

SummitTIMES

Vol 05 | Issue 12 | Gangtok | Tuesday | 14 January 2020

TOP 0 F THE NEWS RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ **5**

THE LAGYAP STORY

Idle expenditure, revenue loss and untenable excuses

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

 $R_{
m government}$ departments or misplaced priorities leading to loss of revenue or the presenting of untenable excuses to explain delays are not rare. In fact, they are too common. It is rare, even for the somnolent bureaucracy, to deliver embarrassments in which all three factors are amplified and exposed. One such project finds ignominious mention in the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Economic, Revenue and General Sectors for Sikkim for the year ended March 2018.

The ambitiously titled, "Restoration, Renovation and Modernisation of Lower Lagyap Hydel Proiect" in East district on dodgy credentials in November 2012 when the Energy & Power Department managed to convince the Land Revenue Department to divert nearly Rs 44 crore from the Rs

1,000 cr sanctioned by the Government of India for reconstruction of infrastructure damaged by the 18 Sept 2011 earthquake.

The central assistance was not meant for renovation or modernization of any infrastructure and was sought and sanctioned explicitly for restoration of damages caused by that calamitous temblor. For restoration, renovation and modenisation, the Power Department should made a separate project and applied for funding or included it in its budget projections. That, however, would have required foresight and planning and follow-up, skills which appear to be in short supply in the department as the Lower Lagyap HEP adventure reveals.

The diversion was sanctioned. and one cannot help but wonder which desperate repair and restoration was put on hold to provide Power Department Rs 44 cr to waste. As for the Power Department, it justified the diversion on the ground that a modernized Lower Lagyap HEP would generate "substantial revenue" to the tune of Rs 20 or Rs 30 crore for the State. The irony of this fantastic claim convincing the diversion of desperately-required funds for earthquake repairs is stark.

Be that as it may, the funds were diverted in Sept 2012 and the Power Department displayed some urgency in expediting the project when it issued a Notice Inviting Tenders in November 2012 itself and on 23 May, 2013, awarded the project comprising of civil works, electromechanical and hydro-mechanical works for a "negotiated lump-sum" of Rs 43.22 crore. The project was to be completed within 18 months - latest by 03 December, 2014.

However, even as of Feb 2019, the "Restoration, Renovation and Modernisation" of Lower Lagyap Hydel Project had still not been completed.

deadline itself when two days before the scheduled date of completion, the contractor requested the Power Secretary for a time extension of 10 months [upto 11 Oct 2015].

This time, the contractor explained, was sought because work could not progress as scheduled due to hindrances by local public in the laying of water conductors. This was a hydel project, and the water conductors are clearly a crucial component without which no power can be generated. This should have been obvious to the engineers in the Department but was overlooked.

The 11 Oct 2015 deadline came and went, and this time neither the contractor seek time, nor did the engineer in-charge bother to check or authorize an extension. This, the CAG auditors view as "failure in exercise of due rigour in execution of the project."

The delay was noticed on the first revealed that the contractor had completed installation of electr-mechanical components of the project which means that the power house was ready for a trial run by November 2015 itself.

Remember the water conductors which have still not been laid? The water conduit pipes, the only components of the project which had been damaged by the 18 Sept 2011 earthquake, had not been completed and without water gushing to the power house, the electro-mechanical components could not be checked.

When CAG auditors checked again in June 2018, the electromechanical components, installed at the cost of nearly Rs 20 crore, were still sitting idle, never having been tested and their warranty of two years having expired.

But why could the water conduit pipes not be laid?

The Department explained in An inspection by CAG auditors August 2018, six years after the

project was begun, that the people of the area had raised objections to the laying of head race pipes due to lingering fears of the 18 Sept earthquake. Officials in the Department claimed that the hindrance cause by the people was beyond its anticipation.

This excuse is patently false because residents of the area had petitioned the State Government through the CM, Speaker and the Department, in February 2013, barely three months since the work was awarded, seeking adequate protective measures to ensure safety of the villages lying below the are axis of the water conductor pipes.

"The EPD [Energy & Power Department] was thus aware of the concern of the public of the area right from the commencement of the work but had failed to address the issue effectively in time leading to loss of huge revenue to the State," the CAG Report concludes.

Girl trapped in cave, rescued



WANGCHUK BHUTIA GANGTOK, 13 IAN:

In what must have been a traumatic experience, a girl was rescued after being stuck head first in a rocky **▲** overhang at Lower Rakdong in East Sikkim today.

The girl, Seti Gurung, had been missing from home since this morning and her family had failed to locate her. Someone eventually spotted her trapped head first in a rocky overhang below the road.

The terrain was difficult and rescue efforts fraught with risks. A brave boy from Jang village finally managed to reach the spot and got her out.

The entire rescue operation, which was joined by police and villagers, took around 4 hours. The girl was then taken to Dikchu PHC, where she is currently undergoing treatment.

Students, teachers collectively boycott classes at JNU

New Delhi, Jan 13 (PTI): The students and the teachers of the Jawaharlal Nehru University on Monday boycotted classes amid standoff with the administration over the fee hike issue.

The classes were supposed to begin on Monday but could not start due to the collective boycott.

Prashant Kumar, a PhD student at the varsity, said the masters and graduation students have decided to boycott classes.

"The vice-chancellor has written to various centres to frame the time-table but there has been no development. The classes did not start today but might begin in a day or two," Kumar said.

A student from the School of Social Science, who did not

wish to be named, said, "We first want the issues to be sorted, only then can we focus on our studies. Just to start a fresh beginning, we cannot forget the past".

The campus saw violence on January 5 when a masked mob attacked students and teachers. The students'

union had earlier said it will ensure registration by paying only the tuition fees and not the increased hostel charges but kept the decision on hold after it found that the administration had blocked the registration portal for many students.

The teachers' association has also given a call for 'non-cooperation' in academic matters over a range of issues, including that of fee hike and the January 5 violence.

Teachers and students have been demanding the sacking of Vice-Chancellor M Jagadesh Kumar.

According to Professor Hari Ram Mishra of the School of Sanskrit and Indic Studies, some students attended classes but many of them are still not back in campus.

'The classes should commence in a proper way in the next couple of days," he said.

Another professor requesting anonymity, said, "The time-tables have not been prepared due to the ongoing situation. The teachers have been asked by the administration but the INU-TA has given a call for

boycott." In a meeting with Human Resource Development (HRD) officials, the JNUTA told officials that they "do not feel secure" on the campus and the atmosphere there was not conducive for academic activities.

"We do not feel secure on the campus, atmosphere not conducive for academic activities. Students who left campus after violence scared to return, how can we resume teaching?" JNU-TA President D K Lobiyal told the ministry officials.

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Opposition parties discuss anti-CAA protests, violence on campuses



NEW DELHI, JAN 13 Jharkhand Chief Minister efforts. **PTI):** A meeting of Opposition parties convened by Congress President Sonia Gandhi on Monday deliberated on the current political situation following widespread protests against the amended Citizenship Act and the violence on campuses.

Significantly, the BSP, the AAP and the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC stayed away from the meeting attended by representatives of 20 parties in all.

NCP supremo Sharad Pawar, Left leaders Sitaram Yechury and D Raja, JMM leader and

Hemant Soren, LID chief Sharad Yadav, Rashtriya Lok Samata Party leader Upendra Kushwaha, RJD leader Manoj Jha, National Conference leader Hasnain Masoodi, besides Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Ahmed Patel and former prime minister Manmohan Singh were among those present.

Sources said top opposition leaders have already held discussions among themselves and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad is leading the

The opposition is seeking to win over the youth and the students by supporting their protests against the amended citizenship law and any National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The sources said the Congress and other parties are seeking to take the students' movement forward and have lent support to their cause.

Last week, Sonia Gandhi had termed the CAA as a "discriminatory and divisive" law whose "sinister" purpose was to divide people on religious lines, and asserted that the NPR (National Population Register) in form and content was "disguised NRC (National Register of Citizens)".

The joint opposition move also assumes significance as it comes soon after Delhi Assembly election dates have been announced.

Elections to 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 8 and results will be declared on February 11.

The last time a majority of opposition leaders got together was at the swearing-in of Hemant Soren as Iharkhand chief

Par panel starts work on legislative impact assessment

New Delhi, Jan 13 of various laws. (PTI): A parliamentary committee has started working on legislative impact assessment, days after Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu pitched for it, official sources said on Monday.

Legislative impact assessment is an informed law-making process under which social, economic, environmental and institutional impacts of legislative proposals

are made. It helps in realising the stated objectives

Naidu is of the view that informed legislation will help in realising the stated objects of various laws. It requires a detailed impact assessment of legislation at the stages of both pre-legislation and post-legisla-

Now, the department-related liamentary standing committee on law, justice and personnel, headed by BIP leader Bhupender Yadav, has started working on the issue and would come out with a report on ways to assess the impact of a law on people, society and economy before and after it is framed, the sources said.

A similar move to have judicial impact assessment on laws could not take off in the past.

Based on the directions of the Supreme Court, a task force was set up in 2008 to study Judicial Impact Assessment.

But various experts had claimed that assessing judicial impact of a law was not for the judiciary.

Later, a committee of experts was constituted in September, 2013 to examine the issue of implementing the methodology of Judicial Impact Assessment and suggest further action.

The committee in its report submitted on January 9, 2015 had concluded that Judicial Impact Assessment was neither feasible nor desirable as a method of proper budgetary planning and allocation of funds

Sports Hostel Odisha in semis of CM's Gold Cup

CHITISH CHETTRI JORETHANG, 13 JAN:

Sports Hostel, Odisha, has reached the semi-finals of the 9th All India Chief Minister's Gold Cup International Football Tournament 2020 being held at Jorethang, South Sikkim.

In the third quarter final match played today, Sports Hostel, Odisha, defeated Mohammedan Sporting Club by 2-1 goals.

SDFA president, Arjun Rai was the chief guest for the day along with guest of honour, Janak Gurung. Also present were NT Bhutia along with South District Football Association (SDFA) members.

Francis Laura, jersey no. 12, Bikash Ch Pradhiary, jersey no. 19 scored a goal each for Sports Hostel, Odisha whereas Samir Tamang, jersey no. 25 scored a goal for Mohammedan



Sporting Club. Bhabagrahi Pradhiary, jersey no. 9 of Sports Hostel, Odisha, cash prize Rs. 10,000.

was declared "Hero of the Match" and awarded

SDFA also felicitated the guest of honour during

Ward development society inaugurated at Assam Lingzey

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

↑ ward development $oldsymbol{A}$ society under National Rural Livelihood Mission-NRLM under the Ministry of Rural Development was inaugurated at Community Hall, Assam Lingzey, today.

This society shall be an apex body for all Self Help Groups under Gairgaon Ward No.4 which shall coordinate with government or agencies for the preparation of road map for trainings, self-reliance, income generation and women empowerment, a press release informs.

The society will col-

lect weekly subscrip-

tion of Rs. 50 from each SHG member which will be further ploughed back to SHGs for investment in income generation initiatives.

The Society was inaugurated in the presence of Retd Joint Secretary, JP Rai, Social Worker, Denis Rai, Panchayat President, Ganesh Chettri, all ward panchayats, BPO, Umesh Gurung and other functionaries from State Rural Livelihood Mission.

Floriculturist, Man Subba, offered a helping hand for any floriculture projects by SHGs or the society.

Area MLA, Em Prasad Sharma, could not attend the event but had conveyed his best wishes to the new society.

