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'REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE' NEEDED TO STOP UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL EXTINCTION CRISIS

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COLIN HANKS SAYS HE WILL RETURN FOR 'JUMANJI' SEQUEL

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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BEFORE & AFTER, SIDE BY SIDE

The original, built in 1929, has more than served its purpose but continues to be of service even as it also sits proud as a heritage infrastructure. It has received a fresh coat of paint and some much-needed repairs and appears to be looking forward to a new round of service. And now, a flyover is also under construction to connect to the District Hospital so that people can avoid crossing the highway on foot. [from YOGEN THATAL]

17 women detained for staging protest at Connaught place

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): Seventeen women were detained Wednesday while they were protesting here against the procedure adopted to deal with a sexual harassment case against Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi.

Gogoi on Monday got a clean chit from the apex court's In-House Inquiry Committee which "has found no substance" in the allegations of sexual harassment levelled against him by a former woman employee of the Supreme Court.

Raising objection to the clean chit given to Gogoi, several protesters, mainly women, holding banners were protesting at Gate No. 7 of the Connaught place metro station.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Madhur Verma said, "They were asked to protest at Jantar Mantar but they continued to protest at Connaught place. Seventeen women were detained and taken to

Mandir Marg police station. However, they were released later."

This comes a day after fifty-five protesters, mostly women lawyers and activists, were detained outside the Supreme Court here. Activist Annie Raja said the complete negation and violation of legal procedure and existing rules of law is unacceptable.

"It will set a precedent that will have a very dangerous impact in the coming year," she added.

The three-member committee, which completed its task in 14 days, proceeded ex-parte as the woman had opted out of the inquiry on April 30 after participating for three days.

The complainant had on Monday said "gross injustice" has been done to her as a woman citizen of India and "worst fears" have come true, and all hope of justice and redress from the highest court of the land have been shattered.

SHSC juniors return to warm welcome



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 MAY:

Sikkim Himalayan Sports Club founder, Tenzin Lamtha, accompanied by club officials received the u-15 players and coaches of the club at Rangpo today. The SHSC u-15 team had

played in the Hero India Junior League, winning two of its three matches in the group league stage and drawing one match. The team could not progress to the next round, losing out to Aizawl FC on goal difference. The team's per-

formance was, however, impressive.

The players and coaches arrived at Rangpo at around 4 pm and were given a warm welcome by Mr Lamtha and officials of the club.

"We are very proud of our junior boys who gave

an excellent performance in Kolkata. Though they did not qualify for the next round, they gave their best and did not lose a single match. The tournament helped our junior players gain experience and exposure," said Mr Lamtha.

Cyclone Fani: Power situation improves in 9 of 10 districts in Odisha

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): Power situation in eight of the nine cyclone-hit districts of Odisha has improved but the functioning of a few ATMs still remained affected due to non-availability of telecom services, the Union Home Ministry said Wednesday.

The National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC), headed by Cabinet Secretary P K Sinha, again reviewed the rescue and relief measures in Fani-hit areas with senior officials of the Odisha government and central ministries and agencies.

The state government informed the Centre that situation in eight out of nine districts has improved and power and telecom services

are gradually picking up in the worst-affected areas of Puri and Bhubaneswar, a home ministry statement said.

While banking services resumed in Puri, non-availability of electricity supply and telecom connectivity hampered the functioning of a few ATMs, it said.

Nearly 3,500 gang men are engaged in restoring power transmission lines, sub-stations etc. and more workers would reach Odisha from West Bengal and Telangana soon.

Landline phone services in Puri have started functioning and BSNL and other telecom service providers have also somewhat improved their mobile services.

turn to pg02

Nationalising Space and Nationalising Frontier: Decoding the Politics of Sarva Dharma Sthal in Sikkim

SUNIL PRADHAN

Sikkim, an erstwhile Buddhist Kingdom, is witnessing an onslaught from the forces and the project of nationalisation processes. The nationalisation of frontier spaces territorially and culturally contiguous to the Tibetan plateau and civilisation remains a major objective of New Delhi's policy thrust vis-a-vis India's North East and particularly in the state of Sikkim.

The demographic distribution of the present state of Sikkim predominantly Lamaist Buddhists and Nepali Hindus differs vastly from the its ideal — liberal foundations of Idea of India and depart significantly from the contemporary right wing 'mainstream' narrative of the Bharat Mata. Thus, this project of nationalizing local Sikkimese narrative as an alternative "Indian" narrative or even those suiting the Indian state's interest seems anachronistic and far-fetched.

In the more recent times, Sikkim's fragile ecosystem and its multi-social setting and social systems are perpetually in the process of nationalization mediated through series of develop-

ment discourses with nationalist sentiments (building dams on Sikkim's river system is one glaring referent of nationalizing Sikkim's Natural Resource Management). Therefore, Sikkim's frontier territory or space has acquired centrality as a major policy force under the objective of nationalizing its borders along the culturally contiguous borders with Tibet now in China. Further, this is exacerbated by the lack of knowhow about India's strategic imperatives and interests among the largely communitarian but modern consumerist Sikkimese masses and the gradual processes in ways by which national security driven interests following the India-China War of 1962 has led to the securitization, fortification and closure of Sikkim's 'soft' border with Tibet.

The closure of the border following India's national security driven imperatives has come much against Sikkim's cross-cultural costs including trade and commerce. The project of nationalisation of Sikkim's frontier spaces with Tibet virtually started in 1962 in the immediate aftermath of Sino-In-

dian border war. Then, the kingdom's ruling and financially dependent dispensation agreed to hand over Sikkim's four key subjects—Defence, External, Finance and Communications to New Delhi's jurisdiction. These four listed subjects strategically hindered Sikkim's aspirations for international recognition. The commencement of the project of nationalisation therefore has its genesis prior 1962 war with China. This substantially relegated Sikkim's status as India's protectorate state under the provisions of Sikkim-India Friendship Treaty in 1950.

The nationalization of Sikkim's frontier space/territory is best exemplified through cinematic representation. The Bollywood production, 'Paltan' produced as part of a war trilogy after Border (1997) and LOC Kargil (2003) is a case in point. The context—border skirmish between Indian Army and China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1967 along the Kingdom of Sikkim's border with Tibet. The border skirmish is nationalized for viewers in India's modern military annals as Sino-Indian border

war theatre. This particular shift in narrative though graphic representation as India's 'own' territorial border with China in 1967 is best exemplified by this Bollywood celluloid. The cinematic representation of Sikkim not as the Kingdom of Sikkim as it was then is deliberate, strategic and tactical. Again, it is noteworthy of mention that Sikkim became part of India in 1975 and not in 1967 as the Bollywood representation intentionally intends to enlighten its nationalist viewers. Further, recreation of the film set in Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir and not in Sikkim conspicuously marks the nonappearance and exclusion of Sikkimese narrative from the plot — border skirmish in question. True, Bollywood ventures are gainfully produced to entertain its English and Hindi speaking middle class consumer audience in the country's Gangetic plains. But, this alleged and glaring exclusion of Sikkim's Himalayan history and people's lived experiences from this war celluloid figure as an emblem of employing cantonment attendance

turn to pg02

SKM CEC thanks all for helping make Election 2019 successful

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 MAY:

A meeting of the Central Executive Committee of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha held today thanked the party's leaderships and workers and the people of Sikkim for their contributions towards the successful passage of Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in the State.

At the meeting, the SKM CEC expressed gratitude towards party president, PS Tamang [Goley], for his "firm, bold, sincere and farsighted leadership" through every situation and the complex challenges faced by the party, informs an SKM press release.

The release adds that during the CEC meeting, the party president thanked all party workers for working tirelessly and dedicatedly to ensure victory for the party.

The meeting has also thanked all SKM candidates for putting all-out

effort in a short span of time in the party's bid to form the government in Sikkim.

SKM also expressed gratitude to all well-wishers, rural people, employees, drivers, workers, yuwa morcha, nari shakti, students, farmers, writers and press and social media for their direct and indirect support to the party, the release adds.

The release informs that the meeting also thanked the ward-level, block-level, constituency-level and zonal-level committees, central working committee and different frontal organisations of the party and all workers who are currently keeping vigil to guard the EVMs.

The CEC meeting has also thanked all Election Commission personnel, police officials and government and non-governmental employees who worked to make the election successful.

Summit Times in Nepali

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Thank You!

West holds first review meeting for 2019 Aspirational District



GYALSHING, 08 MAY (IPR): The First Review Meeting for 2019 Aspirational District was conducted at the Conference Hall, District Administration Center (DAC), Rabdentse. DC (West), Karma R Bonpo chaired the meeting along with SDM (HQ), Tushar G Nikhare and HoDs of Line Departments.

DC West urged the Departments involved to pick up the pace and start to progress towards the improvement of the indicators of Aspirational District in West Sikkim.

He congratulated everyone on their efforts made in the past year and asked them to make similar commitment and show similar enthuse in making the West District better than last year.

He urged the Health Department and Education along with ICDS, NERLEP, ITI, AHVS, Horticulture and Agriculture Departments to put work collectively and in convergence to make an

overall development in the District.

He stressed on Education being the main priority of the district and asked the Addl Dir (HRDD) to concentrate more on residential schools. He also asked the ICDS and Primary Schools to work in co-operation.

He advised the HoDs to focus mainly on the gaps of their individual Departments which needs to be worked upon whilst ensuring that the District Administration would cooperate in every way possible.

He also asked the AHVS Department to focus more on the production of Dairy and Poultry. Agriculture and Horticulture Departments were advised to help farmers with creating more income via their crop production and also the possibility of Cold Storage facility which could be made available in Denta for the benefit of the Farmers of West Sikkim.

The Horticulture Department was also advised by the DC to use the surplus lands of the Residential Schools for crop cultivation which could be utilized to feed the students of the school itself.

He instructed the ADC (Dev.) of Soreng and Gyalshing along with SDMs and BDOs to look after the water Supplies, Rural electricity issues, adoption and monitoring of Schools and teachers. He also welcomed innovative ideas and projects of the departments which can improve the District at large.

SDM (HQ) also spoke under similar lines and urged the departments to focus more on the programs of the Aspirational District after the Elections and to provide the data and target for 2019 as early as possible. He also briefed the gathering on the Aspirational District Program and the indicators which they are ought to improve.



