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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CM assures Rodhi Ghar on the occasion of Tamu Lochar

**SUMMIT REPORT
GYALSHING, 30 DEC:**

Chief Minister, PS Golay attended the state level Tamu Lochar and silver jubilee celebration of All Sikkim Gurung (Tamu) Buddhist Association (ASGBA) at Pelling, West Sikkim today where the 10th Kanchanjunga Winter Tourism Festival is also underway.

He was accompanied by Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba, PHE Minister and area MLA, Bhim Hang Subba, Power Minister, MN Sherpa and Deputy Speaker, Sangay Lepcha amongst others.

Tamu Lochar is celebrated on 30 December every year and is an important festival of the Gurung community.

Chairman of State Bank of Sikkim, DB Gurung, who is also the chief patron of organizing committee informed that Tamu Lochar is part of religious and cultural practices followed by Gurung community since ancient times.

He accused the former SDF government of dividing Gurung communities in many factions for political gain and nothing was done under the SDF government for the welfare of the Gurung community in the state.

DB Gurung also requested the state government to let the Gurung community

follow their age old custom of sheep grazing in the forested areas of the state that has been abolished by the former SDF government.

Chief Minister, PS Golay in his brief address maintained that each and every community of Sikkim has equal right to practice and preserve their cultural heritage through community based programmes.

Mr Golay reiterated that the SKM government will ensure that community based programmes would not be politicized and no political interference in such programmes would be entertained or tolerated.

He added that due to overwhelming support of the people of Sikkim the government has changed after 25 years but change in the system is yet to happen but the SKM government is determined to bring about this change.

Launching a vitriolic attack on the former SDF government, Mr Golay alleged that provision of tribal status to Gurung community could have been possible if the former state government had not suppressed and abolished the cultural practices of Gurungs such as grazing of sheep in forested areas.

On various demands placed by the



Gurung community related to their culture and customs, the CM asserted that all the demands would be considered by the state government. On the demand of construction of Gurung traditional house 'Rodhi Ghar', the CM suggested that 'Rodhi Ghar' should be constructed at Gangtok considering the town's proximity to the state's administrative centres and appealed to the Gurung

community to identify a suitable land and locality.

He further assured to appoint Gurung language teachers in some schools of the state. The CM also deliberated on tourism sector of West Sikkim and expressed that a comprehensive initiative should have been taken for the development of tourism sector in West Sikkim. He stated that Rangbang Check Post

near Jorethang should be opened so that tourists interested to visit West Sikkim get an easy access.

Tapashree Dance Academy from Gangtok presented traditional Kauda dance of Gurung community, Gothaley Nritya (shepherd's' dance) and cultural performances on Gurung traditional musical instrument 'Tungna' were also performed by various dance troupes.

Chief Minister, PS Golay and other eminent personalities from Gurung community were felicitated by the organizing committee recognizing their contributions in various fields.

Among those felicitated were former Chief Minister of Sikkim, BB Gurung; Mohan Gurung; Sarad Kumar Gurung; Sneha Lata Gurung; Narendra Bikram Gurung; Navin Gurung. Similarly, Certificate of Inspirations to Young talents were also given to namely Roshnila Gurung; Joy Gurung; Devika Gurung; Pranisha Gurung.

The Pelling Tourism Development Association also felicitated Principal Pelling SSS, NK Karki; Topzor Bhutia and Nirmal Rai.

Tamu Lochar celebration had started at Pelling on 29 Dec with political advisor to Chief Minister, TN Dhakal as the chief guest.

Sikkim U-10 team comes second in Bhaichung Bhutia Champions Cup



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 30 DEC:**

Sikkim U-10 football team became the runner-up of the Bhaichung Bhutia Champions Cup 2019 held at Vedas International school, Gurgaon from 27-30 Dec, 2019. Bengaluru was crowned the champion with its two-point lead, a press release informs.

Sikkim slipped to the second posi-

tion after it drew the match played against Delhi this afternoon.

The tournament was organized by Bhaichung Bhutia Football schools.

Passang Dorjee Lepcha from Sikkim was awarded Golden Glove title in the tournament.

Nuingzum Limboo was the highest scorer from Sikkim side with 5 goals in six matches.

The tournament was basically an ex-

posure trip supported by Bhaichung Bhutia and the players were chosen from the tournament held at Taktse International school, Gangtok in the month of October 2019, informed coach, Sonam Topden Bhutia.

"Our players performed exceptionally well and hope that they have learned many things to take back home from this tournament," he added.

'Jamiawala Bagh' play staged outside JMI



NEW DELHI, DEC 29 (PTI):

A play titled 'Jamiawala Bagh' was staged outside the Jamia Millia Islamia which has been at the forefront of the protest against the new citizenship law.

Protesters associated with Jamia Hamdard Alumni staged the play which portrayed and condemned the police action on the students of Jamia Millia Islamia on the campus premises on December 15, said a statement from the

Jamia students.

In solidarity with Mohammad Minhajuddin (the injured student who lost one of his eyes), the protesters were requested to bandage one eye to register their dissent and express support.

The Jamia Coordination Committee, which comprises members from various political outfits active on campus, has been helming the protests outside Gate number 7 of the varsity.

States bound to enforce citizenship law: ASG

SHIMLA, DEC 30 (PTI): All states, including Punjab and West Bengal, are bound to implement provisions of the Citizenship Amendment Act, said Additional Solicitor General of India Satya Pal Jain here on Monday.

Talking to media-persons, Jain said, "The CAA is a central act and all states, including Punjab and West Bengal, are bound to implement its provisions."

Also a member of the BJP's national executive and a former MP, Jain said the Union government had framed the CAA as per powers under Article 11 of the Constitution.

He termed statements of Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee politically motivated, saying they were legally and constitutionally bound

to implement the Act in their states.

"The minorities in our country have been provided special rights under Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution. What is wrong if the norms have been relaxed for providing Indian citizenship to the minorities persecuted on the basis of religion in neighbouring Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan," he asked.

Ancient Kerala church opens gates to Muslims for prayers

KOCHI, DEC 30 (PTI): Opening a new chapter in the history of communal harmony in Kerala, an ancient church in nearby Kothamangalam opened its gates to hundreds of Muslims, who were participating in an anti-CAA

protest, to offer prayers. "I could experience the real spirit of India when authorities of an ancient church in Kothamangalam provided us space to offer Maghrib Namaz," Sayyid Munavar Ali Shihab Thangal,

an influential spiritual leader of Kerala Muslims, who led the namaz, told PTI.

The call for Maghrib Namaz (prayers offered after sunset) came when a "secular march" organised by the Kerala

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No place for violence, 'revenge' in country: Priyanka Gandhi

LUCKNOW, DEC 30 (PTI): Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi on Monday hit out at Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, saying there is no place for violence or "revenge" in the country.

Addressing a press conference here, the Congress general secretary took a dig at Adityanath's earlier warning that rioters damaging public property will have to pay and said the saffron denotes Hinduism, a religion that does not advocate violence or "revenge".

Concluding her four-day visit to Lucknow days after statewide violent clashes over the Citizenship Amendment Act, she told mediapersons that her own security was not a big issue.

"The question of my security is not a big one. It is a small question on which there is no need to hold any discussion. I will not raise the issue of security because it is a trivial matter. It has nothing to do with the public," she said, in an apparent reference to her alleged manhandling by the state police.

"The issue is the safety of common man in UP," she asserted.

"This is the country of Lord Krishna - who was the symbol of compassion. Lord Ram was symbol of compassion. Everybody dances in the marriage procession (baraat) of Lord Shiva. There is no place for 'hinsa' (violence), 'badlaa' (revenge) and 'ranj' (anger) in the country's soul.

"When Shrikrishna gave sermon to Arjun during the Mahabharat war, he did not talk about revenge or anger to the



great warrior on the battlefield. He only brought out the feelings of compassion and truth," she said.

Sharpening her attack on the chief minister, she said, "He is wearing the dress (vas-tra) of an Yogi. He is wearing saffron clothes. This bhagwa (saffron) is not yours, it belongs to 'dhaarmik' (religious), 'aadhyaatmik' (spiritual) tradition of Hindustan. It is a symbol of the Hindu religion. Uss dharma ko dhaaran kariye (imbibe that religion). In that religion, there is no place for anger, violence and revenge. This is all I have to say."

Releasing copies of a 14-page memorandum submitted to Governor Anandiben Patel, she said there are ample proof in the document on how the police and the administration indulged in wrong doing and vandalism.

The memorandum claimed a total of 23 death occurred in the

state in the alleged police excesses during the anti-CAA protests by people, while the UP government claims 19 deaths in clashes.

There is also a video of police vandalism, police beating up a minor in Kanpur, she said, referring to the contents of memorandum.

"There were numerous examples through which it could be seen that the police and administration acted on the chief minister's statement that he will take revenge.

"I think it has happened for the first time in the history that a CM has given such a statement that revenge will be taken from the public," she said.

The properties which have been confiscated and notices served, also include that of ex-IPS officer S R Darapuri.

He probably had used the earnings of his lifetime for his house, and he has got a notice, because he had uploaded a Face-

book post.

Quoting from the memorandum, the Congress leader said the conduct of the UP police has been "patently unlawful, destructive of the rule of law and repressive of honest citizens".

"This is unbefitting of a force that is duty-bound to safeguard and protect the citizens' rights," the memorandum said.

After the chief minister's statement, the police and administration appear to have acted in "a manner that is biased, unlawful, and violative of the fundamental rights of citizens," the memorandum said.

It also said in the last two weeks, people in Uttar Pradesh have been "shot at, beaten, arrested, detained, received notices for the confiscation of their properties and been wrongfully charged with extremely serious offences simply for exercising their democratic right to protest".

In some cases, mere bystanders have been

targeted by police, it said.

The UP Police initially claimed there were no deaths caused by police firing, said the memorandum, adding the authorities, however, later admitted deaths in police firings, while trying to make excuses.

The memorandum said the Bijnor police admitted that 21-year-old, Suleiman of Nehtaur was in fact shot by them, while claiming that the boy was killed as he had fired from a country-made pistol.

The family of the boy has stated that the boy was running fever and had gone for his Friday prayers to the local mosque when the police abducted him, removed his clothes from the upper part of his body and shot him in the chest, it said.

"These contradictory statements made by the police can only mean one of two things - either the director general of police intentionally misled the people, or he himself was misled by his own subordinates and was not aware that bullets had indeed been fired by his men," the document said.

"The fabricated narrative of the police has thus been completely exposed in this case," it said.

It also said notices for recovery of fines and seizure of property in lieu thereof have been issued to 498 persons in Uttar Pradesh.

These persons include "respected members of society" and a number of social activists such as 77-year-old retired IPS officer SR Darapuri, who is a well-known social activist and Ambedkarite scholar, it said.

Deputy CM for fourth time: The return of Ajit Pawar



MUMBAI, DEC 30 (PTI): Monday marked the fourth time senior NCP leader Ajit Pawar was sworn in as Maharashtra's deputy chief minister, the previous stint on the post lasting barely three days.

