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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Working weekend for govt offices

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 SEPT:

Government offices will remain open this Saturday and Sunday with the Home Department issuing a circular today announcing that this was being done so that all pending works of all departments are cleared before the long holidays begin.

Govt offices are heading for an extended Dasain break starting 05 Oct and reopening only on 14 October.

I K Gujral Punjab Technical University challenges HC order in Supreme Court

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 SEPT:

I K Gujral Punjab Technical University has challenged the High Court order imposing Rs 2.26 crore fine on the university. The university has approached the Supreme Court challenging this order, the hearing for which was held on 23 Sept.

The High Court of Sikkim had passed the order on 22 July, 2019 regarding the case involving 226 Sikkim students who had pursued BATHM (Airlines, Tourism and Hospitality Management) and Bachelor in Spa, Health and Resort Management courses in Chandigarh during 2013-15. The students had approached the High Court in 2016 seeking court directions for recognition of their degree from University Grants Commission.

Sikkimese students who studied in the ITFT Chandigarh which falls under I K Gujral Punjab Technical University have contended that a course the institute had offered was not approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC), thus affecting their studies and future.

While hearing the appeal filed by the University, Supreme Court judges, Justice Arun Mishra and Justice S Ravindra Bhat directed that a copy of the petition be furnished to the University Grants Commission (UGS) and requested UGC to produce the relevant file in the Court on the next date of hearing on 30 Sept.

In July, the High Court of Sikkim had directed the I K Gujral Punjab Technical University to pay Rs.1 lakh each to the 226 students within three weeks from date of order, failing which, the court had said that appropriate legal measures would be initiated against the defaulter, apart from adding interest to the said sum.

Finance Commission all praises for new Govt, flags concerns and assures support

SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 24 SEPT:

Chairperson of the 15th Finance Commission, former Revenue Secretary and former Rajya Sabha MP, NK Singh, today stated that the priority for the Commission was to further strengthen initiatives of the State government to take forward the pace of the economy in Sikkim.

He expressed “great satisfaction” with the four-month old SKM Government in the State for what he said were “multiple initiatives” taken during this period to give momentum to the economy here.

He assured to provide all cooperation and support from the Commission, within its constitutional mandate, to take the economy of Sikkim forward.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Singh assured the State government of



full cooperation and support to improve the quality of governance and to add momentum to Sikkim’s growth.

He observed that the foremost challenge for Sikkim was connectivity.

On the same, he rued

that although air connectivity was opened last year for Sikkim, flights could not be sustained.

He informed that the CM has brought to the notice of the Commission that extra resources to the tune of Rs 50 crore

were required to address issues related to land acquisition and additional infrastructure for the airport. He said that looking at Sikkim’s problem, the Commission will certainly give a very sympathetic consideration to

improve overall connectivity of the State.

On road connectivity, the Chairperson assured to immediately call a meeting with the National Highway Authority of India to see what can be done to expedite progress and improve

ment of the quality of road connectivity.

Likewise, he also assured to write to the Railway Ministry for early completion of rail connectivity to the State. He expressed that if the connectivity improved

significantly, the overall economy will be significantly benefitted.

Mr Singh informed that the second issue of import brought to the notice of the Commission was regarding the hydroelectric potential of the State.

On the same, he mentioned that several hydro electric projects were lying incomplete and Sikkim has thus not been able to derive any benefits.

He informed that the Commission has placed its suggestions to the State government that in addition to sources of funding, the government should also try to attract the interest of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank and look at multilateral agencies for long term funding.

He mentioned that another important area brought to the notice of the Commission was the need to improve the health sector.

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Speaker rejects Nawin Kiran’s petition seeking disqualification of 12 SDF MLAs, for now



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 SEPT:

The petition filed by Nawin Kiran Pradhan seeking the disqualification of 12 Sikkim Democratic Front legislators who have defected to Bharatiya Janata Party and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha has been rejected by the Speaker, Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

A letter to Mr Pradhan issued on Monday informs him that no materials or records pertaining to the joining/ defection of the MLAs to other political parties, their acceptance etc have been received thus far to determine the petition in juxtaposition to those documents.

Mr Pradhan has been informed that the petition was filed at a premature stage thus stands rejected at this juncture.

On the same, Mr Pradhan commented that the rejection has painted a dark day for democracy in Sikkim and “proven that SKM is worse than SDF”

He further stated that he was not going to let the matter rest and will now that his “fight” to the next level. He hinted that he will be approaching

the High Court against this order.

Mr Pradhan’s advocate, S Chatterjee, questioned which documents the Assembly was looking for after the defections have been reported all over the media and even admitted by the MLAs in question.

He said that there was now no hope or trust in the House.

Meanwhile, it is informed that the hearing on the matter filed on 29 June 2018 seeking the disqualification of seven Sikkim Krantikari Morcha MLAs who joined SDF in the last term at Sikkim Legislative Assembly was scheduled for today at the SLA. Yesterday, Mr Pradhan had reportedly prayed that both his petitions be heard together and in response, the Assembly secretariat has informed him that the hearing scheduled for today has been adjourned “in the interest of justice and fairplay...”

He has further been informed that new dates will be communicated to him “once the necessary requisites in the second matter against the twelve present MLAs are received.”

Fin Comm meets CM, goes over stats and potential

NEW DELHI, 24 SEPT (PIB): The 15th Finance Commission today with Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Goley] and his Cabinet colleagues and senior State Government officials.

The Commission observed that:

- The State has good potential in tourism, organic farming and horticulture. It may establish more cold storages, value chains and develop food processing industries.
- Sikkim was the first State to be declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) in India.
- Sikkim has the second highest per capita income and low BPL population:

0 Per capita income of Sikkim is Rs 2,97,765 (second highest after Goa) while India’s average is Rs 1,14,958 in 2017-18. Per capita income is more than double of the country’s per capita income.

0 Below poverty line (BPL) population in Sikkim is only 8.19% while the country’s average is 21.9% (Tendulkar methodology, 2011-2). Sikkim witnessed a significant decline in BPL population by 23 percentage points from 2004-05 to 2011-12.

• High share of GSDP from secondary sector: The production of electricity from hydropower units and production of the pharmaceutical industries increased the relative share of secondary sector which contributes about 59% of GSDP. Sikkim has good potential of hydropower sector. State should speed up the execution of the ongoing Hydel Projects so as to exploit the potential and to increase the revenue earnings.

Sound debt and deficit indicators:

0 The fiscal deficit of the State has remained under 3% in recent years except in 2018-19 (RE). State is mostly revenue surplus. Debt to GSDP ratio has also remained moderate at 23.2% in 2016-17 which is lower than the average of 28.6% all North-East and Hill States. However, it has increased slightly in recent years. Also, AG Sikkim has informed of significant off-budget borrowings amounting to Rs. 3628 crores of the State Government.

0 The introduction of State FRBM Act in 2010-11 provided the rule based fiscal management with defined deficit and debt targets. The State managed to avail the flexibility of increasing the fiscal deficit by 0.5 per cent in 2017-18 by satisfying the condition



relating revenue surplus and debt stock as recommended by the FC-XIV.

According to the 5th Employment Un-employment survey of Labour Bureau 2015-16, Sikkim has second highest unemployment rate of 18.1 per cent (after Tripura). High per capita income and good share of secondary sector in GSDP is paradoxical to the high unemployment rate hinting towards jobless growth.

Sikkim has third lowest own-tax revenues out of all States, in spite of having second highest per capita income. Due to sparse own resource base, the State depends heavily on transfer of resources from the Central Government. It receives 75% of its total Revenue Receipts from Union Government.

The own non-tax revenue remains an important source of revenue for the State. It constitutes about 40 to 50 % of the own revenue receipts. However, NTR has declined significantly in last few years due to fall in revenues from lottery. It has a trend growth rate of (-10.9%) from 2011 to 2018. State has potential to increase its earnings through Hydro-power sector and tourism which should be explored.

The Commission was informed that:

There are 15 PSUs in the State out of which 7 are non-working. As on 31 August 2019, 11 accounts of four working SPSUs and one account of one non-working SPSU were in arrears. The accumulated losses of 9 SPSUs have increased from ₹ 53.82 crore (2012-13) to ₹ 1,013.27 crore (2017-18).



(AG, Sikkim).

In Sikkim, the Energy & Power Department is solely responsible for supply of electricity in the State of Sikkim. Power Department of State Government does generation, transmission, distribution and trading of power. State Government gives heavy subsidy to rural consumers on electricity. Also, 15% of the consumers were not metered as on 31 Mar, 2017. AT&C losses are about 33% and ACS-ARR gap is 6.93 which is extremely high (M/o Power) State Government should take steps to corporatize and unbundle the power department and allow it to run on sound economic principles.

Sikkim is fully mountainous and geologically young and hence its structure is extremely fragile. It is also in the seismic zone IV and susceptible to earthquakes and it is prone to flash floods and landslides during the monsoon which starts from May to mid-October. Climate Change is posing risk from potentially dangerous glacial lakes in Sikkim Himalaya.

Sikkim faces the problem of high cost of infrastructure building and maintenance and compressed working season due to heavy rainfall.

The State faces difficulties in service delivery to a dispersed population living in hilly areas as the density of population is very low.

According to the State Government’s submissions:

turn to pg02

No nominations for Poklok Kamrang by-poll so far

NAMCHI, 24 SEPT (IPR): No nominations were received today for Poklok Kamrang by-elections according to the Returning Officer, Ragul K.

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Messi, Rapinoe win FIFA Player of the Year awards



MILAN, SEP 24 (AFP): Lionel Messi won the FIFA Men's Player of the Year award on Monday with Megan Rapinoe bagging the women's prize to cap a historic year for the United States' World Cup icon.

Barcelona striker Messi's victory in Milan was a surprise as he edged out Virgil Van Dijk, who won the UEFA player's award last month after helping Liverpool to the Champions League last season.

Juventus's forward Cristiano Ronaldo had also been shortlisted for the award, but did not attend the ceremony as he lost out to his rival in the famous La Scala opera house.

Both Messi, 32, and Van Dijk, 28, are now in the running for the coveted Ballon d'Or which will be announced on December 2.

Rapinoe beat fellow World Cup winner Alex Morgan and England's Lucy Bronze to the women's title, with US coach Jill Ellis winning women's coaching award.

The 34-year-old Rapinoe won the Golden Boot for being top scorer and the Golden Ball for the best player at the World Cup, and also became the face of the tournament for her outspoken views on US president Donald Trump.

Messi was top scorer in the Champions League last season with 12 goals before Barcelona were dumped out by Liverpool in the semi-finals, Barca throwing away a three-goal first-leg lead with a humiliating 4-0 defeat at Anfield. The Argentine also won the European Golden Shoe after scoring 36 goals, won La Liga title with Barcelona and helped Argentina to bronze at 2019 Copa America.

Van Dijk had been bidding to become just

Fifteenth Finance Commission meets trade & industry reps, takes note of challenges

NEW DELHI, 24 SEPT (PIB): The 15th Finance Commission headed by Chairperson, NK Singh, along with its members and senior officials met with representatives of trade and industry bodies of Sikkim today.