Journos play cricket friendlies

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 08 MAY:

Press Club of Sikkim [PCS] played two friendly cricket matches here at West Point Senior Secondary School playground on Wednesday.

In the first match, PCS defeated the Freedom Facility team by 26 runs. Freedom Fa-

cility is a Tathangchen-based rehab centre.

Winning the toss, PCS elected to bat first and scored 179 runs in 15 overs. Chasing the target of 180 runs, Freedom Facility players scored 153 runs in 15 overs and lost the match by 26 runs.

In the second match, an-

other PCS team was defeated by the team of West Point SSS teachers by 13 runs.

After winning the toss, West Point SSS teacher's team decided to bat first and set a target of 153 for PCS. The PCS team was able to score 140 runs in 15 over and lost the match by 13 runs.

These friendly matches

were organised with the support of Sikkim Against Addition Towards Healthy India [SAATHI] cell of West Point SSS.

PCS has been organising different sporting events from time to time for its members for recreation and to give them a healthy and sporting break from their daily routines.

Intervention on Menstrual Hygiene by Duga BAC

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 08 MAY:

A day-long sensitization program was organized by Duga BAC in association with ESS India on 06 and 07 May at Rangpo Secondary School and Central Pendam Senior Secondary School. The program was attended by Rangpo Secondary School, Central Pendam Senior Secondary School and Sajong Junior High School.

The team talked about menstrual hygiene, solid waste management



and also highlighted "good touch and bad touch". The main reason for the program was to create awareness and to break various myths and taboo regarding menstruation along with providing them various environment friendly alternatives

for sanitary pads.

The ESS members also talked about various health issues that can come up due to the continuous usage of sanitary pads. The awareness program was attended by students of both the genders and the teaching faculty.

Dikchu Sr Sec School holds meeting

WANGCHUK BHUTIA

MANGAN, 08 MAY:

A meeting was held at Dikchu Senior Secondary School among SMC members, parents and the school staff. The meeting was chaired by Ward Panchayat, Chandra Lall Neopaney.

Principal, Dr Saroza Pradhan highlighted the

academic performance of the students and also underlined various problems faced by the school. She also urged all the parents to co-operate with the school for the smooth functioning and overall development of the students.

The Principal also highlighted the out-

come of class X and XII CBSE results.

During the meeting, the SMC and parents congratulated the Principal for having acquired a PhD degree recently.

The reshuffling of the SMC members was also done today by adding some more women in the SMC.

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Nationalising Space...

of the Army by Indian state along Sikkim's border as a contrivance for articulating India's legitimate state presence along the border thereby labelling Sikkim as its extra territorial space. This celebration is antithetical to India's liberal constitutional democracy which often despises using the Indian Army as a form of administration in a region marked by nominal state presence. Furthermore, the representation of India's Jat Regiment as protagonist on celluloid recast and reinforces the socially constructed concept of race to invoke and represents a particular set of cultural-linguistic social groups as nationalist population or true sons of the Bharat Mata. Sikkim-Subjects who were eligible and were serving in Indian Army's Gorkha battalion during the time of India-China border skirmish deliberately fail to pass the cut off criteria of 1967 as 'sons' of the 'Bharat Mata' precisely because race as a concept of nationalist imagination excludes the Sikkimese 'Tibeto-Burman' and 'Sino-Tibetan' 'other'. Thus, the representation of Sikkim by this Bollywood celluloid forever misrepresents and construes Indian consumer's imagination and orientation leading them to envision Sikkim as India's integral territory since time immemorial.

This comes with costs — Sikkim's emotional, environmental, ecological and historical —history is a site of referent for its historically specific cultural communities.

Additionally, the socially institutionalized concept of race with religious overtones prominently patronizes certain 'mainstream' religious symbols as Indian religion. The Army, largely colonial in its outlook guards its secular character, unquestionable. On the ground, its secular character is unleashed by the sheer numbers of Sarva Dharma Sthal it has constructed since 1962 under its aegis in border regions to enthrall tourists visiting the border areas. This has propelled border tourism and pilgrimage tourism much at

the cost of fragile ecology in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh—contentious issue in Sino-Indian relations. Therefore, nationalisation of frontier spaces in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh primarily involves altering local myths and deities through substitute ad-hoc myths by institutionalizing and fashioning immortal legends out from posthumous soldiers. From endless construction of Sarva Dharma Sthal to celebrating and observing the sacrifice of immortalised posthumous soldier as a routine affair by state agencies has shifted the narrative from local to nationalized. As a flip to this project of changing nomenclature of social organization of space and place from local to 'mainstream' Indian in the guise to ward off espionage activities from within the 'enemy' posts has been an everyday spectacle.

Gradually, the frontier spaces are emotively nationalized through the presence of the state agencies but resistance entrenched within local ethos and physical landscape as a site of local veneration such as the case of sacred grooves tilts the course in Sikkimese favour. The scale of nationalizing frontier spaces through narratives and practices no matter immense or miniature is now shifting its focus towards nationalizing socio-cultural and ecological organization of space and place by means of appropriating Sikkimese places of worship by the forces of nationalization. The landmark community response adopted to prevent defilement of scared grooves and Deoralis in Sikkim arrives as a signpost and natural artefact of local resistance to such nationalizing tendencies. Therefore, community practices and social organization of space and place in Sikkim contradict and conflict the discourse of nationalized development discourse and practical imperatives of nationalizing frontiers.

The social organization of Sikkim's Gurudongmar lake either as place or space is revered by Sikkimese cultural communities. Sadly, New Delhi based Sikh organizations presumably

administered by descendants of Sikh 'migrants' fleeing Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the aftermath of partition has been consistently appealing the nationalist attention of Gurudongmar as a Sikh place of worship which is highly misplaced and laced with political overtones. The litigation on Sikh Gurudwara within Gurudongmar Lake veiled initially as Sarva Dharma Sthal appears as a dent on Sikkim's Buddhist heritage. Since, the high mountains passes in Sikkim are controlled by the National Agencies and therefore litigation by affluent mainstream but minority Sikh community is worrisome. What started as construction of Sarva Dharma Sthal under the aegis of Army now remains mirrored in legal battle over control of particular social space in question.

The problem is even more magnified when feuding parties allow legal intervention based on western jurisprudence to intrude into the function of customary domain of cultural communities. The most important stakeholder in the upkeep of Gurudongmar is the Dzumsa of Lachen in North Sikkim. Dzumsa as an exemplary customary institution recognised under the "Old Law" of Sikkim not only regulate social, cultural, ecological, political, natural resource management functions but also adjudicates judicial disputes. As a local level dispute between the functionaries of Sarva Dharma Sthal and Dzumsa, the role of Dzumsa is absolute over its customary jurisdiction and the state and its agencies is subservient to this customary institution. In hindsight, the role of state government is expected to be pro-active and not a mute bystander. It must take pains to 'educate' national agencies about Sikkim's distinct Buddhist heritage in secular India. It must seek to evoke and rationalise its bipartisan role by asking evidence about Guru Nanak's (born in present day Pakistan) literal visit and sermon in Gurudongmar Lake for it qualify as a distinct Sikh place of worship.

This local attachment serves as a

reminder about Sikkimese people's symbiotic relationship with its physical landforms and spaces based on customs and conventions and unique knowledge practices. If legal litigation should overrule this customary practice in favour of 'mainstream' propaganda it should be interpreted as intrusion by legal laws over Sikkim's customs and convention. By using mainstream Indian minority religious symbol the forces of nationalization are pitting minority versus minority parleys in Sikkim in their endeavour to nationalize Sikkim's socio-cultural spaces. This is a reminder that Sikkim's non-national narrative of being 'distinct' and 'different' from the experiences of rest of India is a major stumbling block of constructing India as a culturally and politically homogenous nation-state. They have strategically avoided using 'mainstream' majority Hindu religious emblems to nationalize Sikkim's frontier space as a preventive measure to patronise and endorse Sikkimese Nepali cultural communities as its own. Further, the entry of the Government of Punjab in this contentious issue must be avoided at all costs since they wrest significant clout and influence in the national parliament and the Indian Armed Forces. Sikkim's mountains, rivers, lakes, caves, forests are not for sale to the project of nationalization processes as this robs communities' hold over its knowledge practices and life world practices. At the present juncture, community knowledge subjectivity is the only social capital Sikkimese people have been left with as their 'last' remaining 'will'. On a war footing—the "State" as a modernising power is soon set to transform India's few remaining cultural communities as targets of its nationalizing project. This is akin to Requiem.

[The writer is Assistant Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Doctoral Candidate, Centre for Comparative Politics and Political Theory, Jawaharlal Nehru University]

BEFORE THE OATH COMMISSIONER SOUTH SIKKIM AT NAMCHI

AFFIDAVIT

I, Sunil Kumar Sharma, son of Sh. Rambhagat Sharma, aged about 44 years, resident of Upper Sorok (Bhalukaya), Vill. Upper Sorok, Namchi, South Sikkim, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare on Oath as follows:

1. That my true and correct name is Sunil Kumar Sharma.
2. That the names of my parent are:
1) Father's name: Sh. Rambhagat Sharma,
2) Mother's Name: Smt Kalavati.
3. That inadvertently, only my name has been mentioned in all my educational qualification documents and my surname "Sharma" has not been mentioned therein.
4. That I, hereby declare that my name "Sunil Kumar" in my educational qualifications and "Sunil Kumar Sharma" in voter id, Aadhar card is the name of one and the same person i.e. myself.
5. That this affidavit is solely to declare that "Sunil Kumar" and "Sunil Kumar Sharma" is the name of one and the same person i.e. myself. Hence this affidavit.
6. that this is made bonafide and for the satisfaction of the concerned authority.