In an early morning ceremony on November 23, which caught many by surprise, Pawar was sworn in to the post after he rebelled against the NCP and joined hands with the BJP. He resigned on November 26, leading to collapse of the Devendra Fadnavis-led government.

Pawar was the deputy CM twice in the 15-year regime of Congress-NCP alliance in Maharashtra during 1999-2014.

When Ajit Pawar decided to quit politics two months ago citing the Enforcement Directorate move against his uncle and NCP chief Sharad Pawar, some within his party said he may have been looking to get out of the veteran leader's shadow.

This theory was back in circulation last month as in a move few thought possible, the 60-year-old hitched his horse to a different wagon, in the process

becoming the deputy chief minister of Maharashtra once more.

His father worked with film veteran V Shantaram and the suddenness with which Ajit Pawar was sworn in along with Fadnavis looked like something straight from a Bollywood film.

A tough administrator and an immensely popular face in his largely rural Assembly segment Baramati in Pune district, Ajit Pawar is also a maverick leader who doesn't shy from being on a different page from his party, NCP sources said.

Fondly referred to as Dada, Ajit cut his teeth in politics at the grass root-level under the wings of Sharad Pawar in the early 80s.

Ajit Pawar took the plunge into electoral politics by contesting a by-election in 1991 from the Baramati Assembly seat and has since retained the family bastion seven times in a row.

His winning the October 21 Assembly election with the highest margin of 1.65 lakh votes only affirmed his iron grip on the constituency.

Appointed as NCPs legislature party leader before joining hands with the BJP, he first became a minister of state in June 1991, when Sudhakar Naik helmed the state government.

He has so far held portfolios like agriculture, water resources, rural soil conservation, irrigation and power and planning during his three-decade-old career.

The leader, who faced allegations in connection with the alleged irrigation scam and was also named in a money laundering case by the Enforcement Directorate, became the state's deputy chief minister for the first time in November 2010.

Born in a farmer family on July 22, 1959 in Ahmednagar district, Ajit is married to Sunetra, sister of former Maharashtra minister Padmasinh Patil. The couple has two sons Parth and Jay.

Parth unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha election earlier this year from Maval seat in Pune district.

Ajit Pawar's cousin Supriya Sule is Lok Sabha MP from Baramati and nephew Rohit is an MLA from Karjat-Jamkhed in Ahmednagar.

Kerala tops Niti's SDG Index, Bihar worst performer SIKKIM JOINS FRONT-RUNNERS CLUB

NEW DELHI, DEC 30 (PTI): Kerala retained the top rank while Bihar was adjudged as the worst performer in Niti Aayog's SDG India Index 2019, which evaluates progress of States and Union Territories on social, economic and environmental parameters, as per a report released on Monday.

According to 'SDG India Index 2019', Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim have shown maximum improvement, but states like Gujarat have not shown any progress vis-a-vis 2018 rankings.

"Kerala retained its rank as the top state with a score of 70. Chandigarh too maintained its top spot among the UTs with a score of 70.

"Himachal Pradesh took the second spot while Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana shared the third spot," the report said.

Bihar, Jharkhand and Arunachal Pradesh are the worst performing states in this year's Index for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"The United Nations' SDG target of 2030 can never be met without India... We are fully committed to achieving UN's SDG target," Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said at the launch of the report.

Speaking at the event, Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar

said southern states have done well in health.

"West Bengal (rank 14) has also done well in Niti Aayog's SDG Index 2019, but given the education level (in the state), West Bengal should be in top 3 performing states," Kumar added.

The Niti Aayog vice chairman also said Modi government will not leave any stone unturned to make sure India achieves SDG Agenda 2030.

According to the report, India's composite score improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019 with major success in water and sanitation, industry and innovation.

However, nutrition and gender continue to be problem areas for India, requiring more focussed approach from the government.

The report said while three out of five states in the top spots perform equal to or better than the country average on 12 goals, the other two states do the same on 11 goals.

"Only three states were placed in the category of Front Runners (with a score in the range 65-99, including both) in 2018 - Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

"In 2019, five more states joined this league - Andhra

Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Sikkim and Goa, taking the total tally to eight," it noted.

With regard to poverty reduction, states which have done well include Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Sikkim.

On 'zero hunger' parameters, Goa, Mizoram, Kerala, Nagaland and Manipur were the front runners, according to the report.

The SDG India Index, launched last year by Niti Aayog with the help of United Nations, took into account 16 out of 17 goals specified by the United Nations as SDGs. The Index this year ranked states based on 54 targets spread over 100 indicators out of 306 outlined by the UN. The first report, which was launched in 2018 had 13 goals and 39 indicators. The year 2020 will be the fifth anniversary of the adoption of SDGs by 193 countries at the UN General Assembly. The SDGs, constituted through an unprecedented consultative process, have 17 goals and 169 related targets to be achieved by 2030. The SDGs are an ambitious commitment by world leaders which set out a universal and an unprecedented agenda which embraces economic, environmental and social aspects of the wellbeing of societies.

Hundreds of women participate in Night Walk

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC 30 (PTI): Hundreds of women from different walks of life participated in the Night walk organised by the Kerala government across the state on Sunday night.

"Pothu Idam Entethum" (public space is mine too) was organised by the Women and Child Development Department from 11 p.m to 1 a.m to coincide with Nirbhaya Day.

According to government sources, 8,000 women turned up for the walk organised to create general awareness to strengthen the defence systems and to establish the rights of women at public places.

Women from the Malayalam film industry, IAS officers, college students and housewives enthusiastically participated in the event.

In Kozhikode, a young

woman with her three-month old baby in arms was seen walking shoulder to shoulder with other participants.

Dubbing artiste Bhagyalakshmi, Vice-Chairperson of the Chalachitra Academy Beena Paul, Director Vidhu Vincent, Women and Child Development Director T V Anupama and Planning Board Member Mridul Eapen were among those who took part in the walk in the state capital. A case was filed against a 39-year old man in Kasaragod for allegedly making indecent gestures at women who participated in the walk, police said.

Kerala Health minister K K Shailaja said the exercise was carried out by the state government to send out a message that women can walk

fearlessly and without being stigmatised on the streets in the night.

She also said that the walk will also present a message that "women can also go out without time restrictions."

The government was planning to organise such walks in 100 cities without prior information every week.

Ancient Kerala church...

chapter of All India Professional Congress (AIPC) reached near the church on Saturday, known as Cheriya Palli.

AIPC leader Mathew Kuzhalsadan said to avoid the delay in offering evening prayers for hundreds of people from Muslim community, the church authorities were contacted and requested them to permit the Muslims to offer namaz in the church premises.

He said the church authorities immediately threw open the iron gates of the church, wholeheartedly welcoming their Muslim brethren.

The chief priest of the church also arranged carpets and microphones for facilitating the prayers, he said.

"The gesture shown by the authorities of the church...

it generated a kind of feeling among us... no words to explain it. We could experience secularism and the soul of India," said Thangal, who is also a member of Panakkad Thangal family which controls Indian Union Muslim League (IUML).

Priests of the shrine were offering evening prayers inside the church when Thangal was leading namaz in its courtyard.

"This is the message we intended to convey through the secular march," said Kuzhalsadan, a Congress leader, who is heading the AIPC, a department of the Indian National Congress.

The "secular march" against the BJP-led government's decision to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was attended by people from all major political parties including the Congress, the CPI(M) and the IUML.

Noted Supreme Court lawyer Indira Jaisingh, former MP and CPI(M) leader M B Rajesh, Congress MLA V T Blaram, Thangal and Kuzhalsadan addressed the meeting held in Kothamangalam town after the march covered over 10 km from a masjid premises in Muvattupuzha.

DOCUMENTS LOST:

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Another shocker for TDP as another MLA calls it quits

AMARAVATI, DEC 30 (PTI): The opposition Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh got another shock on Monday with one more MLA quitting the party.

Maddali Giri, who represents the Guntur West Assembly segment, met Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy at the latters camp office and discussed a host of issues, including developmental works in his constituency.

On paper, the TDPs strength in the Assembly would still remain 23 but practically it would be now two short of that number.

Giri would not immediately join the ruling YSR Congress to avoid disqualification but is seeking a safe way out like another TDP legislator Vallabhaneni Vamsi who got recognised as an ‘unattached’ member in the Assembly.

Showing his suspension from the TDP as a ruse, Vamsi managed to get recognised as an unattached member with a separate seat allotment in the House.

This strategy jolted the TDP as the YSRC beat it in the game.

In fact, the Chief Minister set a condition that

any legislator seeking to defect to the YSRC should first resign from their elected post.

It did not admit Vamsi into the party but its just a formality.

The TDP, which otherwise acts quickly on such matters, did not react so far to the Guntur West MLAs meeting with the Chief Minister, arousing curiosity on how it would tread in this case after the bitter experience with Vamsi.

TDP sources, however, maintained that the leadership would discuss the issue before taking any action.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting with the Chief Minister, the first-time MLA lavished praise on the Jagan Mohan Reddy governments policies saying the latter was leading the state in an exemplary manner.

The state will become an industrial hub under Jagan.

He is sincerely trying to improve infrastructure in schools and hospitals, Giri said. He criticised TDP president Chandrababu Naidu for allegedly failing the farmers.

Chandrababu should owe an explanation on his betrayal of the farmers, he added.

CBI searches premises of I-T officials in IMA scam

NEW DELHI, DEC 30 (PTI): The CBI has carried out searches at eight locations, including the premises of two Income Tax officers based in Bengaluru, in connection with I-Monetary Advisory (IMA) ponzi scam, officials said Monday.

The officers are then Deputy Commissioner, Income Tax (Investigation), Saurabh Nayak, and ACIT (Assessment) D Kumar, they said.

It is suspected that the two officers allegedly favoured IMA chief Mansoor Khan and turned a Nelson’s eye to his questionable transactions, they said.

Five places were searched in Bengaluru, and one each in Karvar, Salem and Hosur, they said.

The search also covered the premises of three private persons Asish Jain, Kiran Pamidi and Kaizer Basha, they said.

It is alleged that Nayak and Kumar conducted searches at the offices of IMA and assessed its accounts in 2017, they said.

But the officers allegedly did not take action on irregularities in the deduction of TDS on interest payment by the company and ignored huge cash payment entries in the account books, they said.

The CBI has found that the accounts of IMA which were frozen after Income Tax searches in 2017 were defrozen, they said.

The agency suspects huge bribes were paid to the I-T officers by Khan for the alleged omission, they said.

CBI probe has shown that IMA group entities headed by Mansoor Khan

had raised illegal and unauthorised deposits in an alleged in dishonest and fraudulent manner from innocent investors to the tune of over Rs 4,000 crore, the sources said.

As on date over Rs 3,000 crore are outstanding in the form of principal amount and interest in respect of 76,000 investors, they said.

Further investigation is continuing to unearth larger conspiracy, money trail, end beneficiaries and diversion of funds, they said.