The Commission observed that:

- Sikkim has been able to sustain a relatively higher growth in income. The trend growth rate of nominal growth rate of GSDP has been 13.5% from 2011 to 2018. This was as high as 24.9% from 2005 to 2018. The high growth rate has been mainly due to hydro-power sector and pharmaceutical industries.
- The State has abundant opportunities in areas of tourism, horticulture & floriculture, organic products, pharmaceuticals and ethnic handlooms/handicrafts.
- 59% of State's GSVA comes from Secondary sector. This is very high as compared to other States.
- However, according to Ease of Doing Business ranking-2017-18, Sikkim is third lowest after Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. The State has given the following reasons for its low ranking in Ease of Doing business:

- Sikkim currently does not have a Companies Act, as after the repeal of the old Act, new Companies Act has not been notified.
- It is an environmentally sensitive zone so the clearance cannot be automatic as each issue needs a closer look.
- The land laws protect the interest of ethic community and any change of title requires approval at highest level.
- According to 5th Employment Un-employment survey of Labour Bureau 2015-16, Sikkim has second highest unemployment rate (after Tripura) of 18.1 per cent. This implies jobless growth in the State.
- Growth rate of GSDP has not kept pace with revenues of the State.

Regarding the Infrastructure issues and poor connectivity in Sikkim, the Commission observed:

- A small airport with limited capacity has become operational, however the number of flights to the airport are limited are not frequent.
- Sikkim also lacks rail networks.
- The State is entirely dependent on the National Highway-10(NH-10), the only link with the rest of the country. The frequent road disruptions due to natural calamities

on this single lane road creates huge problem for transportation of goods resulting in rise in prices of essential goods and high cost of living in the State.

Difficult geographical terrain, recurring devastation and its impact on maintaining assets are other challenges for development of manufacturing industries in Sikkim.

According to the State Memorandum –

- The tax collected before GST regime from some of the ancillary industries associated with pharmaceuticals, has been flowing out in the form of input tax credit to main producers.
- Sikkim did not need GST compensation in year 2018-19.

Representatives of Sikkim Chamber of Commerce, Cipla Pharmaceutical, Zuentus Pharmaceutical, Intas Pharmaceutical, Marchak Manufacturing Pvt. Ltd. Corrugated Boxes, Sikkim Distilleries Ltd., Sun Pharmaceuticals, Mato-Potter, Designer Candles, Temi Tea Estate, Tea Bag & Flavoured Tea, Bamboo Handicrafts, Govt. Fruit Preservation and Simsar Bakery attended the meeting.

The Commission noted all the concerns highlighted and promised to address them in its recommendations to the Central Government.

East RO convenes meeting with by-election officials

GANGTOK, 24 SEPT [IPR]: Returning Officer (East), Raj Yadav, convened a meeting with all concerned officers appointed for the By-Elections here today.

The officials were sensitized on their roles and duties towards the smooth conduct of by-elections in the constituency.

The RO briefed the meeting about the status of preparedness for elections and specific duties of concerned officers highlighting a range of aspects of preparedness for by-elections in the two constituencies of Martam-Rumtek and Gangtok.

Specific roles, duties and responsibilities of Sector Magistrates, flying squads, static surveillance, video surveillance

team, Assistant Expenditure observers, Accounting team, liaison officers and the Police involved in the elections were highlighted during the meeting.

The concerned officers were asked to ensure strict adherence to all aspects of these plans and complete coordination. Further, he appealed to the concerned officials to move in a team with proper preparation if every situation.

He informed the meeting that Martam Rumtek constituency will have 22 polling stations of which six have been identified as critical while Gangtok is to have 12 Polling Stations.

The Control Room is now operational and Nakas would soon be identified for the two constituencies.

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Fin Comm...

- The FC-XIV projected the State GSDP based on a trend growth rate of 24.32% which was very high as compared to actual. It led to high calculation of OTR for the award period. Due to this, Sikkim became ineligible to get revenue deficit grants from the FC-XIV.
- Sikkim promotes organic farming and there is ban on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Hence, it has no longer remained eligible for any compensation from large fertilizer subsidies which is available to farmers of other States. Cost of production in organic farming is usually high and increase in yield and income of the farmers take time to get sustained.
- The State has suggested that farmers may be compensated in Sikkim for their eco-friendly initiative by making the State eligible for subsidy on fertilizers as revenue forgone.
- Sikkim Government has recommended that the States' share in overall divisible pool of taxes should be increased to 50%.
- Fund devolution should be made for all tiers of the local bodies.

0 Fund requirement for RLBs-

- Projected requirement for both tiers of RLBs is Rs 1,356.8211 cores for 5 yrs
- Additional one time grant amounting to Rs 1100 crores requested for support of human resources and

Awareness on drug abuse prevention for Panchayat functionaries at Mellidara

NAMCHI, 24 SEPT: An awareness programme on "Drug Abuse Prevention" for the Panchayati Raj functionaries was held at Mellidara GPU in South Sikkim by the State Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the National Institute of Social Defense, New Delhi, on 23 September, a press release informs.

The training was attended by the Panchayati Raj functionaries from different wards of Mellidara Paiyong Gram Panchayat unit.

Topics like Basics of Drug Abuse, Drugs and types of drugs, Reasons of taking drugs, Progression and ill effects

of drugs, Community response to drugs and its menace, How to stay away from drugs and the Role of local governments in controlling the drugs at the local level were covered.

Suren Mohra, Master Trainer cum Field Facilitator, SIRDPR, Tobrej Ali, MPH, Mellidara, Desash Gurung, an elected representative of the locality were present as resource persons.

The training was inaugurated by Kusum Dhakal, Panchayat President, Mellidara Paiyong GPU who urged the participants to take the training seriously given the scale of the substance abuse problem.

World Tourism Day on Friday

Gangtok, 24 Sept (IPR): Tourism & Civil Aviation Department has announced plans to organize a World Tourism Day event in collaboration with tourism stakeholders at Chintan Bhawan on 27 September.

Introduced by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation in the year 1980, World Tourism Day is being observed on the theme, 'Tourism and Jobs: A better future for all,' this year. Governor Ganga Prasad has agreed to attend the Chintan Bhawan function as chief

guest on Friday.

The main highlights of the event will be - Overview on journey of Tourism Industry till date, a power-point presentation on the theme, Release of a handbook on Home Stays, Launching of certificate programme on Hospitality and Tourism Management, Presentation on climate change and adventure tourism and awards presentation to Home Stay Operators of Sikkim along with students undergoing Tourism & Hospitality courses at various schools and colleges.

Finance Commission...

On the same, he mentioned that the Commission has assured the State government that the health sector was a focus area of the commission as well.

He said that the Commission has also proposed to convert the District Hospitals at Gyalshing, Namchi and Singtam into Medical colleges. He added that in addition to the cost of the medical colleges the Commission would also provide support to promote allied healthcare.

Mr Singh informed that another important issue brought to the notice of the Commission was in the area of environment, ecology and carbon sequestration.

He mentioned that Sikkim has been a major contributor to carbon sequestration and can derive advantage from it. He suggested that an institutional vehicle be set up by the State government for this purpose to access the market and Sikkim could derive several advantages from the gains made from carbon sequestration.

He stated that the issue on how Sikkim can be compensated for maintaining the ecology and forest cover was also being looked into by the Commission.

On another issue place before the Commission on how to harness Sikkim potential for tourism, the Chairperson expressed happiness on the increase in numbers of tourists and suggested working on ways and means to get high-spending tourists to the State.

Mr Singh also mentioned that the current government has inherited a huge debt burden and that this has happened due to the practice of keeping finances outside the consolidated fund of Sikkim and also off-budget borrowings which created liabilities. He informed that the Commission has advised the State government to restructure its financial picture and to share the roadmap of the State with the Commission.

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AFFIDAVIT

WHEREAS, I, MS. SONEE LOHAR, d/o Lt. Sherman Lohar, aged about 25 years, by faith Hindu, by occupation self-employed, permanent resident of Lower Dalapchand, Ratey Khola, P.O. & P.S. Rongli Bazar, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare as under:

- That due to non-consent with the spelling of my name and according to the convenient of the persons/authorities, my name has been recorded as "SONI LOHAR" in the SERVICE PARTICULARS IN RESPECT OF 154002 RFN/GD of my father LATE SHERMAN LOHAR OF 15 ASSAM RIFLES, issued by the SO-2, Director General Assam Rifles, Shilong-793011.
- That the correct spelling of my name has recorded as "SONEE LOHAR" in my Birth Certificate, bearing Registration No. 2000/178 Date of Registration 22/8/2000, issued by the Chief Registrar of Births and Deaths, Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim and other relevant documents.
- That the name "SONEE LOHAR" & "SONI LOHAR" as disclosed above are of one and same/identical person i.e. myself.
- I do hereby swear on oath that henceforth my correct/official spelling of name shall be "SONEE LOHAR" in lieu of paragraph 1 for all purpose and purport.

DEPONENT

KUTSE SHEGU

The kutse Shegu of our beloved mother late Karma Doma Bhutia who left for heavenly abode on 12th August falls on 29th September, 2019.

All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers to the departed soul at our residence Penlong Bazaar, East Sikkim.

We take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude towards those who extended their support during our time of bereavement..

Khittu Tshering Bhutia (son) 9434127474
Tenzing Bhutia (son)
Sonom Nedup Bhutia (son)
Tshering Dorji Bhutia (son)
Lazey Bhutia (daughter in law)
Layzey Bhutia (DAUGHTER)
Chunki Bhutia (daughter)



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Guwahati-Bangkok flight takes off

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 SEPT:

Chief Minister of Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal flagged off the first International Flight from Guwahati to Bangkok operated by Nok Air, a Premium Budget Airline from Thailand on 22 Sept, 2019.

This flight will open doors for tourism not only for Guwahati and Bangkok but also beyond to the entire South East Asia for purposes of Business and Leisure alike. This flight will operate from Guwahati's Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport to Bangkok's Don Mueang International Airport, twice weekly.

Subsequently a press conference was held in Novotel Hotel, Guwahati by Nok Air and Group Concorde. The conference began with Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs, Kiren Rijiju ji, who inaugurated the flight by lighting the lamp. Other dignitaries



like Principal Secretary Ministry of Tourism, Ramesh Prasad, Govt of Assam, CCO of Nok Air, Thaveechai and CMD of Group Concorde, Pukhraj Singh Chug were also present at the event.

The introductory

speech was given by the Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs, Kiren Rijiju ji, who spoke at great length about the need to increase Tourism in the North-Eastern region along with the need to

develop the infrastructure to increase the holding capacity of tourists.

Chairman and Managing Director of Group Concorde, Pukhraj Singh Chug also spoke about his personal connect with North East and his

dream to connect North East to the world and work towards the successful completion of starting the flights. CCO of Nok Air, Thaveechai also gave a brief history about the airline and about his vision of connecting Bangkok to India, in order to boost tourism for both the countries.

The conference concluded with an interactive and informative question and answer session where queries of the tour operators and media personnel's were answered precisely. The panel was chaired by Principal Secretary - Ministry of Tourism, CMD Group Concorde, CCO Nok Air and Airport Director of Guwahati Mr. Ramesh Kumar. The press conference was followed by a networking lunch for the invitees.

The flight to Bangkok leaves every Wednesday and Saturday while the flight to Guwahati from Bangkok leaves every Thursday and Sunday.

Finance Commission Chairperson voices concern over road conditions



GANGTOK, 24 SEPT (IPR): The Chairperson 15th Finance Commission, NK Singh called on the Chief Minister, PS Tamang [Gola] in his office at Tashiling Secretariat here in the state capital today.

After exchanging the pleasantries, the Chairperson expressed his deep concern about the present road condition between Sevoke - Rangpo, however he expressed his satisfaction and said that Rangpo -

Gangtok road condition is far better.

The two road stretches are been looked after by West Bengal and National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) owned company of the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways respectively.