Sd/-
DEPONENT

BEFORE THE OATH COMMISSIONER SOUTH SIKKIM AT NAMCHI

AFFIDAVIT

I, Tarun Choudhary, son of Sh. R.P Choudhary, aged about 39 years, resident of Dambudara, Namchi, P/O & P/S Namchi, South Sikkim, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare on Oath as follows:

1. That my true and correct name is Tarun Choudhary.
2. That the names of my parent are:
1) Father's name: Sh. R.P Choudhary,
2) Mother's Name: Smt Neelam.
3. That inadvertently, only my name has been mentioned in all my educational qualification documents and my surname "Choudhary" has not been mentioned therein.
4. That I, hereby declare that my name "Tarun" in my educational qualifications and "Tarun Choudhary" in voter id, Aadhar card is the name of one and the same person i.e. myself.
5. That this affidavit is solely to declare that "Tarun" and "Tarun Choudhary" is the name of one and the same person i.e. myself. Hence this affidavit.
6. that this is made bonafide and for the satisfaction of the concerned authority.

Sd/-
DEPONENT

Film poster for Rahasya released



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 MAY:

A new poster of Nepali horror film, Rahasya, was released today in Gangtok. Speaking on the occasion, Producer of the film, Omkar Dhital said that the premiere show is scheduled

on 19 May at Mannan Kendra, Gangtok.

"We have given our best for this film. The film is filled with suspense and thrills. It has got good music and I am sure we will win the hearts of the audience. The special effects is a

major highlight in the movie and was done at Mumbai," said Mr Dhital.

All the actors and actresses in the movie are from Sikkim. The film is directed by Arjun Chapagai and made under the banner of Kreative Eye Production.

8th Interact District Conference held in Gangtok

TNA Interact Club declared best club

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 MAY:

Interact District Council RI District 3240, Interact Clubs of Sikkim & Rotaract Club of Gangtok Hills organized the 8th Interact District Conference, 2019 at Gangtok. The theme for the conference was "The Power of Connection 2019".

A press release informs that the conference is an annual event for interact clubs of RI District 3240 (North East India, North Bengal and Sikkim). More than 250 students from different Interact clubs RI District 3240 were present in the conference.



During the first session which was the inauguration session, football star, Bhaichung Bhutia was the keynote speaker and he spoke on the topic "Youth and challenges". The second session was attended former Miss Sikkim, Peden Ongmu Namgyal.

The conference was also addressed by Rimbu Tshering Lama, APTECH

Learning on the Topic "Technology and Youth".

On the occasion, Faculty Advisor of Interact Club of West Point Sr. Sec School, Deoraj Bagdas was awarded with Life Time Achievement Award for his contribution and dedication towards Interact Movement in Sikkim.

Co-Chairperson Interact District Council,

Prakash Sundas was also felicitated by the Interact District Council for his support and dedication towards Interact Movement of North East India.

In the third session, awards were presented to different clubs according to their annual reports.

The Best Club of RI District: 3240 (North East India) was bagged by Interact Club of

Tashi Namgyal Academy, Gangtok.

Chultim Bhutia from Interact Club of Paljor Namgyal Girls School was installed as District Interact Representative of RI District: 3240 (North East India) for the year 2019-20. Chultim Bhutia took the baton of DIR from Devesh Agarwal from Tashi Namgyal Academy.

Sikkim to host Mr and Miss iComplete Natural [ICN] Championship

SAGAR CHETTRI GANGTOK, 08 MAY:

Sikkim is all set to host Mr and Miss iComplete Natural [ICN] Championship [bodybuilding and physique] for the first time in North-East India in the month of July. The event will be organised under the aegis of ICN Worldwide Federation.

This was informed by recently appointed ICN president for Northeast India, Legden Dorjee Bhutia from Sikkim in a press conference here on Tuesday. He informed that ICN is the largest

bodybuilding and fitness modelling federation in the world.

While talking about the introduction of ICN in the North-eastern region, he stated that the North-eastern region has lot of aspiring bodybuilders and ICN would provide bigger platform and opportunities to them.

"We have been approaching athletes from different bodybuilding federations of the State and the competition will have different categories for men and women," he informed.

It is informed that ICN is one of the fastest growing natural-drug sports that promotes natural athletes worldwide, which was founded in Australia by Wayne McDonald as world president and backed by Ronziemick as world event director.

There are 68 countries including 20000-30000 athletes associated with ICN. ICN gained popularity in India after the success of the ICN inauguration world championship held in Phuket, Thailand in 2017.

Allegations of corruption not exempted from RTI; CIC asks CBI Chief to sensitise staff

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): Emphasising that allegations of corruption are not covered in the exemption given to the CBI from the RTI Act, the Central Information Commission has advised the agency director to sensitise its RTI processing officers about the provision.

Information Commissioner Divya Prakash Sinha quoted an order of the Delhi High Court wherein the Intelligence Bureau was directed to provide information pertaining to allegations of corruption to an applicant.

Like the Intelligence Bureau, the Central Bureau of Investigation has also been listed in the list of organisations exempted from the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

However, this exemption does not extend to records held by the agency which pertain to allegations of corruption and human rights violations and they are subjected to provisions of the RTI Act.

Sinha was hearing a matter wherein an RTI applicant had sought to know status of his complaint alleging irregularities in the allotment of

LPG distributorship by the officers of Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. in Jaipur.

Denying the information, the CBI cited exemption given to it by the central government and said that the provisions bringing information about allegations of corruption under the RTI Act was limited to allegations against its own officers and not every record pertaining to corruption held by it.

Rejecting the argument, Sinha said, "Commission observes that the reliance placed by CPIO on the earlier decisions of the coordinate benches to substantiate the view that CBI is only obliged to provide information relating to allegation of corruption against its own employees does not hold good."

He referred to a Delhi High Court order dated August 23, 2017 wherein the Intelligence Bureau, an exempted organisation like the CBI, was directed to provide information pertaining to allegations of corruption.

"...if the information sought pertains to allegation of corruption and human rights violation,

it would be exempt from the exclusion clause, irrespective of the fact that the information pertains to the exempt intelligence and security organizations or not or pertains to an Officer of the Intelligence Bureau or not, the High Court ordered quoted by Sinha said.

The aforesaid ratio laid down with respect to the Intelligence Bureau is squarely applicable to the case of CBI also, Sinha held.

"Further, Commission finds that the incorrect connotation ascribed by the CPIO to the proviso to Section 24(1) of RTI Act that it is only applicable to cases involving CBI's own employees may result in gross violation of the provisions of RTI Act by the Respondent office in future," the information commission said.

He had marked a copy of the recent order to the Director, CBI advising him to appreciate the necessity of sensitising the Central Public Information Officers (CPIO) regarding the scope and ambit of the RTI Act and that of Section 24 in particular by way of appropriate workshops etc.

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KUTSE SHEGU

The 49th day Kutse Shegu of our beloved mother Late Pempa Bhutia who left for her heavenly abode on 26.03.2019 falls on 13.05.2019. All friends, relatives & well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Tin Taky, Metro, Lower Tadong. We also take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us during the time of bereavement.

PEOLO LEPCHA (HUSBAND), BHAICHUNG LEPCHA, RINCHEN LEPCHA (SONS), TASHI ONGMU LEPCHA (DAUGHTER-IN-LAW), TSHERING DOMA LEPCHA (DAUGHTER), PHUCHUNG NAMCHANGKORPA (SON-IN-LAW), GRAND SONS & GRAND DAUGHTERS.

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Interested candidates may contact : Deepa Yoga Centre at

Mob: +91 7432043719/ +91 8170953919.

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URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM GANGTOK

No: 86/UD&HD/Secy

Dated: 1.05.19

NOTICE

In view of the ensuing monsoon and as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of life and property the following instruction are hereby issued for compliance:

- All construction works involving earth excavation in any form shall be stopped w.e.f 6th May to 30th Sept, 2019 as already notified vide Notice no: 613/GOS/JCTP/UD&HD dated 1st May 2019.
- All concerned officers including District officials and ULBs shall ensure that the sewerage, drainage system and jhoras in their area of jurisdiction are not clogged/ blocked so as to allow free flow of rain water. Wherever necessary sufficient manpower along with tools and machineries shall be stationed for any emergent situation.
- Any area which is vulnerable and likely to be under threat of landslide, flash floods and other related disaster is to be reported to the Head Office/ District Office immediately.
- All Officers shall ensure that no debris or construction material is dumped along the roadside or Jhora areas by any individual/ agency/ organization. Any violation of this direction shall attract astringent action as per norms.
- All individuals/ agency/ organization are requested to be vigilant to prevent any calamities. They are also required to bring any incidence of violation of norms or potential danger to the notice of concerned authorities immediately.
- All concerned officers including District officials and ULBs are required to send a weekly status report of the area under their jurisdiction to the Head Office at Gangtok without fail.

By Order.

Sd/-

Ganga D Pradhan
Secretary UD & HD
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM GANGTOK

No: 613/GOS/JCTP/UD&HD

Dated: 01/05/2019

NOTICE

This is for information of the general public that no construction involving earth excavation works shall be permitted with effect from 6th May, 2019 till 30th September, 2019 due to the onset of the monsoon. Further, Construction Orders shall not be issued during the aforesaid period.

Anyone found carrying out construction in contravention of the above shall be penalized as per the relevant clause of the Sikkim Allotment of House Sites and Construction of Building (Regulation and Control) Act, 1985 as and the Sikkim Building Construction Regulation, 1991 as amended in 2000. Such person shall also be held solely responsible for any loss of life and property, as a result of such unauthorized excavation/ construction. Further, any building material found lying on the road setback or over drains henceforth, shall be seized and auctioned without any notice whatsoever, and action shall be taken as per the bye-laws against the defaulters.

BY ORDER.

Sd/-

R.O. No. 23/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20

Date: 7.5.2019

Secretary
Urban Development & Housing Department

OPPORTUNITY FOR GIRLS TO SERVE INDIAN ARMY

Indian Army offers an opportunity for Girls to join this most respected forces under women Military Police. Large numbers of vacancies have been released by the Army headquarters. Those who have appeared /passed class XII may apply online. Online Registration and submission of application is mandatory. The online Registration process has already opened since 25 April 19 and will remain so till 12 June 19. The online Registration through website: **www.joinindianarmy.nic.in** Start your online Registration immediately.

Now is the time that every eligible girl students must give a try instead of repenting later.

Eligibility

- | | |
|------------|---|
| (a) Age | - Born between 01 Oct 1998 to 01st Apr 2002 |
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| (c) Weight | - proportionately to height |

For any further information& assistance, please visit our Sainik Board Office at Gangtok at any time for online registration.

