel Sturridge are

set to leave on free transfers and cover is needed for Andy Robertson at left-back and up front as a back-up for Roberto Firmino.

TOTTENHAM

Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino has worked wonders to get his side to the Champions League final and back into the competition next season despite not signing a single player since January 2018.

The Argentine, though, has been putting pressure on the famously frugal Tottenham board to back him this summer

now the club have moved into their new 62,000-capacity home, which cost more than 1 billion euro

and has slowed Spurs' spending in recent seasons. Fulham's Ryan Sessegnon is a target as competition for Danny Rose at left-back, while the club needs a more potent back-up to Harry Kane than Fernando Llorente.

The club has also been linked with a number of midfielders, including Barcelona's Andre Gomes, Youri Tielemans, who shone on loan at Leicester from Monaco, and Aston Villa captain Jack Grealish.

But they could be replacements for Christian Eriksen who is out of contract in 2020 like another key player Toby Alderweireld.

CHELSEA

Chelsea may not be able to do any business at all as they are currently banned from signing players for the next two windows by FIFA.

The club plan to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport and hope to have the ban suspended until the judgement.

Eden Hazard finally looks set to land his dream move to Real Madrid, leaving the Blues without their best player in recent seasons.

Christian Pulisic was signed in January to fill that void and will arrive from Borussia Dortmund, but Chelsea may be forced to rely on tal-

ented youngsters currently out on loan.

ARSENAL

Arsenal's summer business will depend largely on whether they beat Chelsea in the Europa League final to seal a return to the Champions League.

An ageing defence that conceded 51 goals in the Premier League cost the Gunners a top-four finish and reinforcements are needed across the whole backline.

The departure of Aaron Ramsey also leaves a big hole in midfield.

MANCHESTER UNITED

United face by far the biggest rebuilding job after a disastrous season. They fail to qualify for the Champions League and finish as close to the relegation zone as to City in the league.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has promised big changes but much will depend on how many players on big contracts United can get rid of to free up funds.

Paul Pogba could be sold to Real Madrid, while Romelu Lukaku has attracted interest from Serie A.

A centre-back remains the priority, with Napoli's Kalidou Koulibaly the prime target, but the Senegalese is likely to cost a world-record fee for a defender.

Dortmund's Jadon Sancho has been linked with a return to England, but would cost more than 100 million.

Ajax seal title to complete double after Euro heartache

DOETINCHEM, MAY 16 (AFP): Ajax were crowned Dutch champions for the 34th time on Wednesday after they cruised to 4-1 win at De Graafschap that completed a domestic double a week after their crushing Champions League exit at the hands of Tottenham Hotspur.

Goals from Lasse Schoene, Nicolas Tagliafico and Dusan Tadic, who bagged a second half-brace, saw Erik ten Hag's side win their eighth league match on the bounce and formerly win the title after effectively sealing the deal at the weekend.

Ajax came into the final match of the season three points clear of closest rivals PSV Eindhoven with a 14-goal higher

goal difference after they beat Utrecht 4-1 and the defending champions lost 1-0 at AZ Alkmaar on Sunday. Those results made a first double in 17 years -- Ajax won the Dutch Cup on May 5 -- a near-certainty, and in the end made PSV's 3-1 win over Heracles irrelevant.

However the flamboyant Amsterdam outfit, who captured hearts as their scintillating football took them to the brink of a first Champions League final in more than two decades, nonetheless turned on the style in their final game before their stars are sold off in the summer.

Midfielder Frenkie De Jong will leave for Barcelona in the summer for an initial 75 million euros (USD 89 million),

while centre-back Matthijs de Ligt, who sent Juventus packing with a bullet header in the quarter finals, could follow his teammate to Catalonia.

After knocking out Real Madrid in the Champions League last 16, coach Franck de Boer admitted that forwards Hakim Ziyech and David Neres would also all be targeted by Europe's biggest clubs come the end of the season. Their thrilling European adventures, which also saw them dump out Cristiano Ronaldo's Juventus, came to an end in gut-wrenching style last week when Lucas Moura's 96th-minute strike for Spurs saw Ajax throw away a 3-0 aggregate lead and miss out on a trip to Madrid on away goals.

