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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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RSS MARCHES IN SIKKIM: Hundreds of Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh [RSS] members marched out in a rally, "Padchalan," at Ranipool in East Sikkim on Sunday. The rally, organized by the Sikkim chapter of the North Bengal branch of RSS, was part of the ongoing RSS Officers' training camp underway at Biraspati Parsai Senior Secondary School premises, it is informed. The camp had begun on 05 January and will continue till 24 January. Today's rally started from the school premises and returned there after taking a round of Ranipool Bazaar.

Retired govt servants organize free health camp in Singtam



YOGEN THATAL SINGTAM, 19 JAN:

A special free medical Camp was conducted today at the District Hospital here by the Singtam branch of Sikkim Government Retired Employees Welfare Association in coordination with the District Hospital and Central Referral Hospital. The total of 340 patients, a majority of them women, were checked by specialists on the day.

The oldest patient to register for the health camp was a 94-year-old. This was in keeping with the focus of the health camp which was on senior citizens.

Patients from Rongli, Pakyong, Khamdong, Padamchey, Yangyang and other from around Singtam visited the camp, informs Prabin Tamang, the Registration Clerk, DHS.

The decision to hold

the camp was taken at a meeting of the association held at Nepali Dharamsala here on 11 Jan.

Members from Sadbhawana Samiti, Shanti Nagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti, Sai Samiti and DHS staff volunteered at the camp.

Health Minister, Dr MK Sharma, who is also the area MLA, was also present at the camp today and checked on patients as well. Cardiologist Dr DP Rai from the New STNM Hospital and Medical Specialist from CRH Dr Mona Dhakal were present as key resource person and guest doctor respectively for the day.

The medicines were provided by the DHS and Chemists' Association of Singtam.

CMO Dr Laden Tshering Bhutia donated a wheelchair.

MVD earns Rs 2.22 cr for State exchequer in 13 days

TRANSPORT SECY DELIVERS TRANSPARENCY, ASSURES IMPROVED ONLINE SERVICES

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 19 JAN:

In a welcome move at transparency, Transport Secretary, Raju Basnet, today posted a summary of revenue collected by the Motor Vehicles Division of the Transport Department in the 13 days - 06 to 19 Jan - that the MVD has launched the document checking drive across the State.

The Facebook post by the Secretary informs that the MVD has earned an impressive Rs 2,22,91,083 over this period. A lion's share of this kitty, a total of Rs 1,34,08,771, has been raked in by RTOs in Gangtok, the

break-up informs.

This amount, the post informs, does not include the revenue earned from permits and the lavishly hiked fines and is the revenue generated from the vehicle owners getting their documents updated.

"The revenue includes transactions other than permits and fines," the Secretary explains.

This is an impressive account of how the fear of paying the hiked fines has convinced vehicles owners to get their documents updated.

"I am posting this to assure you that every penny you pay will be accounted for and will go

to the Government treasury which in turn will be used for public good," the Secretary assures in his detailed post.

He also makes special mention of the fact that 21% of the transactions were made online and announces that the Department wants to make this 90% by the end of the year and is collaborating with NIC to provide all the services online.

"We are already online with Dealer Point Registration, Token Tax payment upto five years at a time, Learner License Application, Temporary permits and Special Permits. We have started

eChallan for transparency in vehicle checking," he details.

The Secretary goes on to inform that Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] and Transport Minister Sanjeet Kharrel have desired that all services be door delivered to the people.

In this regard, Driving License, RC Book, Assurance Letter, Permits etc will be delivered to the doorsteps of the people soon, he states, adding that the Department will soon come up with a Citizen's Charter which will provide all details of documents required and time of service delivery.

"This means you

don't have to visit RTO office stand in a Q get the assessment of taxes and fees go to the bank stand in Q to pay come back to office counter stand in Q get updated. Just apply and pay online from home and wait for the delivery of your documents like Pan Card, Aadhar Card, etc," he informs.

The Department is also organising a training for cyber cafe and other computerised online service providers and operators so they can provide services for their respective localities. The training is scheduled for 20 Jan, starting at 11AM at Yatayat Bhawan here.

Shillong RSC wins CM's Gold Cup



JORETHANG, 19 JAN [IPR]:

The final match for the 9th All India Chief Minister's Gold Cup International Football Tournament was played on the concluding day of Jorethang Maghey Sankranti Mela at Jorethang Playground today.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Golay] was

present as the chief guest accompanied by Cabinet Ministers, area MLA cum Chief Patron Mela Committee Sunita Gazmer alongside Political Secretary to the Chief Minister, Chairpersons, Advisors, members of Jorethang Mela Organizing Committee and South District

Football Association.

Shillong RSC took on Oil India FC and emerged victorious 2-1.

The Chief Minister handed over the trophy and certificates to the winners and runners-up. Donald Diengdoh from Shillong RSC was named as Hero of the Match today.

Arnav Vyas tops Sikkim JEE Mains 2020

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 19 JAN:

Arnav Vyas, a student of Aakash Live, has topped the State Merit List of the coveted JEE MAINS 2020 engineering entrance examination, scoring 98.08 percentile, a press communiqué from Aakash Live.

Congratulating Arnav, Aakash Chaudhry, Director and CEO, Aakash Educational Services Limited [AESL], conveys in a press release, "We are proud that our student Arnav has secured 98.08 percentile and has topped the JEE Mains 2020 from the State of Sikkim. It is the result of the hard work by the student and our faculty, and the quality test preparation imparted at Aakash Live that has enabled him to achieve this feat. I wish Arnav all the best for his future endeavours. We congratulate all our students for consistently working hard to achieve their goals."

Arnav, in turn, credited his outstanding performance to burning the midnight oil and the excellent coaching provided by Aakash Live.

JEE (Main) Examination for BE/B Tech was conducted by NTA between 07 and 09 January in two shifts every day across 233 cities in the country and abroad. A total number of 9,21,261 candidates had registered for the exam.

Prince Harry, Meghan sign up to exit deal; give up royal titles

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, JAN 19 (PTI): Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, have signed up to a formal exit deal from the royal family, which will see them forsake their His and Her Royal Highness (HRH) titles and will no longer receive UK taxpayers' funding for their duties.