Contact Numbers - 8170005757 / 8145837898 / 9593268469

You must have following documents ready during online submission of application:-

- | |
|---|
| (a) Class X mark sheet and Certificate (with 45% Aggregate marks) |
| (b) Date of Birth Certificate |
| (c) Aadhar Card |
| (d) Passport size photograph |
| (e) E-mail ID (your own email ID) |
| (f) Your mobile number (for OTP) |

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Col D N Bhutia
Secretary

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Population Histories

Census numbers hold many stories

The population totals of Census 2011 were released some years back, and bits and pieces and more specifics about Sikkim's numbers arrive from time to time. When the first set of numbers are released, there is much interest, sometimes even gasps over how the state is growing. In the current census figures, Sikkim's falling fertility rate has hogged the limelight, convincing the State government to scrap the financial incentives it offered public servants for keeping their families "small". But there are so many more stories that the numbers tell; statistics are not always boring, provided someone dug out the human stories behind them. This should be a study that more people undertake in Sikkim.

Sikkim's population as of March 2011 has been counted at 6,07,688 people, recording a 12.36% growth since 2001. Since 1911, when the first proper Census operation was undertaken in Sikkim, only three decades, the last being 1941-51, have population growths lower than this. The first Census of Sikkim was conducted in 1891 by the Political Officer. A decade later, in 1901 the West Bengal Census authorities of British India were deputed to carry out the task and it was probably only in 1911 that the Directorate of Census Operations brought the detailed methodology by which India does a head-count of all its people. In the decade of 1901-11, Sikkim's population grew by 48.98%, the second-largest population spurt here since such counting was undertaken. In the next decade, 1911-21, the population fell by 7.05%, the only time it has done so. Population growth in Sikkim has shown marked variations, growing by little over 34% in the decade of 1931-41 and then almost grinding to replacement fertility-rate figure of 10.67% in 1931-41, creeping only slightly higher to 13.34% in 1941-51 and reaching 17.76% in 1951-61. It started rising from thereon, recording a nearly 30% population growth in 1961-71 and then hitting the record of 50.77% in 1971-81, dropping to nearly half this growth rate to 28.47% in 1981-91, rising five percentage points to 33.07% population growth in 1991-2001 and then scaling back to its mid-Twentieth Century average of 12.36% growth in 2001-11.

Census findings are important indicators of socioeconomic conditions of the areas they cover. Populations obviously grow beyond the traditional average either due to influx or improvements in health services, both of which are indicative of the quality of life and opportunities. Of course, in the recent past, our country has been working towards containing its population through family planning schemes launched on mission-mode, but the population figures of the past slightly more than a century are untouched by such efforts and should attract closer academic scrutiny. From the pattern of these figures, one could understand the history of Sikkim from the point of view of the lay people, who, although they have lived through Sikkim and its transitions, rarely find mention in the few records of even contemporary events. The nearly 50% growth in population between 1901 to 1911 should make for interesting analysis, coming as it does in a decade when the palace and the Political Office were in direct confrontation and also the time when British India was most interested in Sikkim, using it as the route to open Tibet. The change in how the State was administered must have obviously created new opportunities triggering new arrivals. What can also not be ignored is that if this 1911 exercise was also the first head-count Census and would hence have accounted for population segments not covered in the previous two Census operations carried out by the Political Officer who had relied on feedback from the landlords, who could have had their own reasons to under-report the actual number of people in areas under their jurisdiction.

The fall in population in 1911-21 should be even more fascinating for anyone interested in the people's history of Sikkim. The population fell by 7.05% due to the Influenza pandemic which spread through the world in the wake of World War-I. Sikkim did not fight the Great War, but an epidemic which was born from it claimed lives here as well. The pandemic broke out in 1918 and is believed to have killed 50 million people across the world. One still does not know how many died of it in Sikkim. The numbers must have been huge because healthcare services were too rudimentary here to have been able to deal with an alien sickness. Most of these deaths would have taken place in the two years between the outbreak and when the Census was carried out. This 7% fall in population immediately after a 50% growth must have scarred an entire generation. It deserves to be researched because it could explain many things about how Sikkim lived in those times. As an aside, there are also references to how the Younghusband Mission of 1904-05 brought the Foot & Mouth disease to Sikkim. Agriculture and animal husbandry were the only occupations in Sikkim at that time. Isn't it important to research into how Sikkim resuscitated itself from that calamity? These exercises are important for Sikkim to understand its past better and may be even understand issues which attract passionate opinions in a different light.

'Revolutionary change' needed to stop unprecedented global extinction crisis

MICHELLE LIM
theconversation.com

We are witnessing the loss of biodiversity at rates never before seen in human history. Nearly a million species face extinction if we do not fundamentally change our relationship with the natural world, according to the world's largest assessment of biodiversity.

Last week, in the culmination of a process involving 500 biodiversity experts from over 50 countries, and 134 governments negotiated the final form of the Global Assessment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

IPBES aims to arm policy-makers with the tools to address the relationships between biodiversity and human well-being. It synthesises evidence on the state of biodiversity, ecosystems and nature's contributions to people on a global scale.

The IPBES Global Assessment provides unequivocal evidence that we need biodiversity for human survival and well-being. To stem unprecedented species decline the assessment sets out the actions governments, the private sector and individuals can take.

Importantly, a whole chapter of the Global Assessment (about one-sixth of the assessment) is dedicated to examining whether existing biodiversity law and policy is adequate. This chapter also outlines ways to address the vortex of biodiversity decline.

If we are to halt the continued loss of nature, then the world's legal, institutional and economic systems must be reformed entirely. And this change needs to happen immediately.

WHAT MAKES IPBES ASSESSMENTS SPECIAL?

IPBES is the biodiversity equivalent to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Assessments are a fundamental part of IPBES's work.

IPBES Assessments review thousands of biodiversity studies to identify broad trends and draw authoritative conclusions. In the case of the Global Assessment, IPBES authors reviewed more than 15,000 publications from scientific and government sources.

Governments and stakeholders give feedback on the draft text, and experts respond meticulously to the thousands of comments before revising and

clarifying the draft. A final summary of key findings is then negotiated with member states at plenary meetings – these meetings concluded on Saturday.

WHAT DID THE GLOBAL ASSESSMENT FIND?

Human activity severely threatens biodiversity and ecosystem functions worldwide. About 1 million species are facing extinction. If nothing changes many of these could be gone within just decades.

But nature is vital to all aspects of human health. We rely on natural systems, not only for food, energy, medicine and genetic resources, but also for inspiration, learning and culture.

The report also reveals the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem function is much less pronounced on lands managed by Indigenous peoples and local communities. It also recognises the significant role of Indigenous knowledge, governance systems and culturally-specific worldviews which adopt a stewardship approach to managing natural systems.

The report identified agriculture, forestry and urbanisation as the number one reason for biodiversity loss in land-based ecosystems and rivers. In the sea, fishing has had the greatest impact on biodiversity and is exacerbated by changes in the use of the sea and coastal lands.

This is followed closely by:

- the direct use of species (primarily through harvesting, logging, hunting and fishing)
- climate change
- pollution
- the invasion of non-native species.

These factors are aggravated by underlying social values, such as unsustainable consumption and production, concentrated human populations, trade, technological advances, and governance at multiple scales.

The Global Assessment concludes that current biodiversity laws and policies have been insufficient to address the threats to the natural world.

What's more, if nothing changes, neither the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Targets nor the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are likely to be met.

And yet, the Global Assessment has an optimistic outlook. It emphasises that if the world's legal, institutional and economic systems are transformed then it is possible to achieve a better future for biodiversity and human well-being in the next 30 years.

But this is only possible if reform happens

immediately, as incremental change will be insufficient.

WHAT MUST BE DONE?

The Global Assessment puts forward these next, urgent steps:

- we need to redefine human well-being beyond its narrow basis on economic growth
- engage multiple public and private actors
- link sustainability efforts across all governance scales
- elevate Indigenous and local knowledge and communities. The report also recommends strengthening environmental laws and taking serious precautionary measures in public and private endeavours. Governments must recognise indivisibility of society and nature, and govern to strengthen rather than weaken the natural world.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Produce and consume sustainably

Individuals can make meaningful change through what we produce and what we buy. Our food is an important starting point. You could, for instance, choose local or sustainably produced meals and reduce your food waste.

Champion the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and local communities

Indigenous and local communities need to be included and supported more than ever before. The Global Assessment provides clear evidence that lands managed by Indigenous and local communities are performing better in terms of biodiversity. Still, these lands face serious threats, and Indigenous communities continue to be marginalised around the world.

Provoke governments to do better

Current biodiversity laws and policies don't adequately address the threats to the natural world. The report recommends the world include biodiversity considerations across all sectors and jurisdictions to prevent further degradation of natural systems. We have an important role in rallying our governments to ensure this occurs.

We are losing biodiversity at record-breaking rates. The majesty of the natural world is disappearing and with it that which makes life worth living. We are also undermining the capacity of the Earth to sustain thriving human societies. We have the power to change this – but we need to act now.

[the writer is Lecturer, Adelaide Law School, University of Adelaide]



Japan: a new emperor and a new era – but women are still excluded from the Chrysanthemum Throne

ELLA TENNANT
theconversation.com

The abdication of Emperor Akihito on April 30 2019 and the enthronement of his eldest son Naruhito to the following day as the 126th emperor of Japan, was a landmark event. This was the first abdication of a reigning emperor since Kokaku abdicated in 1817, in what is seen as the oldest continuous hereditary monarchy in the world.

The Japanese government came up with a law to allow the throne to pass to 59-year-old Naruhito after Akihito publicly announced in August 2016 that he had decided to "retire" – which renewed debate about the male-only succession system.

The exclusion of women as heirs to the throne first appeared as law in 1869 in Article 2 of the Meiji Constitution and was reinforced by the 1947 rewritten constitution of Japan. As a result, out of a total of 18 members of the imperial family, not one of the 13 women will ever have access to the throne. Naruhito's younger sister, Princess Nori, was even forced to leave the imperial household and to surrender her status after marrying Yoshiaki Kuroda, a "commoner" in 2005.