The CBI has already filed two charge sheets against 22 accused, including directors, chartered accountants, middlemen and the company and its sister concerns

The CBI had booked Mohammed Mansoor Khan, managing director of the company, and others pursuant to the notifications issued by the Karnataka government and the government of India, the officials said.

The case came to light when Khan fled to Dubai, leaving behind a video message, saying that he was committing suicide because of “corruption in the state and central governments”.

Khan was arrested on July 19 on his arrival in New Delhi by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and is currently in judicial custody.

He had allegedly promised returns ranging from 2.5 to 3 per cent per month to the investors, who are mainly from the Muslim community.

The Karnataka government has constituted a special investigation team (SIT) of the police to probe the case before handing it over to the CBI.

Hindi entertainment comes of age on streaming platforms

BEDIKA

NEW DELHI, DEC 30 (PTI): Streaming platforms in 2019 offered a bold, new online world for writers and directors looking to break out of the confines of Hindi cinema and satellite television to boldly go where mainstream entertainment hadn’t ventured before.

This was the year online content in India really came into its own, offering viewers who could afford it a true alternative to traditional theatres and cable/satellite television still caught in tired, old themes and the war for TRPs.

Both in terms of content and treatment, shows such as “Leila”, “Delhi Crime”, “Made in Heaven” and the “The Family Man” walked a different path, exploring themes that filmmakers usually stay away from for fear of offending a larger segment of audiences.

“Made in Heaven”, for instance, dealt with topics as diverse as gay conflict, starry eyed crushes and sexual exploitation in its nine episodes.

The Amazon Prime

show mirrored upper crust India through its two wedding planner protagonists -- Shobita Dhulipala and Arjun Mathur -- one a woman trapped in a marriage with an upper class man and the other a gay man navigating life in a conservative society.

The show, with Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti, also stars Kalki Koechlin, Jim Sarbh, Shashank Arora and Shivani Raghuvanshi.

“Leila” was very different in mood. Starring Huma Qureshi in the central role as a woman looking for her missing child in a dystopian world where purity of blood is above everything, the Netflix show was an eerily identifiable commentary on contemporary society.

It was set in the fictional land of Aryavart, where people are segregated, resources scarce and women forced to go through purity tests.

“Sometimes dystopia is the very utopia that you are sold. We all are sold dreams and we think, ‘Oh, this is like a great future that we’re going to get.’ But is it real-

ly going to be that great? ‘Leila’ explores that if a dream is promised, then what if that dream is not so rosy? And there is something deeper and more sinister that is going on,” said Qureshi.

Based on a novel by Prayaag Akbar, the show was directed by Deepa Mehta, Shanker Raman and Pawan Kumar.

The other big online show of 2019 was “Sacred Games”. The Netflix show, based on Vikram Chandra’s novel of the same name, delved deep into societal complexes through its three central characters living in a doomsday scenario in Mumbai -- gangster-philosopher Ganesh Gaitonde, honest cop Sartaj Singh and the mysterious and sinister Guruji.

Though season two did not quite meet the expectations set up by the original, the writer-showrunner and directors team of Varun Grover, Vikramaditya Motwane, Anurag Kashyap and Neeraj Ghaywan successfully explored issues such as rabid nationalism and the police-politician-gangster-religious leader nexus.

Early on in one of the episodes, the show also addressed the spate of mob-lynchings through the story of a teenager.

Grover, in an interview with PTI early this year, said the show appeared relevant because the writers ensured that the show engaged with the contemporary world.

“As writers, we are very keyed into current affairs and that helped. Whatever was missing in the book, we took that piece of jigsaw from the world around us,” he said.

“Delhi Crime”, a seven-part series directed by Indian-Canadian filmmaker Richie Mehta, followed the investigation to nab the six men who raped the 23-year-old physiotherapy intern on a cold December night in a moving bus in the national capital. She died of her grievous injuries 13 days later in a Singapore hospital.

Mehta, who researched the story for four years, called directing it a “delicate balancing act”.

“The biggest challenge was to first find

what the story was that was worth telling, and from who’s perspective. And additionally, what was this all trying to represent? Essentially, how can something positive come out of something so terrible,” Mehta told PTI.

Both “The Family Man” on Amazon and “Bard of Blood” on Netflix were stories about Indian spies trying to outsmart terrorists but there was refreshingly no jingoism.

“The Family Man”, starring Manoj Bajpayee as an NIA field agent trying to uncover the next terrorist attack, also reflected the frustration and the family conflict that comes with working in high risk but low paying jobs.

The Amazon Prime show threw some light on the conflict in Kashmir and how terrorists are sometimes forged in the fire of communal hate and violence.

“Bard of Blood” (Netflix) had at its centre a spy who turns to teaching Shakespeare after a mission goes wrong. He is forced to return to the field through a combination of incidents

and seeks the help of a new but enthusiastic operative and a Baluchistan-stationed field agent who has been forgotten by the system but desperately wants to come home to his ailing father in India.

It wasn’t just about biggies Hotstar, Netflix and Amazon Prime. Smaller, home grown platforms -- Zee5 and AltBalaji -- also made their presence felt.

“Kaafir”, written by Bhavani Iyer of “Raazi” fame, chronicled the journey of a mother, a young Pakistani woman, who is being held prisoner after crossing over to India under mysterious circumstances. She is labelled a terrorist but finds an unlikely ally in a lawyer who wants to prove her innocence and send her back home.

The Zee5 show goes into the mistrust and hatred that exists between people of India and Pakistan and how this hatred can lead to the persecution of innocents.

AltBalaji’s “Kehne Ko Humsafar Hain” dealt with a man caught between the woman he loves and his wife.

CAA-NRC against poor, oppressed: Activists

MUMBAI, DEC 30 (PTI): Several activists assembled under the banner of ‘We The People’ in Mumbai on Monday and condemned the Centre for the Citizenship Amendment Act and proposed National Register of Citizens exercise, which they said was “divisive” and against the poor and oppressed.

Speaking at a press meet, activist and former student leader Umar Khalid accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of “lying” on NRC.

Addressing a rally in Delhi on December 22, the PM had said, “Since my government first came to power in 2014, I want to tell 130 crore countrymen, there has never been a discussion on this NRC, which was done only in Assam due to a Supreme Court order.”

Khalid said the National Population Register (NPR), an exercise likely to begin in April next year, was linked to the NRC.

Chief secy reviews preparedness for Delhi assembly polls

NEW DELHI, DEC 30 (PTI): Delhi Chief Secretary Vijay Kumar Dev on Monday held a coordination meeting with officials from all departments to review preparedness for the assembly elections in the national capital, scheduled for early next year.

According to a statement, the chief secretary emphasised upon the need of proper coordination among the district election officers and deputy commissioners of police at ground level for smooth conduct of elections.

The meeting was attended by chief electoral officer, police commissioner, senior officials of the government and the Delhi Police, all district election officers and district DCPs.

“He (Dev) also emphasised that now since the elections are round the corner, all works re-

lating to the election has to be given top-most priority and every department officers, including all DEOs and DCPs, must ensure that henceforth full attention and focus should be given to the election work,” the statement said.

In the meeting, the chief secretary directed the urban development secretary and director (local bodies) to ensure that polling stations are set up as per specifications of the Election Commission and all assured minimum facilities, including ramps of specific gradient and sufficient toilets, must be provided.

He requested the principal secretary (finance) to expeditiously approve election-related proposals of the office of CEO and DEOs and to provide sufficient funds for the DEOs as per requirement.

Thackeray inducts son, 35 others; Ajit Pawar sworn in Dy CM



MUMBAI, DEC 30 (PTI): Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday expanded his over a month-old ministry by inducting 36 ministers, including his 29-year-old son Aaditya, while NCP leader Ajit Pawar was sworn in as deputy chief minister.

Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari administered oath to 14 ministers from NCP, 10 from Congress and 12 from Shiv Sena at Vidhan Bhavan (state legislature) premises in south Mumbai.

The expansion, which raised the strength of the state ministry to 43, came over a month after the Thackeray-led Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government came to power.

The 36 ministers sworn in on Monday include 10 Cabinet and four ministers of state of the NCP, eight Cabinet and four MoS of Shiv Sena, and eight Cabinet and two MoS of Congress.

The NCP now has 12 Cabinet ministers and four MoS, the Shiv Sena has 10 Cabinet ministers and four MoS while Congress has 10 Cabinet ministers and two MoS.

Ajit Pawar was sworn in as deputy chief min-

ister, while former Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan and Yuva Sena chief Aaditya Thackeray were among the Cabinet ministers who took oath.

Pawar was sworn in to the post for the second time in just over a month.

Pawar had taken oath as deputy CM on November 23 after he rebelled against the NCP and joined hands with the BJP.

However, he resigned on November 26, leading to collapse of the three-day Devendra Fadnavis government.

Senior Congress leader and former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan did not find place in Thackeray’s ministry.

There is speculation that he may lead the state Congress unit.

BJP leaders - and Sena MP Sanjay Raut - skipped the ministry expansion ceremony.

“This government has not fulfilled the expectations of Maharashtra’s farmers. We don’t feel like attending the ceremony,” a BJP leader said.

Another BJP leader said, “When Uddhav Thackeray was sworn in at Shivaji Park last month, state BJP leaders, including Leader of

Opposition in Assembly Devendra Fadnavis, were present. There is no need to attend every cabinet expansion ceremony.”

Raut’s absence was attributed to his brother Sunil Raut, a Sena MLA, not finding a place in the ministry expansion.

The Shiv Sena kept its senior leaders Ramdas Kadam and Diwakar Raote, who were ministers in the previous Devendra Fadnavis-led government, out of the new council of ministers.

Instead, it included allies Shankarrao Gadakh (of Krantikari Shetkari Paksh) as Cabinet minister, and Rajendra Patil Yedravkar (Independent) and Bachchu Kadu (Prarhar Janshakti Party) as ministers of state.

Senior NCP leaders Nawab Malik and Anil Deshmukh, who were ministers in the previous Congress-NCP government, also found place in the ministry.

The two leaders were defeated in the 2014 Assembly polls, but emerged victorious in the state elections held in October this year.

NCP leader and former Assembly speaker Dilip Walse Patil, former leader of opposition in the Legislative Council

Dhananjay Munde and former LoP in Assembly Vijay Wadettivar were also sworn in.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and NCP supreme Sharad Pawar were among those present at the swearing-in ceremony.

The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi ministry led by Uddhav Thackeray was sworn in on November 28.

Balasaheb Thorat and Nitin Raut of Congress, Eknath Shinde and Subhash Desai of the Shiv Sena and Jayant Patil and Chhagan Bhujbal of the NCP took oath along with Thackeray.

The size of council of ministers cannot exceed 15 per cent of the total number of MLAs, which is 288 in the state.

As a result, Maharashtra can have a maximum 43 ministers.

The Shiv Sena last month joined hands with the Congress and NCP, its traditional adversaries, after its alliance with the BJP collapsed over the issue of sharing the chief ministerial post.