Anti-CAA protests: Bhim Army chief moves Delhi court seeking bail

New Delhi, Jan 13 (PTI): Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad sought bail in a local court here on Monday in connection with violence during anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protest in Daryaganj area, claiming that police invoked "boilerplate" charges against him and arrested him "mechanically" without following the due process of law.

The court has put up the matter for further hearing on Tuesday.

Azad, currently in judicial custody, claimed he has been falsely implicated as the allegations levelled against him in the FIR were not only "ill founded", also "improba-

advocate through Mehmood Pracha, alleged that no specific incriminating role has been attributed to Azad in the whose contents

were "vague" and based

on "conjectures and surmises".

It said he was at all demonstrably making efforts to maintain peace.

Azad's outfit had called for a protest march from Jama Masjid to Jantar Mantar against the amended Citizenship Act on December 20, without police permission.

Other 15 people arrested in the case were granted bail by the court on January 9.

Azad's plea further said that he was willing to fully cooperate with the investigation in the case and would not tamper with any evidence or influence any witnesses.

"The police have invoked boilerplate The bail plea, filed charges against the accused (Azad) without the same being founded on any allegation or fact... and have arrested him mechanically without following the due process of law which renders the

initial and his continued detention completely illegal," it said.

"Accused has been falsely implicated in the present case as the allegations levelled against him in the FIR are not only ill founded but also improbable and cannot bring home the charges mentioned in it... Further, the contents of the FIR are vague and based on conjectures and surmises," alleged the plea, also filed through advocates O P Bharti and Jatin Bhatt.

The bail plea claimed that charging him with being a part of an unlawful assembly was "erroneous", as at no point of time during the alleged authorities declare the authorities for acting in neaceful protestors to be

an unlawful assembly. "No motive has been attributed to the accused in the present FIR, and all charges have been added mechanically... Charging

the accused with being

a part of an unlawful assembly is erroneous, as at no point of time during the alleged incident did the police authorities declare, announce, or proclaim the peaceful protestors to be an unlawful assembly, and nor were any warnings issued or announced in this regard.

"It may also be considered that all the material witnesses of the incident are police officials, and therefore it is further unlikely that any witness tampering will be attempted by any individual, especially the accused in the present application," the bail plea

The court had earincident did the police lier pulled up Tihar jail a "callous manner" by flouting laws that safeguard a prisoner's right and asked them to ensure that Azad was treated for polycythemia, a disorder of blood thickness, and taken to AIIMS, Delhi.

It had said that despite knowing Azad's condition, he was given ordinary medical care and not the treatment needed to address his ailment.

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Skill Development Program on Trout and Carp Farming



Namchi, 13 Jan (IPR):

Atwo-day Skill Development Programme on Trout and Carp Farming for fisheries stakeholders organised by Directorate of Fisheries, Namchi, in partnership with National Fisheries Development Board, Hvderabad, began at District Administrative Centre, Namchi today.

The program had the presence of Joint Director of Directorates of Fisheries, CS Rai as the chief guest along with Master Trainers of the programme, Deputy Director of Fisheries, South, RP Subba and RO (Fisheries), Yuwaraj Sharma, Assistant Director (Fisheries), Rochak Subba and progressive fish farmers of South District.

During the program, CS Rai spoke about this programme's aim and complimentary high

objective which is to increase the production of trout and carp fishes. He added that there is a rising demand for these fishes and Sikkim is a place wherein these fishes can be commercially farmed.

Master Trainer. Yuwaraj Sharma gave a detailed presentation on fisheries. He informed that the selection of site for construction of fish pond/raceway is important which needs to be slighted 17 meters in length, 2 metres breadth and 1.5 meters depth, below the ground level.

He also informed that Rs. 1.2 lakh is being granted on installment basis for the construction of raceway or pond by the government with one time yielding 2000 rainbow trout seeds and 3000 Amur variety of carp

On the occasion, Resource Person, RP Subba spoke on the technical aspects of fish harvesting, feeding and hatching of eggs, etc. He informed that suitable soil, climate and water are important as these aspects determine the cultivation techniques for developing and sustaining pisciculture which will also be equally responsible for development of production increase.

The certificate of participation along with work orders were also presented to stakeholders by the Chief Guest. It may be mentioned here that a total of 32 beneficiaries from the district participated in the pro-

Bhim Army chief taken to AIIMS for follow-up treatment

New Delhi, Jan 13 at the Department of **(PTI):** Bhim Army chief Chandra Shekhar Aazad, arrested in connection with violence during anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protest in Old Delhi's Daryaganj, was taken to AIIMS on Monday for "follow-up consultation and treat-

Aazad is suffering from polycythemia, a hody makes too many red blood cells.

Sources at AIIMS said Aazad has been undergoing treatment

Hematology for quite some time. "He has been brought for follow-up consultation and treatment. He is undergoing investigations and will be soon sent back," a source

On January 9, a Delhi court had directed Tihar Jail authorities to provide treatment for polycythemia to Aazad at All condition in which the India Institute of Medical Sciences in the national capital.

> In his plea to the court, Aazad had said he suffered from polycythe

mia and "requires continuous checkup from the doctors concerned from AIIMS, who are supervising his treatment for a long time."

If treatment was not provided urgently, it might lead to cardiac arrest, the plea said.

The Bhim Army chief was sent to judicial custody on December 21.

Aazad's outfit had organised a march from Jama Masiid to Jantar Mantar against the amended Citizenship Act on December 20, without

police permission.

Both Dhawan and Rahul can play, I might bat lower down, indicates skipper Kohli

NIKHIL BAPAT MUMBAI, JAN 13 (PTI): India captain Virat Kohli on Monday hinted at dropping himself down the batting order to accommodate both Shikhar Dhawan and KL Rahul in the playing XI against

Australia in the first ODI

With vice-captain Rohit Sharma an automatic pick, the team management is left with tough choice of selecting either Dhawan or Rahul in the playing eleven. But the skipper sees no reason why both can't play together.

"Look, a guy in form is always good for the team. ...You obviously want to have the best players available and then chose from what the combination should be for the team. There might be a possibility that all three (Rohit, Shikhar and Rahul) might play. It will be interesting to see what balance we want to take in on the field," Kohli said

on the eve of the match. Asked if he would he be happy to bat lower down the order, Virat said,"Yeah, big possibilitv. I would be very happy to do so. Look I am not possessive about where I play. I am not insecure about where I bat," said the skipper.

For Kohli, it is more important as to what kind of leadership legacy he leaves behind rather than chase personal glo-

"Being the captain of the team, it is my job to make sure that the next lot is also ready. A lot of the other people might not look at it that way, but your job as a captain is not only to look after the team right now, but also to prepare a team that you leave behind when you eventually pass it onto someone else," he added.

Kohli stressed that the vision has to be longterm one.

"So these are times when you need to be aware. It is very easy to get into a personal zone, saying I need to get runs and when I score, I feel good about everything. It is not like that, it does not work like that.

"The vision has to be always on the larger picture and figure out how can you make these guys confident. If at all someone has to take responsibility, it should be me and give the other guys opportunities as well."

Virat said that the present Australia side are stronger than the one when they toured India last year and returned victorious 3-2.

"They are a stronger side than the one that came to India last time, but they still won the series. In the series before that, they played a full strength side but we won the series.

"You can have the most experienced and the most skilled players in your squad but if you don't play well as a team in that series, you won't win. That's what happened to us last time and when we went to Australia, it's what happened to them," said Virat.

According to the India captain, the India captain the series between the two-sides have always been exciting. "That shows you how

competitive the series

between these two teams

are and it's never a dom-

inating series, the margin is always 3-2 or 2-1. Maybe five games would have been exciting.

"But taking on Australia, even in our conditions, they have played so much IPL, now they are pretty experienced in these conditions. It's always a good and a tough challenge playing Australia, because of the skill set and the mind set they bring on to the field," added the India skipper.

He also insisted that when India plays Australia, the competitive flavour tales precedence over context of a

bilateral series.

"When you are playing Australia, you don't look at the relevance of the series. It's about playing against the best. The way they are playing their cricket now, after Steve (Smith) and David (Warner) have come back, it's pretty intense. They are challenging every team and they are dominating few teams," he said.

India and Australia are the two sides with proper balance in each department, reckons Kohli.

"We, along with Australia, are probably the top two sides, as far as balance is concerned. Whether it's relevant or irrelevant that's for people to decide. But we as a team are excited to play Australia, in our conditions, to test ourselves against the best.

"But in the year of the World Cup, as many games we play, it is going to benefit us, especially white-ball cricket. From that point of view, we are looking forward to play this series," he signed off.

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Teacher Training Programme on Developing Vocational Teaching Skills

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

five-day Teacher **T**Training Programme (Induction cum In-Service Teachers' Training) on Developing Vocational Teaching Skills for the Vocational Teachers concluded on 11 Jan, 2020.

A press release informs, the training programme was organized by SIBIN Group in collaboration with the Samagra Shiksha, Education Department, Government of Sikkim, Gangtok, for teachers under Vocational Education Programme as per National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF)

298 teachers from 194 Government Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools attended the training held at Sir Tashi Namgyal Sr Sec School, Gangtok, from 07 to 11 Jan, 2020.

The programme was inaugurated by Joint Director, Education Department, Samagra Shiksha, Imbaraj Kurupaiya. Officials from Samagra Shiksha Education Department, were present at the event.

Resource person from SCERT, and Trade professionals from various Universities and industries of the state have participated as resource persons during the training for the entire five days they were spoke to the trainees on the objective of Vocational Education along with methodology of teaching. Training was



beneficial to the trainees and more focus would be on the skill based activities taking place at the Schools. Speaking on the occasion, Joint Director, Education Department, Samagra Shiksha, Imbaraj Kurupaiya. Officials from Education Department, Samagra Shiksha, emphasized that each year more and more students are opting for vocational courses, so the faculty was asked to prepare themselves to shoulder more responsibilities in preparing and shaping a

7/43) and following on

154; 43/5 overs (Rex Raj-

kumar 77; Shivam Kumar

4/68, Saket 3/35). Bihar

won by an innings and

183 runs. Points: Bihar 7,

534/7 declared and 10

for no loss. Arunachal

Pradesh 460; 118.5 overs

(Rahul Dalal 267 not out,

Akhilesh Sahani 65; Imli-

In Sovima: Nagaland

Manipur 0.

meaningful career for all the vocational students. He stressed the need to create interest among the students so that the learning can be fun along with the need for providing more practical oriented class room sessions.

Abhijeet grabs 10, Bihar rout Manipur in three days as Manipur were skittled

BALURGHAT BENGAL), JAN 13 (PTI): Medium pacer Abhijeet Saket returned with a career-best match haul of 10 wickets to power Bihar to an innings and 183-run victory over Manipur in their Ranji Trophy Plate group fixture here on Monday.

Abhijeet, who had claimed 7/12 against Mizoram in the last outing, was again at his best this morning, grabbing 7/43

out for 94 with only two of their batsmen getting to double digits.

Following on, Manipur fought better with No. 8 Rex Rajkumar waging a lone battle during his 77 not out, but Shivam Kumar (4/68) and Abhijeet (3/35) shared seven wickets between them to bundle them out for 154 in 43.5 overs, handing Bihar their second victory.

24-year-old

claimed a career-best match haul of 10/78 in his fourth appearance. He now has 21 wickets at an average of 12.14.

