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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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12,000 enter govt service with Rojgar Mela



CM assures safe and secure future to new appointees

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 12 JAN:**

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling today launched the ambitious "One Family, One Job," scheme of the State Government with the State's first Rojgar Mela here at Paljor Stadium. Some 16,000 youth are to receive temporary government employment in phase-1, with the CM announcing today that the services will be regularised after five years, and around 12,000 of them received their appointment letters today.

The CM informed that despite of working even on holidays for the past two months, the department had been able to prepare the appointment orders only for around 12,000 youth thus far and assured that the rest will also receive their appointment letters very soon.

Congratulating the new government servants, the CM stressed that all programmes of the Sikkim Democratic Front government have been youth-centric and future-oriented. The CM was addressing a packed

Paljor Stadium at the programme organised by the Department of Personnel.

The government is committed to provide jobs in different government departments to 20,000 youth who do not have anyone from the family in government service.

Addressing the Opposition allegations that there were temporary jobs, the CM rejected these as irresponsible statements and urged the people to have faith in the government.

He mentioned that the new appointees will

work as adhoc for five years and then every employee will be regularised.

"We have made the rule and norms to regularise everyone after completing service of five years," he said.

It was because of these rules that 4,313 MR, adhoc and WC employees who have completed five years of service will be regularised within this month, he informed.

He appealed to the new appointees to work hard and sincerely and serve the people well.

He informed that

with this programme, the State will now have around one lakh government employees which was the highest proportion in the country and the world.

Without taking any names, the CM criticised the SKM announcement assuring to give free education to two children of drivers in Sikkim. On the same, he stated that the SDF government has already been providing free education to every student of Sikkim.

Meanwhile, the new employees are being ap-

One Family, One Job appointment highlights

- 12000 appointment orders handed out on 12 Jan.
- Highest number (496) of recruits from Dzongu, North Sikkim.
- Remaining appointment orders to be given in next phase.
- Recruitment on ad-hoc basis for 5 years.
- To be regularized after 5 years.
- Scheme to continue under SDF government.
- New recruits appointed in Group C and Group D category.
- For Group D, the qualification required is Class IV and below Class X passed.
- For Group C, all candidates have to be Class X passed and above.

pointed in the Group C and D categories.

For Group D, the qualification required is Class IV and below Class X passed; and for Group C, all candidates have to be Class X passed and above. Earlier, the Chief Min-

ister received a warm welcome from the crowd who cheered him strongly, expressing their joy and happiness at the first-ever public implementation of such a policy.

He began his address by explaining the ben-

efits of the policy and shared that this was a perennial programme for the Sikkimese people to guarantee a safe and secure future for them.

He remarked on some of the evils of

turn to pg02

10pc reservation for economically weak in general category cleared by president

NEW DELHI, JAN 12 (PTI): President Ram Nath Kovind has given his assent to the constitutional provision to provide 10-per cent reservation in government jobs and education to economically backward section in the general category.

A notification issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice said on Saturday that the Constitution (103 Amendment) Act, 2019 has received the assent of the president.

The Act amends Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution, by adding a clause which allows states to make "special provision for the advancement of any economically weaker sections of citizens".

These "special provisions" would relate to "their admission to educational institutions, including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the state, other than the minority educational institutions".

It also makes it clear that reservation would be "in addition to the existing reservations and subject to a maximum of turn to pg02

Have not announced laptop distribution in Janata Mela, HRDD clarifies

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 12 JAN:**

Human Resource Development Department has clarified that it has never made any announcement of distributing laptops during the Janata Mela or asked students to come to Janata Mela with documents as mentioned on certain social media sites.

In a press release is-

sued today, Nodal Officer for Public Relations and Publicity HRDD, Bhim Thatal, has said, "I would like to clarify here that this news is not issued by the HRDD and is not true."

Laptops shall be distributed in the respective schools for which no student has to bring any documents, he has further said.

The schools have maintained the records of students and on the basis of such documents already available in the schools and other institutions, the laptops will be distributed. Token distribution only will be done during the Janata Mela in the notified venues of Janata Mela, the release mentions.

turn to pg02

Sikkim students win big at 44th Eastern India Science Fair 2019



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 12 JAN:**

The student delegation from Sikkim has won big at the 44th Eastern India Science Fair 2019, which was held in Birla Industrial and Technological Muse-

um (BITM), Kolkata under the aegis of National Council of Science Museums, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, an HRDD release informs.

The participating students Adin Palden Sherpa and Kulan Nirola along

with teacher guide Uma Upadhyay from Sir Tashi Namgyal Senior Secondary School bagged the best team model among the 12 states of East and North East Indian States.

The school won a trophy turn to pg02

"CM initiated a necessary discussion on menstruation"

SDF Cheli condemn SKM attempts to misrepresent what was an important and necessary gesture

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 12 JAN:**

Cheli Morcha, the women's front of the Sikkim Democratic Front, today condemned Sikkim Krantikari Morcha for what it sees as intentional distortion of Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's comments on menstruation to not only tarnish his image, but also trivialize women's issues to serve their shallow political interests.

Addressing a press conference here today, SDF's cheli morcha members lashed out against SKM for playing a "political stunt" and spreading made up misrepresentations to mislead and misguide the people of Sikkim.

SKM, it may be recalled, had demanded an apology from the CM for comments he made on menstruation while



speaking about untouchability in the society.

SDF Cheli Morcha general secretary [South], Raj Kumari Thapa, today said that SKM was circulating an incomplete clip of the CM's speech, using it out of context and then adding inferences to it to serve their political ends.

Where the CM was highlighting that the wrong practice of ostracizing menstruating women was still continuing in some areas, SKM has twisted it to suggest that he was mocking it, Ms Thapa said.

It is obvious to anyone who listens to the

"Therefore, I find it surprising to note that some sections of people, who are totally frustrated and who can't even see me smile, found my remark on women derogatory. I want to categorically say that this allegation is completely baseless and unfounded. In the speech I delivered on 5th December, 2018, I was referring to the condition of women in other parts of the country and the world. In no way was I disrespectful towards our women folk. If you watch my entire speech, you will have a clearer picture." - Chief Minister Pawan Chamling in a Facebook post.

complete reference that the CM was trying to generate awareness, she said, while adding that it was condemnable that SKM used this to malign the CM.

East District Cheli Morcha secretary, Ranju

Lamichaney, criticised SKM for distorting facts and stressed that the CM had taken up this issue to encourage everyone to talk and discuss this issue openly and create mass awareness.

turn to pg02

Gangtok on Sunday, 13 Jan

Temp: 10°C/06°C
Forecast: Sunny to partly cloudy with a little rain in the evening, then a shower in spots

Sunrise: 07:01 AM
Sunset: 03:49 PM

Tulsi Gabbard announces 2020 presidential run to take on Trump

WASHINGTON, JAN 12 (PTI): Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu elected to US Congress and a four-time Democratic lawmaker, has said she will run for President in 2020, becoming the latest member of her party to challenge Republican President Donald Trump.

Gabbard, 37, said she will formally announce her candidacy within a week. The Iraq War veteran is the second woman after Senator Elizabeth Warren to enter the presidential race from the Democratic party.

More than 12 Democratic leaders including Indian-origin Senator from California Kamala Harris are expected to announce their White House bid to challenge President Donald Trump in 2020.

Gabbard, a four-time Democratic lawmaker in the US House of Representatives from Hawaii, told CNN Friday: "I have decided to run and will be making a formal announcement within the next week". "There are many reasons I'm offering to serve you as President to ensure every American gets the healthcare they need, to bring about comprehensive immigration reform, to make sure we have clean water and clean air for generations to come, to fix our broken criminal justice system, to end the corrupt influence of special interests in Washington, and so much more.

"But the main reason I'm running has to do with an issue that is central to the rest war and peace. I look forward to talking with you more about this in the coming days. When we stand together, united by our love for each other and for our country, there is no challenge we cannot overcome," she wrote in an email sent to her supporters. In her first tweet after the announcement, Gabbard urged her fellow countrymen to join her campaign.

"When we stand together, united by our love for each other and for our country, there is no challenge we cannot overcome. Will you join me?" she asked on Twitter. "The First Woman President of the US is ready to take the challenge," said her campaign's Twitter handle.

Born in the US territory of American Samoa, Gabbard has become the first-ever Hindu to run for the presidency in the US. Gabbard, who converted to Hinduism early in her life, is highly popular among Indian-Americans. If elected, she would be the youngest-ever and first woman President of the United States. She would also be the first non-Christian and first Hindu to occupy the top post.



Weeklong Adventure Camp begins at IHTCAE

**SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI 12 JAN:**

Weeklong Residential Adventure Camp began at Indian Himalayan Training Centre for Adventure and Eco-Tourism today.

The Camp is organised by

Nehru Yuva Kendra, Namchi in collaboration with Indian Himalayan Training Centre for Adventure and Eco-Tourism (IHTCAE) Chemchey, South Sikkim.

The camp has 25 participants out of which 10 participants are

from South Sikkim, 05 from West Sikkim, 05 from East Sikkim and 05 from North Sikkim.

The Camp was attended by Nehru Yuva Kendra Volunteer, Suyog Pradhan and Accountant, Dilip Sharma, NYC, Namchi.

Now you can whatsapp
Summit TIMES
@ 7001622863 or write
us at letters@gmail.com

Have not announced...

"The students and their parents are requested to be informed though this release that for this token distribution, respective districts and BAC offices will inform the schools and other institutions about who has to be present for the token distribution," it is stated.

The HRDD has requested students and parents not to get carried away by such unauthorized communication published in certain electronic media without any authentication from the concerned Department. The HRDD has its own approved system of issuing press statements and making announcements officially, the release states.

The respective schools will inform the students about the official formalities which would be very simple. Since schools and other institutes of education are on winter vacation at present, the laptops shall be transported to their respective institutes once the institutes open after the winter vacation.

Regarding distribution of post matric scholarship in merit and general categories to 1578 beneficiaries till the financial year 2016, five token cheques shall be distributed in respective Janata Mela venues and the money for all the beneficiaries shall be transferred to their respective accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer method, the release further adds.

Sikkim students win...

along with a scholarship for one-year worth Rs. 6000 for each student. The guide teacher was also presented with Rs. 2000 as cash award, the release mentions.

Apart from that Deorali Girls Senior Secondary and Modern Senior Secondary School also won awards in Special category. The chief guest for the occasion was Consul General of Japan in Kolkata, Masayuki Taga.

The top ten teams selected after competing in the State level Science, Mathematics and Environment Exhibition for Children 2018-19 had participated in the Eastern India Science Fair 2019. The other participating states were West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Jharkhand, Andaman & Nicobar Island and Arunachal Pradesh.

The State team was led by Rajiv Philip [State level Science, Mathematics and Environment Exhibition Coordinator]. The other teachers who accompanied the team are Manju Gurung from Biraspati Parsai Senior Secondary School, Ranipool, Jyoti Chettri from Deorali Girls SSS, Bhim Prasad Sharma Girls SSS and Royan Lama from Mangan SSS.

"CM initiated a...

Ms Lamichaney expressed her gratitude towards the CM for taking up the issue and starting a discussion on it, SKM's misinformation campaign notwithstanding.

Rhenock constituency Cheli Morcha convener, Subhadra Dangal, also thanked the CM for highlighting the pain and ignorance face by women in society.

Likewise, Cheli Morcha general secretary [North], Karma Ongmu Bhutia, said, "We strongly condemn this baseless issue. Opposition parties need to practice healthy and positive politics and have the guts to appreciate the good works of the government."

The speakers also spoke in one voice that the CM has initiated several policy decisions to empower women and ensure gender parity in Sikkim, something that SKM continues to ignore. "Given his track-record, it is unthinkable that the CM will ever insult or mock women," the said.

Bandh in NE states against police firing on people protesting against Citizenship Bill in Tripura

AGARTALA, JAN 12 (PTI): Firing and lathicharge by security forces to quell protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 in West Tripura district earlier this week triggered 'bandh' in large parts of the north-eastern state Saturday.