The deal, which comes into effect by spring in a few weeks' time, means the couple will no longer be representing the Queen in an official capacity. "The Sussexes will not use their HRH titles as they are no longer working members of the royal family," Buckingham Palace said in a statement on Saturday night.

Queen Elizabeth II said the agreement followed months of discussions and was a "constructive and supportive" way forward for her grandson and his family. "Harry, Meghan and Archie will always be much loved members of my family," the 93-year-old monarch's personal statement read.

"I recognise the challenges they have experienced as a result of intense scrutiny over the last two years and support their wish for a more independent life," she says, thanking the couple for their work for UK and across the Commonwealth.

In a special message for Markle, she said: "I am... particularly proud of how

Meghan has so quickly become one of the family. It is my whole family's hope that today's agreement allows them to start building a happy and peaceful new life". The palace confirmed that the couple were required to withdraw from royal duties, including official military appointments.

"While they can no longer formally represent the Queen, the Sussexes have made clear that everything they do will continue to uphold the values of Her Majesty," the palace said. It added that the pair would continue to maintain their private patronages and associations. The couple intend to repay 2.4 million pounds of UK taxpayer money for the refurbishment of Frogmore Cottage, which will remain their UK family home as they split their time between Britain and Canada.

The palace has declined to comment on security arrangements and who would foot that bill for the couple in future, an issue that has been at the centre of much of the debate since they announced their decision to step back as senior royals earlier this month.

Harry, 35, and Meghan, 38, issued their own update on their official Sussex Royal website, which has been updated to remove references to the HRH titles on the opening page. "We now plan to bal-

ance our time between the United Kingdom and North America, continuing to honour our duty to The Queen, the Commonwealth, and our patronages.

"This geographic balance will enable us to raise our son with an appreciation for the royal tradition into which he was born, while also providing our family with the space to focus on the next chapter, including the launch of our new charitable entity," the statement on their website reads.

Meghan is already in Canada with the couple's eight-month-old son Archie and some reports indicate she may fly back briefly for some pending royal engagements until the new agreement formally kicks in on an unspecified date in spring which begins towards the end of March in the UK.

Meanwhile, Prince Harry will continue to perform royal duties until that time, which includes at a summit for African leaders in London on Monday.

He will eventually step back permanently, giving up his military roles as Captain General of the Royal Marines (a post passed to him by the Duke of Edinburgh), Honorary Air Commandant at RAF Honiton, and Commodore-in-Chief, Small Ships and Diving.

Under what is being dubbed as a "hard Megxit", the couple will also lose

their relatively new roles as Youth Ambassadors of the Commonwealth.

However, as part of keeping their private patronages, they are expected to remain President and Vice President of the Queen's Commonwealth Trust.

"As agreed in this new arrangement, they understand that they are required to step back from royal duties, including official military appointments. They will no longer receive public funds for royal duties," the palace statement specifies.

This gives the couple the financial independence they had sought and means they no longer have access to a share of the UK's taxpayer-funded Sovereign Grant the 82.2-million pounds that the royal family receives from the UK Treasury each year. According to some reports, the couple will continue to receive an undisclosed sum of "private financial support" from Harry's father Prince Charles.

There are still some question marks over the couple's future status, including what their tax and immigration status will be in the UK and Canada.

It is unclear whether former American actress Markle still intends to gain British citizenship, which she had initiated when she got engaged to Harry in November 2017 and would require her to spend a certain amount of time in the UK.

Kerala mosque hosts Hindu wedding

ALAPPUZHA (KER), JAN 19 (PTI): In a rare wedding ceremony held in a Mosque, a Hindu couple tied the nuptial knot and exchanged vows here on Sunday.

The marriage hosted by the Cheruvally Muslim Jamaat mosque near here, was held according to hindu rituals in front of a lighted traditional lamp with guests from both the communities participating.

The Bride Anju and the groom Sarath exchanged garlands and performed rituals in the presence of a priest at the mosque premises, which was decked up for the rare occasion signifying communal amity. A vegetarian sadya was also held at the premises.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan took to Facebook to congratulate the young couple and said the state has always upheld and showcased such

beautiful examples of religious harmony. The wedding was held at a time when a concerted attempt was being made to divide people in the name of religion, Vijayan said conveying his wishes to the couple, their families and the mosque committee.

"Kerala is one and we will stay united" he said and shared a photograph of the wedding ceremony. Since the bride hailed from a poor economic background, Anju's mother had sought help from the mosque committee to conduct the wedding, which they readily agreed.

The Mosque committee also gifted ten sovereigns of gold and Rs two lakh to the bride as a wedding gift. The marriage was held as per Hindu rituals.

Food for around 1,000 people was also arranged, Nujumudeen Alummoottil, secretary of Cheruvally Jamaat committee said.

Pema' Gym felicitates medal-winning members

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 JAN:**

Pema's Gym and Health Club of Martam in East Sikkim felicitated medal winners from the club - Homnath Siwakoti and Suren Rai - who excelled at the recently-held 29th edition of Seniors' and Masters National Strength Lifting Championship for Men and Women held from 25 to 28 December at Udaipur in Rajasthan. Pema's Gym and Health Club owner, Pema Dorjee Bhutia, felicitated the due for represented and winning medals for the State at the national championship.

BJP repeatedly harassing Hardik Patel: Priyanka Gandhi

NEW DELHI, JAN 19 (PTI): Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday accused the BJP of repeatedly harassing party leader Hardik Patel, who has been arrested for failing to appear before a court in a 2015 sedition case.

The Congress general secretary said Patel has been fighting for the employment of youth and the rights of farmers.

The BJP is repeatedly harassing Patel, Priyanka Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi.

"Hardik voiced the concerns of the people of his society, sought jobs for them, sought scholarships, carried out farmers' movement. BJP is calling this 'treason'," she said.

Patel was arrested on Saturday night from Viramgam taluka in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district for failing to appear before a trial court in connection with the sedition case, hours after a warrant was issued against him.

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FIGHTING POLIO:

Health Minister Dr MK Sharma at the polio drive held at District Hospital, Singtam, on Sunday as part of the Intensified Pulse Polio Immunisation Programme. Pulse polio immunization booths were put up at Singtam Bazaar today manned by ICDS staff. [from YOGEN THATAL]

Governor attends Golden Jubilee of Chaurasia Samaj



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 JAN:**

Governor Ganga Prasad attended the golden jubilee celebrations of Chaurasia Samaj at Tulsi Bhavan, Jamshehpur, today, an official press release informs.