Bihar opener Indrajit Kumar, who laid the foundation with his 134 on the opening day, was adjudged Man of the Match. Bihar now have 15

points from four matches to be at fourth place, while Manipur have 12 from five games.

Brief Scores:

In Balurghat: Bihar wati Lemtur 5/123, Shri-431. Manipur 94; 38.1 kant Mundhe 4/96). overs (Abhijeet Saket

In Chandigarh: Sikkim 264 and 69/3; 26 overs. Chandigarh 360; 97.4 overs (Gurinder Singh 99, Bipul Sharma 58, Raman Bishnoi 51, Uday Kaul 44; Iqbal Abdulla 4/89, Ishwar Chaudhary 4/105).

In Puducherry: Goa 270 and 229/5; 83 overs (Snehal Kauthankar 64 batting, Smit Patel 60, Darshan Misal 48 batting). Puducherry 260.

Raut dubs book comparing Shivaji with PM Modi as 'insulting' should quit the BJP over

MUMBAI, JAN 13 (PTI): Terming the book comparing Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj "insulting", senior Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Monday asked the warrior king's descendants to clarify their stand over the issue.

Talking to reporters here, Raut said the BJP should declare that it has no link with the book comparing Modi with Chhatrapati Shivaji.

The book, titled "Aaj ke Shivaji: Narendra Modi", has been written by BJP leader Jay Bhagwan Goyal.

The Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress, which are part of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government, have criticised the book.

"A BJP leader has written the book titled 'Aaj Ke Shivaji: Narendra Modi', which we find insulting. The party should clarify whether it considers Prime Minister Narendra Modi as great as Shivaji Maharaj," Raut

Without taking any names, Raut targeted the warrior king's descendants - BJP's Rajya Sabha Chhatrapati member Sambhaji Raje and former Satara MP Udayanraje Bhosale, Bhosale, who recently joined the BJP after quitting the

"Chhatrapati Shivaji's descendants should clarify if they like Modi being compared to him. They

the book," the Sena leader said.

Raut said the book's author Jay Bhagwan Goyal was once with the Shiv Sena, but was removed from the party after he allegedly attacked the Maharashtra Sadan in

"BJP leaders are quite active when it comes to some issues such as (pertaining to Hindutva ideologue) V D Savarkar. I hope they will demonstrate similar efficiency in this case also. The BJP should declare that it has no link with the book," the Shiv Sena's Rajya Sabha member said.

The descendants of Shivaji Maharaj from Satara and Kolhapur are

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

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Department of Sports & Youth Affairs Government of Sikkim

affiliated with the BJP. They should speak out their views on the issue,

Sambhaji Raje on Sunday demanded that BJP chief Amit Shah immediately ban the book, which was published in the saffron party's Delhi office.

Maharashtra Conspokesperson Atul Londhe on Sunday lodged a complaint with Nagpur Police against Goyal for allegedly hurting the sentiments of people by comparing Modi with Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in his book.

In his complaint, the Congress leader sought action against Goyal, the publisher of the book and its distributor.

Resist

Free speech is muffledbrandishing rods, showering bullets. The pusillanimous assailants covered in masks, sometimes donning khakis. Altars of knowledge, turned into makeshift battlefields. The state unleashes its might, ironically, against

But the wall pushes back, unfazed, unafraid. Showcasing the diversity, the autocrats are out to crush. Singing jan gan, reciting the preamble, even quoting Faiz. They exude the spirit, that brought down the colonialists. An ideological battle rages, the victor will decide our fate.

its citizens.

Tshering Namgyal Bhutia

PEOPLE'S FORUM

Definet ATMs - Govt needs to intervene

On the way to Gangtok supposed to work 24*7 to visit a relative patient today, I needed to withdraw some money from ATM. I tried almost all the outlets from Makha but to no avail! Some of the so called 24x7 ATM outlets were closed and all others didn't have

The bank ATMs are

as advertised but none of the outlets seem to be working.

If the banks cannot maintain and provide services to the customers they should be blacklisted from the state. Only the reliable banks need to be permitted to operate in the state.

This is I suppose the perception of most of the local people of Sikkim which needs immediate intervention by the government.

- D.P. Sharma

| We invite our readers to send in letters, complaints, etc on the People's Forum section of Summit Times.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL DIRECTOR PEN-SION, GROUP INSURANCE & PROVIDENT FUND FINANCE DEPARTMENT **GANGTOK**

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Date: 13.01.2020

NOTICE

The PGIPF Division of Finance Department, Government of Sikkim is conducting Pension Adalat at the District Head Quarters as per the schedule detailed below. All Pensioners including Family Pensioners are requested to kindly attend the said Pension Adalat with their queries and grievances between 10.30 AM to 1.30 PM **Date District** Venue

20.01.2020	North	Conference Hall of District Collector, Mangan
22.01.2020	South	Conference Hall of Zilla Panchyat, Namchi
23.01.2020	West	Conference Hall of District Collector, Rabdentse
27.01.2020	East	Conference Hall of District Collector, Gangtok

Deepak Kumar Pradhan Director, PGIPF State Pension Nodal Office

R.O. No. 325/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20dt. 13.01.2010



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION **GYALSHING, WEST**

Memo No: 581/EDN/W

Dated: 07/01/2020

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender (two bid) are hereby invited on behalf of Government of Sikkim for supplies of groceries and related items to KGBV, Labing, West Sikkim for a period of 01(one) year for academic session 2020-21. With a provision for extension upto two years based on performance. The supplies to be made as per the supply order of the department. **Terms & Condition:**

1. Any local registered Grocery shop/supplier/Catering firm having following documents may apply;

- a. Sikkim Subject/COI
- b. Valid Certificate of registration of firm/trade license.
- c. Valid GST registration.
- d. Latest GST clearance from commercial taxes. e. Solvency Certificate of Rs.10.00 lakhs.
- 2. The interested party may collect the tender form (Technical & financial) and other Terms & Conditions in Appendix - I, from the office of Addl. Director, Education Department, West Sikkim from 11 am to 2 pm on any working day w.e.f. 10.01.2020 to 17.01.2020 on production of BR of Rs.1,000 duly creited to Major Head 0202-800-other
- 3. The duly filled up tender form in sealed cover should reach the office of Addl. Director, District Education Office, West accompanied by self Attested documents as mentioned in Sl.No. 1 above with TDR (refundable) of Rs. 1,00,000(one lacs only) drawn in favour of Additional Director, Education Septt., West from SBS Gyalshing before 12:00 noon of 21.01.2020 tender received after 12:00 noon of 21.01.2020 will not be entertained.
- 4. The sealed tender will be opened on 21.01.2020 at 1PM in the office of DC(W) in presence of tender committee, tenderers & authorized representatives present.
- 5. Incomplete tender are liable to be rejected.
- 6. The department confers the right to accept or reject any or all tender without assign ing any reason thereof.

District Collector DAC, Rabdentse Govt. of Sikkim West District.

R.O. NO. 322/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20

Dt. 9.1.2020

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Summit TIMES

Trolled You

Kirtey-parcha draftsmen playing with new toys

none are the days when trolls were these imag-Ginary creatures which would jump out from under bridges and play villains in children's storybooks. They were almost cute, and invariably outwitted. Nowadays, trolls are often anonymous, but always insecure creatures of the online world who are bawled into duty when reasoned debate becomes too difficult to engage in for the pettiness which marshals these, to borrow from Hillary, "basket of deplorables".

So, who are these modern-day trolls? These are people, some using real names and then also using several online avatars, who find meaning in their life by being mean online. Being mean is no crime, but when the meanness degenerates to threats and obvious nuisance, something needs to be done. Cops in Sikkim as well as elsewhere pick up drunkards and book them for causing nuisance and public disorder even if they are just screaming gibberish on the streets in their drunken rants. And yet, agent provocateurs take nuisance and public disorder to offensive levels without facing any action. And so they get stronger. Roadside Romeos are often shamed and locked-up, and yet, in the online space, much worse than eve-teasing is played out on a regular basis and it is allowed to continue. Good policing, at least the kind that genuinely looks out for the people without first having received orders to do so, of course, is a bit too much to expect in our country of VIPs and VIPs-in-the-making, but what about the audience? Shouldn't they agree on a policy which immediately blocks trolls the moment one jumps up? Trolls purposefully stir up trouble in social media communities by being vicious, deceitful and nasty. While being nasty or even vicious is a personal choice which should not attract public comment, trolling starts venturing into criminality when the name-calling starts dealing in lies and character assassinations. Sikkim knows these kinds well since it has a long history of engaging in political debate through the medium of kirtey-parchas - the anonymous pamphlets - which proved that politicians think that the people are stupid and were convinced that politicking means dealing in fiction not facts. But that trade appears to be doing well for all sides (accept it, all sides did, and are using trolls to fight their battles). Modi-bhakts have taken this form of assault to a new, very scarily well-organised level, but it is not as if Sikkim does not see its own "local" trolls in offensive action on occasion as well. Much as trolls need to be condemned, sometimes, also spare them some sympathy. One needs to be dredging very deep in the pits which suck out self-respect to do obviously shameful things just to rise in the ranks of sycophants.

As for the targets of trolling, let's please not call them victims because that will give too much credibility to the sorry armies of trolls, they can begin by feeling good about it because only the important and significant voices are searched out from the sea of online voices for such treatment. And never feed the troll. Responding to them, or even noticing them, makes them relevant, feeds their hate. Ignore them, and this is not just for the targets but also for all those who even find them sitting on their timelines, and they will crawl back into the nothingness they have emerged from. Come on, we have managed to lose our morals and even our Gods by ignoring them; trolls could not be stronger than that. Since it is leaders who the trolls are out to impress more than the targets they appear to be hounding, maybe people should also consider unfriending/blocking all leaders who share, forward or fail to condemn trolls. In fact, leaders - political and social, okay, also religious - need to take the initiative in such efforts. But they probably won't, or will do so, like always, selectively, and that does not work; so it will have to be the lay people who spit the trolls out of social media spaces.

Meanwhile, has anyone noticed that the young appear to have grown disgusted with us muddying their media (read Facebook) and have moved on to other platforms for social online engagements?

WRITE US:

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

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

The Attacks on Two Delhi Universities Reveal **Modi's Targets: Muslims and Their Allies**

MUKUL KESAAN

THEGUARDIAN

In the middle of December, Delhi I police tried to shut down university protests against the religiously discriminatory Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) by caning Muslim students into submission. Police officers smashed their way into the library at Jamia Millia Islamia university (where I teach history), trashed bookcases and beat the students inside, badly damaging the eyesight of one in the process. They threw teargas grenades into the reading room to force students out. Their excuse was they were chasing violent demonstrators who had taken refuge in campus buildings.

Last week, Delhi police also assembled outside another educational establishment. This time the police remained decorously outside the gates of Jawaharlal Nehru University, India's most well known, cordoning off the campus as masked goons armed with iron rods and improvised bludgeons ran riot inside. They broke into a hostel reserved for women students, inflicted head injuries on the president of INU's student union. who is a woman, and attacked faculty members who tried to protect them. Some 20 students and teachers were hospitalised. After three hours of thuggery the police entered the university at the vice-chancellor's belated invitation but made no arrests because the criminals had mysteriously slipped away despite the police cordon.

The Delhi police was the common factor in the two assaults, in the first instance as perpetrator and in the second as auxiliary. The force reports to the home affairs minister, Amit Shah, prime minister Narendra Modi's right-hand man. Jamia and JNU are centrally funded universities that have attracted the violent displeasure of Modi's government for different but related reasons. Taken together, these reasons define

the ruling Bharatiya Janata party's majoritarian project - its reason for being.