Agitators in neighbouring Assam and Mizoram too joined the stir against the bill that aims to provide citizenship to illegal migrants of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian extraction from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

On Tuesday, the day the bill was passed in Lok Sabha, seven people were injured in Madhabbari area of the district when police and the paramilitary forces resorted to lathi-charge and fired in the air to disperse protesters.

Normal life was crippled during the dawn-to-dusk bandh on Saturday in Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), which comprises two-thirds of Tripura's territory and is home to tribals who constitute a third of the state's population.

The bandh call was given by five indigenous parties Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT-Tipraha), Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra, Twipra State Party, National Conference of Tripura and Tripura People's Party to protest against the police firing.

Sunil Dev Debbarma, general secretary of Tripura Students Federation, said the seven injured in the lathi charge are admitted to a hospital but said to be stable.

Khumulwng town, the headquarters of the tribal council around 18km from Agartala, remained deserted as shops were closed and markets were closed and vehicles stayed off roads.

Schools, colleges and government offices also remained shut, police said. There was no report of any violence from any part of the council during the bandh, said Subrata Chakraborty, the state additional inspector general (law and order).

"There were road blockades by bandh supporters in at least three districts Kalacherra, S K Para and Neilahabari in Dhalai district, Sachirambari in South Tripura district, Amarapur and Takcherra in Gomati district," Chakraborty said.

The officer said there was no road blockade or demonstration near Khumulwng town and adjacent areas.

When contacted, Radha Charan Debbarma, TTAADC chief executive member and prominent leader of the opposition CPI(M), said the situation in the council area remained peaceful.

"Over 1,800 schools and eight colleges in TTAADC area remained closed and no employee turned up at their offices. Everything, including markets and shops, remained closed and vehicles remained off roads,"

Debbarma said. West Tripura Superintendent of Police Ajit Pratap Singh said the situation in Madhabbari and adjacent areas was normal.

The ban on Internet services and prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure have been lifted, Singh said.

Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb has ordered a magisterial inquiry into how and under what circumstances police opened fire on protesters in Madhabbari. During the bandh, Twipra State Party members wore black badges and took out rallies with black flags in several places, TSP general secretary Sunil Debbarma said.

A motorbike rally with participants carrying black flags was organised in Barkathal in West Tripura district, he said. In the neighbouring Assam, the North East Students Organisation (NESO) observed a 'black day' to protest the firing incident in Tripura.

The All Assam Students Union, a constituent of NESO, hoisted a black flag at its headquarters in Guwahati and student activists protested across the state.

AASU chief advisor Samujjal Bhattacharya, who had gone to Tripura with a team of NESO members, said they were stopped by police when they were proceeding towards Khumulwng Hospital to visit the injured persons after meeting other injured people at G B Pant Hospital.

When contacted, Radha Charan Debbarma, TTAADC chief executive member and prominent leader of the opposition CPI(M), said the situation in the council area remained peaceful.

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12,000 enter govt...

bureaucracy and administration like fiscal profligacy and the sense of entitlement, saying that the system needs to do away with such negative practices and adopt the principle of "Dignity of Labour" urging the public to respect the profession and post, stressing that no designation was too small or too big to contribute efficiently towards good governance and administration

Towards the end of his address, he reminded the people that determined leadership, accountable and answerable bureaucracy and a disciplined and responsible public will ensure the success and security of Sikkim.

He ended his speech, promising that he would continue to serve the people with the same commitment, vigour and enthusiasm.

The Chief Minister distributed token Appointment letters to two individuals each from all constituencies. Around 12,000 youth received their appointment orders today as new recruits in the State Government, with Dzongu in North Sikkim having the highest number at 496.

The Chief Minister assured that those who did not receive their orders today would receive it in the coming days.

Allegations against Nandugaon PHC false, says Incharge

OP CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 12 JAN:

Primary Health Center of Nandugaon had recently come under fire on social media when a local resident had accused the PHC of using expired medicines and not functioning properly.

PHC Incharge, DB Gadaily today informed that on 08 Dec 2018, one Ravi Khaling brought his wife to the PHC, immediately blood test and other basic tests were done and TT vaccination was given.

Since there was shortage of IFA tablet and they only had expired stock so they had asked the patient party to get it from the District hospital or the market.

The patient had been asked to come to the centre on 08 Jan 2019 for the second vaccination. However, the patient

came on 09 Jan at 3 30 p.m. by which time the PHC had closed since the work timing is from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Further, the vaccine had been brought from Jorethang on 08 Jan and since Nandugaon PHC does not have freezer facility for storage of such vaccines, the vaccine had to be returned. Later, when Mr Khaling called him, Mr Gadaily was in Barebottay where a suicide had occurred. Mr Khaling was then asked to come on 10 Jan.

However, on 10 Jan Mr Gadaily had to attend a training on substance abuse at Namchi District Hospital.

Mr. Khaling posted false information on social media defaming the entire staff of Nandugaon PHC and also the Health department of the state,

said Mr Gadaily.

"It was shocking to see such allegations against the PHC on social media by a local youth which is without any investigation and we also regret that such issues are being brought up on social media without proper investigation," said former Zilla Panchayat, CP Rai.

Similarly, TR Pradhan informed that Mr. Khaling had asked him for the cell phone number of the PHC Incharge on 09 Jan and he was also informed that the PHC would be closed as duty hours are from 9 to 3 pm.

"We saw the post on social media about the PHC and we are not clear about Mr Khaling's intentions as the PHC is providing all the facilities and services to the people," said Mr Pradhan.

10pc reservation for...

10 per cent of the total seats in each category".

The bill was passed by Parliament on January 9. "For the purposes of this article and article 16, 'economically weaker sections' shall be such as may be notified by the State from time to time on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage," the notification read.

Amendment of Article 16 stated, "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the classes mentioned in clause (4), in addition to the existing reservation and subject to a maximum of ten per cent of the posts in each category."

While introducing the Bill in the Parliament, Union minister Thaawarchand Gehlot had said that at present, the economically weaker sections of citizens have largely remained excluded from attending the higher educational institutions and public employment on account of their financial incapacity to compete with the persons who are economically more privileged.

According to the objects of the bill, "The directive principles of state policy contained in Article 46 of the Constitution enjoins that the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation."

It said economically weaker sections of citizens were not eligible for the benefit of reservation.

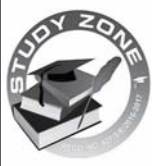
"With a view to fulfil the mandate of Article 46, and to ensure that economically weaker sections of citizens get a fair chance of receiving higher education and participation in employment in the services of the State, it has been decided to amend the Constitution of India," the statement of objects of the bill said.

FLAT AVAILABLE FOR RENT

Fully furnished, 3 Bedroom flat available for rent at Church Road, Near Diesel Power House. Conveniently located by the roadside and a 5-minute walk from M.G. Marg. Suitable for Corporate Office and Guest House.

For further details please

Contact: 9434117687 / 9083826462



ADMISSION OPEN

STUDY ZONE
Mr. Dawchung Lepcha (Chairperson)

OUR COURSE OUTLINES:

1. Winter Crash Courses running successfully for classes X, XII (CBSE, ICSE, ISC)	4. Revision notes for the students to make them much more effective
2. Study Materials provided according to the standards of the board.	5. Doubt clearing Sessions held by respective teachers
3. Mock Test and Pre Board examinations	6. Separate hostel facilities for boys and girls.

OUR COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To give clear concept of the chapters	tively and efficiently
2. To give the students proper guidance to excel in their examinations	4. Greater emphasis would be to excel.
3. To Prepare and deliver answers effectively	5. Last minute suggestion tips as per board requirements

For further details please contact: 9002163719, 7319565616, 7432036651
Address: P.N.G Road, Opp. City press , Gangtok

NHIDCL conducts Cleanliness Drive under “Swachhata Pakhwada”



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 12 JAN:

A cleanliness drive was organized by National Highway & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) under “Swachhata Pakhwada” being observed from 01–15 Jan, 2019 at

Sichey Link Road, Gangtok, East-Sikkim, a press release informs.

During the Swachhata Pakhwada, NHIDCL conducted cleanliness drive at Rangpo-Rorathang in East Sikkim and Namchi-Ravangla in South Sikkim where NHIDCL

projects are going on.

In continuation of Swachhata Pakhwada, NHIDCL aims to renovate one toilet near Sikkim Manipal University and install numerous dustbins along National Highway 10 and Indira Bypass Road. Also, four wall paint-

ings on National Highway 10 with the theme of Swachhata Pakhwada will be undertaken, the release mentions.

The drive was held under the supervision of General Manager (Project), NHIDCL along with the employees.

National Wildlife Board clears ONGC Trishna gas project

AGARTALA, JAN 12 (PTI):

The state-owned ONGC Tripura Asset would soon start extracting natural gas from Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary in Belonia subdivision of Gomati district following National Wildlife Board’s clearance of its proposal, a top official said Saturday.

We have discovered 10-12 gas bearing wells long back in Trishna Wildlife sanctuary. As the gas bearing zones are in the wildlife sanctuary, we needed permission from the National Wildlife Board.

The National Wildlife Board, following recommendations from the state Wildlife Board, has cleared the project on Thursday,” Gautam Kumar Singha Roy, Asset Manager of ONGC Tripura Asset told reporters here.

He said that after the state Wildlife Board sanctioned the project on September 17, the state government had taken up the issue with National Wildlife Board.

He said ONGC has already began laying the pipeline and the entire process would be completed shortly.

The gas extracted

from Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary would be transported to the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Ltd (NEEPCO) owned 100 MW gas-based thermal power project at Monarchak in Sonamura subdivision of Sipahijala district.

The official said that the ONGC Tripura Asset has completed the exploration target for 2018-19 three months ahead of schedule.

“Our exploration target of 19 wells was completed by December itself and six more wells would be explored in the remaining three months of the current financial year,” Singha Roy said adding that ONGC has augmented 10 lakh standard cubic metres gas this year compared to the last year, which was a record.

Singha Roy said that 50 per cent geographical area of the state still remains to be explored and it would be a great achievement if gas is discovered in even 10 per cent area.

He said the Tripura unit of ONGC would provide Rs 25 crore to the state government for carrying out Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Tata Steel literary meet takes off in Bhubaneswar

BHUBANESWAR, JAN 12 (PTI):

The fourth edition of Tata Steel Bhubaneswar Literary Meet (TSBLM) has kicked off here that seeks to promote Odisha’s rich cultural heritage, organizers said. The three-day festival was inaugurated by celebrated poet Jayanta Mahapatra on Friday, in the presence of a host of distinguished personalities including writers, poets, historians and actors.

Besides celebrating and trying to promote the rich cultural heritage of Odisha, the meet also seeks to explore the impact of literature on culture, the organizers said.

Mahapatra, the feted poet and proponent of Odia Literature, who is also the first Indian English poet to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award, spoke about how poetry allows him to understand reality.

Noting that literature is becoming more accessible in digital age, he encouraged budding authors

to draw inspiration from adversities they face and use technology to their advantage to express creativity and imagination.

The inaugural session of the festival saw celebrated historian Sugata Bose discuss Mahatma Gandhi’s relationship with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

Harvard University historian Sugata Bose is Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’s grand nephew. Actress Waheeda Rehman mesmerised the audience as she reminisced her portrayal of iconic literary characters on screen.

“It is wonderful to see the support the Tata Steel Bhubaneswar Literary Meet has received from the people. It is their enthusiasm and love for literature, creative pursuits and debate that motivates and encourages us to make future events even bigger and better,” said Anand Sen, president of TQM (Total Quality Management) and Steel Business, Tata Steel.

BLF tea fetches highest prices in Arunachal Pradesh in Dec

KOLKATA, JAN 12 (PTI):

CTC teas produced by bought leaf factories (BLF) fetched the highest average price in a Arunachal Pradesh district at Rs 191 a kilo during December 2018, according to Tea Board data. Tea Board, however, did not disclose in which of the 16 Arunachal Pradesh districts the prices was highest.