Congratulating Chaurasia Samaj on the completion of 50 years of establishment, the Governor de-

livered a message of unity.

"I wish the Chaurasia Samaj a joyous celebration of Golden Jubilee celebration and the service of humanity in future as well. I want people to carry forward the message of cleanliness so that others could also be motivated towards cleanliness," he said.

The Governor re-

membered the members of the Chaurasia Samaj, both past and present, for having contributed towards the achievements of the organisation.

He called upon the people to carry forward the message of cleanliness so that others could also be motivated towards cleanliness, the release adds.

Deorali School hosts Statistics Olympiad

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 JAN:**

The 12th Statistics Olympiad by CR Rao Advanced Institute of Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Science [AIMSCS], Hyderabad, was held here at Deorali Girls Senior Secondary School on Sunday.

CR Rao AIMSCS is a premier institute of the country and this examination is conducted by the Institute to encourage those with an aptitude for numbers and numerical reasoning.

Gangtok, it is informed, is the only centre for this examination in the entire North East.

The examination was

conducted at 27 centres across the country and Sri Lanka with a total of 1,516 students registering for 2 levels [Junior - Class IX & X; Senior - Class XI, XII and Degree 1st Year].

In Sikkim, 100 students registered in the Junior level out of whom 74 took the exam.

To motivate the students, their entry fee was paid by Samagra Shiksha, Education Department.

"Our State has recorded 74% attendance, which is more than the national average of 67%. Out of the 27 centres, Sikkim stood third in participation level after Karim

Nagar, AP, and Trivandrum. The exam was in line with the Mathematics and Science Olympiads. Our Students got the first-time exposure to such competitive Scholarship examinations. Though it was winter vacation, the students were found enthusiastic and many of the students felt the exam quite interesting," an official press release informs.

Students who have scored more than 70% in Mathematics in the preceding year are eligible to take the exam. For Gangtok, Dr U Yugandhar, Director [Management Services], conducted the examination.

Niti Ayog member justifies internet ban in J&K



AHMEDABAD, JAN 19 (PTI): NITI Aayog member V K Saraswat has said

the shut down of internet services in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 did not have any significant impact on the economy, as people there did nothing other than watching "dirty films" online.

He also said that internet services were suspended in Jammu and Kashmir to prevent certain elements from "misusing" information that could affect law and order situation there.

Saraswat was speaking to reporters in Gandhinagar on Saturday after attending the convocation of the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology.

"What difference does it make if there's no internet there? What do you watch on internet there? What e-tailing is happening there? Besides watching dirty films, you do nothing there," he said.

"If there is no internet in Kashmir, it does not have any significant effect on the economy," he added. Saraswat said the

reason for suspending internet services in Jammu and Kashmir was to prevent certain elements from misusing information.

"If Article 370 had to be removed, and if Kashmir had to be taken forward, we knew there were elements there which will misuse this kind of information in a manner that will affect the law and order situation," he said.

On recent protests in Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Saraswat said the institution has become a "political battleground" with half of the teachers being "hardcore Leftists".

He called for the issues there to be resolved "democratically".

Saraswat also said that protests like those against the Citizenship Amendment Act and in JNU affect the economy.

"The losses are affecting the economy. We are giving people money, but there is no output from them. Government teachers are getting their dues despite the strike. What is the output...all this affects the economy," he said.

Gandhi wanted to spend 15 Aug, 1947 in Pak: Book

NEW DELHI, JAN 19 (PTI):

Mahatma Gandhi wanted to spend August 15, 1947, the first day of freedom, in breakaway Pakistan rather than in India, says a new book by former Union minister M J Akbar.

This was, however, neither tokenism nor a gesture of support for a country carved out of multifaith India in the name of one religion, Islam, the author writes in "Gandhi's Hinduism: The Struggle Against Jinnah's Islam". "It was a promise of defiance. Gandhi simply did not believe in the partition of India, and the creation of new, 'unnatural' borders by an arbitrary scalpel in a fit of what he described as momentary madness," he says.

The book analyses both the ideology and the personality of those who shaped the fate of the region, and spells out the blunders, lapses and conscious chicanery that permeated the politics of seven explosive years between 1940 and 1947.

Gandhi, a devout Hindu, believed faith could nurture the civilisational harmony of India, a land where every religion had flourished, it says. On the other hand, Jinnah was a political Muslim rather than a practicing believer and was determined to carve up a syncretic subcontinent in the name of Islam.

His confidence came from a wartime deal with Britain, embodied in the 'August Offer' of 1940. Gandhi's strength lay in ideological commitment which was, in the end, ravaged by the communal violence that engineered partition. The price of this epic confrontation, paid by the people, has stretched into generations, the book says.

According to the author, Gandhi's immediate concern after independence was the fate of partition's principal victims, the minorities: Hindus in Pakistan and Muslims in India.

"He wanted to be in Noakhali, East Pakistan, where Hindus had suffered bitterly in the 1946 riots and prevent any

recurrence. Gandhi was still struggling to build hope from the incendiary debris of communal violence," he writes in the book, published by Bloomsbury India.

The book says that on May 31, 1947, Gandhi told Pathan leader Abdul Ghaffar Khan, known as 'Frontier Gandhi', that he wanted to visit the North West Frontier and live in Pakistan after independence.

"... I don't believe in these divisions of the country. I am not going to ask anybody's permission. If they kill me for their defiance, I shall embrace death with a smiling face. That is, if Pakistan comes into existence, I intend to go there, tour it, live there and see what they do to me," the book quotes him as telling.

Akbar says Gandhi remained consistent through the long and turbulent roller-coaster ride of high-voltage events.

"For more than 50 years, he sang, literally, from the same hymn sheet. Religion, said his hymn, was a catechism of love, tolerance and unity. Whether in South Africa or India, for over half of a century till the end of his public career in 1948, he explained why he was proud to be a Hindu," he writes.

Gandhi's personal and political life, writes Akbar, were fused by a humanism which believed that the unity of India lay in acceptance of religious and cultural diversity, and its geography was a natural evolution of shared space between Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis or indeed any community that had made this vast subcontinent its home.