Kean Lewis signs extension with Bengaluru FC

BENGALURU, MAY 16 (PTI): Bengaluru FC Thursday announced Kean Lewis' contract renewal, signing a deal that will keep the winger at the club until the end of the 2019-20 campaign.

The TATA Football Academy graduate was part of the Mahindra United academy where he played at various youth levels, and signed with Bengaluru ahead of the 2018-19 campaign.

Twenty-six-year-old Kean claimed the assist for Erik Paartalu's winner against ATK at the Fortress, and was instrumental in several appearances off the bench in Bengaluru's run to the Indian Super League trophy. "I'm very happy



said Kean, after completing formalities on his one-year deal.

Carles Cuadrat, who has signed on with Bengaluru for two more seasons, said that he was happy to see Kean back in the fold.

"We're happy to offer Kean another year because he's been an important player for us throughout the course of last season. Kean made a difference coming off the bench in crucial moments and whenever we needed him. As a player who understands the philosophy of this club and our style of play, we stand to benefit from having him as part of the squad for another year," said Cuadrat.

to have signed on with Bengaluru FC for another season. I was given the opportunity to play in several positions last season, which shows that the coach has faith in me. It gives me more chances to play, which was a key factor in my decision.

"Further to that, the team, the management, and the core of the club is intact, which bodes well for our chances of retaining the title and I'm really looking forward to that,"

Injured Jeje to miss Kings Cup as Stimac names 37 probables for camp

NEW DELHI, MAY 16 (PTI): Injured striker Jeje Lalpekhlua along with four others have been left out of the national team's probables' list for the Kings Cup football tournament in Thailand next month.

India's newly-appointed head coach Igor Stimac Thursday announced the list of 37 probables for the preparatory camp ahead of the Kings Cup to be held in Buriram, Thailand from June 5-8. The camp will be held in New Delhi from May 20.

Jeje is suffering from a knee injury and didn't play during Chennaiyin FC's AFC Cup loss to Abahani Dhaka Ltd on Wednesday. He is set to undergo a surgery in the

third week of May. Besides Jeje, a host of other players who will miss the Thailand campaign are Halicharan Narzary (knee injury), Mandar Rao Desai (hamstring injury), Ashique Kuruniyan (knee injury), Narender Gehlot (knee injury) and Jerry Lalrinzuala.

"I respected the choice of the squad which represented India in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019. The rest of the players have been added post my research watching Hero I-League and Hero ISL matches. I found some players quite interesting, and have summoned them to the camp," Stimac was quoted as saying by an AIFF statement.

"I congratulate all the players, and wish them

good luck. I am eagerly waiting to get on the task immediately. I have always cherished new challenges, and I am looking forward to coaching the Blue Tigers," he added.

The Kings Cup will be followed by the Hero Intercontinental Cup in July.

The King's Cup is a FIFA-sanctioned international 'A' tournament being organised by the Thailand FA since 1968. India's previous participation in the King's Cup was in 1977. Hosts Thailand and Vietnam are the two other teams participating in the tournament.

Probables list: Goalkeepers: Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Vishal Kaith, Amrinder

Singh, Kamaljit Singh.

Defenders: Pritam Kotal, Nishu Kumar, Rahul Bheke, Salam Ranjan Singh, Sandesh Jhingam, Adil Khan, Anwar Ali, Subhasish Bose, Narayan Das.

Midfielders: Udanta Singh, Jackichand Singh, Brandon Fernandes, Anirudh Thapa, Raynier Fernandes, Bikramjit Singh, Dhanpal Ganesh, Pronay Halder, Rowllin Borges, Germanpreet Singh, Vinit Rai, Sahal Abdul, Amarjit Singh, Redeem Tlang, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Nandha Kumar, Komal Thatal, Michael Soosairaj.

Forwards: Balwant Singh, Sunil Chhetri, Joby Justin, Sumeet Passi, Farukh Choudhary, Manvir Singh.

I'm successful because Kohli gave me freedom to attack: Kuldeep

TAPAN MOHANTA

KOLKATA, MAY 16 (PTI): Star India wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav believes he wouldn't have been successful at the world stage had it not been for skipper Virat Kohli, who gave him the freedom to attack. "You need a skipper who backs you and believes in your ability to shine on the big stage. You think we could have been so successful if Kohli bhai had not given us the freedom to attack? I don't think so," Kuldeep told PTI in an interview. Kuldeep, who played for Kolkata Knight Riders, was badly let down by the batting friendly conditions at Eden Gardens in this year's IPL as he returned with just four wickets from nine matches before being dropped by his franchise in the business end of the tournament.