Assam’s highest price was more than West Bengal at Rs 155.51 per kilo as against Rs 124 in the Darjeeling plains, the data showed.


Highest prices in Tamil Nadu and Kerala were lower as compared

to north Indian BLFs, it said. As per Indian Tea Association (ITA) estimates, the proportion of production by BLFs and small growers were in excess of 50 per cent which it felt would cause disruption in the market.

In 2017 (Jan-Dec) small growers and BLFs produced 631 mkg. almost half of total production of 1,348 mkg.

In November 2018, West Bengal’s production was lower at 35.99 mkg as against 37.08 mkg in the same period of the previous year.

Production during November also declined in south India and Assam.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
SOCIAL JUSTICE EMPOWERMENT & WELFARE DEPARTMENT
SAMAJ KALYAN BHAWAN, LUMSEY, TADONG.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare Department invites e-tender from Class - II B Enlisted Contractors (SPWD) for participating in the tender for “Construction and Establishment of Rehabilitation Home for Persons suffering from Mental Illness at Assam Linzey in East Sikkim”. For further details, kindly visit the website www.sikkimtenders.gov.in. Date of uploading of bidding documents in e-procurement portal will be on 11.01.2019(after 2 PM).

Sd/-
Additional Chief Engineer
Social Justice Empowerment and Welfare Department

R.O. No. 584/IPR/Pub/Classi./18-19 Date: 09.01.2019.

SYNDICATE BANK, Ro, Siliguri
J R Commercial Complex,Opp Bdo Office
Sainath More Shiv Mandir,Nh-31,Siliguri,West Bengal,734010

POSSSION NOTICE
[Appendix IV under the Act-Rule-8(1)]

Whereas, the undersigned being the authorised officer of the Syndicate Bank under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(2) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notices on the dates mentioned against the accounts stated herein below calling upon the Borrowers/ Guarantors to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrower/surety/owner of property having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower/surety/owner of property and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under sub-section (4) of Section 13 of the Act read with rule 8 of the Security (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on the dates mentioned below:

The borrower's attention is invited to the provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.


The borrower/surety/owner of property in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Syndicate Bank, for the amount and interest thereon, costs etc.

Gangtok Branch:

A.1. Name of the Borrower: **Deepak Bhujel**
2. Name of the Guarantor: **Tumbabu Subba**
3. Outstanding Amount: **10,675,23,84(Rupees Ten Lakh Sixty Seven Thousand Five Hundred Twenty Three and Paise Eighty Four Only)** and cost thereon.
4. Date of Demand Notice: **14.08.2018**
5. Date of Possession: **08.01.2019**
6. Description of Immoveable Property: All part and parcel of land bearing Parcha Khatian No.172, Plot No.295/519, measuring area of 0.0301 Hectares, under Namchi block, Rumtek Estate, Gangtok, East Sikkim, owned by **Deepak Khawas(Bhujel)**.

B.1.Name of the Borrower: **Bidur Prasad**
2. Name of the Guarantor: **Meera Reshi**
3. Outstanding Amount: **15,84487.32(Rupees Fifteen Lakh Eighty Four Thousand Four hundred Eighty Seven and Paise Thirty Two only)** and cost thereon.
4. Date of Demand Notice: **14.08.2018**
5. Date of Possession: **08.01.2019**
6. Description of Immoveable Property:All part and parcel of land and building bearing Parcha Khatian No.652/1243 Plot No.153/1408/1596 measuring an area of 0.02 Acre owned by **Shri Bidur Prasad** and Bounded: On the North by 3 FT BUILDING FOOT On the South by BUILDING On the East by 11 FT Road On the West by JHORA

Date:11/01/2019
Place: Gangtok
Authorised officer,Syndicate Bank.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM,
RURAL MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT,
NAMCHI DIVISION,
SOUTH SIKKIM.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

N.I.T No.:- 01 /RMDD/Nam/2018-19

Dated:-09/01/2019

For and on behalf of the Governor of Sikkim, Divisional Engineer, Rural Management and Development Department, Namchi Division, invites sealed tenders under single bid system from the eligible contractors of class III grade enlisted with Sikkim Public Works Department vide notification No. 515/R&B/Secy, dated 12/06/2018 and subsequently vide notification No. 556/R&B/PWD/Secy, dated 28/08/2019 and 584/R&B/PWD/Secy , dated: 08/10/2018, through competitive bidding within the territorial jurisdiction of the concerned ward of the GPU/ULB where the work is to be executed. The works are listed as under:-

Sl No	Name of work	Value put to tender (Rs)	Completion time,(in months)	Cost of tender documents (Rs)	Amount of Earnest Money @ 2.5% For issue of tender form (Rs)	Grade of contractor	Name of G.P.U	Name of Constituency
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Construction of Link Road from Tanzi to Ruchung under Namthang Rateypani Constituency South Sikkim.							
a.	KM (1 st – 2 nd)	1,43,17,104.00	18months	30,000.00	3,57,928.00	Grade III	Nagi - Karek	Namthang - Rateypani Constituency
b.	KM (2 nd – km3 rd Ch.31).	1,49,09,283.00	18months	30,000.00	3,72,732.00	Grade III	Nagi - Karek	Namthang - Rateypani Constituency
2.	Construction of Link Road from Suntaley Zero to Suminkhor under Namthang Rateypani Constituency South.							
a.	KM (1 st – km 2.20)	1,13,30,774.00	18months	30,000.00	2,83,269.00	Grade III	Turung - Suminkhor	Namthang - Rateypani Constituency
b.	KM (2.20 – km 4.60)	1,32,63,642.00	18months	30,000.00	3,31,591.00	Grade III	Turung - Suminkhor	Namthang - Rateypani Constituency

Time Schedule:-

1. Date of submission of application with bank Receipt For issue of Tender Documents (excluding Tender Form) at respective GPK) :- 28th January 2019 (From 10.00am to 4.00pm)
2. Date of issue of Tender Form on submission of TDR (as Earnest Money) at respective GPK) :- 29th January 2019 (From 10.00am to 4.00pm)
3. Last Date and Time of submission of Tender (From10.00 am to 12.30 pm) at respective GPK) :- 30th January 2019
4. Date and Time of Opening of Bid (1.30 pm at respective GPK) :- 31st January 2019

CONDITIONS OF CONTRACT:-

1. Tender is open only to the eligible Contractors/Firms of appropriate Class/Area.
2. The intending tenders/contractors should apply in writing for issue of tender documents. The application would invariably be signed by the contractor himself/herself. The tender document will not be issued to any person other than the INTENDING TENDER. The application shall be submitted initially for each work listed above with all required documents.
3. The applicants should enclose attested copies of the Validated/Updated Contractor Enlistment Certificate. It is mandatory to produce the Original validated/Updated Enlistment Certificate during sale/issue of the Tender Document for verification. Selected bidder should produce No objection certificate/ Tax clearance certificate from the commercial taxes Division, Finance Revenue and Expenditure Department prior to the issue of Work Order.
4. The prescribed Non-Transferable Tender Documents (excluding the Tender Form) can be obtained during the period specified in (As above from the respective Gram Prasasan Kendra, Cost of tender form shall be deposited to the revenue of respective GPU. Earnest money deposit @ 2.5% in State Bank of Sikkim shall be in the form of Deposit Receipt of Schedule Bank which includes deposits in the form of temporary deposit receipts (TDR) in favor of the Sr. Accounts Officer (H.Q) RM&DD, Gangtok. Tender form shall be issued from the respective Gram Prasasan Kendra, only on production of the deposited receipts to that contractors/firm who has obtained the tender documents, on production of toward deposit receipts of 2.5% earnest money.
6. The Tender Documents, including the Tender Form with quoted offer should be placed in a sealed cover with the name of the tenderers and the name of the work superscripted on it, Supporting documents listed at Sl. No. 3 above should be enclosed with the offer.
7. Sealed tenders may be deposited in the Tender box at respective Gram Prasasan Kendra, on the date and within the time indicated above.
8. Tenders will be opened by a Tender Opening Committee as prescribed by the Government in the presence of the tenderness on the date and time indicated above.
9. The Tenderer should sign on every page of the tender documents as Acceptance of the general Direction and Conditions of the Contract and other laid down norms. The rate quoted should be both in figures and words and should be inclusive of GST and all other Taxes and Levies. Over writing and correction should be avoided and if made should be authenticated. Incomplete/Conditional tenders shall be rejected forthwith.
10. In case of any discrepancy in rate(s) printed in the Schedule of Rates and Quantities issued with the tender documents, rates as per approved Schedule of Rates will be taken as correct. For items outside the SOR, the rates shall be as per the technically checked estimate/analysis. Decision of the Principal Chief Engineer cum Secretary/ Head of the Department will be final in this regard.
11. The work value, scope and quantum of work are subject to change, the contractor shall execute the work as per the directives of the Department. No claim on this account shall be entertained whatsoever. If any claim is made, it shall be as per the agreement rates.
12. Avoidable damages due to negligence of the contractor shall be at his own risk and cost. The Department shall not be liable for payment of such damages (if any), including accidents to labourer at site.
13. The offer shall remain valid for a period of 90 days. The work should commence within 15 days from the issue of work order.
14. All the conditions as mentioned in the NIT shall be deemed to a part of the agreement to be entered with the contractor. Security deposit shall be collected by deductions from the running bills of the contractor @ 5% of the value of work done.
15. The Department reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason therefor.
16. The recoveries of Royalties on Forest produces shall be as per rates notified by the Government from time to time and applicable on the date of payment. In no case, claim of any contractor for deduction as per rates incorporated in Analysis of Rates or Schedule of Rates on the date of tender shall be acceptable.
17. Subletting of contract work is against the norms and if it comes to the notice, the original contract shall be cancelled and appropriate action shall be initiated as per the rules.
18. In case the man powers employed by the contractors are from outside the State or neighboring countries, it shall be the responsibility of the contractors to get them registered with the labour department, Government of Sikkim as per the relevant Labour Laws.
19. The Department also reserves the right to increase, decrease, alter or modify the item of works as indicated in the NIT without assigning any reason thereof.
20. Use of explosives shall be regulated as under:-
 - a) Transportation, Handling, storage and use of Explosives (if necessary) shall be in accordance with the provisions of the India Explosive Act and General Guidelines, Circulars issued by the department and other competent authorities on the subject from time to time.
 - b) The rules and regulations issued by the Sikkim Public Works Department or any other competent authority shall strictly be adhered to with regard to transportation, storage; handling and use of explosives shall be maintained by the contractor.
21. The contractor shall also make arrangements to have photographs of the works taken at least at three stages of the construction period. i.e. beginning, middle and completion stage.
22. Damage to properties in and around the work site must be avoided at all cost. The contractor shall be held responsible for any acts of negligence and shall be made to make good the damages.
23. Expenditure involved for material testing, cube strength of concrete, crushing strength of road metals etc., at site or in laboratories shall be borne by the contractor. The contractor shall make necessary arrangements accordingly as and when instructed to do so.
24. It is accepted to the tenderer to have inspected the site before submitting his bid. There may be possible site difficulties for which the tenderer should have their own correct assessment before submitting the bid.
25. The contractor will have to pay all taxes and duties as applicable and notified by the State/Central Government and no claim shall be entertained in this regard whatsoever.
26. The cost of stock materials supplied from the Department store will be deducted from the contractors' bills as per rules.
27. The bidders shall produce a Certificate of Residence from the concerned Gram Panchayat Unit where the work is to be executed.

