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SummitTIMES

Vol 04 | Issue 99 | Gangtok | Saturday | 13 April 2019

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

Sikkim Votes! And the U-40 hold decisive share

VOTER TURN-OUT DROPS TO 78.19%



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 APR:

Sikkim voted on Thursday. An electorate of 4.32 lakh received the opportunity to decide who forms the next government in Sikkim and who represents the State in Parliament. However, fewer voters than have traditionally shown up exercised their franchise this time with the State reporting a voter turn-out of 78.19%, noticeably lower than the 83% who voted in 2014. The districts, however, stayed true to past performances with North Sikkim reporting the highest turn-out and East the lowest. Gangtok was again the constituency to post the

lowest voter turn-out.

And while this data will be interesting in its own right, a major factor to keep an eye out for is the youthfulness of the electorate. With 63% of the electorate under forty years of age, this segment now holds a decisive majority for the first time.

As per data collated by the Election office, the 18 to 40 year old voters number 2,74,200 which works out to 63.42% of the total electorate. Of these, the 18-19 year olds number 30,480.

The youth have never been in such a clear majority, and on 23 May, when the verdict locked in the EVMs is calculated,

Sikkim will learn which party appealed most to this segment. It will also be interesting to see whether this bloc voted on issues which matter to their age-band or whether their vote was again decided by the traditional factors of community and family.

In the absence of any scientific data collection, there will be no clear answers even after the results are announced, but that should not mean that some speculation cannot be indulged in.

What the numbers confirm, for instance is that 64% of the electorate came of age with the present government already in office. Even

the 40 year old now was but a teenager when SDF formed its first government twenty-five years back.

Building from that, it is also safe to believe that they have no real experience of previous governments to compare the present government with. Their support or rejection of the ruling Front is hence based completely on their perception of the current government's performance.

Similarly, their image of the contenders, with SKM being the primary one, is also based solely on how SKM has conducted itself in the last five years.

The youth, one must

POLL TURNOUT FOR VIDHAN SABHA ELECTIONS 2019 - SIKKIM

Assembly Constituency	Total Elector				POLL TURNOUT				Voter Turnout %		
	Male	Femal	Other	Total	Male	Female	Other	Total	Male%	Female%	Total%
1-Yoksam-tashiding	7161	6616	0	13777	6097	5461	0	11558	85.14	82.54	83.89
2-Yangthang	6467	6440	0	12907	5236	5084	0	10320	80.96	78.94	79.96
3-Maneybung-dentam	7609	7455	0	15064	6220	6196	0	12416	81.75	83.11	82.42
4-Gyalshing-barnyak	6313	6039	0	12352	4951	4887	0	9838	78.43	80.92	79.65
5-Rinchenpong	7588	7144	0	14732	6500	5851	0	12351	85.66	81.90	83.84
6-Daramdin	7700	7489	0	15189	6200	6010	0	12210	80.52	80.25	80.39
7-Soreng-chakung	7824	7715	0	15539	6512	6246	0	12758	83.23	80.96	82.10
8-Salghari-zoom	5668	5269	0	10937	4607	4155	0	8762	81.28	78.86	80.11
9-Barfung	7651	7167	0	14818	6138	5591	0	11729	80.22	78.01	79.15
10-Poklok-kamrang	7819	7737	0	15556	6336	5174	0	11510	81.03	66.87	73.99
11-Namchi-singhithang	6173	6457	0	12630	4586	4904	0	9490	74.29	75.95	75.14
12-Melli	7734	7669	0	15403	6111	6122	0	12233	79.01	79.83	79.42
13-Namthang-ratepani	7748	7585	0	15333	6321	6115	0	12436	81.58	80.62	81.11
14-Temi-namphing	7217	6943	0	14160	5847	5589	0	11436	81.02	80.50	80.76
15-Rangang-yangang	7052	6796	0	13848	5078	5038	0	10116	72.01	74.13	73.05
16-Tumen-lingi	7965	7851	0	15816	6543	6291	0	12834	82.15	80.13	81.15
17-Khamdong-singtam	6750	6290	0	13040	5295	4945	0	10240	78.44	78.62	78.53
18-West pendam	7749	7176	0	14925	6033	5434	0	11467	77.86	75.72	76.83
19-Rhenock	8716	8568	0	17284	6998	6788	0	13786	80.29	79.23	79.76
20-Chujachen	8870	8775	0	17645	6963	6709	0	13672	78.50	76.46	77.48
21-Gnathang-machong	5986	6000	0	11986	4688	4909	0	9597	78.32	81.82	80.07
22-Namcheybung	7599	7438	0	15037	6049	5980	0	12029	79.60	80.40	80.00
23-Shyari	8010	7661	0	15671	5980	5785	0	11765	74.66	75.51	75.07
24-Martam-rumtek	8413	8498	0	16911	6723	6634	0	13357	79.91	78.07	78.98
25-Upper tadong	5140	5175	0	10315	3571	3691	0	7262	69.47	71.32	70.40
26-Arithang	5989	5415	1	11405	3988	3563	0	7551	66.59	65.80	66.21
27-Gangtok	6117	5508	0	11625	3861	3392	0	7253	63.12	61.58	62.39
28-Upper burtuk	7636	7548	0	15184	5668	5657	0	11325	74.23	74.95	74.59
29-Kabi lungchuk	6121	6483	0	12604	4681	5059	0	9740	76.47	78.03	77.28
30-Djongu	4550	4973	0	9523	3912	4278	0	8190	85.98	86.02	86.00
31-Lachen mangan	3746	4051	0	7797	3158	3371	0	6529	84.30	83.21	83.74
32-Sangha	3224	69	0	3293	2198	43	0	2241	68.18	62.32	68.05
TOTAL	220305	212000	1	432306	173049	164952	0	338001	78.55	77.81	78.19

also bear in mind, does not dwell in the past and looks more to the future. All parties in the electoral fray clearly recognized this much and directed much of their votes pitch to them. But the present day youth is also better informed and can be expected to also evaluate performance and delivery while deciding on which promises appear convincing and which reek of tokenism or are too

superficial.

Principles and ideology also carry more resonance with the youth and the results will also reflect how the youth rate the parties on this parameter.

As for the parties in the fray, Sikkim almost always sees a quasi-presidential form of election with people voting for the party presidents with the hand-picked candidates having only limited contribution to the final

result. When it comes to the youth, such absolute submission to the party will be rare and they can be expected to evaluate the candidates as well. This, if it happens, will be new for Sikkim.

That said, Election 2019 is still a Chamling versus Golay contest, which is unique in the sense that the latter cannot even contest the elections. In that sense, the SKM president, PS Tamang [Golay], to his

credit, has made a fight of the elections despite his corruption conviction and the law not allowing him to contest for six years.

SKM remains the main opposition this time as well since no other party has fielded candidates for all 32 constituencies. Also, except SKM, all other opposition parties had forfeited their deposits in the 2014 elections.

turn to pg02

East DEO refutes allegations of electoral malpractices, clears confusion

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 APR:

The District Election Officer who is also the Returning Officer of East District has reassured the general public that during the entire polling process, all rules and guidelines of the Election Commission were followed scrupulously to ensure full transparency as well as free and fair elections.

A press communiqué received from the IPR Department informs that the DEO stressed that "there cannot be any ground for any doubts on the fool-proof authentication procedures as prescribed by Election Commission of India."

The clarifications comes in response to the scene created outside

the strong-room by SKM supporters last night when the EVMs were being brought in. The SKM supporters suspected something amiss when the reserve EVMs were being moved out of the strong-room.

The press release quotes the DEO as recognising that "some political party supporters flagged issue of reserve/un-used EVMs/ VVPATs being transported yesterday on Social Media."

The DEO underlines that as per Election Commission of India rules only polled EVMs and VVPATs are kept inside the sealed Strong Rooms and all reserve/extra/ un-used or defective un-polled machines are required to be kept at

a different place in a designated warehouse.

When the unused EVMs were being moved out of the strong-room yesterday, SKM supporters had picketed the strong room and refused the truck to leave. They were clearly convinced that something nefarious was being attempted and it was only much after their candidates arrived and understood the matter from the election officials that the process was allowed to complete and the strong-room emptied of the unused EVMs.

The DEO states, "...the plan to transport un-polled machines was as per the ECI rules and was all verified as per the list of machines of different categories." turn to pg02

SKM casts doubt on election process, seeks clarification from CEO

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 APR:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's Complaint Committee has written to the Chief Electoral Officer, Sikkim seeking clarifications on doubts surrounding the conduct of free and fair election in the State. The party has alleged that unused EVMs were being moved around in suspicious manner.

Further, SKM has sought clarification on "speculations going around in the State of Sikkim with regard to replacing of EVMs used in poll with the pre-programmed, tampered machines as well as with regard to EVMs being stored at places other than the specified Strong Rooms".

In the complaint letter, the party has asked the CEO to issue a public declaration "with reasoned and detailed graphic explanation of the machines used, reserved and unused".

SKM has asked for a list of all machines with their numbers that have been utilised in the polling at respective booths, list of all machines that were commissioned but kept reserved for the polling day, list of

unused non-commissioned machines which were moved from various locations on the polling day, and the route map of all utilised EVMs as per their GPS movement tracks and the vehicle details in which these machines were sent to the Strong Rooms of the respective districts by the polling party. The party has also requested for a list of all postal ballots cast booth-wise and constituency-wise.

The letter states that the party reported these incidents to the General Observers appointed for the sole parliamentary constituency and to the general observers of the East District on the night of 11 April and in the morning of 12 April but has not received any clarification from them.

Copies of the complaint letter have also been submitted to the Election Commission of India and the Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim.

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First time voters get inked

NAMCHI, 11 APR (IPR):

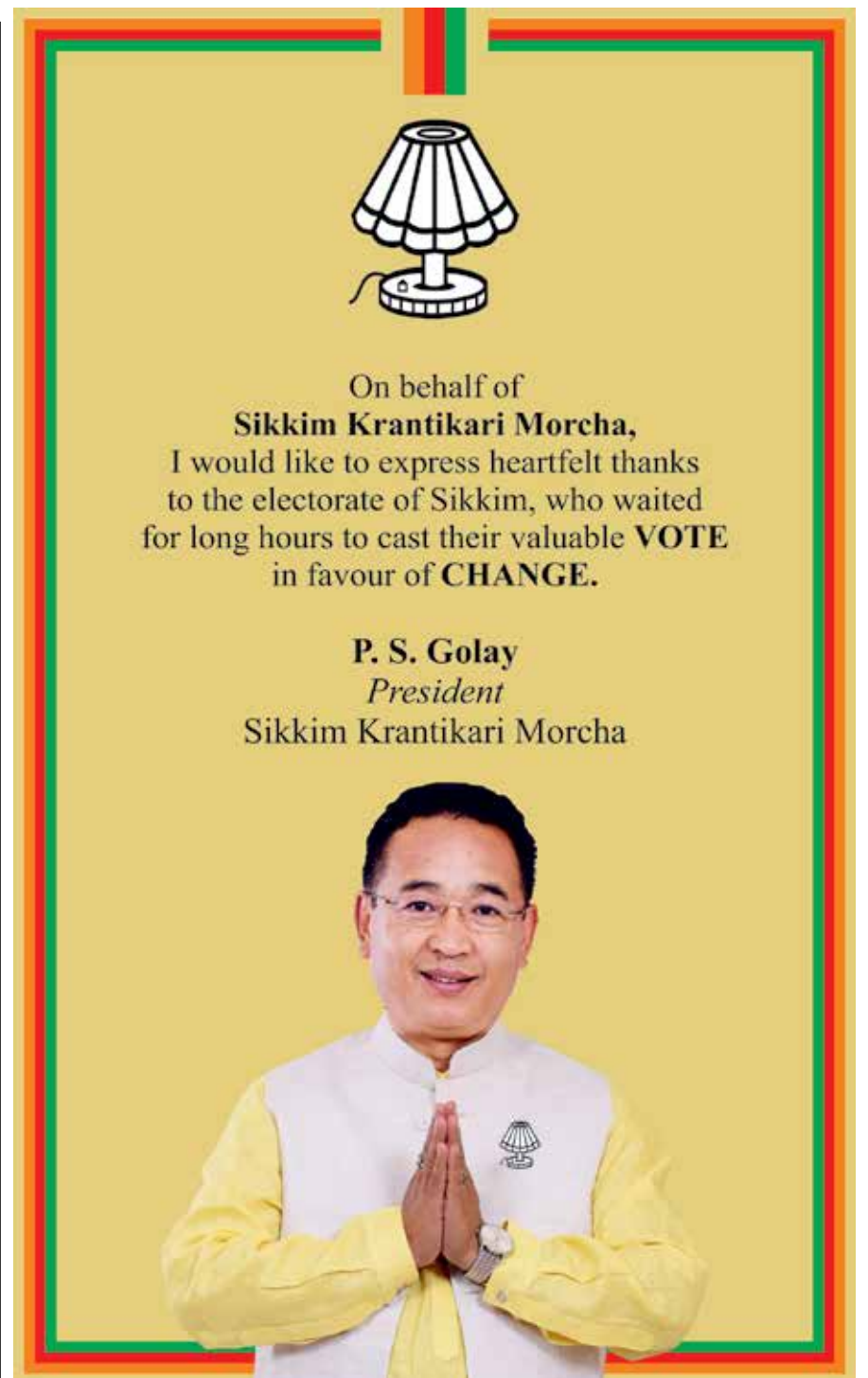
Young and first time voters turned out in record numbers to vote for Assembly Constituency and Parliamentary Constituency at various polling stations spread across South District today.