The same thing was to happen to Princess Mako on wedding Kei Kumoro in November 2018, but the marriage has now been put on hold until 2020. This is in spite of the fact that both Akihito's and Naruhito's mar-

riages to "commoners" are viewed as indicators of their "humanity".

There are now just three living heirs to the Chrysanthemum Throne: Naruhito's younger brother, Prince Akishino, as well as Akishino's son, 11-year-old Prince Hisahito, and Akishino's 82-year-old brother, Prince Masahito.

MATRIARCHAL BEGINNINGS

Despite the exclusion of women from the throne, traditional myth linked to the imperial origins portrays early Japan as a matriarchal society. Popular Shinto and the mythological traditions of the emperor cult are based on a belief in the sun goddess, Amaterasu, from whom the first emperor, Jimmu (who reigned from 660BC until 585BC) is said to have descended. Legendary celebrations in honour of Amaterasu are part of the imperial enthronement ritual, Daijosi, in which the newly crowned emperor symbolically shares a meal with his imperial ancestors.

Ironically women, even members of the imperial family, are forbidden from attending this ceremony. It is difficult to imagine how Masako, Naruhito's Harvard educated, former career diplomat wife might have felt in being excluded from attending the enthronement ritual, and that her own daughter, Princess Toshi, can never hope to succeed to the throne because of her gender.

This exclusion serves to reinforce a rigid patriarchal system and the

subordination of women in Japanese society as a natural cultural norm. It is also at odds with the fact that Japanese religious mythology is based around a female deity. But a lack of studies on women in Japanese history reinforces a belief that their role has been of less worth than that of men.

Nevertheless, Chinese and Japanese historical sources show that women leaders were not a rarity in ancient times. One of the most well-known is Himiko who ruled over more than 30 states during the later part of the Yayoi period from about 180-248AD. This was a time of political and social crisis, and historians remain undecided as to her real identity. But, whoever she really was, the fact remains that she was a powerful woman who ruled Japan.

WOMEN ON THE THRONE

Until the constitution was rewritten in 1947 and changes to the imperial succession procedure were introduced, Empress Jingū (201-269AD) was considered to be the 15th Japanese imperial ruler. As with Himiko, she reigned during a period of turmoil and the legendary invasion of Silla, the South Korean peninsula – although the 1947 reforms and a re-evaluation of historical records led to her name being removed as empress. But she does hold the honour of being the first woman, in 1881, to be featured on a Japanese banknote.

In addition to Jingū, there have been eight empresses of Japan, two

of whom reigned twice. In both cases, according to the "Nihongi", the Chronicles of Japan, the women ascended to the throne after abdication in favour of a male relative. The fact that their successors were more often than not male has only fuelled the argument that tradition requires male-only succession.

During his time as prime minister from 2000 to 2006, Junichiro Koizumi pushed for changes to allow women to succeed to the Chrysanthemum Throne. But the birth of a new male heir, Hisahito, in 2006, appeared to overshadow discussion over disparity between male and female imperial privilege.

While the emperor has no political role, the symbolic and cultural significance links modern Japan to a mythological past. Akihito's reign will be remembered for improved ties with neighbours, reconciliation and recognition of the past suffering of those in the region, influencing politics and change through gesture.

As Reiwa, the era of beautiful harmony, begins, it is hoped that the Japanese government will open the way for women to succeed to the Chrysanthemum Throne. This would be a long overdue gesture that would have an enormous and significant impact for women, parity and recognition of their contribution and achievement throughout Japan.

[the writer is Teaching Fellow, Language Centre and Liberal Arts, Keele University]

In battle for Bankura, a three-cornered fight and an ‘outsider’ tag

AMITAVA ROY

BANKURA (WB), MAY 8 (PTI): The formidable organisational prowess of West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress is up against a surging BJP and the last remnants of the Left in the land of red soil Bankura, once a fortress of the CPI(M).

The Left has ceased to be a force to reckon with in many parts of the state, but still commands a good following in Bankura, according to political analyst Somnath Barat.

The CPI(M) and the BJP can play spoilsport for each other here and end up dividing opposition votes, much to the delight of the TMC, Barat, also an editor of a local magazine, said.

Both the CPI(M) and the BJP are playing on the fact that TMC candidate Subrata Mukherjee, a veteran in state politics, is from Kolkata, claiming that he would not be seen much if he wins the elections.

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee has fielded Mukherjee, a minister in her cabinet, replacing actor-turned-politician Moon Moon Sen, who defeated nine-time CPI(M) MP Basudeb Acharya in 2014, riding on a TMC wave prevailing in the state then.

Asked about the outsider tag, Mukherjee said, “The way Narendra Modi, coming from Gujarat, is nurturing Varanasi, I will also nurture Bankura in the same manner.”

He told PTI that he is no alien to the district and 13 projects of the Panchayat department, of which he is the min-



ister, are currently in the works here.

Mukherjee had lost to Basudeb Acharya in 2009 as a TMC candidate, but had been able to significantly bring down the margin by which the CPI(M) veteran had won the 2004 elections. Acharya had got over 60 per cent of votes polled in 2004, but that came down to 47.66 per cent in 2009, with Mukherjee bagging a 36.71 per cent share.

In the 2016 Assembly elections, TMC won five of the seven seats that makes up the Bankura Lok Sabha constituency, with RSP and Congress winning one each. BJP came a distant third in all the seats.

Though BJP candidate Subhas Sarkar expressed confidence on wresting the seat from TMC this time after losing in 2014, Mukherjee refused to accept that BJP is his main opponent, saying how can a party which got a paltry share of votes in the last state elections be the main contender of TMC, seeming more adept at facing

old foe CPI(M). Sarkar had polled 2.51 lakh votes in 2014, a 20.31 per cent share of the total spoils.

CPI(M) candidate Amiya Patra, however, agreed that the BJP has increased its vote share in last year's panchayat polls in the district at the cost of the Left, but hastened to add that this does not mean that the saffron party will be able to gain in the Lok Sabha elections.

“Since we could not give candidates in many panchayats owing to TMC's atrocities, people who are our traditional supporters voted for the BJP, but now they will vote for us,” Patra said.

“It is up to the people to decide whether they will vote for an outsider following the experience they had with Moon Sen,” he said, alleging that Sen was not available when people needed her and they had to communicate through district party leaders.

However, TMC's local leaders refuted the claims.

Patra is a resident of

Taldangra, an assembly seat which he contested and lost to the TMC in 2016. “Given our vote share in the 2016 Assembly elections and what the BJP got, it is the BJP which will play a spoilsport for us if it manages to get a good number of votes,” Patra said.

He claimed that the BJP candidate, a doctor by profession who owns nursing home in Bankura town, is a seasonal politician and is seen only during Lok Sabha elections.

“After he lost in the 2014 elections, he was not seen in BJP's campaigns in 2016 Assembly polls as also during the panchayat polls in 2018,” he said.

However, BJP's Sarkar, hopeful of turning the tables on the TMC and CPI(M) this time around, said there are several factors for his party to be optimistic about the Bankura seat.

“Social injustice in panchayats in the Jangalmahal area, the TMC candidate being an outsider, a large percentage of CPI(M) voters having

turned to us are some of the reasons that will see the BJP sail through,” he said.

Sarkar said that people in the once Maoist-affected Jangalmahal area in Bankura, who voted for TMC to throw out CPI(M), are a dejected lot.

“During last year's panchayat elections, opposition candidates were prevented from filing nominations. Nepotism in granting facilities under various schemes to people, party colour dominating on who will get benefits, including land rights, are some of the reasons for people's annoyance,” he said.

The local TMC leaders denied the allegations and said that the indigenous populace have got in the party's seven-and-half year rule what they did not since Independence.

“Development has reached the doorsteps of poor people who would earlier regard a meal of only rice and salt as a feast,” said Jyoti Tudu, a party worker in a forested hamlet in Ranibandh.

There are 16,44,523 voters in Bankura, of whom 8,37,195 are male, 8,07,319 are female and 9 from the other gender. They will be voting in the sixth phase of Lok Sabha polls on May 12 in 1,936 polling stations across the constituency.

While Raghunathpur falls in the Purulia district, the rest six Assembly constituencies -- Saltora, Chhatna, Ranibandh, Raipur, Taldangra and Bankura, that makes up the Lok Sabha seat, are in the Bankura district.

Repolling ordered in 168 polling stations of West Tripura LS seat

AGARTALA, MAY 8 (PTI): The Election Commission has ordered a repoll at 168 polling stations out of 1,679 polling stations in West Tripura Lok Sabha constituency, an election official said Wednesday.

Repoll in polling stations spread over 26 of the 30 assembly segments of the Lok Sabha constituency will be held on May 12, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Sriram Taranikanti said.

Polling in the constituency was held on April 11 last and opposition CPI-M and the Congress had demanded repoll in the entire constituency, alleging large-scale rigging by the BJP during voting on April 11.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the EC's decision, Congress

vice-president Tapas Dey said, “We were surprised to find that repoll was ordered only in few polling stations. We have no other alternative but to move the Supreme Court.”

BJP spokesperson Ashok Sinha said, “EC is the judge and they have every right to declare re-polling.”

State secretary of the CPI-M Gautam Das said, “We wanted fresh elections in the constituency. We are not satisfied with the EC order. Many voters who could not exercise their franchise in other polling stations of the constituency due to alleged rigging would be deprived.”

In his appeal to political parties, candidates, polling officials and police personnel,

the CEO said they should demonstrate on May 12 that “We can do it in a nice and positive environment. Meanwhile, additional paramilitary contingents have started arriving in the state for deployment during the re-poll exercise.

State election department officials said central forces would be deployed in all the polling booths. The CEO said webcams will be set up in all polling stations.

The EC on Thursday had removed West Tripura District Magistrate Sandeep Namdeo Mahatme, who was the Returning Officer of West Tripura Lok Sabha seat.

Mahatme was replaced by East Tripura RO and District Magistrate of Dhalai, Vikash Singh.