The Shiv Sena has 56 MLAs, NCP 54 and Congress 44 members in the 288-member Assembly. The BJP has 105 MLAs.

Culture Matters

...which is why it should be nurtured not 'protected' into suffocation

Turn to any corner of the world, click to any group on social media or tune into any conversation on identity or future prospects, and one will definitely be eavesdropping on voices of complaint ruing about a culture under threat, a way of life nearing extinction.

While there are always external elements like the influence of globalisation and the pressure to homogenise which eat away at the edifice of individual cultures, the biggest risk comes from those who refuse to let cultures breathe - those who view it as a relic which needs to be preserved even at the cost of nurture which would keep it organic, relevant and exciting. Nurturing is the more difficult enterprise because it requires allowing 'culture' to adapt, incorporate and grow and that can happen only in an environment of proud confidence; an environment which is open and indulgent. Unfortunately, we live in times of easy paranoia and quick outrage and there are too many who see cultures as perfect and view any influence or adaption as a blemish. They refuse to accept that culture is not something that can be pickled for posterity. Culture, because it is about a people, is vibrant, alive and current. It is spontaneous, almost instinctive, and not something that can be taught or directed. It is imbibed. Since culture forms a part of evolution, it is also subject to fresh interpretations, nuances and expressions.

Because culture is about people, it cannot survive on state patronage alone - that would be relegating it to the status of departmental undertaking and a by-the-numbers presentations because the state will not risk taking responsibility for vibrancy which some sections might see as contamination. It also needs to be accepted that if a people reject their culture as ripe for extinction, no amount of preservation helps. Yet, a culture should not be dismissed even before one has understood it. It is important that the repository of culture is passed on to the next generation to nurture and craft as it feels right. And yes, even discarded if it wants to, but only after it has understood and lived it. If anything, what the State needs to ensure is adequate defences against the snuffing out of a culture due to persecution. In olden times, this happened by way of invasions and was an automatic result of state formation with the subsuming of ethnic identities to suit a nationalistic agenda/ identity. A similar snuffing out is at play in the current times as well, and even though the pressures might be different, they remain real threats to cultures, some of which are on re-discovery mode. And yet, cultures survive even intentional, persistent and state-endorsed onslaught like in the case of Tibetans who hold on to a rich and colourful culture and tradition in exile even as the same is wiped out at home. Closer home, the manner in which the Limboo people kept their language and faith alive despite having lost their land, should provide for some inspirational models.

The lesson is simple, when the desire to sustain a way of life is strong enough, no assault can deliver a fatal blow. Similarly, one needs only look at the cardboard caricatures of 'culture' choreographed to entertain tourists across the country to realise that forced performances rob a culture of its soul. Confusing? Well, that is how life is and that is how things will be with culture and traditions because they are a part of life. There are no easy answers and no checklist of things to do... The only hope lies in earnest commitments and open minds.

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Protest has helped define the first two decades of the 21st century - here's what's next

FEYZI ISMAIL
THECONVERSATION.COM

The first two decades of the 21st century saw the return of mass movements to streets around the world. Partly a product of sinking confidence in mainstream politics, mass mobilisation has had a huge impact on both official politics and wider society, and protest has become the form of political expression to which millions of people turn.

2019 has ended with protests on a global scale, most notably in Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, Hong Kong and across India, which has recently flared up against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Citizenship Amendment Act. In some cases protests are explicitly against neoliberal reforms, or against legal changes that threaten civil liberties. In others they are against inaction over the climate crisis, now driven by a generation of young people new to politics in dozens of countries.

As we end a turbulent two decades of protest - the subject of much of my own teaching and ongoing research - what will be the shape of protest in the 2020s?

WHAT'S CHANGED IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Following moments of open class warfare in the late 1960s and early 1970s, battles against the political and economic order became fragmented, trade unions were attacked, the legacy of the anti-colonial struggles was eroded and the history of the period was recast by the establishment to undermine its potency. In the post-Cold War era, a new phase of protest finally began to overcome these defeats.

This revival of protest exploded onto the political scene most visibly in Seattle outside the World Trade Organization summit in 1999. If 1968 was one of the high points of radical struggle in the 20th century, protest in the early 2000s once again began to reflect a general critique of the capitalist system, with solidarity forged across different sections of society.

The birth of the anti-globalisation movement in Seattle was followed by extraordinary mobilisations outside gatherings of the global economic



elite. Alternative spaces were also created for the global justice movement to connect, most notably the World Social Forums (WSFs), starting with Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001. It was here that questions over what position the anti-globalisation movement should take over the Iraq War, for example, were discussed and debated. Though the WSFs provided an important rallying point for a time, they ultimately evaded politics.

The global anti-war movement led to the biggest co-ordinated demonstrations in the history of protest on February 15 2003, in which millions of people demonstrated in over 800 cities, creating a crisis of democracy around the US and UK-led intervention in Iraq.

In the years leading up to and following the banking crisis of 2008, food riots and anti-austerity protests escalated around the world. In parts of the Middle East and North Africa, protests achieved insurrectionary proportions, with the overthrow of one dictator after another. After the Arab Spring was thwarted by counter-revolution, the Occupy movement and then Black Lives Matter gained global attention. While the public, urban square became a central focus for protest, social media became an important - but by no means exclusive - organising tool.

To varying degrees, these movements sharply raised the question of political transformation but didn't find new ways of institutionalising popular power. The result was that in a number of situations, protest movements fell back on widely distrusted parliamentary processes to try and pursue their political aims. The results of this parliamentary turn have not been impressive.

CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION

On the one hand, the first two decades of the 21st century have seen soaring inequality, accompanied by debt and the neglect of working people. On the other, there have been poor results from purely parliamentary attempts to challenge it. There is, in other words, a deep crisis of representation.

The inability of modern capitalism to deliver more than survival for many has combined with a general critique of neoliberal capitalism to create a situation in which wider and wider sections of society are being drawn into protest. More than a million people have poured onto the streets of Lebanon since mid-October and protests continue despite a violent crackdown by security forces.

At the same time, people are less and less willing to accept unrepresentative politicians - and this is likely to continue in the future. From Lebanon and Iraq to Chile and Hong Kong, mass mobilisations continue despite resignations and concessions.

In Britain, the Labour Party's defeat in the recent general election is attributed largely to its failure to accept the 2016 referendum result over EU membership. Decades of loyalty to the Labour Party for many and a socialist leader in Jeremy Corbyn calling for an end to austerity couldn't cut through to enough of the millions who voted for Brexit.

In France, a general strike in December 2019 over President Emmanuel Macron's proposed pension reforms has revealed the extent of opposition that people feel towards his government. This comes barely a year after the start of the Yellow Vest movement, in which people have

protested against fuel price hikes and the precariousness of their lives.

The tendency towards street protest will be encouraged too by the climate crisis, whose effects mean that the most heavily exploited, including along race and gender lines, have the most to lose. When the protests in Lebanon broke out, they were taking place alongside rampant wildfires.

THINKING STRATEGICALLY

As protesters gain experience, they consciously bring to the fore questions of leadership and organisation. In Lebanon and Iraq there has already been a conscious effort to overcome traditional sectarian divides. Debates are also raging in protest movements from Algeria to Chile about how to fuse economic and political demands in a more strategic manner. The goal is to make political and economic demands inseparable, such that it's impossible for a government to make political concessions without making economic ones too.

As the 2020s begin, it's clear we're living in an unprecedented moment: a climate emergency and ecological breakdown, a brewing global financial crisis, deepening inequality, trade wars, and growing threats of more imperialist wars and militarisation.

There has also been a resurgence of the far right in many countries, emboldened most visibly by parties and politicians in the US, Brazil, India and many parts of Europe. This resurgence, however, has not gone unchallenged.

The convergence of crisis on these multiple fronts will reach breaking point, creating conditions that will become intolerable for most people. This will galvanise more protest and more polarisation. As governments respond with reforms, such measures on their own will be unlikely to meet the combination of political and economic demands. The question of how to create new vehicles of representation to assert popular control over the economy will keep emerging. The fortunes of popular protest may well depend on whether the collective leadership of the movements can provide answers to it.

[the writer is Senior Teaching Fellow, SOAS, University of London]

If you think the millennium bug was a hoax, here comes a history lesson

NIR OREN
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It's not hard to find echoes of the late 1990s in the zeitgeist. Now as then, impeachment is on many peoples' minds, and films such as The Matrix and The Sixth Sense continue to influence culture. Another feature of the same era that perhaps has a more important, if subtler, influence is the infamous Y2K bug.

Y2K was the great glitch in computer systems that looked capable of destroying civilisation at the stroke of midnight on the millennium. In the end, however, nothing much went wrong. Some people started to wonder if we had been misled all along. In fact, they couldn't have been more mistaken. Y2K is in danger of becoming one of those moments in history from which exactly the wrong lessons have been drawn.

Many of the systems that were at risk from the Y2K bug dated from the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. This was the era when the alleged insistence by Bill Gates that "640k [of RAM] ought to be enough for anybody" was still ringing in people's ears. Even powerful servers had only a few megabytes of RAM - a fraction of what you would find in most ordinary PCs today.

With so little space, programmers were always trying to come up with ways to conserve memory. Dates were one of those things that were integral to most computer programmes, and years came to be stored as a number between "0" and "99" - so for example, "80" would represent 1980. The advantage was that only a single byte of memory would be used. But with the new millennium soon to come around, it meant that the year "99" would become "100". As a result, computer programs would believe that the year was 1900 rather than 2000, which threatened to raise serious problems.

BUG ON OUT

It looked likely that financial transactions such as accrued interest would be calculated incorrectly. Monitoring software would suddenly believe it had expired and ceased to work, while navigation software would not be able to compute positions correctly. Still more alarming, fail-

ures in individual mission-critical systems might cascade. This could cause power grids, telecoms networks and financial systems to fail; oil rigs to stop pumping oil; hospital patient record systems to start prescribing the wrong drugs.

The sheer scale of such failures would make recovery difficult. This would potentially affect countries' economies and the wellbeing and even lives of people around the world. As the US president, Bill Clinton, told an audience during a speech in 1998: "This is not one of the summer movies where you can close your eyes during the scary parts."

The computer industry's response involved a massive software rewrite, with official "Y2K ready" certification issued after extensive testing. Different solutions were implemented for different systems, depending on their memory capacity. The best option was to store years as four digits. Where that was not possible, programmers might instruct a system to treat, say, dates between "00" and "50" as being in the 2000s, and years between "51" and "99" as being in the 1900s. This at least allowed systems to keep functioning.

More problematic were embedded systems where the Y2K issue existed in hardware rather than software. In such cases, the only solution was to replace the hardware itself. Estimates of the total cost for Y2K preparation came in at around US\$300 billion, or about US\$460 billion (£351 billion) in today's money - plus a few more billion spent on addressing issues as they arose after the turn of the century.

THE BIG EASY?