Many college students who have attained 18 years and

who had enrolled their names in the voter's list seemed eager to participate in the electoral process in the District, terming their roles extremely important in the democracy.

Dawa Tshering Tamang, a student and a first time voter aged 18, expressed her joy at being able to exercise her

franchise to participate in the democratic festival. Similarly, 22-year-old Rabin Chettri, a voter under Namchi-Singhithang constituency expressed that he feels empowered to cast his vote and appealed to the youth of the state to turn out in big numbers to use the voting right conferred upon them.



Oldest voter casts her vote, gets felicitated



NAMCHI, 11 APR (IPR): The oldest voter this election, 107-year-old, Sumitra Rai, wife of Late Sambhu Das Rai from Lower Kamrang, exercised

her franchise at Government Secondary School, Kamrang Polling Station under Poklok Kamrang Assembly Constituency today. As a mark of re-

spect and to celebrate the spirit of democracy in our state the oldest voter of Sikkim was also felicitated by the polling officers.

Salleybong team first to finish in South



NAMCHI, 11 APR (IPR): The first Polling team to arrive in the Control Room after successfully conducting the polling for General Elections 2019 from South District was the team stationed at Salleybong Junior High School Polling Station under Namchi Singhithang Constituency.

The team handed the Polled EVMs and VVPATs along with the polling materials to the concerned officials in the Control room at Namchi Senior Secondary School auditorium.

East DEO refutes allegations...

This, however, was not the only scene created by SKM supporters.

The DEO informs that “an issue of Route discussion and allegation of tampering with machine was made against one polling party of Upper Burtuk in late night and team was forced to wait for three hours on the way by some people. The issue was later resolved amicably on interaction by District Administration and Security agencies.”

Eventually, when the polling party arrived at the reception centre all seals were checked and no tampering or irregularities were found.

Accordingly in both cases all political party representatives were briefed in detail and they were fully satisfied. Even these explanations were videographed and general observers were briefed on the issues, the release details.

DEO has requested all general public not to believe in any rumours about poll process tampering or any possibilities of manipulation in machines which is an impossible and unthinkable thing. Our District Election team has worked hard and always as per the Election Commission of India guidelines which will be followed in all process too, the DEO reassures.

He explains further, “All EVMs/VVPATs are numbered uniquely and the same is checked in every stage to ensure there are no manipulations or mistakes. Everyone needs to be assured that all due process have been followed and issue raised have been resolved to the full satisfaction of concern parties. All contesting candidates have been provided with list of Commissioned EVMs and those used in Polling on the Poll day which cannot be altered.”

The DEO has also categorically denied allegations if any of attempts of deviations or malpractices during entire process till now and reiterates that it has been ensured polls are totally transparent, free, fair and in accordance with Election Commission of India's idea of democratic elections.

Cong reiterates its Assembly poll boycott call in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 12 APR:

The State unit of the Congress has reiterated its boycott [partial] of the Assembly elections, considering that the matter was sub-judice since a petition challenging the constitutional validity of the Legislative Assembly elections in Sikkim 1979 was currently being heard in the High Court.

A press release issued by the Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee on 11 April states: “The people of Sikkim still participating in the election process is testimony to either their ignorance of rights or the

acceptance of the fallacies and weaknesses of our country's system of governance, which includes all the three pillars our democracy, the political system, the judiciary and the executive. This is indeed unfortunate for the world's largest democracy.”

The release contends that when the seats reserved for the Sikkimese Nepali were done away with in 1979 in violation of Article 371F of the Constitution of India.

“The violation of this article in terms of assembly seats reservation... has been virtually accepted by the electorate since 1979, since the concerned political

leaders never committed to restore it, nor did the people raise their voice in truly rejecting it,” the release states, while adding, “This is probably because democratic responsibility amongst Sikkimese is yet to mature and true democracy yet to take deep roots in Sikkim. As a result, this majority community of Sikkim has remained deprived of this due right.”

Accordingly, the SPCC working president Dr Dipendra Gurung boycott this election by not filing his nomination, till the sub-judice matter of the constitutional validity of all Vidhan Sabha elections of Sik-

kim since 1979 is decided, the release informs.

The boycott was also supported by SPCC president, Bharat Basnett, who abstained from filing his nomination papers from Namcheybung and by West district Congress president, Dal Bahadur Karki who withdrew his nomination from Gylashing Bermiok constituency, it adds.

“This decision to boycott stands, although the electorate in general has shown partial support, for various reasons, and Sikkim has moved forward with the election process,” the release puts on record.

BJP Sikkim thanks Sikkimese for participating in polls

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 12 APR:

Bharatiya Janata Party state president, DB Chauhan has expressed his gratitude to the people of Sikkim for using their democratic right in the 2019 Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. He has also thanked everyone for the peaceful polling process in the State.

A BJP press release has lauded the commitment shown by the oldest voter of the State, 105-year-old Sumitra Rai for using her democratic right. The party has further thanked all voters for standing in line till late night to cast their votes.

Fire consumes home in Dzongu



DIKCHU, 12 APR: A traditional wooden house belonging of Gyatso Lepcha of Ruklu Kayam village of Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim, was completely gutted by fire last night around 2 AM. By the time the fire was noticed, it was already raging out of control and nothing

could be salvaged. Apart from the belongings, the fire also consumed nine goats and a dog. SDM Dzongu along With Deputy Director, Revenue Officer, ward panchayat visited the spot to assess the damage and inform that ex gratia was also handed over to the family.

PwD voters and senior citizens assisted on polling day

NAMCHI, 11 APR (IPR):

To focus on inclusivity as enshrined by the Election Commission of India, the polling stations in South District are equipped with basic minimum facilities like wheel chairs, ramps, drinking water and other equipments for PwD voters and senior citizens.

Additionally, Braille signage for the differently-abled voters to exercise their franchise is provided in order to provide them a platform to cast their vote without any assistant.

It may be mentioned here that there are a total of 395 identified PwD voters in the district and that 160 Polling Stations under South District have been equipped with 75



numbers of wheel chairs.

Moreover, on the poll day the Administration has made vehicular arrangements to pick and drop PwD voters across the district to ensure that no voters irrespective of their age and physical infirmities are left behind. Moreover, volunteers have been assigned in each polling station to assist the differently-abled

as well as senior citizens.

Sharing his experience, 36-year-old infirm voter, Bishnu Kumar Manger who voted at Government Senior Secondary School Asangthang under Poklok-Kamrang, said that it is very liberating to cast his vote and urged all to exercise their franchise to uphold the spirit of democracy.

You can contact Summit TIMES @ 03592 208698

SDF thanks Sikkim for peaceful polls

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 12 APR:

Sikkim Democratic Front has thanked all for the peaceful polling process in the State. The party has thanked the Election Commission, Police officials and personnel, government employees and every individual involved in the entire process from the filing of the nominations to the polling in a peaceful manner.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, SDF spokesperson, KT Gyaltsen, congratulated and thanked all election-related personnel for their participation in creating a conducive environment for

peaceful polling in the State.

He also thanked the people of Sikkim for giving their time to exercising their fundamental right and for their participation in the democratic process of the country. He also appealed to everyone to maintain peace and tranquility.

Responding to media queries, he expressed confidence that SDF will make a clean sweep of the assembly and parliamentary seats and SDF will form the government for the sixth consecutive time under the leadership of Pawan Chamling.

About the incident of a polling party vehicle being diverted towards

Bahai School Road, Mr Gyaltsen stated that the party has verbally reported the incident to the Election Commission already and will also be writing to the ECI on the matter. He said he was confident that the EC will investigate the matter properly.

On the decrease in voting percentage this time, SDF spokesperson PD Rai stated that although there was decrease of around 3% in the votes cast, a 79% turn-out was still a fairly large number.

The press conference was also addressed by SDF general secretary [press & publicity], Kavita Subba.

I-T raids multiple locations in TN to check suspect poll cash; seizes R 15-cr

CHENNAI, APR 12 (PTI): The Income-Tax Department Friday conducted searches at multiple locations in Tamil Nadu on suspicion of alleged illegal cash being pumped in to lure voters in the poll-bound state and seized cash of about Rs 15 crore, officials said.

They said a total of 18 locations in Chennai, Namakkal and Tirunelveli are being raided since early morning hours.

In the first instance, tax sleuths searched the premises of a contractor firm PSK Engineering Construction Company on charges of routing and possession of alleged “unaccounted cash”.

Three premises in Chennai and four linked to the company in Namakkal are being raided, they said. “Unaccounted cash of Rs 14.54 crore, with Rs 13.80 crore from four premises belonging to the construction company, has been seized,” a senior official said.

Incriminating documents and accounts with details of generation of unaccounted money by inflation of expenditure, payments made to influential persons and also unaccounted capital introduced into businesses were also seized, the official said.

In the second case, the Chennai investigation wing of the department searched a group of cash handlers and financiers against whom the sleuths obtained information that they are allegedly “mobilising cash for possible use in elections.”

The locations linked to two individuals identified as Akash Baskaran and Sujai Reddy were also searched, they said.

“Rs 18 lakh has been seized from the premises linked to Reddy,” the official said.

Documents indicating investment of “unaccounted” funds of Rs 16 crore by Reddy in a Malaysian company have also been seized, the official added.

You can contact Summit TIMES @ 03592 208698

Sikkim Votes!...

And now that the Election officials, after a largely unimpressive organizational performance on polling day, have collated the voter turn-out details, its perhaps time to go over the data [see accompanying box for details].

Like has become the norm, North Sikkim posted the highest turn-out at 81.74% with West coming in a close second at 81.64%, South failing to impress at 78.07% and East bringing up the rear with 75.60. Among the constituencies, Gangtok was the least motivated with only 62% of the electorate showing up to vote.

Usually, a noticeably higher voter turn-out is seen as a sign of people voting for change. If that yardstick is applicable to Sikkim, the ruling Front will be breathing easy. But the law of such averages do not always apply on Sikkim. In 2014, for instance, the constituency [Gangtok] with the lowest voter turn-out also posted the highest winning margin for the Opposition.

These speculations aside, what the results will definitely prove is which party worked harder and better and mobilizing their base to come out and vote. The delays and confusions and inexcusably long waits for voters discouraged many voters. While people have complained of these delays, no official explanation has arrived as yet.

AAP releases ‘report card’ of BJP’s Meenakshi Lekhi as New Delhi MP

NEW DELHI, APR 12 (PTI): The Aam Aadmi Party has come out with a “report card” of BJP’s New Delhi MP Meenakshi Lekhi and slammed her for not taking any concrete steps in the last five years towards development of the national capital.

The “report card” has been brought out by the AAP as part of a campaign under which it is releasing such compilation on each MP who was elected from the national capital in 2014. The AAP has come out with “report cards” of BJP Delhi president Manoj Tiwari, North East Delhi MP, and

senior party leader Harsh Vardhan, MP from Chandni Chowk.

“Being New Delhi MP, in 2014 she was appointed to head NDMC meetings, even there all promises made to the people turned out to be imaginary,” AAP leader Gopal Rai said.

“During 2014 elections she promised houses for all in NDMC areas, what is the status of this promise five years later? During the past five years Lekhi did not utter

a word on either demonetisation, GST or sealing in Delhi,” he said.

Reacting to it, Lekhi lashed out at the AAP, saying, “Who the hell are you to question me? People in my constituency know the work I have done.”

“I have given self defence training to 18,012 women and the villages I adopted you should see the work done there. I got electric wire changed, put all services under the road, build open gyms, among other things,” she said.

~ SummitTIMES ~
CLASSIFIEDS

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Governor greets Sikkim on Ramnavami

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 12 APR:

Governor Ganga Prasad has extended warm greetings and best wishes to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of Ramnavami.

In his message, the Governor conveys: “Ramnavami, the auspicious ninth day of Chaitra Navaratri is regarded as the day of incarnation of Lord Vishnu in human form Rama... The day holds immense significance to Hindus across the world since ancient times and reminds us of Sri Rama’s life and deeds which epitomise the ideals of selflessness and duty over self. Rama’s life as Ramayana beholds, is considered as an eternal source of wisdom and light for the people committed for the common good of society.

“On this auspicious day, let us pledge to dedicate ourselves to our duties, the wider cause of society and the country. Let us enrich ourselves with the core values and ideals that our glorious culture represents.”

