



HEROES DON'T WANT TO WORK WITH ME AS MY FILMS ARE ABOUT SOFTER MEN: SUDHIR MISHRA

pg 08

THE HISTORY OF CHINA'S MUSLIMS AND WHAT'S BEHIND THEIR PERSECUTION

pg 04

WOMEN THIS AGE ARE POWERFUL: CHRISTINE BARANSKI ON HER 60S

pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SKM CM and Ministers to take oath of office today



**ARPAN PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 26 MAY:**

The was frenetic activity at Paljor Stadium today as the facility was being prepared for the swearing in of the new Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers scheduled for 10AM on Monday. This venue will be a first for Sikkim since the swearing-in ceremony is usually held at the Raj Bhavan. Meanwhile, uncertainty over who will take oath as the Chief Minister have also been laid to rest with the Governor today accepting the proposal of SKM president, PS Tamang [Goley], to form the gov-



ernment in Sikkim.

Mr Tamang, accompanied by his MLAs, it may be recalled, had

called on the Governor on Saturday morning and formally submitted the party's claim to form the

new State Government.

There has been some confusion over the chief ministerial candidate.

While the SKM legislators had chosen Mr Tamang as their Chief Minister, his conviction in a corruption case disqualifies him from contesting elections just yet. A person not elected into the legislative assembly, if s/he is made Chief Minister, needs to win an assembly election within six months of her/his appointment.

This condition complicates Mr Tamang's candidature for the CM's post and must have been the reason why it took more than 24 hours for the Governor to accept the SKM claim to form the government with Mr Tamang as their CM.

The memorandum submitted to the Governor is signed by Mr Tamang not only as the SKM president but also as the leader of the legislative party of SKM, this latter status making him the CM selected by the party.

A press communiqué from Raj Bhavan confirms that the Governor has accepted "the memorandum submitted by Shri Prem Singh Tamang (Goley), President of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha Party and leader of Legislative Party of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha to form the government."

SUPPORTERS GATHER AT MINTOKGANG TO BID EMOTIONAL SEND-OFF TO THEIR CM

People have not rejected SDF, just given it a new responsibility: Chamling



on him by the people of Sikkim. He smiled and joked and assured the people he would continue to remain connected with them and work for them.

"I respect the mandate of the people and wholeheartedly accept the election results. People have given the victory to SKM and handed over the government to them. I congratulate the leader of SKM and his MLAs on forming the government. I also congratulate the people of Sikkim for electing their government as per democratic norms," he said while speaking to media-persons outside Mintokgang today.

He further stressed that it was important to bear in mind that the "people of Sikkim have not rejected the SDF but only changed its role."

"The Sikkimese had given us the responsibility to run the government for 25 years and in this election they decided to give us the responsibility of an opposition party. We will fulfill our responsibility in an honest manner... this we promise the people of Sikkim," he said.

When asked where he would be based - Namchi

turn to pg02

Overnight rain damages sections of North Sikkim Highway

**WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 26 MAY:**

Heavy overnight rain has damaged several sections of North Sikkim Highway along the Dikchu-Mangan axis which was blocked at 4th Mile today due to a landslide.

Light vehicles plying on this road to Mangan had to hence proceed via Dzongu. Weather permitting, regular traffic is expected to be restored by Monday morning.

The highway was also initially blocked at Namok Khola and was restored by evening.

Meanwhile, the Mangan-Chungthang road was also blocked at Lanthey Kho-



la and Rel Khola and both were restored by evening.

Until the blockages were cleared, commuters had to opt for transship-

ment. Stranded vehicles, however, could move across only after the stretches were cleared. The rain and slides

have also damaged the water supply lines from the Rang Rang and Teynam sources. Repair works are underway.

IN GRATITUDE

I would like to take this opportunity to convey my heartfelt gratitude to all my supporters, Voters and Well-wishers for your unconditional and unwavering support throughout the entire election journey and process.

Despite the outcome of the election, I can honestly state that I am overwhelmed by the spontaneous affection and encouragement given to me. I seek all your blessings today and in the future, rest assured, my good wishes are always with you and your families.



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Parivartan for Whom?

SHRADHA T K LAMA

After 25 years in power, the Sikkim Democratic Front led by Pawan Chamling has finally been ousted from office, winning 15 seats in the assembly elections, two seats behind the winning party Sikkim Krantikari Morcha which is now preparing to form the new government with 17 seats.

The emotions in Sikkim are varied. The quest for change, the taste of something new after 25 years, the possibilities of better amenities in the face of growing unemployment, unstable health facilities and rampant adhoicism.

Parliamentary democracy in Sikkim implemented in post Indian annexation era 1975 has had its own ups and downs. Successive governments have negotiated their way to power with a mix of kinship ties in the close knit society, the money power in the class ridden society and muscle power in an entrenched patriarchal society. The 45 years of parliamentary democracy in Sikkim have been particularly marked by the role of money in the political sphere.

The influx of money into Sikkim which had started in the post annexation era, largely through all the “development” projects has resulted in large scale corruption. The Indian government’s largest aid to Sikkim which was three and a half crores before 1975 increased to thirty-six crores a year after 1975 (highest aid per capita). The increase in budget was done deliberately to curb people’s dissent against the neo-colonial actions of the Indian government in Sikkim, at least during the early years.

Corruption is not just a political phenomenon but an everyday reality in Sikkim society. That corruption is rampant in all departments is known and normalized. It is accepted that complaints against the embezzlement are muzzled because every family has a relative or cousin engaging and profiting from it.

Today in Sikkim, Health facilities lack even basic amenities. Every check-up requires people to travel to private hospitals in north Bengal, which is extremely difficult for those from the lower classes. What is menacing in all this is the fact that in a society that has seen such an increase in the standard of living among the upper classes, basic amenities continue to remain scarce for people in the lower strata of the society. The everyday wage of those employed as wage labor and other unorganized

sector is minuscule to living a standard life.

Apart from this, the condition of government schools remains disheartening and the Sikkimese upper class send their children to the elite local schools in Gangtok or the lavish boarding schools in Darjeeling or to private schools in north Bengal.

The Sikkim Krantikari Morcha which is now going to form the new

VIEWPOINT

dra Modi. Their close relationship with the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) whose policies and actions of Hindutva against religious and caste minorities in mainland India, is worrisome.

The BJP has been an active force in trying to implement the Citizenship Amendment Bill in the North-East. How

pitched its support for the then prime ministerial candidate Naren-

tion taking place across the country.

The 2019 elections in Sikkim will be remembered but whether for the better or worse is something we will only know in the coming days. The Sikkim Krantikari Morcha in terms of policies does not seem to be offering anything new to the Sikkimese janta. Their primary slogan throughout the campaign centered around the need for change (Parivartan) but what form of change or change for whom wasn’t



government has promised many things in its manifesto - promises of employment for all unemployed youth within 100 days of its government formation, Unemployment income of 10,000, loan waiver for farmers, permanent jobs, increase in salary for govt school teachers etc. For the indigenous minority of the state, it has promised to safeguard the separate status of Sikkim, seat reservation for Tamangs and Limboos and voiced its opposition to the communally motivated Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB). The promises of the now ousted Sikkim Democratic Front were more or less the same in its manifesto. In fact, to speak of employment, permanent jobs and amenities for ethnic minorities have been the road followed by all political parties in Sikkim.

Although the SKM has promised to safeguard 371F, old laws and oppose the citizenship amendment bill there still remains a lot of loopholes in their promises. Before the elections, there were efforts to form an SKM-BJP alliance. In the 2014 elections, SKM openly

SKM will negotiate with the BJP government which has won again at the Center is still under question. Will it be able to maintain autonomy, which is integral to ensure and maintain the separate status of Sikkim?

Today more than ever, provisions such as Sikkim subject, old laws, land rights, 371F need to be safeguarded. The BJP government at the center over the past five years has done all it can to propagate its idea of Hindu Rashtra across the states in the north-east. Assam serves as a great learning ground for us as we see the Assamese today negotiating between the NRC and the CAB. This imagination of a uniform Hindu nation-state will have overriding effects on communities in the fringes; our distinct history, culture and practices will eventually erode if we do not build the conscious resistance in due time. To say that these are issues concerning only the mainland is ill-advised. It is wrong to assume that Sikkim will be able to remain immune to the larger polariza-

elaborated upon. To what extent this Parivatran reigns for the working classes, the lower classes and the indigenous sikkim subject holders will only be known in the coming days. The ranks of SKM continues to be filled with sons and daughters of former ministers, heirs of big business, of the local elite who leave no modesty in flaunting their family lineages in a still feudally arranged society.

The Sikkimese people have spoken this time nevertheless. They wanted change, a new face, an anticipation of a new era after 25 years of monotony, corruption, dwindling working conditions and empty promises. What lies ahead for us after 54 years of electoral democracy is only for tomorrow to tell. Was the Samjhauta that took place in 8th may 1973 worth all that has happened in our society over the years?

[the writer hails from Jorethang, South Sikkim, and is currently pursuing her Masters from Lady Sri Ram College, New Delhi]

Surat fire: Tyres used as chairs in class, fire tenders were 45 mins away



GANDHINAGAR, MAY 26 (PTI): Presence of inflammable materials, including flex and tyres, and fire tenders stationed away from the spot contributed to the blaze at a commercial complex in Surat and hampered the fire fighting operation, Gujarat Chief Secretary J N Singh said Sunday.

Twenty-two students, including 18 girls, of an art and craft coaching institute died in the devastating fire that engulfed the four-storeyed Takshashila Arcade in Sarthana area of Surat on Friday.

Preliminary probe revealed that use of highly inflammable materials and tyres, which doubled up as chairs in the coaching class, caused the fire to spread rapidly, Singh said.

“The fire spread very quickly because highly inflammable materials, such as flex, were used...

The ceiling (of the coaching institute) was just five feet high. Since one cannot sit on a chair in such a room, the owner used tyres instead of chairs for the students,” the chief secretary told reporters here.

“High-capacity fire tenders took time to reach the spot as they were stationed at a considerable distance, around 45 minutes away. It hampered the fire fighting operation to some extent,” he said.

The municipal corporation has high-capacity fire tenders for dousing fires in multi-storeyed buildings.

The owner of the institute, Bhargav Butani, was arrested on Saturday. The builders -- Harshul Vekaria and Jignesh Paghdal, are on the run.

Singh said two officials of the Surat fire department -- S K Acharya

and Kirti Mod -- have been suspended for laxity.

Chief Minister Vijay Rupani has asked Additional Chief Secretary of Urban Development Department, Mukesh Puri, to conduct a thorough inquiry and submit a report on Monday, he said.

In the wake of the tragedy, all the municipalities and municipal corporations in the state have undertaken a massive drive to identify buildings which do not comply with fire safety norms, the chief secretary said.

“All these municipalities and corporations have formed 713 teams to identify such buildings. We have already examined over 9,900 buildings housing tuition classes, malls or hospitals, and issued show-cause notices to over 9,300 premises. Owners have been warned that they should install fire fighting systems or else the buildings will be sealed,” Singh said.

“This incident was a wake up call for us and we are sorry and sad about it. We are taking all necessary steps to ensure that such incidents do not take place in future,” he said.