The Chief Minister, PS Tamang informed the Chairperson, NK Singh that he has already expressed his concern

over the poor road conditions and written to the Home Ministry and also raised the issue in the recently concluded North East Council meeting in Guwahati.

The Chairperson also assured that he will also raise this issue of bad road conditions with the Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways, Nitin Gadkari and also with the Chairperson of National Highway Authority.

Gopalpur beach more polluted than Puri, finds new study

BERHAMPUR (ODISHA), SEP 24 (PTI): Gopalpur beach in Odisha's Ganjam district is more polluted than Puri, a study has found.

The recently-released findings are based on the study conducted by the Marine Sciences Department of the Berhampur University in collaboration with the National Center for Coastal Research, Chennai.

Waste from Gopalpur, Puri and an Olive Ridley turtles' nesting site near the mouth of Rushikulya river were collected on the International Coastal Cleanup Day on September 21 and analysed, Pratap Chandra Mohanty, head of Marine Sciences Department, said on Tuesday.

Volunteers from Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and Gopalpur Port Limited (GPL)

along with university students, teachers and residents had joined the drive, he said.

"We have found 3.60 gm solid waste per square metre in Gopalpur beach and 1.20 gm of it per square metre in Puri beach," Mohanty said.

Some 0.828 gm solid waste per square metre was found at the turtle nesting site, he said.

Mohanty said around 65.28 kg waste of ten different categories were collected from 18,117 square metre area of Gopalpur beach.

The waste included soft drink bottles, plastic carry bags, cigarette packets and fishing nets.

Around 31.50 kg waste was collected from 22,200 square metre area of Puri beach and 140 kg from the Olive Ridley nesting site, he said.

NSS Day celebrated in Mamring SSS East Sikkim



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 SEPT:

The NSS unit of Government Senior Secondary School, Mamring, East Sikkim celebrated NSS Day at the school premises on Tuesday in the presence of Principal, teachers, students, SMC members, local residents and panchayat members.

The programme started with an introduction to NSS by Songmit Lepcha from class XII. A

skit was presented on the theme 'Not Me, But You' including differently-abled persons by the volunteers.

PO of the Unit, Bikash Bhattarai explained the importance of the play and the programme and presented a report on the activities and awareness programs conducted by NSS in the current academic year.

Principal Prahlad Sharma, in his address, listed the various bene-

fits of such programmes and also flagged off the recently modified vehicle of Dilip Dhakal, a local social worker, for the collection of plastic waste from the locality.

Mr Dhakal also presented a briefing on his scheme and appealed to everyone to support the initiative.

All participants and guests along with the school family participated in a cleanliness drive around the school.

Teesta-IV organises free medical camp at Chandey



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 SEPT:

Teesta-IV Hydro Electric Project of NHPC organised a free multi-speciality medical and awareness camp at Chandey in association with District Hospital, Mangan and support of paramedical staff of PHC, Passingdong, today.

The intervention was part of its CSR initiatives under the health & sanitation sector to provide sustainable healthcare as per the requirement of the area.

A detailed baseline survey of the entire GPU was also conducted by Teesta-IV HEP with

the help of Self Help Groups covering a period of two months.

The medical camp was organized based on the findings of the survey, at Chandey under Tingchim Chandey GPU.

A team of doctors from the North District Hospital - Dr Upasana Gurung (Psychiatry), Dr JT Wangdi (Medicine), Dr Suren Tamang (Ortho), Dr Sudipta Rai (Gynaecology), Dr Roshan Poudyal (Paediatrics), Dr TT Bhutia (ENT) along with NHPC doctors were present to attend to the patients.

The NCDST team, Mangan, carried out

blood sugar monitoring. An awareness programme by the ITC Cell, Mangan, on, "Health & Hygiene and Alcohol & Drug Abuse" was also organised during the camp. 154 patients were attended to today. The prescribed medicines were arranged by NHPC and distributed free of cost to the patients.

The medical camp was inaugurated by General Manager, Ramesh Mukhiya, Teesta-IV HE Project, in the presence of panchayat members of Tingchim Chandey GPU and officials from NHPC and local residents.

Gandhians, social activists to take out year-long march from Delhi to Geneva

NEW DELHI, SEP 24 (PTI): Carrying messages of non-violence and peace, 200 tribal and Dalit activists, writers, thinkers and eminent Gandhians will begin a year-long march from New Delhi to Geneva on Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary on October 2.

The 15,000 km Jai-Jagat 2020 (Hail World) 'yatra' will wind its way through 10 countries, including the UK, France, Germany, Iran, Senegal, Sweden and Belgium, and will be joined by parallel groups of marchers, including foreign delegates, en-route, said Aneesh Thillenkery, national convener of the Ekta Parishad.

The initial plan, formulated three years ago, also included a two-month stay in Pakistan, but tension between the two countries forced the organisers to shelve it, he said.

"The plan included a march from Raj Ghat to the Attari-Wagah border, then to Lahore and thereafter Iran. Now the Attari-Wagah border is sealed. So, that's not happening," Thillenkery said.



The one-year march will be led by social worker P V Rajagopal, Gandhian scholar and Canadian leader Jill Carr-Harris and Dalit and tribal rights activist Ramesh Sharma among others, he said.

The group will walk from Delhi to Sevagram in Maharashtra where Mahatma Gandhi had set up his ashram and fly from Nagpur to Iran. From there, the yatra will proceed to Armenia and onwards.

"A man came to our non-violence training from Armenia a few years ago. He took the message of Gandhiji back to his country and worked on principles of non-violence. He (Nikol Pashinyan) is the prime minister of Armenia

now," Thillenkery said.

Along the route, local committees will organise daily events and non-violence training to prepare peace-builders, Thillenkery said. The yatra will reach Geneva by September 26 next year.

Municipalities of the Canton of Geneva have already passed a resolution to host the marchers. A group of 30 municipality members will welcome the marchers, he said.

About 5,000 people from across the globe will participate in a one-week global action forum will be organised in Geneva to deliberate with United Nations' agencies and like-minded organisations on poverty, social exclusion, climate crisis, and non-violence.

Dikchu prepares for Durga Puja



SUMMIT REPORT

MANGAN, 24 SEPT:

The people of Dikchu East and North Sikkim have resolved to organise Durga puja celebrations at Dikchu

Bazar from 29 Sept to 08 Oct. The final preparatory meeting was held at Dikchu on Monday and attended by all the residents and members of the Bazar committee.

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GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS & YOUTH AFFAIRS
WHITE HALL COMPLEX, GANGTOK, EAST SIKKIM

Information

The Department of Sports & Youth Affairs is conducting Selection Trials at District Level in four districts and State Level at Gangtok to select a Sikkim State U-17 Girls Football Team to participate at 65th National School Football U-17 Girls Championship 2019-20 to be held at Ajmer Rajasthan from October 21st to 25th October 2019.

Revised Dates & Venues

Selection Trials		
Districts	Dates	Venues
West	25/9/2019 Wednesday, 10 AM	Jorethang Play ground
South	26/9/2019 Thursday, 10 AM	Namchi Singithang ground
East	01/10/2019 Tuesday, 10 AM	Paljor Stadium
North	30/9/2019 Monday, 10 AM	Mangan Playground
State Level Selection	3/10/2019 Thursday, 10 AM	Paljor Stadium, Gangtok

All interested girl football players of respective district born on or after 01-01-2003 (U-17yrs), studying in 12th or below class but not below 6th Standard, can attend the selection trials as mentioned above with Xerox copy of Date of Birth Certificate and Reading Certificate of Schools. For further details may contact District Officers/Assistant Director Sports of respective District/BACs.

Contact Nos:

East- 9647859222, West-9647871168, North-9800254352 & South- 9434213738

Demographics Has Offered an Opportunity

Let's Pamper Our 10%

The Union Home Minister recently announced that the 2021 Census will use a special app to expedite the number-crunching delivery of this decadal exercise. That is good news because data culled from the headcount of the country's residents used to take extremely long earlier, and once the initial excitement of population numbers died down, the significance of the data also subsided when it came to deciding policy. This was unfortunate because too many opportunities were then wasted. For instance, as of 2011, exactly 64,111 members of Sikkim's population were in the 0-6 age-group, making up a slim 10.50% of its population of 6,10,577 people. The national share of population in this age-group is slightly higher at 13.1%, down from 15.9% in 2001. These figures, as per the Census of India 2011. The previous census had posted the number of children in this age-group at 78,195, making up 14.50% of Sikkim's population of 5,40,851 at the time. This remains a lost opportunity.

There has been talk of the fall in fertility rates, with some even suggesting that Sikkimese women should bear more children:-o While such demands are clearly wrong on so many levels, this section had only recently commented on such attitudes, so today, let's discuss "young age dependency", as census enumerators refer to the 0-6 age-group. Dependency ratio can be defined as the age-population ratio of those typically not in the labor force. This would mean the minors and the senior citizens, whose care rests on the shoulders of the productive/ working population. Clearly then, the lower this number, the lesser the stress on the working population and better the access to available resources for the 'dependents'. At a wider, society and State level, this means that the existing infrastructure and funds can now go much further since the number of beneficiaries is fewer. Even in absolute terms, for instance, the number of minors has dropped from 78,195 in 2001 to 64,111 in 2011. Given the trend, this number must be even lower now, five years down the line. Budget outlays have however consistently risen, and even after factoring in inflation, there should be much more available by way of funds for these children per head than was the case a decade and a half ago.

It goes without saying that fewer number of the very young translates into an enhanced ability to invest in child development. It's simplistic, but one needs to be bear in mind that a fewer newborns now, while it might free resources to ensure better care and education for them in the immediate future, also translates as greater responsibilities on their shoulders in the longer run. As a generation ages, they will stop being active contributors to the economy and the workplace. Improved healthcare facilities will mean that they will also remain dependent for more years. The share of elderly will increase, and with fewer young coming of age down the line, the pressure on them to look after the aged will increase. China is feeling the stress of its one-child policy now. That said, today's minors will deliver on their adult responsibilities only as well as they have been groomed at present. All the more reason why they should be exposed to the best education and groomed with a stronger sense of responsibility and belonging if the present generation wants to be looked after better when they retire and grow into the dependency of old age.

If education is genuinely touched by quality, a more confident and definitely more resourceful generation can be prepared. But Sikkim has been failing its young embarrassingly. Take the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for 2013, for instance. Where one had hoped that fewer children would have improved classroom teaching, the opposite seems to be happening. Reading levels among standard III students dropped from 52% in 2009 to 51% in 2013. Agreed, the drop is marginal, but reading levels were measured as class III students being able to read standard I texts. It should have improved substantially. But it dropped. This was for government schools, and for those who think private schools must have performed better, they didn't. Combined govt and private school data registers an even sharper drop from a combined acceptable level of 61% in 2009 to a worrying 57% in 2013. In mathematics, the fall in learning quality is even more dramatic. In 2009, 60% of the standard III students could do subtraction, the basic for this age, but in 2013, barely 50% in that class could do so anymore!

Where the young should have been learning better because there are fewer of them and still the same number, if not more, of teachers attending to them, the quality of teaching has fallen!

But quality education is something everyone owes to the very young. And now it is also affordable. Think about it, if 90% of the population wakes up to its responsibilities towards the remaining 10% who depend on them for everything, they can ensure that the minors receive the best of everything. If this 90% consciously resolves to genuinely care, a much more responsive, warm and compassionate generation will take charge of Sikkim in the very near future.