"Jinnah, in contrast, adopted a chameleon persona to suit his political objectives. For more than six decades, he was a nominal rather than practicing Muslim. After 1937, he became the standard-bearer of Islamic separatism, and suddenly acquired plumes of the devout Muslim that he had never been, and never was," he says.

Accidents, suicides claimed lives of 2,200 CAPF personnel in 2014-2018 period

NEW DELHI, JAN 19 (PTI): As many as 2,200 Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) personnel died in accidents and suicides in a span of five years from 2014 to 2018, with the annual figures of such casualties coming down in recent years, according to an official data.

In 2018, 104 CAPF personnel died in accidents while 28 in suicides, totalling 132 deaths during the year, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data showed.

In 2014, when the NCRB had first collected data of such cases linked to CAPF, 1,232 accident-related deaths were reported and suicide figures stood at 175.

The number of accident-related deaths stood at 113 in 2017, 260 in 2016 and 193 in 2015, while suicide cases stood at 60 in 2017, 74 in 2016 and 60 in 2015, the NCRB data from the corresponding years showed.

According to the data, 1,902 CAPF personnel died in accidents, while 397 in suicides, totalling 2,199 such casualties from 2014 to 2018.

The NCRB has included data from five forces -- Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force

(CRPF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) besides Assam Rifles (AR) and National Security Guard (NSG).

Working under the Union Home Ministry, CAPFs play a vital role in guarding borders and assisting Centre and state governments in maintenance of internal security and in curbing other illegal or unlawful activities.

As on January 1, 2018, the CAPFs

had the actual strength of 9,29,289 personnel, according to the latest report of the NCRB, which works under the MHA and is responsible for collection and analysis of crime-related data.

A cause-wise analysis of accidental deaths of CAPF personnel revealed that maximum casualties of forces have been reported under 'Killed in Action or Operation or Encounters' -- 31.7 per cent (33 out of 104 deaths) in 2018, the NCRB said.



It was followed by 'deaths due to other causes' accounting for 21.2 per cent (22 deaths), while road or railway accidents' (21 out of 104 deaths) accounted for 20.2 per cent of total fatalities during the year, it stated.

There were also four deaths each because of 'forces of nature' and 'fratricide' during 2018, according to the NRCB data.

A cause-wise analysis of suicidal deaths revealed that 35.7 per cent, which is 10 out of 28 suicides, were due to 'family problems', the data showed, adding, another 17.9 per cent (5 out of 28 suicides each) were due to 'marriage-related issues' and 'service-related issues'.

Overall, 1,34,516 suicides were reported in the country during 2018, showing an increase of 3.6 per cent in comparison to 2017.

The rate of suicides, which means deaths per one lakh population, also increased by 0.3 per cent during 2018 over 2017, the NCRB stated.

Medical experts, however, say that suicide is a serious public health problem but are preventable with timely, evidence-based and often low-cost interventions.

~ **SummitTIMES** ~
CLASSIFIEDS

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Roadside plots for sale at Adampool, Ranipool-Rumtek highway.

For details contact: 9083826462

FLAT FOR RENT/LEASE

Fully furnished 3BHK flat available for rent/lease at Church Road near DPH. Roadside and five minutes walking distance from MG Marg.

For more details: 9083826462 /9832556698

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General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College. Flat Land no cutting required. Price 36 Lakhs (negotiable).

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

LAND FOR SALE

An area measuring 1 acre at Sadam South Sikkim near Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact: 78640-04501,62970-03235, 98320-48410

Rotarians host Gangtok launch of Intensified Pulse Polio Immunization Campaign

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 JAN:

Rotary Club of Gangtok today hosted the launch of Intensified Pulse Polio Immunization Campaign in Sikkim at Titanic Park here at MG Marg.

Rotary International, a press release informs, has pledged to take up and continue the fight against polio.

At the launch here, Dr Yogesh Verma spoke about Rotary International's commitment to support the fight against polio and that the organization will continue to support the fight.

State Immunization Officer, Dr Phumsey Denzongpa, thanked Rotary Club of Gangtok and Inner Wheel Club of Gangtok along with Inner Wheel Club of Gangtok Orchid for their continuing support which would help in 100% coverage of all children below the age of 5.

Also present on the



occasion were Gangtok Mayor Shakti Singh Choudhary, Principal Secretary, Health Department, K Sreenivasulu, Secretary cum Director General

Health Services, Dr PT Bhutia, Health Department officials, members of Rotary Club of Gangtok, Inner Wheel Club of Gangtok and Inner Wheel Club of

Gangtok Orchid.

Pulse Polio is an immunisation campaign of the Government of India to eliminate poliomyelitis by vaccinating all children under the age

of five years against the polio virus. The project fights poliomyelitis through a large-scale pulse immunisation programme and monitoring for polio cases.

Newar Guthi members visit language classes underway in Singtam



SUMMIT REPORT

RANGPO, 19 JAN:

A team of Sikkim Newar Guthi Youth Affairs members visited the ongoing Newa language classes in Singtam today, a press release informs.

Sikkim Newar Guthi youth secretary, Dr Sushen Pradhan, while addressing the students, highlighted the importance of learning the mother tongue and its role in preservation

of culture.

Bikash Pradhan, Culture Secretary, SNG, also encouraged young students and appreciated their effort in learning the language.

A brief interaction was also held with the students in Newa language which underlined the progress the students were making.

The team also attended the class and learned new words and sentences themselves, the re-

lease adds. Other members present for the visit were Binita Pradhan, Urvasi Pradhan, Deepanjali Pradhan, Anisha Pradhan & Chetan Pradhan.

SNGYA has appreciated the efforts of Newa Bhay Bowneykuthi, Singtam branch and specially of the teachers involved - Nisha Pradhan from Sumbuk and Kiran Pradhan from Dentam - who have made time from their busy schedule to take the classes.

Rohit Sharma third fastest to 9000 runs in ODIs



BENGALURU, JAN 19 (PTI): India opener Rohit Sharma on Sunday became the third fastest to 9000 ODI runs during the series-decider against Australia here.

Rohit reached the milestone in the first over of India's chase with a double.

