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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Learning levels in Govt schools plummet

ASER 2018 paints dismal picture of education in Sikkim in recent years

TSHERING EDEN

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

The Annual Status of Education Report [Rural] 2018 paints a dismal picture of education being imparted in government schools in the State which has been showing a downward trend on many indicators.

According to the ASER report, which was released on 15 Jan 2019, the percentage of children studying in Class V who can read Class II level text in English has been consistently dropping from 61.6% in 2012

Reading Tool (English)			
Std II level text		Std I level text	
Salma is a little girl. She had a pretty doll. She loved playing with her doll. One day the doll fell from her hand to the floor. It broke into many pieces. Salma was very sad. She cried a lot. Her mother gave her another doll. Now she is happy again.		Ravi is a boy. He has many friends. He loves to draw. He does not like to sing.	
Letters		Words	
b	s	ring	bad
k	m	old	king
y	r	clap	foot
t	x	girl	crow

Arithmetic Tool (English)			
Number recognition 1-9	Number recognition 10-99	Subtraction 10-99	Division
1 4	51 83	46 - 29 = 63 - 39	7)879(
7 3	37 65	47 - 28 = 45 - 17	6)824(
6 9	55 26	92 - 76 = 84 - 57	8)985(
5 2	91 43	52 - 14 = 66 - 48	4)517(
36 27			

to 41.7% in 2018.

The percentage of Class V students who can do division has in turn fallen drastically from 43.8% in 2012 to 12.5% in 2018!

Even the percentage of Class VIII students

who can read a Class II level text has dropped from 93.4% in 2012 to 78.9% in 2018.

ASER 2018 is a nation-wide household survey that provides a snapshot of children's schooling and learning for a rep-

resentative sample of children across rural India. Children in the age group 3 to 16 are surveyed to find out their enrollment status in school or pre-school. Children in the age group 5 to 16 are assessed one-on-one to understand

their basic reading and arithmetic abilities. ASER continues to be the only national source of information about children's foundational skills across the country.

In learning assessments conducted for

ASER in Sikkim, it was found that only 16% of Class I students could read Class I level text and only 25.3% of Class II students could read Class II level texts. Moreover, 18.1% of Class VIII students could only read up

to Class I level text.

In another segment of the survey, in which the progress of four groups of Class IV students was tracked till they reached Class VIII, a consistent drop in progress was recorded.

Class IV students

were tested on their ability to read Class II level texts till they reached Class VIII. Approximately 36% of Class IV students in 2008 could read Class II level text and by the time they reached Class VIII in 2012, 93.5% of them could read Class II level text.

However, over the years, there has been a consistent drop in the progress made by Class IV students till they reach Class VIII.

Around 91% of those in Class IV in 2010 could read Class II level text when they reached Class VIII in 2014.

Among those in Class IV in 2012, only around 86% could read Class II level text when they reached 2016.

In the next batch of 2014 Class IV students, only around 78% could read Class II level text by the time they reached Class VIII in 2018.

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Bhumchu measures out perfect 21 cups

Tashiding monastery thanks Govt for including Bhumchu in list of govt holidays

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Bhumchu, the holy ritual, held at Tashiding Monastery in West Sikkim on the 15th day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar, was held at the monastery on the intervening night of 18-19 Feb. The festival drew among its largest attendance this year, something made possible by the State Government including the festival in the list of government holidays from this year onwards.

In fact, the organizers have also thanked Chief Minister Pawan Chamling for making Bhumchu a gov-

ernment holiday and remarked that "this thoughtful gesture of the government has not only allowed the Sikkimese devotees to attend in large numbers but also given due recognition and respect to this centuries old festival started in the monastery in 1942 AD."

A press communiqué received from Phurba T Tsechutharpa, Drunyk, Tashiding Monastery, informs that when the water in the holy vase was measured out, the water level was one and a half cup higher than last year, thereby leveling to its actual capacity of 21 cups.

The amount and texture of the water, it may be mentioned here, is believed to predict the year ahead for Sikkim. An exact measurement is believed to be a good sign of a normal year, but an official verdict on it will have to await a divination by the masters.

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CM inaugurates Evangelical Presbyterian Church

One Family One Job scheme will continue: Chamling



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling today said that One Family One Job (OFOJ) will be an ongoing process which will continue in future as well. He was speaking during the inauguration of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPCS) today at PNG Complex, Gangtok.

With 8000 candidates to be appointed under the scheme in the second phase, almost 99% of households in the State will now have at least one government employee, said the CM.

Dedicating the church to members of the Christian community, Mr Chamling said that the Christian community should realize

that there is complete protection of their identity as a minority community; and they have been treated with respect and honour that they so rightly deserve.

He added that Sikkim is the only State where religious institutions are constructed with the help of financial aid from the Government.

The CM went on to

highlight the progress made by the State in the last two and a half decades, and also urged the Pastors and Elders to sensitize the youth regarding the educational facilities provided by the State Government.

It may be mentioned that the foundation stone of the church had been laid on 03 Oct, 2013.

Four adhoc teachers arrested

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Four adhoc teachers who were leading the dharna for regularization which involved the blocking of the highway on Monday have been arrested by Sadar Police this evening.

Yogesh Sharma, Prakash Parajuli, Rajesh Dahal and Lapden Sherpa were arrested following an FIR filed by ADC East at Sadar PS on

Monday. The four adhoc teachers have been accused of leading and inciting the crowd of adhoc teachers who blocked NH 10 for over three hours on Monday.

They have been booked under sections 188/283/341/147/149 of IPC r/w section 8(B) of National Highway Act 1956.

The four teachers are now in police custody and will be produced in court on Wednesday.

SKM's parivartan rally continues in West Sikkim



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

On the third leg of the ongoing Parivartan Sankalp Yatra of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, the party president PS Tamang [Golay] interacted with the people of Pherek, Miling, Sepi Kumuk and Uttarey in West Sikkim on Tuesday.

On the occasion, a total of 67 families of SDF Party from different wards joined SKM, informs an SKM press release.

Addressing the people at Miling Pherek, Mr Tamang accused SDF of favouritism and partial-

ity in the distribution of government benefits to the people and of threatening the people not to attend meetings of opposition parties.

He further accused the government to suppressing the voice of the people and urged the people to be aware of their rights and alert against its denial. He assured to carry out developmental activities in all corners of the State if SKM forms the government and to distribute government benefits to genuine beneficiaries irrespective of party affiliations.

SKM opens zonal office in Singtam, lashes out against Govt

YOGEN THATAL

SINGTAM, 19 FEB:

A zonal party office of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha was inaugurated at Singtam Bazaar in East Sikkim on Tuesday.

SKM acting president, Syari MLA Kunga Nima Lepcha, was present as the chief guest accompanied by chief coordinator of the party, Sangha MLA Sonam Lama, secretary general Arun Uprety, senior vice president TN Sharma, advisor TM Sharma and other workers and supporters of SKM party.

The party workers also took out a rally through town today.

An SKM press release informs that the inaugural function also had the "special presence" of SKM candidate from the 2014 election, Dr MK



Sharma, who has been inactive in the party for some time due to personal issues. He received a grand welcome from the people, the release adds.

The release mentions that SKM yuva morcha general secretary, Shadav Sharma, appealed to the people to support the 24-hour Sikkim Bandh

called by SKM for 28 February and added that the bandh has been called in the interest of the people of Sikkim and not for any personal interest.

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Training for Presiding and Polling Officers of South District

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

The first round of training for the Presiding Officers and Polling Officers – I has been conducted today in South District, a press release informs. Over hundred Polling personnel have attended the training who will be deployed for the conduct of poll in various polling stations on poll day.

The hands on training on use of EVM and VVPAT have also been conducted to instil confidence in the minds of the Polling personnel on the day of poll.

The resource persons in today's program were SDM Ravangla, Zigmee Wangchuk Bhutia and SDM, Bimal Chandra Rai while SDM Namchi, Hemant Rai coordinated the pgoramme.

The second round of training for the Presiding and Polling Officers will commence from 05 Mar till 08 Mar, the release mentions.

Sikkim to play Arunachal in first match of Dr T Ao Centenary C'ship

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Sikkim has been placed in pool A in the 2nd Dr T Ao Centenary North East International NEC Gold Cup Football Championship [U-21 years] 2019 which will begin on Tuesday at Guwahati in Assam. Sikkim has been placed with Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan and Bangladesh in pool A. Likewise, teams of Nepal, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura have been placed in pool B.

Sikkim will be playing its first match against Arunachal Pradesh on 20 Feb, followed by the second match against Bhutan on 21 Feb, third match against Assam on 24 Feb and final match with Bangladesh on 25 Feb in the qualifying round.

An 18-member Sikkim team led by Kunal Tamang as team captain is already in Guwahati, Assam for the championship. Other team members are Lakpa Dorjee Bhutia, Roshan Mangar, Aunrag Chettri, Kelvin Sherpa, Abid Mohammad, Roshan Pradhan, Prashant Chettri, Boxer Pradhan, Nikesh Gurung, Robin Sharma, Sukraj Subba, Sagar Mahanto, Burnes Rai, Milan Chettri, Sangay Chophel, Sanjay Rai and Roman Subba.

The team is accompanied by Arjun Rai as team manager, Milan Singh as team coach, Dilip Chettri as team official and Dr Pragyan Basnett as physiotherapist.

Sikkim Red Fest winner Roll Heads bags 2nd prize at NE Multi Media Campaign



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 FEB:**

Music band 'Roll Heads', the winner of Red Fest III, Multi Media Campaign 2018-2019, represented Sikkim State AIDS Control Society at the 1st North East Multi Media Cam-

paign held on 18 Feb 2019 at Kohima, Nagaland and bagged the 2nd runners up title and a cash prize of Rs. 50,000, a press release informs.

The band from Manipur, The Wishes and Luli Yephtho & the band from Nagaland were

the winner and the 1st runners up respectively. They bagged a prize of Rs 1,00,000 and Rs 70,000 respectively.

The event hosted by Nagaland State AIDS Control Society under the theme 'North East United against HIV/AIDS'

is the first North East mega event organized by National AIDS Control Organization with an aim to create awareness and deliberate on the issues of HIV & AIDS.

The event was attended by S Pangnyu Phom, Minister for Health &

Family Welfare, Government of Nagaland as the chief guest along with Major General Pradeep Nair, YSM, Inspector General, HQ, IGAR (N) and Dr Naresh Goel, Deputy Director General, NACO as special guests.

The colorful parade by Assam Rifles, NCC, Bharat Scouts & Guides, State AIDS Control Societies and the 16 tribes of Nagaland marked the beginning of the Mega event.

The event also had Alobo Naga, Tetseo Sisters and Nise Meruno as guest artists.

The judges for the competition were Alobo Naga, Dr Naresh Goel, DDG NACO and Guru Rewben Mashangva.

The Sikkim Contingent was led by Lubhana Rai, Assistant Director/IEC and Phoor Tshering Lepcha, Assistant Director/Youth of Sikkim State AIDS Control Society, the release mentions.

LTVC rejects Land Bill for ignoring Tamangs

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 FEB:**

The Limboo-Tamang Voluntary Committee has "strongly" opposed the Land bill introduced in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly yesterday since the bill proposes to protect only Limboo land from alienation even though Tamangs, by virtue of having been included in the Scheduled Tribes list along with the Limboos, are also entitled to similar protection.

"This totally reflects the double standard of GoS and ruling Govt towards Limbu & Tamang Communities. Knowing the fact that LTVC had requested to safeguard both Limbu and Tamang communities lands but still the govt is trying to divide us. Randomly re-introducing land protec-

tion to only Limbus without involving the Tamang community and that too with liability is not what we had asked for. Why only LT are being used as a scapegoat by the Govt? What ulterior motive can be there behind this?" an LTVC press release issued today questions.

The release also informs that the Ministry of Home Affairs has forwarded a petition submitted by LTVC and directed the Chief Secretary to necessary action on the same.

"LTVC is hopeful that State Govt will comply with the orders of MHA and MoTA and take appropriate steps to resolve all the issues raised by LTVC pertaining to Limbu & Tamang Communities of Sikkim at the earliest," the release concludes.