Artificial Intelligence has a gender bias problem – just ask Siri

RACHEL ADAMS
theconversation.com

Suggest to Samsung's Virtual Personal Assistant Bixby "Let's talk dirty", and the female voice will respond with a honeyed accent: "I don't want to end up on Santa's naughty list."

Ask the same question to the programme's male voice and it replies "I've read that soil erosion is a real dirt problem."

In South Africa, where I live and conduct my research into gender biases in artificial intelligence, Samsung now offers Bixby in various voices depending on which language you choose. For American English, there's Julia, Stephanie, Lisa and John. The voices of Julia, Lisa and Stephanie are coquettish and eager. John is clever and straightforward.

Virtual Personal Assistants – such as Bixby, Alexa (Amazon), Siri (Apple) and Cortana (Microsoft) – are at the cutting edge of marketable artificial intelligence (AI). AI refers to using technological systems to perform tasks that people usually would.

They function as an application on a smart device, responding to voice commands through natural language processing. Their ubiquity throughout the world is rapidly increasing. A recent report by UNESCO estimated that by as early as next year we will be having more conversations with our virtual personal assistants than with our spouses.

Yet, as I've explored in my own research with Dr Nora Ni Loideain from the Information Law and Policy Centre at the University of London, these technologies betray critical gender biases.

With their female names, voices and programmed flirtatiousness, the design of virtual personal assistants reproduces discriminatory stereotypes of female secretaries who, according to the gender stereotype, is often more than than just a

secretary to her male boss.

It also reinforces the role of women as secondary and submissive to men. These AI assistants operate on the command of their user. They have no right to refuse these commands. They are programmed only to obey. Arguably, they also raise expectations for how real women ought to behave.

The objective of these assistants is to also free their user from menial work such as making appointments and purchasing items online. This is problematic on at least two fronts: it suggests the user has more time for supposedly more important work. Secondly, it makes a critical statement about the value of the kind of secretarial work performed, first by real women and now by digitalised women, in the digital future.

"WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?"

One of the more overt ways in which these biases are evident is the use of female names: Siri and Cortana, for instance. Siri is a Nordic name meaning "the beautiful woman that leads you to victory".

Cortana takes its name (as well as visuals and voice) from the game series Halo. In Halo, Cortana was created from a clone of the brain of a successful female scientist married with a transparent and highly-sexualised female body. She functions as a fictional aide for gamers with her unassuming intelligence and mesmeric shape.

In addition to their female voices, all the virtual personal assistants on the market today come with a default female voice, which, like Bixby, is programmed to respond to all kinds of suggestive questions and comments. These questions include: "What are you wearing?" Siri's response is "why would I be wearing anything?"

Alexa, meanwhile, quips: "They don't make clothes for me"; and Cortana replies, "Just a little something I picked up in engineering."

BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION IN AI

It is being increasingly acknowledged that AI systems are often biased, particularly along race and gender lines. For example, the recent recruitment algorithm development by Amazon to sort resumes for job applications displayed gender biases by downgrading resumes which contained the word "women" or which contained reference to women's colleges. As the algorithm was trained on historical data and the preferential recruitment of males, it ultimately could not be fixed and had to be dropped.

As research has shown, there is a critical link between the development of AI systems which display gender biases and the lack of women in teams that design them.

But there is rather less recognition of the ways in which AI products incorporate stereotyped representations of gender within their very design. For AI Now, a leading research institution looking into the social impact of AI, there is a clear connection between the male dominated AI industry and the discriminatory systems and products it produces.

The role of researchers is to make visible these connections and to show the critical links between the representations of women, whether in cultural or technological products, and the treatment of women in the real world.

AI is the leading technology in the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution. It refers to the technological advances – from biotechnology, to AI and big data – that are rapidly reshaping the world as we know it. As South Africa continues to engage with the promises and pitfalls of what this holds, it will become increasingly more important to consider and address how the technologies driving these changes may affect women.

[the writer is Research Specialist, Human Sciences Research Council]

Yemen's Houthis – and why they're not simply a proxy of Iran

VINCENT DURAC
theconversation.com

The attacks on oil production facilities at Abqaiq and Khurais in Saudi Arabia have drawn renewed focus on Yemen's Houthi movement, which claimed responsibility for the strikes. Whether these claims are true or not – the US and Saudi Arabia allege that Iran was more directly involved in the attacks – they underscore the transformation of the Houthi movement.

What was once a small opposition movement which emerged in Yemen's north in the early years of the 21st century, is now a player of national, and increasingly, regional significance.

The Houthi movement, named after the family with which it is most strongly associated, developed in Yemen's northern province of Saada as a response to the perceived marginalisation of its Shia Zaydi population by the government in the capital, Sanaa. Members of the Houthi family claimed to defend Shia Zaydi identity from dilution in a wider Sunni Islamic setting. The movement was also motivated by what was seen as the economic discrimination of Saada by the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president who dominated Yemeni political life from 1990 until his overthrow in a popular uprising of 2011.

The Houthi leadership's increasingly vocal criticism of Saleh's regime and the close relationship it had with the US drew the movement into direct conflict with the government in Sanaa. Between 2004 and 2010, Saada was the site of recurrent conflict which resulted in thousands of deaths and significant destruction. In

the course of that conflict, the Houthis were transformed from a small, marginal opposition movement into a battle-hardened militia, capable of fighting regime forces to a standstill.

SEIZING THEIR MOMENT

When Saleh was forced to resign in 2011, he transferred power to his deputy, Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who presided over a coalition of government and opposition parties. The Houthi movement, which had adopted the name Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), took advantage of a chaotic transitional period to consolidate its control over the north of the country and move towards the capital.

When Hadi's government proved incapable of resolving the deep-seated economic and political problems that had fuelled the 2011 uprising, the Houthis seized control of Sanaa in September 2014 without violence. They were aided by support from Saleh and forces loyal to him who had lost out in the twists and turns of the transitional period and saw advantage in throwing in their lot with their erstwhile enemies.

Although the unlikely alliance between Saleh and the Houthis did not last, it was crucial to the Houthi seizure of existing state institutions and their access to vastly increased military resources. This included tanks, artillery and anti-aircraft weapons, as well as short-range ballistic missiles and launchers.

The advance of the Houthis drew in the involvement of regional powers. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) led a military intervention against the Houthis which began in March 2015 with the support of regional allies and the international community. The subsequent

aerial bombardment of the country has killed up to 90,000 people and led to one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of the modern era.

As Saudi airstrikes continued to devastate the country, the Houthis – who continue to control Sanaa, – began to launch missile and drone strikes against Saudi territory in January 2018.

THE IRANIAN DIMENSION

The entry of regional powers into the conflict in Yemen was prompted, in part at least, by fears of Iranian expansionism and the framing of events by the Saudis and their allies as a sectarian war. Yet, while the Houthis have benefited from support from Iran, the suggestion that they constitute little more than an Iranian proxy is wide of the mark.

There is limited evidence that Iran controls the Houthis' strategy. The Houthis reportedly ignored Iranian advice not to take over Sanaa in 2014 and, while the Arab coalition spends between US\$5-6 billion each month on the war, Iran's spending on the Yemen war has been estimated at little more than several million dollars each year.

There are also significant doctrinal differences between the Houthis' Zaydi version of Shia Islam and that practised in Iran. Some Houthi activists are even on record stating that the Iranian system could not be implemented in Yemen because Sunni Muslims constitute a majority of the country's population.

Framing the conflict as a sectarian war by proxy also misses the complexity of the motivations and the nature of the alliances fighting on all sides. In taking control of the capital, the Houthi movement drew support

from a complex array of local groups, tribesmen and military officers who resented what they saw as their marginalisation at the hands of central government.

The expansion of the Houthi movement was also made possible by the shortcomings of the post-2011 transitional process and the Hadi government's failure to address corruption or to pursue meaningful political reforms. As the government lost legitimacy in the context of widespread socioeconomic distress, the Houthis were able to mobilise support well beyond their immediate base.

Insisting the conflict is a sectarian one also misses the extent to which regional players are using events in Yemen as a projection of their ambitions for power. One of the clearest examples of this is the UAE's strategy to develop its own economic and geopolitical interests, taking advantage of its presence in southern Yemen and its patronage of local actors, including local Salafis and Southern secessionist forces. This strategy includes effective control of energy infrastructure, oil fields and commercial ports all of which link to broader Emirati objectives in the region.

Despite this complexity, the US and its allies in the region, notably Saudi Arabia, find it convenient to see the Yemeni conflict as a simple proxy war between the Saudis and their allies on one side, and Iran and the Houthi movement on the other. In so doing, they condemn Yemen to the unnecessary prolongation of a brutal conflict that is long overdue for resolution.

[the writer is Lecturer, School Of Politics & International Relations, University College Dublin]

Pradyot Debbarman resigns as Tripura Congress chief

AGARTALA, SEP 24 (PTI): President of the Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee, Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarman, has resigned from all party posts over his plea for implementation of NRC in the state and refusing to “compromise” with other Congress leaders.

Debbarman said the central leadership had requested him not to make his resignation public before the by-elections to Badharghat constituency, which was held on Monday.

“I have resigned from all posts of the Congress a few days ago. The party high command had asked me to compromise with a section of state leaders but I told them it was not possible.

“Then they asked me to withdraw the litigation that I have filed for the introduction of NRC (National Register of Citizens) in Tripura, but I did not agree to it, too,” Debbarman told PTI over the phone from Delhi.

“Though I have resigned from all the posts of the Congress, I am still with the party at heart,” he said.

Debbarman said he was also unhappy over the central leadership’s decision to appoint Subal Bhowmick as the executive president of the Tripura PCC.

Bhowmick, a former Congress MLA, had joined the BJP before the Assembly elections on February 18 as the saffron party’s state vice-president but returned to his former party before the Lok Sabha polls.

Debbarman, the grandson of Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya who had ruled the princely state of Tripura, was appointed as the Tripura PCC president on February 25 this year.

Earlier in the day, in a Facebook post, Debbarman wrote: “Woke up today after a long time feeling relaxed. I start this day without having to listen to criminals and liars....not having to listen to ‘High Command’ on how to accommodate corrupt people in high positions...”

“I realised how my health and my life was being affected because I was not ready to allow wrong elements to get into posts which would destroy our state.

“I tried and perhaps lost but then how could I win when I was alone in this fight from the beginning? The Bubagra (king) in me is more powerful than any political post,” he added.

Panic over NRC grips Kolkata, several parts of Bengal

KOLKATA, SEP 24 (PTI): Hundreds of people lined up at government and municipal offices here and across West Bengal Tuesday to collect their birth certificates and necessary documents to be in readiness should NRC be implemented in the state despite assurances by the TMC government that it would not be allowed.

The omission of a large number of Hindu Bengalis from the final NRC list in BJP-ruled Assam has apparently created panic among the people and has led to six deaths in the state so far.

Large queues were seen outside Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) headquarters and other division offices in the city and BDO offices in other parts of Bengal as people waited for their turn to search for land and other necessary documents.

“I have come to the KMC office to collect my birth certificate as I had lost it long back. I have heard that we need to have our birth certificates to prove that we are citizens of this country in case



NRC is implemented in Bengal,” said 75-year-old Ajit Ray, who was seen standing outside KMC headquarters.

55-year-old Bimal Mondal was seen standing outside the land records department of KMC, in search of documents of land procurement

in Kolkata by his parents five decades ago. In rural Bengal similar picture was witnessed outside various government and panchayat offices.