The 24-year-old said he is looking forward to put the IPL disappointment behind with a spectacular performance in the upcoming World Cup beginning May 30. "IPL is very different than World Cup. There are players who have done well in IPL but have struggled to make a mark for the country. I've matured as a bowler and by no means it will affect my performance

in the World Cup," Kuldeep said. "It's (T20) such a format, you may have a bad day where you're hit for runs. I'm not a magician who will do well in every match. You cannot say I will take so many wickets."

By his own standard, an average of 71.50 in IPL is something he would look to forget. "If I'm not getting wickets it does not mean I'm not bowling well. Now I play as a mature cricketer and think more about the team," Kuldeep said. Kuldeep also spoke about the recent controversy about his comments on Mahendra Singh Dhoni that sometimes the former skipper "goes wrong" with his tips.

"How can a youngster like me make such comments on a senior member of the side? My comments had been misinterpreted by media to create a controversy," he said. "There is no doubt that his tips have been invaluable not only for me but for the entire team. His presence behind the stumps makes our job easy and nobody can change that fact. We wouldn't have been half as effective without his inputs." Andre Russell was a terror in the IPL with his batting exploits and single-handedly turned KKR's fortunes before they failed to make the playoffs.

Alabama governor signs near-total abortion ban into law

MONTGOMERY (US), MAY 16 (AP): Alabama's Republican governor has signed the most stringent abortion legislation in the nation, making performing an abortion a felony in nearly all cases.

"To the bill's many supporters, this legislation stands as a powerful testament to Alabamians' deeply held belief that every life is precious and that every life is a sacred gift from God," Governor Kay Ivey said in a statement on Wednesday.

The bill's sponsors want to give conservatives on the US Supreme Court a chance to gut abortion rights nationwide, but Democrats and abortion rights advocates criticised the bill as a slap in the face to women voters.

"It just completely disregards women and the value of women and their voice. We have once again silenced women on a very personal issue," said Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison, a Birmingham Democrat.

The abortion ban is set to go into effect in six months, but is expected to face a lawsuit to block it from halting abortion access.

Coleman-Madison said she hopes the measure awakens a "sleeping giant" of women voters in the state.

But Republican pollster Chris Kratzer noted that there is no congressional district and likely no legislative district with enough swing voters to put Republicans at serious risk in the state.

"The people who are outraged about this are not the people who are electing these guys, generally speaking, especially when we're talking about the primary," he



said. Further, Kratzer argued, there aren't enough potential swing voters and disenchanted Republicans to make the issue any kind of advantage for the lone Democrat elected to statewide office, US Sen Doug Jones, who scored a surprise win in a 2017 special election.

Jones upset Republican Roy Moore in part on the strength of GOP-leaning college graduates abandoning the controversial Moore. But Kratzer said that was more about Moore's long history of flouting federal courts as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court and accusations that Moore sexually harassed teens when he was in his 30s not Moore's hardline stance on abortion.

The legislation Alabama senators passed Tuesday would make performing an abortion at any stage of pregnancy a felony punishable by 10 to 99 years or life in prison for the provider. The only exception would

be when the woman's health is at serious risk.

Women seeking or undergoing abortions wouldn't be punished.

Rep Terri Collins, the bill's sponsor, said she believes the measure reflects the beliefs of the majority of the state electorate. The vote came after 59 per cent of state voters in November agreed to write anti-abortion language in the Alabama Constitution, saying the state recognizes the rights of the "unborn."

Ivey acknowledged Wednesday that the measure may be unenforceable in the short term. Even supporters have said they expect it to be blocked by lower courts as they fight toward the Supreme Court.

"It's to address the issue that Roe v. Wade was decided on. Is that baby in the womb a person?" Collins said.

Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio and Georgia recently have approved bans on abortion once a fetal heartbeat is detected, which can occur

in about the sixth week of pregnancy. The Alabama bill goes further by seeking to ban abortion outright. Abortion rights advocates vowed swift legal action.