When the fateful day came and went with little more than minor problems, the questions started. A view took root that Y2K had been overblown - perhaps, for instance, to guarantee a giant pay day for programmers. People could point to the fact that some countries, such as South Korea and Russia, had got away with doing little to mitigate the problem, not to mention small businesses.

But this ignores the fact that software patches for the bug were rolled out worldwide. Those who didn't prepare were protected thanks to the efforts of those who did. There is ample evidence, thanks to preparedness exercises, code reviews and the like, that if not addressed, the impact of Y2K would have been much more significant.

Unfortunately, the contrarian view has wormed its way into other important areas of policy. Climate change deniers and anti-vaccination activists often raise the lack of impact of the Y2K bug as evidence that experts are not to be trusted. If we are eventually successful in dealing with problems like climate change in future, don't be surprised if similar arguments about wasted time and effort appear.

By that time, the same people will probably also be able to point to a couple of sequels to the millennium bug that didn't come to much either. As I mentioned above, ancient software systems still exist which treat all dates with two digits greater than "50" as occurring in the 1900s. While most of them should be retired before we get to the next danger year of 2050, the likes of mission-critical systems can be notoriously long-lived.

We can also look forward to the year 2038 problem. This relates to the fact that Unix systems historically stored dates and times as sequences of 32 ones and zeros, interpreted as the number of seconds since January 1, 1970. When 2038 rolls around, this number will overflow for the same reason the Y2K bug occurred. Such Unix systems again form the foundation of many mission critical pieces of software.

The Unix community is well aware of this bug, however, and most of these systems will again have been replaced long before 2038. So just like with Y2K, if the world survives these future problems, it will not have been because it was all hype. The more boring truth is often that a stitch in time saves nine. Sorry to be the bearer of good news.

[the writer is Head of Computing Science, University of Aberdeen]

Country proud of both Mary Kom and Nikhat Zareen: Rijiju



NEW DELHI, DEC 30 (PTI): Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Monday said not much should be made of the “ugly spat” that marred the trial bout between M C Mary Kom and Nikhat Zareen and the country is proud of both the six-time world champion and her promising challenger.

Mary Kom defeated Zareen 9-1 in the trials held on Saturday to make the squad for Olympic Qualifiers in China in February. The bout was marred by acrimony as the two boxers didn't shake hands after the contest and Mary Kom ignored an attempted hug by Zareen.

“Mary Kom is a legend who has achieved what no other boxer has ever

achieved in the World Amateur Boxing. Nikhat Zareen is an amazing boxer who has the potential to follow the footsteps of Mary Kom. India is proud of both of them. Period,” Rijiju tweeted.

“...passions & emotions are the souls of Sports! The only point to bear in mind is, in professional sports, the players & money matter more whereas in amateur sports it's the nation. The ugly spate (sic) shouldn't have adverse effects on players while representing India,” he added.

Zareen had approached Rijiju with an open letter when the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) flip-flopped on a stated policy and announced direct selec-

tion of Mary Kom for the Olympic qualifiers.

Rijiju had steered clear of the matter at that time citing the Olympic charter.

On Saturday, Mary Kom said she was upset about being dragged into the selection controversy as the call on selection was not hers to take.

The Manipuri icon defended her refusal to exchange post-bout pleasantries with Zareen, saying that the former junior world champion will get her respect only if she “herself shows respect to others”.

The 23-year-old Zareen said she expected better from the senior boxer and felt hurt when her attempt at sharing a hug was rebuffed.

Students file plea, MP HC stays medical college's fee demand

JABALPUR, DEC 30 (PTI): A vacation bench of Madhya Pradesh High Court on Monday allowed 52 postgraduate (MD/MS) students of a private medical college to appear for their January exam without depositing extra tuition fees.

Bhopal-based LN Medical College, on the basis of a recent order of the Appellate Authority Admission and Fees Regulatory Committee of Madhya Pradesh, had demanded extra tuition fees from students, the peti-

tioner students' counsel Aditya Sanghi said.

A vacation bench of Justices Nandita Dubey and Sanjay Dwivedi stayed the order of the Appellate Authority Admission and Fees Regulatory Committee, he added.

The 52 students took admission in postgraduate medical courses in the college on a fee structure of Rs 11.55 lakh per annum on the basis of an order of the state director medical education issued in April 2019, Sang-



hi informed.

However, the college, two weeks ago, asked students to deposit Rs

13.75 lakh with LNCT University Bhopal before December 31, failing which they would not be

allowed to appear for the examination to be held in January, Sanghi said.

The court served four-week returnable notices on the respondents, namely Secretary of Appellate Authority Admission and Fees Regulatory Committee, Secretary of Admission and Fees Regulatory Committee, Registrars of LN Medical College and the LNCT University Bhopal, Director of medical education and Principal Secretary of medical education, he said.

Hindu priests protest against CAA, NRC in Kolkata

KOLKATA, DEC 30 (PTI): Hindu priests on Monday assembled in the heart of the city to register their protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens.

Nearly hundred priests under the banner of 'Paschim Banga Sanatan Brahmin Trust' gathered around the Mahatma Gandhi statue on Mayo Road raising anti-CAA and anti-NRC demanding that peace should prevail in the state which had wit-

nessed incidents of violence during protests against the contentious Citizenship Act.

General secretary of the trust Sridhar Mishra said, “It is a matter of great concern that efforts are underway to divide the country on the basis of religion. The CAA and the NRC are aimed at excluding people of a particular community.

It is very unfortunate.

“If one community is targeted like this, it might also be inflicted on us some day.”



Trinamool Congress MLA Rajib Banerjee said

that the priests have descended on the streets to protest against the CAA and the NRC.

“The Centre cannot take such drastic steps targeting a particular community based on religion.

“It is extremely divisive in nature and will alienate people of the country where greats like Rabin-dranath Tagore and Swami Vivekanada had preached about inclusive nature of Indian society,” he said.

Footballer Dhanarajan collapses during game, dies

MALAPPURAM (KERALA), DEC 30 (PTI): Footballer Dhanarajan Radhakrishnan, who represented Kolkata heavyweights Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, died while playing a match in Perintalmanna, Kerala after reportedly suffering a cardiac arrest.

Playing a Sevens (seven-a-side) match for FC Perintalmanna against Sastha Medicals FC Thrissur on Sunday evening, the defender collapsed midway during the game and was imme-

diately rushed to a hospital nearby. The 39-year-old died at 10.20 pm, hospital sources said.

He collapsed in the 27th minute of the match, raising his left hand before collapsing.

Radhakrishnan who began his career at erstwhile Chirag United, played professional football for 11 years. Besides being part of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, he has also represented Mohammedan Sporting from 2012-14.

The All India Foot-

ball Federation on Monday condoled the death of Dhanarajan, who also played for the Bengal in the Santosh Trophy.

The Sevens football tournament, popular in this part of the world, is organised by the All Kerala Sevens Football Association.

Dhanarajan, along with mid-fielder Denson Devadas, came to Calcutta in 2005 and United Sports Club (then Chirag United) was the first team he played for.

NEW DELHI/NOIDA, DEC 30 (PTI): Winter tightened its icy grip across large parts of north India, particularly the national capital where the maximum temperature dipped to 9.4 degrees Celsius making Monday the city's coldest recorded December day since 1901.

While the Dal Lake froze over with Srinagar at a minimum of -6.5 degrees Celsius and Jammu recorded its coldest night in a decade with 2.4 degrees Celsius, Delhi and its surrounding areas were not just cold but foggy and smoggy too with life hit across the region.

A thick fog blanketed the Delhi-NCR region, leading to thousands of people being stranded as flights and trains were delayed, diverted or cancelled with visibility dropping to zero metres in some places in the

morning.

To make things worse, pollution levels were also high with Delhi's air quality index 'severe' at 448 at 9.38 am.

According to Kuldeep Srivastava, head of the regional weather forecasting centre, the day temperature was almost half of what is considered normal for this day of the year.

“Today was the coldest day recorded for the month of December,” Srivastava said. The India Meteorological Department has records of temperatures since 1901.

According to meteorologists, dense fog across the Indo-Gangetic belt, which hinders sun rays from reaching the ground, and the continuous flow of icy northerly winds aggravated cold conditions across the plains of north India that in some places recorded

temperatures lower than hill stations.

As a thick fog descended on the region, six people from a joint family, including two minors, were killed when their car skidded off the road and fell into a canal in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida late Sunday night.

Eleven people travelling in an Ertiga car were on their way to Delhi from Sambhal when the accident occurred, a police spokesperson said on Monday, adding that the accident appeared to have taken place due to low visibility caused by fog.

Forty flights were cancelled, 21 diverted and at least 530 delayed until afternoon, an airport official in Delhi said.

Flights operated at the airport under CAT III B conditions, which means the runway visual range (RVR) is between

50 metres and 175 metres, the official said.

“Owing to dense fog in north India our flights have been impacted across India. We will continue to review the situation and provide real time updates on our social platforms,” IndiGo airline said in a statement. Other airlines, too, reported similar disruptions.

Train travellers were also hit due to the fog, marring year-end holidays for some and urgent travel plans for others.

Thirty trains were delayed by two to seven-and-a-half hours, according to a Railways official.

The Delhi-Bhubaneswar Rajdhani was delayed by seven-and-a-half hours.

While some people went about their work, many decided to stay at home, peering out of their windows hoping to

catch a glimpse of the sun through the blanket of fog. The many thousands of homeless lit 'garbage' fires, made a beeline for government shelters or huddled in their threadbare blankets to stay warm.

But the day did not relent with sun staying firmly behind the fog.

The minimum temperature settled at 2.6 degrees Celsius at the Safdarjung observatory, four notches below the season's average, and humidity was 100 per cent. At Palam, it was marginally better at 2.9 degrees Celsius, while it was colder at Lodhi Road (2.2 degrees Celsius) and Ayanagar (2.5 degrees Celsius).

The visibility recorded by the Safdarjung and Palam observatories stood at zero metres at 8.30 am. It was recorded at 100 metres at Safdarjung and zero at Palam at 5.30 am.

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Novel invisible ink may help detect fake currency

SHAKOOR RATHER GREATER NOIDA, DEC 30 (PTI): Scientists at Shiv Nadar University here have developed a low-cost security ink that may help detect counterfeit currency, and could be employed in official documents and medical diagnosis.

The new ink, described in the peer-reviewed Journal of Physical Chemistry C, offers improved security features compared to existing inks that are multi-component and, therefore, more expensive, the researchers said.

These materials can be used in other applications, such as security signs, emergency route signs, traffic signage, in addition to medical diagnosis, and background-independent bio emitting probes, they said.

“Our white security ink is made from cheaper, organic compounds that can be used in daylight as they show white emission with afterglow

feature covering visible range of the spectrum (400-700 nanometres) under UV light exposure, Debdas Ray, a professor at Shiv Nadar University, told PTI.

“These single component security inks give better stability, colour reproducibility and simple device fabrication over the multi-component security inks that are costly, toxic and work under different background, Ray said.

To prepare an ink, these compounds can be mixed with commercially available cheaper transparent polymers in organic solvent or other glue-like materials, according to the researchers.