S/d

R.O. No. 588/IPR/Pub/classi./18-19
Date. 11.1.2019

Divisional Engineer
Rural Management & Development Department,
Namchi Sub-Division

SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Politics Demands Commitment

...but slack accountability makes casual flirtations too easy

Politics is an exciting engagement, one that evokes passionate stands and distracts very easily. Where Sikkim is concerned, its political milieu has been traditionally populated rather extensively by teachers and midlevel government servants. Nothing wrong with having political leanings, in fact that would be a healthy engagement in a democracy, but everyone knows that involvement here used to extend much beyond that. It is also difficult in a State as small as Sikkim for anyone of any significance to remain genuinely apolitical. And as mentioned earlier, unless politics is really “dirty”, there is nothing wrong in having a political position even if your job description requires you to stay detached. What is important though is for the people concerned to keep their responsibilities (as government servants or “social workers”) and interests and (political) beliefs in separate silos. Unfortunately, government servants, given the astounding slack concepts of accountability enforced by the administration, are easily tempted to flirt with politics. In systems where accountability is casually fixed and job-responsibilities poorly defined, it is easy to start dispensing favours and bending rules; and before one knows it, the administrators become rather deft political players themselves. Engagement with party level politics follows and then come political ambitions.

What blurs the line even more is the confusion with which politics is mixed up with administration and government mistaken for a party. Also, in a political environment thick with parties and slim on ideological differentiators, the decision to take the plunge comes easy because options never dry out and cross-overs rarely need to be explained with any conviction. Not just government servants, but this situation makes it easy for everyone to ‘try out’ politics, move around political parties, taste all options and if nothing works out, step back into a supposedly “apolitical” life only to resurrect whenever occasion demands or opportunity arises. It is the facility with which this last option [the one of turning apolitical whenever it suits one] can be acquired that makes irresponsible dabbling in party politics so easy for most wannabes here.

Let us agree first that while ideological political positions are absolutely acceptable, and even welcome, it is the tendency to engage in ‘active’ politics, the one involving planning and negotiating, that vitiates work cultures and political engagements. This latter involvement diverts attention from the tasks they draw salaries for [in the case of government servants], and should they be aligning with factions opposed to the ruling party, could also lead to willful compromising of policy implementation. In the case of private people involved in “social work”, simultaneous political and social pursuits come at the cost of sabotaging their responsibilities towards society. And this cannot be dismissed as inconsequential even if they are volunteering their time and energies, because when one occupies a public space, one is required to remain earnest and not allow their priorities to get colored by political exigencies.

Politicians rarely suffer the fallout of such situations and the loss, in the long run, is burdened on the people whom the politicians, the government employees and the social workers should be serving first. Politics does not compromise governance or administration; it is the ambitious politicking that robs people of deserved delivery. For that reason alone, it is advisable to maintain a healthy interest in politics and also hold opinions, but leave the politicking to politicians; and if one is to engage actively, then doing so with full commitment.

Countering Russian disinformation the Baltic nations’ way

TERRY THOMPSON
theconversation.com

As the new Congress begins, it will soon discuss the comprehensive reports to the U.S. Senate on the disinformation campaign of half-truths, outright fabrications and misleading posts made by agents of the Russian government on social media in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election.

After years of anemic responses to Russian influence efforts, official U.S. government policy now includes taking action to combat disinformation campaigns sponsored by Russia or other countries. In May 2018, the Senate Intelligence Committee endorsed the concept of treating attacks on the nation’s election infrastructure as hostile acts to which the U.S. “will respond accordingly.” In June, the Pentagon unleashed U.S. Cyber Command to respond to cyberattacks more aggressively, and the National Cyber Strategy published in September 2018 clarified that “all instruments of national power are available to prevent, respond to, and deter malicious cyber activity against the United States.”

There are already indications that Cyber Command conducted operations against Russian disinformation on social media, including warning specific Russians not to interfere with the 2018 elections. However, low-level cyberwarfare is not necessarily the best way. European countries, especially the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, have confronted Russian disinformation campaigns for decades. Their experience may offer useful lessons as the U.S. joins the battle.

THE BALTIC EXPERIENCE

Beginning in 1940 and continuing until they declared independence in the early 1990s, the Baltic countries were subjected to systematic Russian gaslighting designed to make people doubt their national history, culture and economic development.

The Soviets rewrote history books to falsely emphasize Russian protection of the Baltic people from invading hordes in the Middle Ages, and to convey the impression that the cultural evolution of the three countries was enabled by their allegiance and close ties to Russia. Even their national anthems were rewritten to pay homage to Soviet influence.

Soviet leaders devalued Baltic currencies and manipulated economic data to falsely suggest that Soviet occupation was boosting the Baltic economies. Further, Soviet authorities settled ethnic Russians in the Baltic countries, and made Russian the primary language used in schools.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Baltic countries, the Russian Federation has continued to deliver disinformation to the region, making extensive use of Russian-language social media. Some themes characterize the Baltic people as ungrateful for Soviet investment and aid after World War II. Another common message criticizes Baltic historians for “falsification of history” when really they are describing the real nature

of the Soviet occupation.

A MASSIVE RUSSIAN ATTACK

After independence, and as the internet grew, Estonia led the way in applying technology to accelerate economic development. The country created systems for a wide range of government and commercial services, including voting, banking and filing tax returns electronically. Today, Estonia’s innovative e-residency system is being adopted in many other countries.



These advances made the Baltics a prime target for cyberattacks. In the spring of 2007, the Russians struck. When Estonia moved a monument memorializing Soviet soldiers from downtown Tallinn, the country’s capital, to a military cemetery a couple of miles away, it provoked the ire of ethnic Russians living in Estonia as well as the Russian government.

For three weeks, Estonian government, financial and media computer systems were bombarded with enormous amounts of internet traffic in a “distributed denial of service” attack. In these situations, an attacker sends overwhelming amounts of data to the targeted internet servers, clogging them up with traffic and either slowing them down or knocking them offline entirely. Despite concerns about the first “cyber war”, however, these attacks resulted in little damage. Although Estonia was cut off from the global internet temporarily, the country’s economy suffered no lasting harm.

These attacks could have severely damaged the country’s financial system or power grid. But Estonia was prepared. The country’s history with Russian disinformation had led Estonia to expect Russian attacks on computer and information systems. In anticipation, the government spearheaded partnerships with banks, internet service providers and other organizations to coordinate responses to cyberattacks. In 2006, Estonia was one of the first countries to create a Computer Emergency Response Team to manage security incidents.

THE BALTIC RESPONSE

After the 2007 attack, the Baltic countries upped their game even more. For example, Estonia created the Cyber Defense League, an army of volunteer specialists in information technology. These experts focus on sharing threat information, preparing society for responding to cyber incidents and participating in international cyber defense activities.

Internationally, Estonia gained approval in

2008 to establish NATO’s Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn. Its comprehensive research into global cyber activities helps identify best practices in cyber defense and training for NATO members.

In 2014, Riga, the capital of neighboring Latvia, became home to another NATO organization combating Russian influence, the Strategic Communications Center of Excellence. It publishes reports on Russian disinformation activities, such as the May 2018 study of the “Virtual Russian World in the Baltics.” That report analyzes Russian social media activities targeting Baltic nations with a “toxic mix of disinformation and propaganda.” It also provides insight into identifying and detecting Russian disinformation campaigns.

“Baltic elves” – volunteers who monitor the internet for Russian disinformation – became active in 2015 after the Maidan Square events in the Ukraine. And the Baltic nations have fined or suspended media channels that display bias.

The Baltic countries also rely on a European Union agency formed in 2015 to combat Russian disinformation cam-

paigns directed against the EU. The agency identifies disinformation efforts and publicizes accurate information that the Russians are seeking to undermine. A new effort will issue rapid alerts to the public when potential disinformation is directed against the 2019 European Parliament elections.

WILL THE ‘BALTIC MODEL’ WORK IN THE US?

Because of their political acknowledgment of threats and actions taken by their governments to fight disinformation, a 2018 study rated Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania the three European Union members best at responding to Russian disinformation.

Some former U.S. officials have suggested adopting similar practices, including publicizing disinformation efforts and evidence tying them to Russia. The Senate Intelligence Committee has called for that too, as has the Atlantic Council, an independent think tank that focuses on international affairs.

The U.S. could also mobilize volunteers to boost citizens’ and businesses’ cyberdefenses and teach people to identify and combat disinformation.

Disinformation is a key part of Russia’s overall effort to undermine Western governments. As a result, the battle is ever-changing, with Russians constantly trying new angles of attack and target countries like the Baltic nations identifying and thwarting those efforts. The most effective responses will involve coordination between governments, commercial technology companies and the news industry and social media platforms to identify and address disinformation.

A similar approach may work in the U.S., though it would require far more collaboration than has existed so far. But backed by the new government motivation to strike back when provoked, the methods used in the Baltic states and across Europe could provide a powerful new deterrent against Russian influence in the West.

[the writer is Adjunct Instructor in Cybersecurity, University of Maryland, Baltimore County]

Phosphorus: 350 years after its discovery, this vital element is running out

PETR KILIAN
theconversation.com

It’s time to buy a lot of candles. And if we light them with matches, it will only be possible because of the anniversary in question. It’s happy 350th birthday to the discovery of phosphorus, an element that is essential for life as we know it.

The story of how the 15th element on the periodic table was discovered stands as one of the great accidents of human endeavour – the chemist’s equivalent, perhaps, of Columbus setting out for India only to find the Americas by mistake. In the case of phosphorus, the explorer was Hennig Brand, a 17th-century alchemist and merchant from Hamburg, Germany.

Brand had been trying to achieve one of the great goals of alchemy, to make the philosopher’s stone. Alchemists thought this was the elixir of life, capable of transforming lead into gold. But where to find this legendary substance?

Brand was convinced that the answer was human urine, for two good reasons. First, gold and urine were a similar colour. Second, urine came from the human body, which was regarded by alchemists as a work of perfection.

THE DISCOVERY

The actual process that Brand set up in 1669 was remarkable. One would struggle to repeat it in a garden shed nowadays – unless you had neighbours who were willing to tolerate extremely bad smells. Brand concentrated large amounts of human urine and left it to ferment. He then heated the residues,

performing dry distillation, as depicted below in the 1795 Joseph Wright painting, the Alchemist in Search of the Philosopher’s Stone.

Brand was left with a white waxy solid which glowed in the dark even in a closed bottle, and combusted spontaneously with a very bright white flame when exposed to air. Intrigued by these properties, he named it phosphorus because this meant “light bearer” in Greek. He attempted many times to use the substance to transform lead into gold, but to no avail.

Presumably disappointed, Brand may well have thought he had instead found one of the other great postulations of alchemy, pure phlogiston. Alchemy had a spiritual framework rooted mainly in ancient Greek philosophy, which stipulated that all matter is formed of four elements, or qualities – air, earth, fire and water. When heat and light were generated during combustion, alchemists thought it was because of phlogiston, a fire-like element which was contained within combustible objects and released when they burned.

The theory of phlogiston was not debunked until the 1770s, when Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier showed that combustion is a reaction with a gas – oxygen. More than a century after that, it became possible to transmute one metal into another – but using a nuclear reactor rather than a philosopher’s stone. Economically, however, the process has never made sense as only tiny amounts of noble metals like gold can be made in this way.

On the other hand, the discovery of phosphorus opened up a dazzling

new chapter in what became modern chemistry. Some 50 years after Brand’s discovery, Johann Thomas Hensing, a professor of medicine at the University of Giessen in central Germany, showed that phosphorus was also present in the human brain (it would be decades later before it was shown that there were also minerals containing phosphorus).

Early medicines containing elemental phosphorus started being sold, perhaps on the thinking that “if it is in your brain, it must be good for you”. This turned out to be seriously flawed, however, since white phosphorus is in fact very toxic – a fatal dose is only 1mg per kilogram of body mass. Patients ended up being poisoned as a result.

BRINGER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Nonetheless, phosphorus is biologically vital. The average human body contains about 0.5kg of phosphorus, most of it in the form of phosphate to make bones and teeth strong. Phosphorus also crucially holds together DNA and RNA molecules – the backbone of these long chain-like structures contains two phosphate groups per pair of nucleic bases. Without phosphorus, it is hard to imagine any kind of life at all.

Foods rich in phosphorus include various meats, seafood, lentils, beans, nuts and seeds. At the other end of the spectrum, white phosphorus was long used in rat poison. Even more extreme, chemical warfare agents Sarin and VX are phosphorus compounds. Sarin, for example, is 21 times more deadly than potassium cyanide. It’s a great example of how elements occurring in different forms can have both very differ-

ent appearances and biological effects.