The attack on Jamia was triggered by the BJP government's determination to snuff out protests against the CAA, which excludes Muslim migrants from the amnesty given to others from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Having smuggled into law a religious test for citizenship for one class of migrants, the government hopes to press its advantage further by forcing Indians to prove their citizenship to a latterday inquisition, the National Register of Citizens. The NRC is the citizenship act's evil twin; those who aren't able to document their claim to being Indian before the tribunals of the NRC will be cast into limbo – but non-Muslims among them can hope to be rescued by the CAA's amnesty.

Undocumented Muslims will have no such recourse; they will be interned and deported as Amit Shah promised in the speeches he made all over the country. This destabilisation of Muslim citizenship is a great prize for a majoritarian party such as the BIP which sees India as a Hindu nation, Hindus as its natural citizens and Muslims as potential fifth columnists with extraterritorial loyalties. Jamia was brazenly attacked by the police of this would-be Hindu nation because the government was confident that making a violent example of a Muslim university would play well in public.

It had good reason to be confident. Modi had won an absolute majority in parliament for the second time in 2019; the supreme court had awarded the site of a mosque demolished in 1991 by Hindu mobs, led by BJP leaders, to Hindu litigants who claimed it was the god Ram's birthplace; the government had successfully reduced India's one Muslim-majority state, Jammu and Kashmir, into two Delhi-administered union territories, and the citizenship amend-



ment bill had been expertly ushered through both houses of parliament with hardly any resistance from a divided and demoralised opposition.

Against the odds, this attempt to shock Indian Muslims into submission by brutalising a Muslim university backfired - for two reasons. First, the assault galvanised Muslims all over the country into spontaneous and sustained resistance to the CAA and NRC. Second, the police atrocities in Jamia led to huge demonstrations of solidarity in colleges and universities all over India and sparked a fire of resistance, against the furtive bigotry of the CAA, which continues to burn.

The BJP has long believed that its anti-Muslim project has two enemies: Muslims, and those non-Muslims who see Muslims as equal citizens under the constitution. The Delhi police made an example of Jamia as a warning to India's Muslims. When that didn't go according to plan, the same police travelled several miles across the city to help make an example of a university that the BJP sees as the institutional incarnation of the secularism that might yet thwart its dreams of a Hindu nation. Since majoritarian parties are constitutionally incapable of empathy, the BJP understands JNU's brand of secular solidarity as a form of Hindu self-hatred.

For the better part of Modi's first

term in office, there has been a running battle between INU students and central government, a David and Goliath standoff that has turned student politicians into national figures. But the BJP's loathing of the university is obsessive and wildly out of proportion to the threat that its students and teachers pose. Stung by the pan-Indian support that Jamia's anti-CAA protests have provoked, Modi's government seems to have concluded that it was all INU's fault. Otherwise it is hard to believe that a dispute over accommodation charges - the last source of conflict between JNU students and the authorities to make headlines - could goad a national government into risking complicity in this violent charade. The only other explanation for the attack is that it was an attempt to turn attention away from the anti-CAA protests by giving people something else to be outraged about.

It's hard to predict what lasting effect the assaults on these two universities will have on Indian politics. A party that controls the state will generally outlast spontaneous civil society movements that lack political leadership. For the moment, though, the passion (and existential panic) that has powered this campaign against sectarianism seems to have deranged Modi's leviathan.

Britain's Racism Pantomime: Now Starring Meghan and Harry

▼t's pantomime season again. Is Britain racist? Oh **I** no it's not. Oh yes it is! The script is ready – all we need is to find new stars, maybe update the rest of the cast here and there. The last performance, at the end of December, featured Stormzy, a crowd favourite whose misreported quote about racism in Britain sent the country into days of absurd debate. Is it "100% racist"? Or is it definitely racist, yes, 100%?

The headlines were already well rehearsed. "'100% wrong!' Sajid Javid hits out at Stormzy over claims the UK is a 'racist country'", said the Daily Express. Javid has become a key character in these national circuses, cooing out denials with a robotic chirpiness on Twitter. Before Stormzy's starring role, there was the performance featuring Naga Munchetty – a special edition with the BBC as an endearingly bumbling villain. And did you see the one with Diane Abbott? It's one of the most popular – and long-running – of the "but is it racism?" shows.

This week there is a very special guest in the pantomime – Meghan. Has her treatment in Britain been marked by racism? Oh no it hasn't! Oh yes it has! The cast assume their positions. On one side of the stage, black and brown people are summoned to perform their parts in the pantomime - with frustration, disbelief, even tears. In the middle are the mediators, the TV and radio programme hosts - earnest, but clinically, unrelentingly goading. On the other side of the stage, the professional race-baiters, the red-tops, the "journalists", the online trolls elevated to respectability once again, and Piers Morgan. There is always Piers Morgan.

Britain's conversation about race endlessly repeats itself, first as tragedy, and for ever thereafter as farce. Instead of discussing race relations in this country through the issues of hate crime, systemic police prejudice and the dramatic disparity of opportunity between people of different ethnic backgrounds, we have decided to debate it by constantly arguing about whether it is relevant. Because things are so much better than they used to be, aren't they?

In many ways, any improvement in race relations has come with a proportional decline in self-awareness, and with it a degradation of the public conversation on race. The increased visibility of black and brown people in those spaces where this conversation takes place - in politics and the media - has achieved little apart from sift-



ing them into for and against camps. Whenever a public figure is subjected to racist behaviour, a sort of kangaroo court is set up, one with an impossibly high bar for proving a racist event has occurred anything short of an explicit slur or a violent attack can easily be explained away. The outcome of the litigation is certain because the whole point of the exercise is the spectacle, rather than the inquiry. It's a set-up.

The subjects of the spectacle are not chosen by accident. As a nation, we love a celebrity racism row, and the media is happy to play both sides: everyone loves to read about celebrities, and it's easy work to tear down someone young, famous and wealthy for claiming to be a victim of racism. In fact, it is this cherrypicking of the most prominent figures that guarantees that the national conversation about race is diverted into one about privilege.

Is there a worse advertisement for victimhood than a literal princess? Are there worse advocates for the literal princess than the few black and brown people in the media – whose very presence in these exclusive debates (where they are generally not included unless race is the subject) is taken to demonstrate their own privilege? They will be accused of ungratefulness for living and thriving in a 100%-not-racist country that has provided them with the opportunity to appear on Newsnight approximately once a year to be sneered at.

The chosen protagonists - the princess, the pop star, the TV presenter, the politician – ensure that the conversation is never really about racism. Confining our attention to elite victims conveniently shrinks the subject to something neat and quick: it can be packaged into a short viral video, a highly quotable column that is basically an extended tweet, a studio shouting match that will light up social media.

There will be no time to discuss the laziness, complicity and complacency of a media class that has turned racism into a spectator sport. There will be no time to discuss the unique toxicity of tabloid culture, and why it thrives in the UK. There will be no time to discuss the large swathes of a deeply conservative country that are goaded and taunted by a cultural showreel from the metropolis that inflames and excludes them.

There will be no time to talk about the rightwards creep of our political culture under successive Tory governments that have consistently turned up the dial on nativism. There will be no time to position these elite victims as central characters in a culture war led by the right - one that has weaponised the word "woke" to discredit any efforts, or even gestures, towards social justice. There will be no time for anything but performance.

And in the performance, behind a mask of innocent inquiry, the same old interrogation - which pretends to ask about racism in Britain, but in fact only hopes to smoke you out in the open and then draw some blood. Look out. It's behind you.



New Delhi, Jan 13 (PTI): Hundreds of Jamia Millia Islamia students gheraoed Vice Chancellor Najma Akhtar's office on Monday, demanding registration of an FIR against Delhi Police in connection with last month's violence on the campus.

Among other demands, they also want the university to reschedule examinations and ensure security of students.

The students barged into the office premises after breaking the lock on the main gate and raised slogans against the VC.

Akhtar tried to pacify

the students and said attempts were being made to file an FIR but it has not been registered yet. The vice chancellor said she has raised the matter with the government and has also sought legal course in the matter.

She said security has been doubled on the campus.

Angry students claimed that notices were given to vacate the hostel post the violence, a charge denied by Akhtar.

Saeed Fahad, a student, said FIRs have been registered against those who were demanding their rights during protest. The real accused are still at large, he said referring to the police crackdown.

Adil, an engineering student, said not even a single FIR has been filed in connection with last month's violence.

On December 15, protestors torched four public buses and two police vehicles as they clashed with police in New Friends' Colony near Jamia Millia Islamia during a demonstration against the amended Citizenship Act, leaving nearly 60 people including students, cops and

fire fighters injured.

Committee set up by MHA on Assam meets Amit Shah

New Delhi, Jan 13 (PTI): A high-level committee, set up by the Home Ministry to suggest ways for providing constitutional safeguards to the indigenous people of Assam, on Monday met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and discussed with him issues related to its work.

A four-member delegation of the committee, headed by Justice (Retd) Biplab Kumar Sharma. met the home minister for an hour and briefed him about the progress of its work.

"We have apprised the home minister about the progress of our work. The home minister has given a few suggestions. We hope to submit our final report within next 15 days," Sharma told reporters here.

The committee with more than a dozen members was set up as per the Clause 6 of the 1985 Assam Accord.

According to its terms

PATNA, JAN 13 (PTI):

Bihar Chief Minister Ni-

tish Kumar on Monday

asserted that a nation-

wide implementation of National Register of Citi-

zens (NRC) was needless

and had no justification.

on the floor of the state

assembly while thanking

the House members for unanimously approving

a constitutional amend-

ment for extending quo-

He made the remarks

and conditions, "The Asked whether the committee will assess the appropriate level of reservation of seats in Assam Legislative Assembly and local bodies for the Assamese people." soon.

"The committee will recommend the appropriate level of reservations in employment under the government of Assam for the Assamese people," according to a home ministry notification.

panel could finalise the "definition of Assamese", the retired judge said they were yet to take a decision on it and hope to come to a conclusion

committee will soon meet to finalise the report and all remaining issues to be resolved," he said.

"All members of the

The meeting took place four days after Assam Chief Minister Sar-

Nationwide NRC needless, has no justification: Nitish

bananda Sonowal met the home minister and discussed with him various aspects of the Assam Accord's Clause 6, under which the central government had promised to provide constitutional safeguards to the indige-

The committee is said to have completed its deliberations and discussions with various stakeholders in Assam.

nous people.

The meeting was held amidst widespread protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in Assam. It bears significance as there has been a growing feeling among the indigenous people of Assam that the newly enacted legislation will hurt their interests both politically, culturally as well as socially.

The Assam Accord provides for detection and deportation of all illegal immigrants, who have entered the country after 1971 and living in the state, irrespective of their religion.

According to CAA, members of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities who have come from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan till December 31, 2014, facing religious persecution there will not be treated as illegal immigrants but given Indian citizenship.

The protesters in Assam said that the CAA violates the provisions of Assam Accord.

TMC students' wing continues anti-CAA demonstration with songs, poems



KOLKATA, JAN 13 (PTI): The Trinamool Congress students' wing is continuing to protest the Citizenship Amendment Act or CAA with songs, poems and speeches at a

Their demonstration entered the fourth day on Monday.

in the heart of the city

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who is also the TMC supremo, visited the sit-in venue on Saturday and is likely to pay another visit on Monday afternoon.