Samba spy scandal: HC seeks Centre’s reply on plea to de-classify documents

NEW DELHI, APR 12 (PTI): The Delhi High Court Friday sought the Centre’s response on a plea by two former Army officers, caught for allegedly spying for Pakistan in the infamous Samba spy scandal which broke out in 1975, to de-classify all documents related to the case.

Justice Vibhu Bakhru asked the Ministry of Defence and Chief of Army Staff to file their replies to the petition and listed the matter for further hearing on September 3.

Ashok Kumar Rana and Ranbir Singh Rathaur, formerly captains, said in the petition that their fundamental rights were violated by branding them as Pakistani spies/ agents and not disclosing the essential documents pertaining to the ‘Samba Spy’ incident to them.

They sought direction to the authorities to de-classify all the official documents pertaining to ‘Samba Spy’ scandal and put the same in public domain as more than 40 years have elapsed and all court cases have ended and no claim of national security can now be raised.

“In all the major democracies around the world including United States of America and several European countries, all the classified documents have a fixed duration of classification and are mandatorily required to be declassified after a passage of a specified time or a specified event,” said the petition, filed through advocate Pranav Sachdeva.

It said the petitioners have tried all the legal recourse available to them to prove their innocence but to no avail as the entire basis of the charges and subsequent court martial proceedings against them were never properly and fully disclosed either to them or to the court.

NE Annual day at CNESPR, JMI

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 12 APR:

Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, JMI (CNESPR) held its 9th NE Annual day on 11 Apr, 2019. The event was organized by the Centre in collaboration with Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative (NCHCI) and hosted by North East Students Association (NESA) in the Engineering Auditorium, JMI. Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative (NCHCI) is an independent not-for-profit organization based in Delhi and operating across the country. NCHCI is committed to preserving cultural and natural heritage.

The welcome remark was delivered by the Director, Prof Simi Malhotra, CNESPR.

The event was funded by North Eastern Council.

The NE Annual Day is one of the major highlights of the University’s Cultural calendar. It is part of the Centre’s cultural extension activities



with the aim to bridge the existing cultural gap between the NE and the rest of the country.

Many renowned personalities in the field of culture, music and traditional art forms have performed in the past events such as Soulmate, Alobo Naga, Lou Majaw, Reuben Mashangva, Mangka and others. She also acknowledged and thanked the North Eastern Council (NEC) particularly Secretary, Ram Muivah, for his constant support and encouragement to all the Centre’s activities.

The cultural heritage of the NE was showcased by displaying Tangkhul Naga traditional attires by Tangkhul Models Team, Delhi. The

Tangkhul Delhi Models Team is a group of models who worked in different profession such as air hostel, corporate employees etc.

The event was also marked by the mesmerizing performance Medley dance by the Northeast Society: Gargi College depicts the unique and diversified culture of the NE. The musical bands Red Light Passengers and the Frisky Pints enthralled the full packed auditorium music lovers from the NE. Abhineet Mishra pulled off a spell bound performance incorporating rich content which was not only make us lough but in way take through the recent

socio-political issues around the country. Especially his take on the issues of north east, allow audience to enter into the larger understanding of the region. His unique way of presentation and engagement with the audience make it smoother to pass on the narrative.

The purpose of the festival is to connect the unique way of life of north eastern people with the rest of the country. The performance showed the diverse culture and dance forms of Northeast India. The event concludes with the votes of thanks from North East Students Association (NESA).

Cong welcomes SC order on electoral bonds, says BJP should reveal ‘murky flood of money’

NEW DELHI, APR 12 (PTI):

The Congress on Friday welcomed the Supreme Court judgement on electoral bonds and asked the BJP to reveal its “murky flood of money” received through such bonds.

The party said it has always maintained that transparency in political funding and governance must be adhered to and free and fair elections in a level-playing field must be ensured, hoping the Supreme Court goes to the root of the matter and opens the sealed envelopes of names of electoral bond donors.

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said, “This so-called corrupt invention of bonds is nothing, but a direct assault on the Indian constitutional basic structure.”

“The BJP should reveal the murky flood of money, which is earned through the 95 per cent electoral bonds having gone to one party. Financial dominance of the single party decimates the very concept of a level-playing field,” he told reporters.

Singhvi said a level-playing field is the heart of free and fair

elections and such elections are the heart of democracy, which, in turn, is the heart of the basic structure of the Constitution.

“To ensure this flow of dirty money in a non-transparent manner by this so-called corrupt invention of bonds is nothing, but, a direct assault on the Indian constitutional basic structure,” he said.

Congress spokesperson Priyanka Chaturvedi took a swipe at the BJP and said the judgement would bring out the “nexus” between the ruling party and its “suited-booted friends”.

“We welcome this judgement coming from the Supreme Court. We have always maintained that transparency in political funding, transparency in governance must be adhered to,” she told reporters.

Singhvi said the Supreme Court has provided the mechanism through its interim order about resolving the issue of electoral bonds which is in favour of the ruling party, even though it has not quashed it.

“The Supreme Court has now said that what-

ever has been given till now, you will give the names in a sealed cover. The Supreme Court has said that what will be given from now till May, you will also give the names in a sealed cover.

“Let me predict between now and May these donations will dry up. These great anonymous names donated generously to one party. Suddenly the generosity will vanish, because now there is a possibility that the sealed cover will be opened in May,” he said.

The Congress leader said the crux of this design “of Modi, by Modi, for Modi” was to facilitate unanimity to keep names secret, to receive money without names being known and what benefit those names get also remains anonymous.

Chaturvedi alleged that the BJP, which came to power on the back of promises such as bringing in transparency in the system, has done nothing towards it.

She also alleged that the BJP has undermined the Right to Information and the Central Vigilance Commission and the party is doing everything to suppress transparency in

governance.

“We hope that the BJP would explain how they got such kind of political funding. We also hope this would expose the nexus between their suited-booted friends and the political party, which has within its five years not given development to this country, but developed a five-star headquarters for itself in Delhi,” she said.

The Supreme Court on Friday directed all political parties to furnish receipts of political funding received through electoral bonds and details of identity of donors in a sealed cover to the Election Commission.

In an interim order, the apex court also directed all political parties to provide details of the amount of the bond and bank account of donors by May 30 to the poll panel.

The apex court said it would examine in detail changes made in Income Tax law, electoral law and banking laws to make them in consonance with the electoral bond scheme and ensure balance does not tilt in favour of any political party.

Chhath Puja celebrated

GANGTOK, 11 APR: The Bihari community in the State celebrated Chhath Puja in grand manner all over the State after casting their votes in the assembly and parliamentary elections on Thursday.

Members of the community from in and around Gangtok offered prayers here at the Thakurbari complex.

Likewise, the state has also witnessed Chhath Puja celebrations at Tadong Durga Mandir, Ranipool, Singtam and



Rangpo in East Sikkim along with other bazaar areas in North, South and West districts.

A member of Gangtok Chhath Puja com-

mittee, Bijay Prasad, adds that all members of the community cast their votes early in the morning and then gathered for the puja.

116 candidates in fray for six LS seats in Mumbai

MUMBAI, APR 12 (PTI):

As many as 116 candidates are left in the fray for the six Lok Sabha constituencies in Mumbai after the last date of withdrawal of nomination papers ended on Friday.

In Mumbai South and South Central, two candidates each withdrew their papers.

In Mumbai South Central, 17 candidates in the fray, while in Mumbai South 13 candidates are contesting.

In South Central, sitting Shiv Sena MP Rahul Shewale is pitted against

Congress’s Eknath Gaikwad. While in South, sitting Shiv Sena MP Arvind Sawant is contesting against Milind Deora of Congress.

Shewale and Sawant had defeated Gaikwad and Deora respectively in 2014.

In the suburbs, 86 candidates remain in the fray in four constituencies after five candidates withdrew their papers.

There are 18 candidates in fray in Mumbai North, 21 in Mumbai North West, 27 in Mumbai North East and 20 in Mumbai North Central.

Jet operates only 11 aircraft, PMO holds meeting to discuss situation

NEW DELHI, APR 12 (PTI):

The crisis in Jet Airways deepened Friday as the airline could operate only 11 aircraft on Friday, leaving passengers stranded at various domestic and international airports and prompting the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) to hold an urgent meeting to discuss the situation.

According to sources, the meeting was called after Civil Aviation Minister Suresh Prabhu asked secretary of the department Pradeep Singh Kharola to review issues concerning Jet Airways.

After participating in the meeting at the PMO, Kharola held a meeting - through video conference - with the management of Jet Airways.

Passengers were left stranded at airports as

Jet Airways announced on Friday that it is suspending international operations till Monday. Moreover, its employees carried out a protest march in Mumbai, asking the airline to pay their pending salaries.

Kharola told reporters that Jet Airways flew 11 aircraft on Friday and will fly six to seven aircraft on both days this weekend on domestic routes.

When asked if the airline has enough funds to keep the operations going on till Monday, the secretary replied in affirmative.

He said that Jet Airways had a meeting with the bankers on Friday “wherein they put forth their demand” regarding interim funding. A consortium of lenders - leading with State Bank of India (SBI) - is current-

ly handling the airline.

Kharola said that the bankers have asked the airline to “rework its proposal” regarding interim funding.

“Monday again, they (Jet Airways) will be approaching the bank. Depending on what the banks decide, the future course of action would be taken,” he said.

“Till Monday afternoon, (six to) seven planes would be flying. After that how many would fly would depend on their interaction with bankers,” he added.

The secretary clarified that while one aircraft that would be flying in the weekend would be Boeing 737, all other aircraft would be ATR. With less than 100 seats, an ATR is a much smaller aircraft than Boeing 737.



Mallya fails to delay USD 40mn Diageo claim, legal costs mount in UK

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, APR 12 (PTI):

Even as he renewed an appeal against his extradition to India, embattled liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya suffered another legal setback on Friday in a separate USD 40-million claims case brought by British liquor giant Diageo plc in the UK High Court.

Justice Clare Moulder ruled against the 63-year-old former Kingfisher Airlines boss’ application to seek a delay in the full hearing in the case scheduled for May 23 and additionally ordered him to pay legal costs of 34,000 pounds. She was extremely critical of the “unexplained” delays by Mallya in clearing the unpaid invoices of his previous solicitors Greenwoods, which resulted in his new solicitors Joseph

Hage Aaronson (JHA) finding themselves in difficulty and wanting to seek an unfair adjournment.

The delay is at best unexplained and arguably of the defendant’s [Mallya] own making. In my view, the claimants [Diageo] are entitled to have their claim progressed expeditiously, Justice Moulder said, concluding that Mallya was the author” of his “own misfortune”.

The claimants say that if the May hearing is adjourned they will suffer prejudice there would be a race in relation to Mallya’s assets which are subject to a number of competing claims; Mallya may be extradited and this will affect the ability to enforce the judgment against him, the judge noted, in reference to the extradition order

and worldwide freezing order already in place against Mallya.

While the judge agreed to a short extension until April 23 for Mallya’s new lawyers to submit their evidence to the court, having missed an April 5 deadline, she ordered that meanwhile the businessman must pay additional legal costs of 34,000 pounds for Diageo’s lawyers within 28 days. Diageo, which had acquired Mallya’s United Spirits nearly six years ago, is claiming USD 40 million paid to the liquor tycoon as part of an alleged breach of agreement.

The UK-based drinks giant is also claiming USD 141 million from Mallya, his son Sidhartha, and two companies linked to them for alleged questionable payments.

The case, dating back to November 2017, is being contested by Mallya and will now go ahead for a full hearing at the Business and Property Courts of the UK High Court on May 23. The three claimants in the case -- Diageo Plc, Diageo Holdings Netherlands BV and Diageo Finance Plc -- are seeking a total of USD 181 million from four defendants Vijay Mallya, his son Sidhartha, Watson Limited and Continental Administrative Services Limited (CASL).

Mallya’s counsel Barrister Daniel Margolin argued for more time to prepare for the full hearing because his firm JHA had received all the documents in the case, including nearly 1,750 electronic files, only towards the end of March.

SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Monitor, Evaluate and Hold Accountable

There will be fewer complaints then, and less resentment

Monitoring & Evaluation have always been part of governance. The least paid-attention-to part, but a part nevertheless. Its presence is token and piecemeal, extended by pick and choose when it should have been institutionalized and extended to all levels. Occasionally, one hears of moves underway to elevate this aspect of administration to the hierarchal dominance it deserves – right at the top – but nothing really moves beyond the talk of such things. M&E should be prioritised. It is high time, especially now when those who control the release of funds and opportunities are demanding achievement records in black & white.

Too many doles, projects, funding and sponsorship have been invested in Sikkim without a scientific, unbiased or transparent appraisal of how far the buck travels in the State.

Frankly speaking, monitoring & evaluation is a simple science. Projects get drafted, funds get allocated, the release of payment requires numerous NOCs and clearance certificates to endorse that the work was done – that's monitoring. People look at roads carpeted a few months ago disintegrate with the first showers – that's evaluation.