Phosphorus has many other positive traits. Together with nitrogen, phosphates form the basis of the fertilisers used widely in agriculture. There is no substitute for phosphorus in this role; it cannot be replaced by any other element in plants.

This raises an important problem. Supplies of phosphate rock – the only major phosphorus ore – are limited. So much so that phosphorus has been listed among the “endangered elements” where there is a risk to future supply. The problem is that the phosphorus used as fertiliser ends up dissolved in rivers and oceans as soluble phosphate, eventually becoming sediment. Currently there is no economically viable way of recovering it, and scientists predict a shortage within about 30 to 40 years.

This points to the need to develop phosphorus recycling, ideally at the point before it becomes highly diluted in our water streams. So how could this be done? Humans consume 3m tons more phosphorus than they need each year, which is eventually excreted as urine and faeces. Recycling phosphorus from human waste might not sound a very uplifting endeavour, but it will be a golden egg for whoever finds a way to do it.

This raises an interesting point. It is tempting to look with amusement at the way Brand found phosphorus in buckets of urine. It may turn out that with the hindsight of 350 years, he was actually focusing on exactly the best place after all.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer, Chemistry, University of St Andrews]

Christmas in Yangon

CK LEPCHA

It is almost an unwritten rule that when Christmas comes, we come back from wherever we are the rest of the year and celebrate at our ancestral church. Once my brother arrived right on Christmas day and the parents didn't seem too happy. But he made it so they were relieved.

Over the years Christmas celebration has become pretty routine (if I may). Everybody is back, and on their best behaviors for Christmas day. The church is usually decorated with pretty lights, a Christmas tree and interesting decorations to say the least; like that one time when a huge Santa and his reindeer was placed in the front central wall and everybody's attention was on that instead. But old hymns are sung and new clothed children run around church premises as the love feast after church service unites those who were away and those stayed back to catch up and gossip. Laughters are shared and games are organized as gifts are distributed making it a pretty festive event throughout the day.

But this past Christmas, I found myself away from the church, the village, and the familiarity of Christmas celebrations I have known most of my life.

I woke up in a new city and found my way to a church in Yangon via google maps. The past week we had been traveling through the country and had reached the old capital on Christmas eve. So, on Christmas morning we found a church that was walking distance from where we were staying and the service had already started when we got there. We had entered the Cole Kayin Baptist Church –to a gathering of about 50-60 people belonging to the Karen tribe. Most of the men were attired in their traditional woven tops indicating their tribal identity as the Karens are a hill

tribe living primarily in Southeast Asia and speaking the Tibe-to-Burman language.

The people who saw us enter looked friendly enough and made us feel comfortable as we joined the service. We did not understand their language but closed our eyes in prayers when the pastor prayed and hummed to the tunes of "joy to the world" when they sang that song next.

When the service ended, everyone went around shaking hands, wishing each other "Merry Christmas" and we joined in doing so as well. We decided to leave but an elderly lady stopped us and asked us to join their "love feast". We could not say no and joined the congregation in an already arranged table seating with naangyi thoke and tea. The lady beside me asked if we had something like this where we came from and since it had noodles, I thought of thukpa and said yes. But it was nothing like thukpa. It was dry noodles with chicken, slices of fish cakes and boiled eggs with powdered chickpea flour that needed to be mixed. It was different but we savored the meal and got invited for next year's Christmas meal as well.

When they heard we were from India, the lady



next to me asked about Karens in India. I was happy to report her that yes we have the Karen tribe in India too. I told her that they live in the Andaman Islands and I had actually met a lady cop hailing from the Karen tribe when I was in Port Blair four years ago. Most Indians however do not know about Karens in India for our own geographic and cultural ignorance. But it is believed that the Karen tribe of India actually calls the Andaman Islands the "land of paradise" because they were free from the kind of political set-up of their counterparts in Myanmar.

Thereafter she was keen to know where in India I was from because I did not look Indian. I told her I also belonged to a hill tribe and that seemed to satisfy

her. After some photo sessions, we took leave, thankful for the time, the food and the fellowship.

I did not expect to find a church in Myanmar especially after all the pagodas and temples we had visited earlier. But it was a nice reminder of a small community in a predominantly Buddhist country having the freedom to celebrate Christmas in their own fashion. It was nice to see a non-commercial, pretentious-free Christmas celebration where people welcomed strangers like us. I was grateful for the experience and did not mind that I skipped our regular Christmas celebration at the ancestral village. Instead it has inspired me to find a new place to celebrate Christmas next year perhaps.

Bandh in Tripura tribal council area affects normal life



AGARTALA, JAN 12 (PTI): Normal life was crippled in the tribal council area of Tripura on Saturday during the dawn-to-dusk bandh called by five indigenous parties to protest against the police firing at Madhabbari earlier this week.

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) comprises two-third of the state's territory and is home to the tribals, who constitute a third of the state's population.

Khumulwng town, the headquarters of the tribal council and around 18 km from here, wore a deserted look as shops downed their shutters, markets remained closed and vehicles stayed off the roads. Schools, colleges and government offices also remained closed, the police said.

On Tuesday, seven people were injured at Madhabbari in West Tripura district when the police and the paramilitary forces resorted to lathi-charge and fired in the air to disperse those protesting against the citizenship bill.

The parties, who called the bandh, are the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT-Tipraha), Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipura (INPT), Twipra State Party (TSP), National Conference of Tripura (NCT) and Tripura People's Party (PPP).

The entire tribal council area remained peaceful so far and no untoward incident was reported from any part of the council area, and no one was arrested, said Subrata Chakraborty, the state additional inspector general (law and order).

"There were road blockades by the bandh supporters at least in three places. Those are Kalacherra, S K Para and Neilahabari in Dhalai district, Sachirambari in South Tripura district, Amarpur and Takcherra in Gomati district," the AIG said.

The officer said there were no road blockades or demonstrations near Khumulwng and adjacent areas. When contacted, Radha Charan Debbarma, TTAADC chief executive member and a prominent leader of the opposition CPI(M), said the situation in the tribal council area remained peaceful.

"Over 1,800 schools and eight colleges in TTAADC are closed and no employee turned up in offices. Everything, including markets and shops, remained closed and vehicles remained off the roads," Debbarma said.

West Tripura Superintendent of Police Ajit Pratap Singh said the situation in Madhabbari and adjacent areas was normal.

"The ban on Internet services and prohibitory order under section 144 of the CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure) would expire in the evening. If the situation demands, both would continue," he said.

Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb had told a press conference earlier that a magisterial inquiry was ordered to look into how the incident took place and under what circumstances did the police open fire.

FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS

Women in Lepcha Community

MONGFING LEPCHA

Women are considered as the backbone of a family. If we put this into a larger context, women can be considered as the backbone of an entire society or a nation given the fact what status the society provides them with. Each society has its own set of laws which grants women access to their rights or overshadows their existing rights. Inequality of rights between men and women exists in most of the societies, neglecting the fact that in order for a society to flourish organically, the contribution of both men and women plays a vital role. Various studies indicate that education has brought many social changes and autonomy of women being one, yet it is also a contradicting fact that education of women

considered different factors like social, religion, education, income, etc. in the Lepcha community that has contributed in shaping the status and role of women in the society and how far women have been able to prove themselves worthy of the status they are allotted to.

It is a known fact that no matter how well educated and independent a woman may be, her status and role is always defined by the perception of the society for women where she comes from. However, when we look at the Lepcha community, women are given almost equal status as men. Here the term almost equal has been used because looking back in time there were certain cultural process in which Lepcha women had less autonomy in marriage decision making which with time has faded away. Now, women play



alone does not give all the rights of decision making to women but the autonomy of women in a given society depends upon the autonomy provided by her culture and society. This article is inspired by all the women I came across during my fieldwork in different villages I stayed. Every place I stayed, women of those areas never failed to amaze me by it carrying heavy loads of grass for their cattle every morning and afternoon or the heavy fire woods in weekends, working in their fields under that scorching sun, running small business alongside taking care of all household chores, to settling small disputes among villagers as a Panchayat, and so forth. The article reflects facts which many of us have not taken time to pay attention to yet women alongside men are the ones who have been keeping the art of existence moving.

Since, women can be the backbone of a society; this paper consists of how women in Lepcha community actually functions as the backbone and what autonomies exists in the status provided to them by the community. There are many studies on the status of women in different communities, and every study has revealed a common fact that the status of women is largely dependent upon the nature of the society that treats their women either as an object or as a part of the society. Here, I have

equal and important part in deciding their marriage. Women are considered as important an asset to the family as she is engaged in almost all the household work. This is the reason why when they get married, the groom's family has to compensate the bride's family with goods and gifts as bride price. Widow remarriage is practiced in Lepcha community which is why widows are never looked down upon or treated in a different way. Among the Lepcha community religion has not played any negative role. Although there are some religious rituals (Falo: clan ritual etc.) where women's presence is prohibited but during preparation of such rituals, the involvement of women is as equal as men even if it means indirect involvement. Since Lepchas are originally animists and later adopted other religions mostly Buddhism and Christianity yet animism is also practiced side by side



mostly among the Buddhist Lepchas. Ritual faith healer/ shamans commonly known as Bongthings (male) and Muns (female) are part of their animistic belief. So, it can be seen that both male and female plays a vital role in religious corner as well.

Among the Lepcha community there is no preference of male child over a female. After interviewing many Lepchas about their idea of male and female child their responses were that both male and female child is equal for them. However, exceptional cases may be there where disparity between male and female child can be seen yet the general response did not reflect any bias notion where male child is preferred over female.

Income plays a vital role in every aspect but its absence has not evolved into gender discrimination issue in Lepcha community. Women or girl child are not seen to be considered less over men or male child due to low income. There is no unequal distribution of food even if the food is less. The health check-up is based on the severity of illness and not on the basis of who should be (male child or female child). Even when buying clothes, it would be either for both or none.

Education is an important aspect of development. In many parts of the nation women are deprived of right to education because of reasons like early marriage, women are considered domestic beings who are trained to look after the family before and after marriage, men are seen as the ultimate breadwinner because of which they are treated in a special manner. Education among women in Lepcha community is considered as equal to the male counterparts. There seems to be no reason for the parents not to send the girl child to school. Considering employment in a greater context, there are no sectors

where Lepcha women are not a part of it, be at the administrative level, health sector, engineering, academics, etc. they are exceptionally doing well. In recent years it is seen that they are doing justice to positions like village panchayats, ASHA, ICDS teachers, etc. Lepcha women also have self help groups which are seen to be more active than self help groups (SHG) of men. The women spare free time for the SHG and engage themselves in some creative things which can be sold to get some fund for the SHG and later those funds can be used in needy hours. As ASHA and ICDS teachers, women have contributed so much in providing better health to the community. An active participation of ASHA and ICDS teachers, have contributed better maternal and child health at village level. Women are equally involved in the political scenario of the community. Their voices are given importance which is why females are actively participating as village Panchayats and working for the betterment of their villages.

Violence against women (physical or mental) is another considerable factor that shows how women are treated in a society. As such, looking at the Lepcha scenario, violence on women is less prevalent. There may be cases of domestic violence but that is totally individualistic action and cannot be taken as a general action by the society against its women.

Women play a pivotal role in the community and are given a respectful status. However, it is also an undeniable fact that despite of having a better status of women in the community, there is no disparity among men and women. This however, will not justify some of the complex issues faced by women in a general or individual way. It is an utopian dream to see men and women having equal rights in all aspects yet women play an important part in the Lepcha community and are still doing well in every field and taking equal steps as men.

[the writer is Research Scholar, Department of Anthrpology, Sikkim University]

PSG fined by UEFA for crowd trouble



PARIS, JAN 11 (AFP): Paris Saint-Germain have escaped with a fine from European football’s governing body UEFA following crowd trouble at their Champions League home game against Red Star Belgrade in October.

The French giants ran the risk of being forced to play their

next home European match -- against Manchester United in the Champions League last 16 second leg in March -- behind closed doors.