Suspected Rohingya refugees shifted to state-run shelter homes

AIZAWL, MAY 8 (PTI): Twelve suspected Rohingya refugees, who were rescued here three days ago allegedly from a human trafficking gang, have been shifted to state-run shelter homes, a senior police officer said. A group of eight women and four minor boys was apprehended from the house of a local woman in Aizawl on Sunday for residing in India without valid travel documents.

The woman, who had hosted the group, told police that she provided them shelter as a favour to her cousin in Tahan, Myanmar.

She also said that it was the fifth time that people took refuge at her home, before being

transported to Myanmar. “While the boys were sent to a home for orphans, the women were moved to another protected shelter home, both maintained by the state social welfare department.

“It seems that all 12 of them were brought to Mizoram from Bangladesh refugee camps,” Deputy Inspector General of Police (Northern Range) Lalbiakthanga Khiante said.

The DIG also stated that the group was probably trafficked to Mizoram through the porous Assam border.

“No one understood the language in which they were speaking, making the interrogation process extremely

difficult for us,” Khiante said, adding that an investigation is underway to nab the culprits who brought them here illegally.

More than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine state to neighbouring Bangladesh since August 2017, triggering a massive refugee crisis.

Many of them fall prey to trafficking gangs, who lure them with promise of better jobs and livelihood.

Last month, a group of eight Rohingya women were apprehended at Vairengte, the Assam-Mizoram border town in Kolasib district. The group did not have Inner Line Permit.

Vigil stepped up along India-Myanmar border in Manipur

IMPHAL, MAY 8 (PTI): Vigilance has been stepped up by the Assam Rifles along the India-Myanmar border in Manipur to check possible human trafficking and illegal drug trade, an official of the paramilitary force said here Wednesday. The locals, mostly traders travelling to the border town of Moreh, have been asked to travel with proper identity proofs, the official said.

The existing bilateral agreement allowed local residents of both the countries to travel up to 16 km from the border without travel documents. “The step has been necessitated following inputs about the possible movement of militants and drug smugglers in in Chandel, Churachandpur and Ukhrul districts of the state,” the Assam Rifles official said.

The precautionary measure has also been taken in the wake of the rescue of 12 suspected Rohingya refugees allegedly from a human trafficking gang in neighbouring Mizoram and the detection of “unauthorised camps” set up by NSCN(IM), a militant outfit, at Shihai village in Ukhrul district, five km from the international border.

EC's decision on Tripura falls short of expectations: CPI(M)



NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): The decision of the Election Commission on Wednesday to conduct repolling in 168 booths in West Tripura constituency has “fallen short of expectations”, the CPI(M) said and claimed that a substantial number of voters has been denied their right to vote due to rigging.

It was after several complaints by political parties that the poll body ordered a repoll at 168 of the 1,679 polling stations, almost a month after polls were held in

West Tripura seat on April 11. The EC said that repoll in polling stations spread over 26 of the 30 assembly segments of the Lok Sabha constituency will be held on May 12.

“The Polit Bureau of the CPI(M) expresses its deep sense of disappointment over the Election Commission of India's order to hold the elections void in 168 booths for the Tripura West parliamentary constituency and hold re-poll in these booths. There had been widespread rigging and

prevention of voters exercising their franchise by the ruling BJP during polls held on April 11.

“We firmly hold that this order is not in consonance with the ground reality and obviously too little and too late in ensuring a free and fair poll where more than half the electorate was actually unable to exercise their right to vote,” a statement from the party said.

Alleging that the EC had only “partially” considered the complaints made by political parties and individuals about

large-scale rigging and illegality, the statement said that the order will “signal, on the one hand, acknowledgement of rigging on a major scale and yet falling short of the expectations that the ECI will deliver justice for the voters of the constituency who could not cast their votes.”

“Nothing short of a re-poll for the entire Tripura West parliamentary constituency will serve the purpose of a free and fair poll and protecting the rights of the voters,” it said.

Indian national arrested for smuggling black pepper to India from Nepal

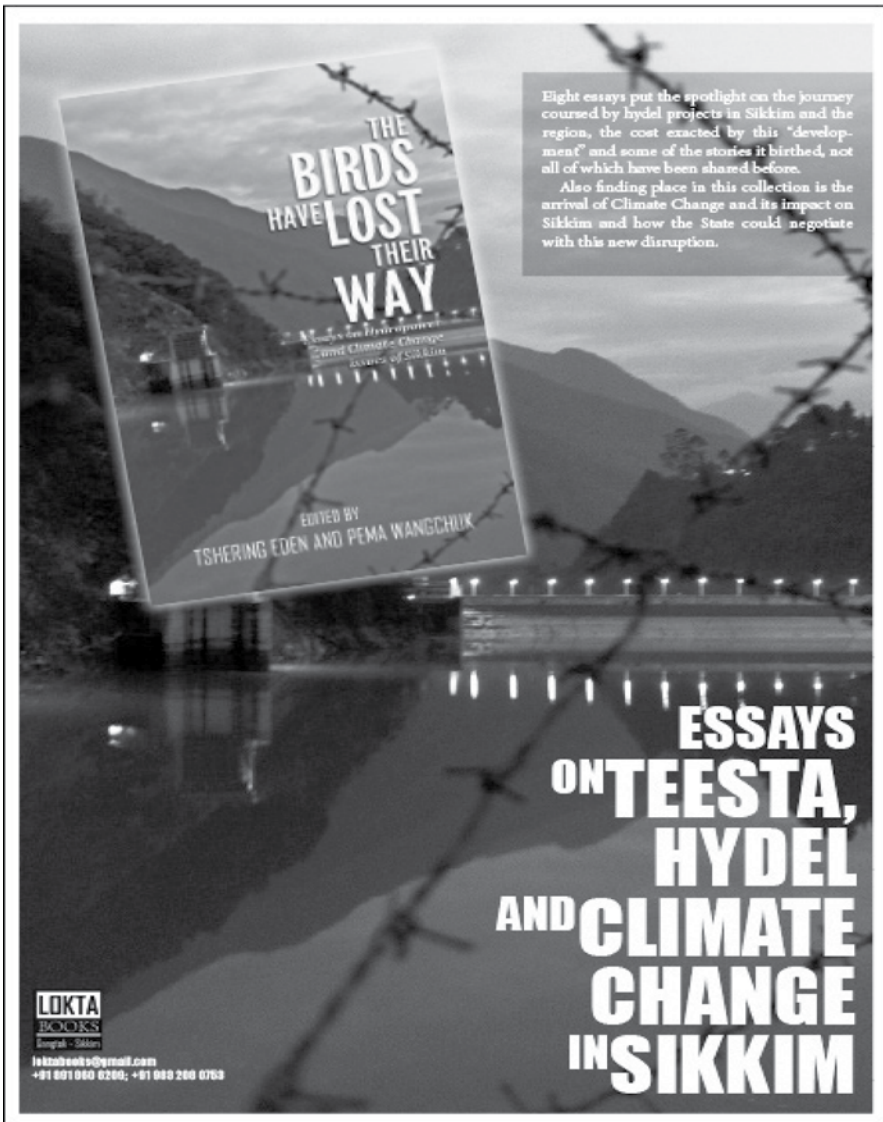
KATHMANDU, MAY 8 (PTI): An Indian national and a Nepalese man have been arrested for allegedly smuggling black pepper to India from southern Nepal's Birgunj city, police said Wednesday.

Dipendra Manda, 28, a resident of Raxaul, India and Binod Prasad Patel, 36, a resident of Birgunj Municipality were arrested from Birgunj near Nepal-India border for allegedly being in-

involved in black pepper smuggling racket. Police have seized eight sacks of black pepper from them as they were being transported on a motorbike.

They were arrested during a security check

conducted by a special team of police in the Nepal-India border point after receiving information that a large consignment of black pepper is being trafficked to India from Birgunj.



It's very painful': Valverde rocked by Barca collapse

LIVERPOOL, MAY 8 (AFP): Ernesto Valverde admitted Barcelona had only themselves to blame for their "terrible" Champions League semi-final collapse at Liverpool on Tuesday.

Barca were blown away on an incredible night at Anfield as Liverpool won 4-0 to overturn a three-goal first-leg defeat.

Liverpool are only the third team in the history of the European Cup to recover from such a large semi-final deficit.

Barca boss Valverde conceded his players failed to match Liverpool's intensity and lost their cool after the Reds scored twice in quick succession in the second half to level the tie on aggregate.

"Things got on top of us after those two quick goals. We didn't manage to get on the scoresheet and they rolled us over really," he said.

"It's a terrible result for our fans and for ourselves. It's really, really unfortunate, but credit to Liverpool.

"They started really well, and they pinned us back. Early goal, we reacted well after that.

"We managed to



control things a little bit in the second part of the first half. We had half-chances to score.

"We tried to sit a little bit deeper, but the tie ended for us with the fourth goal. We couldn't respond."

It was a second successive Champions League humiliation for Barca after they squandered a 4-1 first-leg lead in the quarter-finals last season, going out on away goals to Roma after

losing the return 3-0.

Valverde has just led Barca to another Spanish title, but he was asked if the collapse at Anfield would undermine his position at the Camp Nou.

"I do not know how it's going to affect me, here we are, the coach has to take responsibility," he said.

"It's very painful for us, especially for our people, it's the second year they've come back like that. "When you have a

battle like tonight, you're going to go through some really tough few days, like all our fans as well.

"You're going to suffer. That's what it is like. You have to go through this penitence and we've not got long to go until the end of the league season.

"We've got the Copa del Rey final (against Valencia) still to fight for and we've got to really finish the season well on a high after this. "But at

the moment we're blown away, it's terrible." The Catalan club haven't won the Champions League since 2015.

Barcelona midfielder Sergio Busquets was quick to say sorry for one of the most chastening results in their history.

"I apologise to the fans because after the Rome thing, it happens again, it is very hard to fall like that with a good result in the first leg," Busquets said.

It's going to be amazing but gruelling: Bairstow on World Cup, Ashes

LONDON, MAY 8 (PTI): England batsman Jonny Bairstow can't wait for the "biggest summer" of his cricket career to get underway with the World Cup this month but he also expects it to be the most gruelling as the Ashes is lined up just a few weeks later.