Agency to conduct entrance tests for DU admissions not yet finalised



NEW DELHI, MAY 26 (PTI): Delhi University’s admission committee is yet to decide on the agency that will conduct the entrance exams for admission to various courses in the varsity, leading to a delay in the start of the process.

Last year, the varsity’s admission process had started from May 15. This time, the standing committee on admissions recommended that the process be started from May 27, but the varsity’s admission committee has not yet finalised the date.

Rajeev Gupta, dean, Students’ Welfare, said the dates for the entrance exams are yet to be finalised.

“The portal is the same for merit-based

courses and entrance exam based courses. The admission process will start once the dates are finalised. We are yet to finalise the agency that will be conducting the entrance exams,” he said.

An official, however, said the National Testing Agency (NTA) is likely to conduct entrance exams for various Delhi University courses.

Gupta said the coming week will likely see a finalisation on the admission process.

Sources said technical glitches are also arising during the testing process of the server, delaying the announcement of admissions.

The server is in the process of undergoing testing and some problems are arising because

there are many new features in the offering.

The standing committee had also suggested that there should be multiple payment gateways for students to make admissions and this is being analysed.

“The standing committee had recommended that there should be tie-ups with e-wallets and other payment gateways so that students can easily pay the fee.

“Earlier, there was only one payment gateway which would lead to the server crashing but having multiple gateways will ease the process,” said an official.

The standing committee recommendations are yet to be approved by the admissions committee.

SDF legislators to boycott govt swearing in

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 26 MAY:

Sikkim Democratic Front legislators will be boycotting the swearing in ceremony of the SKM Government at Paljor Stadium on Monday.

An SDF press release informs that the decision was taken to register the party’s protest against the “blatant disregard” of Supreme Court rulings and all norms of democracy being shown by the SKM in going ahead with their party president, PS Tamang [Golay] as the Chief Minister.

Mr Tamang, it may be recalled, did not contest the assembly elections. While a person who has not been elected an MLA is allowed to become CM, the law requires him to get elected into the legislative assembly within six months of taking office as CM.

Mr Tamang as CM comes with a unique complication in that his conviction in a corruption case bars him from contesting elections for the present.

A Supreme Court judgment in a similar case [involving J Jayalalitha] argued that a person who is disqualified from being a member of the State legislature cannot be appointed as a chief minister.

The SDF is holding up this judgment as the reason behind their decision to boycott the swearing in ceremony during which Mr Tamang is expected to take oath of office as the new Chief Minister of Sikkim.

The party has cited the incidents of post-poll violence, allegedly by SKM party workers targeting SDF supporters as another reason they will be staying away from Paljor Stadium on Monday in protest.

SRP congratulates SKM; Open to merger if new govt delivers



SHRAVAN CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 26 MAY

Sikkim Republican Party, while extending congratulations to the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha for having been voted into government, also announced that if the SKM succeeded in delivering on its promises and genuine equality then SRP would also be open to the idea of merging with SKM.

Addressing a press conference here at the Press Club of Sikkim today, SRP president KB Rai underlined that his party respects democracy and democratic processes.

“We respect the decision of the people and are thankful to them for the support they have extended to us,” he said.

Mr Rai added that SRP had planned to field more candidates but the

strict scrutiny process left six of its candidates unable to contest.

Meanwhile, he stressed that SRP’s main agenda was genuine “equality” among the Sikkimese and wants community councils to be established in the State to pursue and deliver this agenda.

“If the new government succeeds in doing so then the SRP would raise its hand for unification of the two parties in the coming days,” he said.

He also commended SKM for achieving what other political parties have failed to do in the past 25 years.

While recognising that change was a natural phenomenon, he hoped that this new chapter in the political history of Sikkim proves beneficial for the State.

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People have...

or Gangtok, Mr Chamling informed that he would be mostly working out of Gangtok and will be travelling frequently to Namchi and Gyalshing.

“My headquarters will be in Sikkim,” he quipped, adding, “I will reach out to every person in Sikkim. I want to set up my headquarters in their mind.”

After receiving a guard of honour from the Sikkim Police, the CM left Mintokgang. His motorcade was joined by SDF party workers and supporters who raised slogans in his support all along the route.

EC lifts model code

NEW DELHI, MAY 26 (PTI): The model code of conduct, which came into force on March 10 when the Lok Sabha election was announced, ceased to be in existence, the Election Commission said on Sunday.

In an instruction to the cabinet secretary and chief secretaries of state governments, the commission said the model code had been lifted with immediate effect.

The code bars the party in power from using official machinery to further its political interests. The poll panel uses the model code to pull up politicians who are either found guilty of threatening voters or using religion and bribe to seek votes.

The election watchdog used its constitutional powers to ban some politicians from campaigning for a few days. It cited the disruption of level-playing field to ban biopics on politicians, including one on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, till the election process was over.

The seven-phase electoral exercise began on April 11 and ended on May 19.

Himalaya Clean Up campaign launched at Mamring School



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 26 MAY:

Mamring Senior Secondary School here in East Sikkim launched the "Himalaya Clean Up Campaign" in the area on 25 May.

A press communiqué informs that the clean-up sites were "carefully chosen" from the most polluted areas of the village.

The campaign was initiated by school principal Prahlad Sharma, NSS PO Bikash Bhattarai, Eco Club Green Teacher BS Bastola, IP Khatiwara, TD Bhutia, Pradip Pradhan along with other teachers and students of the school.

Around 400 hundred volunteers participated in the clean up drive.

The campaign was jointly organised by NSS, SAATHI and Eco Club of the school.

The campaign covered the school complex, the nearby village pocket, road and commercial areas etc.

To make the campaign effective, the program was designed as an inter-house competition at the school.

Incessant rain through the day made the campaign inconvenient, but the students stayed dedicated and mopped up a substantial amount of waste and even

compiled an audit.

This is what they cleaned up:

Pet bottles: 1.5 kg

Multi layered packaging: 0.5 KG

Tetrapak : 0.7 kg

Plastic items: 36 kg

Single use plastic items: 10 kg

Glass: 5 kg

Tin/ metals: 40 kg

Papers/ card boards: 3 kg

Clothes/ textiles: 0.5 kg

Total collections: 97.2 kg.

The competition was won by Yellow House which collected 26 kgs of waste.

Modi to take oath with new ministers on May 30



NEW DELHI, MAY 26 (PTI): Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be administered oath of office for his second term along with his new council of ministers on May 30, the President's Office said Sunday.

President Ram Nath Kovind will administer the oath of office and secrecy to the prime minister and other members of the Union Council of Ministers at a ceremony in Rashtrapati Bhavan on Thursday at 7 pm, an official communicate said.

Modi is the first BJP leader who has been elected for the second time after completion of his five-year tenure, a feat so far achieved only by two Congress leaders Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

From BJP, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was also elected as a prime minister for two consecutive terms, but his first stint had lasted only for one year and seven months.

"The President (Ram Nath Kovind) will administer the Oath of Office and Secrecy to the Prime Minister and other members of Union Council of Ministers on 30.05.2019 at 07.00 pm at Rashtrapati Bhavan," the communique issued by President's press secretary Ashok Malik said.

Names of the ministers who would join Modi in his second innings is yet to be disclosed, though there has been speculation about some new members expected to join the council, including from states like

West Bengal that played a key role in the BJP's massive victory in the just-held Lok Sabha elections.

It was also not immediately clear whether the ceremony will be attended by some world leaders. Modi had stunned everyone during 2014 swearing-in when he had called SAARC leaders, including the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif.

The 2014 swearing-in was held at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan with around 2,000 people including foreign dignitaries invited for Modi's oath ceremony, which was administered by the then President Pranab Mukherjee.

Several global leaders, including Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, US President Donald Trump, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin have congratulated Modi on his resounding victory.

On Sunday, Khan spoke to Modi and expressed his desire for both the countries to work together for the betterment of their peoples, the Pakistani Foreign Office said.

Khan reiterated his vision for peace, progress and prosperity in South Asia and said he looks forward to working with Prime Minister Modi to advance these objectives.

Modi has been elected unanimously as leader of the National Democratic Alliance after which he called on Pres-

ident Kovind on Saturday in his capacity as leader of the BJP Parliamentary Party, which has majority support in the House of the People following the general election to the 17th Lok Sabha.

The President, exercising powers under the Constitution, appointed Modi to the office of Prime Minister of India and sought his advice about names of others to be appointed members of the Union Council of Ministers and indicate the date and time of the swearing-in-ceremony to be held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Earlier on Saturday, an NDA delegation, led by BJP president Amit Shah and comprising of Parkash Singh Badal, Rajnath Singh, Nitish Kumar, Ram Vilas Paswan, Sushma Swaraj, Uddhav Thackeray, Nitin Gadkari, K. Palaniswami, Conrad Sangma and Neiphiu Rio also called on the President at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

They handed over a letter stating Modi has been elected leader of the BJP Parliamentary Party. The letters of support from the NDA constituent parties were also handed over to the President.

NDA together has a strength of 353 MPs in the 543-member Lok Sabha, out of which BJP has a majority of 303 Members of Parliament. This is the highest every tally for the BJP, which had got just two MPs in its Lok Sabha electoral debut in 1984.

CBI summons ex-Kolkata police chief, asks him to appear before it on Monday

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, MAY 26 (PTI): The CBI has summoned former Kolkata police commissioner Rajeev Kumar on Monday for questioning in connection with the Saradha ponzi scheme case, officials said.

A team of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) visited Kumar's official residence in Kolkata on Sunday evening to serve the notice, officials said.

The 1989-batch IPS officer has been asked to be present at the Salt Lake office of the agency on Monday in connection with the investigation into the chit fund scam, an officer said.

The CBI has also issued a lookout notice against Kumar. All the airports and immigration authorities have been alerted to prevent him from leaving the country and intimate the agency about any possible move, officials said.

The agency wants custodial interrogation of Kumar in connection with the chit fund scam as he was heading the special investigation team (SIT) of the West

Bengal police to probe the case before the CBI took over, the officials said.

The CBI had told the Supreme Court that custodial interrogation of Kumar was necessary, saying he was not co-operating in the probe and he was "evasive" and "arrogant" in answering the queries put to him during questioning.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who was appearing for the CBI, had said Kumar was the incharge of investigation by the SIT and had allowed the release of mobile phones and laptops, which were seized from the accused and contained crucial records of alleged involvement of political functionaries in the scam.

Mehta had said the seized mobile phones and laptops were not even sent for forensic examination and material evidence were destroyed in the case

The apex court had asked the CBI last month to furnish evidence for seeking custodial interrogation of Kumar in the Saradha case, saying it

has to be satisfied that the agency's request was "bona fide" and not for "political purposes".

The court had on May 17 withdrawn protection given to Kumar from any arrest and had asked the CBI to proceed as per law. It gave a week's time to Kumar to approach the competent court for anticipatory bail.

Kumar had again approached the top court last Monday, seeking extension of the protection and saying the courts in West Bengal were not functioning due to a lawyers' strike. This petition was rejected, following which Kumar had approached a Kolkata court with an anticipatory bail.