SDF Legislators meet

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 FEB:**

The legislators' meet of Sikkim Democratic Front was held here at Mintokgang on Monday evening chaired by the Chief Minister Pawan Chamling. The meeting discussed different issues of the State and took various decisions, informs a press release issued by SDF spokesperson, Bhim Dahal.

The meeting agreed that the SDF government has been following and managing regularisation of jobs in the State Govt in proper manner on mission mode. The meeting further discussed that the process of regularising adhoc and muster roll employees and identification and development of employment-oriented sectors will be continued.

The meeting also deliberated that the SDF government has appointed more than one lakh people in government jobs so far, and over one lakh people are employed in the service sector here. The meeting discussed that around three lakh people are working in industries, tourism, educational institutes, health and other sectors in the

State and have been earning a livelihood.

The release adds that the meeting also thoroughly discussed the 'One Family, One Job' scheme and reiterated the commitment of the government to manage this scheme as a regular programme of the government.

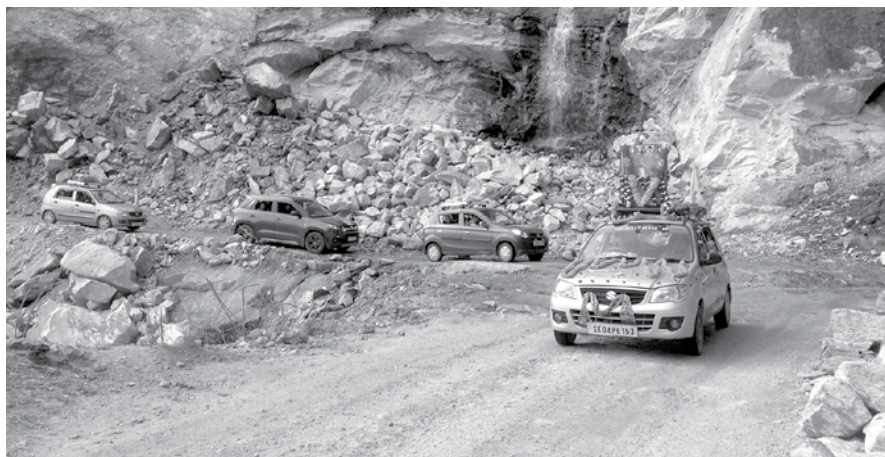
The legislators' meet also decided to celebrate the SDF foundation day on 04 March at the constituency-level across the State this time. The meeting further decided to have a live telecast of the party president's address on the day at every constituency.

The meeting also resolved to always preserve and protect peace and security in Sikkim.

The legislators' meeting also discussed and expressed satisfaction on works in providing equal protection and ensuring identity and respect to every community of Sikkim and further discussed that this process will always be continued.

The meeting also discussed that the people of Sikkim should also participate and contribute to maintaining peace, security and tranquillity in the State.

MUSS marks 50 yrs in Sikkim with car rally



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 FEB:**

A two-day Sadhbhawna car rally to mark 50 years of Manav Dharma in Sikkim, Darjeeling Hills, Daoars and Bhutan concluded upon reaching Gyalshing in West Sikkim on Sunday.

The car rally had started from Melli in South Sikkim on 16 February and covered different parts of South

and West Sikkim.

The first day of the car rally toured through Melli Bazaar and concluded at Daramdin in West Sikkim and on the second day, from Daramdin to Sombaria, Soreng, Chakung, Sreebadam, Kaluk, Hee-Bermiok, Pelling and finally concluding at Gyalshing.

This Spiritual Awareness Car Rally was organised by Manav Uthtan

Sewa Samiti, Sikkim.

On the occasion, Mahatma Akhilesh Baiji, Mahatma Puspawati Baiji, Mahatma Tarika Baiji, Mahatma Gyan Baiji, Mahatma Brinda Baiji, Mahatma Anima Baiji, Mahatma Kritika Baiji, Mahatma Sarala Baiji and other addressed Sadhbhawna Satsang Samaroh organised at different places along the route of the car rally.

Interactive Engagement on Menstrual Hygiene at Rakdong Tintek



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 FEB:**

ESS India, a Non-Governmental Organization working in the field of menstrual hygiene conducted an intervention at Rakdong Tintek, East Sikkim on 18 Feb. The session had students from Schools, Concerned Panchayats, Local Self Help Groups, Doctor and nurses from Primary Health Centre and staffs of BDO office, informs a press release.

During the interac-

tion, the ESS India team highlighted important aspects of menstrual hygiene and informed them about menstrual cups, a unique product that would help us to reduce environmental pollution by reducing sanitary napkins going to the dumping site.

The team also briefed the audience on issues related to health and the importance of taking care of their body during menstruation

The primary objec-

tive of conducting sessions at BAC -Level is to further the cause of menstrual hygiene, to break the taboo of discussing the subject and also to engage females in an open conversation so that they scientifically approach the subject of menstruation.

BDO Rakdong Tintek, Indramani Adhikari gave away menstrual cups to Panchayats, office staffs and to Primary Health Centre, the release mentions.

Organic Input Retail outlet-cum-Agri Clinic opened at Pakyong and Rongli



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 FEB:**

International Panacea, a service provider agency working under Sikkim Organic Mission, organized the inauguration an Organic Input Retail outlet cum Agri Clinic at Pakyong and Rongli by service provider, Concede Organisation in East Sikkim.

The main idea behind opening the Organic Input Retail Outlet cum Agri Clinic in the area is to provide maximum services and fulfill basic necessities to the organic

farming community here, a press release informs.

Dr S Annabalagan, Chief Executive Officer, Sikkim Organic Mission, MK Pradhan, Director, SOM, Suman Sharma, Additional Director, SOM, Lendup Tamang, Accountant, SOM, Field & Office staff of IPL, FPO presidents and farmers from different areas were present for the inaugural function.

Dr Annabalagan mentioned that the decision to open such outlets was taken at a recent meeting with the service providers.

Learning levels...

This drop in progress from 93.5% in 2012 to 78% in 2018 is a significant one.

Even in assessment for Arithmetic ability, the trends over time are worrying.

The percentage of Class V students who can do division has fallen from 43.8% in 2012 to 12.5% in 2018.

The percentage of Class VIII students who can do division has also dropped from 77.4% in 2012 to 44.7% in 2018.

When it comes to facilities available in schools, Sikkim does fairly well except for the lack of libraries and computers. In 2018, 47.7% of schools in the State did not have libraries while 66.4% of schools did not have computers available for children to use.

Percentage of schools with computers and children observed using them on day of visit by ASER surveyors has decreased from 24.6% in 2010 to 9.4% in 2018.

Sikkim allocates 20% of its annual budget to education and there are still schools without libraries or computers.

The report also states that percentage of Class II students sitting with one or more classes has increased from 9% in 2010 to 23.8% in 2018. Class IV students sitting with one or more classes has also increased from 9.2% in 2010 to 20.4% in 2018.

Out of the four districts, the performance of South district is comparatively better than other districts. In Class III to V learning levels, the percentage of children who can read Class II level text is the highest at 46% in South Sikkim with the lowest in West district at 33.3%.

In Class VI to VIII learning levels, the percentage of children who can read Class II level text is the highest at 77.1% in South district while the lowest is 29.3% in West Sikkim.

The 2018 ASER survey was conducted in all four districts of the State wherein 2,606 children aged between 3-16 years were tested on various aspects.

Bhumchu measures...

Meanwhile, the ceremony at Tashiding was led by Khenpo Lha Tshering, the ceremonial and spiritual head of Tashiding, who opened the vase on the midnight of 18 Feb in the presence of area MLA Sonam Dadul Bhutia and representative from the Ecclesiastical Affairs Department, Tshering Thendup Bhutia.

After thorough examination of the water and its measurement, distribution to devotees waiting outside started at 1:30AM on 19 Feb and continued till the end of the day.

The organizers point out that the Bhumchu this year was not easy for devotees to attend due to the continuous rainfall and cold weather. Devotees from Bhutan, an official communiqué informs, were present in the largest numbers.

Bhumchu is among the most holy ceremonies exclusive to Sikkim and has been held uninterrupted at Tashiding Monastery ever since the Holy Vase was placed here by Ngadag Sempa Chenpo Phuntsog Rigzing, one of the founding saints of the kingdom of Sikkim, in the 1640s.

SKM opens zonal...

that it was unfortunate that educated youth of the State have to take to the streets for their rights.

Likewise, SKM acting president, KN Lepcha, claimed that the people received government benefits due to the voice raised by SKM. He also alleged poor work culture and administrative failure as having caused the demotion of Accounts Officers recently, the protest by adhoc teachers etc.

He added that change in the State was only possible under the leadership of PS Tamang.

The release informs that the meeting was also addressed by senior vice-president TN Dhakal and vice-president [zone 2], Anand Lama.

SRC of Tadong College thanks CM for laptops

SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 19 FEB: Student Representative Council of Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Tadong has thanked the State Government and the Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling for providing laptops to 2906 students of the college. The council has also thanked the CM for providing jobs to more than 100 students of Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College through One Family One Job scheme.

Addressing a press conference here today, SRC president, Arun Limboo expressed his gratitude to the CM for providing laptops to college students. He also expressed



his happiness on starting the distribution of laptops to students from Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Tadong.

“We submitted a

memorandum to the CM on 05 October last year and one of our demands was the distribution of laptops to college students. On behalf of the

college students, we would like to thank the CM for fulfilling our demand,” he said.

Mr Limboo also thanked the CM for pro-

viding jobs to more than 100 students of Tadong College in the first phase of One Family One Job scheme. He expressed his hope that more students will get jobs in the second phase of the scheme.

Without taking any names, he stated that the state-wide bandh called by a political party on 28 Feb will affect studies of 2906 students of the college.

“We request them not to disturb studies of 2906 students of Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College and if there is any disturbance then we will condemn the act in a democratic manner,” Mr Limboo said. He added that students will not compromise on their studies at any cost.

Inter-BAC football tourney kicks off at Paljor Stadium

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

The district-level Inter-BAC football tournament under East District Sports Activities 2018-19 kicked off here at Paljor Stadium on Monday. The event is being organised by Khelo India District Level Executive Committee, East District and Department of Sports & Youth Affairs, government of India and sponsored by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, government of India, under ‘Sports for Peace and Development’ [Vertical of Khelo India].

Director of Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Kamal Chettri was present as the chief guest for the tournament.

The tournament has

U-14 boys & girls and U-19 boys & girls teams from each BAC of the East District. The participating BACs are Ranka, Regu, Rhenock, Parakha, Pakyong, Duga, Khamdong, Rakkdong, Martam, Nandok and Gangtok.

The final matches of U-14 boys and girls will be played on 27 Feb, which will be followed by finals of U-19 boys and girls on 28 Feb. The organisers will be providing medals and certificates to winning teams.

Likewise, East District Sports Activities 2018-19 has included the district-level [inter BAC] competition in six other sports disciplines of Athletic, Archery Badminton, Karate, Taekwondo and Table Tennis.

Pak responds to India’s arguments at ICJ over Kulbhushan Jadhav’s case

THE HAGUE, FEB 19

(PTI): Pakistan on Tuesday responded to India at the International Court of Justice in the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav, insisting that the Indian Navy officer was a “spy” and not a businessman.

The four-day hearing in the Jadhav case opened Monday at the UN court headquarters in The Hague amidst heightened tensions between India and Pakistan following one of the worst terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad terror group that killed at least 40 CRPF soldiers.

“India, I am sorry to say, has demonstrated a lack of faith throughout these proceedings... good faith is part of international law,” lawyer Khawar Qureshi said.

“India doesn’t know Pakistan, Pakistan is a state that has provided the largest contingent for peacekeeping, whose soldiers have lost lives in pursuing world security,” he said.

“India’s conduct and abusive process... India has deployed this process for political theatre,” lawyer Qureshi said.

He alleged that the Indian Navy officer was a “spy” and not a businessman.

Qureshi also alleged that Jadhav was an “instrument of India’s official policy of terror”.