The protesters of the Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) were seen carrying posters and placards against the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

They demanded that the new citizenship law be revoked.

TMCP leaders said that their protest is also against the violence in sit-in demonstration on Jawaharlal Nehru Uni-Rani Rashmoni Avenue versity and Jamia Millia Islamia in New Deini.

> "NRC, CAA and NPR is not just discriminatory against Muslims but is also against the poor, the working-class people and the students. Why do we need to prove our citizenship after so many years of Independence?

> "We want jobs for youths and food for the poor. The Centre should be bothered about these issues rather than keeping themselves busy deciding who is an Indian and who is not." a senior

TMCP leader said while addressing the demonstration.

CPI(M)-affiliated Students Federation of India (SFI), however, mocked the TMCP for organising a sit-in against CAA "while Mamata Banerjee compromised the fight against the law by meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi".

"On one hand TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee is meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi by not participating in the opposition meeting and on the other, TMCP is

staging a protest. "This is nothing but a drama which has already been exposed before the masses," SFI state secretary Srijan Bhattacharva said.

other 10 years.

Referring to an impassioned speech made by Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav, who had demanded that the chief minister, who is an ally of the BJP, come clean on the issue of Citizenship (Amendment) Act, NRC and National Population Register (NPR), Kumar wondered from where did this talk of NRC sprung up?

The country is wit-

nessing huge turmoil on these issues (CAA, NRC and NPR), Kumar said, adding that we should keep in mind that NRC was an exercise confined to Assam as part of the accord signed by

A natiowide NRC would be needless (koi zarurat nahin hai) and has no justification (koi auchitya nahin hai). We do not think any such

the Rajiv Gandhi gov-

ernment.



thing is going to take place. I think the prime

minister, too, has spoken clearly on this, he added.

tas to SCs and STs by an-**Assam Assembly ratifies** bill to extend SC/ST quota



unanimously ratified the Constitution (126th Amendment) Bill, 2019, which extends quotas for SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and state legislatures by another 10 years.

A special one-day session of the Assembly was held to ratify the Bill, which was passed by the Parliament on December 11 last year.

Moving the proposal in the House, Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal sought the support of all

Guwahati, Jan 13 (PTI): the legislators as he said, The Assam Assembly on the Bill would ensure socio-economic uplift of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

He also spoke about various schemes undertaken by his government for the welfare of SC/ST students.

Leader of the opposition in the Assembly, Debabrata Saikia of the Congress, Asom Gana Parishad's Bhaben Bharali, Bodo People's Front's Kamal Singh Narzary and AIUDF's Hafiz Bashir spoke supporting the resolution.

WB guv invites CM, other pol leaders to discuss

Kolkata, Jan 13 (PTI): West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday invited Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and leaders of the state's legislature parties for a meeting on January 17 to discuss matters pertaining to two bills that have been cleared by the Assembly and was

The governor has sought "guidance" and a "way forward" on the two bills -- West Bengal (Prevention of Lynching) Bill, 2019 and West **Bengal State Commission** for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Bill, 2019 -- both passed by the Assembly on August

Have started process to identify refugees: UP minister

LUCKNOW, JAN 13 (PTI): The state government has started the process to identify refugees for the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act, said UP minister Shrikant Sharma here on Mon-

"The notification for the CAA (by the Centre) has been issued and all district magistrates in UP have been asked to collect data." Sharma told PTI.

In the first list, over 32,000 refugees have been identified in 21 districts of the state and the exercise is going on in the entire state as per information I have from the state Home Department, Sharma added.

There are 75 districts in the state.

When asked about the countries they belong to, Sharma said,"They are from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh."

The districts from where the first list has arrived included Gorakh-Sahranpur, pur, Aligarh, Rampur, Pratapgarh, Pilibhit, Lucknow, Varnaasi, Bahraich, Lakhimpur, Rampur, Meerut, Agra.

Sources said Pilibhit has the maximum number of refugees. However, the exact number is yet to be disclosed by the state government.

"The exercise is going on and as the data comes, we will update figures," Sharma said.

An NGO, Nagrik Adhikar Manch, has also prepared a 116page report, "Uttar Pradesh Mein Aaye Pakistan, Afghanistan Evam Bangladesh ke Sharnarthivon ki Aapbeeti (Unke Utpeedan ki Kahani)" and sent it to the state and the Centre.

The state government has not confirmed whether it was taking the report into account or not.

"We have got the report of the Nagrik Adhikar Manch," senior Home Department official said, who refused to elaborate.

The Centre last week had issued a gazette notification announcing that the CAA has come into effect from January 10, 2020. The Act grants citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim minorities from Pakistan. Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

BJP office gutted in Bengal, saffron party blames TMC

ASANSOL (WB), JAN 13 (PTI): A BJP office was gutted in West Bengal's Paschim Burdwan district, following which the saffron party activists accused the TMC of being behind the incident.

A party office of the BJP at Salanpur area in Asansol was reduced to ashes in a blaze on Sunday night and an investigation is on to ascertain the cause of the fire, a senior police officer said.

The BJP has put the blame on TMC, which the ruling party in West Bengal has denied, terming the incident a result of a brawl between "goons" of the saffron party.

"As part of an initiative by union minister and local MP Babul Supriyo, BJP workers distributed blankets to tribals in the area on Sunday morning, following which TMC activists set fire to our party office.

"Several other BIP offices in the area have been set ablaze in the past by the TMC. As the popularity of our party is on the rise, TMC is using these tactics to terrorise the people," BJP leader Abhijit Roy said.

Dismissing the allegations, Salanpur's TMC MLA Bidhan Upadhyay said the incident was a result of a brawl between "goons" of the BJP.

"Lottery tickets used to be sold at the entrance of the BJP party office and goons affiliated to the saffron party used to consume liquor there. This incident is a result of a brawl between them," he said.

Man shot by forest guards in Bengal's Alipurduar, locals protest

JALPAIGURI, JAN 13 (PTI): A 33-year-old man was shot dead by forest guards in West Bengal's Alipurduar district on Monday, triggering tension in the area.

The incident happened in Mantharam area of Kalchini block in the district. Bimal Rava, a resi-

dent of Uttar Mendabari area, went to rear cattle on Sunday evening at a nearby forest area and while returning he lost his way. When he reached near his home early morning, he was shot at by forest guards, local sources said.

Rava, stated to be mentally challenged, was then taken to Alipurduar district hospital where doctors declared him

brought dead.

Protesting against the death, locals vandalised a forest department office in the area and also a government vehicle.

Officials said a large number of police personnel has been deputed to control the situation.

Forest Minister Rajib Banerjee visited Rava's home and spoke to his family.

Later, speaking to reporters at 'Sabala Mela' in Nagrakata town of neighbouring Jalpaiguri district, the minister said he has ordered a high-level probe into the incident.

Banerjee said the chief forest conservator has been asked to submit the probe report to him based on which the family will be given compensation.

pending bills

waiting for his nod.

30 last year.



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Real Madrid beat Atlético Madrid on penalties to lift Spanish Supercopa

JEDDAH, 13 JAN [AP]: Thibaut Courtois was the hero for Real Madrid as they won the Spanish Super Cup final with a 4-1 penalty shootout victory over rivals Atlético Ma-

Courtois kept out Thomas Partey's spotkick after making a number of vital saves following Federico Valverde's red card in extra-time, as it ended 0-0 after 120 minutes. Saúl Ñíguez also missed for Atlético, allowing Sergio Ramos to convert the winning spot-kick in the first year of the revised format of the competition, which was played in Saudi Ara-

It was an 11th Super Cup for Real, who dominated the 90 minutes but ended up relying on Courtois to send the game to penalties with two big stops. The LaLiga match between the two sides ended goalless in September, so there was no surprise that this was a cagey affair in Jeddah.

Real settled the quickest, but Diego Simeone's men, who beat Barcelona in the semi-finals, created the first big chance as Joao Felix intercepted Ramos' pass on the edge of the area, but his snapshot went wide of the far post. Zinedine Zidane's men began to dominate possession, but this was a Simeone defence they were up against and chances were hard to create. Their best of the opening 45 minutes came when left-back Ferland Mendy went on an adventurous run but his shot was easy for Jan Oblak to save.

diately carried more threat after the break as Luka Jovic was in menacing form, going close after getting free of two defenders. Jovic was enjoying himself and provided a superb chance for Valverde midway through the second half, but the defender somehow headed on to his own knee inside the sixvard box.

Real Madrid imme-

Atlético had been camped in their half but had a chance to go ahead with 11 minutes left when Kieran Trippier teed up Álvaro Morata but his former Chelsea team-mate Courtois got down well to keep out a low shot.

With extra-time looming Real had a chance to claim glory as the ball fell to Rodrygo but he shot straight at Oblak. Valverde saw red in the additional period for hacking down Morata when he was through on goal and then Courtois had to produce two big saves to keep his side in it. He kept out Trippier's low cross and then did well to stop Angel Correa's effort and those saves proved vital.

After Saul missed Atlético's opening penalty by hitting the post, the Belgian stopper then made a save off Partey's effort to put Real in command. Ramos finished the job as Zidane collected more silverware.

Simeone said: "Fede Valverde's red card was the most important moment of the game. I told him not to worry, that anyone would've done the same in his position. He won the game.

Xavi 'would love' to coach Barca amid rumors of his return

BARCELONA, JAN 13 (AP): Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde's job appears in serious doubt after his club met with Xavi Hern ndez amid growing speculation that its former midfield great could become its next coach.

Those rumors were stoked to fever pitch when Qatari club Al-Sadd - where Xavi coaches said that Barcelona was negotiating with him.

"There are negotiations between Xavi and Barcelona now and we wish him success wherever he decides to go," Al-Sadd's sports director Muhammad Ghulam Al Balushi told Oatari television broadcaster Alkass.

Xavi said he had met with Barcelona sports director Eric Abidal on Friday in Doha but did not reveal the nature of the meeting. He added that he is committed to coaching Al-Sadd for now.

I don't hide my dream of coaching Barcelona one day, I would love to coach the team. I support them and my dream is to train Barcelona, but now my focus is on Al-Sadd, Xavi said Saturday after his side's 4-1 win over Al-Rayyan in the Qatar Cup semifinals.

Eric Abidal is my friend. Out of respect for Barcelona and Al-Sadd, my focus is on the next match against Al-Duhail, he said. I cannot speak on this issue and the conversation was on many issues with Abidal. Barcelona has made no public

comment on the meeting. The 39-year-old Xavi left Barcelona for Al-Sadd in 2015, following 17 trophy-laden seasons. A World Cup winner with Spain, he is one of the club's all-time greats and has long been seen as a future coach at Camp

But most fans expected that day to be far away and for Xavi to perhaps follow the path of former Barcelona players Pep Guardiola and Luis Enrique, who returned as coaches of its reserve side to gain experience before eventually making the leap to its star-studded senior team.

Xavi, however, is not the only possible replacement being touted by local media.

Barcelona-based sports daily Mundo Deportivo said that reserve team Javier Garc a Pimienta could be promoted as a snap replacement. Netherlands manager and former Barcelona star Ronald Koeman has for several years been considered another strong candidate.

Valverde is under intense pressure after his team conceded two late goals to Atl tico Madrid in a 3-2 loss in the Spanish Super Cup semifinals on Thursday. The loss added to the perception many supporters have that Valverde's side throws away leads against important rivals, tarnishing his otherwise strong record that includes back-to-back Spanish league titles.