So, when the government spends precious funds training its officers on monitoring and evaluation, it is expected that they bring something more to the table than the thumb rule that has the people monitoring and evaluating already. What is it that 'training' can deliver that one does not already know? Definitely the science to be able to monitor and evaluate so well that when things go wrong, the figures align themselves in a way that a shortlist of who is to be blamed how much is ready even before the Vigilance Police wakes up.

Monitoring and evaluation exercises can be carried out endlessly without delivering any results unless the most important follow-up to the M&E process is codified – accountability. And one does not speak of fixing criminal culpability and corruption charges on failed projects here. The M&E exercise should lead to pulling up lethargic officials who contributed to failed projects, those who compromise the impact of good initiatives with their poor delivery and those who routinely fail to see the larger picture. These can be departmental exercises leading to a red inked ACR or a compulsory admission to re-learning school so long as action is seen to be taken after the 'culprit' has been correctly identified. That would be true monitoring and evaluation because it would be delivering accountability. Such follow-up will also ensure that people do not have a reason to grow too resentful, because that is a common condition among the lay people who see expansive promises get processed with shallow intentions, and then tall claims being made without even a token gesture to evaluate or hold agencies to account.

Islamic State: the 'caliphate' is off the map for now, but will evolve in dangerous ways

HAROUT AKDEDIAN
theconversation.com

The so-called Islamic State (IS) recently lost its last remnant of territory in Syria, but observers were quick to remind the world that the war against the organisation is far from over. What then does this loss of territorial control actually mean for IS?

At its height, the self-proclaimed "caliphate" controlled an estimated 34,000 square miles across Syria and Iraq, so its defeat on the ground is clearly a severe blow for it. Nevertheless, IS is now expected to evolve. Its networks will disperse into virtual, online spaces and become largely invisible. It will focus on insurgency tactics and terror attacks with a wider reach.

In the face of this evolution, it may seem like maintaining IS in a contained geographic pocket would have been better than eradicating its primary territorial base altogether. With its defeat on the ground in Syria and Iraq, however, IS and its offshoots will have a more limited capacity for recruitment, indoctrination and growth.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TERRITORY

The success of rebel groups to survive protracted armed conflicts is dependent on their ability to maintain territorial control. They require it to extract resources and enlist local recruits.

Territorial control allows armed groups to force local populations into compliance and conformity with their ideological outlook. Since its inception, IS understood that its radical "Islamic" community does not locally exist. Instead, the organisation set about creating it, reshaping communities under its control in its own image.

Comparative evidence from civil wars around the world demonstrates how territorial control does not depend on a local population's ideological agreement with the forces in place. Instead, in his book *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Stathis Kalyvas argues that a combination of coercive measures and local administrative bodies allows a force to maintain order, stability and compliance.

For example, during the Liberian civil war in the early 1990s, NPFL (The National Patriotic Front of Liberia) rebels, led by Charles Taylor, used administrative bodies and courts in the territory they controlled to create an alternative order backed up by displays of brutality and violence. This led to an intricate system of patronage and loyalty that created new dependencies between local communities and the new regime.

These Taylor-era Liberian courts are comparable to IS's religious courts which controlled the issuing of permits for cross border activities, defined the educational content of local schools, distributed social services – and carried out extreme public punishments.

In enduring armed conflict, these administrative bodies, social services and displays of order encourage the cooperation of the local population. In other words, territorial control allows the occupier to manage the behaviour and, potentially, the ideology of the people under its control.



INSTRUMENTS OF CONTROL

Under IS, spectacles of brutality and violence were a key part of this. Public executions involved people being incinerated, stoned, decapitated, and thrown off towers. Staged in front of local people, these executions were carefully choreographed, and meticulously documented and disseminated – both locally and internationally.

IS explicitly claimed that these acts of brutality were intended to create a vacuum by disrupting local societal structures that could then be "filled" and "managed" by them. Essentially, displays of violence were used as an instrument of social organisation.

Data personally collected between 2012 and 2014 shows that many living under the rule of radicalised groups such as IS judge these groups based on their own immediate day-to-day conditions rather than the organisation's overall performance or outlook.

If administrative structures function and people have access to food and basic services, for example, local populations may overlook – or even adhere to – the occupying force's ideology (albeit under duress). And those that don't are severely and publicly punished as an "example" to others.

The 2014 executions of members of the Sunni Arab al-Shaitaat tribe, in Deir el-Zor, Syria, are a case in point. IS took the lives of more than 700 of its members for revoking a pledge of allegiance.

In addition, IS incessantly targeted other Jihadi or predominantly Sunni rebel formations. Indeed, the tally of those killed continues to increase as more mass graves are discovered.

VIOLENT CONSOLIDATION

Such atrocities were examples of IS consolidating its power through the elimination of rivals and the suppression of potential or real dissent within its area of control. Faced with this, local populations had no choice but to imitate expressions of religiosity as defined by IS and to demonstrate compliance. For local people, this was a method of adaptation and survival – but IS's loss of territorial control now greatly reduces its capacity to control and indoctrinate local residents in this way.

The question of how IS's methods impacted local populations in the long run is yet to be answered. A lot will depend on what happens next in its former territory and to those living there now.

Either way, while IS is badly incapacitated, it certainly is not finished. It will most likely splinter into new organisations which might try to establish territorial control elsewhere. Parts of North Africa and the Maghreb are particularly susceptible, where control over vast swathes of land remain contested. In the meantime, IS will continue to try to nurture its virtual communities and seek new audiences online.

[the writer is Carnegie SFM Postdoctoral fellow, Central European University]

#MeToo in Mexico: women finding their voice as campaign gathers force

DEBORAH SHAW
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The global #MeToo campaign seemed to have largely bypassed Mexico – until recently. There had been some activity through hashtags such as #MiPrimerAcoso ("My First Assault"), and individual cases such as actress Karla Souza's accusations of rape against an unnamed Mexican director. But this created cultural ripples rather than waves – and did not reach the scale of #MeToo and its transnational offshoots, such as the French #BalanceTonPorc, the Italian #QuellaVoltaChe, the Arab world's #AnaKaman, and #MeTooIndia.

That is not to say that harassment, abuse and violence against women is any less serious in Mexico. Sexual harassment at work is widespread throughout the country, as a recent poll released by the group Periodistas Unidas Mexicanas (Mexican Women Journalists United) demonstrated. The poll revealed that of 392 women journalists, 73% had experienced sexual harassment, with 63% of incidents carried out by male colleagues.

The earlier failure to establish a Mexican #MeToo movement was largely due to potential accusers fearing retaliatory action in a country that has tended to protect abusers over victims. Luis Miguel González of *The Economist* attributes this to concerns about financial cost, reputational damage, or indifference to the suffering of victims. But this all changed recently with a tidal wave of activity, via Twitter campaigns, across cultural sectors.

The origins of this Mexican #MeToo campaign began with a tweet on March 21 by political commentator Ana G. González (@anag-g), alleging abusive and violent behaviour against many women by a powerful literary figure. A Twitter account – @MeTooEscritoresMexicanos (#MeToo Mexican Writers) – soon followed, headed by the words "No estás sola" (You are not alone) and "Yo te creo" (I believe you).

This led to a proliferation of profession-specific #MeToo Mexican Twitter accounts in the fields of film, literature, journalism, academia, sport, music, theatre, law and politics – and a movement of women in the publishing industry using the hashtag #MujeresJuntasMarabunta made demands for more specific actions for equal rights.

Mexico now holds its breath as allegations against powerful men emerge with each new tweet – and heads have already rolled. The director of operations of the important Mexico City newspaper *Reforma* was fired following accusations of sexual harassment against him. Three employees of the Mexico City news outlets *Chilango* and *Máspormás* have also been suspended while investigations are taking place.

ACCUSERS ANONYMOUS

Mexico was clearly in need of its own #MeToo movement, but it had to find a way to protect women for it to take root. What is unique about



the Mexican #MeToo phenomenon is that these are industry-focused accounts that offer fearful accusers protection through anonymity. For instance, the account of the #MeTooEscritoresMexicanos features the words (my translation): "If you are afraid to identify your abuser, send an anonymous message with your story and the name of your abuser."

This anonymity has empowered women to speak out, while protecting their identities. But it has drawn criticism for protecting accusers, but not the accused, and any lack of judicial oversight.

The criticisms gathered pace, for example, following the suicide of the Mexican rock musician Armando Vega Gil on April 1. The author of an anonymous post had accused him of sexually abusing her when she was 13. His suicide note proclaimed that the act was taken as a declaration of his innocence to "clear the path my son will walk in the future".

POWER IMBALANCE

Indeed, the MeTooHombres Twitter account (that uses the English @MeTooMenPower) voices the disquiet among some men about the potentially harmful effects of this flurry of anonymous denunciations. The account administrator, who goes by the name of Dante, has spoken against the anonymity of #MeToo Mexico and has criticised what he sees as the lynch mob mentality of such social media campaigns.

While the pinned tweet at the top of the feed asserts that it is not

a site against women, but a space for men, the use of the English word "power" in the Twitter handle, does suggest that for some men this is a gender war. The assertion of such traditional notions of masculinity will certainly make many women seeking cultural shifts uncomfortable.

Women are turning to Twitter to denounce their abusers precisely because the legal system and other institutions have failed to offer them protection and justice. In an interview with me, for example, the renowned film critic Fernanda Solórzano summarised the debate thus:

"The lack of a legal system that can deal efficiently and judiciously with accusations of assault and abuse has meant that these fora for anonymous accusations are the only spaces for women to find support and a community that backs them. On the other hand, the anonymity polarises a society that should collectively engage with deep-rooted societal and educational problems."

Despite the flaws inherent in anonymous Twitter campaigns, #MeToo Mexico in all its multiple forms is shaking up cultural life in the country. Women and girls have been given a space in which to speak out, and individual men will be more likely to check their behaviour from everyday sexism to violent assaults and rape. This is how cultures change in the digital age.

[the writer is Reader in Film Studies, University of Portsmouth]

Nepal bans internet game PUBG

KATHMANDU, APR 12 (PTI): The popular multiplayer internet game PUBG has been banned in Nepal following a court order which said that it was having a negative effect on the behaviour of children and youth, according to a media report.

The Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA) on Thursday directed all the internet and mobile service providers to ban PlayerUnknown's Battleground, commonly known as PUBG, the Kathmandu Post reported on Thursday.

According to police, those found playing the game after the ban will face arrest.

The Kathmandu District Court gave the per-



mission to ban PUBG on a petition filed by the metropolitan crime division citing negative behavioural affect in children, the report said.

After the court permission, the division then sent a letter to the NTA requesting it to ban the game.

Based on a letter from the crime division, we

have ordered all internet and mobile service providers to ban the game, Purushottam Khanal, acting NTA chairman, was quoted as saying.

PUBG is a game in which a maximum of 100 players drop on an island and fight to be the last one left standing. The players have to search for

arms and other equipment after landing on the island and compete to win the game.

Players can team with their friends and create crews that they can venture onto the island with. Cooperative play also sees players healing fallen comrades, strategising in teams and holding

positions for better defensive play. Players can chat with each other and on mobile phones.

We received a number of complaints from parents, schools and school associations regarding the effect of the game on children, Senior Superintendent of Police Dhiraj Pratap Singh, chief of the Metropolitan Crime Division, said.

Singh said that they also held discussions with psychiatrists before requesting the court for permission to ban the game.

There have been many shocking incidents due to the game in other countries. We have decided to ban the game before anything unfortunate occurs in Nepal, Singh said.

SC slaps Rs 20L fine on WB for stopping screening of film, says clear abuse of public power

NEW DELHI, APR 11 (PTI): Holding that there was clear abuse of public power, the Supreme Court on Thursday imposed a Rs 20-lakh fine on West Bengal government over not allowing screening of satirical film "Bhobishyoter Bhoot".

Castigated the state police, saying its action poses a grave danger to personal liberty and free speech and expression. In scathing remarks, the top court said that by pulling down the film from the theatres, the West Bengal police overreached their statutory powers and became "instruments in a concerted attempt to silence speech, suborn views critical of prevailing cultures and threaten law abiding citizens into submission".

The top court also restrained the West Bengal government from using "extra constitutional" means to stop the screening of the film and said the state shall specifically ensure that the properties of the theatre owners are duly protected and viewers safety is looked after.

"We have no manner of doubt that this was a clear abuse of public power. The police are entrusted with enforcing law. In the present case, the West Bengal police have overreached their statutory powers and have become instruments in a concerted attempt to silence speech, suborn views critical of prevailing cultures and threaten law abiding citizens into submission," a bench comprising Justices D Y Chandrachud and Hemant Gupta said in its verdict on a plea by the filmmakers.

The apex court said the fine amount would be given to producers and cinema hall owners as compensation for violation of right to freedom of speech and expression. It also awarded Rs 1 lakh as litigation costs to the producers.

It said that the petitioners have suffered violation of their fundamental right to free speech and expression and of their right to pursue a lawful business.

The apex court said that the state of West Bengal had informed it that it had not taken recourse to its statutory powers either under state or Union legislation.