Trouble erupted outside the Parc des Princes after the game, but the only punishment for the crowd disturbances and “illicit chants” from their support-

ers was a fine of 35,000 euros (USD 40,346). Red Star, who lost the game 6-1, were also fined 25,000 euros for chants from their supporters.

Meanwhile, Olympiakos were fined 90,000 euros and handed a suspended one-game stadium ban after their fans set off fireworks and invaded

the pitch when the Greek club beat AC Milan 3-1 in the Europa League last month.

Milan were fined 5,000 euros, while Ajax were fined 20,000 euros and Bayern Munich 8,000 euros for the throwing of objects and setting off fireworks in their 3-3 Champions League draw in December.

Solskjaer, Pochettino face off in Man United ‘audition’

LONDON, JAN 12 (AFP): Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has a golden opportunity to further his credentials for the permanent manager’s job at Manchester United when he goes head to head against Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino on Sunday.

The Norwegian interim manager has enjoyed a perfect start to his Old Trafford career, winning all five matches and transforming the mood among players and fans.

But in the opposite dug-out at Wembley will be Pochettino, who remains the favourite to be named to the United hot seat after keeping Spurs on the fringes of the Premier League title race against considerable odds. United have beaten Cardiff, Huddersfield, Bournemouth and Newcastle in the league and Reading in the FA Cup since Solskjaer replaced Jose Mourinho last month.

But third-placed Tottenham in London will be a different proposition and the match will be a severe examination of how far United have come under their temporary leader.

Solskjaer has revitalised a number of players including Paul Pogba and Marcus Rashford, but bristles at suggestions he has had an easy ride so far. “We’ve had tests,” he said. “Newcastle away is a test and the first game was a test as to how everyone reacted. The first home game with the crowd is a test.”

“We are not going to get as many chances to attack against these as we had before so when we have the ball we have to be ready to play well with it and we have to use the whole pitch because Wembley is a decent size pitch as well,” he added. Solskjaer says he has not spoken to the club hierarchy about the full-time position although has clearly stated his desire to stay beyond the end of the season.

The minimum requirement for Solskjaer is probably to qualify for next season’s Champions League -- United have closed the gap significantly but are still six points behind fourth-placed Chelsea.

Rohit Sharma’s brilliant hundred goes in vain as India lose series-opener



SYDNEY, JAN 12 (PTI): Rohit Sharma’s individual brilliance was not enough to make up for a floundering top and middle order as India suffered a 34-run defeat at the hands of a resilient Australia in the first One-day International, here Saturday.

Sharma conjured up a magnificent 133 of 129 balls for his 22nd ODI hundred but eventually it only helped in reducing the defeat-margin as India ended up at 254 for nine while chasing a 289-run target.

Three of India’s top four batsmen could not reach double-digit and lasted a mere 11 balls.

With 10 fours and six sixes, Sharma reached his hundred off 110 balls, equalling Sourav Ganguly’s record of 22 ODI centuries and is now behind only Sachin Tendulkar (49) and Virat Kohli (38).

India were gasping after losing three batsmen at a single-digit score of four before Sharma and Mahendra Singh Dhoni (51) combined to stitch together a 137-run stand for the fourth wicket.

Debutant Jason Behrendorff broke the partnership by sending back Dhoni, who became only the fifth Indian batsman to complete 10,000 runs

in ODI cricket during the course of his knock that came off 96 balls.

Tendulkar, Ganguly, Rahul Dravid and Kohli are the other batsmen to achieve the feat.

The hosts owe their 1-0 lead in the three-match series to a collective batting effort by their middle-order batsmen, specially Peter Handscomb, who switched gears in time to steer his side to 288 for five with his 73-run knock.

Handscomb and Marcus Stoinis (47 not out) grabbed the momentum with their 68-run stand for the fifth wicket as Australia scored 93 runs in the last 10 overs.

Usman Khawaja (59) and Shaun Marsh (54) also scored half-centuries for the hosts who lost skipper Aaron Finch (6) in a slow start after electing to bat.

Young paceman Jhye Richardson (4/26) rocked the Indian middle order by dismissing India skipper Virat Kohli (3) and Ambati Rayudu (0) in space of three balls and later added wickets of Dinesh Karthik and Ravindra Jadeja in a career-best performance.

First, Behrendorff (2-39) trapped Shikhar Dhawan lbw for a first-ball duck before Richardson swung into action.

Kohli was caught at short square leg, and then two balls later Rayudu (0) was trapped plumb lbw, as the Indian top-order was destroyed.

It put huge brakes on the scoring even as Sharma and Dhoni struggled to get going. So much so, India managed only a paltry 21-3 in the first ten overs.

Their 50-stand came off 82 balls, while they took India past 100 in the 26th over even as Australia started to feel the pressure.

Sharma reached his half-century off 62 balls, while Dhoni reached his 68th ODI half-century off 93 balls.

Thanks to the initial caution, India were only placed at 141-4 in the 32nd over, when Dhoni was trapped lbw by Behrendorff.

Sharma was starting to run out of partners thereafter as Richardson castled Dinesh Karthik in the 40th over.

The run-chase came to an informal end by the 46th over as Ravindra Jadeja (8) and Sharma holed out in the space of ten balls.

Marcus Stoinis (2-66) dismissed Sharma, and India’s hopes perished with him for there was too much for the remaining tail-enders to do.

Earlier, India spinners Kuldeep Yadav (2/54) and Jadeja (1/48) shared three wickets between them while pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar (2/66) accounted for two batsmen.

Kumar bowled Finch (6) in the third over, an inswinger slipping in through the gate.

Alex Carey (24) made a good start and was looking set for a longer innings, when Yadav outfoxed him in his very first over, caught at slip off a quicker top-spinner. Australia only managed 41-2 in the first 10 overs.

It brought Khawaja and Marsh together, and they put on 92 runs off 111 balls for the third wicket. In doing so, they pushed India to make changes in the middle overs.

Khaleel Ahmed (0/55) had an off day as he struggled with this front-foot and control over line and length.

Khawaja-Marsh pair added 50 in 61 balls as Australia crossed 100 in the 23rd over. Khawaja brought up his fifth ODI half-century off 70 balls, and opened up a bit more to play some attractive sweeps.

But he perished in that manner as Jadeja trapped him lbw in the 29th over, providing a crucial breakthrough for India. Marsh carried on though, and reached his 13th ODI half-century off 65 balls. He put up 53 runs off 55 balls with Handscomb for the fourth wicket.

Their 50-run stand came off only 49 balls as Australia started to show a little more urgency. Australia finally managed to cross 200 in the 42nd over, but had lost Marsh in the process as he holed out off Yadav in the 38th over.

Stoinis’ arrival at the crease had helped press matters as both he and Handscomb opened up with a couple sixes and upped the run-rate.

Handscomb reached his second ODI half-century off 50 balls, helping push Australia past 250 in the 48th over.

Kerber keeping Open expectations in check

MELBOURNE, JAN 12 (AFP): Wimbledon champion Angelique Kerber Saturday said her confidence and motivation were sky high and her form good, but she is thinking no further than round one of the opening Grand Slam of the year.

Despite her reticence to look too far forward, the world number two is seen as one of the favourites for the Australian Open crown, carrying good momentum into the tournament after a stellar 2018.

The 30-year-old has the experience to make another deep run at Melbourne Park, having won in 2016.

“Now we have a new season coming, and the motivation is really high again,” she said ahead of her first round clash with Poland’s Polona Herczeg.

“You know, for me it’s important to be going on court and trying to make the transit from my practice sessions to the match ones.

“I was really working hard in the pre-season, and now I’m really looking forward to having the competition and playing matches again,” added the German star.

Kerber fell to world number one Simona Ha-



lep 9-7 in the third set of an epic semi-final battle last year but was not prepared to outline her aspirations for 2019.

“I’m not putting too much expectation on me, with the results and everything like that,” she said. “I’m here to, like always at the Grand Slams, find my rhythm, play the first round, try to do my best, then look day by day.

“I know that I am playing good right now, that I had good matches, that I have the confidence. But still it’s not easy being here. The tournament starts from zero.”

Kerber is working with new coach Rainer Schuttler, who reached

the Australian Open final in 2003 where he lost to Andre Agassi.

German Tennis Association’s Barbara Rittner, who helped develop Kerber as a teenager, said recently that Schuttler would add more “daring” to her game.

Kerber said he was her first coach who actually played at the top level, and this was proving invaluable.

“He knows how it is to being under pressure, to having emotions on court. He understands my thinking,” she said.

“You know, on court he is also a hard worker. He loves the sport like me, we are both really trying to do our best. We have the passion.

Shy Osaka working to be more mature



MELBOURNE, JAN 12 (AFP): US Open winner Naomi Osaka admitted on Saturday that she was naturally shy and said one of her key goals in the off-season had been to work on her confidence and become more mature.

The likable 21-year-old Japanese was catapulted into the global spotlight when she won the US Open last year, beating Serena Williams, whose tantrum at the umpire in the final almost overshadowed her achievement.

The breakthrough made her a new standard bearer for tennis in her homeland, Asia and the next generation of women, and she is working hard on living up to the hype.

While focusing on her game during the off-season, she has also been concentrating on better dealing with the off-court responsibilities that come with being a major winner.

“For me one of my biggest goals is to be more mature, like to mature as a person,” she said ahead of her opening round clash at the Australian Open against Poland’s Magda Linette next week.

“And I feel like in a

way I am, but in other parts I’m very, like, three years old mentality, you know? I feel like just levelling that out is one of my biggest goals I had during the off-season.”

Winning in Flushing Meadows has meant Osaka now has to do far more media, and her confidence in that department is growing.

But she admits to still struggling in one-on-one situations.

“I mean, in press I feel comfortable because I’m being asked questions,” she said, when it was noted that she seems more relaxed in media conferences.

“But you know when you have to do small talk, like, ‘hello, how are you?’, after that, I don’t know what to do.” Asked what she does in those situations, she replied: “I go, ‘uhm, okay’, then I walk away.

“But, yeah, I mean, I feel like I’m more comfortable talking to people,” she added.

“I’ve sort of been put in the position that I have to. It’s not something I can avoid any more.”

Osaka heads into the Australian Open, often dubbed the Asia-Pacific Grand Slam, seeded four and carrying the hopes of

Japan on her shoulders.

She said the locker room generally saw Williams as the favourite to win an eighth Melbourne crown and claim a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title.

“But there’s a group of players that I think everyone thinks is very difficult to play against, especially in Grand Slams,” she said.

Asked to name who, she replied with a smile: “For me, you’re going to have to ask someone else because I don’t talk to people, so I wouldn’t know what they’re thinking.”

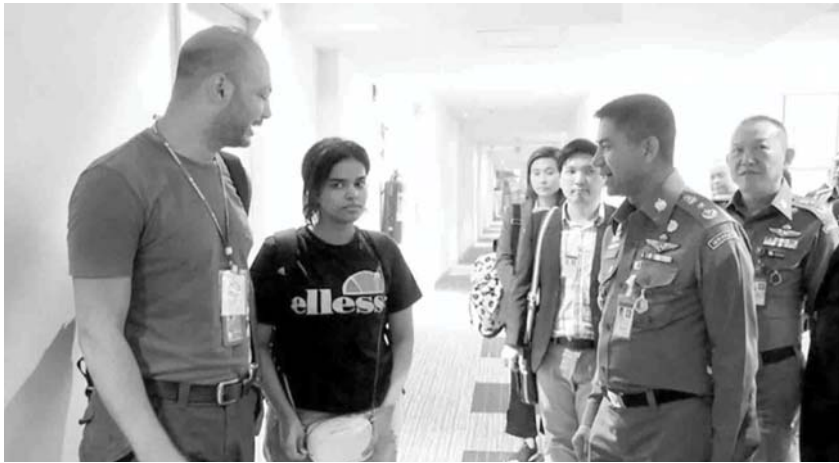
Osaka began her season by making the semi-finals of the Brisbane International, where she lost to Lesia Tsurenko, blaming a lack of focus for failing to get the job done.