It takes only 45 minutes to develop this ink which costs around Rs. 1000 per gram, the researchers said.

Any characters of interest, such as symbols, pictures, shapes, bar code, etc. can be written on the document i.e. a

white background to provide additional security, they said.

We can think about additional security in the bank note, official documents, defence security, etc, Ray noted.

After writing the characters, the document can be stored in daylight as the written characters will be invisible due to their transparent colour.

In order to view the characters by naked eye, the document needs to be simply exposed to UV-light.

The researchers, including Harsh Bhatia from the Department of Chemistry, noted that secured storage has attracted increased attention in economic as well as military fields due to the increase in cyber thefts.

Security ink has gained tremendous importance during the past decades, they said. For application as a security ink, the components of that ink must



be invisible under daylight.

The researchers noted that white light-emitting materials that show afterglow have become of increasing importance because their behaviour can be changed after switching off the light exposure.

These light-stimuli responsive luminescent materials are promising alternatives for the application of data recording and data security, they said.

To design invisible security ink, there are many strategies developed by chemists which

employ organic dyes, conjugated polymer dots, inorganic quantum dots, etc.

However, these materials suffer from disadvantages as the characters written with them may be visible to the naked eye under ambient light or they may have absence of afterglow with different colour of the code.

Besides, they are expensive and toxic, and make processing difficult, the researchers explained.

The new ink, on the other hand, is made with the help of a com-

mercially available cheaper polymer known as polyvinyl alcohol.

A small portion of polymer is mixed with water. The sample is then dissolved in an organic solvent -- either tetrahydrofuran or ethanol.

To write down the characters of interest over the filter paper, a micropipette is partially filled up with this solution mixture.

After writing the characters, the paper is allowed to dry at ambi-

ent conditions for four hours. Afterwards it can be used directly for prac-

tical applications, the researchers said.

The new materials work on the principle of both fluorescence -- emission of light immediately (nano second) after light exposure -- and phosphorescence, where absorbed radiation is re-emitted for longer timescale (microsecond to second).

When the light is switched on, the character is visible in white background due to the involvement of both fluorescence and phosphorescence, but as soon as the light is switched off, the character is visible in a different colour due to phosphorescence.

Ray said the current security ink used in bank notes in India works on the principle of fluorescence, which makes the hidden symbol or character visible under a UV lamp only.

There will be no character visible when the lamp is subsequently switched off under dark

environment. Because the materials used in the note lacks phosphorescence property, he said.

If we use the materials having both fluorescence and phosphorescence, then switching on the lamp will show one type of colour of the code used, while same or different colour, depending on the materials used, will be visualised due to the phosphorescence, Ray explained.

The colour may persist from several milliseconds to seconds, providing additional security to the notes or documents, the researchers said.

They explained that afterglow or persistent luminescence materials can also be used in bio-imaging of the cells, where they can be attached with different organelles.

Since the emission persists for longer time, the imaging event can be detected in longer time scale, the researchers noted.

Arsenal 1-2 Chelsea: five talking points from the Emirates

NICK AMES
THEGUARDIAN
ARSENAL UNDONE BY FAMILIAR FAILING

When the dust settles, Mikel Arteta will feel a measure of satisfaction that so much of his message is getting through. Arsenal ran, harried, moved the ball on quickly, posed a genuine threat and did not really look like buckling under pressure until Bernd Leno's howler changed the complexion. That felt harsh but what happened next was a reminder that simple game management is one of the first things Arteta's Arsenal need to master. Sometimes you have to know when to take a point but, from their own attack, Matteo Guendouzi lost a crucial challenge to N'Golo Kanté and set in motion a movie everyone has seen before. Arsenal were shockingly open as Willian and Tammy Abraham sliced through them – a situation not helped by their centre-halves backing off fatally – and resembled a team that had rushed headlong to chase the

game. It betrayed a lack of savviness in the side.

LAMPARD DESERVES CREDIT FOR QUICK CHANGE

The act of a brave manager or an admission he got his starting lineup wrong? Frank Lampard can reasonably claim the former given that it seemed entirely reasonable to select virtually the same XI that won so handsomely at Spurs a week ago. The anomaly was Emerson Palmieri's presence at left wing-back; the Italian had a half-hour to forget but his problems were not the only reason Lampard chose to replace him with Jorginho after 34 minutes. Chelsea simply had not been able to build from the back, their central defenders all looking shaky in possession and their midfield failing to drop short and keep things ticking over. Jorginho is just the man for that – his near miss with a red card notwithstanding – and Chelsea's improvement was instant. They gained a stranglehold that nev-



er slackened and, while Jorginho's fortunate equaliser was probably not something Lampard had priced in, such a quick acknowledgment that things needed changing is hugely to his credit.

ÖZIL'S REBIRTH CONTINUES WITH OVATION

What a difference a fortnight makes. When Mesut Özil was substituted an hour into Arsenal's

3-0 defeat by Manchester City, his reaction earned him a dressing-down from Freddie Ljungberg and, in effect, a one-match suspension of duties. Against Chelsea he was withdrawn after 76 minutes, this time receiving a warm ovation and showing his own appreciation to the crowd, and the turnaround in reception was no accident. Özil is

among several senior players who seem energised by the clean slate Arteta has granted them and the signs are that it is too early to sound the death knell on his Arsenal career. Frequently drifting to a narrow right-sided position, he was instrumental in a number of the overloads that gave Chelsea such a torrid opening half and his appetite to get in-

volved out of possession, pushing on to Mateo Kovacic to good effect at times, was unquestionable, too. Özil appears to have the stomach for the fight and, on the last two games' evidence, is a genuine asset once again.

LAMPTEY SPARKS LACKLUSTRE CHELSEA INTO LIFE

Chelsea are a strange side and, while this result gave them a second

excellent London derby away win in the space of a week, they might not get away with this bland a performance when faced with more confident opposition. They did well to play themselves into contention following such a ragged start but even then rarely got behind a makeshift Arsenal defence and needed a considerable slice of luck to draw level. That sluggishness owed as much to their more experienced players as to any of their younger brood – even if Mason Mount was among those to have an off day – and it was a player making his first-team debut who gave them added impetus when he arrived for the final half-hour. Tariq Lamptey was a bundle of energy at right-back and his smart bursts forward helped peg Arsenal back; the 19-year-old looks a fine prospect and one who should receive plenty more exposure from here.

CHAMBERS BLOW HIGHLIGHTS ARTETA'S TRANSFER PRIORITY

It says something for both Calum Chambers and Arsenal that the centre-back's first-half substitution through what appeared to be a knee injury now looks like such a turning point in the game. Chambers was at least able to reject the option of departing by stretcher but, assuming some sort of absence is inevitable, it highlights Arteta's top priority in the transfer window. Amid a sea of mediocrity Chambers has been one of the few Arsenal players whose stock has actually risen this season and he followed a man-of-the-match display against Everton with a fine start here, rising highest in the box to head on for Aubameyang's opener. A thin set of convincing defensive options has just diminished further and, as Chambers' replacement Shkodran Mustafi demonstrated when getting nowhere near close enough to Abraham for the winner, enlisting at least one capable new face in their position is now a matter of urgency.

2019, the year of hope, optimism in Indian hockey

SAUMOJYOTI S CHOUDHURY

New Delhi, Dec 30 (PTI): If 2018 was all about missed opportunities, Indian hockey experienced a renewed sense of optimism this year with both the men's and women's teams qualifying for next year's Olympic Games in Tokyo.

In 2019, the Indian teams grabbed most of the opportunities that came their way -- the biggest among them was securing their Tokyo tickets.

In terms of high-level results, there weren't any major tournaments lined up for the Indian teams in 2019 and they mostly competed in bilateral series and one-off International Hockey Federation (FIH) events.

But the biggest takeaway from the year was the progression of some junior players into the senior fold under new chief coach Graham Reid, who took charge of the senior men's team in April this year.

While top sides like Australia, world champions Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and Argentina were busy with the first edition of the FIH Pro League, the Indians largely played against lower-ranked sides this season.

For the men's team, the year started with the FIH Series Finals in June in Bhubaneswar, where the Manpreet Singh-led side left no stone unturned and emerged victorious by thrashing South Africa 5-1 in the final to qualify for the FIH Olympic Qualifiers.

In the lead up to the FIH Olympic Qualifiers, the Indian men participated in the Tokyo Olympics test event in August involving hosts Japan, Malaysia and New Zealand. The Indian men again came out victorious, defeating the Black Sticks 5-0 in the summit clash.

They then went on an exposure tour

to Belgium to play five matches -- three against reigning world champions Belgium and two against Spain.

The Manpreet-led side passed with flying colours beating Belgium 2-0, 2-1 and 5-1 and then vanquished Spain 6-1 and 5-1.

But the biggest test awaited them in the year-ending final round of Olympic Qualifiers where the team enjoyed a relatively easy outing, handing Russia an 11-3 drubbing on aggregate to seal their Tokyo tickets.

The Indian men's hockey team's biggest gain this year was the emergence of some talented fresh faces.

With no big tournaments lined up, India tested a number of youngsters under Reid and the move paid rich dividends, throwing up talent like Vivek Sagar Prasad, Hardik Singh and many more.

In rankings, India started the year in the fifth spot and managed to maintain that throughout the season.

Despite the consistency, the Indians will have to make drastic improvement in the remaining eight months if they wish to break their Olympic medal jinx.

"...we have nine months (before Olympics). Just get better and better, that's our plan. Focus on the process, result will take care of itself," Reid had said after the Olympic Qualifiers in Bhubaneswar in November.

"That's what we need to bring to this team and give it a big shot (in Tokyo)," added the 55-year-old Australian, who was part of the team that won silver at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

The Indian women's team also deserves applause for its fine show this year. Just like their male counterparts, the Rani Rampal-led side held on to their ninth spot in the international standings throughout the year.

Ailing New Zealand call up Sydney specialist for third Test

WELLINGTON, DEC 30 (AFP): New Zealand have turned to Will Somerville for his experience of playing in Sydney as they look to avoid a whitewash in the third and final Test against Australia.

Off-spinner Somerville, who was raised in Australia and played Sheffield Shield for New South Wales, will replace injured pace bowler Trent Boult for the Test starting in Sydney on Friday.

Coach Gary Stead said the inclusion of the lanky 1.93 metre (6ft 4in) Somerville was a nod to



the expected conditions at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

"There's no secret the SCG pitch is one of the more spin-friendly in Australia," Stead said.

"Will offers some-

thing different to our two other spinners in the squad with his right arm off-spin and height.

"The fact he's played a lot of cricket in Sydney during his career for New South Wales will also be

helpful as we prepare for this final Test."

Somerville, 35, has played three Tests, taking seven wickets on his debut against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi last year and a total of seven in two

Tests away to Sri Lanka four months ago.

Boult is returning to New Zealand after suffering a fracture to his right hand in the second Test which Australia won comfortably by 247 runs

on Sunday within four days in Melbourne.