In January, the Centre and the state government had faced an unprecedented standoff after a CBI team, which reached the residence of Kumar for questioning, had to retreat after the police refused to let it enter and detained its officers.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee came in the defence of Kumar and started a sit-in to protest against the Centre's move.

New Lok Sabha has 475 'crorepati' MPs: ADR

NEW DELHI, MAY 26 (PTI): A total of 475 members of the new Lok Sabha are 'crorepati' with Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath's son Nakul Nath topping the list, the Association of Democratic Reforms said Sunday.

The ADR arrived at the figure of 'crorepati' MPs after analysing the affidavits on assets and liabilities of 539 new MPs.

The ADR said it was unable to access affidavits of three of the 542 new MPs -- two of the BJP and one of the Congress. The BJP won 303 seats in the 17th Lok Sabha and the Congress 52.

Elections were held for 542 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats. The election for Vellore Lok Sabha

seat had been cancelled by the Election Commission of India, citing abuse of money power. A fresh date is yet to be announced. Two members of the 545-strong House are nominated.

Out of the 301 new BJP MPs, whose affidavits were examined, 265 (88 per cent) were found crorepati, while all 18 winners of its NDA partner Shiv Sena had assets exceeding Rs one crore.

In the Congress, 43 out of its 51 MPs (totaling 96 per cent) were found to be 'crorepati'.

Similarly, 22 (96 per cent) out of 23 DMK MPs, 20 (91 per cent) out of 22 of the Trinamool Congress MPs and 19 (86 per cent) out of 22 YSR Congress MPs had assets ex-

ceeding Rs one crore.

The top three crorepati MPs are from the Congress, the ADR said.

Nath, who won from Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, has declared assets worth Rs 660 crore, followed by Vasanthakumar H from Kanniyakumari, Tamil Nadu (Rs 417 crore) and D K Suresh from Bengaluru Rural, Karnataka (Rs 338 crore). The average of assets per winner in the Lok Sabha elections is Rs 20.93 crore.

There are 266 members in the new Lok Sabha whose assets are Rs 5 core or above.

The number of crorepati MPs elected in 2009 Lok Sabha elections was 315 (58 per cent) and 443 (82 per cent) in the 2014.

Humbly accept people's verdict, prepare for 2020 Delhi polls: Kejriwal to AAP workers

NEW DELHI, MAY 26 (PTI): Motivating disheartened AAP workers after the party's crushing defeat in the Lok Sabha polls, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Sunday asked them to humbly accept people's verdict and concentrate on the assembly elections slated for next year.

Kejriwal, addressing party workers in west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh, said anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare told him that "when one comes into politics or public life, one should have the ability to endure humiliation".

"We have to bear humiliation at times and I am proud of my workers for humbly accepting that insult," he said.

"Now, you go to the people of Delhi and tell them that the big election has ended and small elections are going to come, and in these elections, cast your vote on the basis of 'kaam' (work) and not 'naam' (name)," he said.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) lost on all seven Lok Sabha seats in the national capital by huge margins of votes.

Kejriwal said the party has not deviated from

its principles of honesty and hard work which is its biggest strength.

"All of us are as honest as we were on November 26, 2013 when the party was formed. I am proud to say we have not deviated from the values of the party. Several CBI raids were conducted against me, Manish Sisodia (deputy chief minister) and Satyendra Jain (health minister), but corruption of not even a single paisa was found. You all should be proud of it," he said.

The chief minister asserted that all the work done by the AAP in Delhi has been due to the support of party workers and they should take pride in it.

"I can say with confidence that we got 54 per cent votes in the last assembly elections and this time we would win by more votes," he said.

Sisodia also asked AAP workers to start preparing for the 2020 assembly elections.

"The assembly elections next year will not be fought by any individual MLA or counsellor. It will be contested by Team Kejriwal and our slogan will be 'ladenge, jeetenge' (we will fight and win)," he said.

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Habituated is Not the Same as Prepared

Preparedness does not mean only post-disaster drills

The Southwest Monsoon, officials at the Met department inform, are scheduled to arrive in Kerala on 06 June, nearly a week later than normal. Meanwhile, the journey of Southwest Monsoon 2019 officially began with its onset over Andaman and Nicobar Islands where it actually arrived earlier than its normal date of 20 May and has already covered South Andaman Sea and some parts of South Bay of Bengal and Nicobar Islands. The arrival on the mainland, meteorologists indicate, is impeded by high temperatures in the seas surrounding India, and an El Nino. What is more, the monsoon is predicted to advance sluggishly after reaching Kerala. What this will mean is that real monsoon rains might get delayed for Sikkim even as this being an El Nino year, a weather phenomenon associated with deficient rain, the monsoon could be below normal. The current run of wet weather does not however suggest so, but let's see what the next few months prove.

So much for the science of meteorology.

Moving on, irrespective of what the Southwest Monsoon has in store for the rest of the country, Sikkim, the Gangtok ridge and its attached mountain features, have hosted pre-monsoon showers of substantial intensity, and just these rains have been enough to start scratching at the hill sides. The drainage has taken a hit, site excavations have collapsed and the water supply already disrupted. You can now begin shuddering with speculations on what the remaining four months have in store by way of damage and connectivity disruptions, because, the nor'westers teasers are already unleashing what the monsoon months have always been pregnant with in Sikkim.

This will not take much imagination for anyone who has been in Sikkim for any length of time; we are habituated for it. Unfortunately, and surprisingly, Sikkim has still not developed preparedness for it.

Sikkim hills might be young and prone to crumbling, but even a superficial observation will bear out that there are just too many scars on its hills now. Go up to the Ridge and look towards Tsomgo and a monster slide gashes the hill face there. The vision should be shocking, but one does not hear of it having generated any concern. Construction site excavations poke out more than just the marked out sites and the entire stretch from Deorali to Tenzing & Tenzing on the national highway in Gangtok spills muck and slush every time it rains. Neither however appear to have attracted any long-term interventions. The Indira Bypass has seen a rash of constructions in the recent years, and the road surface sinks and caves in ugly reminders of amiss planning. The shoulder of the road has already caved in some sections, retaining walls have given up at others and potholes the size of craters ambush from innocent looking puddles.

The general disinterest towards precautions is dangerous, because the out of sight, out of mind attitude is misplaced. Gangtok is not a very big hill, and when any part of it starts slipping, it leaves the monster above standing on wobbly legs as well.

By now, Sikkim should have mapped all its natural and manmade drainage channels and their carrying capacities, installed rain gauges at least at all disaster-prone locations, worked out a way by which real-time information could be shared so that the moment inundation neared the carrying capacity limit of any jhora or drain, warnings could be sent out and disaster drills put into effect. On ground, however, this has not been explored even for Gangtok. Hence, the administration prepares for post-disaster scenarios, which, while necessary, should not be the only component of preparedness. And, without the deployment of available technology and science, which the policy makers in Sikkim are yet to discover, post-disaster scenarios are all that it can build preparedness for. What that means is that Sikkim begins another blind date with monsoon now. All the best...

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The history of China's Muslims and what's behind their persecution

KELLY ANNE HAMMOND
theconversation.com

Over 1 million Uighur Muslims are being held in detention centers in the far western province of Xinjiang, China.

Uighur leaders and experts located outside China have warned that the situation could worsen, and "mass murder" could not be ruled out. With upwards of 10% of the Uighurs being held against their will, it is being called the worst and the most neglected humanitarian crisis of the past 10 years.

Why is this is happening, and what makes the Chinese government see Muslims as a threat?

ISLAM IN CHINA

I have studied the long history of Muslims in China. Today's China is home to a large Muslim population – around 1.6% of the total population, or around 22 million people.

They are not newcomers. Islam was introduced to China by envoys from the Middle East who traveled to meet Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty in the seventh century.

Shortly after this visit, the first mosque was built in the southern trading port of Guangzhou for Arabs and Persians who traveled around the Indian Ocean and the South China Seas. During this time, Muslim merchants established themselves in Chinese ports and in Silk Route trading posts.

However, they lived segregated from the Han Chinese majority for five centuries.

This changed in the 13th century under the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, when Muslims came to China in unprecedented numbers to serve as administrators for the new rulers who were descendants of Ghengis Khan, founder of the Mongol empire.

The Mongols had little experience running the bureaucracy of the Chinese empire and turned to Muslims from important Silk Road cities like Bukhara and Samarkand in Central Asia for help. They recruited and forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of Central Asians and Persians to help them govern

their expanding empire to the Yuan court.

During this time, wealthy officials continued to bring their wives with them, while lower-ranking officials took local Chinese wives.

After Ghengis Khan conquered much of Eurasia in the 12th century, his heirs ruled different parts of the continent, leading to a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity. This allowed cultures to flourish and goods and ideas to travel more freely. It brought the cultural traditions of China and the Muslim world together in new ways.

For about the next 300 years – during the Ming Dynasty – Muslims continued to be influential in government.

Zheng He, the admiral who led Chinese fleets on exploratory and diplomatic journeys through Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, was a Muslim eunuch. His familiarity with Arabic – the lingua franca of the Indian Ocean – and his knowledge of the social graces associated with Islam made him an ideal choice to lead the journeys.

PERSECUTION DURING CULTURAL REVOLUTION

In the 18th century, the relationship between Muslims and the state in China began to change. This period witnessed some violent clashes as the state tried to exert more direct control over territories where the majority of Muslims lived.

The Qing Dynasty, which lasted from 1644 through 1911, marked a period of unprecedented population growth and territorial expansion. During this period, Muslim populations clashed with the Qing rulers and revolted on numerous occasions.

Many revolts were staged as opposition to the influx of migrants, who were coming from the overpopulated regions of China to regions that had not previously been under direct Chinese control. These revolts were violently suppressed by the state, ending a long period of accommodation for Muslims in China.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, ethnographers and anthropologists

divided the people who lived within the borders of the new state into 56 ethnic groups based on relatively ambiguous criteria, such as shared language, territory, history and traditions.

Of these groups, 10 are now recognized as Muslim minorities. They are, in descending order based on the sized of their populations: Hui, Uighur, Kazakh, Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Bonan and finally Tatar, who currently number around 5,000.

In the first years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Muslims enjoyed relative religious freedom. However, during the chaotic early years of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1969, mosques were defaced, copies of the Quran were destroyed, Muslims were prohibited from going on the religious pilgrimage of hajj and expressions of all religious beliefs were banned by the Communist Red Guards.

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the Communists adopted more relaxed policies towards Muslim communities.

SILENCE OF WORLD LEADERS

But tensions have been escalating since 9/11, and reached a boiling point in 2009 when there were ethnic riots between the Uighurs and Han Chinese throughout Xinjiang province. Since then, the Chinese state has slowly and quietly increased restrictions on the movement and culture of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities.

In the past 18 months, these tensions have been exacerbated by the unlawful incarceration of Muslims living in the Uighur region of western China. A campaign that started with the Uighurs is now being extended to Kazakhs and others. There is also mounting evidence that the Hui are facing increasing restrictions.

Our recent work also shows that Islamophobia in the West is further abetting the Islamophobia in China, with global leaders willing to stay silent about the treatment of Muslims.