On the first day of hearing, India urged the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to annul Jadhav’s death sentence and order his immediate release, saying the verdict by a Pakistani military court based on a “farfical case” hopelessly fails to satisfy even the minimum standards of due process. India moved the ICJ in May in 2017 against the “farfical trial” by the military court of Pakistan against 48-year-old Jadhav.

Jadhav, a retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017.

India first approached the ICJ on May 8, 2017 for the “egregious violation” of the provisions of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, 1963 by Pakistan by repeatedly denying it consular access to Jadhav. A 10-member bench of the ICJ, which was set up after World War II to resolve international disputes, on May 18, 2017 had restrained Pakistan from executing Jadhav till adjudication of the case.

The ICJ has set a timetable for the public hearing in the high-profile case from February 18 to 21 at the Peace Palace in The Hague, the Netherlands.

While India argued on Monday and Pakistan responded to India’s arguments on Tuesday. India will reply on February 20 while Islamabad will make its closing submissions on February 21.

It is expected that the ICJ’s decision may be delivered by the summer of 2019.

Month-long Entrepreneurship Development Prog at ICFAI



REBYNA RANA

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Month-long Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) for Science and Technology has started at The ICFAI University Sikkim campus. The programme has been sponsored by NSTEDB, Department of Science & Technology, Government of India and has been organized by Sik-

kim Consultancy Centre (SICON) Gangtok in association with The ICFAI University Sikkim for the students of IT Department.

The programme was inaugurated by H. K. Mandal [Officer-in charge, SICON], Dr. R. K. Singh [Director, KVIC], Ramudamu [Officer of SICON], Registrar Dr. Ravindra Chettri, Dean Dr. Sudha Jha and Ajit

Karki [Coordinator of IT School].

The program aims to motivate, train and guide entrepreneurs who want to set up their own ventures in Sikkim. The program shall cover all aspects of successful establishment of self-employment ventures including guidance for selection of product and site, machinery, marketing and arranging finance, etc.

Pak seeks urgent UN intervention to de-escalate fresh tensions with India

ISLAMABAD, FEB 19 (PTI):

Pakistan has sought the urgent intervention of UN Secretary-General in defusing tensions with India and help facilitate dialogue between the two countries, the Foreign Office said on Tuesday, following one of the worst terror attacks in Kashmir that killed 40 CRPF soldiers.

On February 14, at least 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed in Kashmir’s Pulwama district in a suicide attack claimed by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terror group. The attack has heightened bilateral tensions with both New Delhi and Islamabad calling back their envoys for “consultations”. India on Friday announced the withdrawal of the Most Favoured Nation status for Pakistan and hiked the customs duty by 200 per cent on goods originating from the neighbouring country.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi sent a letter to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday, seeking his help to reduce the tensions between the two countries, the Pakistan Foreign Office said.

“It is with a sense of urgency that I draw your attention to the deteriorating security situation in our region resulting from the threat of use of force against Pakistan by India,” Qureshi wrote in

the letter. India has rejected any third party intervention on the Kashmir issue and has maintained that all outstanding matters in Indo-Pak ties should be resolved bilaterally. India has also firmly told Pakistan that dialogue and terrorism cannot go hand in hand.

Qureshi, in his letter, said the Pulwama attack on Indian CRPF soldiers was “ostensibly and even by Indian accounts” carried out by a Kashmiri resident. He said attributing the attack to Pakistan even before investigations was “absurd”.

He alleged that for domestic political reasons, India deliberately ratcheted up its hostile rhetoric against Pakistan and created a tense environment.

Qureshi wrote that India has also hinted that it may abandon the Indus Waters Treaty, asserting that it would be a “grievous error”. “It is imperative to take steps for de-escalation. The United Nations must step in to defuse tensions,” Qureshi said.

He said India must be asked to conduct an “open and credible investigation” in the terror attack. “You may also consider asking India to refrain from further escalating the situation and enter into dialogue with Pakistan and the Kashmiris to calm the situation down,” he wrote.

The foreign minister requested that his letter should be circulated to

members of the UN Security Council and General Assembly.

Meanwhile, Qureshi said on Tuesday that Pakistan wanted peace in the region as unrest and chaos would not serve any one’s interest.

He made the comments while talking to Pakistan’s High Commissioner to India Sohail Mahmood who called on him in Islamabad.

Radio Pakistan reported that they exchanged views on overall security situation of the region in particular context of Indian allegations against Pakistan over the Pulwama incident.

“We are seriously reviewing the emerging situation and I have written a letter to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres apprising him about the situation,” Qureshi was quoted as saying.

Pakistan’s High Commissioner to India Mahmood is in Islamabad for “consultations” after the Pulwama terror attack.

Pakistan has repeatedly asked the UN to intervene in Kashmir. Former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had also sought the US’ intervention, saying America was the “most relevant” party to get involved in Kashmir issue.

The US, however, has time and again reiterated that it is for India and Pakistan to discuss and decide on the pace and scope of their bilateral relationship.

Tractor Operator course begins at CAEPHT

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 18 FEB:

A 25-day skill development training for tractor operators began here at the College of Agricultural Engineering and Post Harvest Technology (CAU, Imphal) at Ranipool on Monday.

The training is being sponsored by Agriculture Skill Council of India (ASCI) under Skill India Mission of the Govt. of India.

The training will impart specific skills on the operation, repair and maintenance of tractors and power tillers.

Inaugurating the training, Dean Prof PP Dabral, emphasised the significance of the training and urged the trainees to utilize this opportunity to become skilled tractor operators.

20 trainees from NE states are in attendance.

Chitfund scam victims stage demonstration

BHUBANESWAR, FEB 19

(PTI): Thousands of chitfund scam victims Tuesday staged a demonstration here demanding refund of their money and accused the Odisha government of delaying identification of the investors duped by ponzi firms.

The agitators from across the state staged demonstration under the banner of the Chit Fund Khyatigrastra Milita Manch. They have decided to stage an indefinite sit-in dharna till their demands are met.

“The chitfund victims will continue civil disobedience agitation

till government refunds their money. The state is not serious about identifying the duped investors,” Manch convener Jayant Das said.

While the state government could identify the beneficiaries under the newly launched Kalia scheme within a month, it was over six years to complete identification of the duped investors, Das said alleging that the state has shown gross apathy towards the chit fund investors.

Though the state government announced creation of Rs 300 crore corpus fund in 2013 to refund money

to small investors (less than Rs 10,000 investment), it has not yet taken any step in this regard, they alleged.

The Justice MM Das Commission of Inquiry has identified nearly 3.5 lakh small investors and recommended the state government to refund their money. However, the state government has not taken any step in this regard, Das alleged.

Finance Minister S B Behera said “The government has already started refunding money to investors. There is, however, delay in regard to proper identification of investors.”

Were under pressure to say won’t admit Kashmiri students from next session: Dehradun colleges



DEHRADUN, FEB 19

(PTI): Clarifying on their statements of not granting admission to students from Kashmir, two city-based colleges Tuesday said they were under pressure and no decision of such sort has been taken by their management.

“We had to do it under pressure from a mob of around 400-500 which was protesting at the gates demanding expulsion of Kashmiri students from the institute and an assurance in writing that the new ones will not be granted admission following the terrorist attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama,” Chairman of Alpine College of Management and Technology, Anil Saini, told PTI.

“What the institute administration gave in writing to the protesting mob was to ensure the safety of the Kashmiri students,” he added.

He said no policy decision has been taken about denying admission to Kashmiri students from the next session.

“How can we deny admission to Kashmiri students?. Aren’t we bound by the constitution of India? The statement given in writing by the institute’s administration was meant to pacify the angry protesters and to prevent the situation from going out of

hands,” Saini said.

Baba Farid Institute of Technology, which was the other city-based institution to give a similar commitment in writing, also admitted that it did so under pressure.

“The institute was open that day and there were Kashmiri students on campus. We were worried about their safety. That is why we said no Kashmiri student will be admitted from the upcoming session,” Principal of Baba Farid Institute of Technology Aslam Siddiqui said.

About 450 students from Jammu and Kashmir study in these two institutes.

However, Siddiqui refused to name any outfit for the protests.

“A mob does not have a face. It was an angry mob consisting of even people from nearby villages. They were in no mood to listen to us and it was no use arguing with them. All they wanted was a written undertaking denying admission to Kashmiri students which we gave to defuse the situation,” he said.

Siddiqui admitted that the WhatsApp message sent by a Kashmiri student of Sridev Suman Subharti University in which he

had expressed happiness over the terrorist attack in Pulwama did add fuel to the fire.

“People were already angry following the terror attack in Pulwama and his comment did rub salt into the wounds triggering tension and the subsequent protests.”

He said the situation now was fully under control with no protests over the last three days and substantial deployment of police personnel around campuses where Kashmiri students study. “We are getting full co-operation from the police with SSP Nivedita Kukreti herself monitoring the situation,” Siddiqui said.

IG Garhwal range Ajay Rautela said the Kashmiri students are completely safe and they should not worry. Police patrolling in Premnagar area, where most of the Kashmiri students live, has been stepped up.

However, he appealed to people to maintain calm.

“People are grief stricken over the martyrdom of our soldiers in Jammu and Kashmir. In a situation like this we must ensure that no such content which has the potential to hurt sentiments is floated on the social media,” he said.

Water!

To meet the challenge, engage the young

It is not clear whether the thunder showers that the region received over the past few days were the Nor'westers or not. Of course they were not. They were Western Disturbances bringing down some violent and heavy moisture. Irrespective of what they were, the showers have been working wonders for farms parched by the dry Winter that Sikkim experienced this time. A similarly dry spell had also set over most of North India and even the North-East was hard hit since what it received from a late and barely normal monsoon coursed away with the floods, and the dry winter scorched the fields and brought its many hydel projects to sputtering stops. Of course the fall in demand can also be blamed for some of the sputtering and one needs to only look at the sliver that the Teesta becomes between dams every winter to realize the amounts that the reservoirs hold back thumbing their collective noses at the fiction of "run of the river" model. And this after a normal monsoon because the Winter stayed without its drizzles right until the end of the season. It goes without saying that if the main rivers [on which hydel projects are developed] are running low, the feeder streams and jhoras and springs on which mountain people rely for drinking and agricultural water supply must also be drying out. The region is thus facing an irrigation and drinking water shortfall along with a power crisis. And all this because the Winter had been so dry that the watersheds replenished by the monsoons could not tide over the dry spell. In that sense, the recent rains have been welcome.

The situation has not been as dire for Sikkim although fields which rely on rains for irrigation have suffered. A possible reason why Sikkim fared better than the rest of the similarly parched regions is perhaps because it retains a better forest cover in comparison to what has happened elsewhere. The nation requires 33 per cent of its land mass to be under forest cover. At present, this cover in the country stands at 23.68%. When one speaks of the Indian landmass, the 10% shortfall in forest cover presents a monumental task, especially when not much is being done to meet this target. Given the national average and targets, some might say that Sikkim need not have undertaken the State Green Mission given the fact that nearly 46% of the State is already under forests. And yet it did and should the Green Mission sustain, the State will be all the richer from the initiative. It is after all the green cover which keeps the watersheds replenished and wet even if the winters are dry. Gangtok, for example, does not have a water supply problem. Taps run dry here because of distribution problems, not because the source at Ratey Chu does not have enough water. Few regions are as well naturally provided and sustained as Gangtok and most other parts of Sikkim. The areas which have a supply problem have inherited a traditional challenge or have messed up the sources with poorly planned 'development' projects like roads which have choked up springs with debris or runaway construction which has not planned for supply.

It is possible that readers will notice a surge in water-related events in the State as the World Water Day [22 March] eventually arrives, and it would apt to begin discussing water issues now. The timing is perfect as Feb-March sits in the cusp of acute shortage [winter] and the problem of plenty [monsoons]. The policy-makers or event managers will be well advised to engage the young in more meaningful discussions on water. Saving them from indoor speeches and taking them out to where water is sourced from would be a good place to begin. That will establish a connection which can be complemented with sessions on how watersheds need to be nurtured and conservation returned as an instinctive habit. This engagement is necessary because if such issues are to be addressed and resolved in the long run, the young need to be involved. And unless the young re-establish a more organic connection with nature, the involvement will not move beyond participating in awareness programmes.