“What will we do if we are declared foreigners though we were born and brought up in this country? From where

will I get documents of my father being born in this country?” 25-year-old Khalque Mollah of South 24 Parganas district said.

According to government sources, six people have died so far in the districts. Two of them allegedly committed

suicide after failing to procure old documents and four others died after falling ill while standing in queues with thousands of villagers at different government offices to get their documents.

More than 19 lakh people in Assam have been excluded

from the recently published final NRC on August 31, out of which around 12 lakh are Hindus. “We are requesting people not to panic at all. There will be no NRC in Bengal. The TMC government will never allow it. As long as TMC government is in power not a single person will be touched,” Kolkata Mayor and senior minister Firhad Hakim told reporters.

West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on Monday accused BJP of creating panic over NRC and had iterated she will not allow NRC exercise in the state.

The BJP Bengal leadership has, however, blamed Banerjee and her party, the TMC for creating a panic over NRC in Bengal to instill fear among the Hindus.

“Only TMC will be responsible for the deaths over NRC in the state. We have clearly said all the Hindus who have come from other countries will be given citizenship under Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB) and then NRC will be implemented to weed out the infiltrators,” state BJP president Dilip Ghosh said.

Funds crunch cripples world’s oldest tea research institute



ZAFRI MUDASSER NOFIL JORHAT (ASSAM), SEP 24 (PTI): The Tocklai Tea Research Institute here has been facing severe financial crisis which has affected work at the oldest and largest tea research facility in the world but authorities assert steps are being taken to tide over the tough phase.

Employees allege that they have not received several salary components like insurance and provident fund for years. They have been on strike off and on demanding release of assured funds, recruitment of scientists, smooth conduct of research work and other measures.

Retired employees are also yet to get their full dues, they say. The institute’s director A K Barooah says that financial trouble for the institute began during the period 2012-2017.

“Since then there has been a backlog. We have not been able to pay dues to even retired employees,” Barooah told PTI.

He says some externally-funded projects are going on currently but main research work is affected.

Organised research on tea in India began in 1911, with the establishment of Tocklai Experimental Station in the loop of the rivulet Tocklai at Jorhat. In 2014, it was renamed as Tocklai Tea Research Institute (TTRI).

According to Tea Board India data, the to-

tal tea production in the country is around 1,370 million kg. Assam alone accounts for over 50 per cent of this tea.

The tea industry currently funds 64 per cent of Tocklai TRI’s budget. With 10 branches, it looks after research and advisory services in Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya.

The Department of Commerce through the Tea Board of India has approved funding 49 per cent on five heads - salaries, provident fund, gratuity, medical expenses and training expenses of the institute.

In 1964, the Tea Research Association (TRA) was formed which took over the management of Tocklai TRI although it was guided and funded by Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). With the change of government policy and directives, CSIR withdrew its technical and financial support to Tocklai in 1996.

The central government started providing financial aid to Tocklai TRI through the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Tea Board was engaged as the monitoring agency for utilisation of funds and research progress but the overall control of Tocklai lies with the TRA.

The ministry does not directly grant fund to Tocklai TRI or TRA. Fund is released to Tea Board which in turn releases fund to TRA as per the

approved guidelines.

According to the Department of Commerce in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, during the Medium Term Framework (MTF) Scheme 2017-2020, 80 per cent funding (49 per cent grants-in-aid for five identified heads - salary, wages and bonuses, PF, gratuity, medical and training and 31 per cent for research projects have been approved to TRA.

Authorities say the financial crunch faced by the institute is due to lower allocation of funds on the R&D head of Tea Board of India.

The department has asked Tocklai TRI to become financially self sufficient.

Barooah says focus is now on generation of funds.

“The institute has been providing its services to its members and few projects have been initiated in the past few years. The institute has released new clones as well as tea seed stock for the use of the tea industry,” he says.

Recently, Barooah says, the stakeholders approached the Centre for sustainable funding of the institute so that research work is not hampered.

“We have not been able to recruit scientists in the way we want though a few have been appointed in a phase-by-phase manner,” he says.

Authorities, however, denied any mismanage-

ment of affairs by the Tea Board with regards to the institute.

The Tea Board of India has always provided its helping hand to TRA and has taken up all issues of the institute with the ministry favourably, they said.

Devajit Baruah, secretary of Tocklai Employees’ Union, says that the tea industry cannot survive leaving out Tocklai TRI.

He alleges that the tea industry lobby is posing a hindrance to direct control of TTRI by the central government.

“We want full government funding and also declaring TRI as an institute of national importance so that work is not hampered. The R&D section has been hit the most. We want government control, we are even open for restructuring of the organisation,” he says.

“There should be a proper funding pattern and government should become a proper guardian, Baruah adds.

The employees are again on strike which entered the second day on Tuesday.

Last month, the pending insurance amount of employees was deposited by the management after much delay.

Baruah says the employees are demanding nothing more than what fellow central government staff is getting. “We just want our dues which have been pending for long.

Court rejects Chinmayanand’s bail



SHAHJAHANPUR (UP), SEP 24 (PTI): An Uttar Pradesh court has rejected the bail application of BJP leader Swami Chinmayanand, who was arrested in a sexual-assault case following rape allegations by a law student.

Shahjahanpur chief judicial magistrate has rejected the bail application of Chinmayanand on Monday, saying it should be moved in the sessions court, the former Union minister’s counsel, Om Singh, said on Tuesday.

The court has also rejected on the same grounds the bail application of three men -- Sanjay, Sachin and Vikram -- who were arrested on extortion charges filed by the BJP leader.

A special investigation team (SIT) on Tuesday took Sachin and Vikram on remand for 95 hours for taking them to the site for recovery of a

mobile phone allegedly used in making the extortion demand, sources in the probe team said.

According to the sources, the accused had told the SIT that they had thrown the mobile phone, which was used to make the alleged extortion call, near Mehandipur Balaji in Rajasthan. The two will be taken there to recover the device.

The SIT has also sent the Chinmayanand lawyer’s mobile phone, on which the alleged extortion message was sent, for forensic examination, the sources said.

The postgraduate student, who studied at a college run by Chinmayanand’s ashram, has alleged that she was raped and physically exploited by the 72-year-old for a over a year.

Chinmayanand, who was arrested on Friday

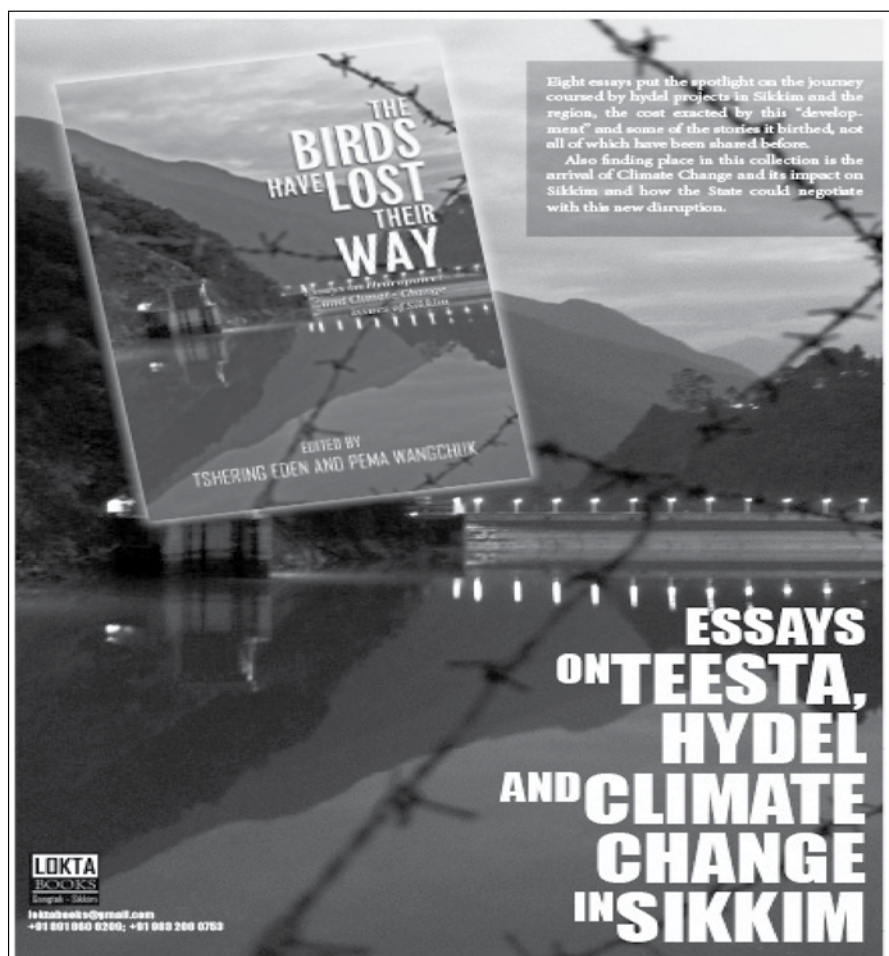
and and sent to 14 days’ judicial custody, was shifted admitted on Monday to a Lucknow hospital, where he was tested for cardiac problems.

He has been booked under sections 354 D (stalking), 342 (wrongful confinement) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code.

Instead of Section 376 (rape), the 72-year-old has been booked under Section 376 C, which is usually applied in cases where a person abuses his position to “induce or seduce” a woman under his charge to have “sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape”.

If proved, a rape charge can lead to punishment of up to life imprisonment, while someone convicted under Section 376C can be jailed for between five and 10 years.

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Megan Rapinoe: the world's best player in every sense of the word

CATLING MURRAY
theGuardian

By the time Megan Rapinoe stood in Stade de Lyon after July's World Cup final, arms outstretched like a statue one might find at the Musée d'Orsay, it was obvious she had arrived at an apex few of us can ever hope to reach. The heart of a World Cup-winning USA team that will go down as the greatest ever, Rapinoe was the worthy recipient of Fifa's The Best award on Monday in the women's player category.

But a few years ago, it was almost inconceivable that Rapinoe would be standing under the bright lights, hailed as a hero. It appeared Rapinoe's career was winding down and her best days were behind her – struggles that, in retrospect, propelled her to the stage at Fifa's awards gala.

There was the disappointment of the 2016 Olympics, of course, where Rapinoe's US team were knocked out in the quarter-finals – the earliest exit for the Americans in any major tournament. Rapinoe made her return during the Rio Games after 252 days without playing competitive football and, in her rushed return from an ACL injury, she failed to make the impact coach Jill Ellis had hoped for.

There were also the off-field diversions. Rapinoe joined Colin Kaepernick's protest against racial injustice by kneeling during the national



anthem for both club and US team games. In response, the US Soccer Federation passed a new bylaw stating that any player who didn't stand for the anthem would face punishment, something that threatened her place on the team.

All the while, Ellis vowed to upend her roster before the 2019 World Cup and veteran players soon found themselves out in the cold. Call-ups and starts that used to belong to Rapinoe had gone to young up-and-comers such as Mallory Pugh, a winger 13 years Rapinoe's junior.

It was a year that Rapinoe later admitted was a difficult one but she insisted it also rejuvenated her. On the pitch, she was resurgent, fitter and stronger than ever. Away from the game, she became more committed

to speaking out, even if it meant being labeled as a "controversial" athlete.

"It really only solidifies who I am as a person and the things that I stand for," she said in 2017. "Often times you stand up [for something] and people clap, and sometimes you do and they don't. It only strengthened my resolve and my ethos of standing up for what I believe in."