Rohit took 217 innings to reach the landmark while his skipper Virat Kohli is the fastest to 9000

runs with 194 innings. AB de Villiers is the second fastest, having reached there in 208 innings.

Besides Rohit and Kohli, the other Indians who have crossed the 9000-run mark are Sachin Tendulkar (18,426 runs), Saurav Ganguly (11,221), Rahul Dravid (10,768) Mahendra Singh Dhoni (10,599) and Mohammed Azaruddin (9,378).

SARAS Mela continues to impress in Jorethang



JORETHANG, 19 JAN [IPR]: The 11th Sikkim Sale of Articles of Rural Artisan Society [SARAS] Trade Fair, an exhibition and sale organised by Sikkim Rural Livelihood Mission under Rural Development Department is being hosted at the New SNT Complex here and will continue till 23 January.

This trade fair pro-

vides a platform for rural entrepreneurs from across the country as well as Sikkim to showcase their products such as home-made artefacts through Self Help Groups, house decor, paintings, garments, food and organic produce, jewelry, biodegradable articles and many more.

This fair boasts of rural artisans and their

finesse in their own respective handloom and handicrafts works.

A total of 203 stalls have been set up in this fair, out of which 158 are from Sikkim and 45 participants from states such as Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Goa.

Steve Martin, Martin Short to lead Hulu's new comedy series



LOS ANGELES, JAN 18 (PTI): Hulu has handed a straight-to-series order to a new comedy show, starring veteran comedians Steve Martin and Martin Short.

The show, described as a story about "three strangers who share an obsession with true crime and suddenly find themselves wrapped up in one", has been co-created by Martin and John Hoffman. The makers are currently looking for a young woman actor to play the third lead in the yet-untitled show.

The project hails from 20th Century Fox Television and will be executive produced by "This Is Us"

creator Dan Fogelman, reported Deadline.

"When you're lucky enough to have lunch with Steve Martin, and halfway through the meal he says hey, I have an idea for a TV show' it's a pretty good day. This is as exciting as it gets," Fogelman told the outlet.

The series is the latest collaboration between Martin and Short, whose friendship began 35 years ago. The duo are currently on a comedy tour together, called the "Now You See Them, Soon You Won't Tour".

The series is set in New York, which is expected to be a big character in the show.

Voice of Nepal performs in Gangtok



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 JAN:

The winner of Voice of Nepal Season-2, Ram Limboo, performed at Manan Kendra on Saturday evening.

The stage was also shared by other top con-

testants of VoN S-02 at the event organized by Gangtok-based Lazy Bee Events.

On stage were Bikash Limbu, Arif Rauf, Sanish Shrestha, Bimochana Lomejail and Geeta Sharma. The stage was also

shared by Tshering Leizum, who was also part of the show as the advisor to one of the judges, Raju Lama.

The concert had the Forest Minister Karma Loday Bhutia as the chief guest.

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Wandering Souls of Sikkim is excited to announce our plan to upgrade the school library of Govt. Secondary School, Amba, East Sikkim. This will be fourth such upgradation of school libraries by WSOS.

We have successfully upgraded 3 school libraries so far with the support and contributions of our generous patrons and are looking forward to receive more such contributions.

We request all to kindly contribute books either old or new or cash for the upgradation of school library at Amba.

Our Library Initiative is aimed at upgrading School libraries specially in rural areas of the state and for laying a foundation for better future of our young minds studying in these schools.

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**GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL DIRECTOR PENSION, GROUP INSURANCE & PROVIDENT FUND
FINANCE DEPARTMENT
GANGTOK**

NO. 338 /PGIPF

Date: 13.01.2020

NOTICE

The PGIPF Division of Finance Department, Government of Sikkim is conducting Pension Adalat at the District Head Quarters as per the schedule detailed below. All Pensioners including Family Pensioners are requested to kindly attend the said Pension Adalat with their queries and grievances between 10.30 AM to 1.30 PM

Date	District	Venue
20.01.2020	North	Conference Hall of District Collector, Mangan
22.01.2020	South	Conference Hall of Zilla Panchayat, Namchi
23.01.2020	West	Conference Hall of District Collector, Rabdentse
27.01.2020	East	Conference Hall of District Collector, Gangtok

Sd/-
Deepak Kumar Pradhan
Director, PGIPF
State Pension Nodal Office

R.O. No. 325/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20dt. 13.01.2010

Good Rules Need Better Implementation

Regulations are required, but try building confidence first

It has now been two years since the government announced speed-limits for Sikkim roads. You don't remember, do you? Not in these times when up-to-date documentation is the priority. That said, the move was welcome when it was announced and now that some years have passed, also comes the realization that good rules need better implementation to be of any consequence.

Given how things work here, this regulation too was only superficially thought out, and even when, and if at all, implemented was done so only for nuisance value for some time and then forgotten. To begin with, how were speed-limits to be checked everywhere, and how was the breaking of speed limits to be penalized? What were the traffic cops on the prowl to check more diligently against, unauthorized/ irresponsible parking, dangerous driving or over-speeding? Does the speed regulation apply to all vehicles? Couldn't be, because parking rules don't appear to be universally applicable either and VIPs treated to empty slots kept empty in anticipation of their arrival even in areas like MG Marg where private citizens are whistled away.

One wonders why the speed limit was formalized. Again, most people would think that it was to make the roads safer. But, if it is only the private citizens who need to observe the speed limits while the VIPs and their officers can ignore it, then one would be forced to surmise that private vehicles are being intentionally slowed down so that those who consider themselves "very important" can travel even faster. If that is not the case, then ensure that the speed regulation is extended to every vehicle on the roads. And this brings one back to the need for improved implementation to ensure that well intentioned moves deliver on their promise.

Some years ago, the Motor Vehicle Rules were marked for an amendment to deliver a stronger commitment to making vehicular traffic safer in Sikkim. The proposed amendment required a driver to produce a driving license issued from hill regions or procure such a special permit from Sikkim before being allowed to ferry passengers in the State. The idea was sound. At one level it ensured that those hired as taxi drivers in Sikkim were tried hands on hill roads and not landing jobs despite suspect driving skills only because they have managed to buy a driving license elsewhere. The requirement to get these permits renewed and the powers given to the licensing authorities here to verify the antecedents of the applicants ensured that drivers took their jobs more seriously and the authorities have a paper trail to follow in case someone absconds after a mishap (a common response). One wonders where this rule sits nowadays because it sure does not appear to be in practical practice.