For instance, how many youngsters in Gangtok know where the town gets its water from? Most of those who think they know will say Selep [which is the reservoir, not the source] and only very few of those who know the source to be Ratey Chu would have actually seen it. But take them up to Ratey Chu on an excursion and most of them will return with a clearer appreciation of the need to conserve. More earnest commitments to lifestyle changes to support conservation will then follow..



Frozen II: return of the strong female characters that little girls need to see

HELENA BASSIL-MOROZOW
theconversation.com

The brooding, dramatic trailer for Frozen II generated a lot of excitement on its release last week when it was watched 116.4m times in just 24 hours. In the two-minute teaser, Elsa stands alone on a stormy shore before running at the towering waves and turning them to ice. By the end of the trailer, which also features her sister Anna and friends Kristoff and Olaf, the younger sibling has drawn Kristoff's sword and is leaping towards an unknown assailant hidden from view.

Disney has been much criticised in the past for peddling gender stereotypes to the most impressionable of audiences: children. The female protagonists have traditionally been depicted as sexualised, objectified princesses hobbled by tight, glamorous, (often revealing) pastel-coloured outfits. Pretty, humble and invariably white, they often awaited a handsome, chiselled, invariably white suitor to seduce, tame, save and fall in love with them.

US TOO, DISNEY

But things have been slowly changing at Disney over the past decade. The company has introduced a diversity into its films that reflects the changing environment, and the experience and voices of women in the 21st century. These include The Princess and the Frog (2009), Tangled (2010), Brave (2012), Frozen (2013), and Moana (2016), and each explored the journey of smart, strong, funny, independent female characters.

Still, there is a shortage of confident female role models for young girls more generally, and the reason is age-old and banal: the industry is run by men, as Brave's co-creator Brenda Chapman has frequently pointed out.

Male executives, directors and writers simply tend to create fictional worlds from their own point of view – worlds that explore issues relevant to them. This paucity of fair representation is detrimental to generations of young women and their vision of themselves – their ambitions, motiva-

tions, goals, and their place in society.

The #metoo movement highlighted not just the way actresses and women creatives were treated in Hollywood, but also the dearth of stories with self-sufficient, determined female characters – women protagonists with agency and vision.

Back in 2013, Frozen did break a few stereotypes and raise a few eyebrows. A tale of two sisters, one of whom possesses the magical power to turn everything she touches into ice, it explores female power, creativity and the way in which society traditionally perceives both.

Forced to wear gloves in order to protect herself and her younger sister, Elsa is led to believe that her power, as well as her touch, are deadly, and need to be concealed. A female protagonist with an unusual gift is already a departure from the male superhero canon.

Another is the deliberate refusal to fixate female characters on a male saviour – neither Elsa nor her younger sister Anna find salvation in a romantic heterosexual bond by the end of the film, despite the fact that two males are available to fall in love with.

There has also been a rather rigorous internet discussion about Elsa's sexuality and calls for Disney to give her a girlfriend in the second film. This kind of narrative move would, in fact, be quite in line with the portrayal of Elsa and the winter metaphor associated with her; she is perceived as cold by men, but perhaps the reality is that she simply hasn't found her true love, who may well be a woman.

Importantly, Frozen is inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's The Snow Queen – a tale about an evil queen living in a remote kingdom, capable of freezing hearts of human beings which only other human beings can thaw with love. The Snow Queen is an archetypal Terrible Mother who, in a rather Freudian twist, abducts a boy named Kay, steals his heart and keeps him in her ice castle while his resourceful and resilient friend Gerda spends most of the tale looking for her lost mate.

In the end, Gerda wins the boy's heart and repels the evil queen. The boy is presented as precious and special while the two female characters of the original story fight over a male who has no feelings – not exactly a narrative triumph for feminism.

REWRITING FAIRYTALES

Frozen takes the elements of The Snow Queen – female creativity, energy, resilience and power – and explores them further by replacing the Snow Queen with Elsa, and Gerda with Anna. The male characters are sidelined, and it is Elsa's heart Anna has to win instead. The pain and sacrifice Anna goes through help redeem her sister's special gift.

Yet the magical power Elsa possesses in the first film still has connotations of harm as she has no mastery over it – it just happens in her, and she is afraid of it. The teaser trailer for Frozen II (scheduled for release in November 2019), promises to remedy this situation as Elsa is shown to use her powers to tame the waves and extinguish fire with jets of ice. Meanwhile, a different Anna – less knockabout, more serious – is also revealed as she determinedly wields a man's sword to protect those around her.

Other than creating a sense of menace and urgency, the trailer gives no hint as to what is going on, but Elsa is centre stage, directing her power and creativity to achieve goals. Both Elsa and Anna appear to be on a wild adventure whereas in the original film, Elsa spends her time locked up in two different castles which serve as a metaphor for her inability to be true to herself.

Anticipation is already building for Frozen II. Let's hope it builds fruitfully on the original, helping young girls to feel empowered by role models who are brave, determined, focused and decisive. Who doesn't want to see female characters acting with real agency in stories that look beyond marriage, motherhood and traditionally perceived happy-ever-afters?

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Both democracy and authoritarianism are on the rise in Africa

NIC CHEESEMAN
theconversation.com

Is democracy in Africa in retreat? Or is it simply suffering "growing pains"? The last 12 months have seen a great deal of controversy and debate on these important questions.

There have been some bright spots, like the rise of more resilient opposition movements in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. But elsewhere on the continent, as in Tanzania and Zambia, repression is on the rise.

A new report I have produced for the Bertelsmann Transformation Index on democratic trends between 2015 and 2018 comes to two very important conclusions about the state of democracy in Africa today.

First, the continent experienced an overall deterioration in the quality of almost all indicators of political and economic governance. The fall is not massive, though, and so it makes more sense to speak of democratic difficulties than democratic collapse. However, the decline is real. Its impact has been to move the continent further away from political stability, democratisation, and economic sustainability.

Second, there is not one "Africa". Instead, it's essential to look beyond regional averages because they mask a remarkably divided continent. Today there are almost the same number of defective democracies (15) as there are hard line autocracies (16), among the continent's 54 states.

To understand democracy in Africa, therefore, it's important to look both at the general trend and the remarkable variation.

DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

The data collected by the Bertels-

mann Transformation Index shows that the average score for every measure of political change in Africa fell between 2015 and 2017. This means there was an overall decline in the quality of political participation, rule of law and the capacity of the state in a number of areas.

The stability of democratic institutions, as well as political and social integration, also declined. Some of these changes are relatively small. But they are also consistent with a decade of democratic backsliding and the entrenchment of authoritarianism.

In line with these trends, more countries moved towards authoritarian rule than democracy during this period. Most notably, growing government abuses in Uganda and Mozambique led both to be downgraded to "moderate autocracies". Similar developments in Burundi and Zimbabwe saw them falling to the index's least democratic classification: "hard-line autocracies".

Nothing better epitomises the curtailment of democratic checks and balances than the removal of presidential term limits, and age limits for the head of state in some countries. For now, restrictions have been respected in more countries than they have been abandoned. But 2015 to 2017 saw the continuation of a worrying trend as leaders in the continent's most authoritarian states used their control of political systems to set themselves up as presidents for life.

Following Djibouti (2011, the Republic of Congo (2015), and Burundi (2015), term limits on President Paul Kagame were circumvented in Rwanda in 2017. In Uganda President Yoweri Museveni – who freed himself from term limits in 2006 – success-

fully manoeuvred the passage of legislation that led to the removal of age limits in late 2017.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

The overall trend was also disappointing when it comes to a broader range of governance indicators. On average, the last few years have witnessed a small decline. This is true whether looking at the ability of governments to form consensus, reduce corruption, use resources effectively or build consensus around the best way forward.

As a result, the number of governments rated as having "good governance" fell. Namibia and Uganda moved down to the "moderate" governance category, having previously been rated as "good". Egypt, Mozambique and Morocco also declined, in their case from "moderate" to "weak".

In many of these cases, this trend reflects continued conflict and political instability, a failure to reduce corruption and waste as well as limited government legitimacy. It is also underpinned by slow progress towards regional integration.

However, it is important to note that problems in this area are not limited to conflict-prone or authoritarian states. The seven countries whose anti-corruption rating fell between 2015 and 2017 featured some of the continent's more stable and democratic states. These included Ghana, Liberia, Namibia, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

A DIVIDED CONTINENT

Continent-wide averages are useful for giving a sense of how things are changing. But they can sometimes hide more than they reveal. This is certainly true of Africa today.

West and Southern Africa consistently perform better than the

continent's East, Central and North regions when it comes to the quality of both democracy and governance. While many of the continent's more authoritarian governments have become even more repressive and entrenched, a number of aspiring democracies are holding their own.

Along with the rising tide of repression in many countries, the last few years have seen peaceful transfers of power in Gambia, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Ethiopia saw the emergence of a reformist Prime Minister in Abiy Ahmed.

Two countries have also improved their overall ranking. Between 2015 and 2017, Guinea was reclassified from "highly defective democracy" to "defective democracy". Similarly, a change of regime meant that, despite ongoing challenges, Burkina Faso jumped two categories, from "moderate autocracy" to "defective democracy".

The Index shows that as a result of these changes, Africa is becoming increasingly polarised between political extremes. The evidence also suggests that its democratic and authoritarian countries are moving further away from each other.

This has significant implications for the future, at both the country and African Union level that need to be grappled with now. Generating greater regional political cooperation, for example, will become more difficult given the growing democratic divide.

Establishing common political standards through the African Union is already problematic. Imagine how tricky it will be when a group of committed democrats face off against a set of entrenched authoritarians.

[the writer is Professor of Democracy, University of Birmingham]

Kids ‘ostracised’, Kashmiri doctor mulls leaving Kolkata

KOLKATA, FEB 19 (PTI): The Kashmiri doctor, who claimed he was asked to leave Kolkata following the Pulwama attack, is considering bidding adieu to the city after his daughters complained of ostracism in school and neighbourhood.

The doctor, a cardiologist who has been living here for the last 22 years, has claimed that a day after the terror attack, he was threatened of “dire consequences” if he continued to stay in the city with his family.

The Pulwama terror strike in Jammu and Kashmir on February 14 claimed the lives of 40 CRPF personnel and injured several others.

In spite of the threats, the doctor said on Monday that he would stay put after the West Bengal government came to his rescue.

The doctor’s daughters, aged nine and seven, are students of one of the leading English-medium schools in the city.

Ananya Chakraborti, Chairperson of the West Bengal State Commission



for Protection of Child Rights, who had been coordinating with the family and assured all support to them, said both the girls have been ostracised by their friends in school. “The doctor told me that his daughters’ friends are not interacting with them properly. I told him not to get tensed. I spoke to the school authorities and they said they will look

into it,” Chakraborti told PTI.

Some kids who go to school with the doctor’s daughters, all of a sudden, have stopped travelling with them, she said.

The doctor also told me that some children even stopped talking to his daughters, Chakraborti said.

“We have assured all support. But this is an alarming situation which is being deliberately cre-

ated ahead of the elections, with the sole aim of polarisation,” she said.

The doctor, who did not wish to be named, could not be contacted as he is not willing to speak to the media.

He had said on Monday that he was heckled but he did not pay much attention to the threats he received initially.

However, his concern grew when some men gathered outside his

residence and threatened to harm his daughters, unless he “returned to Pakistan”.

According to the doctor, on February 15, a day after the Pulwama attack, five men aged between 20 and 25 years had come to his house after he returned home from his chamber, asking him to leave the city immediately and “go back to Pakistan as Kashmiris have no place in this country”.

Boycott everything Kashmiri, says Meghalaya Governor Tathagata Roy

SHILLONG, FEB 19 (PTI): Meghalaya Governor Tathagata Roy on Tuesday supported a call for a boycott of “everything Kashmiri”, including the Amarnath Yatra and purchasing products from the state.