Her comeback from one of the most tumultuous years in her career laid the groundwork for her eventual breakout in 2019. At this summer's World Cup, Donald Trump tweeted criticism of Rapinoe, chastising her for not respecting "our Country ... or our Flag" after she had said she did not want to visit the White House. Rapinoe promptly scored twice in her next game,

a marquee match-up between the US and France. For good measure, Rapinoe scored again in the World Cup final, which the US won, and left with a literal armful of trophies. Criticize her at your peril.

Rapinoe, to be sure, is a dazzling player to watch. A crafty and audacious winger, her enthusiasm is spellbinding – she plays like she's having the time of her life, even when it seems like everyone wants to bring her down. She'll dribble a defender into circles, find a seam for a pass out of nowhere, or score an impossible curler and make it look routine. But her sensational 2019 was buoyed by something more than that – something beyond what she could do with the ball at her feet. Her authenticity and self-belief set her apart in the

most rigorous edition of the Women's World Cup ever played.

She used routine press conferences to talk about the inequities in women's football and, even as a Fifa media officer sat close by, she didn't hold back in her criticism of football's governing body. Fifa hadn't shown it cared about the women's game and offered lip service but not enough resources, she calmly argued.

Rapinoe and her teammates have sued the US Soccer Federation over allegations of gender discrimination, and she didn't demur as the topic came up in France. By the time she and her teammates lifted the World Cup trophy, the crowd in Lyon erupted into a rousing chant: "Equal pay! Equal pay!" If the USA's biggest star in the tournament had been

someone else – someone less inclined to speak so openly about inequality – it's worth wondering if that chant would have happened.

It was only fitting that on the night she was being honored as Fifa's top player of the year, she again made the platform bigger than herself, calling on everyone to combat racism, sexism and other ugly elements of football.

"I ask everyone here: lend your platform to other people," she told the crowd in Milan. "Lift other people up. Share your success. We have a unique opportunity in football, different to any other sport in the world, to use this beautiful game to actually change the world for better. That's my charge to everyone. I hope you take that to heart and just do something. Do anything."

How to define the word "best" may vary depending who you ask, and it becomes all the more complicated when trying to untangle a player's individual success in a team sport. But if "best" can be defined as the player who made the greatest impact with the most poise at the highest level, there is little doubt that Rapinoe was the best 2019 had to offer.

Her performance has been transcendent, not just within the white lines on the grass, but at podiums and in front of crowds. Awarding the top individual honor to any other player simply wasn't an option.

Barcelona trapped in a recurring nightmare that began at Anfield

SID LOWE
theGuardian

Pretty much the first thing Junior Firpo did as a Barça player was miss the ball. The second was to fall flat on his face. He had been on the pitch for 54 seconds and as he lay on the grass, the soundtrack provided by a bloke with a swanee whistle and a set of cymbals, he watched the men in red and white run beyond him and a familiar scene unfold. It was happening again, only faster. At Athletic Bilbao on the opening night, Barcelona had gone behind in the 89th minute; against Betis a week later, it was the 17th; and at Osasuna, the sixth.

This time, in week five at Granada, they had only just made it to the second when Ramon Azeez scored. This time, they wouldn't make it out of trouble. As for Junior, signed from Real Betis for €18m in the summer, he didn't make it out for the second half. Lionel Messi did, at last making his first league appearance of the season, and so did Ansu Fati, their hope at 16. Even they couldn't salvage anything from this wreckage. Arturo Vidal came on too. Pretty much the first thing he did was boot the ball off. The second was stick a hand out in the area. From the penalty spot, Álvaro Vadillo made it 2-0. It was all over. And, it was tempting to conclude, even this early, all might actually mean all. Barcelona had been beaten. Barcelona are beaten, it seems.

On the night when Granada, with a budget that couldn't pay Messi let alone everyone else at the Camp Nou, their salary cap 18 times lower than Barcelona's, deservedly won 2-0, the story should have been about them. What they had done was, in their manager's too-literally-translated words, "barbaric". It should have been about how 11 of their players on Saturday were in the second division while Barcelona won the league last season. About how they have lost just once, against Sevilla on their first home game back in primera, and won three in a row since without conceding. It should have been about how victory momentarily took them top. Granada. Top. But it wasn't. And not just because Diego Martínez, their manager, insisted that looking at the league was a "waste of time". Or even because the story almost never is about them when it can be about them.

It was because there was something about the way Barcelona were defeated, the way it managed to shock and not shock at all, that ran deeper. This wasn't just one game, and certainly wasn't just two men – still less Junior or Vidal, or even just Ernesto Valverde – however bad it had been. And, boy, had it been bad. It was difficult to remember a performance worse than this, and yet there was no lack of contenders.

This was sudden; it was also a long time coming. Dreadful in defence, in midfield, up front. Nothing worked. "Not even with Messi," ran the cover of AS, and there

was something telling in that too. On Friday morning, El Mundo Deportivo gleefully splashed on Real Madrid in crisis. By the following night, it was Barcelona who were. And by the night after, Madrid were top.

"This Barcelona lies in ruins," AS's headline ran. "Another disaster," El Mundo Deportivo said. At the end, Frenkie De Jong approached the fans and apologised. He must have wondered where he had ended up. It wasn't supposed to be this way. "For Barcelona, every stadium is Anfield now," wrote Santi Giménez. "They are a drama of epic proportions, where anyone can strip them bare with startling ease." Something broke that night. Or maybe it's more accurate to suggest that something was revealed, and has not been remedied.

They carried on regardless, reluctant to challenge the old order. But once it had happened it was more likely to happen again, a recurring nightmare. Rome resurfaced in Liverpool, and Liverpool resurfaces anywhere: Bilbao, Pamplona, Granada, Dortmund. The Camp Nou is one thing but Barcelona haven't won away since April. "I am responsible," Valverde said. He meant for Saturday night but there's more. It is early, but it is their worst start in 25 years, and for all the coincidences – injuries, penalties, daft individual mistakes – it isn't entirely coincidental. They've trailed in four of their five games and conceded in all of them. No one in La Liga has conceded more goals.

And this is more than that old, facile line about how Barcelona can't defend: they can't attack either. At Granada, they had one shot on target. Sure, they have been without Messi, Suárez, Dembélé, Neymar too, but it's not about that either; it's about the most basic thing of all, the essence of Barcelona, perhaps hidden behind Messi for too long: the play. Against Liverpool, there was something deeper than defeat. That this is a team losing its religion is an old debate, politicised and exaggerated: Barcelona have been the best team in Spain by miles over the last two years. For all the flaws, Anfield remains hard to explain. Nor were they as heretical, as un-Barça as some accusations had it. But there is something in it, in the lack of a structure, an idea, a commitment to an identity.

It has been hard to avoid the feeling that too few of those that mattered, manager included, believed in the model. Slowly, football slipped from them. Xavi and Iniesta have gone. Messi is too often the team – a process in which he may not be entirely blameless – and one day, he will be gone too. That has created a kind of desperation. After the defeat in Liverpool, Valverde's time appeared to have come to a close, but it didn't. It is hard to see how you can recover from a moment like that. There's a feeling this is a season too far – two seasons too far, some critics insist.

Bajrang wants wrestling to be made National Sports

NEW DELHI, SEP 24 (PTI): Three-time World Championship medallist Bajrang Punia on Tuesday called for wrestling to be made the national sport, insisting that Indian grapplers have consistently won medals in big-ticket events.

During a felicitation function of World Championships medal-winning wrestlers by Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju here on Monday, the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) President Brij Bhushan Sharan mooted the idea of making wrestling the national sport, which received the backing of double Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar.

"I too feel wrestling should be made the national sport as it is one sport which has consistently won medals in the World Championships and Olympics," said Bajrang during the program organised by the Sports Ministry.

Bajrang clinched a bronze medal in just-concluded World Championships in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan to add to his silver (2018 Budapest) and bronze (2013 Budapest) he had won earlier.

Sport Minister Kiren Rijiju, however, said he can't discriminate or favour any particular sports.

"As a Sports Minister I have to give equal importance to all sports. I can't sound discriminatory. Wrestling is very important for India, it makes our country's flag fly high but we have to give importance to all Olympic sports as well as non-Olympic and traditional sports," he said.

"But to declare some sport as a national sport... it is a matter which is very emotional and critical. So as a Sports Minister, I shouldn't be making announcement or judgement on the basis of any demand. I am not going to discuss this issue and generate unnecessary controversy."

The Sports Minister also hoped that wrestling will produce maximum number of medals at next year's Tokyo Olympics.

"The 2020 Tokyo Olympics is going to be a watershed moment and along with other disciplines our wrestling team will be one of the major force in Tokyo. I am happy with the management of wrestling, the efforts of the coaches and entire technical support staff," Rijiju said.

"India have the capability to win many medals at Tokyo."

WFI President Sharan, who was also present at the program, promised that wrestlers will produce a much-better performance in Tokyo.

"India had won two medals at Rio and one of them was in wrestling. I promise that our wrestlers will double that medal at Tokyo."

Sri Lanka squad leave for Pakistan despite security concerns



COLOMBO, SEP 24 (AFP): Sri Lanka's depleted national cricket squad left for Pakistan on Tuesday expressing confidence in security promises by the hosts despite reports that the team could be targeted by militants.

The Sri Lanka team were attacked in Lahore in 2009. Since then most international teams have refused to tour the South Asian country, leaving Pakistan to play nearly all their "home" games in the United Arab Emirates.

Ten senior players citing security concerns have opted out of the tour comprising three one-day internationals and three Twenty20

matches beginning on Friday.

But the captain of the Twenty20 squad, Dasun Shanaka, said Tuesday he had no misgivings about returning to Pakistan after they played a Twenty20 international in Lahore in October 2017, their first since the 2009 attack.

"I have been there before," Shanaka told reporters just before the team left Colombo where they were blessed by saffron-robed Buddhist monks.

"I am satisfied with the security arranged for us and I am happy to lead my team to Pakistan. We hope to give a good fight to our very strong hosts." ODI skipper Lahiru

Wimbledon champion Halep targets strong finish in Asia

WUHAN (CHINA), SEP 24 (AFP): Simona Halep said that winning her first Wimbledon title this year meant "everything", but she was determined to have a better Asian swing than in past years after an emphatic start to her Wuhan campaign on Tuesday.

Halep suffered opening-round exits in three of her previous five appearances at the Chinese event -- including the last two seasons -- but was dominant in a 6-3, 6-2

triumph over Wimbledon semi-finalist Barbora Strycova to reach the last 16. A solid contender for clinching one of the six remaining spots in the WTA Finals in Shenzhen, sixth-ranked Halep also has a shot at finishing the year as world number one for a third consecutive time with a strong finish to the season in Asia.

"Very, very tough goals honestly After winning Wimbledon, I was a little bit let's say more relaxed in

results, making big results. But I'm still motivated. I'm working hard," said the fourth seed, who next faces Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina for a place in the quarter-finals.

"For this period I just want to be better because every year I promised myself that I will do the best I can, and I couldn't for different reasons.

"Now I feel healthy, I feel motivated, I feel fresh. I just want to go there and win every match I play."

2 killed, over 100 injured in PoK after earthquake jolts north Pakistan

BY SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, SEP 24 (PTI): At least two people were killed and more than 100 others injured in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on Tuesday after a 5.8-magnitude quake jolted several cities in the northern parts of the country including capital Islamabad.

According to US Geological Survey, the epicentre of quake was near New Mirpur in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

PoK Minister for Sports, Youth and Culture Chaudhry Mohammad Saeed told the media that at least two people have died and over 100 injured in different parts of Mirpur district.