Agreed, this one was complicated and presented many genuine complications, but in the many years that have passed, these could have been ironed out to guarantee that drivers of passenger vehicles in Sikkim had tested driving skills. That is a substantial assurance to receive for passengers nowadays.

The point being reiterated is that 'good rules' need good implementation to deliver 'good results.' After all, there is no dearth of either good rules or good intentions in the country, but it is in the delivery that everything goes wrong. The more stringent stipulations to keep the roads safe are welcome, but almost immediately raise the fear of more complicated red tape, more powerful officials, more dugdi. In fact, it would not be a bad idea to first win back the trust of the people before issuing any more rules. There is too much disconnect nowadays between the janta and their janardhans, too much distrust. Let's work at repair this faith first.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

The Olympics have always been a platform for protest. Banning hand gestures and kneeling ignores their history

DAVID ROWE
theconversation.com

It is the year of the Tokyo Olympics, and the International Olympic Committee was quickly out of the blocks with new guidelines regarding athlete protests.

The IOC is worried the biggest stories of the Games will be political gestures rather than sport performances, and so have introduced specific guidelines to prevent "any political messaging, including signs or armbands" and "gestures of a political nature, like a hand gesture or kneeling" during play, opening and closing ceremonies, medal ceremonies, and at the Olympic village.

The IOC has historically shown greater anxiety around the commercial arrangements of athletes, protecting its sponsors. But the rise of the activist athlete now looms as the more immediate threat to the IOC's image and bank account.

Most Olympians are not household names. But they can become so by taking advantage of the rare moments when the world's cameras and microphones are within easy reach. No wonder the IOC's (mostly) elected Athletes' Commission is keen to ensure athletes do not give in to the "desire to drive change" and "use the platform of an appearance at the Olympic Games to make [their] point".

The problem for the IOC is that submitting to this temptation is burnt into Olympic iconography.

The Olympic movement has always claimed to be a unifying force – but bringing the athletes of the world together inevitably means they bring along their politics, too.

1906: IRISH INDEPENDENCE

One of the first documented protests at the modern Olympics was Irish athlete Peter O'Connor's rejection of having to compete under the Union Jack in Athens. After winning the silver medal in the long jump, O'Connor was expected to stand under the British flag at the medal ceremony.

Instead, O'Connor climbed the flag pole and

waved the Irish flag.

1964-1988: THE BAN ON APARTHEID-ERA SOUTH AFRICA

In the face of multiple threatened boycotts by nations and athletes opposed to South Africa's refusal to allow black athletes to compete at the Olympics, the country was banished from Olympic sport for over two decades.

It is widely believed that such sporting bans helped weaken apartheid before its official abandonment in 1991.

1968: BLACK POWER

One of most famous Olympic images is of the raised arm, black power demonstration on the podium at the Mexico Olympics by African-American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos.

They were silently supported by Australian runner Peter Norman, who was wearing an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge.

Smith and Carlos were sent home and Norman was ostracised by International and Australian Olympic authorities. He received a posthumous apology in the federal parliament.

1980 AND 1984: COLD WAR BOYCOTTS

Seven Olympics have been boycotted, but the most prominent were the tit-for-tat boycotts of the Moscow and Los Angeles games by Eastern and Western blocs after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Ironically, these boycotts were driven by nation-states, not protest groups.

2008: PRO-TIBET DEMONSTRATIONS

The lead up to the Beijing Olympics was marked by protests against China's treatment of Tibet as the Olympic torch relay proceeded across continents towards the host city. This was a public relations disaster at a time when China was trying to present a more liberal face to the world.

2014: LGBTQI COLOURS

When Vladimir Putin's Russia was trying to improve its image via the Sochi Winter Olympics, it only drew attention to its homophobic laws and treatment of LGBTQI people. Suddenly, rainbow co-

lours began appearing on the bodies and clothes of Olympians.

2018: NORTH KOREA

IOC President Thomas Bach, a strong critic of athlete protests at Olympic venues, was more than happy to play a very political game over North Korean involvement in the PyeonChang (South Korea) Winter Olympics, meeting Leader Kim Jong Un and lobbying the UN to lift sanctions against sports equipment in North Korea.

2020: TOWARDS TOKYO

The Athletes' Commission has expressed concern other athletes will be the main victims of those who protest alongside them.

Despite the threat of disciplinary action for protesting at the venue – including being stripped of a medal – some committed activist athletes may be willing to pay the price for taking the knee, painting their finger nails in politically meaningful colours or, like Australian swimmer Mack Horton last July, refusing to share the podium with a competitor who has been previously banned for doping.

According to the guidelines, expressing political views – which are differentiated from "protests and demonstrations" – can only take place at media conferences, team meetings and on traditional and social media. Freedom of political speech is still permitted, but not where it is closest to the action and attracting maximum attention.

At the Tokyo Olympics, climate change, racism, homophobia, refugees and other urgent political issues will weigh heavily on the consciences of athletes.

Their decisions to accept or invert political protocol will have a major bearing on how this latest chapter of the Olympic story will be told around the globe.

Will this be the silent athlete Olympics, or one where human rights voices are raised on the podium?

[the writer is Emeritus Professor of Cultural Research, Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University]



Why you need more Vitamin D in the winter

MARGHERITA T. CANTORNA
theconversation.com

Winter is upon us and so is the risk of vitamin D deficiency and infections. Vitamin D, which is made in our skin following sunlight exposure and also found in oily fish (mackerel, tuna and sardines), mushrooms and fortified dairy and nondairy substitutes, is essential for good health. Humans need vitamin D to keep healthy and to fight infections. The irony is that in winter, when people need vitamin D the most, most of us are not getting enough. So how much should we take? Should we take supplements? How do we get more? And, who needs it most?

I am a medical microbiologist and immunologist who studies the functions of vitamin D in immune cells. My laboratory has been interested in figuring out why the immune system has vitamin D receptors that determine which cells can use vitamin D. In the immune system, vitamin D acts to improve your ability to fight infections and to reduce inflammation.