Roy, who describes himself as a right-wing Hindu socio-political thinker, writer, ideologue on Twitter, went on the microblogging site to air his views.

“An appeal from a retired colonel of the

Indian Army: Don’t visit Kashmir, don’t go to Amarnath for the next 2 years. Don’t buy articles from Kashmir emporia or Kashmiri tradesman who come every winter. Boycott everything Kashmiri. I am inclined to agree,” he tweeted.

The BJP leader turned governor also referred to the Pakistan Army “who are handling the Kashmiri separatists” and its role in “East Pakistan”, mentioning war crimes

like slaughter and rape.

“... And they would have kept East Pakistan but for the whacking from India,” Roy tweeted.

“I am not suggesting that we go that far. But at least some distance?” he wrote.

Roy’s comments come in the wake of the February 14 terror attack by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed terror group in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed in south Kashmir’s Pulwama district.

Cong, BJP to support bandh called by farmers outfit in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, FEB 19 (PTI): The opposition Congress and BJP extended their support to the state’s leading farmers outfit call for a 12-hour Odisha bandh on February 21.

The Naba Nirman Krushak Sangathan (NNKS) has given the call for the bandh demanding proper minimum support rice on paddy, pension and prestige for the farmers. Odisha Congress chief Niranjan Patnaik Tuesday announced his party’s support to the NNKS’s bandh call.

“Farmers are our top priority,” Patnaik said.

BJP Odisha unit president Basant Panda said the saffron party will extend support to NNKS, which has been demanding pension and proper price of the agricultural produce.

Panda on Monday said: “The farmers have rights to express their opinion and protest in a democracy. The state government has time and again tried to throttle their voice.

We will protest the anti-farmer policies of the state government.”

Meanwhile, the NNKS convenor Akshya Kumar

told PTI Tuesday that the outfit has rejected the state government’s appeal to refrain from organising a 12-hour bandh on February 21 in view of the annual high school examination.

“We have given a 12-hour bandh call on Thursday. The government’s plea is aimed to foil our agitation. The NNKS is sensitive towards the examination and therefore vehicles carrying examination related materials will not be detained,” Kumar said.

The state government in an appeal to the agitating farmers body had requested it to refrain from the bandh in view of the annual high school certification examination.

The NNKS said it was “forced” to call a Odisha bandh after the state government ignored their “genuine” demands like price, pension and prestige for farmers. They have been demanding proper minimum support price (MSP) on paddy and other agricultural produces.

As question and answer sheets will be transported to different places on February 21, the bandh may affect the examination process,

the government said requesting the NNKS to refrain from its bandh in the interest of six lakh students who will appear in the examination.

Kumar, however, said that they will not halt the vehicles carrying examination related papers. “As such our bandh will be observed during the day time and they can transport the examination materials after 6 pm,” he said.

The CPI(Maoist) have also supported the NNKS’s bandh call. The police have recovered banners at Baliguda in Kandhamal district where, the Maoists appealed to the people to support the NNKS bandh call and termed the state’s BJD government as “anti-farmer.”

Odisha’s Finance minister S B Behera, who also heads a ministerial panel to deal with agitating farmers, said: “The opposition parties don’t have any other issue to raise. Odisha government is trying to fulfill the demands of the farmers and the bandh call given by NNKS will cause inconvenience for the students appearing in the matriculation exam.”

MEA delegation visit Agartala-Akhaura railway site



AGARTALA, FEB 19 (PTI): A six-member delegation of the MEA Tuesday visited the Agartala-Akhaura railway site in the Indian side and left for neighbouring Bangladesh for a field visit there, official sources said.

A 15.054 km-long railway line connecting Agartala with Akhaura in Bangladesh will connect Indian Railways with Bangladesh Railways for improved connectivity and boost trade between the two countries and will connect West Bengal and Tripura through Bangladesh, the officials said.

The team will hold a meeting with the officials of Bangladesh Railways at Akhura, they said.

Of the total stretch, five km will be on the Indian side and the rest in Bangladesh and is scheduled to be completed by 2020, they said.

The new Akhaura rail line will reduce journey time between Agartala and Kolkata to 10 hours from 31 hours as the distance between the two places will be reduced to 550 km from 1600 km at present.

It will cut through Dhaka instead of Guwahati and will help in freight movement as well as goods from the northeastern state, while goods from Chittagong port will reach Agartala quicker.

“Kolkata is a major destination for people in this area, but there is no direct connectivity to the city. The line will help not

only people from Agartala but also those from Mizoram which is 150 km away,” NF Railway sources said.

Akhaura is linked to Dhaka-Chittagong rail route.

The total project cost of Rs 972.52 crore is being borne by the Government of India with the Indian side being funded by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), while the MEA is financing it for the Bangladesh side, the officials said.

India and Bangladesh currently have four operational rail links between West Bengal and western Bangladesh - Petrapole-Benapole, Gede-Darshana, Radhikapur-Biral and Singhabad-Rohanpur.

Radhikapur-Biral and Singhabad-Rohanpur are also notified for use of Nepalese transit traffic.

North East Frontier Railway deputy chief engineer, Rakesh Kumar told newsmen that the team is headed by joint secretary to the Ministry of External Affairs, Namghya Khmapa and a presentation was made before it by the Indian Railway Construction Company Limited (IRCON) about the progress of the construction of the railway line.

The other members of the team are Anita Barik, Railway Advisor, Mamta Shankar, Economic Advisor DoNER, Navin Kumar, Advisor of DoNER and SP Singh, Chief Engineer, NF Railway.

Antarctic fungi can be used to treat childhood cancer: Experts

HYDERABAD, FEB 19 (PTI): Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology-Hyderabad working with scientists from the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa, have isolated Antarctic fungi that contain L-asparaginase, an enzyme-based chemotherapeutic agent used to treat acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL).

ALL is the most common childhood cancer.

It occurs when a bone marrow cell develops errors in its DNA.

A press release said here Tuesday that the isolation of L-asparaginase containing fungi from extreme environments could lead to development of new chemotherapeutic treatment methods that have fewer side-effects than

the existing methods.

One of the most frequently used chemotherapy drugs to treat ALL is the enzyme L-asparaginase which reduces the supply of asparagine, an amino acid that is essential for the synthesis of protein, to cancer cells.

This prevents the growth and proliferation of the malignant cells, the release said.

On the need to discover other sources of pure L-asparaginase, Dr Devarai Santhosh Kumar, who is the principal investigator, said, “Extensive purification steps are necessary before L-asparaginase derived from E.Coli and E.Chrysanthemi is used as a drug to treat ALL.”

This increases the cost of the drug, the release said. The L-aspar-

aginase enzyme used for chemotherapy is currently derived from commonly found bacteria such as *Escherichia coli* and *Erwinia chrysanthemi*.

These enzymes are always associated with two other enzymes - glutaminase and urease - both of which cause adverse side-effects such as pancreatitis, hemostasis abnormalities, central nervous system dysfunction and immunological reactions, the release said.

The research team looked at psychrophiles as alternative sources of the enzyme.

Psychrophiles are organisms that are capable of growth and reproduction in low temperatures in the range of -20C to +10C, such as those found in Antarctic regions, it said.

Anuj Sharma replaces Rajeev Kumar as Kolkata police chief



Kolkata, Feb 19 (PTI): In a major shuffle in the IPS cadres, the state government has appointed Additional Director General (ADG) of West Bengal Police (law and order) Anuj Sharma as the new Kolkata Police Commissioner, replacing Rajeev Kumar, a government notification said on Tuesday.

Kumar, who had completed three years in office as the Kolkata police chief, was posted as the ADG of the Criminal In-

vestigation Department (CID), it added.

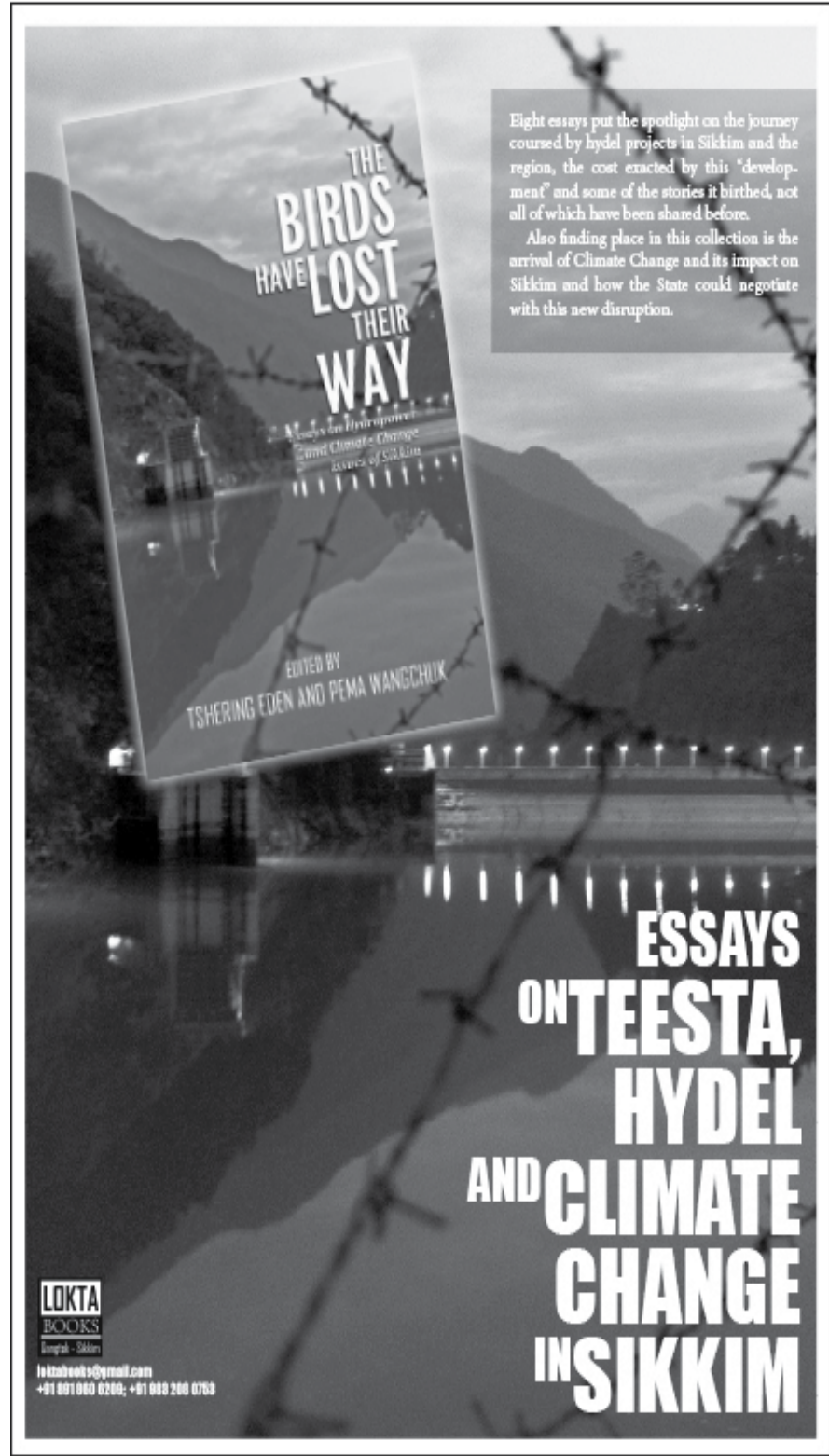
The outgoing police commissioner was recently in the eye of a storm over his alleged role in tampering with the evidence in the Saradha chit fund case.

Kumar was questioned by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in Shillong for five days after the Supreme Court directed him to appear before the agency and cooperate in the

investigation of chit fund cases. The notification also said Sharma had assumed his new responsibilities.

Siddh Nath Gupta, who was the ADG (IB), was made the ADG (law and order).

According to a rule of the Election Commission (EC), any IPS or IAS officer, who has completed three years of service in a post, should be transferred before an impending election.