"If that be so, there has to be some explanation forthcoming before the court why the film was simultaneously removed from the theatres, at one stroke, shortly after release.

"The apprehension of the petitioners that this was an action which followed on the letter dated February 11, 2019 of the Joint Commissioner of Police is not unfounded. The letter addressed by INOX to the producer specifically mentions that they were directed by the authorities to discontinue the screening in the 'interest of the guests,'" it said.

The top court said that the approach of the authorities in the present case treats citizens as "subjects" denying them autonomy and self-determination, by vesting wide authority to decide the forms of expression that these "subjects" can access and be "trusted" with having exposure to.

"The police are not in a free society the self-appointed guardians of public morality. The uniformed authority of their force is subject to the rule of law. They cannot arrogate to themselves the authority to be willing allies in the suppression of dissent and obstruction of speech and expression.

"The Joint Commissioner was not unmindful of the fact that the film had been slated for release within a few days of his communication in theatres across the city of Kolkata and the state. If there was any doubt whatever over the entitlement of the producers to have the film exhibited, it was laid to rest when the producers immediately informed him of the film being CBFC certified," it said.

The bench termed as insidious the step to unceremoniously pull down from theatres a film which is duly certified and slated for release.

"They are insidious because they are not backed by the authority of law. They pose grave dangers to free speech because the citizen is left in the lurch without being informed of the causes or the basis of the action. This has the immediate effect of silencing speech and the expression of opinion," it said.

The apex court further said the ability to communicate 'ideas' is a legitimate area of human endeavour and is not controlled by the acceptability of the views to those to whom they are addressed.

"When the ability to portray art in any form is subject to extra constitutional authority, there is a grave danger that fundamental human freedoms will be imperiled by a cloud of opacity and arbitrary state behaviour," the court said.

The apex court was hearing a plea filed by Indibily Creative Pvt Ltd and others seeking a direction to the state government and its departments including the Home as also the Police Commissioner to refrain from causing any obstruction to unhindered exhibition of the film.

The film was certified for public viewing by the Central Board of Film Certification on November 19, 2018. It has a U/A certification.

A communication was received by one of the producers of the movie from the Special Branch of West Bengal Police that the contents of the film may hurt public sentiments which may lead to political law and order issues.

The petition had said that that the film has been taken down from a majority of theatres, and out of 48 exhibitors, only two were presently displaying the film.

The film, directed by Anik Dutta, was released on February 15 and withdrawn a day later.

The story of the film revolves around a group of ghosts, including of a politician, who assemble at a refugee camp and try to be relevant in the contemporary times.

Ayushman Bharat package rates revision on radar



KOLKATA, APR 12 (PTI): The contentious issue of package rates of Central government's Ayushman Bharat scheme may be resolved after the Lok Sabha election, a senior official of a private hospital chain said here on Friday.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has demanded a "reasonable and fair package rate" in the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), which seeks to provide a cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year and is likely to benefit more than 10 crore poor families across the country.

"Government is seriously considering on package rates.

We are expecting something after the election," Medica Group of

Hospitals chairman Alok Roy said on the sidelines of a programme organised by The Bengal Chamber.

PricewaterhouseCoopers healthcare leader Rana Mehta said the rates of Ayushman Bharat is not sustainable for quality healthcare and the industry has to compromise on quality at these tariffs.

The AB-PMJAY will help in building a national healthcare record database, Mehra said.

Roy said technology continues to reduce healthcare cost if inflation is taken into account.

"The charge of a procedure remains at the same level even after 10 years. It should have been higher by 50-100 per cent," Roy said.

Indian embassy issues advisory for Kailash Mansarovar Yatra via Nepal



KATHMANDU, APR 12 (PTI): The Indian Embassy in Nepal has asked Indian citizens planning to travel for Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through the Himalayan kingdom to get appropriate Chinese visa and travel permit for Tibet before commencing the journey.

In an advisory, the Embassy also advised the pilgrims to ensure that they have adequate insurance coverage to meet all exigencies, including high altitude sickness, emergency medical relief, evacuation and extended stay.

"The Chinese visa is to be obtained from the Embassy of China in New Delhi and not from Embassy of China in Kathmandu," the advisory said.

"They (the pilgrims) should ensure that travel agent has obtained Restricted Area Permit for Simikot/Hilsa or Rasuwagidhi in Nepal as per their itinerary/route," it

added.

As there are minimal or no medical facilities in Simikot and Hilsa, the pilgrims are advised to carry adequate medicines for duration of the tour and reserve supply for at least another 10 days.

"Simikot and Hilsa do not have ATM facilities, so yatis should carry adequate cash to meet any emergency. Pilgrims should carry SIM Card with international roaming facility," the advisory said and asked the pilgrims to install messenger applications like Whatsapp, Viber and WeChat to remain in constant communication even from places with poor or no mobile connectivity but having Wi-Fi.

"Pilgrims are advised to halt at all designated acclimatisation points along the journey to reduce health risks arising from change in altitude or oxygen levels.

BJP, TMC cross swords over use of security forces in first phase

COOCH BEHAR/KOLKATA, APR 11 (PTI): The BJP candidate of Cooch-behar Lok Sabha seat Nishit Pramanik Thursday held a protest in front of the District Magistrate's office, demanding a re-poll in all booths where central forces were not deployed, accusing the ruling Trinamool Congress of rigging elections in several seats.

The BJP and the TMC Thursday engaged in a war of words with the two parties accusing each other of using state police and central forces to "manipulate" the voting process in Cooch Behar Lok Sabha seat, which went to polls Thursday in the first phase.

"We have complained to the EC and the district magistrate that rigging was going on in over several polling stations in different parts of Cooch Behar. But no action was

taken. The Trinamool Congress goons rigged the polls in at least 350 polling booths," Pramanik claimed.

"We want repoll in all the polling stations which were guarded by the state police and not by the central force personnel. I will continue the demonstration unless our demands are heard," he said.

Polling was held in two north Bengal seats Cooch Behar and Alipurduar in the first phase and around 81 voter turnout was registered.

Trinamool Congress secretary general Partha Chatterjee alleged that the BJP has used the central forces to terrorise the voters.

"We have reports of central forces threatening voters. This is unprecedented. We condemn it and want EC to look into it. Is this the

way they want poll to be conducted," Chatterjee said.

TMC leader and North Bengal Development Minister Rabindranath Ghosh claimed that EVMs malfunctioned in several booths and it could be part of a conspiracy to manipulate votes.

"I have never seen such an election ever in my life. Just within two hours, so many EVMs have started malfunctioning. I have been calling the observers and nobody is answering," Ghosh told PTI.

The TMC and the BJP are the main contenders in the two north Bengal seats, while the CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Congress are fighting to prove their existence.

Left Party constituent Forward Bloc is contesting from Cooch Behar and RSP in Alipurduar.

83.79 per cent polling recorded in two LS seats of West Bengal



ALIPURDUAR/KOLKATA, APR 12 (PTI): An estimated 83.79 per cent of 34.52 lakh voters exercised their franchise in Cooch Behar and Alipurduar Lok Sabha constituencies in the first phase of polls in the state, an election department official said Friday.

In Cooch Behar (SC), 83.88 per cent electorate cast their votes till 6 pm Thursday, while Alipurduar (ST) seat registered 83.70 per cent polling, he said.

No incident of violence was reported from any part of the two constituencies and the first-phase of the seven-phase election in the state was largely "peaceful", he said.

The ruling Trinamool

Congress (TMC) as well as the opposition BJP and the Congress, however, complained that polling was not undertaken in a free and fair manner in the two parliamentary seats.

TMC leader and North Bengal Development Minister Rabindranath Ghosh alleged that EVMs malfunctioned in several booths and it could be part of the opposition's conspiracy to manipulate votes.

A presiding officer at Sitalkuchi area of Cooch Behar constituency has been showcased following complaints that he allowed some unidentified persons inside the booth, the election department official stated.

Asked about parties

seeking re-poll in several polling stations in Cooch Behar constituency, he said the department is reviewing the reports of the presiding officers and a decision will be taken soon.

With the conclusion of the first phase, the fate of 18 candidates in the two seats has been sealed in the Electronic Voting Machines.

The ruling TMC and the BJP are the main contenders in the two north Bengal seats, while Left Front constituents - the Forward Bloc and the RSP - and the Congress are fighting to prove their existence.

Polling in the remaining 40 Lok Sabha seats in the state will be held in six more phases.

Zero per cent polling in some Maoist-hit areas of Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, APR 11 (PTI): Though first phase polls remained violence-free in Odisha on Thursday, zero per cent polling was recorded in some Maoist-hit areas of Malkangiri district, while villagers in some places boycotted elections over local demands, an official said.

Around half-a-dozen booths in Chitrakonda area of Malkangiri district recorded "zero polling," he said.

"Yes, we have received reports of poll boycott by villagers over some issues, while zero polling was recorded in some Maoist-hit areas of Malkangiri district," Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Surendra Kumar said.

Sources in Malkangiri district administration said that in many places in Chitrakonda assembly segment, people did not turn up to cast their votes.

Though the polling stations were located close to the BSF camps



to ensure safety of voters, the people in Cut-off area and in Mathili block in Malkangiri district chose not to take any risk. Earlier, the Left Wing Extremists had appealed to the villagers through posters to boycott the polling.

Meanwhile, a report from Kalahandi district said that the people in five places boycotted votes on local demands like road connectivity, bridges and lack of development activities in their areas.

The vote boycott was reported from Bhejipadar village under Bhawanipatna assembly segment, Surli, Supel, Kusumdara, Sankriguda cluster of

villages under Junagarh assembly segment, Tetengpadar under Narla assembly segment, 4 villages under Taljhapi of Thuamul Rampur block in Lanjigarh assembly segment, Manibandha of Lanjigarh assembly segment.

The CEO said there is no provision for holding repoll in places where people boycotted the polls or refrained from voting due to other reasons.

Meanwhile, a delegation of BJP Thursday moved the Chief Electoral Officer and alleged that the ruling BJD activists indulged in violence and booth rigging at the Chikiti Assembly constituency in Ganjam district and Koraput assembly segment.

"They (BJD activists) rigged booths in the Chikiti assembly constituency. Even BJP polling agents were not allowed to enter as many as 18 polling booths", Mohanty alleged.

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Singapore Open: Sindhu seals semifinal spot, Saina ousted

SINGAPORE, APR 12 (PTI): PV Sindhu survived a scare before making the semifinals but Saina Nehwal was thoroughly outplayed in her straight-game quarterfinal loss on a mixed day for India at the Singapore Open badminton tournament here Friday.

Rio Games silver-winner Sindhu defeated world No.18 and 2017 BWF World Junior Championship bronze-medalist Cai Yanyan of China 21-13 17-21 21-14 to set up a meeting with former world champion Nozomi Okuhara.

It is Sindhu's second semifinal of the season, following a last-four finish at the India Open last month.

The second-seeded Okuhara, hailing from Japan, didn't break much sweat on her way to a 21-8 21-13 win over sixth seed Saina, a bronze-medallist at the London Olympics.

Sindhu broke off at 5-5 in the opening game to earn the bragging rights but her Chinese rival came back strongly in the second game, opening up a lead of 11-6 at the break.

The Indian fought back superbly to narrow the lead to 15-16 before Cai marched ahead to take the match to the decider.

In the third game, Sindhu once again found her bearings and surged to a lead of 11-5 before the interval. The Indian continued to move ahead and closed out the match comfortably in the end.

In contrast, Saina, who had defeated Okuhara in their last three meetings and also enjoyed a 9-4 advantage ahead of this clash, fell apart against the Japanese in a lop-sided clash.

Okuhara jumped to a 9-0 lead, a gap which Saina failed to breach, collecting only eight points in the first game.

In the second, Saina rose to 4-0 but Okuhara clawed back at 6-6 and then turned the tables, reaching 11-8 at the breather.

The Japanese then moved ahead at 12-11 and didn't look back.

Virat Kohli's RCB take on R Ashwin-led KXIP in must-win IPL clash

SANJAY GANJOO MOHALI, APR 12 (PTI): Gasping for breath after six successive defeats, Virat Kohli led Royal Challengers Bangalore will look to snap their winless streak and stay afloat when they take on an inconsistent Kings XI Punjab in a must-win IPL encounter here Saturday.

Nothing seems to be going right for RCB, who slumped to their sixth straight loss after going down against Delhi Capitals in their IPL match last Sunday.

Kohli, who was recently named the Leading Cricketer of the year for the third successive time by Wisden Almanack, will hope that fortunes finally knock at the doors of RCB as they need to win all their next eight matches to salvage any hope of making it to the play-off.

RCB have been inconsistent with both their bowling and batting faltering in many occasions.

The RCB bowlers had allowed Sunrisers Hyderabad to post a mammoth



232 with centuries from Jonny Bairstow and David Warner before they were skittled out for 113 to lose the match by a massive 118 runs.