Sergio Agüero hits hat-trick at Aston Villa in Manchester City demolition job

PAUL DOYLE

BIRMINGHAM, 13 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Manchester City reclaimed second place in the Premier League thanks to the leading overseas scorer in Premier League history. Sergio Agüero wrested that title from Thierry Henry here thanks to three goals that also took him beyond Alan Shearer's record for the number of Premier League hat-tricks, with his 12th bringing up an extraordinary tally of 177 league goals since his arrival at Manchester City in 2011.

In addition to being a supreme predator Agüero has developed under Pep Guardiola to endanger defences in other ways too. Here, for instance, he helped to create both Riyad Mahrez goals while his fellow forward Gabriel Jesus also found the net on an afternoon when Aston Villa performed so badly that several unwitting assists could be attributed to them. Anwar El Ghazi's late goal from a penalty certainly did not dilute their humiliation.

City were 4-0 up at half-time before Agüero added two more goals in the second period.

JAMIE JACKSON

The only positive that Villa's manager, Dean Smith, could salvage from the rubble of this performance was that it strengthened the case for using this month's transfer window to procure players capable of filling the holes ripped in his team by injuries even before City tore more.

While the visitors

started here with two strikers, one an all-time great and the other Iesus, Villa had none at all. With Wesley injured and Jonathan Kodjia omitted, the winger El Ghazi had to fill in up front. And that was only one of the home team's problems on an afternoon when they sank into the bottom three before kick-off owing to Watford's win at Bournemouth. Things deteriorated from there.

One prospective signing, the goalkeeper Pepe Reina, was at Villa Park to run the rule over his potential new teammates before completing a loan move from AC Milan. If his reason for wanting to sign is to get more action, he will have been reassured. Whoever keeps goal for Villa will be very busy if their outfield players continue to dither as much as they

Manchester United thump Norwich as Marcus Rashford celebrates in style

MANCHESTER, 13 JAN: Marcus Rashford decorated his 200th Manchester United appearance with a two-goal display of menace that ensured victory over a hapless Norwich. The forward was taken off just before the hour and headed for the changing room.

Ole Gunnar Solskjær said: "What an achievement to get to 200 games at his age. He is absolutely top-class to work with. A great kid, wants to learn, improve, knows to keep his feet on the ground and today he's carrying a few knocks but no chance he's going to say to me before the game he doesn't want to

play." Solskjær is unsure whether Rashford will be able to face Wolves in Wednesday's FA Cup third-round replay. "I don't know but if he's ready he's played many games so [we] might have to look at how we can manage him," the manager said.

Midway through the second half the singing section were heard chanting against Ed Woodward, United's executive vice-chairman, and

owners, the Glazers. Solskjær said: "I'm not sure if the players will get it but I noticed. As a club we've got to stick together, we've got to be united, we are a family. I can only say from when I've been here I've been backed by the owners, I've been backed by Ed and they're supporting me. "We are in all competitions. We are still in the Carabao Cup, FA Cup, we're fifth in the league, still challenging, we've improved the position from last season, we've got the Europa League.

"They've [the fans] just got to believe me when I say I feel we are doing loads of good things behind the scenes, we are going in the right direc-

"See the group today - the attitude, the workrate, that's the core of the group that's going to go forward."

Harry Maguire was a headline inclusion - the captain recovering quickly from a hip problem - as United were bright throughout. The key was pace: of thought and exe-

United's opener was impressive. If Juan Mata's sluggish speed means he has become a squad player his vision is not in doubt. So it was that he could send a curving ball that sliced open the defence and allowed Rashford to hit an aerial finish past Tim Krul.

United had clicked into a higher gear. The excellent Brandon Williams roved inside, fed Fred and the midfielder took aim. A Rashford sprint along the right ended with a cross that splayed Norwich. Later, he sprayed a 30-yard diagonal from the other wing straight into Aaron Wan-Bissaka's path.

On the touchline Mike Phelan. Solskiær's assistant, was a head-in-hands embodiment of United's frustration they had still not doubled their advantage. Without David de Gea they would have conceded an equaliser just before the break, too. When Norwich broke quickly Emiliano Buendía was allowed to dance across the face of the area and feed Todd Cantwell and only an outstanding save sustained United's lead. They heeded the warning and attacked from the start of the second half and were rewarded almost instantly. Maguire fed Rashford and he played the ball in behind to the galloping Williams. The 19-yearold's pace took him past Krul who upended him and the referee, Anthony Taylor, awarded the

penalty.



did here.

Another loan signing, Danny Drinkwater, was cast straight into the starting lineup after arriving from Chelsea and must have wondered what he had let himself in for. At least he had an excuse for being bypassed by opponents, this being only his seventh league start since his £35m transfer from Leicester to Chelsea in 2017. An alarming number of his new teammates also struggled to keep up with City here. The home side were helpless onlookers as City strolled into a threegoal lead in the first half an hour.

thought luck was going to smile on them when a slip by Agüero let Ezri Konsa off the hook after the defender had given the ball away with a loose pass in the 14th minute. But they were disabused of that notion within two minutes, a lovely individual goal by Mahrez heralding the start of the

Mahrez collected the ball about 35 yards out after Kevin De Bruyne let an Agüero pass run to him. Then Villa were equally generous, with Drinkwater seemingly unable to do more than chug along behind the attacker, who waltzed into the box unchallenged before using Kortney Villa might have Hause's body as a shield

and slotting a low shot past the unsighted Ørjan Nyland. Rather than wake Villa up, it seemed to render them even more passive.

Six minutes later Agüero took advantage of dawdling by Ahmed Elmohamady to prod the ball back from the byline. It landed at the feet of Drinkwater, whose lack of sharpness was exposed by David Silva, who nipped in to relieve him of the ball and feed Mahrez, who swished it into the net from 10 yards.

Villa deteriorated. Jesus fired just over the bar after a Konsa mistake in the 26th minute. City soon came back for more, scoring their third

before the half-hour mark. De Bruyne breezed past Drinkwater in midfield before finding Agüero, who brushed aside Douglas Luiz before blasting into the net from 20 yards to equal Henry's record. There was no chance of him stopping there. Jesus got in on the act before half-time, converting at the back post after De Bruyne had again been allowed to canter through midfield and deliver a superb low cross.

City created chances to increase their lead before Agüero did so in the 57th minute. Again De Bruyne motored past almost stationary Villa midfielders to supply David Silva, who slipped the ball through to Agüero. The striker held off Elmohamady and sidestepped Tyrone Mings before slotting home. He completed his hat-trick nine minutes from time. Hause gave the ball to Mahrez, he helped it on to Agüero and the Argentinian made no mistake.

City's clean sheet was lost when Ilkay Gündogan tripped Trézéguet and El Ghazi netted from the spot but there could be no wiping away Villa's

Djokovic insists no clear favourite for Australian Open

SYDNEY, JAN 13 (AFP): Defending champion Novak Djokovic insisted there are no clear favourites for the next week's Australian Open despite his ominous start to the season.

The world number two was in fine touch at the ATP Cup, leading Serbia to victory over 23 other nations in the new men's team event, overpowering Davis Cup champions Spain in the final in the early hours of Monday.

His march included wins over dangerous Ca- it's really open, the Aus- down to beat Thiem. nadian Denis Shapovalov, world number five Daniil Medvedev and his longtime rival, the top-ranked Rafael Nadal.

Despite this, and Djokovic's dominance at Melbourne Park, where he has won the season-opening Grand Slam seven times since 2008, the Serb said there were plenty of players capable of being crowned champion.

"Look, the last hardcourt Grand Slam was in New York, and Rafa won it," he said of the US Open final where Nadal edged Medvedev in five sets.



tralian Open or any other Slam.

"I don't think there are really clear favourites. You have obviously Federer, Nadal, myself because of the experience and everything and the rankings that we get to be probably named the top three favourites.

"But then you have Medvedev, (Stefanos) Tsitsipas, Dominic Thiem that are really showing some amazing tennis." Djokovic pointed to the season-ending ATP Finals in London where Tsitsipas

"So, you know, I think battled back from a set Sydney.

They showed that they matured on the big stage, that they can challenge the best players in the world and win against them," he said.

"So everybody keeps on talking about NextGen player winning a Slam. You know, it seems like it's getting closer. Hopefully not this year. We'll

Djokovic enjoyed the ATP Cup hugely, a different start to how he usually begins his season, revelling in the team spirit and the large Serbian crowd support when he played in Brisbane and

He called it the "perfect preparation" for a tilt at an eighth title at the Australian Open, which starts on January 20.

"I didn't know what to expect from the event. Obviously I didn't know how deep we would go and I was hoping we would pass the group stages and see how it goes," he said.

"But these kind of team competitions are really, truly special, and I'm personally over the cloud with my emotions, and hopefully I can take that positive energy and use it for Australian Open.

Punjab FC host Mohun Bagan in clash of heavyweights

LUDHIANA, JAN 13 (PTI): Punjab FC will host table-toppers Mohun Bagan in a big-ticket I-League clash here on Tuesday.

Punjab FC are placed third while the Kolkata heavyweights are a the top of the table.

Both sides are on a hot streak with the visitors enjoying a fourgame winning run and the hosts are also unbeaten in their last six, setting up what could turn out to be one of the most exciting games of the league so far.

The visitors, however, have a superior 3-1 headto-head record, with one ending in a stalemate.

The youngest coach

of the league, Punjab FC's Yan Law, while acknowledging Mohun Bagan's form, stressed on his team's home record.

"Mohun Bagan is a good team, but playing at home is our advantage. We are very strong and unbeaten in our home pitch."

He also pointed to Punjab's unbeaten run saying, "We have had a six-game unbeaten run and this win can take us to the top. We are very confident and have worked very hard."

Mohun Bagan's Spanish coach Kibu Vicuna also exuded confidence.

"The game against Punjab is very important to us and the result could



have an impact in the title race. It is even more important, going into the derby against East Bengal on Sunday but for now, we are focused on Punjab and we will try to come away with the three points."

Mohun Bagan have been well served by their Spanish imports with Joseba Beitia in the centre of midfield, Fran Gonzales in the holding midfielder's role and Fran Morante at the heart of the defense.

Youngsters such as Nongdamba Naorem, Sk. Sahil and Subha Ghosh have also expressed themselves on the pitch, helping Vicuna's side deliver some eye-catching performances.

Punjab, on the other hand, while remaining unbeaten, have fallen short of crossing the line on more than one occasion.

Brazilian forward Sergis Barbosa and Cameroonian veteran Dipanda Dicka along with talented youngster Makan Chote have been scoring the goals for Punjab.

Japan's Abe warns conflict with Iran impacts entire world

RIYADH, JAN 13 (AFP): Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has warned that military confrontation with Iran will impact global peace and stability, as he visits the Middle East hoping to ease tensions spiked by the US killing of a top Iranian general.

His comments came at the start of a five-day Gulf tour that had been thrown into doubt after Tehran responded to the attack on Qasem Soleimani by launching a barrage of missiles at bases hosting American troops in Iraq, prompting fears of all-out war.

But as those concerns receded, the Japanese premier decided to go ahead with the visit and on Sunday discussed regional tensions during an hour-long meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in northwestern Al-Ula province, according to foreign ministry spokesman Masato Ohtaka.