In-form Djokovic wins a fourth Laureus, Woods too among big winners

BHARAT SHARMA

MONACO, FEB 19 (PTI): Tennis star Novak Djokovic, record-breaking gymnast Simone Biles, golfing legend Tiger Woods and the World Cup champion French football team bagged the top honours at the 2019 Laureus World Sports Awards here.

Djokovic fought off tough competition from the likes of Kylian Mbappe, Eliud Kipchoge and LeBron James to win the Laureus 'World Sportsman of the Year Award' on Monday night.

Djokovic, who won the last three Grand Slams including the Australian Open last month, after returning from elbow surgery, equalled the great Usain Bolt by winning the top Laureus award for the fourth time. Roger Federer has won it a record five times.

"Last year was an incredible season for me, returning from injury to win Wimbledon and the US Open is something I'll remember forever. I am

delighted and I would like to thank the Laureus Academy for their support," said the Serbian.

The Laureus World Sports Academy made up of 68 global sporting legends volunteered their time to vote for the winners in each shortlisted category which recognises sporting achievement in 2018. The Awards were hosted by actor James Marsden and featured entertainment from Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter Jorja Smith.

Gymnast Simone Biles was crowned 'Sports-woman of the Year' after her record-breaking performance at the World Championships, in which she won four gold, one silver and one bronze medal.

Biles, who also won the same Award in 2017, made history last year by becoming the first woman to win four all-around world championships. At just 21, she now has a record 14 career world titles.



FIFA World Cup winners France became the first national football team to win a second Team of the Year Award, fighting off competition from the world-leading teams across a range of sports including Mercedes AMG Petronas F1,

Golden State Warriors and Real Madrid. French coach Didier Deschamps was in Monaco to accept the award on behalf of the team.

Japan's first Grand Slam tennis star Naomi Osaka received the 'Breakthrough of the

Year Award' for her victory in the US Open, where she defeated five-time Laureus Award winner Serena Williams.

Osaka, 21, who is now number one in the world after recently winning the Australian Open, makes history as Japan's

first Award winner.

Golfing star Woods won his third Laureus Award, after winning the 'Sportsman of the Year' accolade in 2000 and 2001. The American, who was not present, won the 'World Come-back of the Year' Award

for winning the Tour Championship, his first win in 1,876 days. Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat was nominated in this category and she attended the ceremony.

The 17-year-old American snowboarding sensation Chloe Kim, who became the youngest woman to win a Winter Olympics snowboarding gold medal at the Pyeongchang Games, won the 'Action Sports-person of the Year' Award.

Slovak alpine skier Henrieta Farkasova and her guide Natalia Subrtova won the 'Sports-person of the Year with a Disability' Award. They have become the most decorated Winter Paralympian pair in Pyeongchang with four gold medals in vision-impaired Downhill, Giant Slalom, Super Combined and Super-G, plus silver in Slalom.

Yuwa, a sport for development organisation that works in the rural region of Jharkhand in northern India, received the Laureus Sport for Good Award for

their life-changing work in using football to improve the lives of young girls from disadvantaged communities. The Laureus Academy recognised marathon world record breaker Eliud Kipchoge with the Exceptional Achievement Award.

Kipchoge, who ran the fastest time ever in a marathon in Berlin with a time of 2 hours 1 min 39 seconds, broke the previous record by a massive 1 min 18 seconds.

Legendary football manager Arsene Wenger received the Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to football during his 22 years as manager of Arsenal.

Wenger received a guard of honour at the ceremony from legendary Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas and football legends Alessandro Del Piero, Luis Figo, Fabio Capello, Didier Deschamps, Cafu and Alex Scott.

Skiing great Lindsey Vonn's incredible career was recognised by the Academy with the Spirit of Sport Award.

Italian side kicked out of Serie C after 20-0 defeat

MILAN, FEB 19 (AFP): Italian third-tier side Pro Piacenza were on Monday excluded from Serie C after fielding a team of just seven players in a 20-0 defeat by league rivals Cuneo, governing body Lega Pro announced.

Financially troubled Pro Piacenza, a side from northern Italy, have been unable to pay their players and staff, who have been on strike for several weeks.

Before Sunday's game at Cuneo in Piedmont, northern Italy, bottom club Pro Piacenza had already forfeited three matches and a fourth would have seen them kicked out of Serie C.

So they took to the pitch with seven players, all teenagers born between 2000 and 2002. An eighth player could not initially start having forgotten his identity papers, and came on after an hour.

One of the two players born in 2000 was named on the match sheet as the coach, with a team physiotherapist even taking to the pitch at one point to substitute a player who was suffering from cramps.

Italian Football Federation president Gabri-

ele Gravina had slammed the match as "an insult to sport" and vowed it would be "the last farce".

Lega Pro sports judge Pasquale Marino on Monday ruled that Pro Piacenza would be excluded from Serie C, with the "farcial match" assigned as a 3-0 defeat.

In a statement Lega Pro slammed "Pro Piacenza's unacceptable behaviour" which it said was also dangerous for players who had not been adequately prepared from the competitive point of view.

Team physio Alessio Picciarelli, who came onto the pitch to replace a player, was disqualified until December 31, 2019. Pro Piacenza will also have to pay a fine of 20,000 euros (USD 22,615).

The Italian third division, which is made up of three groups of 20 teams, is professional in Italy, but many of the clubs have financial problems.

Last week Matera were kicked out of the league after forfeiting a fourth match with their players on strike since December, having not been paid since September.

PGA Tour approves shorts for practice, pro-am rounds

Miami, Feb 19 (AFP): Players will be allowed to wear shorts in PGA Tour practice and pro-am rounds under a change in player appearance guidelines unveiled Monday. The change, effective immediately, applies only to tournaments on six tours operated under the PGA Tour umbrella.

Long pants will remain required attire for all official competition rounds. This week's World Golf Championships Mexico Championship and the US PGA Puerto Rico Open will be the first tournaments offering golfers the apparel option.

The move follows years of discussions about shorts being worn during non-competition days with positive feedback from players, fans, sponsors and tournaments for the change. "It makes the guys a lot more comfortable," four-

time major winner Rory McIlroy said of wearing shorts. "I don't think there's anything wrong with professional golfers showing the lower half of their leg."

James Hahn, co-chairman of the PGA Tour Advisory Council, informed PGA players of the rule change in a video posted on Twitter. Shorts must be knee-length, tailored and neat in appearance. Compression leggings worn under shorts must be solid in color.

PGA Tour caddies were first allowed to wear shorts during competition days in 1999. The European Tour began a policy for players wearing shorts in practice rounds in 2016. The PGA of America has allowed players to wear shorts for practice rounds at the PGA Championship the past two years.

IPL: BCCI announces schedule for 2 weeks, defending champs CSK to play RCB in opener



NEW DELHI, FEB 19 (PTI): Defending champions Chennai Super Kings will take on Royal Challengers Bangalore in the opening encounter of the 12th Indian Premier League for which a provisional two-week schedule was announced by the BCCI on Tuesday.

The opening game has been scheduled for March 23 in Chennai, the BCCI announced in its schedule comprising 17 games.

The IPL will be off to an earlier-than-usual start this year owing to the general elections, dates of which are yet to be announced. Any change in the provisional itinerary -- from March 23 to April 5 -- will be revised accordingly.

"These are still subject to the announcement of the Lok Sabha 2019 election dates. Once these have been released, the BCCI will address any issues with the first two weeks and will also prepare a schedule for the remainder of the season working with the local authorities around the polling dates," read an official statement from the IPL.

On March 24, Kolkata Knight Riders will host Sunrisers Hyderabad in the afternoon encounter of a double header in which Mumbai Indians will take on Delhi Capitals in Mumbai.

Rajasthan Royals and Kings XI Punjab will meet each other in Jaipur to complete the first round of games.

A total of 17 matches will be played during this two-week phase across the 8 home venues of the respective franchises.

MILAN, FEB 19 (AFP): Inter Milan's Chinese president Steven Zhang on Monday ruled out selling unsettled Argentine forward Mauro Icardi to Serie A rivals Juventus.

It follows comments from Juventus sporting director Fabio Paratici that the champions would keep an eye on the striker's situation in the summer after he was stripped of the captain's armband during the week.

"Will Icardi ever join Juventus? No, never," said Zhang after a shareholders' meeting at the San Siro on Monday.

"This has been spoken about a lot in the past week

All teams will play a minimum of four games with Delhi Capitals and RCB competing in five matches each during this time. Every side will play a minimum of two home and two away matches except for Delhi and RCB. While Delhi will compete in three home games, RCB will play an equal number of away encounters.

While the weekends will have double-headers but the schedule doesn't clarify whether the BCCI will continue with the usual 4pm (afternoon) and 8 pm (evening) format or there will be a change in timing.

Itinerary

March 23: CSK vs RCB (Chennai)
March 24: KKR vs Sunrisers Hyderabad (Kolkata, Afternoon)
March 25: Rajasthan Royals vs Delhi Capitals (Mumbai, Evening)
March 26: Delhi Capitals vs CSK (Delhi)
March 27: KKR vs KXIP (Kolkata)
March 28: RCB vs MI (Bengaluru)
March 29: Sunrisers vs Rajasthan Royals (Hyderabad)
March 30: KXIP vs MI (Mohali, Afternoon)
March 31: Sunrisers Hyderabad vs RCB (Hyderabad, Afternoon)
April 1: KXIP vs Delhi Capitals (Mohali)
April 2: Rajasthan Royals vs RCB (Jaipur)
April 3: MI vs CSK (Mumbai)
April 4: Delhi Capitals vs Sunrisers Hyderabad (Delhi)
April 5: RCB vs KKR (Bengaluru).

No chance Icardi going to Juventus, says Inter president Zhang

contract expires in 2021, arrived from Sampdoria in 2013 and has scored 122 goals in 210 games, winning the award for Serie A's most prolific scorer twice.

Nara, also a regular on Italian television, tearfully revealed on Sunday that the forward had only learned of his demotion on Twitter.

"It was like taking away a leg. It is not our intention to leave," Nara told Mediaset's football talk show Tiki Taka.

It had been her comments on the show last week had infuriated Inter directors and the player's teammates.

"If I had to choose be-

tween a new contract and the arrival of someone who will give Icardi five decent passes per game, I'd prefer the latter," she said.

Meanwhile, the club's new Board of Directors was approved on Monday after Chinese private-equity fund LionRock Capital's purchase of a 31.05 percent stake from Indonesian businessman and former owner Erick Thohir.

Daniel Tseung and Tom Pitts of LionRock Capital were appointed to the board.

Inter Milan were taken over in 2016 by Chinese electronics retailer Suning

'Spygate' Leeds fined 200,000 pounds but no points deduction

LONDON, FEB 19 (AFP): Leeds United have escaped a points penalty in their quest to be promoted to the Premier League after it was announced Monday they had been fined GBP 200,000 (USD 259,000, 229,000 euros) and reprimanded for spying on their opponents. Leeds faced an investigation by the English Football League after veteran manager Marcelo Bielsa admitted sending someone to spy on Derby at their training ground ahead of a match last month.

The club formally admitted a breach of Regulation 3.4 which states: "In all matters and transactions relating to the League, each Club shall behave towards each other Club and The League with the utmost good faith."

Many were uncertain, however, whether Bielsa had committed a specific offence and the EFL now plan to clarify the situation by introducing a new rule that bans teams from viewing opposition training in the 72 hours immediately before a match, unless invited to do so. EFL chief executive Shaun Harvey, announcing the punishments against Leeds, said Monday: "The sanctions imposed highlight how actions such as this cannot be condoned and act as a clear deterrent should any club seek to undertake poor conduct in the future. "We will now look to move on from this inci-

dent and commence the discussions about introducing a specific regulation at a meeting with all clubs later this month."

- 'CULTURALLY UNACCEPTABLE' -

England's governing Football Association added it had issued "formal warnings" against Leeds, Bielsa and an unnamed club video analyst.

Leeds responded to the EFL and FA sanctions by saying: "We accept that whilst we have not broken any specific rule, we have fallen short of the standard expected by the EFL with regards to regulation 3.4.