"We haven't lost a case in Alabama yet and we don't plan to start now. We will see Governor Ivey in court," said Staci Fox, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Southeast.

Evangelist Pat Robertson on his television show Wednesday said the Alabama law is "extreme" and opined it may not be the best one to bring to the US Supreme Court in the hopes of overturning Roe "because I think this one will lose." "God bless them they are trying to do something," Robertson said.

One mile (1.6 kilometers) from the Alabama Statehouse down the street from the Governor's Mansion sits Montgomery's only abortion clinic, one of three performing abortions in the state. Clinic staff on

Wednesday fielded calls from patients, and potential patients, wrongly worried that abortion was now illegal in the state. They were assured abortion remained legal in the state.

Dr Yashica Robinson, who provides abortions in Huntsville, said her clinic similarly fielded calls from frightened patients.

"This is a really sad day for women in Alabama and all across the nation," she said.

"It's like we have just taken three steps backwards as far as women's rights and being able to make decisions that are best for them and best for their families." But Robinson said the bill is also having a galvanising effect. With phone lines jammed, she said messages came streaming across their fax machine.

"We had letters coming across the fax just asking what they can do to help and telling us they are sending us their love and support our way," Robinson said.

Trump to visit S Korea for talks on North's nukes: White House

WASHINGTON, MAY 16 (AFP): President Donald Trump will visit South Korea in June to meet with his counterpart Moon Jae-in over their efforts to persuade North Korea to scrap its nuclear weapons arsenal, the White House has said.

It will be the second meeting between the pair since the collapse of a summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Hanoi in February after they failed to reach a deal on denuclearisation.

"President Trump and President Moon will continue their close coordination on efforts to achieve the final, fully verified denuclearisation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," the White House said in a statement on Wednesday, using North Korea's official name.

The dovish South Korean president, who has long backed engagement with the nuclear-armed North, brokered the talks process between Trump and Kim, which led to their first landmark summit in Singapore last June.

But security allies Seoul and Washington have at times appeared to diverge on their approach to Pyongyang, and Seoul's simultaneous announcement of the vis-

it was noticeably different in its phrasing.

A statement issued by the South's presidential office said the two leaders will discuss "establishing a lasting peace regime through the complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula" -- rather than the North specifically.

The "denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula" was the term used in the joint statement signed by Kim and Trump after their first summit in Singapore.

But it is a phrase open to wide interpretation, and the process has become bogged down as the two sides disagree over what it means.

In the past, Pyongyang has argued it must include the removal of Washington's nuclear umbrella over the South and the 28,500 US troops stationed in the country.

When US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited the North's traditional ally Russia this week, Moscow's veteran foreign minister Sergei Lavrov told him: "The leadership of DPRK expects certain guarantees of security of their country reciprocated by denuclearization, and that denuclearization should be expanded over the whole of the Korean Peninsula." The White House said

Trump's trip to South Korea would combine with his visit to nearby Japan, where he will attend a G20 summit in Osaka on June 28-29.

The Hanoi summit between Trump and Kim broke up after the pair failed to agree on what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in exchange for relief from sanctions imposed over its nuclear and missile programmes.

Since then, Moon has tried to salvage diplomacy between the two mercurial leaders and flew to Washington last month for a brief meeting with Trump.

His attempts have so far proved futile, with Pyongyang raising the pressure earlier this month week by launching short-range missiles in its first such test since November 2017.

North Korea has repeatedly warned that it could take a different approach if Washington did not change its stance on sanctions by the end of this year.

In a move that could further stoke tensions, the US announced the seizure of a North Korean cargo ship for violating international sanctions, which was slammed by Pyongyang as an "unlawful and outrageous act".

North Korea says it is suffering worst drought in decades

SEOUL, MAY 16 (AP): North Korea has said it is suffering its worst drought in nearly four decades amid reports of severe food shortages.

The official Korean Central News Agency said an average of 54.4 millimeters (2.1 inches) of rain fell throughout the country in the first five months of this year. It said that is the lowest level since 1982, when North Korea received 51.2 millimeters (2 inches) of rain on average during the same period.