Australia won the first Test by 296 runs, again wrapping up the match inside four days.

New Zealand already have Matt Henry and Kyle Jamieson in the squad to provide fast bowling cover while Somerville's height and local knowledge could see him overtake the incumbent spinners Mitchell Santner and Todd Astle.

Somerville was one of the leading bowlers in Australia's Sheffield Shield in 2016-17 season with 35 wickets at an average of 23.14.

Borussia Dortmund sign teen striking prodigy Haaland

BERLIN, DEC 30 (AFP): Borussia Dortmund have signed teenage goalscoring sensation Erling Braut Haaland from RB Salzburg, beating off a host of top European clubs, the German Bundesliga club announced on Monday.

Dortmund said the 19-year-old Norway forward, who scored eight times in the group stage of this season's Champions League, had signed a contract until 2024 but did not mention a fee.

Haaland has caught the eye of clubs around Europe, reportedly including Juventus and Manchester United, after scoring 28 goals in 22 games in all competitions so far this campaign.

Dortmund's Bundesliga rivals RB Leipzig had confirmed their interest earlier this month but Haaland said Dort-

mund were always his first choice.

"From the beginning I had the feeling I definitely wanted to switch to this club, to walk this path," he said.

He will join up with his new teammates on January 3 for a training camp in Marbella before Dortmund resume after the Bundesliga's winter break with a visit to Augsburg on January 18.

In a video posted on the Dortmund website, Haaland wished Dortmund fans a happy new year as he pored over a 2020 to-do list topped with "Learn German".

Earlier in December, the forward had been spotted landing in the city to meet with club representatives.

Dortmund, currently fourth in the Bundesliga, have been looking for a new striker with Spain



international Paco Alcacer and World Cup winner Mario Goetze struggling for consistency this season.

"Despite many offers

from the very top clubs across Europe, Erling Haaland has chosen the sporting challenge at BVB (Dortmund)," chief

executive Hans-Joachim Watzke said in a statement.

"We can all look forward to an ambitious,

Kohli maintains top spot, Pujara a place down in ICC Test batsmen ranking

DUBAI, DEC 30 (PTI): Indian captain Virat Kohli will end the year at the top of the ICC Test ranking chart for batsmen but five-day specialist Cheteshwar Pujara slipped a place to fifth.

With 928 points, Kohli is way ahead of second-placed Australian maestro Steve Smith (911) and New Zealand's inspirational skipper Kane Williamson (822), while Australia's Marnus Labuschagne, who has amassed 1,085 runs

in 11 Tests this year, improved a place to grab the fourth spot.

Pujara was placed fifth with 791 points, while Ajinkya Rahane was joint seventh with 759 points.

With his enterprising 95 against England in the first Test, Quinton de Kock not only set up his team's win, but also shot into the top of the latest rankings release on Monday.

In bowling, India's lead pacer Jasprit Bumrah, returning from an



injury layoff, remained static at sixth position with 794 points, while spinner Ravichandran Ashwin (772 points) and seamer Mohammed Shami (771) were ninth and tenth respectively

in the order. vAustralian pace spearhead Pat Cummins was at the top of the standings with 902 points ahead of Neil Wagner (859) and South African paceman Kagiso Rabada (832).

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North Korea's Kim warns of 'grave' economic challenge



SEOUL, DEC 30 (AFP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has warned top ruling party officials of the "grave situation" facing the nuclear-armed state's economy and called for urgent corrective measures.

His comments, reported Monday by state media, came on the second day of a key party meeting held ahead of a year-end deadline for Washington to shift its stance on stalled nuclear talks with Pyongyang.

Kim, who chaired the meeting, said the time had come to bring about a "decisive turn" in the North's economic development.

He presented the assembled officials with "tasks for urgently correcting the grave situation of the major industrial sectors of the national economy," the official KCNA news agency reported.

The North does not publish economic statistics of its own, leaving outside estimates as the only available figures for its financial performance.

In July, the South Korean central bank estimated that the North's sanctions-hit economy

had shrunk by 4.1 per cent in 2018 - the largest contractions since the devastating famine of the 1990s.

Talks on denuclearising the Korean peninsula have been largely deadlocked since a second summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump collapsed in Hanoi at the start of this year over what the North was willing to give in return for sanctions relief.

China and Russia - the North's biggest economic partners - have proposed the easing of UN sanctions imposed over the North's nuclear weapons programme, and Pyongyang has given Washington until the end of the year to offer fresh concessions.

The KCNA report indicated the plenary session of the party leadership was headed into a third day Monday -- marking the first time since 1990 that it has lasted more than two days.

"Pyongyang's decision to host the plenary event for multiple days illustrates how gravely it views internal and external situations," said Cheong Seong-chang, a senior researcher at the private Sejong Institute.

US strikes in Somalia kill four militants

WASHINGTON, DEC 30 (AFP): The United States military said it killed four "terrorists" in airstrikes against the Al-Shabaab militant group in Somalia on Sunday, a day after the country's deadliest attack in two years. US Africa Command (AFRICOM) conducted three airstrikes in two locations in the conflict-hit east African nation on Sunday targeting Al-Shabaab militants, it said in a statement.

"These precision airstrikes targeted Al-Shabaab militants responsible for terrorist acts against innocent Somali citizens and coordinating with Al-Qaeda," AFRICOM said.

"The US and the federal government of Somalia will continue to increase pressure on the terrorist organization in order to deny them the ability to plot terrorist attacks."

Sunday's strikes killed two militants and destroyed two vehicles in Qunyo Barrow while a separate strike killed another two in Caliyoow Barrow, according to AFRICOM, which regularly carries out airstrikes in

Somalia.

They followed a massive car bomb explosion in a busy area of Mogadishu on Saturday that left at least 79 people dead and scores injured.

At least 16 of those killed were students from the capital's private Banadir University, who had been traveling on a bus when the car bomb detonated at a busy intersection southwest of the Somali capital.

Scores of wounded were carried on stretchers from the site, where the force of the explosion left the charred and twisted remains of vehicles.

Two Turkish nationals were also killed, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said.

The attack has not been claimed, but Mogadishu is regularly hit by car bombings and attacks waged by the Al-Shabaab Islamist militants, who have fought for more than a decade to topple the Somali government.

The militant group emerged from the Islamic Courts Union, which once controlled central and southern Somalia, and is variously estimat-



ed to number between 5,000 and 9,000 men.

In 2010, the Shabaab declared their allegiance to Al-Qaeda.

The following year, its fighters fled positions they once held in the capital Mogadishu, and have since lost many strongholds.

But they retain control of large rural swathes of the country and continue to wage a guerrilla war against the authorities, managing to

inflict bloody death tolls in attacks at home and abroad.

"Since Al-Shabaab's first external attack in 2010, the group has ruthlessly killed hundreds," said US Army Major General William Gayler, AFRICOM's director of operations.

"They have attacked and killed African partners, allies, and fellow Americans." Since 2015, there have been 13 attacks in Somalia with

death tolls above 20. Eleven of these have been in Mogadishu, according to a tally of AFP figures.

All of them involved car bombs.

The deadliest attack in the country's history was a truck bombing in October 2017 in Mogadishu which left 512 people dead and around 295 injured.

US strikes in Somalia surged after President Donald Trump declared

the south of the country an "area of active hostilities." The rate of airstrikes has risen sharply this year, and in an April statement AFRICOM said it had killed more than 800 people in 110 strikes in Somalia since April 2017. AFRICOM, which has been accused by Amnesty International of killing several civilians in its airstrikes, said no civilians appeared to have been killed or wounded in its Sunday strike.

Death toll in Somalia bombing climbs to 81: govt

The death toll from a massive car bomb in the Somali capital has risen to 81, a government spokesman said Monday, as rescue workers pursued their search for the missing.

The bombing Saturday at a busy intersection in Mogadishu was the country's deadliest attack in two years.

No one has claimed responsibility, though President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed blamed Islamist group Al-Shabaab, which has regularly carried out car bombings and other attacks as part of its decade-long bid to topple the internationally-backed government.

"The overall number of the dead stands at 81 currently. Two more people died from their injuries," Ismail Muktar, a spokesman for Somalia's information minis-

try, told AFP Monday.

One of the new fatalities was among the injured who had been evacuated to Turkey via a Turkish military plane on Sunday, Muktar said.

Muktar said the death toll could climb further as rescue operations entered a third day.

Around two dozen people were listed as missing after the attack, but 12 have been located -- five of them dead -- and the rest remain unaccounted for, he said.

Some 125 people were injured in Saturday's blast, a caseload that has overwhelmed health facilities in Mogadishu.

At least 16 of those killed were students from the capital's private Banadir University, who had been travelling on a bus when the car bomb detonated.



The attack was the biggest to hit Somalia since a truck exploded in 2017 near a fuel tanker in Mogadishu, creating a fireball that killed over 500 people.

Al-Shabaab was blamed for that strike too, though it never for-

mally claimed responsibility -- as it often does not do when there is a large amount of civilian casualties.

The United States military said Sunday it had killed four "terrorists" in three airstrikes targeting Al-Shabaab.

US Africa Command (AFRICOM) said two militants were killed and two vehicles destroyed in Qunyo Barrow, while two more militants were killed in Caliyoow Barrow.

The US regularly carries out airstrikes

in Somalia, though the frequency of such operations has risen sharply this year.

In an April statement AFRICOM said it had killed more than 800 people in 110 strikes in Somalia since April 2017.

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China jails Protestant pastor for 9 years for 'inciting' subversion

China on Monday jailed the leader of an unofficial Protestant church for nine years for "incitement to subvert state power".

Pastor Wang Yi, whose Early Rain Covenant Church was the target of a government crackdown last year, was also found guilty of "illegal business operation" by a court in Chengdu, southwest China, according to an announcement on an official court website.

Wang was detained in December 2018 in a raid by authorities in which dozens of members of his "underground church" disappeared.

China's officially atheist government is wary of any organised movements outside its own control, including religious ones.

Protestants in the country are split between unofficial "house" or "underground" churches like the Early Rain Covenant Church, and state-sanctioned ones where Communist Party songs also

feature in the order of service.

Catholics are similarly divided between unofficial churches led by bishops recognised by the Vatican and those who follow official prelates.

Wang was convicted in an open trial by a court in Chengdu, where his Early Rain Covenant Church had been based, the city's official court website said.

The charge of inciting subversion has often been used against dissidents as a way to silence criticism of the government and the Communist Party. Shortly before being detained, Wang wrote a post on his church's Facebook page criticising the Chinese government for repressing Christians, saying "the Party can flourish for a while, but it cannot last forever."

"The Party can kill my body, but it cannot kill my soul," Wang wrote.

- 'Chilling effect' -

Patrick Poon, a Hong Kong-based researcher with Amnesty Interna-

tional, said Wang's sentence would "have a chilling effect on other house churches in China."