"We apologise for acting in a way that has been judged culturally unacceptable in the English game." Bielsa had previously insisted his behaviour was normal practice in his native Argentina.

But Derby manager Frank Lampard was unimpressed by the former Argentina manager's explanation. "He (Lampard) believes I violated the fair play spirit," Bielsa said during a press conference last month.

"I have to adapt to the rules linked to the habits of English football."

Leeds, in action against Bolton on Saturday are currently third in the Championship.

They are also level on points with second-placed Sheffield United and two adrift of leaders Norwich, but Leeds have a game in hand on their promotion rivals.

Commerce Group, which bought a 68.55 percent stake from Thohir for 270 million euros (305 million).

Zhang said the club's revenues have increased in the past two years and Inter are now ranked 14th in the Deloitte Football Money League with revenues of 281 million euros, up from 15th last year and 19th two years ago.

Inter Milan ended a six-season absence from the Champions League by finishing fourth in Serie A last season. They crashed out of the elite European competition in the group stage and are now playing in the Europe League.

‘World’s first gene therapy to halt most common cause of blindness’

LONDON, FEB 19 (PTI): Oxford researchers claim to have carried out the world’s first gene therapy operation to halt age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of untreatable blindness in the developed world.

Dry AMD is a slow deterioration of the cells of the macula. It affects the central part of a patient’s vision with gaps or ‘smudges’, making everyday activities like reading and recognising faces difficult.

If successful, the treatment could have a beneficial impact of patients’ quality of life and their ability to remain independent.

“A genetic treatment administered early on to preserve the vision in patients who would otherwise lose their sight would be a tremendous breakthrough and certainly something I hope to see in the near future,” said Robert McLaren, Professor at the University of Oxford in the UK.

The first person to undergo the procedure was Janet Osborne of Oxford, said McLaren, who carried out the procedure at the John Radcliffe Hospital in the UK.

Like many people with AMD, Osborne has the condition in both eyes, but it is more advanced in her left eye. As is typical with this con-



dition, the central vision in her left eye has deteriorated and is very hazy, although her peripheral vision is better.

The 80-year-old said that her restricted vision makes household tasks like preparing vegetables and sewing difficult, and she cannot read for very long. She finds it hard to recognise faces.

Osborne said her motivation for taking part in the trial was the possibility of helping others with AMD.

“I wasn’t thinking of me. I was thinking of other people. For me, I

hope my sight doesn’t get any worse. That would be fantastic. It means I wouldn’t be such a nuisance to my family,” she said.

The operation involves detaching the retina and injecting a solution containing a virus underneath.

The virus contains a modified DNA sequence, which infects cells, called the retinal pigment epithelium (RPE), and corrects a genetic defect that causes AMD.

Ideally if successful, gene therapy would only need to be per-

formed once, as the effects are thought to be long-lasting.

A key factor in AMD is the complement system, a system of proteins in our immune system that fights bacteria.

In macular degeneration, these proteins are over-active and start to attack the retinal cells, in a similar way to how they would attack bacteria.

“We are harnessing the power of the virus, a naturally occurring organism, to deliver the DNA into the patient’s cells,” McLaren said.

“When the virus

opens up inside the retinal cell it releases the DNA of the gene we have cloned, and the cell starts making a protein that we think can modify the disease, correcting the imbalance of the inflammation caused by the complement system,” he said.

“The idea of this gene therapy is to ‘deactivate’ the complement system, but at a very specific point at the back of the eye, so the patient would otherwise be unaffected by it, and we hope that in future it will slow down the progression of macular degeneration,” said McLaren.

“We have a better understanding now on the relationship between the complement system and the AMD disease which lead us to the discovery that restoring the balance of a hyperactive complement system could be a potential therapeutic approach in dry AMD,” said Peter Lachman, the scientist from the University of Cambridge.

The aim of the therapy is to halt the progress of the condition and preserve what vision patients have remaining.

If successful, it is hoped that gene therapy can be used in the future on patients with early AMD and so halt the disease before their vision has started to deteriorate.

China urges restraint by India, Pakistan on Pulwama terror attack



BEIJING, FEB 19 (PTI): China on Tuesday urged restraint by India and Pakistan amid escalating tensions over the Pulwama terror attack and called on both the countries to peacefully resolve their issues through dialogue as soon as possible.

On February 14, at least 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed in Kashmir’s Pulwama district in a suicide attack claimed by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terror group.

The attack has heightened bilateral tensions with both New Delhi and Islamabad calling back their envoys for “consultations”. India on Friday announced the withdrawal of the Most Favoured Nation status for Pakistan and hiked the customs duty by 200 per cent on goods originat-

ing from the neighbouring country.

“Pakistan and India are both important countries in South Asia. A stable bilateral relationship between the two is essential to the peace and stability in the region,” Geng Shuang, spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry told a media briefing when asked about the tensions between the two countries following the Pulwama attack.

“South Asia has maintained an overall stability which should be cherished and upheld by all sides. China hopes that Pakistan and India will exercise restraint, engage in dialogue and realise the soft landing of the relevant issues as soon as possible,” he said.

To another question about Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signing USD 20 billion agreement

for Saudi investments in Pakistan during the just concluded visit of Saudi crown prince Muhammad Bin Salman, Geng said, “China is glad to see Pakistan having friendly exchanges and cooperation with other countries including Saudi Arabia.”

On the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Geng said, “It will help with connectivity and shared development. China is ready to on the basis of consultation and consensus with Pakistan have a third party cooperation.”

“The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a pilot project under the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative). It is committed to consultation and collaboration for shared benefits and when foreign minister Wang Yi visited Pakistan the two sides agreed to third party cooperation under this framework.

Pakistan is out of financial crisis: claims central bank governor

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, FEB 19 (PTI): Pakistan has come out of the financial crisis with the help of friendly countries and the economy has been set on the right path, the governor of the cash-strapped country’s central bank has claimed.

Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan Tariq Bajwa’s remarks coincided with the announcement by Saudi Arabia that it would invest USD 20 billion in Pakistan under various projects.

Bawja told an audi-

ence at a private university in Lahore on Monday that uncertainty in the economy had ended, while the government was on the right path and it was capable of meeting all economic challenges, Dawn reported.

The governor spoke about the current account deficit, which had hit the economy badly during the current financial year. The current account deficit was the real cause of concern for the new government headed by Prime Minister Im-

ran Khan. Khan visited friendly countries like China, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Malaysia and Turkey to seek investment and managed to get financial help to bridge the external deficit.

Bajwa said a plan had been prepared to eliminate the current account deficit. He said the deficit was the biggest hurdle for the country and the government was still negotiating with the International Monetary Fund for a package to minimise it.

N Korean envoy en route to Hanoi ahead of Trump-Kim summit: Yonhap

SEOUL, FEB 19 (AFP): The North Korean special representative for the US arrived in Beijing on Tuesday, apparently en route to Vietnam to meet his Washington counterpart ahead of a second scheduled summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un, South Korea’s Yonhap news agency said. Kim Hyok Chol arrived in the Chinese capital at around 10 am (0200 GMT) and was expected to board a plane bound for Hanoi later in the day.

Kim’s trip comes three days after Kim Jong Un’s de-facto chief of staff, Kim Chang Son, landed in Hanoi to discuss protocol and security matters with the US team ahead of the summit on February 27-28.

Kim Hyok Chol and his US counterpart Stephen Biegun were engaged in three days of talks in Pyongyang earlier this month, exploring each side’s positions on denuclearisation ahead of the much-anticipated meeting. Biegun said they had been productive, but more dialogue was needed.

“We have some hard work to do with the DPRK between now and then,” Biegun said, adding that he was “confident that if both sides stay committed we can make real progress here”.

The US State Department said talks during Biegun’s trip explored Trump and Kim Jong Un’s “commitments of complete denuclearization, transforming US-DPRK relations and building a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula”.

16 states sue Trump to stop him from using national emergency to build border wall

LALIT K JHA WASHINGTON, FEB 19 (PTI): Sixteen US States have sued US President Donald Trump over his plan to declare a national emergency to get funding for his controversial wall along the border with Mexico, saying he has veered the country toward a constitutional crisis of his own making.

The lawsuit came after Trump on Friday declared that he would spend billions of dollars more on border barriers than Congress had granted him.

The National Emergencies Act allows the President to declare a national emergency and unlock a stash of funds by invoking certain statutory authority.

The coalition of 16 states in their lawsuit alleged that the Trump administration’s emergency declaration and diversion of funds is unconstitutional and otherwise unlawful.

The states include California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Virginia.

The suit, filed in Federal District Court in San Francisco, argues that the president does not have the power to divert funds for constructing a wall along the Mexican border because it is Congress that controls spending.

“President Trump has veered the country toward a constitutional crisis of his own making. For years, President Trump has repeatedly stated his intention to build a wall across the United States-Mexico border,” reads the suit.

The dispute stems from steps Trump said he would take after lawmakers granted him only USD 1.375 billion for new border barriers, legislation he signed last week to avoid another government shutdown. The fund is far short of the USD 5.7 billion Trump had initially requested.

Trump asserted the power to tap three additional pots of money on his own: USD 600 million from a

Treasury Department asset forfeiture fund for law enforcement priorities; about USD 2.5 billion from a military antidrug account, most of which would first be siphoned from other military programs the Pentagon has yet to identify, and USD 3.6 billion in military construction funds he said he could redirect by invoking an emergency-powers statute.

Trump declared the national emergency to fulfil his 2016 presidential campaign promise to “build a wall” on the US-Mexico border, which he calls “a major entry point for criminals, gang members, and illicit narcotics”. The lawsuit file on Monday seeks to block the Trump administration’s emergency declaration, the unauthorised construction of the border wall, and any illegal diversion of Congressionally-appropriated funds, a media release said.

The states allege that the Trump administration’s action exceeds the power of the executive office, violates the US Constitution and federal statutes, and would illegally and unconstitutionally divert federal funds appropriated by Congress for other purposes.

The lawsuit seeks declaratory and injunctive relief to block the emergency declaration, the construction of the wall, and any illegal diversion of congressionally-appropriated funds.

White House officials said they believe they can unlock an additional USD 6.6 billion through the emergency declaration and other budget maneuvers. The White House believes the money would allow the administration to build at least 234 miles of the border wall. “President Trump is manufacturing a crisis and declaring a made-up ‘national emergency’ in order to seize power and undermine the Constitution,” said California Governor Gavin Newsom.

“This ‘emergency’ is a national disgrace. Rather than focusing on fighting the real vulnerabilities facing Americans, the President is using the powers of America’s highest office to fan the flames

of nativism and xenophobia. Our message to the White House is clear: California will not be part of this political theater. We will see you in court,” he said.

President Trump treats the rule of law with utter contempt, charged California Attorney general Xavier Becerra.

“He knows there is no border crisis, he knows his emergency declaration is unwarranted, and he admits that he will likely lose this case in court. He is willing to manipulate the Office of the Presidency to engage in unconstitutional theatre performed to convince his audience that he is committed to his ‘beautiful’ border wall,” he said.

The complaint alleges that the Trump administration’s action declaring a national emergency due to a purported border crisis is unlawful and unconstitutional.