WHERE TO GET YOUR VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is called the sunshine vitamin since it is made in the skin after exposure to sun. The same UVB rays that cause a sunburn also make vitamin D. Sunscreen, darker skin pigmentation, clothing and reduced

daylight in winter diminish the skin's ability to make vitamin D. The people who experience the biggest seasonal swings in vitamin D levels are fair-skinned individuals living in the northern regions of the U.S. and at higher latitudes around the globe where there is very little daylight in winter.

But those most at risk for low vitamin D levels are people of color and people living at higher latitudes. Dark-skinned individuals are more likely than fair-skinned individuals to be low for vitamin D year-round because the darker skin blocks the UVB rays from producing vitamin D. However, even in dark skinned individuals, vitamin D is lowest in the winter.

In the winter, in addition to high vitamin D food, adults should take additional vitamin D from foods and/or supplements to get at least 600 IU per day of vitamin D. People who have dark skin or avoid sunshine should eat more vitamin D year-round.

VITAMIN D IS IMPORTANT FOR BONES AND YOUR MICROBES

Originally, doctors thought that vitamin D was only important for bone health. This was because the vitamin D deficiency caused bone diseases like rickets in children and osteoporosis in adults. However, in the 1980s scientists discovered that immune cells had

receptors for vitamin D.

My group's research has shown that vitamin D plays an important role in maintaining health in the gastrointestinal tract. Higher levels of vitamin D reduce susceptibility to inflammatory bowel disease and Crohn's disease, gut and lung infections in animals and people.

My colleagues and I have discovered that one of the ways vitamin D functions is by keeping the microbes in the gut healthy and happy. Vitamin D increases the number and diversity of microbes living in the gut, which together reduce inflammation throughout the body.

Low vitamin D levels are associated with inflammatory bowel disease in humans. Researchers have found that inflammatory bowel disease patients in Japan have more symptoms in winter than during other seasons.

WHY IS VITAMIN D MORE IMPORTANT IN WINTER?

In the winter, humans are exposed to more infections and spend less time outside. Exactly how much vitamin D healthy adults should have is debated. Some authorities recommend from 200 IU per day to 2,000 IU per day. In the U.S., the Institutes of Medicine recommends 600-800 IU per day for adults, while the Endocrine Society states that optimal vitamin D status may require 1500-

2,000 IU per day. In the winter, people have a reduced ability to make vitamin D when they go outside, so amounts of at least 600 IU per day of vitamin D from food or supplements would help maintain vitamin D status at summer levels.

But, just like many things, too much vitamin D can be harmful. Vitamin D toxicity does not result from too much sun or food. Because of the risk of skin cancer, dermatologists and other health professionals do not recommend unprotected sun exposure to boost your vitamin D. Instead they suggest supplements. But vitamin D toxicity can occur if an individual takes too many.

The experts that set the national intakes of vitamin D for the U.S. recommend that adult individuals take no more than 4,000 IU per day of vitamin D to avoid toxic side effects. Vitamin D helps you absorb calcium from your diet, but when vitamin D is too high, calcium levels in the blood go up and that can lead to kidney disease.

By consuming more vitamin D during the winter your gut microbes will be healthier and you'll be more resistant to infection and inflammation year-round.

[the writer is Distinguished Professor of Molecular Immunology, Pennsylvania State University]

Impossible for immigrant to give proof of religious persecution: Himanta

GUWAHATI, JAN 19 (PTI): Assam Finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has said it is impossible for an immigrant to provide proof of religious persecution.

Sarma, who is also convenor of the NDA's regional wing North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), said that it is not possible for the person to go back to his country of origin and collect a copy of police report to show that he was subjected to religious persecution.

Assam has been witnessing protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act with the people apprehending that it will hurt their interests.

"It is not possible for an applicant to prove that he had been subjected to religious persecution in his country of origin. Because if he has to prove it, then he has to go to Bangladesh to collect an FIR or police report," Sarma said after a party function on Saturday.

"You cannot prove fear of religious persecution or religious persecution itself. How can you prove it? Somebody will challenge it.

"That is what my assessment is. You will ask a person to go back to



Bangladesh and ask him to collect videographic or photographic evidence of religious persecution?" he asked.

The Assam government has requested the Centre to include submission of evidence by an applicant that he was in the state prior to 2014 in the rules of the CAA, which are under preparation, the NEDA convenor said.

"Our firm view is that in order to prove that you have come to Assam before 2014, you have to prove it through

documents like a bank account opened prior to 2014 or name in the electoral roll prior to 2014 or NRC application before 2014," the BJP leader said.

The Assam government wants a very short window period to establish citizenship under the CAA because rumours are being spread about the possible number of beneficiaries under the Act.

"Our firm view is that the applicants will be in the range of 3 lakh to 5 lakh. These are the peo-

ple who are staying in Assam from 1972 or 1975.

"We want to end this confusion in Assam. So, we requested for a very short window period because our target people are already selected during the process of NRC.

"Everybody knows that my name is not in NRC, so there is no confusion. No confusion on the applicant's side, no confusion on the government's side. Just go and apply.

It will hardly take 2-3 months. Somebody

whose name is not in NRC, they can go and apply," the minister said.

The Act aims to provide Indian citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis entering India on or before December 31, 2014 from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan after five years of residence here.

The Supreme Court has issued a notice to the Centre on a batch of 59 petitions challenging the validity of CAA. The next date of hearing is January 22.

CAA suit in SC: Ker Guv seeks report from government

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN 19 (PTI): Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has sought a report from the CPI(M) led Left Democratic Front government for moving the Supreme Court against the Citizenship Amendment Act without informing him.

The office of Raj Bhavan sought the report from the state Chief Secretary of the state.

"The Governor's office has sought a report from the Chief Secretary for not informing him

about the state's move to approach the apex court against the CAA," a top source from Raj Bhavan told PTI on Sunday.

The Governor has been at loggerheads with the government ever since the state assembly passed a resolution last month, seeking to scrap the new law.

Khan had also publicly expressed his displeasure over the government not informing him moving moving the Supreme Court against the CAA.

Parl panel to submit report on proposed sixth schedule amendment by March: Anand Sharma

SHILLONG, JAN 19 (PTI): A day after consultations with the state's stakeholders over the proposed amendment of the Constitution's sixth schedule, Anand Sharma, who chairs the parliamentary standing committee on home affairs, said on Sunday the panel would submit its observations by March.