Against Kolkata Knight Riders, despite AB de Villiers and Kohli scoring 63 and 84 respectively, RCB bowlers failed to defend 205 with KKR riding on Andre Russell's explosive knock of 13-ball 48 to romp home.

Yuzvendra Chahal has been their top bowler with nine wickets but rest of the bowling line-up conceded far too

many runs.

RCB's batting too has looked equally inconsistent.

In their first match against Chennai Super Kings, RCB were bowled out for a paltry 70 in 17.1 overs after their top-order crumbled against Harbhajan Singh and Imran Tahir.

In their last match against Delhi, barring Kohli's 33-ball 41 and Moeen Ali's 18-ball 32 came, RCB's ordinary batting display took the side to a modest 149/8, a target which was easily achieved by DC.

"We need to grab those chances, can't give excuses every day. We just weren't good on the given day. That's the whole story of RCB this season," Kohli had said after the match.

"When you have clarity, you can take your chances better. It hasn't happened so far, and that's the reality."

KXIP, on the other hand, have won four matches out of seven but they have maintained dominance on home ground.

However, Punjab failed to defend 197

against Mumbai Indians in their last match with Kieron Pollard's knock of 31-ball 83 blowing them away.

Despite the loss, KXIP's batting has done well with opener K L Rahul, who scored unbeaten century against Mumbai, and Chris Gayle looking in devastating form.

Gayle had felt a twitch in the back in the previous encounter against Mumbai and it remains to be seen if he would be available for Saturday's clash against RCB.

Kings XI also has the likes of David Miller and Mandeep Singh and the side will look forward to some big knocks from them as well.

The pace-spin duo of Mohammad Shami and Ashwin has been KXIP's best bowlers and they would look to put another good show.

Among others, Ankit Rajpoot, Sam Curran, Hardus Viljoen, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Andrew Tye would also look to provide depth to the Kings XI bowling.

Dhoni let off with 50 per cent fine after angry reaction to umpire's call



JAIPUR, APR 12 (PTI): Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni escaped a ban and was let off with a 50 per cent fine on his match fee for an unprecedented confrontation with the on-field umpires during the IPL encounter against Rajasthan Royals here.

In a rare instance, Dhoni, who was not even meant to be on the field of play, lost his cool and rushed out of the dugout to challenge umpire Ulhas Gandhe after he flip-flopped on a no ball on Thursday night.

"MS Dhoni, the Chennai Super Kings captain, was fined 50 percent of his match fees for breaching the VIVO Indian Premier League's (IPL) Code of Conduct during his team's match against Rajasthan Royals at Jaipur," the BCCI stated.

Gandhe had tried to rule a waist high full toss as no ball by RR all-rounder Ben Stokes. But he reversed his decision after square leg umpire Bruce Oxenford did not signal for it.

"Dhoni admitted to the Level 2 offence 2.20 of the IPL's Code of Conduct and accepted the sanction," it further stated.

As is the case with IPL teams, it's the franchise that will pay the fine on the player's behalf.

Dhoni was seen angrily gesturing at Gandhe for backtracking after initially signalling a no ball.

It took some convincing from Oxenford for Dhoni to head back to the dugout even though he seemed far from convinced.

But the confusion and the ensuing confrontation did not have a bearing on CSK's fortunes.

Stokes failed in the final over and Mitchell Santner finished the match with a six to take his team to a four-wicket win in a chase of 152.

According to the ICC Code of Conduct, which governs the IPL, showing serious dissent at an umpire's decision by words or action can lead to a maximum punishment of one-Test or two-ODI ban.

The ongoing edition of the IPL has had quite a few umpiring controversies so far. Not too long back, India and Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli lambasted the standards after his team was at the receiving end of a poor no ball call.

The umpire failed to spot a clear case of over-stepping in RCB's clash against Mumbai Indians and Kohli had gone on to say that the officials "should keep their eyes open".

Focus on Pollard, Joseph as MI eye 4th straight win



NIKHIL BAPAT MUMBAI, APR 12 (PTI): West Indian duo of Kieron Pollard and Alzarri Joseph will hog the limelight when Mumbai Indians lock horns with an out-of-sorts Rajasthan Royals in an IPL match in which home skipper Rohit Sharma's return from injury will also be awaited here Saturday.

A leg spasm had forced Rohit to miss an IPL game for the first time in 11 seasons when he set out of Mumbai's last game against Kings XI Punjab.

In his absence, stand-in skipper Kieron Pollard ensured MI continue its good run as his whirlwind 83-run knock helped the side script a three-wicket win in a humdinger on Wednesday.

The winning runs were hit by 22-year-old Alzarri Joseph, who has been the new sensation in this year's cash-rich T20 league.

After a dream debut where he returned with best IPL figures of six for 12 against Sunrisers Hyderabad, Alzarri (15 not out) played a crucial cameo against Kings XI to romp the side home.

So it would be interesting to see whether the Antigua-born Joseph and the big-hitting Pollard

can carry their form into Saturday's game.

Another West Indian who would be in focus is Jofra Archer, who had given Rajasthan Royal a chance to defend 151 against Chennai Super Kings last night with a superb spell of fast bowling.

Mumbai are currently placed at the third spot with four wins from six matches, while Rajasthan are languishing at the seventh position with a solitary win from six matches.

Rohit's injury had given a scare to India ahead of the World Cup but Pollard has made it clear that the skipper missed the last game just as a precautionary measure and he should be back in the next game.

"Obviously, Rohit is the captain of the team and it was only a precautionary measure for the team. He should be back in the next game," Pollard had said.

Rohit's inclusion will not only put to rest any doubts about his fitness but also boost the Mumbai's batting line-up, which also comprises Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya, Krunal Pandya and ever-reliable Surya Kumar Yadav.

The hosts have death overs specialist Jas-

prit Bumrah along with Australian pacer Jason Behrendorff apart from Joseph and on their day, they can rip apart any good batting line up.

Rajasthan would be wary of MI's attack after they were reduced to a 53 for three by CSK last night. None of the batsmen could score a big innings with Ben Stokes emerging as the top-scorer with 28 run.

RR's batting line-up, including skipper Ajinkya Rahane, Sanju Samson, Steve Smith and Jos Buttler will need to pull up their socks to confront the Mumbai bowlers at the Wankhede Stadium.

Archer had a decent outing against Chennai Super Kings and his performance would also be key.

Rajasthan Royals pacers Jaydev Unadkat and Dhawal Kulkarni along with Shreyas Gopal and leggie Riyan Parag would have to deliver for their skipper if they have to stay alive and make it to the Playoffs.

English all-rounders Ben Stokes, who was hit for a six by New Zealand's Mitchell Santner to seal the four-wicket win for Chennai, will have to come up with something special with both bat and ball.

traditionally marks the start of the so-called fighting season, though the announcement is largely symbolic as in recent winters the Taliban have continued fighting Afghan and US forces.

"Our Jihadi obligation has not yet ended," the Taliban said.

'Frightening' Vettel jolts Mercedes at landmark Chinese GP

SHANGHAI, APR 12 (AFP): Sebastian Vettel fired a warning as he powered his Ferrari to the fastest time in first practice at the milestone Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai on Friday.

For what will be the 1,000th Formula One race, the four-time world champion clocked a best time of one minute 33.911 seconds, with Mercedes' reigning title-holder Lewis Hamilton 0.207 secs behind.

Third fastest was Vettel's young Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc, 0.256 secs off the pace, followed by Red Bull's Max Verstappen and Valtteri Bottas in the other Mercedes.

But the session belonged to Germany's Vettel, 31, who has been under pressure after a series of unforced errors stretching back to last season.

He has been struggling with the set-up of his Ferrari and admitted on Thursday that he was still not really at home in it.

Vettel finished fourth in the season-opening race in Melbourne and was then fifth in Bahrain, where he was eclipsed by team-mate Leclerc, who is 10 years his junior.

Vettel's opening Shanghai salvo was all the more impressive because the Ferraris were on the slower medium

tyres in first practice.

The Chinese Grand Prix has one of the longest straights in Formula One, which will suit Ferrari's awesome pace.

Toto Wolff, Mercedes team principal, called Vettel's straight-line speed "frightening".

"We need to stretch ourselves and fight," said Wolff, adding that Ferrari were clearly ahead of the rest in Bahrain despite the Mercedes one-two of Hamilton and Bottas.

"Having a benchmark like that helps and motivates." Leclerc, the supremely talented 21-year-old who led in Bahrain but finished third after his Ferrari lost power, struggled early on in practice before finding some rhythm.

The Monegasque locked his wheels in his opening run and was then told over the radio from his Ferrari team on a subsequent lap: "We need you to push a bit."

In warm Shanghai conditions and with a slight breeze, Racing Point's Lance Stroll took a minor spin, the Canadian's predominantly pink car shuddering down the track.

After two grands prix this season, Bottas leads his team-mate Hamilton by one point at the top of the standings, followed by Verstappen, Leclerc and Vettel.

Trump laments EU toughness on Britain after Brexit delay

WASHINGTON, APR 11 (AFP): US President Donald Trump on Wednesday lamented the EU was being "so tough" with Britain after European leaders agreed to delay Brexit by six months.

Under a deal struck during late night talks in Brussels, Britain received a "flexible extension" until October 31, saving all sides from a chaotic no-deal British departure at the end of the week.

British Prime Minister Theresa May had originally asked for a delay until June 30, but European leaders voiced

South Korean constitutional court eases abortion ban



SEOUL, APR 11 (AFP): South Korea's constitutional court on Thursday ordered the country's decades-old abortion ban to be lifted in a landmark ruling over a law that campaigners say puts women at risk.

South Korea remains one of the few industrialised nations that criminalises abortion, except for instances of rape, incest and when the mother's health is at risk.

But the nine-member bench ruled by seven to two that the 1953 statute aimed at protecting lives and traditional values "goes against the constitution" and ordered the law to be revised by the end of next year.

"The abortion ban limits women's rights to pursue their own destinies, and violates their rights to health by limiting their access to safe and timely procedures," the court said in a statement.

"Embryos completely depend on the mother's body for their survival and development, so it cannot be concluded that they are separate, inde-

pendent living beings entitled to rights to life." Hugging and celebrating, hundreds of women -- including teenagers and females with disabilities -- cheered wildly in front of the Constitutional Court in central Seoul, where the official ruling was announced.

"Women deserve to be happy as much as we want to be today," said activist Bae Bok-ju told AFP.

"Today's decision was made because countless women ceaselessly fought for their rights for so many years. We deserve the world's attention and we deserve its recognition," Bae added.

Under the ban, women who underwent the procedure could face up to a year in jail and a fine, while doctors who performed the procedure were given two years in prison.

The 1953 law had been widely flouted and rarely resulted in prosecutions, but activists had claimed it left women facing being unable to pay for terminations, unsafe procedures and social ostracisation.

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Taliban announce spring offensive amid Afghan peace push

KABUL, APR 12 (AFP): The Taliban on Friday announced their annual spring offensive, which comes as the US and Afghan politicians try to negotiate for a peace settlement with the Islamic militant groups.

Operation Fath -- which means

"victory" in Arabic -- will be conducted across Afghanistan with the aim of "eradicating occupation" and "cleansing our Muslim homeland from invasion and corruption," the Taliban said in a statement.

The annual spring offensive

Sudan army topples veteran leader Bashir

KHARTOUM, APR 11 (AFP): Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir was ousted by the army on Thursday, brought down by months of anti-government protests against his three decades of iron-fisted rule.

"I announce as minister of defence the toppling of the regime and detaining its chief in a secure place," Defence Minister Awad Ibnouf said in a sombre televised address to the nation.

A transitional military council would replace Bashir for two years, he said, adding that the country's borders and airspace would be shut until further notice.

The veteran leader, who swept to power in a 1989 coup, was one of Africa's longest serving presidents. He is wanted on charges of genocide and war crimes by the International Criminal Court.

Since early morning huge crowds of jubilant Sudanese had begun thronging squares across the centre of Khartoum on Thursday as the army promised an "important announcement".

Chanting "the regime has fallen," thousands poured into the open ground outside army headquarters where defiant protesters have braved tear gas to keep up an unprecedented sit-in now in its sixth day.

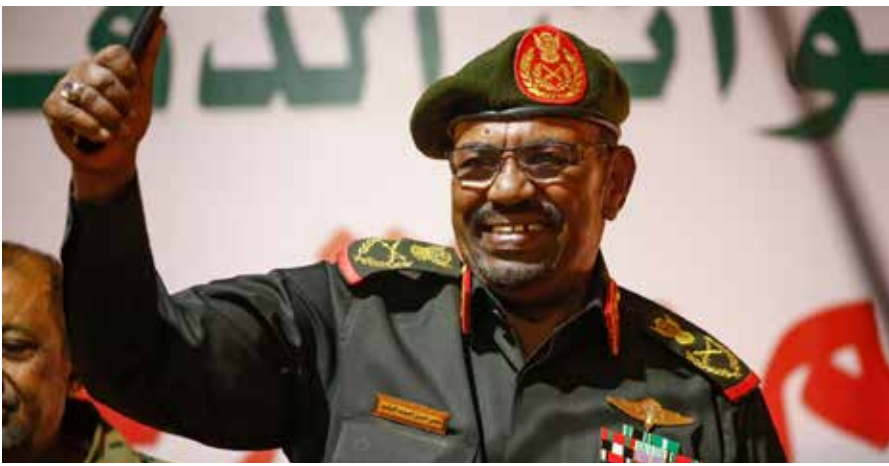
The protests, which erupted in December over the government's tripling of the price of bread, were the biggest challenge yet to Bashir's long rule.