[the writer is Assistant Professor of History, University of Arkansas]

Recycling: poorer countries can now refuse plastic waste imports – this could make the system fairer

JEN ALLAN
theconversation.com

The world generated 242 million tonnes of plastic waste in 2016 – a figure that's expected to grow by 70% in the next 30 years. But this same plastic is also a commodity that's sold and traded in a global industry that generates US\$200 billion every year.

Exporting plastic waste is one way rich countries dispose of their waste. By selling waste to firms that then send it to countries where recycling costs are cheaper, rich countries can avoid the unpleasant task of finding somewhere at home to dispose of it. Unfortunately, most of this waste is shipped to countries that aren't equipped to properly manage it.

When wealthy countries export their plastic waste to poorer countries with weaker recycling capacity, those plastics are often dumped, eventually polluting the land and sea. But a recent UN decision could help those countries most affected by plastic litter and with the least capacity to manage it. Due to a little-known treaty called the Basel Convention, poorer countries can now say no to the deluge of exported waste.

AN ENDURING INJUSTICE

The Basel Convention was adopted by the UN in 1989 to manage the flow of toxic waste sent from rich

to poor countries. It's cheaper for wealthy countries to relocate their waste to areas with lower costs and oversight, and so opportunities to abuse the system emerge.

Italian waste management firms made headlines in 1988 because they stored hazardous wastes in a Nigerian fishing village, in drums labelled as building materials. For years Canada delayed repatriating waste – including nappies – dumped by a Canadian firm in the Philippines. The refuse has been sitting in the sun there since 2013.

The images of plastic waste piling up on beaches in many developing countries, including on some of the world's most remote islands, prompted an effort led by Norway to use the Basel Convention for its original purpose.

The negotiations held in Geneva over two weeks were intended to bring urgent action to address a complex issue. A few countries, such as Argentina and the US, were more cautious, as exporters of plastic waste themselves. They, like the recycling industry, warned that regulations could make it more difficult to recycle plastic, at a time when much more needs to be recycled. Statements went on for hours as developing countries recounted the plastics littering their lands, seas, beaches and even glaciers.

Norway brought forward a pro-

posal to change how the treaty regulates plastics, by moving many types of plastics from the "non-hazardous" category to a list of wastes "of special concern."

Starting in 2020, this will require developing countries to be informed if these plastics are in a waste shipment. With this information, countries can give, or revoke, their "prior informed consent". For the first time, developing countries can refuse a shipment of plastics with the backing of international law.

MAKING THE RECYCLING INDUSTRY FAIRER

This decision only applies to low-value, hard-to-recycle plastics. Think of food packaging or single-use water bottles: the plastics are soiled or mixed together (the lid, label, and bottle are different types of plastic), making them difficult to recycle. Most recyclers don't want these plastics, which don't generate a profit and increasingly are dumped in the landfills of poor countries.

Research shows how cheap plastics leach persistent organic pollutants into the environment – a particularly nasty group of chemicals that are toxic, travel through air and water over long distances, accumulate in animal tissue (including humans), and last a long time. More than 233 marine species have ingested plastic and litter has reached the deepest

parts of the ocean.

The trade in global plastics is one driver of this problem, so giving developing countries the right to know what is entering their country and to refuse it is an appropriate solution to waste dumping.

China, previously the world's largest importer of plastics for recycling, banned the import of cheap and contaminated plastics in 2018, displacing plastic waste to other countries. China's neighbours, such as Indonesia, and Malaysia, shouldered a heavier burden, particularly since countries like the UK continue to export over 600,000 tonnes of plastic a year.

Rich countries tend to produce the most plastic waste in the world per person and have better systems for managing it. If cheap and easy routes for dumping plastics close, wealthier countries may have to find ways to compel recycling companies to deal with their cheap plastics domestically.

This agreement is only the start, but it could empower poorer countries to refuse the deluge of plastics that ultimately end up lingering on their shores. In time, it may help redress some of the burning injustices in the global waste trade.

[the writer is Lecturer in Environmental Politics, Cardiff University]

Assam Rifles battalion to be placed in J&K as NDRF

NEW DELHI, MAY 26 (PTI): The Assam Rifles, a central paramilitary force that guards India's border with Myanmar, will soon have presence in Jammu and Kashmir as the government has approved conversion and placement of one of its battalion into the NDRF.

A recent government order issued by the Union Home Ministry said the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) will have four new battalions that will be based in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and the national capital region.

The order, accessed by PTI, said the new battalions of the NDRF will be drawn from the Assam Rifles (location in J-K), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand) and the Border Security Force (Delhi-NCR region).

The Assam Rifles draws its strength of officers from the Army and functions under the command of the Union Home



Ministry. Established in 1835 as a militia called the 'Cachar Levy', the paramilitary force today has a strength of about 47,000 personnel.

"The process of acquiring land and operationalising the new NDRF battalions is now on," a senior official said.

The Narendra Modi government had approved raising of the four

new NDRF battalions in August last year in order to strengthen India's disaster response set up at an estimated cost of Rs 637 crore.

The aim for creation and placement of these new units is to reduce the response time, keeping in view the vast geographical area of the country, the government had said.

An NDRF battalion

comprises a little over 1,000 personnel. Its battalions are raised from various Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and the parent force is responsible for feeding the ranks and personnel, who are sent on a time-bound deputation to the NDRF.

The NDRF has 12 operational battalions at present. It is a specialised force that was raised in

2006 for specific tasks of relief and rescue during natural and man-made disasters or threatening situations.

The operational battalions are located in Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, NCR (Ghaziabad), Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

Switzerland steps up process to share banking info; 11 Indians get notices in a day

New Delhi/Berne, May 26 (PTI): As Switzerland strives hard to re-establish its global financial centre position after clamping down on secrecy walls of its banks, there has been a significant surge in the number of cases where it has initiated process to share information on Indians with Swiss bank accounts and shot off letters to about a dozen such individuals last week itself. Since March, at least 25 notices have been issued by the Swiss authorities to Indian clients of Switzerland-based banks in which they have been given one last chance to appeal against sharing of their details with India.

An analysis of the notices issued by the Federal Tax Administration, Switzerland government's nodal department for sharing of information on foreign clients of Swiss banks, shows that the Swiss government has stepped up its efforts in sharing such details with a number of countries in the recent months, but the surge in India-related cases is noticeable in the past few weeks. At least 11 such notices were issued to Indian nationals on May 21 itself, though the gazette notifications of the Swiss government have redacted full names for several of them while making public only their initials besides the nationality and the dates of birth.

The two Indians whose names have been mentioned in full are Krishna Bhagwan Ramchand and Kalpesh Harshad Kinariwala (born in May 1949) and Kalpesh Harshad Kinariwala (born in September 1972). However, no further details have been disclosed about them as well.

The Indian nationals with redacted names include Mrs A S B K (born November 24, 1944), Mr A B K I (born July 9, 1944), Mrs P A S (born

November 2, 1983), Mrs R A S (born November 22, 1973), Mr A P S (born November 27, 1944), Mrs A D S (born August 14, 1949), Mr M L A (born May 20, 1935), Mr N M A (born February 21, 1968) and Mr M M A (June 27, 1973).

In these notices, the individuals or their authorised representatives have been asked to file their appeals, if any, within 30 days with necessary documentary proof to support their case against providing 'administrative assistance' to India, which broadly means sharing of their banking and other financial details.

Earlier this month on May 7, a similar notice was issued to another Indian national, Ratan Singh Chowdhury, giving an option to appeal within ten days, while another Indian national with redacted name, Mr R P N, was given 30 days on May 14. In April also, some such notices were issued including to one Mrs J N V, as also to Mr Kuldeep Singh Dhingra and Anil Bhardwaj, among others.

Several of these names are said to have figured in the leaked HSBC lists and Panama papers which allegedly contained names of Indians with Swiss bank accounts and are being probed by Indian authorities in alleged black money cases.

In case of Krishna Bhagwan Ramchand and Kalpesh Harshad Kinariwala, such notices were issued in April as well and fresh notices have been served to them presumably after their responses to the earlier notices.

Before that in March, Switzerland had issued such notices to Mumbai-based Geodesic Ltd and its three directors (Prashant Sharad Mulekar, Pankaj Kumar Onkar Srivastava and Kiran Kulkarni), as also

to Chennai-based Aadhi Enterprises Pvt Ltd, who are being probed by the Indian authorities for alleged money laundering and other financial irregularities. Switzerland was widely known as an alleged safe haven for black money before it bowed down before the global pressure and agreed to bring down the famed secrecy walls that had historically surrounded the Swiss banks, provided the requesting country gave proof for financial irregularities done by the concerned person or the company.

Along with several other countries, India has also been making use of this change in the stance of Switzerland by seeking details of suspected black money hoarders in Swiss banks and it has already got back information in a large number of cases in the last few years.

As per the Swiss law, the FTA decision can be appealed within 30 days (in some cases 10 days), provided the appellant is able to give sufficient ground to challenge it.

While the Swiss government documents did not disclose specific details related to the information and assistance sought by the Indian authorities regarding these Indian companies and individuals, such an 'administrative assistance' follows submission of proof about financial and tax-related wrongdoings and typically involves sharing of information relating to bank account details and other financial data.

While Switzerland has always denied being a safe haven for black money, it has begun sharing details for last few years with several countries including India after submission of evidence about financial and tax-related wrongdoings of the clients of Swiss banks.

Low-intensity quake hits WB's Bankura district



KOLKATA, MAY 26 (PTI): A low-intensity earthquake, measuring 4.8 on the Richter Scale, shook West Bengal's Bankura district and its nearby areas on Sunday, the Met department said here.

A tweet by the India Meteorological Department said the quake hit Bankura at 10.39 am.

Official sources in Jharkhand maintained that tremors were also felt in the Santhal Parga-

na region of the neighbouring state, mainly in Dumka, Rajmahal and Deoghar districts.

There was no report of any casualty or damage to property so far from anywhere, according to reports.

The epicentre of the earthquake in Bankura was 10 km below the surface of Earth at latitude 23.3 degrees north and longitude 86.9 degrees east.

Post Lok Sabha polls, Bihar Mahagathbandhan faces uphill task in 2020 assembly election

PATNA, MAY 26 (PTI): A detailed analysis of the Lok Sabha election results in Bihar suggests that the NDA, which obliterated the opposition in the state winning all but one out of the 40 seats, is poised to retain power in the assembly polls due next year.

Out of the 243 assembly segments in the state, the RJD led in eight, the Congress in four, the RLSP in one and the HAM in two. Besides these constituents of the Mahagathbandhan, Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM and the CPI(ML) established lead in two and one assembly segments respectively.

In 2015 assembly polls, the RJD had won 80 seats and its old ally the Congress had 28 MLAs. The two parties had then sought to broaden the social base of the combine by forging an alliance with the RLSP headed by Koeri leader Upendra Kushwaha, HAM led by Jitan Ram Manjhi who is a Musahar (SC) and Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP) founded by Mukesh Sahni who belongs to the sizeable Nishad community.

Facing an election for the first time without its charismatic founding president Lalu Prasad who is serving sentences in fodder scam cases the RJD drew a blank in the Lok Sabha polls putting up the worst-ever performance since the party's inception in 1997.