"The message is very clear -- you will be the next Wang Yi if you don't register and follow the Communist Party's line on religion," Poon told AFP. Wang's church was among a number of prominent "underground" churches shut down by the government in 2018 as part of a crackdown on religion, especially on followers of Islam and Christianity.

Beijing-based Zion Church, one of China's largest "underground" Protestant churches, was banned by city authorities in September 2018 for operating without a licence after dozens of officials stormed its premises.

Earlier that year, unauthorised versions of the Bible were pulled from Chinese online retailers.

In November, politburo standing committee member Wang Yang said at a forum that Bei-

jing should even alter religious scripture to fix "contents not in line with the progress of the times." Reinterpreting religious doctrines would show "religious circles' responsibility for their own beliefs" and was in line with the "Sinicisation and modernisation of religions," Wang said.

He said Beijing should "effectively resist the erosion by extremist thoughts and heresies" by making its own re-evaluation of religious texts.

China has faced international condemnation for rounding up an estimated one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim ethnic minorities in internment camps in the northwestern region of Xinjiang.

An AFP investigation found in October that China's efforts to erase minorities' religious identity in Xinjiang have included the destruction of burial grounds where generations of Uighur families were laid to rest.

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VIDEO NEWS SECTION

Farah Khan, Raveena Tandon apologise to Cardinal Oswald Gracias

MUMBAI, DEC 30 (PTI): Film-maker Farah Khan and actor Raveena Tandon met Indian Cardinal of Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Oswald Gracias to tender an apology after the duo, along with comic Bharti Singh, were booked for allegedly hurting the religious sentiments of the community in a TV show.

Farah earlier took to Twitter to apologise on behalf of entire team of Flipkart Video Original's quiz show "Backbenchers", on which she serves as the host. The said episode has also been taken off by Flipkart Video.

In a statement, the host-director said she along with Raveena paid a visit to Gracias to tender an unconditional apology.

"His Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias met us. We apologised and asked him to forgive our mistake and he very graciously accepted our apology. He also issued a statement on our behalf to end this matter," Farah said.

Dr Abraham Mathai, president of Indian Christian Voice, said the Christian community accepted the apology tendered by Farah, Raveena and Bharti Singh.

"We appreciate Flipkart video and Walmart CEO for removing the epi-

sode off air. The Christian community expresses appreciation to Flipkart video and Mr Doug McMillon, the global CEO of Walmart for having considered our demands and sentiments. "This evening Farah Khan and Raveena Tandon went in person to His Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias to tender a written and unconditional apology, which the Cardinal graciously accepted. I appeal to the Christian community in this nation who have been enraged by this whole episode to accept their apology in the true spirit of Christ," Mathai said in a statement.

Farah on Monday took to Twitter to

express her gratitude to the cardinal.

"To err is human to forgive divine. Thank you, Your Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias for meeting us and accepting our heartfelt apologies and putting this unfortunate matter to rest," her tweet read.

Bharti, who is out of the country, also apologised to the community for "hurting their sentiments".

"From the bottom of my heart I would like to say Sorry to my Christian brothers and sisters for hurting their sentiments. Thank you Your Eminence Cardinal Oswald for personally hearing my apology in the voice note (as I'm not in the country) and forgiving me," she tweeted.



UPTON AND OUT! THE MODEL, KATE UPTON LOOKS HAPPY AS SHE STEPS OUT IN HER ATHLEISURE GEAR IN LOS ANGELES.

Take pride in recognition of my profession: Bachchan on Dadasaheb Phalke Award

MUMBAI, DEC 30 (PTI): Megastar Amitabh Bachchan feels proud to be presented with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, Indian cinema's highest honour, and says he has nothing but gratitude and affection for the people of the country.

President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday presented Bachchan with the award in a special ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Bachchan was earlier supposed to receive the honour at the National Film Awards ceremony last Monday, but the actor was unable to attend the event due to ill health.

Sharing pictures from the ceremony on his blog, the 77-year-old actor said, "I am in pride for the recognition. I am in pride for the recognition of my profession. I am in pride of my country and my film Industry."

The actor attended the ceremony with his wife, veteran actor-MP Jaya Bachchan and son, actor Abhishek Bachchan. Also present were the winners of the National



Film Awards.

Bachchan took to Twitter and wrote, "My gratitude and my affection to the people of this great country, India for this recognition."

In a career spanning five decades, Bachchan has stayed at the top, surprising fans with memorable performances film after film.

The government honoured Bachchan with the Padma Shri in 1984, the Padma Bhushan in 2001 and the Padma Vibhushan in 2015 for his contributions to the arts.

Penn Badgley accidentally confirms 'You' season 3

LOS ANGELES, DEC 30 (PTI): "You" star Penn Badgley has accidentally revealed that the audiences will be seeing more of his narcissistic murderer Joe Goldberg in future.

The first season of the series, developed by Greg Berlanti and Sera Gamble, premiered on Netflix in December 2018, and the second season released last week.

In an interview with Entertainment Tonight, Badgley accidentally let it slip that season three was pretty much a done deal, when quizzed on the character development of his most recent love interest, Love Quinn, played by actor Victoria Pedretti.

"She doesn't appear to be the same kind of person. She doesn't appear to be the same kind of predator. She doesn't appear to be the same kind of you know, dare I say, in the third season - oh, god!" Badgley said.



"I literally know nothing about the third season," he added.

When the host of the show asked him again about the third season, he replied, while nodding his head, "Technically I can't... I mean, like, unofficially?"

"You" also features James Scully, Jenna Ortega and Ambur Childers.

Sharon Stone blocked from Bumble dating app

Actor says she was blocked from the app after users reported her account profile was a fake

She may be known as one of the sexiest women in the world, but even Sharon Stone can't catch a break with online dating. Writing on Twitter, the actor complained to the dating app Bumble that she had been blocked from the service after her account was deemed to be fake. "I went on the @bumble dating sight [sic] and they closed my account. Some users reported that it couldn't possibly be me! Hey @bumble, is being me exclusionary? Don't shut me out of the hive."

She included a screenshot of her account after it was closed, where a statement had been posted: "Your account has been blocked because we've received several reports about your profile being fake." Bumble's editorial director Clare O'Connor replied to Stone, unblocking her account and apologising for the error.

Stone, 61, became a global sex symbol after the release of 1992 erotic thriller Basic Instinct, and had further film hits with Total Recall, Casino and The Quick and the Dead.

She has been married and divorced twice, and also called

off another engagement. She is now single, and has three sons with whom she lives in Los Angeles. In 2018, she dated Italian real estate agent Angelo Boffa, but the pair separated, with Stone saying later that year: "I think somewhere in the back of your mind you think maybe one day you won't be a single parent, then, eventually you realise: I think it's better. I'm no longer hoping for someone."

After posting her tweet to Bumble, she was inundated with replies offering dates. One post read: "If you're ever in Buffalo and kinda dig fat guys with mustaches my DMs are open. Also own a car so willing to drive (up to 25 miles) even if ya just close by."

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ARIES: Disrupt the status quo on Saturday, Aries, but aim for mild tremors instead of extreme shockwaves. With the Sun and moon trading friendly fire, it's obvious to everyone that change is necessary. But leadership is sorely needed to reveal the next stage of the game. That's where you come in: Make proactive suggestions or simply lead by example!

TAURUS: ETrue success doesn't simply hinge on climbing tirelessly to the top. Saturday's evocative angle between the Sun and moon points you down a more soulful path. Pause from "doing, doing, doing" and think big picture. Beyond putting food on the table, how is your work helping other people and the world at large?

GEMINI: Start your weekend on an inspired note! Pull a motivational or spiritual book off the shelf for some morning reading. Try a little "bibliomancy": opening to a random page and letting the words be your divine directive for the day. Avoid complainers like the plague and seek "high-vibrational" groups of people to spend time with,

especially if you could use an infusion of positive energy.

CANCER: Trying to get a straight answer over the last three weeks has been nearly impossible, thanks to communicator Mercury's backspin through your truth-telling ninth house. You can now breathe easy as the messenger planet turns direct and forges ahead. No more dancing around an issue—insist on the complete story. Steer clear of even slight exaggerations and aim to be fully authentic. Since the ninth house also rules travel, you've got a cosmic thumbs-up for a winter getaway.

LEO: Today's cosmos shine a light on hidden realities as expressive Mercury turns direct in your covert eighth house. Over the past three weeks, while the messenger planet was retrograde, you've held your cards close to your vest, but guarding one secret could be taking a toll on your psyche. Mercury's forward motion could attract a worthy confidante—which is a good start to releasing your burden.

VIRGO: Your routine-driven sign isn't

generally considered erratic, but Mercury's retrograde through your relationship house over the past three weeks might have made you flip-flop. Perhaps a BFF hasn't had much time for you since finding "The One" or an ex resurfaced without an offer of commitment. Enough already!

LIBRA: Channel-surfing or downward-dogging? If you've been doing more of the former over the past three weeks, you can thank Mercury, which has been retrograde (backward) in your self-care sector. But don't throw in the towel! Today, the quicksilver planet turns direct, helping you find sustainable routines.

SCORPIO: You're back! On March 5, expressive Mercury turned retrograde in your passionate fifth house. You may have felt like you were missing the love boat. Or perhaps you couldn't get a clear read on a romantic interest. Get ready to shake off the confusion and insecurity today, as the communication planet powers forward and calls forth your most radiant self!

SAGITTARIUS: Baby, it might (still) be

cold outside, but it wouldn't hurt to open a few windows and air out Chateau Sagittarius. With Mercury retrograde in your domestic fourth house since March 5, home and family matters might have felt a bit dazed and confused. Your survival instincts kicked in, causing you to retreat from the insanity. You can breathe a sigh of relief and re-engage today, as Mercury turns direct. Call a truce with your roomies, make up with your S.O., seek out a solution with your mother! **CAPRICORN:** Banish that either-or thinking, Capricorn. After a confusing three-week Mercury retrograde in your communication house, the messenger planet powers forward today. While you prefer to pour your (prodigious) energy into one thing at a time, this approach may not be serving you. Don't be afraid to dip your toe into multiple ponds, like those librarian-slash-actors or entrepreneur-slash-activists. Commuting or living in two cities is even a possibility for some earthbound Goats.

AQUARIUS: Loosen those purse strings, Aquarius. Since Mercury went retrograde

on March 5, you may have had a few budgetary breakdowns. But the messenger planet resumes forward motion today, making it safe to once again enjoy your hard-earned cash. This is a perfect time to revisit (and if necessary, revamp) your plans to strike a healthy balance between saving and spending. Invest in your greatest resource: yourself! A personal growth workshop, meditation retreat or life-coaching sessions can awaken your creativity and usher in a tsunami of entrepreneurial ideas.

PISCES: Vote with your dollar on Saturday, Pisces. An auspicious Sun-moon angle sends a reminder of how loudly money talks. Perhaps you'll choose socially responsible companies over those with murky or questionable practices. Supporting a small business owner can keep the unique character of your neighborhood thriving. This cosmic confab could inspire you to do business in different ways yourself or even earmark some of your earnings for a very specific cause you want to support.