The report came on Wednesday after UN food agencies said in a joint assessment earlier this month that about 10 mil-

lion people in North Korea were facing "severe food shortages" after the country had one of the worst harvests in a decade. In February, North Korea's ambassador to the United Nations, Kim Song, issued an unusual appeal for urgent food assistance.

North Korean officials have blamed the food shortage on bad weather and international economic sanctions that were toughened after the country conducted a series of high-profile nuclear and missile tests in recent years.

In a high-stakes summit in Vietnam in February, President Donald Trump rejected North

Korean leader Kim Jong Un's call for an easing of the sanctions in return for dismantling his main nuclear complex, a partial disarmament step.

KCNA said the drought is expected to continue until the end of May. North Korea's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper reported Wednesday that officials and workers are attempting to find new water sources and mobilise pumps and irrigation equipment to minimise the damage to agriculture. North Korea suffered a devastating famine in the mid-1990s that is estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of people.

At least 10 reported trapped in Shanghai building collapse

SHANGHAI, MAY 16 (AFP): At least ten construction workers were trapped in the rubble of an industrial building that collapsed in Shanghai on Thursday as it was undergoing renovation, according to Chinese media reports.

The accident occurred around 11:00 am (0300 GMT) in an area of central Shanghai, with Chinese news outlet The Paper saying at least four people were rescued from the collapsed structure.

Trump to provide rare look of finances in disclosure report

NEW YORK, MAY 16 (AP): President Donald Trump's latest financial disclosure report is expected to provide a rare glimpse into whether his presidency has helped or hurt his hotels, golf resorts and other parts of his business empire.

The report, which is filed with the Office of Government Ethics and set for release Thursday, will be closely studied for changes in revenue at key properties in 2018, including his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, his Washington, D.C., hotel and his Doral golf resort in Miami.

Experts say the Trump business has taken a hit from the president's divisive policies and rhetoric, though the Trump Organization says much of the business is fine.

Trump's biggest revenue generator among his golf properties, Doral, took in USD 75 million in revenue in 2017. By comparison, Trump's "Summer White House," his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, generated USD 15 million.

Mar-a-Lago took in USD 25 million in 2017 and his Washington ho-



tel generated USD 40 million.

In total, the disclosure report for 2017, released a year ago, showed Trump's assets including books he has written, licensing deals and other business ventures generated revenue of at least USD 453 million. The report estimated the assets were worth at least USD 1.4 billion.

While Trump has not released his tax records, he has been filing financial disclosure reports since he ran for president.

The latest report, listing 2018 figures, will allow for the first time a 12-month comparison

with a previous year. Trump's report released two years ago stated estimates for revenue over 16 months.

A key part of the report released last year was a footnote listing a reimbursement of as much as USD 250,000 to Trump's former personal lawyer Michael Cohen. Cohen, who is serving three years in prison for campaign finance violations among other crimes, admitted paying hush money during the presidential campaign to silence Stormy Daniels, the porn actress who alleges she had sex with Trump. The president has denied that he had

an affair. The reports filed with the government ethics agency each year are for revenue, not profits, and the figures are given in ranges and so provide only a partial picture of the finances of Trump and other executive branch officials who file them.

When Trump took office, he refused to fully divest from his global business, a break with presidential tradition.

Instead, he put his assets in a trust controlled by his two adult sons and a senior executive. Trump can take back control of the trust at any time, and he's allowed to withdraw cash from it.

You can contact SummitTIMES @ 03592 208698



Over 2 lakh 'Game of Thrones' fans sign petition to remake final season with 'competent makers'

LOS ANGELES, MAY 16 (PTI): Over two lakh fans of "Game of Thrones" across the world have signed an online petition urging HBO to remake the eighth and final season of the epic fantasy series with "competent writers".

The petitioner, Dylan D started the appeal to HBO on Charge.org after the premiere of the penultimate episode of the show, "The Bells" led to be one of its most divisive chapters.

Showrunners David Benioff and DB Weiss have been under fire for below par script writing and poor portrayal of women in the final season of the HBO series, based on author George RR Martin's book series "A Song of Ice and Fire".

The petition, titled "Remake 'Game of Thrones' Season 8 with competent writers", reads the showrunners have displayed incompetence in the absence of "source material".

"David Benioff and DB Weiss have proven themselves to be woefully incompetent writers when they have no source material (ie the books) to fall back on.