"Any military confrontation in the region that includes a country like Iran will have an im- Emirates and Oman.

to reaffirm priest celibacy

VATICAN CITY, JAN 13 (AP): Retired Pope Benedict XVI has broken his silence to reaffirm the value of priestly celibacy, co-authoring a bombshell book at the precise moment that Pope Francis is weighing whether to allow married men to be ordained to address the Catholic priest short-

Benedict wrote the book, "From the Depths of Our Hearts: Priesthood, Celibacy and the Crisis of the Catholic Church," along with his conservative, Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah, who heads the Vatican's liturgy office and has been a quiet crit-

The French daily Le cerpts of the book late Sunday; The Associated Press obtained galleys of the English edition, which is being published by Ignatius Press.

Benedict's intervention is extraordinary, given he had promised to remain "hidden from the world" when he retired in 2013 and pledged his obedience to the new pope. He has largely held to that pledge, though he penned an odd essay last year on the sexual abuse scandal that blamed the crisis on the sexual revo-

His reaffirmation of priestly celibacy, however, gets to the heart of a fraught policy issue that Francis is expected to weigh in on, and could well be considered a public attempt by the former pope to sway the thinking of the current one.

The implications for such an intervention are grave, and are likely to fuel renewed anxiety about the unprecedented situation of two popes, one retired and one reigning, living side by side in the Vatican gardens.

The authors clearly anticipated that potential interpretation, and stressed in their joint introduction that they were penning the book "in a spirit of filial obedience, to Pope Franpact not only on peace and stability in the region but the peace and stability of the whole world," Abe said, according to Ohtaka.

Abe called "on all relevant countries to engage in diplomatic efforts to defuse tensions", Ohtaka added.

The spokesman said the two leaders agreed on working closely on maritime security in the region and discussed Tokyo's decision to send a destroyer for intelligence activities along with two P-3C patrol aircraft to the Middle East.

Japan, however, will not join a US-led coalition in the region.

Tokyo has walked a fine line in balancing its key alliance with Washington and its longstanding relations and interests with Tehran.

said Abe Ohtaka stressed the importance of a continuous and stable Saudi oil supply to

The prime minister's tour will also include visits to the United Arab

Pope Benedict XVI breaks silence

Francis has said he would write a document based on the outcome of the October 2019 synod of bishops on the Amazon. A majority of bishops at the meeting called for the ordination of married men to address the priest shortage in the Amazon, where the faithful can go months with-

out having a Mass. Francis has expressed sympathy with the Amazonian plight. While he has long reaffirmed the gift of a celibate priesthood in the Latin rite church, he has stressed that celibacy is a tradition, not doctrine, and therefore can change, ic of Francis. and that there could be pastoral reasons to allow

Figaro published ex-

Benedict and Sarah, and then a chapter apiece inbetween. True to his theologform, Benedict's chapter is dense with biblical references and he explains in scholarly terms what he says is the "necessary" foundation for the celibate priesthood that dates from the lution of the 1960s. times of the apostles.

> "The priesthood of Jesus Christ causes us to enter into a life that consists of becoming one with him and renouncing all that belongs only to us," he writes."For priests, this is the foundation of the necessity of celibacy but also of liturgical prayer, meditation on the Word of God and the renunciation of material goods."

for a exception in a par-

Benedict addresses

the issue head-on in his

chapter in the brief book,

which is composed of a

joint introduction and

conclusion penned by

ticular place.

Marriage, he writes, requires man to give himself totally to his family.

"Since serving the Lord likewise requires the total gift of a man, it does not seem possible to carry on the two vocations simultaneously. Thus, the ability to renounce marriage so as to place oneself totally at the Lord's disposition became a criterion for priestly ministry."

Australian 'megablaze' brought under control

SYDNEY, JAN 13 (AFP): Exhausted firefighters said they had finally brought Australia's largest "megablaze" under control on Monday, as wet weather promised to deliver much-needed respite for countryside ravaged by bush-

New South Wales firefighters said they finally had the upper hand in the fight against the vast Gospers Mountain fire on Sydney's northwestern outskirts, which has been burning out of control for almost three months.

Visiting the area on Monday, New South Wales Rural Fire Sercommissioner vice Shane Fitzsimmons said there was a "small area of burning still to complete" but the "containment prognosis looks promising."

The fire seared an area of national park three times the size of



ElseWhere

Greater London and lit several connected blazes totalling over 800,000 hectares -- an area larger than Austria.

As residents and authorities continued to come to grips with the sheer scale of the devastation, the Bureau of Meteorology forecast some firegrounds could get up to 50 millimetres (two inches) of rain in the next week, a relief after a pro-

longed drought.

If that forecast bears out, the New South Wales Rural Fire Service said. "then this will be all of our Christmas, birthday, engagement, anniversary, wedding and graduation presents rolled into one. Fingers crossed." Dozens of other fires are yet to be controlled.

mate-change-fuelled fires have prompted an Ley has warned that in

international outpouring and donations from around the world to help communities and animal

populations. Australia's unique flora and fauna has taken a catastrophic hit, with an estimated one billion animals killed, and countless trees and shrubs burned away.

The country's environment minister Sussan some areas, koalas may have to be reclassified as endangered.

This weekend, Sydney will host a star-studded charity gig to benefit fire services, the Red Cross and animal welfare organisations.

Headliners include Alice Cooper, Olivia Newton-John and Queen.

The political impact of the crisis is also coming into sharper relief.

A poll released on Monday showed Prime Minister Scott Morrison's approval ratings have nosedived in the face of widespread anger over his handling of the deadly crisis.

The Newspoll survey showed 59 per cent of Australian voters are dissatisfied with the conservative leader's performance overall, and only 37 per cent were satisfied, an abrupt reversal since his shock election win last May.

Morrison has been criticised heavily for his response to the monthslong crisis -- which included going on holiday to Hawaii, making a series of gaffes and misleading statements about his government's actions, and forcing angry victims to shake his hand.

Morrison began the crisis insisting local authorities had enough resources to handle the fires and exhausted volunteers firefighters "want to be there".

He also repeatedly stated that Australia was doing more than enough to meet its emission reduction targets, prompting a series of large-scale street protests.

Seeing a backlash, Morrison has since deployed the military, launched the largest peacetime call up of reserves, pledged billions of dollars in aid, increased payments to firefighters, and suggested more work may need to be done on emissions.

Experts warn Puerto Rico not prepared for big earthquakes

More than two years ago, Hurricane Maria revealed that Puerto Rico was utterly unprepared for a powerful hurricane despite its location in one of the world's most storm-vulnerable

Now, a flurry of earthquakes topped by a magnitude 6.4 temblor that killed one person and damaged hundreds of buildings has many accusing the government of being caught unready again.

"It proved that Puerto Rico is not prepared for a seismic movement," said Nazario Lugo, president of the island's Association of Emergency Managers. "The government has to be proactive, and we saw that was not the case until they were up to their neck in water."

Lugo, a former emergency management director for Puerto Rico, The Associated Press that the government didn't activate its command emergency centre until the day after the largest quake hit, breaking with protocol.

This drew comparisons to Hurricane Maria of 2017, which devastated the island and caused thousands of deaths. Critics said it caught the local and federal governments with limited supplies on an island with poorly maintained infrastructure and led to a delayed response stemming from

SAN JUAN, JAN 13 (AP): a lack of communication and organisation.

A flurry of hundreds of small quakes began hitting Puerto Rico on December 28, and a magnitude 5.8 jolt that toppled a famed rock formation landmark struck on January 6, Three Kings' Day, a major holiday on the island.

"The first day, when toys were being handed out, they should have started a process to activate the emergency plan," he said.

That didn't happen until Tuesday's 6.4 earthquake hit before dawn. It knocked out power to the entire island, collapsed several homes and schools and cracked

Many living along the southern coastline were left without water service and more than 4,000 people sought refuge in government shelters.

While many Puerto Ricans were surprised, scientists were not, including Christa von Hillebrandt, former director of the island's Seismic Network and manager of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Caribbean tsunami warning pro-

gramme. "For decades, scientists and people like me have been informing and communities alerting and the government of Puerto Rico of the physical threat," she said. "In the past 30 years, seis-

mic conscience definitely improved in Puerto Rico, but not much action was taken...You would see some improvements, but some critical areas did

Just days after the natural disaster, emergency management Director Carios Acevedo ac· knowledged to reporters that the government had yet to complete a plan that dictates protocol for when an earthquake hits the island.

not receive sufficient at-

tention."

Juan Alicea, president of Puerto Rico's Society of Professional Engineers, told the AP that he received a draft of the plan only on January 5.

"I see that as a failure," he said. "We all have to assume our responsibilities."

Acevedo did not return messages for comment and has insisted that Puerto Rico is prepared in case another big quake strikes.

Von Hillebrandt partially agreed with that assessment, noting that local officials had identified all tsunami risk zones by 2003 and completed evacuation maps

By 2016, all coastal communities in Puerto Rico were certified as being ready for a tsunami. In October 1918, a

magnitude 7.3 quake struck near Puerto Rico's northwest coast, unleashing a tsunami and killing 116 people. While concerns re-

main about Puerto Rico's preparedness, federal authorities have praised the local government's response.

Jeff Byard, with the US Federal Emergency Management Agency, said he is extremely pleased with the postquake operation.

"I cannot commend commonwealth enough for the proactive nature that they've taken providing the initial

resources, the initial sup-

port," he said. More than 1,280 earthquakes have hit Puerto Rico's southern region since December 28, more than two dozen of them magnitude 4.5 or

US Geological Survey. Given that activity, Alicea said it's extremely worrisome that some 200,000 homes across Puerto Rico are not built to code, as evidenced by the damage caused in recent days.

greater, according to the

"If we don't take action, this is going to cost us a lot of money and a lot of lives," he said.

Also of concern is that some 500 public schools across Puerto Rico were built before 1987 and don't adhere

to new construction codes, placing students at risk, according to Alicea. He said the government has invested money to bring many other schools up to date, but the remaining ones are not built to withstand earthquakes.

Tuesday's quake flattened several schools and damaged an estimated two dozen overall, forcing education officials to postpone the start of classes by two weeks and only open schools that have passed inspection.

Government officials have said they are identifying the most vulnerable schools and creating a plan to strengthen them, a process that could take months and cost between USD 1 million and USD 5 million per school.

Meanwhile, people like Nancy Torres, 58, vow they will not return home until the shaking

She was sleeping in a small, four-door compact car with her husband in the front and their 21-year-old son crammed in the back. Her father-in-law had built the house where they were sleeping when the earthquake hit, and she doesn't trust it.

"I couldn't even get up from my bed," she said of the day the big quake struck, adding that if she goes into the home, it's for very brief periods. "I can't even take a proper shower.

Iran agrees de-escalation 'only solution' to solve crisis with US

TEHRAN, JAN 13 (AFP): Iran has signalled it favours a de-escalation after 10 days of heightened tensions with the United States during which both sides fired missiles and Tehran accidentally shot down a passenger air-

Security was stepped up in Iran's capital Sunday after a vigil the previous night for those killed in the air disaster turned into an angry protest and police temporarily arrested the British ambassador for being there.

US President Donald Trump warned Iran against harming demonstrators and against a repeat of a deadly crackdown against rallies in November sparked by a fuel price hike.

"To the leaders of Iran - DO NOT KILL YOUR PROTESTERS," Trump tweeted Sunday in his occasional all-capitals style. **US Defense Secretary**

Mark Esper, however, said Trump was still willing to "sit down and discuss without precondition a new way forward" with Iran, although Tehran has steadfastly refused to hold talks with Washington unless it lifts sanctions first.