RJD sources said the party's attempt to brazen out the numerous charges of corruption against Prasad and his family and its continued patronage of persons with criminal antecedents found few takers.

In Siwan and Nawada, where wives of RJD leaders convicted in cas-

es like murder and rape were in the fray. They lost by heavy margins to NDA nominees who were making their Lok Sabha debut.

The party also scored a self-goal in Jahanabad, which it lost by about 1,000 votes, a margin less than the number of votes polled by a rebel candidate who was said to enjoy patronage of Prasad's elder son Tej Pratap Yadav.

The Congress had given tickets to four sitting Bihar MPs of the previous Lok Sabha but it proved to be of little help. Actor-turned-politician and two term MP from Patna Sahib Shatrughan Sinha failed to retain the prestigious seat for the party he had joined recently. Tariq Anwar put up a fight in Katihar but it was not good enough. Ranjeet Ranjan, quite popular in Supaul, lost to a less-fancied JD(U) candidate.

Kirti Azad, who represented Darbhanga, was packed off to Dhanbad in the adjoining Jharkhand with no better result.

The only saving grace for the Congress was Kishanganj, which the party retained with a sitting MLA as candidate in place of the incumbent MP who had died a few months ago. The party defeated the JD(U), leading in three of the six assembly segments. The AIMIM, which finished third, and yet polled close to three lakh votes, led in two.

The Congress also led by a slender margin in Mokama falling under Munger Lok Sabha seat which it lost to the JD(U) by over 1.5 lakh votes.

With three MPs in the previous Lok Sabha, The RLSP had walked out of the NDA when its demand for adequate num-

ber of seats was not met. In the Grand Alliance, the party headed by former Union minister Upendra Kushwaha was offered five seats and it lost all of them including Ujiyarpur and Karakat from where Kushwaha himself contested.

The party led in only two assembly segments of Karkat, which Kushwaha had won in 2014.

HAM had fought three seats but it led in only two assembly segments of Aurangabad. In the remaining two seats, including Gaya from where party chief Jitan Manjhi was himself in the fray, the party trailed in all assembly segments.

The VIP sank without a trace, losing all the three seats it had fought by heavy margins and trailing in all the assembly segments falling under these.

Also, the NDA's victory margin in 23 seats was in excess of two lakh votes and in four of these it was as high as over four lakhs.

When BJP chief Amit Shah had last year agreed to a formula in which the party and its ally JD(U) were to contest 17 seats each, it was a major climb-down by the saffron party, which had won 22 seats in 2014 as against only two bagged by JD(U), which had then contested separately.

The results, however, justify the trust reposed by Shah in the alliance as it ended up obliterating the opposition in the state.

With assembly polls due in about a year and a half, the opposition camp is seeking solace from the fact that it will be a different cup of tea where issues like national security, made a poll plank by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will find little resonance.

MP woman braves oxygen cylinder snag, scales Mt Everest



BHOPAL, MAY 26 (PTI): Bhawna Dehariya from Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh became the first woman from the state to scale Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, but not before a leaking oxygen cylinder regulator gave her a mighty scare.

The 27-year-old, hailing from Tamia in Chhindwara and pursuing her Masters in Physical Education from Bhopal, completed the feat on May 22.

Speaking about the life-threatening hiccup that took place as she approached the summit, Dehariya told PTI, "The oxygen cylinder's regulator started leaking. I had to keep a thumb on the leak for about 90 min-

utes to survive. After the leak was plugged by my help accompanying me, I resumed the trek, scaled the peak and unfurled the Tricolour."

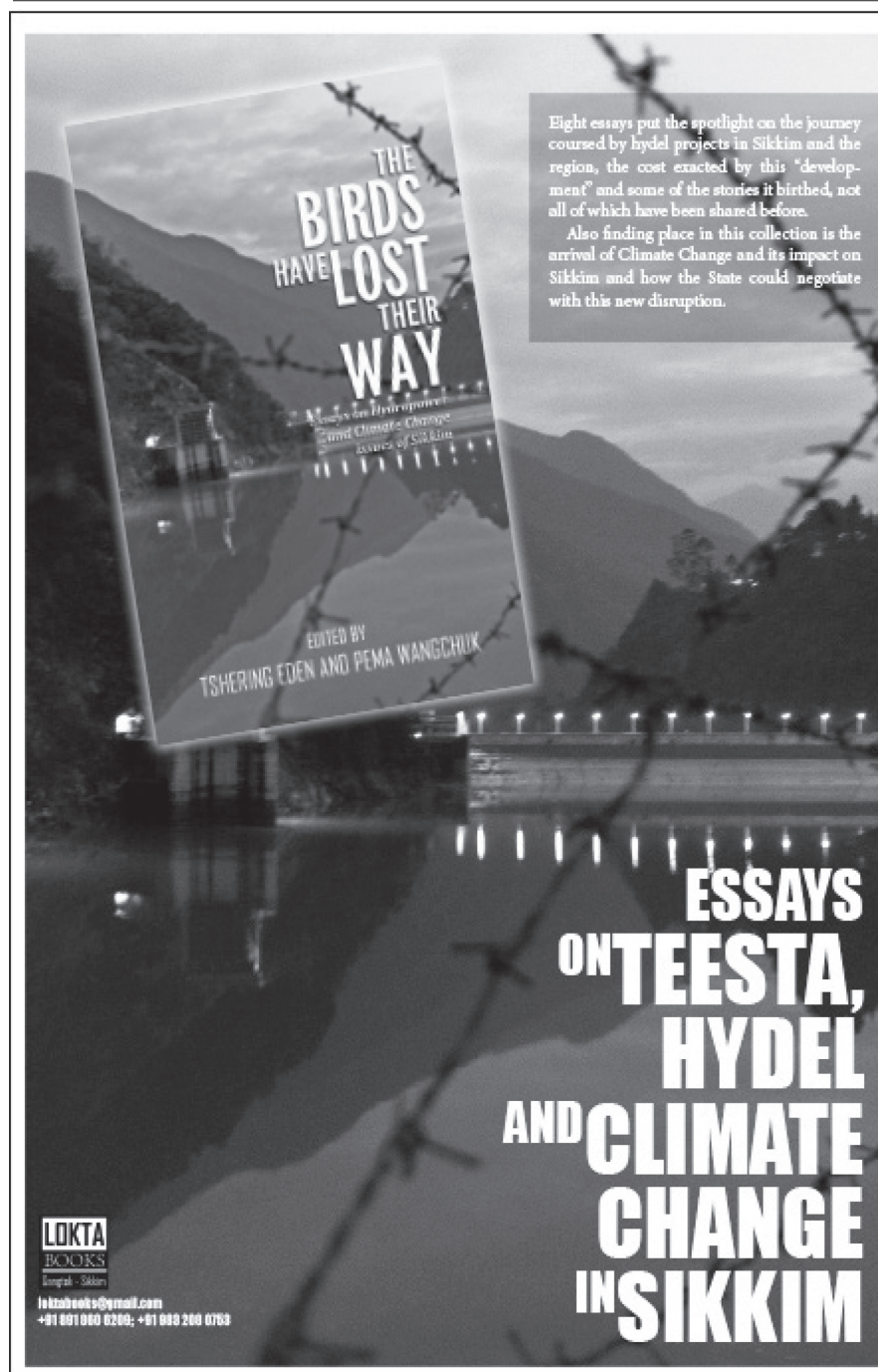
She was speaking over phone from Kathmandu in Nepal, from where she will fly to Delhi and then on to MP.

She expressed gratitude at the Rs 27 lakh support she received from MP chief minister Kamal Nath.

"If Nath ji had not helped me, I could not have conquered Mt Everest. I am also grateful to my family for their untiring support," she said.

Her expedition leader, Dawa Steven Sherpa, confirmed that Dehariya had scaled the world's highest mountain peak.

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Valencia stun deflated Barcelona to win Copa del Rey

SEVILLE, MAY 26 (AFP): Barcelona wanted a trophy to ease their Champions League heartache but instead fell to another shock defeat as Valencia pulled off a thrilling 2-1 victory on Saturday to win the Copa del Rey.

Chasing a record fifth consecutive triumph, Barca were undone by a relentless and gutsy Valencia side, who hung on after Lionel Messi pulled a goal back to set up a dramatic finish in Seville.

By then, Valencia were already two up, Kevin Gameiro and Rodrigo scoring twice in 13 frantic first-half minutes, after the latter spurned a golden early chance that could have spared them a nerve-shredding last 17 minutes. Messi drove the comeback effort and Goncalo Guedes twice should have wrapped it up for Valencia, missing a one-on-one and then an open goal before the final whistle sparked pandemonium.

Valencia's coach Marcelino, who might have been sacked when his team were four points off relegation in January, raced around the pitch in a frenzy. Barcelona's players sank to their knees.

"We always had faith," said Marcelino.

"Beating Barcelona to win the cup is very special. We deserved to win."

Messi admitted on Friday his team had still not recovered from the "hard blow" suffered against Liverpool and certainly they seemed too easily disheartened here, finding their fight only once it was too late.

Messi also threw his support behind Barce-



lona's coach Ernesto Valverde but it remains to be seen whether the backing of the board remains after two dreadful defeats have now spoiled such a brilliant La Liga success.

"I'm fine," Valverde said. "When a coach loses you want to go again, to fight to overcome the next challenge. I know losing for this club is hard."

"I do not think it's the coach's fault," said president Josep Maria Bartomeu.

"I think he has done a great job," added Gerard Pique. "But it does not depend on us."

They came here as favourites, but only just, their 1,457 consecutive days as Copa del Rey champions under threat, from their own sense of deflation, key players out injured and Valencia's recent surge.

If Barca's season all but ended three weeks

ago, Valencia's arguably found life a few days later, as they moved into the top four for the first time and then held on to qualify for the Champions League. - 'HISTORY MADE' -

Winning their first trophy since 2008, in the club's centenary year, completes a remarkable comeback campaign that, after 15 games, had them languishing in 15th.

"We have made history," said captain Dani Parejo. Gameiro added: "In the difficult moments we stayed close. I don't have the words to describe it."

Some saw a metaphor in Barcelona's pre-match tifo, spelling out 'All Together' splitting down the middle, while there were key absentees from their starting line-up too, Marc-Andre ter Stegen, Luis Suarez and Ousmane Dembele all injured. Valencia should have been ahead within five minutes, Clement

Lenglet's error sending Rodrigo clear but his finish was brilliantly scooped off the line by the recovering Gerard Pique.

Barca, with Sergio Busquets in the centre of a back three, settled but lacked zip and in the 23rd minute they were behind. Jose Gaya scuttled in behind Nelson Semedo and his pull-back wrong-footed everyone except Gameiro, who fired in.

Semedo had been beaten down the left and soon after Jordi Alba was outrun down the right, by Carlos Soler, whose cross needed only to be nodded down and in by Rodrigo for number two.

Barcelona stirred before the break. Ivan Rakitic volleyed and then headed wide, before Messi registered their first shot on target in the 43rd minute. Malcom and Arturo Vidal came on for Semedo and Arthur during the interval, as

Barca turned the screw. Messi might have turned the match but after wriggling through his sumptuous flick towards the far corner brushed the post. Pique fired wide as Valencia dropped deeper. Finally, Messi broke through, the post this time his friend after Lenglet's header struck the woodwork and landed kindly at his feet.