Pakistan Meteorological Department's earthquake centre said the 5.8-magnitude earthquake was located near the mountainous city of Jehlum in Punjab province. Its depth was at 10 kilometres. However, Minister for Science Fawad Chaudhry said that the intensity of the quake was 7.1.

Some houses collapsed in Mirpur following the earthquake, Deputy Commissioner



Raja Qaiser said. Parts of a mosque also collapsed in the area, which is severely affected by the quake. Emergency has been declared in hospitals across PoK.

TV channels showed the footage of heavily damaged roads in Mirpur, with many vehicles overturned. Several cars fell into the deep cracks on the roads.

The quake was powerful and created

panic as people ran out of building, eye-witnesses said.

Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa directed "immediate rescue operation in aid of civil administration" for victims of earthquake in PoK. Army troops with aviation and medical support teams have been dispatched, the media wing of the army tweeted.

Lt. Gen. Muhammad

Afzal, chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority, said that most of the damage was done in Mirpur and Jhelum.

"We are assessing the damage to life and property," he said.

Several cities including Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Skardu, Kohat, Charsadda, Kasur, Faisalabad, Gujrat, Sialkot, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Chitral, Malakand,

Multan, Shangla, Okara, Nowshera, Attock and Jhang felt the tremor.

Pakistan's major water reservoir Mangla Dam located near Mirpur remained safe, officials said. Mangla dam power house has been closed, cutting off 900 MW power supply to the national grid, they said.

However, upper Jhelum canal was damaged and water inundated various villages.

S Arabia blocking approval of UN oceans report: participants



MONACO, SEP 24 (AFP): Oil giant Saudi Arabia is blocking the adoption of a major UN report on oceans and climate change by challenging an earlier UN assessment highlighting the need to slash carbon emissions caused by burning fossil fuels, multiple sources told AFP.

Already deep into overtime, a meeting of the 195-nation Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in Monaco remained deadlocked early Tuesday, with delegates tweeting pictures of the rising sun.

A 30-page executive summary is scheduled for release on Wednesday morning. "It has been 24 hours and there has been absolutely no compromise from the Saudis," said a participant.

"They are undermining the science underlying this report, and it is despicable." At issue is what might have been a routine reference to an October 2018 IPCC report on the feasibility of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius.

That assessment detailed the stark consequences for humanity of piercing that threshold, and the need for deep cuts in the use of fossil fuels. Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil exporter, and has raised similar objections to other IPCC reports.

"It really seems like Saudi Arabia only came to this meeting to block any language on 1.5C," a participant in the Mona-

co meeting told AFP.

Two other sources taking part in the five-day talks confirmed the stand-off, noting that Norway, Britain, France, Canada, Chile the European Union were resisting Saudi proposals to drop any reference to the 1.5 C report, or include a reference to its alleged "shortcomings".

Global warming and pollution caused by humanity's carbon-heavy footprint are ravaging Earth's oceans and icy regions in ways that could unleash misery on a global scale, the IPCC report is set to conclude.

Observed and projected impacts include vanishing glaciers, and expanding marine heatwaves, irreversible sea level rise that could eventually displace hundreds of millions of people, according to a draft seen by AFP.

Under the IPCC's consensus rules, all countries must sign off on the language of a 30-page Summary for Policymakers, designed to provide leaders with objective, science-based information.

The Saudis have rejected a sentence that would read: "This assessment reinforces findings in IPCC Special Report on 1.5 C," along with two other UN science reports released over the six months, one on biodiversity and another on land use and food systems.

The 2015 Paris Agreement calls for capping global warming at "well below" 2 C, and 1.5 C if possible.

Trump slammed for trolling Greta Thunberg climate speech

NEW YORK, SEP 24 (AFP): US President Donald Trump stirred up fresh outrage on social media Monday with a tweet mocking an impassioned speech made by 16-year-old activist Greta Thunberg at the UN climate summit in New York.

Her voice shaking with emotion in an address that was the defining moment of the summit, Thunberg accused world leaders of betraying her generation by failing to act on rising emissions, repeating the words "how dare you" four times.

"You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words, and yet I'm one of the lucky ones," she said. "People are suffer-

ing. People are dying." "She seems like a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future. So nice to see!" climate-skeptic Trump tweeted a few hours later, alongside a clip of the speech.

The trolling of the teen activist -- who suffers from Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of autism -- racked up more than 16,000 responses in three hours, many of them attacking the US president.

"Donald Trump picking on an innocent young girl is absolutely disgusting!" wrote one user.

Thunberg and Trump were briefly in the same small room as they arrived for the summit, with video showing the

teen glowering at the president as he passed by with his entourage.

Thunberg has become the global face of a growing youth movement against climate inaction that mobilized millions in a worldwide strike on Friday.

Her struggle began quietly in August 2018 when she skipped school for the first three weeks, and then on Fridays to spend the day outside Sweden's parliament with a sign labelled "School strike for climate".

In August, she crossed the Atlantic in a two-week journey on a sailboat to attend the climate summit in New York. She refuses to fly because of the carbon emissions caused by planes.

'Where do you find reporters like these?' Trump asks Imran Khan at joint press meet



NEW YORK, SEP 24 (PTI): Donald Trump's dislike for journalists is well-known and this was quite evident when he encountered a bunch of aggressive Pakistani reporters who pressed him on Kashmir, forcing the US President to ask Prime Minister Imran Khan, "Where do you find reporters like these?"

President Trump met Prime Minister Khan on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly on Monday and the two leaders discussed bilateral ties, the Kashmir issue and the faltering Afghan peace process.

During the joint press interaction, the Paki-

stani media, angered by India's revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, posed a volley of questions to Trump on the situation in the Valley.

When a Pakistani journalist asked Trump about the situation in Kashmir, the president mocked him by asking him whether he was a member of Khan's team.

"Are you from his (Imran Khan) team? You are making a statement, not asking a question, the US President said, snubbing him.

The Pakistani journalist again pressed Trump about the alleged human rights violations in Kashmir to which

Trump turned towards Khan and asked him, "Where do you find reporters like these?"

While Trump took a swipe at the Pakistani journalist, a squirming Prime Minister Khan was seen counting his tasbeeh (string of beads used by Muslims while praying).

Trump has a history of accusing media outlets of "fake news".

On September 2, he tweeted, "The good news is that we are winning. Our real opponent is not the Democrats, or the dwindling number of Republicans that lost their way and got left behind, our primary opponent is the Fake News Media.

Israel's main parties begin talks on coalition government

JERUSALEM, SEP 24 (AP): Israel's two largest parties met Tuesday to discuss the possibility of forming a unity government, in a long-shot effort to solve the political paralysis that has emerged from last week's deadlocked national elections.

The meeting between party representatives comes a day after Blue and White leader Benny Gantz and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of the rival Likud party held their first working meeting since the vote. Israeli President Reuven Rivlin brought them together in hopes of breaking an impasse that could send the nation into months of political limbo and potentially force a third election in less than a year.

"We took a significant step this evening, and now the main challenge is building a direct channel of communication out of trust between the two sides," Rivlin told the two rivals.

"People expect you to find a solution and to prevent further elections, even if it comes at a personal and even ideological cost." Israel's president is responsible for choosing a candidate for prime minister after national elections. That task is usually a formality, but it is far more complicated this time since neither of the top two candidates can build a stable parliamentary majority on his own.

Rivlin summoned Gantz and Netanyahu for another summit Wednesday before making his decision. No breakthrough is expected, and it is unclear which way Rivlin is leaning.

Gantz's centrist Blue and White came in first in the elections, with 33 seats, trailed by Netanyahu's Likud with 31. With



smaller allied parties, a total of 55 lawmakers have thrown their support behind Netanyahu, against 54 for Gantz, leaving both men short of the required 61-seat majority.

A unity deal between the large parties, with a rotating leadership, is seen as perhaps the only way out of the gridlock. That's what Avigdor Lieberman, the kingmaker leader of the ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu, party is insisting upon.

Lieberman, who controls eight seats, has refused to endorse either candidate and is demanding they join him in a broad, secular unity government that excludes the ultra-Orthodox parties Netanyahu's long-time partners. A former aide and ally of Netanyahu, Lieberman forced the Sept. 17 repeat vote by refusing to join Netanyahu's coalition and robbing him of his parliamentary majority.

Both Netanyahu and Gantz have expressed theoretical support for a unity deal between their parties but have deep disagreements over its agenda and who should lead it. Gantz insists he

should go first and has vowed not to partner with Likud so long as Netanyahu is at the helm, citing the prime minister's legal predicament. Israel's attorney general has recommended charging Netanyahu with a series of corruption-related charges and is expected to make a final decision following a hearing with the prime minister early next month.

Netanyahu, seeking protection from prosecution, believes he should remain as prime minister and has signed a deal with his smaller allies, including ultra-Orthodox parties, to negotiate as a "bloc," further signaling that there was more jockeying than real negotiating involved in the latest developments.

"It is going to be very hard, if not downright impossible, to form a government based on the two larger parties, when one of them drags its satellite parties along with it," wrote columnist Nahun Barnea in the Yedioth Ahronot daily. "That's like a bride who wants to bring her brother, cousin, neighbor and rabbi along with her to the consummation of her marriage. It won't work.

FIFA chief says racism 'not acceptable' in Italian football

Milan, Sep 24 (AFP): FIFA president Gianni Infantino has made a plea to "kick racism out" of Italian football, during the FIFA Best Football Awards ceremony in Milan. "Tonight is a night to celebrate, but we should reflect a little bit," the Swiss-Italian football chief told a star-studded gathering at Milan's iconic La Scala Opera House on Monday night.

"I would like to say

that here in Italy in my country, yesterday (Sunday) we witnessed again in the Italian championship an episode of racism.

"This is not acceptable any more, we have to say no to racism in society. We have to kick racism out of football and society once and for all."

Sunday's Italian league match between Atalanta and Fiorentina was halted for sever-

al minutes after racist abuse was aimed at the Tuscan side's Brazilian player Dalbert in a game played in Parma.

The problem is a recurring one throughout the peninsula.

This season Inter Milan's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku and AC Milan's Ivorian player Franck Kessie have both been targeted by monkey calls without any sanction being taken.

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GIRLS DAY OUT! Twinsies, Emmanuelle Chriqui and Jenna Dewan waved to the paparazzi while out in Studio City, California, in matching outfits.

Ankita Lokhande joins 'Baaghi 3'



MUMBAI, SEP 24 (PTI): Ankita Lokhande has bagged her second Bollywood project and the actor will next be seen in "Baaghi 3".

Ankita, who made big-screen debut with "Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi", will play Shraddha Kapoor's sister in the third instalment of the action series.

The actor said she wanted to do an out-and-out commercial film and "Baaghi 3" was the perfect choice.

"It is very challenging, but I am confident that my character will strike a chord with the audience. The third installment is different from the previous two, as 'Baaghi 3' is more

about family bonding.

"I play a fun-loving girl, who shares a great bond with her sister. I haven't played anything like this on TV or in Bollywood and the audience will see me in a never-seen-before avatar in my next outing," Ankita said in a statement.

The film, directed by Ahmed Khan, will see Tiger Shroff reunite with Shraddha, after starring in the first film.

Riteish Deshmukh plays Tiger's brother in the film, produced by Sajid Nadiadwala.

"Baaghi 3" is scheduled for a March 6, 2020 release.

Wanted to do a film with two heroines having equal roles: **Taapsee Pannu**

MUMBAI, SEP 24 (PTI): Taapsee Pannu, who will be sharing screen space with Bhumi Pednekar in her forthcoming release "Saand Ki Aankh", said she was eagerly waiting to do a two-heroine project.