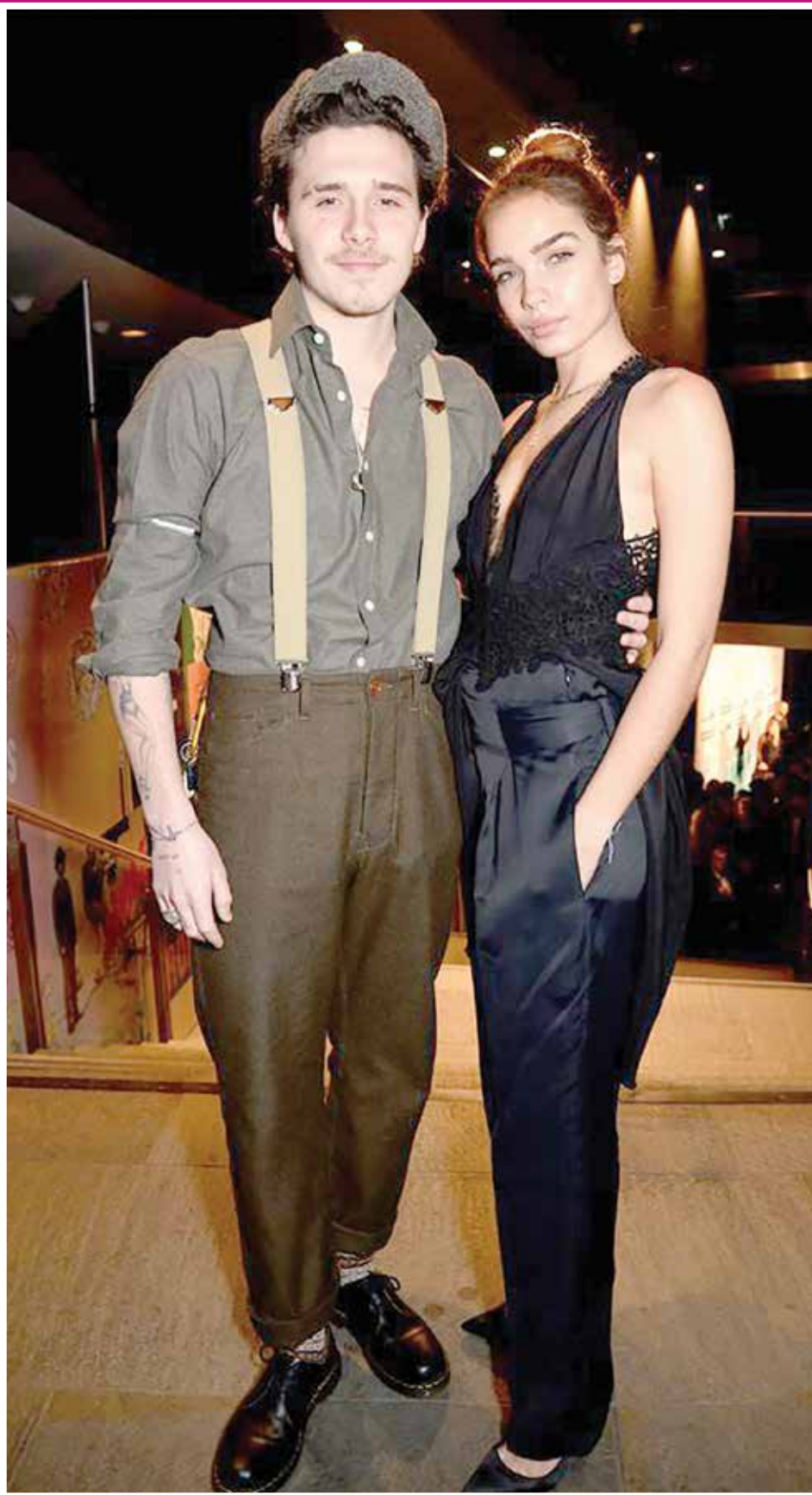
“President Trump’s hyped crisis is a pretext to justify redirecting congressionally-appropriated funds to pay to build a wall along the southern border after he failed to get Congress or Mexico to pay for it. The facts do not support President Trump’s rhetoric or his declaration,” a media release said.

“Unlawful southern border entries are at their lowest point in 20 years, immigrants are less likely than native-born citizens to commit crimes, and illegal drugs are more likely to come through official ports of entry. There is no credible evidence to suggest that a border wall would decrease crime rates,” it said.

National emergencies can last for one year and then terminate, unless the president renews the declaration 90 days prior, said Robert Chesney, who served in the Justice Department and teaches at the University of Texas at Austin School of Law. Every six months, Congress can consider whether to put forward a joint resolution to terminate the emergency.

According to the Brennan Center, there have been 58 national emergencies between 1978 and 2018. Of those, 31 are still in effect today.





HOT COUPLE! The eldest Beckham son, Brooklyn Beckham, and his girlfriend, Hana Cross, pose for pics at the Fabulous Fund Fair event in London.

Queen to perform at Oscars



LOS ANGELES, FEB 19 (PTI): Queen, the band at the centre of best picture nominee “Bohemian Rhapsody”, will perform at the Academy Awards ceremony, the Motion Picture Academy announced on Tuesday.

“Queen + @adamlamBERT will ROCK YOU,” the post shared on the official Twitter handle of the Academy read.

The band now performs under the name

Queen + Adam Lambert, with two of the four original members, guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor, fronted by former “American Idol” star Adam Lambert.

Bassist John Deacon has not performed with Queen for many years.

“We will rock The Oscars,” Lambert tweeted. “Bohemian Rhapsody” is up for five Oscars.

Kangana Ranaut On Manikarnika: ‘People Would Have Disowned It If It Were Bad Film’

Manikarnika: The Queen Of Jhansi, for which actress Kangana Ranaut and Krish contested for primary director’s credit (more on that later), has reportedly crossed the Rs. 100-crore mark at the box office. Speaking to mid-day about the film’s success, Kangana said that if the movie had failed, “people would have abandoned it.” “These people would have disowned the film if it was bad. These are the people who would have abandoned it,” she was quoted as saying. Kangana added: “(But) this is a good fight, where the cast and crew are bickering over who owns the movie more. We were able to make a clean film. No one has blamed me for distorting history. Personally, there is no controversy of great magnitude here. I don’t see any



negativity attached to it outside the industry. I am satisfied with the audience’s response.”

When Manikarnika was in the work-in-progress stage, Kangana Ranaut filled in for director Krish to complete the film’s patchwork but soon it was reported that she reshoot some portions of Manikarnika too. In the film, Kangana Ranaut has been credited as the primary director. After the film released, Krish opposed to it saying more than 70 per cent of his work was retained in the final cut. However, Kangana’s sister Rangoli Chandel said that the actress had directed a major portion of the film and if Krish can prove otherwise, Kangana will retract and apologise.

Meanwhile, Manikarnika released a day before Republic Day and two weeks after Ad-

itya Dhar-directed Uri: The Surgical Strike, starring Vicky Kaushal. Uri’s box office success story is unparalleled and it



threatened Manikarnika’s monopoly at the ticket window. “None of us expected the competition we got from Uri. It was another patriotic film that shared the same theme - fighting back for the nation. It was in its third week but it still put up quite a tough fight,” Kangana told mid-day.

Manikarnika: The Queen Of Jhansi is based on the life of Rani Laxmi Bai, who led Jhansi’s battalion in the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the East India Company. The film also features Ankita Lokhande, Jisshu Sen-gupta and Atul Kulkarni.

I was lonely with him: Mandy Moore on her marriage to Ryan Adams



LOS ANGELES, FEB 19 (PTI): Singer-actor Mandy Moore has opened up about her former marriage to musician Ryan Adams calling it “an entirely unhealthy dynamic”.

During an appearance on the Sunday episode of Marc Maron’s WTF podcast, Moore said she was “sad and lonely”.

“I was living my life for him. It (was) an entirely unhealthy dynamic. I had no sense of self. I felt like I was drowning. It was so untenable and unsustainable and it was so lonely. I was so sad,” Moore, 34, said.

The interview comes in light of the recent New York Times article in which Adams was accused

of sexual misconduct and emotional abuse by multiple women, including Moore.

She added that pressure from Adams led to her working less.

“I got married in 2009, and that’s when things really quieted down for me...I would do little jobs. It’s not like I completely stopped working. I would do things here or there, but it would become abundantly clear while I was working, things would fall completely apart at home.

“I couldn’t do my job because there was a constant stream of trying to pay attention to this person who needed me and wouldn’t let me do anything else.

Paris Hilton to release new music



LOS ANGELES, FEB 19 (PTI): Socialite and reality TV star Paris Hilton has revealed that she is working on new music and it will be out soon.

The track will mark her first in 12 years. In 2006 the hotel heiress released her debut album “Paris”.

The album peaked at Number. 6 on the Billboard 200, and the debut single, “Stars are Blind,” reached 18 on the Hot 100.

“Back in the studio. New music coming soon” Hilton posted on Twitter.

In 2008, Hilton announced that she had finished a second album, but it was never released.

ARIES: Go big or go home, Aries. With the moon and generous Jupiter merged in your expansive ninth house, the world is truly your oyster. You could be overcome by a craving for new scenery and adventures today. Start researching flights and travel plans or register for an inspirational seminar. Conversations could also take you to new heights, causing you to rethink some of your core beliefs!

TAURUS: Partnering up could be profitable, Taurus. Today, the moon and fortuitous Jupiter connect in your eighth house of joint ventures. Consider how much further along you’d be if you merged your skills and resources with others. This cosmic combination urges you to spend more time on the tasks you excel at and outsource the rest.

GEMINI: The truth shall set you free, Gemini. Today, the moon aligns with “tell it like it is” Jupiter in your relationship house, sparking honest dialogue. A heartfelt discussion or a clear-the-air conversation can bring you to a deeper understanding. With the cosmic gambler, Jupiter, in the mix, it’s

an auspicious day to take a chance in love. Coupled? Move your bond to a deeper level by addressing unspoken issues.

CANCER: Reminder: Healthy living isn’t about suffering and deprivation. How about making it into an adventure instead? Today’s expansive moon-Jupiter merger in your self-care sector motivates you to create an enjoyable routine. Take a Southeast Asian cooking class, experiment with new spices and superfoods, sign up for a circus workshop: aerial silks, anyone? These orderly stars could also give you the urge to purge any clutter from your space.

LEO: Give your feelings some airtime, Leo. Today, as the moon merges with outspoken Jupiter in your shout-it-from-the-rooftops fifth house, insist on transparency. There’s a good chance your emotions will come rushing out before you can stop them, so just roll with it. Silver lining: With everything in the open, at least you don’t have to pretend anymore. The fifth house also rules romance, and this cosmic lineup could dial up the flirtatious vibes.

VIRGO: Are you being a know-it-all, Virgo? Try taking a “live and let live” approach, especially with your family. Since you only want the absolute best for your loved ones, it can be hard to withhold your unsolicited advice. But today’s alignment of the moon and expansive Jupiter in your domestic sphere prompts you to listen and ask questions more than talk AT people. Initiate an honest conversation with a relative or close friend.

LIBRA: It’s a no-filters kind of day, Libra. Today’s merger of the moon and outspoken Jupiter in your communication house emboldens you to speak frankly with everyone. Instead of being overly diplomatic (and vague), share what’s on your mind without all the window dressing. Even if your delivery is a little rough around the edges, at least others will know your message is sincere. Besides, a little unpolished honesty can be a potent conversation starter

SAGITTARIUS: It’s a no-filters kind of day, Libra. Today’s merger of the moon and outspoken Jupiter in your communication house emboldens you to speak frankly with everyone. Instead of being overly diplomatic (and vague), share what’s on your mind without all the window dressing. Even if your delivery is a little rough around the edges, at least others will know your message is sincere. Besides, a little unpolished honesty can be a potent conversation starter!

CAPRICORN: It’s a no-filters kind of day, Libra. Today’s merger of the moon and outspoken Jupiter in your communication house emboldens you to speak frankly with everyone. Instead of being overly diplomatic (and vague), share what’s on your mind without all the window dressing. Even if your delivery is a little rough around the edges, at least

others will know your message is sincere. Besides, a little unpolished honesty can be a potent conversation starter.

AQUARIUS: It’s a no-filters kind of day, Libra. Today’s merger of the moon and outspoken Jupiter in your communication house emboldens you to speak frankly with everyone. Instead of being overly diplomatic (and vague), share what’s on your mind without all the window dressing. Even if your delivery is a little rough around the edges, at least others will know your message is sincere. Besides, a little unpolished honesty can be a potent conversation starter.

PISCES: Make hay while the sun shines, Pisces. Today’s mashup of the moon and lucky Jupiter in your ambitious tenth house could throw open the doors to professional advancement. Don’t wait for opportunity to fall in your lap. Connect with an influential player and make your bold ask. Under these auspicious skies, you could get exactly what you want. If the “yes” you’re seeking doesn’t come immediately, shepherd your request through the proper channels.