There were 17 minutes to survive and with six left, Messi headed over. The Valencia fans roared and then again when Messi was dispossessed by a sliding challenge.

Messi drove from the edge of the area but it was blocked and Guedes twice should have wrapped it up, first missing a one-on-one and then an open goal when Jasper Cillessen had gone up for a corner. He was perhaps as relieved as anyone when the whistle blew.

Boos 'water off a duck's back' for Smith

SOUTHAMPTON, MAY 26 (PTI): Steve Smith has shrugged off the booing by the Hampshire crowd as "white noise" and "water off a duck's back" after his century guided Australia to a 12-run win over England in a warm-up match.

Smith made 116 in his first appearance against England since a year-long ban for ball-tampering as Australia beat the World Cup hosts and favourites here Saturday.

Both Smith and David Warner, also coming off a one-year suspension for ball-tampering, were booed loudly by large sections of the crowd when they came out to bat and when they were dismissed, but Smith was also jeered when he reached fifty and then when he completed a sprightly hundred.

"Everyone's entitled to their opinion and how they want to treat people," Smith told reporters after a 102-ball innings featuring eight fours and three sixes.

"It's water off a duck's back and it doesn't bother me. I try to black it out.

"They call it 'white noise'. When I'm out in the middle I don't pay attention to the crowd or what they're saying," he added after top-scoring in a total of 297 for nine. Former captain Smith



said both he and Warner, his deputy in the infamous Cape Town Test last year, had been welcomed back warmly by their teammates.

"It's like we never left in a way. I know I've got the support of my teammates up on the balcony and for me that's the most important thing.

"If I can make them proud out in the middle and make Australians proud as much as I can then that's my job."

On his form he added, "I'm not reading too much into it, they are just practice games. "Hope-

fully I can keep this form for the real stuff. But I am feeling good, composed and calm at the crease. Any time you make a hundred for Australia it's a real honour." England stand-in skipper Jos Buttler, who was also doing the wicket-keeping duty while Smith creamed the English attack, said: "He's the same player. He was a class player 12 months ago and he still is.

"He hasn't forgotten. He's one of the world's best batsmen," added Buttler, leading England in place of injured regular skipper Eoin Morgan.

Old warhorse Malinga keeps Sri Lanka dreaming



COLOMBO, MAY 26 (AFP): Lasith Malinga will be one of the World Cup's oldest players but the Sri Lanka paceman shows no signs of slowing down as he bids to prove his critics wrong.

Malinga was stripped of the Sri Lanka one-day international captaincy in April after losing all eight matches in a troubled reign that lasted just four months.

Sri Lanka's selectors, led by former fast bowler Ashantha de Mel, said Malinga was unable to unite the team, while he was also accused of falling out with other senior players.

That hammer blow reportedly prompted Malinga to consider retirement, but he opted to stay on after being named in the World Cup squad.

The 35-year-old recently reminded the world of his enduring qualities when he claimed 16 wickets for the Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League.

He produced a sensational final over in the Twenty20 final against Chennai Super Kings to

hand Mumbai a record fourth IPL title.

Malinga frequently hits speeds of over 86 miles-per-hour (138 kph), while his devastating slower balls were in evidence during the IPL, a welcome sign for embattled Sri Lanka ahead of the World Cup in England and Wales, which starts on May 30.

With several inexperienced bowlers in Sri Lanka's squad, Malinga, with 322 ODI wickets to his name, is expected to be the cutting edge to the team's attack.

Once he got over the shock of losing the captaincy, Malinga's appetite for the game returned as he shuttled between Sri Lanka and India to play in the domestic tournament and fulfil his IPL commitments.

Malinga was Sri Lanka's captain when they won the 2014 World T20 title with a host of stalwarts by his side including Mahela Jayawardene, Kumar Sangakkara and Tillakaratne Dilshan.

But following the retirement of Sri Lanka's big guns, a new crop of players made their way into the side, a group

selector De Mel believes did not fully back the quick bowler as skipper.

New captain Dimuth Karunaratne's first major goal will be to bring a hurting Malinga back into the fold to ensure the team get the best out of the old warhorse.

Some of Malinga's most memorable performances have come at the World Cup, where the bowler frequently raises his game.

Malinga first burst into global prominence after claiming four wickets in four balls against South Africa at the 2007 World Cup.

In the 2011 edition, Malinga grabbed another hat-trick against Kenya, and went on to bowl a memorable new-ball spell in the final against India, when he grabbed the prized scalps of Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag in quick succession.

If Sri Lanka are to have any chance of repeating their 1996 magic, when they won the tournament under Arjuna Ranatunga, they need Malinga fit and firing in what is likely to be his final World Cup.

2 held in Dabholkar murder case sent to CBI custody till Jun 1

PUNE, MAY 26 (PTI): A lawyer and a right-wing activist arrested for allegedly helping in destruction of evidence in the Narendra Dabholkar murder case were sent to CBI custody till June 1 by a Pune court on Sunday.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested lawyer Sanjeev Punalekar and Vikram Bhave, a member of the Sanatan Sanstha, in Mumbai on Saturday.

They were produced before the Pune-based court of Additional Sessions Judge S N Sonawane, who remanded them to the agency's custody till June 1 after hearing the arguments of the prosecution and the defence.

Dabholkar, an anti-superstition activist, was shot dead while he was out on morning walk in Pune on August 20, 2013.

A preliminary probe has revealed that Punalekar and Bhave had links with the two alleged killers of Dabholkar and had also helped in destruction of evidence, apart from providing other assistance.

The CBI told the court on Sunday that Punalekar had allegedly asked Sharad Kalaskar, one of the shooters arrested in the case, to destroy the weapons used in the killing of Dabholkar and journal-

ist Gauri Lankesh.

It also said Bhave had allegedly assisted the shooters and conducted a reconnaissance of the spot, where Dabholkar was shot at.

Bhave, a convict in the 2008 Gadkari Rangayatan blast case, was out on bail.

After his release on bail, he had penned a book in Marathi, titled "Malegaon Sphotamagil Aadrushya Haat" (The invisible hand behind the Malegaon blast).

It is suspected that it was Bhave who had identified Dabholkar to the shooters, a CBI official said on Saturday.

So far, six people, including Sanatan Sanstha member and ENT surgeon Virendrasinh Tawde, Sachin Andure and Kalaskar, have been arrested by the CBI in the case. The central agency had earlier claimed that Tawde was the "mastermind" of the conspiracy to kill Dabholkar and veteran Communist Party of India (CPI) leader and rationalist Govind Pansare.

Pansare was killed in Kolhapur, Maharashtra in February, 2015.

The CBI had claimed that Andure and Kalaskar had shot Dabholkar dead. The agency has also arrested Rajesh Bangera, Amol Kale and Amit Digvekar in connection with the alleged conspiracy.

We will take some confidence out of win against India: Boult

London, May 26 (PTI): Acknowledging the swing on offer during their warm-up game against India, fast bowler Trent Boult says the convincing win over one of the favourites gives them confidence heading into the World Cup.

Boult was the wreck-in-chief, returning impressive figures of 4/33 to bowl out India for 179 in under 40 overs at the Kennington Oval.

"Nice to see it swinging around a little bit," Boult told ICC after the game here Saturday.

"I'd love to expect that everywhere, some

good wickets around the country. It's going to be a good challenge, but us as a bowling unit, we're definitely looking forward to it, but we'll take some confidence out of today. "But yeah, the biggest challenge will be when it's not swinging and not nipping around a little bit. Then how do we take wickets? So we'll look at that."

With batsmen dominating one-day internationals in England in recent years, there is a belief that this World Cup could see imposing totals being notched on regular basis. "We know what early wickets does to the

batting side," Boult said. "We want to be as aggressive as we can to try and get into any team's batting order, so we know if we get two or three wickets at the top of the order, it puts a lot of pressure on the opposition. That is the basic plan, and for me, it's about pitching the ball up and swinging the ball around as much as it can."

Boult was the joint leading wicket-taker in the 2015 edition with 22 scalps from nine matches. The conditions have become more challenging since then, but he isn't intimidated by predictions of 500-plus scores.

England sweat on Wood's World Cup fitness

SOUTHAMPTON, MAY 26 (AFP): England fast bowler Mark Wood was left with a nervous wait after his World Cup chances were thrown into doubt by a foot injury that saw him leave the field during a warm-up defeat by Australia in Southampton on Saturday.

The Durham quick had managed just 3.1 overs in his opening spell when he abandoned his run-up after feeling pain in his left foot.

Wood's injury-plagued career has been blighted by a history of repeated ankle problems but he did give England some cause for optimism by running off to the pavilion, although the fact he then went to hospi-

tal for a scan and took no further part in an eventual 12-run defeat was concerning. "We'll see how it turns out in the morning. It can be a worry for him," said England stand-in captain Jos Buttler.

"He's worked really hard and it's something he's battled a bit which is a frustration for him. He puts in all the work, the medical staff are great with him, and I'm sure he's in the best hands.

"We hope for the best for him." This was just Wood's second appearance of the season and his latest injury was a reminder that World Cup hosts and favourites England may have to call-up

left-arm paceman David Willey as a replacement before the lengthy event is over. "Unfortunately in professional sport things like this happen," said Buttler, deputising as skipper for the injured Eoin Morgan.

"Around a World Cup everything is heightened because you want everyone to be fit and firing. We'll go through the six weeks and we'll have niggles in our team but so will other teams. It's just the nature of the game.

Final votes cast as Europe chooses future course

BRUSSELS, MAY 26 (AFP): Tens of millions of Europeans will vote Sunday as 21 countries choose their representatives in a battle between the nationalist right and pro-EU forces to chart a course for the bloc.

Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania and Cyprus were the first to open their polling stations at 0400 GMT and France, Germany, Italy and the rest followed over the next two or three hours.

Seven EU member states had already voted, but no official results can be published until rest of the union has taken part. The European Parliament will give an estimate at 1815 GMT and provisional results will begin to emerge from 2100 GMT.

Euro-sceptic parties opposed to the project of ever closer union hope to capture as many as a third of the seats in the 751-member Strasbourg assembly, disrupting the pro-integra-

tion consensus.

The far-right parties of Italian deputy PM Matteo Salvini and France's Marine Le Pen will lead this charge, and anti-EU ranks will be swelled by the Brexit Party of British populist Nigel Farage.

France's President Emmanuel Macron has taken it upon himself to act as figurehead for the centrist and liberal parties hoping to shut the nationalists out of key EU jobs and decision-making.

"Once again Macron is daring us to challenge him. Well let's take him at his word: On May 26, we'll challenge him in the voting booth," Le Pen told a rally in France on Friday.

Meanwhile, the mainstream parties are vying between themselves for influence over the choice of a new generation of top European officials, including the powerful president of the European Commission.

And Brussels insiders are closely following



the turnout figures, fearing that another drop in participation will undermine the credibility of the EU parliament as it seeks to establish its authority.

Britain and the Netherlands were first to vote, on Thursday, followed by Ireland and the Czech

Republic on Friday with Slovakia, Malta and Latvia on Saturday, leaving the bulk of the 400 million eligible voters to join in on Sunday.