Bairstow, who scored 445 runs from 10 matches for Sunrisers Hyderabad in his debut IPL season, will be a key player for the England in the World Cup starting May 30 in the United Kingdom. The World Cup will end on July 14 and the Ashes, against arch-rivals Australia, will start August 1.

"It is huge. It is the biggest summer I will ever be involved in. It is the biggest ever summer for English cricket full stop," he told 'The Daily Telegraph'.

"A World Cup and an Ashes; it is going to be amazing. You dream of winning them. If you can't dream about that and think what that is going to feel like then what is the point (of playing)?

"At the same time you know it is going to be a gruelling summer. Five Tests at the end of World Cup is going to be tough, mentally and physically," he added.

Bairstow played alongside Australia's David Warner, who came back after serving a one-year ban for his role in the infamous ball-tampering scandal, in the IPL.

Speaking of his impressions of the controversial but swash-buckling batsman from Down Under, Bairstow said, "I think that experience (ball-tampering)

can only change you as a person. He was a very good team-mate, he passed on a lot of knowledge about local bowlers, game-plans, pitches, everything. He was excellent."

All praise he might be for Warner but the Englishman said there would be no love lost when the two square off during the Ashes.

"We can say hello now. We did not have a connection before, but now we've played together and done well together and had a good partnership it will make a difference.

"We spent five weeks together having dinner and coffees. It changes things but it will still be England versus Australia," he said.

Bairstow also spoke of an interaction with England football manager Gareth Southgate, who was widely credited for the team's run till semifinals of the FIFA World Cup last year. The batsman, however, did not elaborate on the interaction.

"The biggest thing for us will be home support, playing in front of our own fans. We heard from Gareth Southgate last week. He was brilliant. A lovely guy. The football lads were so meticulous in their planning for the World Cup last year.

"We were all proud as punch when they got to the semis. I am not saying it will be quite like that for us guys, but at the same time if people are sat in pubs wearing an England shirt wanting us to go through, and getting right behind us, that would be very special," he said.

First in Indian Cricket: Women state captains to have voice at BCCI Conclave

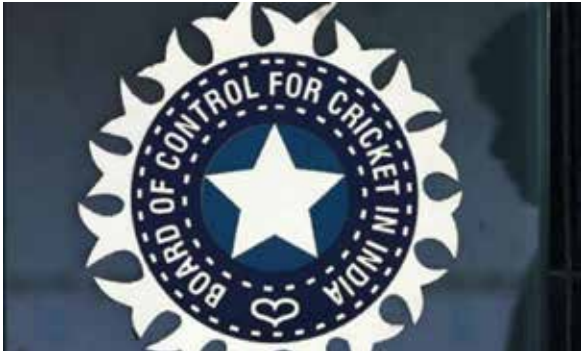
KUSHAN SARKAR

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): In a first, the Indian cricket board will be inviting all the state skippers of the women's teams at its 'Annual Domestic Captains and Coaches Conclave', making the event more inclusive.

The more than a decade old conclave is conducted at the end of every domestic season. Captains and Coaches of various Ranji Trophy teams give their feedback to the BCCI administration about the season that goes by. However, the women cricketers were not made a part of it in the previous editions.

During the May 17 conclave in Mumbai, the captains and coaches of the women's state teams will be joining their male counterparts in giving assessment of the just-concluded domestic season.

"Yes, this is the first time that domestic women's team captains and the chief coaches have been invited to the conclave. Their feedback is very important and we would like to know what they thought about the



last season," BCCI GM (Cricket Operations) Saba Karim, who is also in charge of overall development of women's game, told PTI on Wednesday. Karim, however, didn't wish to get into whether there will be discussions on how to broaden the talent pool in order to have a full-fledged women's IPL in near future.

"I would not like to comment on that but yes we need to get feedback from our women cricketers and coaches for the development of the game and how we can help to raise the quality of cricket at the domestic level," the former India wicket-keeper said.

It is expected that likes of Jhulan Goswami (Bengal), Mithali Raj (Railways), Jemimah Ro-

drigues (Mumbai) along with other domestic captains will be attending the conference. As far as the men's conclave goes, the notable aspect up for discussion will be the feedback provided by the captains and coaches of the North Eastern states who joined the first class system last season.

It is expected that sub-standard umpiring across all formats and age groups (men and women) is also likely to come up for discussion during the meeting.

In all, the 2018-19 season featured 2024 domestic matches (men and women) across age-groups with 6471 registered players (men and women) taking part.

This was close to 1000 matches more than last year.

Young writers, Urdu veterans dominate Hindi bestseller list

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI): Urdu veterans in poetry and emerging writers in fiction category dominated a recently released list of Hindi bestsellers.

The Dainik Jagran and Nielsen Bookscan Bestseller list included 10 books each in four categories -- Fiction, Non-fiction, Poetry, and Translation.

"The list offers the best-selling books between January 2019 to March 2019 quarter from the Hindi bestseller list," the organisation said. Among the books that made it to the fiction bestseller list include three of writer Satya Vyas -- "Banaras Talkies", "Chaurasi" and "Dilli Darbar" and two of Nilotpal Mrinal -- "Aughad" and "Dark Horse: Ek Ankahi Dastan".

In the poetry section, where poet-lyricist Piyush Mishra's "Tum Meri Jaan Ho Razia Bee" topped the chart and "Kuch Ishq Kiya Kuch Kamm Kiya" find



a mention in the top five, Rahat Indori's "Do Kadam Aur Sahi" and "Naraz" were also featured in the top 10 along with Gulzar's "Paji Nazmain". "This kind of

Balanced India definitely good for WC semis but will need some luck after that: Kapil

NEW DELHI, MAY 8 (PTI):

The legendary Kapil Dev Wednesday said India will have no trouble in making the World Cup semifinals given the "balanced" line-up, which features an "unmatchable" duo in Virat Kohli and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, but will need some luck to progress beyond that.

The World Cup, which begins on May 30 in the UK, will see all 10 participating nations face each other in a round-robin format.

India's 15-member squad boasts of experienced players like Dhoni, Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Mohammed Shami and Shikhar Dhawan along with in-form youngsters such as Jasprit Bumrah, Hardik Pandya and Kuldeep Yadav.

"India has a great combination of youth and experience. In a way they are more experienced than the other teams. They have the right balance -- four fast bowlers, three spinners and they have Virat Kohli and Dhoni," Kapil, the 1983 World Cup-winning captain, told reporters at a promotional event Wednesday.

"Dhoni and Kohli have done extremely well for India. Both of them are unmatchable," he added. The legendary all-rounder also hailed India's pace attack and said it will deliver in the English conditions.

"The four fast bowlers we have are fantastic, they are very good. I think the English con-



ditions will help them swing the ball. Then players like Shami and Bumrah can bowl 145kmph, have swing and pace," he said. Kapil, who has also coached the Indian team in 1999-2000, predicted that the "Men in Blue" will reach the semifinals alongside hosts England and defending champions Australia.

"I think India will definitely finish in the top four. After that it will be really difficult. After the semifinals, stroke of luck alongside personal and team performance will determine who goes forward," he said.

"England, Australia and India are the top three teams. These teams have more strength than the others. New Zealand or West Indies can emerge as the surprise package," he said.

A lot of debate has been going on regarding who will play at the crucial number four spot but Kapil said it will boil down to the

mindset of the players as the position can be taken by anyone other than the openers.

"After watching the T20 games you don't know who is the opener or who is number 4. It is very difficult to pick a person, it depends on the mind set of the player," said Kapil.

"Dhoni went before Yuvraj (Singh) in Mumbai (2011 World Cup final). In the last 10 years cricket has changed. Nowadays apart from the openers, anyone can play at the number four spot," he said.

Asked about Pandya, who has often been compared to Kapil himself, the 60-year-old former captain said the youngster should be left alone to play his natural game.

"You should not put pressure on Hardik Pandya. He has enough talent, let him play his natural game. I don't like anybody being compared to anyone because that puts pressure on that player."

Shoaib Malik to rejoin Pakistan squad after 10-day break



KARACHI, MAY 8 (PTI):

Senior batsman Shoaib Malik will rejoin the national team in England on Thursday after a 10-day break owing to personal reasons, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said on Tuesday.

"Shoaib Malik will rejoin the Pakistan cricket team in Southampton on Thursday and will be available for selection for the second One-Day International against En-

gland to be played on Saturday, 11 May," the PCB said in a statement.

Malik was granted a 10-day leave on April 29, but the Board did not give any reason for doing this.

"The Pakistan cricket team management has given leave to Shoaib Malik so that he can return home to deal with a domestic issue. He is expected to rejoin the team in 10 days' time," the

Board had said. The 37-year-old is the senior most player in Pakistan's 15-member World Cup squad with the experience of 282 ODIs and 111 T20 internationals to his name.

He has already announced his retirement from ODIs after the World Cup.

Pakistan play their first ODI of the five-match series against England on Wednesday at the Oval.

hitya Akademi, said at the event. Author Ashok Kumar Pandey's "Kashmirnama", Manav Kaul's "Tumhare Baare Mein", and Vijai Trivedi's "Har Nahi Manoonga: Ek Atal Jeevan Gatha" along with "Yada Yada hi Yogi" were some of the top rated books in the non-fiction category.

The best-seller list included not only books originally penned in Hindi, but also translations of several bestselling English works.

"Sita - Mithila Ki Yoddha", the Hindi translation of Amish Tripathi's "Sita: Warrior of Mithila" by Urmila Gupta, topped the list. It was followed by former president A P J Abdul Kalam's autobiography "Meri Jeevan Yatra" and "Revolution 2020" by Chetan Bhagat.

Amish Tripathi's "Amar Bharat" and Twinkle Khanna's "Mrs Funny Bones", also made it to the list.

effort is worthwhile for the Hindi world. Seeing this list, the authors are also writing on subjects related to the readers' interest," K Sreenivasarao, Secretary, Sa-

US welcomes release of two jailed Reuters journalists in Myanmar

BY LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, MAY 8 (PTI): The US has welcomed the release of two Reuters journalists in Myanmar after they were pardoned by the country's civilian government, amidst international pressure.

Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo walked free Tuesday from Yangon's Insein jail after spending over 500 days in prison. They were jailed under Myanmar's Official Secrets Act for reporting on a massacre of Rohingya civilians.