The security agency also announced it was freeing all political prisoners.

Army vehicles carrying troops were seen deploying across the centre of Khartoum from early Thursday.

Troops raided the offices of the Islamic Movement, the ideological wing of Bashir's ruling National Congress Party, witnesses told AFP. And martial music was played on state television as soldiers ordered the TV to halt its normal programming.

Outside army headquarters, dozens of joyful protesters climbed on top of landcruisers and armoured vehicles that had been posted to protect them from interven-



tion by other branches of the security forces.

Braving the searing 42 degree Celsius (108 degree Fahrenheit) heat, protesters hugged and kissed soldiers in the crowd.

Sudan's feared intelligence service said it was freeing all the country's political prisoners, state media reported.

"The National Intelligence and Security Service has announced it is releasing all political detainees across the country," the official SUNA news agency said.

But in the eastern cities of Kasala and Port Sudan, protesters stormed NISS buildings after the releases failed to materialise, witnesses said.

Protesters approached the NISS building in Kasala demanding that officers free their prisoners, a witness told AFP by telephone from the city.

"But NISS officers fired in the air after which protesters stormed the building and looted all the equipment inside," he said.

Protesters chanting slogans against Bashir also stormed an NISS building in Port Sudan, a witness said.

The raids on NISS buildings came despite a call by protest organisers for demonstrators to refrain from attacking government figures or buildings.

"We are calling on our people to control themselves and not to attack

anybody or government and private properties," the Alliance for Freedom and Change (AFC), the umbrella group that is spearheading the protest movement, said in a statement.

"Anyone found doing this will be punished by law. Our revolution is peaceful, peaceful, peaceful."

"We had enough of this regime -- 30 years of repression, corruption, rights abuses, it's enough," said one protester at the sit-in.

Demonstrators have spent five nights defiantly camped outside the sprawling headquarters complex, which also houses Bashir's official residence and the de-

fence ministry.

There has been an often festive mood at the sit-in, with protesters singing and dancing to the tunes of revolutionary songs.

The demonstrators have braved repeated volleys of tear gas from members of the NISS since they began camping outside the complex on Saturday, protest organisers say.

Officials say 49 people have died in protest-related violence since demonstrations first erupted in December.

"I hope our revolution will achieve its goal," said Alaa Salah, dubbed the protest movement's "Nubian queen", after a video clip went viral of her conducting chants with demonstrators outside army headquarters.

Earlier this week, the US, Britain and Norway for the first time threw their weight behind the protesters.

"The Sudanese authorities must now respond and deliver a credible plan for this political transition," the countries' Khartoum embassies said in a statement.

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New Zealand's new gun laws get final assent to take effect

WELLINGTON, APR 11 (AP): New Zealand's governor general on Thursday formally signed into effect sweeping gun laws outlawing military style weapons, less than a month after a man used such guns to kill 50 people and wound dozens at two mosques in Christchurch.

Governor General Patsy Reddy signed the bill as police said a gun buyback program will be announced to collect the now-banned weapons. The weapons will be illegal starting at midnight, but police said a brief amnesty program will be in effect until details of the buyback are announced. "For people who find themselves now in possession of a prohibited firearm, we ask you to please notify us," Police

Deputy Commissioner Michael Clement said.

"The collection of firearms will occur at a later stage. " He added that "for now, there is an amnesty in place and we ask people to please notify us," he added.

Anyone who retains such a weapon now faces a penalty of up to five years in prison. Exemptions allow heirloom weapons held by collectors or weapons used for professional pest control.

The House of Representatives on Wednesday passed by a final vote of 119 to 1 legislation banning the weapons after an accelerated process of debate and public submission.

"The Government acted quickly to change New Zealand's firearms laws and Police is now re-



sponsible for implementing and enforcing these new laws," Clement said.

Australian Brenton Harrison Tarrant, 28, was charged with 50 counts of murder and 39 counts of attempted murder. The royal commission set up to investigate issues surrounding the massacre is examining how he obtained a gun license in New Zealand and purchased weapons and am-

munition.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern spoke emotionally during the bill's final reading of the traumatic injuries suffered by victims of the March 15 attack, whom she visited in Christchurch Hospital after the shootings.

"I struggle to recall any single gunshot wounds," Ardern said. "In every case they spoke of multiple injuries, multi-

ple debilitating injuries that deemed it impossible for them to recover in days, let alone weeks. They will carry disabilities for a lifetime, and that's before you consider the psychological impact. We are here for them."

"I could not fathom how weapons that could cause such destruction and large-scale death could be obtained legally in this country," she said.

Ardern, who has won international praise for her compassion and leadership since the shootings, was able to win rare bipartisan support for a bill that makes it illegal to own a military-style semi-automatic rifle.

The only dissent was from the libertarian ACT Party's lone lawmaker in Parliament.

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North Korea bolsters diplomatic lineup amid stalled US talks

Seoul, Apr 12 (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has retained his most important leadership post as his rubber-stamp parliament made a slew of personnel changes that bolstered his diplomatic lineup amid stalemated nuclear diplomacy with the United States.

Some observers say the personnel appointments could show Kim's desire to keep nuclear diplomacy alive rather than returning to a policy of ratcheting up tensions. In Washington, President Donald Trump and visiting South Korean President met Thursday and agreed on the importance of nuclear talks with North Korea.

The North's Korean Central News Agency reported Friday that Kim was re-elected as chairman of the State Affairs Commission at the first session of the Supreme People's Assembly on Thursday. It said the assembly re-elected Kim because of "his outstanding ideological and theoretical wisdom and experienced and seasoned leadership." The 35-year-old Kim holds many governments, military and ruling party leadership

titles, but he officially rules the country in his capacity as the commission chairman. The assembly had first elected him to that post in 2016.

KCNA also published a list of other officials elected to top state posts. Among them is Choe Ryong Hae, one of Kim's top lieutenants who was made president of the assembly's Presidium. Choe was also elected to first vice-chairman of the State Affairs Commission, a new post.

By the constitution, the presidium president post is North Korea's nominal head of state though all state power is heavily concentrated on Kim, the third-generation hereditary ruler of a family that has ruled the North since 1948.

Choe's election to head the presidium means the departure of 91-year-old Kim Yong Nam, who has served all three generations of the ruling Kim family. His retirement has long been expected due to his age.

Three of the four senior officials involved in the nuclear negotiations with the U.S. have been re-elected or newly elected to members of Kim Jong Un's



state commission.

Among them was former military intelligence chief Kim Yong Chol, who travelled to Washington and met Trump twice ahead of Kim Jong Un's two summits with the president last year.

The fate of Kim Yong Chol had been the focus of South Korean media speculation since the second Kim-Trump summit ended without any agreement due to disputes over U.S.-led sanctions on the North. The nuclear negotiator who wasn't mentioned in the assembly-elected lineup is Kim Hyok Chol, the North's special representative for U.S. affairs.

The North's latest personnel changes show Choe strengthened his status as No. 2.

His appointment to first vice-chairman of the state commission could also allow him to oversee the U.S. diplomacy while

having the nuclear negotiators and others in the commission under his control, some observers say.

Choe has been a rising star since Kim Jong Un took power in late 2011. He went China and Russia as Kim's special envoy, and has assumed a series of high-profile jobs including the top political officer in the North's 1.2 million-member military. In 2015, however, South Korea's spy agency speculated that he was briefly banished to a rural collective farm for reeducation.

"It's a positive sign that Choe has gained greater influence in negotiations" with the United States, said analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's Sejong Institute.

He said there is a high chance for Kim Jong Un to send Choe as his special envoy.

Cheong said much of the responsibility for the failed nuclear diplomacy with the United States should be go to Kim Yong Chol, a hardline former military general blamed for two attacks in 2010 that killed 50 South Koreans.

Peak break: China to add 'eco' toilet on Mount Everest

BEIJING, APR 12 (AFP): Climbers with pressing needs on Mount Everest will soon find an "eco-friendly" toilet at a Chinese campsite 7,028 metres (23,058 feet) above sea level in an ongoing campaign to deal with the peak's waste problem.

Decades of commercial mountaineering have turned Mount Everest into the world's highest rubbish dump as an increasing number of big-spending mountaineers pay little attention to the ugly footprint they leave behind.

Fluorescent tents, discarded climbing equipment, empty gas canisters and even human excrement pollute the well-trodden route to the summit of the 8,848-metre peak.

During the climbing season this spring, a Chinese expedition company will add what state media dubbed an "eco-friendly" loo at the higher campsite on the northern slope in Tibet.

"The toilet makes it easy to collect human waste produced by the climbers as there is a barrel with rubbish bags underneath the toilet," Xinhua quoted Pema Tinley, deputy secretary general of the Tibet Mountaineering Association, as saying.

The waste will be col-

lected and brought down the mountain.

Similar facilities have been installed at lower camps, including at the 5,200-metre north base camp, in previous years, according to Xinhua.

The waste from the base camp is taken away daily and is provided to local farmers to use as fertiliser, the news agency reported in February, citing observations by its reporter and a member of the mountaineering management team.

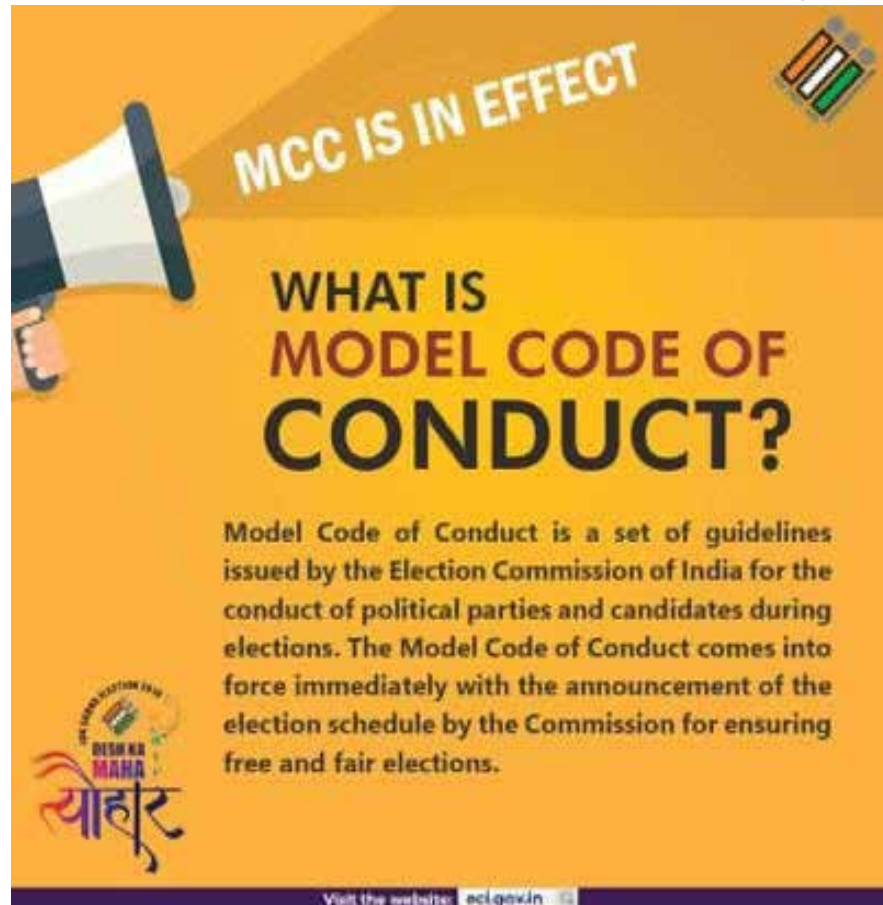
The temporary toilets will be removed at the end of the climbing season.

Governments on both sides of the mountain have been battling the human waste and trash left by an increasing number of climbers.

In February, China banned non-climbers from accessing its Everest base camp in Tibet in an attempt to clean up its side of the mountain.

Meanwhile, engineers in Nepal are considering installing a biogas plant near the more popular south base camp that would turn climber poo into a useful fertiliser.

Currently raw sewage from the camp is carried to the next village -- a one-hour walk -- and dumped into trenches, where it risks contaminating water sources down in the valley.





AB FAB! THE ACTRESS, LUCY HALE SHOWS OFF HER TONED TUMMY DURING A COFFEE RUN IN L.A.