At the last EU election in 2014, Slovakia had the lowest turnout of any country, at less than 14 percent, and centrist

president Andrej Kiska is worried that the far-right is poised to profit.

"We see that extremists are mobilising, we see a lot their billboards and activities all over Slovakia. We can't let someone steal Europe from us. It's our Europe," Kiska told reporters.

But the right and the far-right have not had everything their own way so far.

In the Netherlands, the centre-left party of EU vice president Frans Timmermans won the most votes and added two seats to the Socialists and Democrats

(S&D) bloc in parliament, according to exit polls.

A day later, the S&D's centre-right rival the European People's Party (EPP) was buoyed by exit polls suggesting that Prime Minister Leo Varadkar's pro-EU Fine Gael party was in the lead in Ireland.

If Britain leaves the European Union on October 31, the latest deadline for Brexit, then its MEPs will not sit for long in the EU parliament but could still play a role in the scramble to hand out top jobs.

Thursday's votes from Britain won't be counted until after polls close in Italy, but Farage's Brexit Party appears on course to send a large delegation to a parliament it wants to abolish.

Macron is pinning his hopes on his Renaissance movement joining with the liberal ALDE voting bloc and other centrist groups to give impetus to his plans for deeper EU integration.

But much will depend

on who gets the top jobs: the presidencies of the Council and the Commission, the speaker of parliament, the high representative for foreign policy and director of the European Central Bank.

The 29 EU leaders have been invited to a summit dinner on Tuesday to decide how to choose the nominees, and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel is expected to back the lead EPP candidate Manfred Weber for the Commission.

Macron and some other leaders oppose both Weber, a German conservative MEP with no executive experience, and the idea that the parliament should get to choose one of its own for Brussels' prime post.

But whichever way the leaders' council leans, there will be no immediate decision. Instead, Council president Donald Tusk will take note of how the debate went and draft the nominations before a June 21 EU summit.

Chinese Vice President arrives in Pak on three-day official visit

ISLAMABAD, MAY 26 (PTI): Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan arrived in Islamabad Sunday on a three-day official visit to Pakistan during which he will hold talks with President Arif Alvi and Prime Minister Imran Khan on a host of bilateral issues including the smooth development of the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Wang, 70, is a member of the ruling Communist Party of China's (CPC) powerful Politburo Standing Committee. He is also a member of China's Parliament, National People's Congress and the Central Foreign Affairs Commission, a key foreign affairs body of the CPC. He was received at the airport by Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and other high officials. During the visit, Vice President Wang will call on President Alvi and have a separate meeting with Prime Minister Khan.

Pakistan and China will sign MoUs and agreements and inaugurate projects to enhance bilateral cooperation in a broad range of areas, state-run Radio Pakistan reported on Sunday.

His visit underscores the vitality of the time-tested and all-weather relationship between Pakistan and China. Wang's visit will reinforce the strength of bilateral ties and impart further impetus to the growing, multi-faceted cooperation between the two countries in diverse fields, it said.

The visit is in continuation of high-level exchanges between the two countries, which have acquired an increased momentum since Prime Minister Khan's visit to China in November last year and his participation in the 2nd Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in April this year.

Last week, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang in Beijing said that Vice President Wang's visit to Pakistan will further deepen high-level exchanges, friendship and mutual trust between the two countries.

Iran's president says country could hold vote over nuke deal

TEHRAN, MAY 26 (AP): Iran's president has suggested the Islamic Republic could hold a referendum over the country's nuclear program amid the unraveling deal with world powers and heightened tensions with the United States, Iranian media reported Sunday.

According to the official IRNA news agency, President Hassan Rouhani, who was last week publicly chastised by the country's supreme leader, made the suggestion in a meeting with editors of major Iranian news outlets on Saturday evening.

Rouhani said he had previously suggested a referendum to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2004, when he was a senior nuclear negotiator for Iran.

At the time, Khamenei approved of the idea and though there was no referendum, such a vote "can be a solution at any time," Rouhani was quoted as saying.

A referendum could provide political cover for the Iranian government if it chooses to increase its enrichment of uranium, pro-

hibited under the 2015 deal with world powers.

Last year, President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the deal that capped Iran's uranium enrichment activities in return to lifting sanctions. Trump has argued that the deal failed to sufficiently curb Iran's ability to develop nuclear weapons or halt its support for militias throughout the Middle East that the U.S. says destabilize the region, as well as address the issue of Tehran's missiles, which can reach both U.S. regional bases and Israel.

In recent weeks, tensions between Washington and Tehran have escalated over America deploying an aircraft carrier and B-52 bombers to the region over a still-unexplained threat it perceives from Tehran. The U.S. also plans to send 900 additional troops to the 600 already in the Middle East and extending their stay amid the tensions.

Rouhani's remarks could also be seen as a defense of his stance

following the rare public chastising by the supreme leader.

Khamenei last week named Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif relative moderates within Iran's Shiite theocracy who had struck the nuclear deal as failing to implement his orders over the accord, saying it had "numerous ambiguities and structural weaknesses" that could damage Iran.

Earlier last week, Iran said it quadrupled its uranium-enrichment production capacity though Iranian officials made a point to stress that the uranium would be enriched only to the 3.67% limit set under the deal, making it usable for a power plant but far below what's needed for an atomic weapon.

Zarif, the foreign minister, was in the Iraq capital on Sunday for talks with officials. On Saturday, Mohamad Halbousi, the parliament speaker in Iraq, a key Iranian ally, said Baghdad is ready to mediate between the United States and Iran if it is asked to do so.

8 in the fray to replace Theresa May as British PM

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, MAY 26 (PTI): At least eight candidates have joined the fray to battle it out to take over the reins from British Prime Minister Theresa May as the UK's ruling Conservative Party leadership contest gets underway.

May had announced her resignation earlier this week and is set to formally step down as Tory leader and PM on June 7, after a three-day state visit to the UK by US President Donald Trump.

The formal segment of the party leadership contest will then kick off on June 10, but prospective candidates have already begun laying out their bids for the top job.

While hard Brexiteer Boris Johnson, the former foreign secretary, is seen as the frontrunner to succeed May, the contest still remains wide open to at least seven other contenders.

UK environment secretary Michael Gove became the latest Tory MP to announce his intention to challenge Johnson on Sunday.

"I can confirm that I will be putting my name forward to be prime minister of this country. I believe that I'm ready to unite the Conservative and Union Party, ready to deliver Brexit, and ready to lead this great country," he told reporters outside his home in London on Sunday.

Gove's decision is reminiscent of the 2016 leadership race, when he was accused of betraying Johnson by withdrawing his support for him and choosing to contest himself. It led to Johnson withdrawing his bid and Gove went on to lose out in the party ballot, resulting in May being chosen for the post.

Among some of the other contenders eyeing Downing Street include the former Brexit secretary, Dominic Raab, and former Commons leader Andrea Leadsom both of whom confirmed their leadership bids in different Sunday newspapers.

They joined UK foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt, international development secretary

Rory Stewart, health secretary Matt Hancock, and former work and pensions secretary Esther McVey, in the battle for the leadership.

All the leadership contenders must make their position on Brexit clear to their electors the 313 Tory MPs who choose a shortlist and the 124,000 party members who will have the ultimate say on the final two contenders who will go head to head in the race.

A dividing line has emerged between candidates such as Johnson, who say the UK must be ready to leave the EU on 31 October without a deal, and those who oppose a such no-deal Brexit like Stewart who has said that he would not serve in the Cabinet of someone explicitly pushing for a no-deal Brexit.

The Opposition Labour Party also remains divided over the issue, with one section still pushing for a second referendum on the final Brexit deal and the other calling for a common Customs Union with the

European Union (EU).

"I think the responsibility is on all of those opposition parties to come together with us and some Conservative MPs to block a 'no deal' and if that means going back to the people, yes let's go back to the people," said Labour's shadow chancellor John McDonnell.

Meanwhile, May is set to continue as Prime Minister while the leadership contest takes place. Tory MPs have until the week beginning June 10 to put their names forward, and any of them can stand as long as they have the backing of two parliamentary colleagues.

The candidates will then be whittled down by votes of MPs until two remain, and in July a postal ballot of all Tory party members will be held to decide the winner.

The last leader elected by the Tory party membership was David Cameron in 2005.

May was chosen opposed in 2016 after Leadsom withdrew her candidature at the last minute.

Wickremesinghe vows to stop Islamic State terrorism raising its head again in Lanka



MAY 26, COLOMBO (PTI): Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has vowed to take security measures to prevent Islamic State (IS) terrorism raising its head again in the country as he appealed people not to support extremism or religious fanaticism.

The premier after meeting with a group of representatives of civil societies and trade union collective at Temple Trees on Saturday said the security forces and police have been able to apprehend everyone involved in the Easter Sunday attacks that killed 258 people, the Colombo Page reported.

"But this doesn't mean that this is the end of this type of terrorism. We now have to take certain measures of counterterrorism to ensure that the country will not face terrorism again," he cautioned.

He said the government is discussing the counterterrorism measures that are being taken, with the country still on edge after the attacks on three hotels and three churches that were blamed on a local jihadist group, the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ). The Islamic State group has also claimed a role in the attacks.

"We have also had the help of the Muslim community in bringing about many changes and suggestions - Madrasa education bill not allowing sharia universities, ensuring name boards in only the three national languages," the premier said. Civil societies and

trade union representatives inquired the prime minister on the political and institutional responsibilities which have failed to prevent the Easter Sunday attacks and also on the security situation in the country after the attacks.

The premier responded, saying the parliamentary select committee (PSC) has been appointed to investigate the issue. He pointed out that the attacks in Sri Lanka is one instance that the ISIS did not have the support of the local Muslim community for their actions and that should be maintained.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe requested not to drive people to extremism by supporting religious fanaticism and racism.

"We must maintain it that way and not allow extremism to come in, racial and religious hatred to come in, whereby driving some people to the other side," he said.

Christians make up 7.6 per cent and Muslims 10 per cent of mainly Buddhist Sri Lanka.

The prime minister said the government will appoint a resident committee of parliament to look into all the incidents and circumstances surrounding the Easter bomb blasts.

Wickremesinghe said a methodology will be devised preventing Islamic State (IS) terrorism to raise its head again in the country by safeguarding the law and order of the country.

He also said that the Speaker has agreed to

open the proceedings through the media in order for people to gain access to the activities of the PSC.

"Today we have taken all the measure to restore law and order. We've been able to observe Ramadan, We've been able to hold prayers, Sunday Mass, and Vesak Poya has been observed very, very successfully," he said.

He said schools have started and life is getting back to normal. The security forces and police have been able to apprehend everyone involved in the attacks and detained while legal proceedings are yet to be decided by the Attorney General.

"But this doesn't mean that this is the end of this type of terrorism. We now have to take certain measures of counterterrorism to ensure that the country will not face terrorism again," the Premier cautioned adding that the government is discussing the counterterrorism measures that are being taken and being presented.

"We have also had the help of the Muslim community in bringing about many changes and suggestions - Madrasa education bill not allowing sharia universities, ensuring name boards in only the three national languages," the Premier said.