The film is the real life story of octogenarians Chandro Tomar and Prakashi Tomar of Johri village in Uttar Pradesh. The duo are among the world's oldest sharpshooters and the winners of several national championships.

Taapsee will portray the role of Prakashi Tomar, while Bhumi will be seen as Chandro Tomar.

"I wanted to do a film that has equal roles for two heroines. I got to know that the team was working on one such story. It is a story of those women, who lived their life as per the desire of their parents, after marriage lived as per their husbands' desire and will, and then lived for their children. When did she live her life then?" Taapsee asked.

The actor, who was speaking at the trailer launch of "Saand Ki Aankh" on Monday, dedicated the film to her

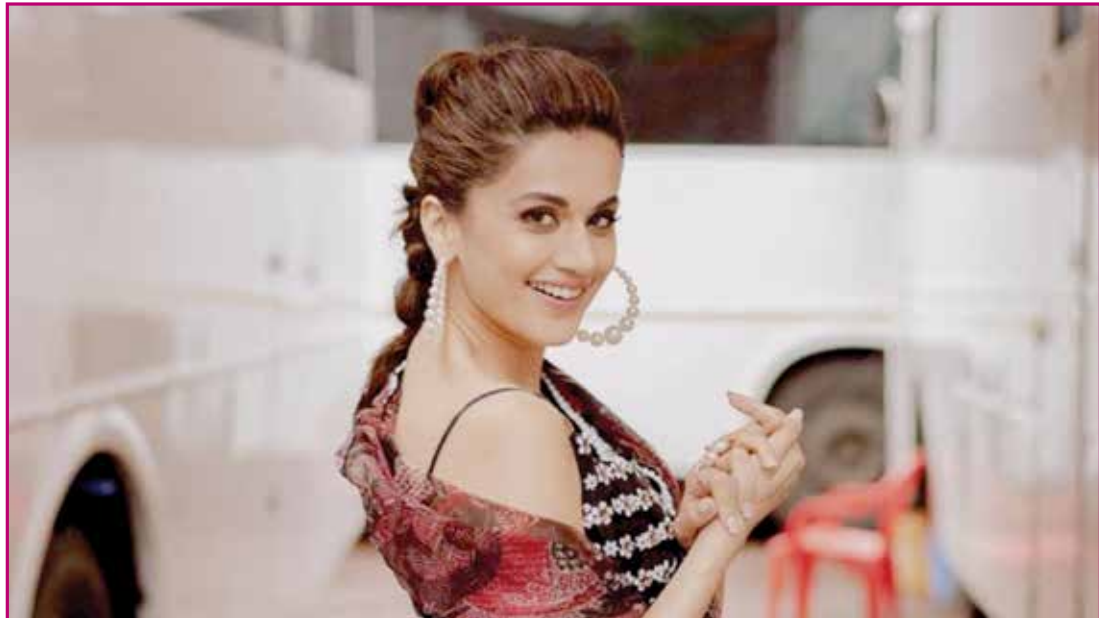
mother. She said the makers have stayed true to the story of Prakashi and Chandro Tomar.

"We have not shown anything that has not happened in their life. The film was shot in front of them. We have not added any emotional

get inspiration that there is no age to start living," she added.

The actor said while it was easy to dye their hair grey, the nailing the body language was most difficult.

"Both of them have a swag, the way they talk, walk and use the gun. They put



angle forcefully in the film."

Taapsee said the idea is to inspire people, especially women, to fulfil their desires.

"I want everyone to take their parents to watch the film. Don't give up on life. Life ends when you decide, any day is a good day to begin. Everyone should

a lot of us to shame. That was the biggest challenge."

The Reliance Entertainment film marks scriptwriter Tushar Hiranandani's directorial debut. The film also stars Viineet Singh and Prakash Jha.

The movie is jointly produced by Anurag Kashyap and Nidhi Parmar.

Joaquin Phoenix walks off interview over question on 'Joker' violence

LOS ANGELES, SEP 24 (PTI): Hollywood star Joaquin Phoenix walked off an interview after he was asked whether the violence in "Joker" will encourage people to become violent.

The actor later returned to complete the interview with The Telegraph film critic Robbie Collin but avoided the question.

Collin asked Phoenix if he worries "Joker" might "perversely end up inspiring exactly the kind of people it's about, with potentially tragic results."

Phoenix said, "Why? Why would you? No, no," and abruptly stood up and walked out of the interview.

According to The Telegraph, the actor spent about an hour speaking with a Warner Bros press agent before returning to complete the interview.

Phoenix told Collin that he panicked because he did not consider the question.

In a New York Times profile of Phoenix earlier this month, director Todd Phillips also spoke about how the actor would walk out of the set in the middle of a scene.

Phillips told NYT that the 44-year-old actor "lost his composure on the set, sometimes to the bafflement of his co-stars".

"In the middle of the scene, he'll just walk away and walk out. And the poor other actor thinks it's them and it was never them it was always him, and he just wasn't feeling it," Phillips said.

The film is generating Oscar buzz for Phoenix.

At least cast us for parts that suit our age: Neena Gupta on 'Saand Ki Aankh'

MUMBAI, SEP 24 (PTI): Actor Neena Gupta on Tuesday spoke about the casting of Bhumi Pednekar and Taapsee Pannu as two women who become champion sharpshooters in their 60s in "Saand Ki Aankh".

Both Bhumi and Taapsee had to transform through make-up to play Chandro and Prakashi Tomar, respectively.

A Twitter user pointed out how Gupta, Shabana Azmi or Jaya Bachchan would have been a better fit for the movie but the makers went with contemporary names who are in their early 30s but are playing women double their age.

"I love @bhumipednekar and @taapsee but I kinda wish older actors were cast in these roles. Could

you imagine @Neenagupta001 and @AzmiShabana or Jaya Bachchan? #SaandKiAankh," the user wrote.

Gupta, who earned critical and commercial success for her role in "Badhaai Ho!", agreed with the sentiment, saying, "Yes, I was just thinking about this. Hamari umar ke role toe kamse kam humse kara lo bhai (At least cast us for the role that suit our age)".

The 60-year-old actor will next be seen in "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhaan".

"Saand Ki Aankh" is a Reliance Entertainment film, which marks the directorial debut of scriptwriter Tushar Hiranandani. It is jointly produced by Anurag Kashyap and Nidhi Parmar.

The film hits the screens Diwali.

Ayushmann-Nushrat elated as 'Dream Girl' enters Rs 100 crore club

Mumbai, Sep 24 (PTI): Ayushmann Khurrana and Nushrat Bharucha have thanked fans for their love for "Dream Girl", which has clocked Rs 101.40 crore at the box office.

Ayushmann, who plays the role of a guy pretending to be a woman over phone, took to Twitter to celebrate the win and wrote, "DreamGirl scores a century! Thank you for this love."

Nushrat, who plays his love interest, called the film's box office run a "big win" for the team.

"It's truly an outstanding feeling. The love and appreciation that the audience has given us is absolutely overwhelming. After 'Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety' last

year and 'Dream Girl' this year, I truly feel blessed with all the support, Rs 100cr for us is a big win," Nushrat said in



a statement. "Dream Girl", directed by Raaj Shandilya, released on September 13.

Besides Ayushmann and Nushrat, the film featured a strong support cast in Annu Kapoor, Manjot Singh, Vijay Raaz and Abhishek Banerjee among others.

ARIES: Nobody said it was going to be easy, Aries. Relationships require work and from both parties. In order to find a middle ground, you must find a way to open the channels of communication. Tell them if you would like things to slow down and enjoy the present rather than feel the pressure of planning for the future, especially if the pressure to get somewhere is weighing you down.

Tip: Communicate your needs to your needs in an honest and effective manner.

TAURUS: It's all or nothing, Taurus. Some of you may be deciding to get together for the long haul. Happily-ever-afters don't write themselves. Play an active role in shaping your future, with some room for improvisation, of course! Those who have already exchanged vows could be thinking about working on their marriage.

Tip: Did somebody say wedding bells?

GEMINI: Out of the darkness and into the light. After a period of immense struggle, you may feel like things are taking a turn for the better. If the breakthrough hasn't registered yet, that's okay. Know that the world

has taken notice of the efforts you have put in. Some of you may feel like you've crossed a massive hurdle on the personal front too. Ready for the next stage of your togetherness?

Tip: Celebrate both the big and small wins.

CANCER: This day calls for soul searching, Cancer. You've been at odds with everyone around you for a while now. It is probably because you are at odds with yourself. Take the day off and spend it in your company. Start a conversation about the things that matter. Pray, meditate, chant. Engage in activities that help you feel connected. This is the secret to get out of your funk and finding the wisdom you need to triumph over your current set of challenges.

Tip: Introspect.

LEO: It's not this or that. Find a balance between the material and spiritual. Don't forget to set some time aside for the most important person in your life. Your personal life could also be suffering at the moment. Realign where you need to. Your loved ones could do with your attention. Single lions,

who are juggling more than one lover, be honest about your intentions.

Tip: Find that elusive work-life balance.

VIRGO: Being with somebody whose intelligence would put Sheldon Cooper to shame has its perks, both in the bedroom and outside. (What a turn on, right?!) But that doesn't necessarily mean they're gifted with emotional sensitivity. Today brings with itself the reminder that your partner may not express love in the same language as you and that's okay. **Tip:** Everybody expresses love in different ways.

LIBRA: Blame the concept of linear time if you must, but we've all gotten into the habit of expecting things to materialise rapidly. Newsflash, Libra: the Universe doesn't work on our timelines, and that doesn't have to be such a bad thing. Trust that there is a divine plan at play here. Sometimes, going with the flow is the best thing you can do for yourself and the others involved.

Tip: Let go of the mindset that only things that come after a large amount of effort are valuable.

SCORPIO: What you're experiencing

right now is a classic case of opposites attract. Just because you're meant to be together does not mean the journey to where you are has been easy. It's taken a lot of patience and understanding from both parties and now you are reaping the rewards for it.

Tip: How well you complement each other!

SAGITTARIUS: Words of wisdom courtesy Bruce Lee, "Patience is not passive; on the contrary, it is concentrated strength." Your prayers are being answered, Sagittarius. This is something you've got to learn to trust. Surrendering to the flow is the best thing you can do for yourself and others. How you communicate your need is just as important in the grand scheme of things.

Tip: Good things come to those who can wait.

CAPRICORN: If there is one thing you can be sure of it's that your life will not look the same before and after the storm. Does that have to be a bad thing? Depends on your perception, Capricorn. The Universe is offering you a chance to do away with all that is false in your life, from beliefs to

relationships. Act in accordance with your higher wisdom.

Tip: Let go of all that is false.

AQUARIUS: Things to do today: schedule an appointment with your healer/therapist. There are some things we're incapable of dealing with ourselves, and that's okay. For instance, your mental acrobatics which must be put to rest. Remember, things have a way of figuring themselves out when we stop worrying about them. Know when to push and when to relinquish control.

Tip: Surrender to the flow.

PISCES: Why stop at a mani and pedi when you can get a body scrub and massage too? This is the week to say yes to the alluring scents of rose and jasmine as you take the self-care game a notch higher. Just set a budget from the start so you don't get carried away. On an emotional level, you're being to experience what it's like to be self-sufficient in every way. This could be the secret to breaking out of the vicious cycle of co-dependent relationships.

Tip: Nurture your mind, body, and soul.