‘Hawkeye’ miniseries with Jeremy Renner in works at Disney+



LOS ANGELES, APR 11 (PTI): Fans may or may not be proven right about what happens to Jeremy Renner’s Hawkeye in the much anticipated ‘Avengers: Endgame’, but the actor will reprise his role as archer Clint Barton in an eponymous miniseries.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the Marvel series will air on the upcoming Disney+ streaming service.

The project is planned as a graduation point for Barton where he is able to pass on the Hawkeye mantle to his young protegee Kate Bishop, who in the comics is a member of the Young Avengers.

Bishop has starred in the ‘Hawkeye’ series

from Matt Fraction and Alex Aja. Launched in 2012, the comic book series centered on the student-teacher relationship between Barton and Bishop.

The ‘Hawkeye’ miniseries is the latest to join the list of Disney+ projects starring Marvel Cinematic Universe talent -- Tom Hiddleston, Paul Bettany and Elizabeth Olsen, and Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan.

Disney+ has two unscripted Marvel shows in the works -- ‘616’ and ‘Hero Project’ -- that were unveiled Wednesday.

Meanwhile, ‘Endgame’ is slated to be released worldwide on April 26.

Priyanka Chopra, Nick Jonas part of 2019 Met Gala Host Committee

LOS ANGELES, APR 11 (PTI): Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas will be a part of this year’s Met Gala Host Committee, the actor has revealed.

The couple, who first posed for the shutterbugs on the 2017 Met Gala red carpet in Ralph Lauren designs before tying the knot last December, feature in the list presided over by Vogue editor Anna Wintour.

Chopra took to Instagram to share the news Wednesday.

“From walking the prestigious carpet for the first time, to meeting my husband and many friends for life... Nick and I are honoured to be on the Benefit Committee for this year’s Met Gala. Looking forward to the first Monday in May,” the actor wrote.

Chopra and Jonas will be joined by other high-profile names in the committee include the likes of Jennifer Lopez and Alex Rodriguez, Lena Waithe, Katy Perry and Jared Leto.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Wintour is co-chairing the gala with Serena Williams, Lady Gaga, Harry Styles and exhibit



sponsor Gucci’s Alessandro Michele.

With 183 people from different walks of life such as showbiz, fashion, philanthropy and sport, actors comprise the largest group with 48 per cent attending the gala.

Bradley Cooper, Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds, Chadwick Boseman, and Lupita Nyong’o will also walk the red carpet.

Organised by Metropolitan Museum of Art, the gala is scheduled to be held on May 6 in New York.

Geoffrey Rush wins sexual harassment defamation suit

LOS ANGELES, APR 11 (PTI): Actor Geoffery Rush, who sued The Daily Telegraph in a sexual harassment defamation suit, emerged victorious, winning a minimum of USD 610,000 in damages from the Australian tabloid.

Daily Telegraph alleged the actor had engaged in inappropriate behaviour towards co-star Eryn Jean Norvill during a production of ‘King Lear’ in 2015 and 2016.

“(There are) no winners in this case. It was extremely distressing for everyone involved,” Rush told reporters, adding he would make no further comment.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Australian Federal Court Justice Michael Wigney said on Thursday that the Telegraph had defamed the Australian actor and not proved its truth defence.

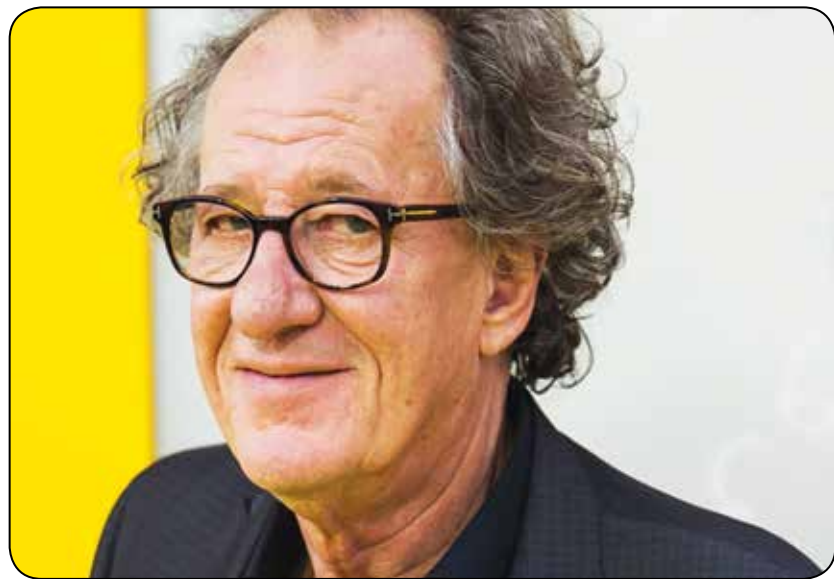
Justice Wigney chastised News Corp’s Sydney-based newspaper and journalist over reports that accused Rush, 67, of inappropriate behaviour towards Norvill.

“This was, in all the circumstances, a recklessly irresponsible piece of sensationalist journalism of the very worst kind. It was difficult to avoid the conclusion that it was calculated to damage,” the judge said.

Hesaid The Daily Telegraph and reporter Jonathan Moran failed to adequately research the stories before they published.

Justice Wigney said that Rush’s accuser, Norvill was not a “credible or reliable witness and was “prone to exaggeration and embellishment”.

Initially, he introduced his findings saying the case, which



had evolved against the backdrop of the #MeToo movement, was “sad and unfortunate”.

Rush’s legal team said the newspaper had implied he is a “pervert”, a “sexual predator” and “committed sexual assault”. He had Rush denied any wrongdoing and described the accusations as “slurs” and “hyperbole”.

Those imputations were central to the judge’s decision, with the Oscar winner able to prove these implications were conveyed by the articles but were not true.

During the trial, Norvill alleged that Rush made “groping gestures in the air with two cupped hands” that simulated “fondling” her breasts during rehearsals.

The trial lasted 13 days late last year.

‘American Horror Story’ season 9 title revealed

LOS ANGELES, APR 11 (PTI): The ninth season of Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk’s ‘American Horror Story’ is titled “1984”, the showrunners announced.

The upcoming cycle of FX anthology is tuning into the ‘80s and Murphy revealed the new name on social media.

The creator shared a video on Instagram which invokes slasher horror films from the decade, particularly “Friday the 13th”, and saw serial killer Jason Voorhees terrorising a group of counsellors at the overnight Camp Crystal Lake.

The year 1984, in particular, welcomed a slate of horror classics to the big screen, including “A Nightmare on Elm Street”, “Children of the Corn” and “Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter”.

Murphy earlier confirmed returning cast member Emma Roberts will be back for season nine and leading lady Sarah Paulson is also expected return.



Olympic freestyle skier and silver medallist Gus Kenworthy is the new entrant, who will play Roberts’ boyfriend. The series is set air later this year.

Wiz Khalifa docuseries coming to Apple Music

LOS ANGELES, APR 11 (PTI): Veteran rapper Wiz Khalifa will give a sneak peek into his life with a docuseries, which is set to air on Apple Music April 17.

According to Variety, the series is titled “Wiz Khalifa: Behind the Cam”.

It will feature the “most intimate aspects” of the musician’s life and contain archival footage from throughout his decade-plus-long career.

Khalifa has hits such as “Black and Yellow”, “Say Yeah”, “Work Hard, Play Hard”, “We Dem Boyz” and “See You Again” to his credit.

The five-episode docuseries will also feature interviews with his family and his closest friends.

The project was produced by SMAC Entertainment, Taylor Gang, Dirty Robber, and Atlantic Records.

Meanwhile, the rapper is set to perform at both Coachella weekends, beginning Friday.

‘The Conjuring 3’ will be a doozy: Vera Farmiga

LOS ANGELES,

APR 10 (PTI):

For Vera Farmiga, “Annabelle Comes Home” is a warm-up before she starts work on “The Conjuring 3” and the actor says the next film will be a “doozy”.

The

45-year-old

actor

reprises

her role

as

ghost

hunter

Lorraine

Warren

opposite

partner

and

on-screen

husband

Ed, played

by

Patrick

Wilson, in

the

third

installment

in the

“Annabelle”

films of

“The

Conjuring”

franchise.

“Conjuring

3’ is

coming,

and it

will

be

a

doozy.

It

will

be

big.

So

for

me,

visiting

these

characters,

it’s

like

practising

your

scales

and

doing

a

large

arpeggios

before

having

to

dive

deep

into

the

next

one.

Be-

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one

is

massive,”

Farmiga

told

EW.

The

actor

said

she

“loves”

playing

the

character

of

Lorraine

opposite

Wilson,

45.



“Of course, any day to pal around with this guy and goof around on set is a good day for me,” Farmiga said of her co-star.

“This is a woman who is living her potential. To be honest with you, in this climate of dissension and rancour and division, I love exhibiting their unity and their closeness and their togetherness. It’s something special for me,” she added.

“Annabelle...” is slated to be released on June 28 and the actor starts shooting for “The Conjuring 3” in summer, which will open on September 11, 2020.

ARIES: The higher you climb, the more support you need. Today’s productive angle between the confident Sun and structure junkie Saturn could illuminate a great coach, mentor or consultant who can guide you up the next rung of the ladder. It’s not a sign of weakness to ask for help (need we remind you again, Aries?)

TAURUS: Yes, Taurus, it’s your turn to call out the neon pink elephant in the room. But relax: Today, people are actually ready to hear it. They’ve known for a while that something was off, and it’s been affecting the morale of the entire team. If there wasn’t an actual mutiny on your hands, people have certainly been drifting.

GEMINI: Power surge! Today’s Sun-Saturn collaboration blesses you with an added measure of authority. With the Sun amping up your leadership skills and Saturn in your intuitive eighth house, listen to your gut. People will follow your lead, Gemini, so step up and take charge. You don’t have to show your entire hand or spend all day justifying the decisions you make.

CANCER: Relationships will benefit from unapologetic honesty today, Cancer, but there’s just one hitch. Don’t confuse your opinions with the gospel truth. The way something SEEMS may not reflect the way it actually is, but you run the risk of flinging false accusations based on assumptions. If you are unhappy with a partnership, lay down your weapons and advance with curiosity..

LEO: Forget about going with your best guess today, Leo. A precise angle between the illuminating Sun and structure hound Saturn insists that you take exact measurements in all that you do. Do the cost breakdown of an upcoming project or travel plan. You may need to simplify or tweak an aspect to keep within budget. If you “heard it through the grapevine,” do your detective work. Unless you have facts and empirical data to back up the case, consider it an unsolved mystery—and perhaps even “fake news.”

VIRGO: Right swipe! Today’s lust-positive angle between the flirtatious Sun and

steady Saturn could bring a hot prospect with staying power. You certainly won’t meet this person while clearing out your Netflix queue. Follow the Sun’s motivation to dress up and meet friends out on the town. Coupled Virgos, don’t get lazy. Take a pause from co-hibernating and reserve a table for two.

LIBRA: Go ahead, Libra, let your inner control freak have the wheel today. With the can-do Sun productively angled to structure fanatic Saturn, you could really whip a plan into shape. Be a stickler for the details. If people’s promises aren’t making sense or their deadlines don’t seem realistic, call it out. You don’t have to go along with the first offer people make.

SCORPIO: WYou’re a creative force today, Scorpio, so use that magnitude to push a project to the finish line. You’ll create some real tremors if you dare to color outside the lines. Don’t just do this for shock value, however. With a message behind your “madness,” you can wake people up to important issues or ideas they haven’t thought of yet.

SAGITTARIUS: So many people, so little time. You’ve been spreading yourself thinner than angel hair pasta lately, Archer. The person suffering most is you, and if you keep running at this pace, you won’t have anything left to give others. Be firm when a close friend or family member pushes for more of your time than you have to give. Today, make sure your schedule includes plenty of pauses in between appointments, a longer lunch break and a spot of time tonight to soak in the tub, listen to music and just relax!

CAPRICORN: You’ve been mulling over some pretty big ideas ever since hard-hitting Saturn entered Capricorn on December 19, 2017. Today, take another step toward putting those visions into words. With the expressive Sun forming a propitious angle to Saturn, take time to write out your thoughts, even if you’re scrawling in your journal or typing into a private Excel document. You might find it helpful to bounce these visions off of more experienced people. Do your research. Some not-so-random Googling

could unearth a Eureka!-level discovery.

AQUARIUS: Lift your nose from the grindstone and give your personal life attention today, Aquarius, as the Sun gets a supportive boost from your co-ruler, structured Saturn. If your house isn’t in order—literally and metaphorically—it’s going to be difficult to focus and be productive. Even cleaning your space can be meditative. Or maybe it’s time to hire a cleaning service to deal with the dust bunnies you simply don’t have the space to clear away anymore..

PISCES: Take charge of a floundering mission and get everyone focused and inspired again. With the expressive Sun in Pisces at a propitious angle to can-do Saturn, people won’t mind when you assert yourself or call out what’s broken about the current state of affairs. As long as you follow up with a proactive idea for FIXING things, you won’t lose your battalion of support. But do take care to word your critiques so that they don’t hit anyone below the belt. Be more of a dolphin than a shark.