Tehran said it favoured an easing of tensions after its arch-enemy Washington on January 3 killed a revered Iranian general, Quds Force chief Qasem Soleimani, in a Baghdad drone strike.

In a meeting between Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and the visiting emir of Qatar, both sides agreed de-escalation is the "only solution" to the regional crisis, the Qatari ruler said.

Qatar hosts the largest US military base in the region but also enjoys strong ties with Iran, with which it shares the world's largest gas field.

"We agreed... that the only solution to these crises is de-escalation from everyone and dialogue," Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said on what was believed to be his first official visit to the Islamic republic.

For his part, Rouhani said: "We've decided to have more consultations and cooperation for the security of the entire region."

Iran's president also met with visiting Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, whose country has offered to mediate between Tehran and US ally In a meeting on Sun-

day with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe warned military conflict with Iran will have an impact on global peace and stability, Japanese foreign ministry spokesman Masato Ohtaka said.

In a briefing to Parliament, Hossein Salami, commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, said the missiles it fired last Wednesday on Iraqi bases hosting US troops were not aimed at killing American personnel.

The US said no American personnel were harmed in the attacks.

Across the border in Iraq, the military said rockets slammed on Sunday into Al-Balad, an Iraqi airbase where US forces have been stationed, wounding two Iraqi officers and two

airmen. The base had held a small US Air Force contingent as well as American contractors, but a

majority of these personnel had already been evacuated due to the tensions between the US and Iran, military sources told AFP.

Reacting to the latest attack, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted: "Outraged by reports of another rocket attack on an Iraqi air-

"These continued violations of Iraq's sovereignty by groups not loyal to the Iraqi government must end," he added. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Sunday's rocket attacks. The US has previously blamed such attacks on Iran-backed groups in Iraq.



THE SUPERMODEI American model, Kaia Gerber shows off her famous physique in a chic black bikini at the beach in Miami who is enjoying a weekend break.

lan McKellen releases journal entries he wrote during 'Lord of the Rings' shoot

McKellen has shared his diary entries from the time he worked on Peter Jackson's fan favourite "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, giving a closer look to the fans at the making of the film series.

Based on JRR Tolkein's books, the movie franchise spawned into "The Fellowship of the Ring" (2001), "The Two Towers" (2002) and "The Return of the King" (2003), and a trilogy of prequels based on the author's children book "The Hobbit".

McKellen, who played Gandalf the Grey in the films, tweeted a link to his journal entries on Friday from over two decades ago.

"20 years ago, I arrived New Zealand to begin filming 'The Lord of the Rings'. I joined the cast on January 10, 2000. During that time, I kept a journal, which today would be called a blog. Perhaps you'll enjoy reading about those heady times," the 80-year-old actor wrote.

McKellen's journals date back to the time of his casting in August of 1999 and continue on through his travels to New Zealand - where the films were shot - pre-pro-

Los Angeles, Jan 12 (PTI): Veteran actor Ian duction, filming, and premieres of all the films in the 'LOTR' trilogy.

> "While filming 'The Lord of the Rings', I began recording my impressions in The Grey Book named for Gandalf the Grey, the wizard who leads the Fellowship of The Ring in its fight against Sauron, the Lord of the Rings.

> "This was one of the earliest blogs, launched before the term came into widespread use. Originally posted like a blog, with the newest entries at top, in 2010 the entries on this page were rearranged into chronological order from 20 August 1999 to 14 December 2001. After 2001, I began an additional volume of entries called The White Book," McKellen wrote.

> The veteran stage-film actor covers a range of topics like trying on the Gandalf costume and beard for the first time, working with his cast mates and his scheduling conflicts with the X-Men franchise -- he also played another popular character, mutant Magneto/ Eric • Lensherr.

Fans and followers can read his diary entries on McKellen.com.

Start shooting for 'Succession' S3 this year: Sarah Snook Los Angeles, Jan 13 (PTI): "Succession" star Sarah Snook

says the team will start shooting for the third season of the satirical comedy-drama in 2020.

HBO gave a renewal order to its breakout show, created by Jesse Armstrong, last August.

Snook plays Siobhan "Shiv" Roy, the unlikely contender of the media empire owned by Logan Roy, essayed by Brian Cox.

Asked about the new chapter, the actor told Variety, "We know nothing. We know that we shoot this year and few other tidbits but like barely anything."

Snook was speaking on the sidelines of Critics' Choice Awards 2020. She was nominated in the best actress category but lost to Regina King for "Watch-

Overall, "Succession" bagged the award for drama series and best actor in a drama series for Jeremy

Also starring Hiam Abbass, Kieran Culkin, Alan Ruck, Nicholas Braun, Matthew Macfadyen and J Smith-Cameron, the show revolves around a media empire owned by a patriarch, whose dysfunctional family is vying for their ailing father's throne.



I'm recovering fast: Shahid on 'Jersey' injury

Mumbai, Jan 12 (PTI): Actor Shahid Kapoor, who was injured during the filming for his upcoming film "Iersey", on Sunday said he has got a "few stitches" but is recovering fast.

The actor was shooting for the cricket movie, a remake of the 2019 Telugu blockbuster, in Chandigarh and got struck by a ball during a rehearsal shot earlier this week.

Shahid reached out to his fans on social media and thanked them for their concern.

"Thank you for all the concern. Yes I have got a few stitches but am recovering fast. #jersey has taken a little bit of my blood but a script this good deserves that in the least.

"Have a good one you all. Keep it real. Make it count. Spread the love. Humanity above all," the actor wrote on Twitter.

"Jersey" chronicles the story of a talented but failed cricketer, who decides to return to the field in his late thirties driven by the desire to represent the Indian cricket team and fulfil his son's wish for a jersey as a gift.

The Hindi version of the sports-drama is being directed by Gowtam Tinnanauri, who also helmed the original 2019 Telugu film, starring Nani in the lead.

Also featuring Mrunal Thakur and Pankaj Kapur, "Jersey" is slated to be released in August.

My daughters and I have conversations about having the right to say 'no': Nicole Kidman



LONDON, JAN 12 **(PTI):** Actor Nicole Kidman says she makes sure to teach her two daughters about the right and need to say 'no'.

The actor shares Sunday Rose, 11, and Faith Margaret, nine, with husband singer Keith Urban.

Kidman, 52, said sexual harassment

impacts people differently, and her latest release "Bombshell", aims to educate and encourage people to talk about it.

"Every woman has encountered it (sexual harassment) in some way, shape or form. A lot of it is making it safer for people so ultimately we have a safer world, a safer workplace," she told The Daily Telegraph.

"I'm raising two little girls right now so there's a lot of conversations in our house about having the right to say no to many different things," she added.

Directed by Jay Roach, "Bombshell" is based on the accounts of several women at Fox News who set out to expose CEO Roger Ailes for sexual harassment.

Kidman claimed to have not experienced sexual harassment in the industry, but had witnessed it.

The Emmy-winning actor earlier said the marriage to her "Days of Thunder" co-star Tom Cruise inadvertently shielded her from being sexually harassed in Hollywood.

Kidman was married to Cruise, 57, for 11 years. They finalised divorce in 2001.

'Star Trek: Picard' renewed for second season



Los Angeles, Jan 13 (PTI): "Star Trek: Picard", the new series from the sci-fi franchise based on veteran actor Patrick Stewart's iconic character, has received a second season order even before its debut.

The CBS All Access show will see Stewart reprise the role of Jean-Luc Picard as the title character. He played Picard for seven seasons on "Star Trek: The Next Generation".

Julie McNamara, the ViacomCBS owned streamer's EVP, Original Content, made the announcement on Sunday, reported Deadline.

'The energy and excitement around the premiere of 'Star Trek: Picard' has reached a magnitude greater than all of us at CBS All Access could have hoped for.

"We're thrilled to announce plans for a second season before the series' debut, and we are confident that 'Star Trek' fans and new viewers alike will be captured by the stellar cast and creative team's meticulously crafted story when it premieres on January 23," McNamara said.

However, there is no official word yet when season two will premiere and how many episodes it will have.

Also starring Isa Briones, Santiago Cabrera, Michelle Hurd, Alison Pill, Harry Treadaway and Evan Evagora, the 10-episode "Picard" starts streaming on January 23.

Aries:

Failure is temporary. What makes it permanent are the sentiments and expectations attached to the action. Beware of clinging to the past or playing the old tape over and over in your head. What's gone is gone and it's time for you to accept that. Could there be a silver lining somewhere in here? As Thomas Alva Edison famously said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

Taurus:

"What you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contacts are so quick. Fashion is an instant language." Miuccia Prada knew what she was talking about, Taurus! So where are you in your style evolution? What is the message you want to give the world about yourself? It's time up the sartorial game

Quality time with la familia is on the cards. I know what you're thinking. How are you As you do, you will be able to turn your at-

going to be your most 'authentic self' with all of your relatives playing Judge Judy? All that inner work is going to be put to the test, Gemini. Watch your triggers, draw boundaries wherever necessary, and take everything they say with a pinch of salt

Cancer, pay attention to recurring thoughts and ideas. Your higher self is communicating with you and showing you the path you were destined to walk on. This is not the time to hesitate. Take the next step armed with courage and confidence. Yes, change isn't always easy to deal with, Cancer.

Not everything we ask for is necessarily in alignment with our highest good. Know that when something isn't working out according to your plan, it's because you are being protected by the mysterious forces above. So let go of the resentment and regret. Let go of the 'coulds' and 'shoulds'.

tention to what is being offered to you now.

We're 13 days into the new year. Safe to say, you haven't broken up with all your resolutions yet. Drastic changes are great, but they need above-average strength and resilience, which you may or may not be gifted with. Word for the wise: simplify things for yourself. Set realistic goals and intentions. For instance, if you wish to adopt a plantbased diet, going cold turkey on meat may or may not be a viable option. Getting on board the Meatless Monday bandwagon? Now that's completely up your alley.

In the words of Anne-Maria Yritys, "Minimalism is not about having less. It is about making room for more of what matters." You may be best known for your penchant for luxury, but the turn of the decade has you looking at the world around you through a brand new lens. Consuming more does not necessarily equal a greater degree of happiness. In fact, there are things in your possession that are no longer a source of joy and inspiration.

Scorpio:

Revelation, revelation: you cannot rush time. Everything is taking place in accordance with the divine plan. Trust the process. On your part, keep putting in the work knowing that your venture will eventually be a success. Remember, quality trumps quantity every time. Choose projects that you feel aligned with your higher self and don't feel bad about refusing the rest. Sagittarius:

There are very few people in this world who can ace anything they set their minds to. I suppose that would make you an anomaly, but in the best possible way. So what are you going to do with that 'golden touch' you are gifted with? It's time to put that inner alchemist to the test, Sagittarius. Your manifestation abilities are also heightened at this moment Capricorn:

Change is the only constant, and in your case it promises to bring joyous tidings. No opportunity is too big or small. Accept what's coming your way and be open to what it leads to. Your word for the day: happenstance. Follow your strange impulses, Capricorn. Listen to what your inner voice is guiding you to do.

Aquarius:

Beware of operating from the ego space. You are not better than them, just different. By walking against the team, you are stalling the work and coming in the way of your own success. Some of you may be feeling rather competitive. Remember, your journey is different from theirs.

Pisces:

"Within you there is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself." These words by Hermann Hesse are giving you the sign you have been looking for. Keep work aside for a moment, Pisces, and focus on finding that inner balance.