"This series deserves a final season that makes sense. Subvert my expectations and make it happen, HBO!" it reads.

In season five, the makers had Mar-

but plans to release them after the TV series is complete.

Calling the reports "absurd", the 70-year-old reiterated that books are not yet finished. He said delaying



tin's most recent volume of the series, "A Dance with Dragons", for script adaptation, till the point when Jon Snow is killed. After that the showrunners dealt with the series on their own.

Martin recently trashed reports which claimed he had finished writing the final two books in the saga

the release of the books makes no sense financially. The network and the showrunners never asked him to delay his books, he added.

Over 227,000 signed the petition at the time this report was filed.

The season finale of "GoT" premieres next week.



SO CHIC! The model, Romee Strijd steps out on a sunny day in France during the 72nd annual Cannes Film Festival.

Britney Spears' manager says singer may never perform again

LOS ANGELES, MAY 16 (PTI): Britney Spears' longtime manager Larry Rudolph has said the singer may never perform again.

Rudolph, whose association with the singer goes back as far as her debut album "Baby... One More Time", in 1999, said he wants her to find a "peaceful, happy" place.

"I've been with her for two-thirds of her life. I look at her almost like I look at my own daughter. It's very emotional for me... and really rough. Personally, I want for her to just find a peaceful, happy place whatever that means for her. It's not about a career anymore it's about life," he told Variety.

Spears, who recently postponed her Las Vegas residency in the wake of her father's Jamie Spears' recent treatment for a ruptured colon is scheduled to undergo psychological evaluation.

She reportedly told a judge that her father forced her to enter a mental health facility and take medication against her will. The 37-year-old singer had checked herself into a 30-day programme in March in the midst of her father's ongoing health issues.

Rudolph said the decision not to go ahead

with the Vegas residency stemmed from the fact that she is "taking time to regroup and get her head together." "She's putting herself ahead of everyone else, and I'm proud of her for that. If she never works again, she never works again. My role is to handle her



career when she wants a career. If she comes back strong and full of desire and passion and wants to do it, great. If she takes off six months or six years, it's totally fine. To me, it's about her finding her happy place," he added.

Last month, fans protested Spears' hold in a psychiatric facility with "Free Britney" banners, chanting slogans such as, "Hey, ho, Larry Rudolph has got to go," claiming it was her manager's decision to put the star in the facility.

Famke Janssen joins 'The Postcard Killings'

LOS ANGELES, MAY 16 (PTI): "X-Men" star Famke Janssen has boarded the cast of crime thriller "The Postcard Killings".

According to Variety, the actor will star opposite Jeffrey Dean Morgan in the film.

The story follows Jacob Kanon (Morgan), a hardened New York detective, in search of the person responsible for the murder of his only daughter.

Janssen plays Valerie Kanon, the mother of their now deceased child.

The plotline adds: Across Europe, newlywed couples are being targeted in a

string of bizarre homicides that leave the young victims' bodies looking like copies of great works of art.

Danis Tanovic is directing the movie, which is produced by Good Films' Miriam Segal alongside Paul Brennan, Peter Calvin Nelson and Leopoldo Gout.

Connie Nielsen, Denis O'Hare, Naomi Batrick, Ruairi O'Connor, Sallie Harmsen, Eva Rose and Joachim Krol are also part of the cast.

The film, based on the James Patterson and Liza Marklund bestseller of the same name, will be shot in Norway and Sweden.

Mithun Chakraborty's next to be horror-comedy

MUMBAI, MAY 16 (PTI): Actor Mithun Chakraborty has signed a horror-comedy, which is scheduled to begin production by July-August.

The actor, who was seen on the screen in "Tashkent Files", has been away from the spotlight for a while reportedly due to his ongoing treatment for back pain.

He will next be seen in "Bhootiyapa", which features him along side comedians Krushna Abhishek, Sugandha Mishra and Rajiv Thakur. The film is directed by Manoj Sharma. "When I narrated the film to Mithun da, he was very excited! He is absolutely fit and fine and told me he loved the script. I am thrilled to direct him and I think it will be a fun ride for all of us," Manoj told PTI.

The director said Mithun



will be in the role of a man who invites three stand-up comedians for a private performance in his mansion.