He pointed out that the attacks in Sri Lanka is one instance that the ISIS did not have the support of the local Muslim community for their actions and that should be maintained.

Heroes don't want to work with me as my films are about softer men: Sudhir Mishra



JUSTIN RAO

MUMBAI, MAY 26 (PTI): Filmmaker Sudhir Mishra says male actors don't want to work in his films as his heroes are "frail and vulnerable", a nuance which goes for a toss in formulaic cinema.

Mishra, known for films like "Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi", "Chameli" and "Inkaar", is drawn towards grey characters as he believes they are not only cinematic but also real.

"It's who we are. People are heroes at one point in life. It's very rare for people to be heroes throughout their lives. To expect that is also wrong," Mishra told PTI.

"There is a reason why male heroes don't like my films, don't want to work with me, because my films are about softer, indecisive, confused, men. Men who make mistakes, the vulnerable, frailest one. They're not macho," he added. The director said formulaic cinema only looks at the world in two extremes of good and bad, with no room for anything in between.

"Formulaic cinema harms and dumbs down people. You tend to look at life in black and white. That's very harmful to the society as a whole, looking for this 'perfect' human being who doesn't exist."

In his career of over 30 years starting as the screenwriter for cult classic "Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron" Mishra has often told socially relevant stories, but said there was a time when he bowed down to the pressure of making commercial cinema with his "Calcutta Mail".

"At that time, it was a big cast. Anil Kapoor was a big star, so was Rani Mukerji and Manisha Koirala. But I failed. I still like some things about the film but as a whole it's a failure.

"After that I realised, we are made to direct some films, not every kind of films. I have to understand that and can't strut around calling myself a genius. I can only make a film I can relate to." The director has now taken the digital plunge with his maiden web series "Hostages", produced by Applause Entertainment.

Remake of the 2013 Israeli television series, "Hostages" revolves around the life of a renowned surgeon who is ordered to assassinate the chief minister, in exchange for the survival of her family.

"I like to explore lives of the side characters which the digital world allows me to do. It's a great platform where you can be authentic to your story. This should've come earlier in my life, 20 years ago would've been fun."

For Mishra, though, the struggle to tell his stories hasn't really ended.

"Many years ago when I was in Tokyo International Festival, Akira Kurosawa told us, 'If you're a filmmaker, you must have 20 stories to tell, so that when producer says not this one, you should have another one.'

"You don't always decide which film will get made due to commerce and other factors. But whenever it does, it should still be your film. The struggle never gets over, unless you have so much money that you can do it yourself."

Lay Zhang Is the First K-Pop Star to Wear H&M's New Designer Collaboration

Swedish fashion label H&M has only just announced its new designer collaboration with Paris-based fashion designer Giambattista Valli, but K-pop superstar Lay Zhang has already had the honour of being one of the first people in the world to wear it.

In a set of images released with the announcement, Lay can be seen wearing a full look from the upcoming Giambattista Valli x H&M collection.

This is also the first time that Giambattista Valli has ever done menswear, and Lay definitely does the special collection justice with his fashion-forward take.

"Normally, it's women who adopt pieces from the masculine wardrobe, so I thought my men could just pick things up from the women's wardrobes," Valli told H&M in an interview. "The animal and flower prints, as well as the sequins and the transparencies, are just the same. In fact, pieces from the men's collection can easily be worn by women: I encourage customers to do so, because everything is meant to be exchanged."

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RIPPED AT 50: Jennifer Lopez is once again proving that she's simply unstoppable. The multi-talented artist turns 50 soon and has been hitting the gym and putting the rest of us to shame with her well-toned body that she regularly (and understandably) flaunts on social media. On Saturday, the 49-year-old posted a selfie on Instagram.

Women this age are powerful: Christine Baranski on her 60s

LOS ANGELES, MAY 26 (PTI): "The Good Fight" star Christine Baranski says she is living the "best years" of her career now. The 67-year-old actor currently stars in the spin-off of "The Good Wife", in which she reprises her role as top litigator Diane Lockhart.

Baranski said after years of featuring in the supporting actress capacity to Julianna Margulies' Alicia Florrick on "The Good Wife", she got the opportunity to be the leading lady with the sister show.

"I got the number one position in my career and I was in my 60s. These are the best years of my career. I get offered wonderful theatre roles. I'm finally a leading lady, after all this time. I'm still this strong, authoritative, professional woman, well-educated. "Women this age are powerful, and I love that somehow in this moment in time, I'm playing in a TV that reflects that. It's high time

that women of such authority have their real air time. It's long overdue," she told The Hollywood Reporter's Drama



Actress Roundtable. Baranski said she had years of theatre experience before she made her TV debut at the age of 41. She was cast in a supporting role on the hit series "Cybil", and won an Emmy award.

Asked what inspires her to act, the actor said it was more of an environment effect than a choice. "I don't know

if it's a choice. It just came to me early on. My grandparents were Polish actors in Buffalo at the Polish-American theatre,

so I grew up around flamboyant personalities, and music and expressivity. It seemed like a wonderful playground. I still feel that was," she said.

Baranski's TV credits also include "Frasier" and the recently-concluded "The Big Bang Theory", in which she played Leonard's mother, Dr Beverly Hofstadter.

Moby accuses Natalie Portman of lying, shares photo evidence to support his dating claims

LOS ANGELES, MAY 25 (PTI): Musician Moby has accused Natalie Portman of "lying" after the Oscar-winning actor debunked his claims of dating her. The 53-year-old singer had mentioned about his alleged relationship with the actor in his new memoir "Then It Fell Apart", claiming that he briefly dated her after she "flirted" with him in his dressing room at one of his shows. Portman, 37, rejected his claims and said the musician was instead "creepy" towards her. The actor, however, acknowledged that she met him at a concert.

"I was surprised to hear that he characterized the very short time that I knew him as dating because my recollection is a much older man being creepy with me when I just had graduated high school," she told Harper's Bazaar UK.

On Friday, Moby took to Instagram, where he shared some photos of his with the actor to support his claims, and said "it hurts to be lied about".

"In my memoir Then It Fell Apart I respectfully and honestly describe the brief, innocent, and consensual romantic involvement I had with Natalie Portman in 1999.

"But she's denying that we ever dated, even though in the past she's publicly discussed our involvement, and there's ample photographic evidence that we briefly dated and then were friends (some pictures included in this post). It hurts to be lied about, especially as I've always respected her, and I thought we were friends," he wrote.

The musician said he has received violent messages from Portman's fans which has started to affect him professionally and personally.

"So what should I do? What do you do when people believe lies and accusations and not actual photographs and evidence? I want to take the high road, but I honestly don't know what to do. "It's one thing to be lied about, and entirely another when someone's lies result in physical threats from complete strangers," he added.

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ARIES: Lunge out of your comfort zone on Saturday, Aries! Under a boundary-busting trine between amorous Venus in your adventurous ninth house and transformative Uranus in your sign, love knows no limits. Keep an open mind and see where that leads you. If you're single, you could be attracted to someone radically dissimilar to your usual type or be amenable to a long-distance relationship.

TAURUS: Your sex appeal is off the charts this Saturday as voluptuous Venus in your erotic eighth house hooks up with unpredictable Uranus in your fantasy zone. You won't be able to keep a lid on your blazing sensuality. You could be minding your own business when out of the blue, a sultry lightning bolt strikes. With spontaneous Uranus in the picture, this person could have serious soulmate potential.

GEMINI: If you find yourself at a cross-roads with a key relationship on Saturday, Gemini, don't panic. You'll know which way to turn without a GPS. Diplomatic Venus in your partnership house teams up with game-changer Uranus, bringing on a make-

it-or-break-it moment. Suddenly the fog lifts, and you'll have the clarity to decide whether or not to ink the deal, move in together or whatever next step you're deliberating.

CANCER: Set some new goals and commit to making the kind of positive changes that will give you even more energy and clarity, like swapping out that second coffee with a green juice and renew your yoga pass. On Sunday, vixen Venus heads into Capricorn and charges up your partnership sector until March 1. This could make you think a bit more seriously about your own relationship status.

LEO: Ready for a style upgrade? On Saturday, fashionista Venus in your glamorous fifth house shoots a supportive beam to changemaker Uranus, turning your attention to your overflowing closet. To make room for some seasonal arrivals, you'll need to clear out space—and Uranus says there's no time like the present!

VIRGO: PMystery is the spice of life, and things could get muy picante on Saturday as a zesty trine between amorous Venus and transformative Uranus in your clandestine

eighth house arouses desires you didn't even realize you had. With the love planet lighting up your home zone, Chez Virgo could become the setting for some sexy escapades.

LIBRA: Got a heart brimming with love? Shout it from the rooftops on Saturday, Libra! As devoted Venus in your expressive third house forms a supportive angle with transformative Uranus in your relationship corner, communicating your feelings to that special someone could be a game-changer. Even a simple declaration of your admiration to a friend will deepen the bond.

SCORPIO: Saturday's harmonious angle between fair-minded Venus in your money house and game-changer Uranus in your sixth house of details can help reset your balance sheet. Whether you've been picking up the slack for a coworker (or they for you) or the idea of reciprocity has been lost on a certain entitled friend, take a step toward parity. Surprise someone who's been wildly generous to you by sending flowers or taking them out to lunch just because!

SAGITTARIUS: Expect the unexpected

this Saturday as amorous Venus in your sign buddies up with unpredictable Uranus in your passionate fifth house. If you're inspired to do something completely out of character, just go with it without judging it or worrying about the consequences. Take the initiative with someone new, weeding out the tepid types and drawing in people who can keep up with your sizzling energy! **CAPRICORN:** You're in for a surprise this Saturday, Capricorn—if you can drop your guard enough to let the magic in. A harmonizing trine between affectionate Venus in your unconscious corner and radical Uranus could dredge up some deeply buried emotions—you know, the pesky kind you hate to deal with. While you're great at the stiff-upper-lip thing, people who know you best realize that under that cool exterior lives a super-sensitive soul.

AQUARIUS: Scan local listings and find the most fun and out-there activities. Then grab some fellow adventurers to join your escapades. On the romantic front, if you're single, don't restrict yourself to one person. Life's a buffet, Water Bearer, so fill your plate! Attached? This day

is perfect for that double (or group) date you've been talking about. On Sunday, as creative Venus glides into Capricorn and your quixotic twelfth house until March 1, mix it up! Pull clothes out of your closet that haven't seen daylight in a while. Rock some bling you might normally think is too much. If you've been secretly crushing on someone, take a bold leap and invite THEM out. At least you'll find out if you've got a fighting chance!

PISCES: Before you head out for brunch or a night of dancing, stop and gaze into your metaphorical crystal ball. Saturday's helpful hookup of lucky Venus in your career sector and transformative Uranus in your money house provides the perfect opportunity to hit pause and evaluate some of your loftiest professional ambitions. Are your dreams the same as last year? Do they need some updating? And the million-dollar question: What are you doing to steer things in that direction? Make a list of what you think you can or should do to take a giant leap forward, and schedule a few of these things into your calendar for next week. On Sunday, affable Venus swings into Capricorn and fires up your collaborative eleventh house.