The two men were released as part of an amnesty of 6,520 prisoners by the country's President Win Myint.

"Jailed for over 500 days since December 2017 for reporting on atrocities against the Rohingya, we are delighted they will be reunited with their families, White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said Tuesday.

The two journalists from the London-based news agency won international acclaim for their reporting on the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar.

The men led an explosive Reuters investigation -- which eventu-



ally won a Pulitzer Prize -- into the killing of 10 Rohingya men in the village of Inn Dinn, part of a military-led campaign against the Muslim minority which began in August 2017 after Rohingya militants attacked police posts.

More than 720,000 Rohingya are estimated to have been forced to flee into Bangladesh as a result of the ensuing violence.

Their December 2017 arrests made them an international cause celebre and a sign of Myanmar's deteriorating press free-

doms under Nobel laureate and civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Sanders hoped other jailed journalists in Myanmar would also be freed.

"A free press, freedom of religion, and the rule of law are fundamental principles for any democracy. The United States will continue promoting a stable, prosperous, and democratic transition in Burma," Sanders said.

Welcoming their release Senator Marco Rubio said the two journalists were unjustly jailed for their work -- report-



ing the alleged atrocities against the Rohingya.

"Their cases serve as a reminder of the critical role a free press plays in bringing accountability and transparency to governments, and we must do all we can to protect and advance those principles," Rubio said.

Non-profit Reporters Without Borders (RSF) also welcomed the release of the two journalists.

"As well as the release of two individuals who should never have been in prison Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo this is

a fundamental victory for press freedom and for the RSF, which had campaigned constantly since their arrest," said Daniel Bastard, the head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk.

"Their case is emblematic of investigative journalism's importance for the functioning of democracies. We hail the role played by all those civil society actors who, both in Myanmar and internationally, never forgot the fate of these two journalists and kept fighting for them until this successful outcome," he said.

Pompeo in London to discuss the UK-US 'special relationship'

LONDON, MAY 8 (AP): US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is in London for talks with British officials on the status of the special relationship between the nations amid heightened tensions with Iran and uncertainty over Britain's exit from the European Union.

Pompeo will meet Wednesday with British Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and will later deliver a speech on the potential for improved U.S.-U.K. ties after Brexit.

At his first event in the British capital, a meeting about religious freedom with Hunt and British faith leaders, including Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, Pompeo told participants

that the Trump administration is committed to the rights of all people to worship as they please.

"In the United States it's in our Constitution, the First Amendment, it's central to our founding," he said.

Welby thanked Pompeo for the administration's attention to the matter, noting that Christians in the Middle East and Africa and religious minorities everywhere are under threat. But he also sounded a note of caution by telling Pompeo that foreign military inventions often have severe consequences for religious freedoms.

"Where the interests of religious minorities are concerned, foreign interventions can often have very serious, long-

term (impacts)," he said.

Pompeo didn't address Welby's comment.

Pompeo arrived in London after canceling a trip to Germany to make an unannounced visit to Baghdad, where he warned Iraqi officials about what he called imminent threats to American interests in the Middle East.

Iran said earlier Wednesday that it would partially suspend its compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal from which President Donald Trump withdrew last year. Britain remains a party to the deal and has been working with the other European participants, France and Germany, on ways to salvage the accord in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal.

Nawaz Sharif back in jail after massive show of strength

BY M ZULQERNAIN

LAHORE, MAY 8 (PTI): Pakistan's deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif has returned to prison to serve his sentence in a corruption case after the end of his six-week bail which was granted to him on medical grounds.

On March 26, the Supreme Court suspended Sharif's seven-year sentence in the Al-Azizia Steel Mills corruption case and granted him bail for six weeks with a condition that he would not leave Pakistan.

Last month, the 69-year-old three-time prime minister sought the apex court's permission to go abroad for medical treatment. However, the permission was not granted.

On Tuesday, Sharif left his Jati Umra residence here for the Kot Lakhpat Jail with a procession of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) workers led by his daughter Maryam.

Maryam and his nephew Hamza Shehbaz along with hundreds of PML-N workers accompanied him.

The supporters gathered outside Sharif's Jati Umra residence and accompanied him to jail.

The procession took four hours to reach the Kot Lakhpat Jail, which



public.

"The roads to the jail from Jati Umra were jam-packed. Only heads and long queues of motorists," Maryam tweeted.

Amidst sloganeering in support of Sharif, party workers were seen showering rose petals at his car. "The people know why I am being punished. What sin I have committed... they know. But I am optimistic that soon the black night of this oppression will end and I will get released from jail," Sharif said.

Though Sharif was to reach jail before midnight, he reported half-an-hour late. The Punjab Home Department directed the jail authorities to receive Sharif and shift him to the barrack, officials said. He was imprisoned in Adiyala Jail and shifted to Kot Lakhpat Jail on request.

Sharif has been serving a seven-year prison term at the jail since December 24, 2018 when an accountability court convicted him in one of the three corruption cases filed in the wake of the apex court's July 28, 2017 order in Panama Papers case.

Sharif and his family have denied any wrongdoing and allege that the corruption cases against them were politically motivated.

US lifts sanctions for Venezuelan general who defied Maduro

CARACAS (VENEZUELA), MAY 8 (AP): The US has lifted sanctions on a top Venezuelan general who broke ranks with President Nicol s Maduro, trying to help the opposition regain momentum in the face of a government crackdown following last week's failed uprising.

Vice President Mike Pence said Tuesday that the lifting of financial sanctions for former spy chief Manuel Figuera is intended to encourage

others in the military to abandon their support for Maduro.

The Treasury Department said the move is a display of "good faith" designed to elicit "concrete and meaningful actions to restore democratic order" by dozens of other sanctioned Venezuelan insiders.

As the US looked to lure the Venezuelan military, Maduro and his allies started going after opponents who supported the uprising.

Iran stops curbing enriched uranium, heavy water stocks: official



TEHRAN, MAY 8 (AFP): Iran will no longer respect limits it agreed on its enriched uranium and heavy water stocks under a 2015 nuclear deal with major powers, officials said on Wednesday.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council said the measure was necessary to "secure its rights and bring back balance" after Washington's abandonment of the agreement exactly one year ago on May 8, 2018.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran does not at the current stage consider itself committed to observing restrictions regarding storing enriched uranium stocks

and heavy water stocks," the council said. "The remaining parties to the (deal) are given 60 days to implement their commitments, in particular in the fields of banking and oil," it added.

It was referring to the commitment made by Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia to lift sanctions on Iran in return for it curbing its nuclear activities.

The five countries have largely failed to deliver on their side of the bargain as their banks and oil firms have moved to abide by the sweeping sanctions reimposed by Washington over the past year on Iran's banking and oil sectors.

South Africans head to polls tipped to be won by ANC

JOHANNESBURG, MAY 8 (AFP): South Africans go to the polls on Wednesday in national elections which the ruling ANC party, in power since 1994, is the favourite to win despite corruption scandals and sluggish economic growth and record unemployment.

The ANC has won all the past five elections, but Wednesday's vote is set to be an electoral test on whether the party has staunched a decline in popularity.

The party is tipped to win the vote, but with a reduced majority and the result will reveal whether its new leader, President Cyril Ramaphosa, can reverse growing resentment among South African voters.

Ramaphosa took over from scandal-tainted Jacob Zuma, under whose leadership the ANC saw the most significant drop in support since 1994.

He acknowledged on the eve of the election that "we are humble enough to admit our mistakes. We have taken decisive steps to fight corruption."

The election comes 25 years since Mandela led the African National Congress (ANC) to power in the country's first multi-racial ballot, which marked the globally-celebrated end of apartheid rule.

Support for the ANC has fallen in every election since 2004 with the party winning just 54 percent in 2016 local elections, compared with 62 per cent in the last national vote in 2014.

Ramaphosa, 66, took office last year when Zuma was forced to resign as president by the ANC after a nine-year reign dominated by cor-

ruption allegations and economic woes.

Most opinion surveys suggest the ANC will secure nearly 60 percent of the vote on Wednesday, thanks to the Ramaphosa effect and a weak and fragmented opposition.

"The ANC will pull another majority. It might be a reduced majority," said political scientist Collette Schulz-Herzenberg from Stellenbosch University.

"It reflects the weakness of the opposition, more than it does reflect the achievements of the ANC," she added.

The pro-business moderate Ramaphosa is a former anti-apartheid activist and trade union leader who was Mandela's apparent favourite to succeed him as president. After being outmanoeuvred in that race, Ramaphosa instead became a wealthy entrepreneur before serving as Zuma's vice president.

The ANC has been confronted by deepening public anger over its failure to tackle poverty and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. The economy grew just 0.8 percent in 2018 and unemployment hovers at a high of nearly 27 percent, rising over 50 percent among young people.

Corruption, especially in state owned companies became almost endemic under Zuma.

"In a normal country the ANC should be losing the election on the 8th (of May)," said University of Witwatersrand senior lecturer Lumkile Mondli.

Of the 47 opposition parties in the race, only the main opposition centrist Democratic Al-

liance (DA) and the radical-left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) are major players.

The DA which hopes to shed its image as a white, middle-class party as its first black leader, Mmusi Maimane, fights in his first general election since he took the helm in 2015, is expected to make marginal gains from the 22 per cent it won 2014.

But the radical leftist EFF, founded just six years ago by a former ANC youth leader Julius Malema, is predicted to make major inroads, growing from 6.3 per cent to a forecast 11 per cent.

The party, which appeals mainly to young voters and the poor, has centred its election campaign on its policy of seizing land from largely white owners to give to poor blacks.

Enforced land redistribution has also been adopted as a policy by Ramaphosa's government -- alarming some investors.

Wednesday's provincial elections will also measure ANC fortunes, with the party in a close fight with the DA for control of Gauteng, which includes the capital Pretoria and the economic hub Johannesburg.

Some 26.8 million voters are registered to cast ballots at 22,925 polling stations.

Polls open at 7:00 am (0500 GMT) and close 14 hours later.

Early results will emerge on Thursday with an official winner declared on Saturday.

The party that wins most seats in parliament selects the president, who will be sworn in on May 25.