"We are trying something new with the film, the genre of horror-comedy is new and we have a fantastic story and the cast to make it entertaining." Manoj is hoping for an April 2020 release for the film.

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ARIES: With Venus on tour through Aries since April 20, you've been speeding along the romantic superhighway. Perhaps you've been pressuring your S.O. to commit to a goal, or maybe you've been in "love 'em and leave 'em" bachelor(ette) mode. Today, as la love planet slips into sensual Taurus until June 8, you'll slow your roll. The next few weeks are about appreciating the small and sensual things together, like delicious meals, conversations that connect you and ambling hand in hand.

TAURUS: Winning people's hearts and minds? You've got that dialed in starting today as your cosmic ruler, captivating Venus, grooves into Taurus until June 8. You could start your own charm school—and don't be surprised if admirers emerge out of thin air. Since Venus also rules your highest values, use these weeks to filter out the people and things you don't want in your world, from artwork you've outgrown to friends who drain your energy.

GEMINI: Cupid takes aim at your heart

and fires off his love arrows as sensual Venus sashays into Taurus and your twelfth house of fantasy until June 8. You're ready and willing to be swept away, Gemini, but don't fall for any old charmer who gallops up on a white steed. You're susceptible to illusion under this transit, so while you do need to let down the drawbridge (discerningly), you don't want to slip into that river called Denial.

CANCER: Seeking your soulmate? Look no further than your own inner circle (or your iPhone) over the next few weeks as love planet Venus makes her annual orbit through your eleventh house of friends and technology until June 8. Single Cancers could meet intriguing prospects through group hangs or a new dating app. Already attached? Lunge into spring training by doing more outdoorsy activities with your sweetie or spending more social time with your blended friend groups.

LEO: There's no other way to say this, Leo—you're in the mood for love. Tonight you may feel a strong urge to be with your

partner. If there isn't one in your life, you should take steps to correct that. You may meet someone who sweeps you off your feet. You want to be head-in-the-clouds in love, which is the only way to be!

VIRGO:

You have a generous spirit, Virgo, which could get you into trouble if you aren't careful. When you get a gift of money or even a hint of one, your tendency is to buy presents for all your friends. It's hard to fault you for this, but there are other ways to show your affection. You could bake cookies to distribute, for example. This will keep your money safe and earning interest.

LIBRA: You're ready for a career change, Libra, or at least a change of venue. Have you considered telecommuting one day per week? That might give you the variety you seek without needing to find a new job. You may meet someone today or in the near future who will have a dramatic influence on your career decisions. Listen carefully.

SCORPIO: What is your dream, Scorpio?

Answer that question as specifically as possible today, then set about attaining that goal. All signs indicate that whatever you begin today will pay off big time. Even though you may feel that your dreams are too ambitious, there's no need to feel overwhelmed. Vow to take things one step at a time. Keep in mind the old adage, "Once begun is half done."

SAGITTARIUS: This may seem odd, Sagittarius, but you may not be the person you think you are. There are indications that you have hidden talents. If they come out today, no one will be more shocked than you! This could take your career in an entirely new direction. Strategize ways to incorporate this talent into your career. Your work will take on a new dynamic, and you will take a major leap forward.

CAPRICORN: You're about to experience a major change in your life's direction, Capricorn, and it may occur today. Keep your mind open to all sorts of possibilities. You're likely to receive some important information. Of course, you may not realize its im-

portance right away. It's only with the passage of time that you will look back on this event as pivotal. Make sure you don't miss it.

AQUARIUS: Is Maison d'Aquarius home sweet home, or could it stand some sprucing up? Whether you just need a fresh coat of paint or a radical makeover, Venus' three-week tour of your domestic zone until June 8 is sure to call forth your interior decorator. Browsing the shelter blogs and Pinterest or just pulling paint swatches from Home Depot will set your imagination racing.

PISCES: Don't hold back, Pisces! While charismatic Venus tours your expressive third house until June 8, people will be hanging on your every word. The love planet can also help you communicate your amorous desires—because, no, people can't actually read your mind. Let your love interest know what you fancy for dinner or in the boudoir. Single and wading in the online dating pool? Upload a sexy new profile picture and start swiping right with abandon.