It is a trimmed down Osaka this year, with shedding a few pounds another target during the off-season to help with her mobility around the court.

“About the losing weight question, it’s because I want to be faster. It’s not for looks or anything,” she said.

“I feel like it helps me play better, I get to the ball faster, and I’m not as sore.

Canada takes in Saudi teen asylum seeker



OTTAWA, JAN 11 (AFP): Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Friday that Canada was taking in an 18-year-old Saudi asylum seeker who fled her family and harnessed the power of Twitter to stave off deportation from Thailand.

Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun was already en route to Toronto late Friday when the prime minister made the surprise announcement, after officials had previously given heavy hints she was bound for Australia.

"Canada has been unequivocal that we'll stand up for human rights and women's rights around the world," Trudeau said. "When the United Nations made a request of us that we grant al-Qunun's asylum, we accepted."

The move is sure to further strain Canadian relations with the kingdom that went sideways

last August over Ottawa's rights criticism of Saudi Arabia, prompting Riyadh to expel the Canadian ambassador and sever all trade and investment ties in protest.

Canada also sparked fury in Riyadh by demanding the "immediate release" of jailed rights campaigners, including Samar Badawi, the sister of jailed blogger Raif Badawi, whose family lives in Quebec.

Qunun's attempt to flee the ultra-conservative kingdom was embraced by rights groups as a beacon of defiance against repression. Thai authorities initially threatened to deport her after she arrived in Bangkok from Kuwait last weekend.

But armed with a smartphone and hastily opened Twitter account, she forced a U-turn from Thai immigration police

who handed her into the care of the UN's refugee agency as the #SaveRahaf hashtag bounced across the world.

Qunun alleged that she was abused by her family -- who deny the allegations -- and rights groups also said she had renounced Islam, risking prosecution in Saudi Arabia. Rahaf first said she was aiming for Australia where officials had suggested they would give serious consideration to her claim for asylum, which was endorsed as legitimate by the UNHCR on Wednesday. But late Friday Thailand's immigration police chief said a smiling and cheerful Rahaf was bound for Toronto and had left on a flight after 11:00 pm (local time).

"She chose Canada... Canada said it will accept her," Thai immigration chief Surachate Hakparn

told reporters at Bangkok's main airport.

"She is safe now and has good physical and mental health. She is happy."

Rahaf left from the same airport where her quest for asylum began less than a week ago in a swift-moving process that defied most norms.

On Friday afternoon Rahaf posted a final cryptic tweet on her profile saying "I have some good news and some bad news" -- shortly after her account was deactivated in response to death threats she had faced, her friends said. "Rahaf received death threats and for this reason she closed her Twitter account, please save Rahaf life," tweeted supporter @nourahfa313, who has flanked Rahaf's social media campaign with her own updates on Twitter.

Rahaf's swift use of

Twitter saw her amass more than 100,000 followers within a week, highlighting her plight at a time when Saudi Arabia's human rights record is under heavy scrutiny following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year.

Her deployment of social media allowed her to avoid the fate of countless other refugees who are quietly sent back home or languish in Bangkok detention centres. She refused to see her father who travelled to Thailand and expressed opposition to her resettlement. Surachate said her father and brother were due to return home on a flight in the early hours of Saturday.

Although her asylum case moved fast the final manoeuvres that led to her flight to Canada remain a mystery.

Australia had dropped strong hints it would accept her after the UN urged the country to do so and it remains unclear why the resettlement location changed.

On Thursday its foreign minister said Canberra was still assessing the request.

Thailand's immigration chief Surachate had earlier told reporters Friday that "two or three" countries were ready to offer her asylum.

The Southeast Asian country is not a signatory to a convention on refugees and asylum seekers must be referred to a third country.

FBI opened probe into whether Trump working for Russians: NYT



WASHINGTON, JAN 12 (PTT): The FBI has opened an inquiry into whether Donald Trump was working for Russians in the days after the American President fired James B Comey in 2017 as the top investigative agency's director, according to a report.

In May 2017, the US President abruptly removed the 56-year-old Comey, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), who was overseeing a criminal probe into whether the Trump campaign colluded with the Russian government to influence the 2016 presidential election that was won by the real estate mogul.

The New York Times, based on unnamed sources, said that such an investigation against Trump that was started by the FBI carried explosive implications, as the law enforcement agents sought to determine if the president was knowingly working for the Russians or had unwittingly fallen under Moscow's influence.

Investigators have to consider if Trump's own actions constituted a possible threat to the national security, the paper reported on Friday.

"No evidence has emerged publicly that Trump was secretly in contact with or took direction from Russian government officials," The New York Times said.

"Agents and senior FBI officials had grown suspicious of Trump's ties to Russia during the 2016 campaign but held off on opening an investigation into him, the

people said, in part because they were uncertain how to proceed with an inquiry of such sensitivity and magnitude," the paper reported.

The White House described The New York Times story as absurd.

"This is absurd. James Comey was fired because he's a disgraced partisan hack and his deputy Andrew McCabe who was in charge of the time is a known liar fired by the FBI. Unlike former president (Barack) Obama who let Russia and other foreign adversaries push America around, President Trump has actually been tough on Russia, the White House Press Secretary said.

The FBI did not respond to a query on the alleged investigation against Trump.

But according to the daily, the FBI investigation was taken over by the Special Counsel Robert Mueller who has been tasked to investigate into the allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential elections.

The inquiry is part of Mueller's broader examination of how Russian operatives interfered in the 2016 election and whether any Trump associates conspired with them.

Trump has, however, denied of having any collusion with the Russians and repeatedly criticised the Mueller investigation as a "witch hunt" and views it as a stain on the legitimacy of his presidency.

"If the president had fired Comey to stop the Russia investigation, the action would have been

a national security issue because it naturally would have hurt the bureau's effort to learn how Moscow interfered in the 2016 election and whether any Americans were involved, according to James A. Baker, who served as FBI general counsel until late 2017," the report said.

Baker privately testified in October before House investigators who were examining the FBI's handling of the full Russia inquiry, it said.

"Not only would it be an issue of obstructing an investigation, but the obstruction itself would hurt our ability to figure out what the Russians had done, and that is what would be the threat to national security," Baker said in his testimony, portions of which were read to The New York Times.

He did not explicitly acknowledge the existence of the investigation of Trump to congressional investigators.

The report casts pressure on the White House, which is already feeling the heat from months of investigations.

Trump's former campaign chairman Paul Manafort in August 2018 was convicted of financial crisis and later pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud the US and conspiring to obstruct justice.

Trump's longtime lawyer and aide Michael Cohen is set to begin a three-year prison sentence in March after pleading guilty to fraud, campaign finance violations and lying under oath.

Government shutdown becomes longest in US history

WASHINGTON, JAN 12 (AFP): The US government shutdown that has left 800,000 federal employees without salaries as a result of President Donald Trump's row with Democrats over building a Mexico border wall entered a record 22nd day Saturday. The Democrats' refusal to approve 5.7 billion demanded by Trump for the wall project has paralyzed Washington, with the president retaliating by refusing to sign off on budgets for swaths of government departments unrelated to the dispute.

As a result, workers as diverse as FBI agents, air traffic controllers and museum staff, did not receive paychecks Friday.

The partial shutdown of the government became the longest on record at midnight Friday (0500 GMT Saturday), when it overtook the 21-day stretch in 1995-1996, under president Bill Clinton. Trump on Friday backed off a series of previous threats to end the deadlock by declaring a national emergency and attempting to secure the funds without congressional approval.

"I'm not going to do it so fast," he said at a White House meeting.

Trump described an emergency declaration as the "easy way out" and said Congress had to step up to the responsibility of approving the 5.7 billion. "If they can't do it... I will declare a national emergency. I have the absolute right," he insisted.

Until now, Trump had suggested numerous times that he was getting closer to taking the controversial decision. Only

minutes earlier, powerful Republican ally Senator Lindsey Graham tweeted after talks with Trump: "Mr. President, Declare a national emergency NOW"

It was not clear what made Trump change course. But Trump himself acknowledged in the White House meeting that an attempt to claim emergency powers would likely end up in legal battles going all the way to the Supreme Court.

Opponents say that a unilateral move by the president over the sensitive border issue would be constitutional overreach and set a dangerous precedent in similar controversies. The standoff has turned into a test of political ego, particularly for Trump, who came into office boasting of his deal making powers and making an aggressive border policy the keystone of his nationalist agenda.

Democrats, meanwhile, seem determined at all costs to prevent a president who relishes campaign rally chants of "build the wall" from getting a win.

Both Democrats and Republicans agree that the US-Mexican frontier presents major challenges, ranging from the hyper-violent Mexican drug trade to the plight of asylum seekers and poor migrants seeking new lives in the world's richest country.

There's also little debate that border walls are needed: about a third of the frontier is already fenced off.

But Trump has turned his single-minded push for more walls into a political crusade seen by opponents as a stunt to stoke xenophobia in

his right-wing voter base, while wilfully ignoring the border's complex realities. For Trump, who visited the Texas border with Mexico on Thursday, the border situation amounts to an invasion by criminals that can only be solved by more walls.

"We have a country that's under siege," he told the local officials in the White House.

Some studies show that illegal immigrants generally commit fewer crimes than people born in the United States, although not everyone agrees on this.

More certain is that while narcotics do enter the country across remote sections of the border, most are sneaked through heavily guarded checkpoints in vehicles, the government's own Drug Enforcement Administration said in a 2017 report. It said that most smuggling is done "through US ports of entry (POEs) in passenger vehicles with concealed compartments or commingled with legitimate goods on tractor trailers."

Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in the House of Representatives and a key figure in opposing Trump's agenda, said money should be spent in many areas of border security, but not on walls. "We need to look at the facts," she said.

But Trump accused the Democrats of only wanting to score points against him with a view to the 2020 presidential elections.

"They think, 'Gee, we can hurt Trump,'" he said. "The Democrats are just following politics."

Deputies agree to historic name change for Macedonia

SKOPJE, JAN 11 (AFP): Macedonian politicians voted on Friday to change the country's name to "Republic of North Macedonia", settling a decades-long row with Greece and paving the way for NATO and EU membership. Parliamentary speaker Talad Xhaferi said 81 MPs had voted in favour of the name change in the 120-seat chamber, securing the required two-thirds majority.

The name change will only be effective once it is also agreed by the Greek parliament.

Ahead of the vote, Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev had emphasised the historic importance of the decision.

"Without the accord with Greece, there will be neither NATO nor EU membership, Zaev said.

"I changed my opinion on the name issue in the name of progress and at the cost of my political career," he added.

Athens has promised to lift its veto on Skopje's attempts to join NATO and the European Union on the condition Macedonia changes its name.

Greece has blocked the path to those international organisations since Macedonia broke away from the former Yugoslavia in 1991 because, it had said, the name Macedonia should apply solely to its own northern province.

For the Greeks, Macedonia evokes national pride as the cradle of Alexander the Great's ancient empire.

The Friday vote brought an end to months of political bickering in Macedonia that

included a controversial consultative referendum in September and a long parliamentary battle.

Officials of the main opposition conservative VMRO-DPMNE party, who refused to take part in the parliamentary debate, claimed the name change was national treason. However several opposition MPs broke ranks and voted for the change, alongside the ruling Social Democratic party and their junior coalition partners from the ethnic Albanian minority.

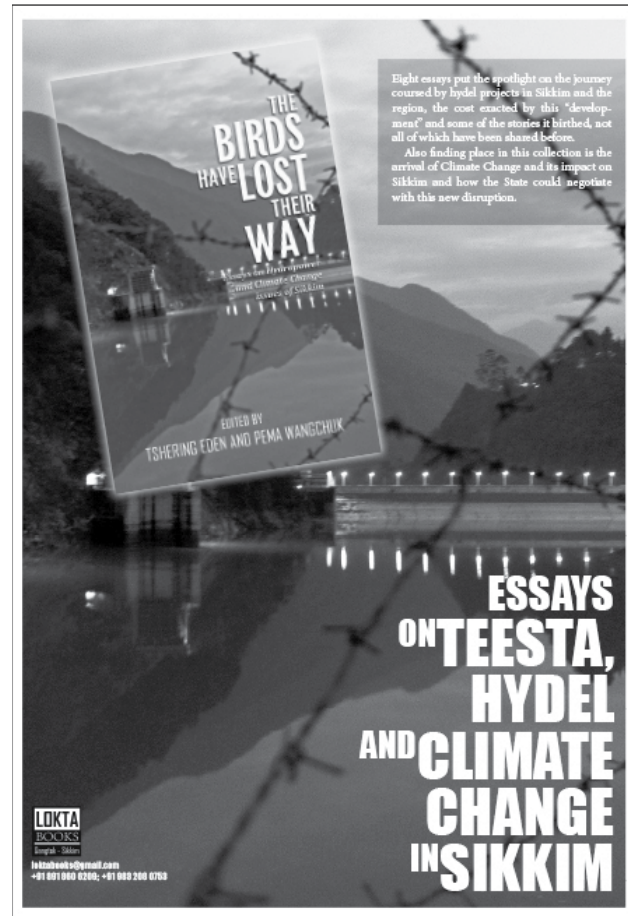
Notably the outcome was enabled thanks to four MPs who received an amnesty for their alleged roles in the violent storming of parliament in April 2017.

That prompted VMRO-DPMNE leaders to denounce "bribes and threats" used by Zaev to reach the necessary majority.

The vote is a political triumph for the Social Democratic leader who analysts say was weakened by the low turnout in the September referendum.

Macedonia's right-wing president, Gorge Ivanov, has been a vocal opponent of the proposed name change and continues to speak out against it.

But the Macedonian constitution stipulates that as the measure was passed by a two-thirds majority, the president has no choice but to sign it into law.





SIMPLE AND SWEET! Actress Claire Foy steps out in a casual sweater, jeans, and sneakers in L.A.

Really cool: Keanu Reeves on getting cast in 'Toy Story 4'

Los Angeles, Jan 12 (PTI): Actor Keanu Reeves says getting a part to play in Disney-Pixar's upcoming animated feature "Toy Story 4" was a "really cool" moment for him. In an interview with Collider, the 54-year-old actor said he had "fun" while working on the Disney project.

"I have no idea but I got a call which was really cool, out of the blue from the lovely people at Pixar and the creators of this continuation of the story," Reeves said.

"They pitched the character to me and we spoke and they allowed me to, kind of, riff on it and I've done four recording sessions with them so far and

it's been a lot of fun," he added. Tim Allen, who voices Buzz Lightyear in the franchise, had



revealed last year that Reeves has an "edgy" mystery role in the fourth installment, which is scheduled to release on June 21 this year.

ARIES: This weekend's Mercury-Saturn mashup in your ambitious tenth house provides a powerful window for reflection on the current state of your career. You're not one who likes idling in neutral, but the question is: Do you have proper structures in place to support your expansion? It might be time to contract out certain aspects of the job so that you can focus on higher-level tasks. Still gazing up from a lower rung on the ladder?

TAURUS: Hold your fire! Your words pack more of a punch than you realize, thanks to the volatile mashup of the Sun and powerhouse Pluto in your outspoken ninth house. You think you're just "calling it like you see it," but those may be fighting words to someone else. Your patient sign has the longest fuse of the zodiac, but when you're provoked, look out! You might be easily rattled today, which could cause you pick a fight. Give people the benefit of the doubt and presume innocence until they're proven guilty!

GEMINI: Watch your back, Gem! Today, the Sun mashes up with piercing Pluto,

shining a blinding light on certain people's less than honorable sides. Pluto, lord of the underworld, rules mystery and behind-the-scenes activities. Trust your gut. If a situation trips your alarm system, don't just naively go along with the status quo. Do some deep sleuthing—but hold off making any accusations until you have all the cold hard facts.

CANCER: Watch out for an uncere-monious visit by the green-eyed monster today. An alignment of the fiery Sun and controlling Pluto in your seventh house of relationships could leave you feeling deeply jealous. But if your sweetie or crush is acting sneaky, don't leap to conclusions. Be direct. Ask questions and listen to your gut when they respond. And no secretive snooping yourself. For all you know, they could be planning a surprise for you.

LEO: Do you sense something dodgy going down? Your natural inclination in cases like these is to blow the whistle. Not so fast, Leo! With the Sun beaming alongside undercover agent Pluto, your

Men don't age in India: says Pooja Bhatt

KOMAL PANCHAMATIA

MUMBAI, JAN 11 (PTI): Actor-director Pooja Bhatt believes women start blooming in their forties but somehow they are not represented correctly on the screen whereas men continue to play characters half their age.

Pooja, who is returning to the silver screen after a gap of 18 years with "Sadak 2", had said goodbye to acting but then it pulled her back.

"I had said bye-bye to acting in a way but once an actor always an actor. Life has got other plans for me. Like I did not want to be an actor, I wanted to be an architect or astronaut and 'Daddy' happened and the rest is history.

"I felt I was happy being in the back, launching people like Sunny Leone, repackaging Richa Chadda, John Abraham but life had other plans and it includes 'Sadak 2' and a web series," Pooja told PTI in an interview.

Known for her films such as "Daddy", "Sadak" and "Zakhm", Pooja will reprise her role in the sequel of "Sadak", that marks the return of her filmmaker father Mahesh Bhatt to direction.

Pooja, whose last film as an actor was "Everybody Says I'm Fine" in 2001, will also be seen in a web series based on Abheek Barua's book called 'A City of Death'. Set in Kolkata, the story revolves around an alcoholic female cop in her 40s, who is sent to investigate a crime of passion.

"Sadak 2", Sanjay Dutt and Pooja will be seen playing the older couple while Pooja's younger sister Alia Bhatt and Aditya Roy Kapur are the young pair.

"I am glad when I am coming back to acting I am getting to play my age," Pooja said.

"One thing I do not see happening is women of certain age being represented correctly. We have to evolve conceptually. Men don't age in India. Women who are younger than them are suddenly playing the role of a mother," she said.

The actor said she also played the role of Ajay Devgn's mother in 1999 film "Zakhm" because the role demanded it but she would not play the role of a mother just for the sake of it. As an actor and producer, Pooja said she has always taken risks.

"One woman who I think is great is Vidya Balan, her casting in 'The Dirty Picture' was very exciting. Let's break new grounds, let's think beyond the usual. Why can't a woman who plays a mother, also play a lover, or why a lover can't play a villain?" Citing the example of American actor-producer Sharon

Stone, Pooja, 46, said why can't writers write about women beyond a certain age.

"Where is India's Sharon Stone? How come women in Hollywood come to their own, post their 40s? I feel that's when you actually bloom... Why are men allowed to come to their



own at 40s and 50s and women are expected to bury themselves at this age," she added.

Pooja said, personally, her 40s have been more exciting than her 30s.

"I found my feet in my 40s, got divorced at 40, two years of drinking and then at 42, I became sober. My 30s were the most boring phase. When you are in your 40s, you know your mind, body, you know what you want to do and you are not impressed with the usual bulls**t that the world gives you. You don't care about people's opinion and you do what you want to do," she said.

Pooja is currently promoting her film "Cabaret", which has been in the making for sometime and was supposed to release in 2016. It got delayed due to her differences with the producers over its release.

"One of our partners wanted to minimise the cost of print and advertising and I was not in agreement with it. We decided to not release it then. The two years time period then seemed difficult, long and dark but the universe was conspiring for us to give it a right platform. At that time if we would have released it in theatres, the film would have come and gone and nobody would have known about it."

"Cabaret" is streaming on ZEE5 from January 5 and the actor-producer is happy with its digital release.

"Our standards keep changing. Cinema hall is a cinema hall but it is not the holy grail anymore. My phone has become my cinema hall and we need to understand and respect this new medium. "Who dreamt that 20 years ago, there will be digital streaming? It is like a new dawn. I am glad I am a part of it," she added.

Directed by Kaustav Narayan Niyogi, the film revolves around a bar dancer, played by Richa Chadha.

Shay Mitchell Has a Message for Social Media Haters

Attention social media trolls: Shay Mitchell is not here for it.

Based on her Instagram, there's no doubt that the You actress is living her best life. The Canadian star posts epic photos with backdrops of stunning international landscapes, flawless beauty and ridiculously amazing fashion on the daily. It provokes the kind of wanderlust that will have anyone seriously planning their next vacation. But, don't get it twisted, her Instagram is the result of her inner ambitions for self-discovery. It's not for validation.

"It's so important to take time to design the life you want to live, as opposed to looking at how other people are living their life," she told E! News at the launch party for her collabora-

tion with Buxom. "You're never going to be able to please everybody, so social media is just my tool to share my

and noises at all hours, it's nice to have a black screen and just have a conversation with yourself," she stated. "As crazy



as that may seem, some times you can get a lot of answers and realize a lot of things you may be asking when you have a moment to yourself."

For the star, who has overcome her own personal battles as of lately, including sharing news of a recent miscarriage, finding a balance between self-exposure and self-care has been a priority.

"To be honest, I do have a limit to social media, whether it looks like it or not," she said. "Being so active on social media, and seeing the positive and negative effects that it can have on anybody, I really did realize how important it is to connect to yourself."

experiences and inspire people and let them know what's out there."

Her advice to those addicted to the Insta-scroll: Connect with yourself before you connect to the world.

"We're so bombarded with images

personal investigation could reveal that there's more going on than meets the eye. Your best intentions to be helpful could suck you into a situation that's heavier than you bargained for. Stay out of other people's entanglements and think twice—make that thrice—before getting involved.

VRGO: an you feel the power of your purr? You're a head turner of the first degree, thanks to today's sultry sync-up of the Sun and seductive Pluto in your glamorous fifth house. Grabbing the spotlight takes minimal effort on your part, but be careful what you do with that gift today, Virgo. You've got the power, but you need to wield it carefully!

LIBRA: Is your blood boiling, Libra? Your easygoing sign can turn fierce when you suspect someone is messing with your inner circle. Today's conjunction of the passionate Sun and possessive Pluto in your sensitive fourth house could throw up red flags. Did someone cross your line in the sand? Since you might be too emotional to confront them directly, call a dispassionate third party who can help you determine the best course of action.

SCORPIO: The pen—and the voice—are

mightier than the sword today, Scorpio, so make every word count. Potent Pluto (one of your galactic guardians) syncs up with the Sun in your third house of communication, turbocharging your confidence and helping you speak your truth. This isn't the time to confuse, conflate or manipulate. By honestly expressing yourself, you could move the masses. But make sure you know what you want to say. Anger or resentment will only serve to water down your message.

SAGITTARIUS: Read the fine print, Sagittarius, especially the digits on your financial statements. Today's keen connection between the illuminating Sun and probing Pluto could reveal a hidden charge that you forgot to cancel (your ex's phone service) or a contract clause that needs amending. Keep your eyes wide open when making any new fiscal transactions.

CAPRICORN: Magnetic doesn't begin to describe you today as the Sun simmers alongside seductive Pluto in Capricorn. You're in the power position; a subtle assertion of leadership is all that's required for people to fall in line with your ideas. Wield

this influence carefully. Today, others may see you as their capable queen, but if you hand down orders without asking for feedback, your royal court could turn mutinous.

AQUARIUS: Don't be so quick to trust today, Aquarius. People may not be totally on the up-and-up, and with the Sun aligned with secretive Pluto, you could put your faith in the wrong folks—and land in a heap of trouble. Even if you had nothing to do with their misdeeds, others may deem you guilty by association. Worse, you could get ensnared in activities that tarnish your reputation!

PISCES: Have you been trusting people "on instinct" instead of taking time to see what they're actually all about? A feel-good conversation says little about a person's integrity. This weekend, you may realize that you need more intel on someone who is advancing toward your inner circle. Group projects could use the same discerning review. If there's a weak link in the chain, find out if they simply need more training or if they're actually unqualified for the role.