The amendment bill, currently under the review of the committee, seeks to increase the executive and financial powers of autonomous councils in the sixth schedule areas of the Northeast. The Congress MP, who was in Shillong to hold a meeting with the representatives of the Meghalaya government and three autonomous district councils (ADCs), said he was apprised of the concerns of local people over the proposed amendment.

He, however, refused to share the details.

"Hopefully, the committee will be able to submit its report to Parliament by March. I am not going to share any

details (as of now)," the Rajya Sabha MP told reporters. The panel will examine the ground situation in the states of Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura before preparing the report, he added.

Among others who attended Saturday's meeting was opposition Congress leader and former CM Mukul Sangma, who said "it was a privilege to be a part of the deliberations".

"It is an exercise before the amendment of the legislation. Until it is tabled in Parliament, it remains a secret document," he said. Asked about the proposal to nominate unrepresented tribes in the three district councils of the state, Latiplang Kharkongor, a member of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), said it has registered strong opposition against the idea.

KHADC chairman PN Syiem told reporters that the council has also sought an increase in the number of seats - from 35 to 37 - with two seats reserved for women.

Assam minister shown black flags

GUWAHATI, JAN 19 (PTI): Assam minister Jogen Mohan was shown black flags in Sivasagar district on Sunday by AASU activists protesting against Citizenship (Amendment) Act, a day after he was sworn in.

The incident happened when the minister was going to his constituency - Mahmara.

The activists also shouted slogans against him.

"Jogen Mohan go back", "We don't accept CAA" and "BJP go back"

were some of the slogans the agitators shouted while waving black flags at the new minister. Jogen Mohan on Saturday was sworn in as minister of state with independent charge was given the portfolios of revenue and disaster management, PWD (assisting the cabinet minister).

Dozens of members of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) showed black flags while Mohan's convoy passed through Gaurisagar area of Sivasagar district. On

January 15, the day of 'Bhogali Bihu', Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal was shown black flags by AASU activists in Dibrugarh district while he was on his way to his hometown Chabua to celebrate Bihu with his family members.

Sonowal, on New Year's day was shown black flags by AASU and Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad at several places between Nalbari and Barpeta when he was travelling to Barpeta district.

Attack on Visva-Bharati students: one more arrested



SURI (WEST BENGAL), JAN 19 (PTI): One more person was arrested from Jharkhand on Sunday in connection with an attack by a group of students on another near a boys' hostel of the Visva-Bharati university campus last week, police said.

Sulav Karmakar, a student of the history department of the central university, is the third person to be arrested in connection with the incident that left several men injured on January 15.

Karmakar was picked up from Godda in Jharkhand, police said.

Two TMCP leaders - Achintya Bagdi and Saber Ali - had been arrested earlier for their alleged involvement in the assault on Left-leaning students on January 15.

The attack took place a week after BJP Rajya Sabha MP Swapn Dasgupta was heckled by Left-leaning students after he came to deliver a lecture on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on January 8.

An SFI leader of the university had alleged that the attackers said the assault was a fallout of the demonstration

the Left students held during Dasgupta's visit to the campus.

Dasgupta, Visva-Bharati Vice-Chancellor Bidyut Chakraborty and others had to remain confined for around eight hours to a building of the central university outside which hundreds of Left-leaning students staged a sit-in, accusing the politician of promoting hatred among communities.

The Visva-Bharati on Friday set up a 3-member panel to probe the alleged confinement of the politician and the incident of assault.

5 child marriages foiled in Odisha's Ganjam district

BERHAMPUR (ODISHA), JAN 19 (PTI): A total of five child marriages have been foiled across Odisha's Ganjam district following swift action by the administration, officials said on Sunday.

While three attempts to marry off three minor girls were thwarted in Hinjili block, two such attempts were foiled in Sanakhemundi and Bhanjanagara blocks on Saturday, they said.

All the girls were aged between 15 and 17 years, they said.

Officials of the district administration, police officers and activists of an NGO went to the villages after getting information about the attempts to marry off the minor girls, an official said.

Though the families were initially reluctant to drop the idea of marrying off the minor girls, later they realized that such practices are illegal, he said.

"We have convinced the parents and all of them have given undertakings that they will not get their daughters married till they attain the age 18 years," the Coordinator of Childline NGO, Sai Prasad Samal, said.

The activists of the Childline, police, child development project officer-cum child marriage prohibition officers of the respective blocks had visited the villages to convince the parents of the minor girls, he said.

In the first week of this month, the dis-

trict administration had stopped at least seven child marriages.

The district administration had foiled as many as 42 such cases in 2019, sources said.

More awareness is needed to prevent child marriages in the district, child rights activist Sudhir Sabat said.

The Ganjam district administration has launched an initiative called 'Nirvaya Kadhi' to prevent child marriages in the district, an official said.

Besides, 'Mu Sachetan' (I am aware) programme has also been launched in the schools by the administration to create awareness against child marriage, he said.

SFI moves SC challenging Citizenship (Amendment) Act

NEW DELHI, JAN 19 (PTI): The Students' Federation of India (SFI) has moved the Supreme Court challenging The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, claiming it is "discriminatory" in nature and is "destructive" for the core principles of Indian constitutionalism.

The CAA, which was notified on January 10, grants Indian citizenship to non-Muslim minorities -- Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian -- who migrated to India from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh till December 31, 2014, following persecution over their faith.

In its plea, the SFI has sought to declare the CAA "violative" of the Indian Constitution, saying "explicit preference to certain religious groups to the exclusion of others can never, in the Indian constitutional scheme, constitute a valid and reasonable classification meeting the test of Article 14 (equality before law) of the Constitution".

Besides, the plea has sought to strike down certain provisions of

The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and The Foreigners Act, 1946, claiming that they are violative of the Constitution.

"Student members of the petitioner (SFI) are immensely disturbed by the enactment of The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and view it as being destructive of core principles of Indian constitutionalism," the plea said.

It said that the Centre, despite being fully aware of the "protests and disaffection among the masses" with the CAA, has categorically and unequivocally reiterated its position and stated that there is no question of repeal or amendment of this statute.

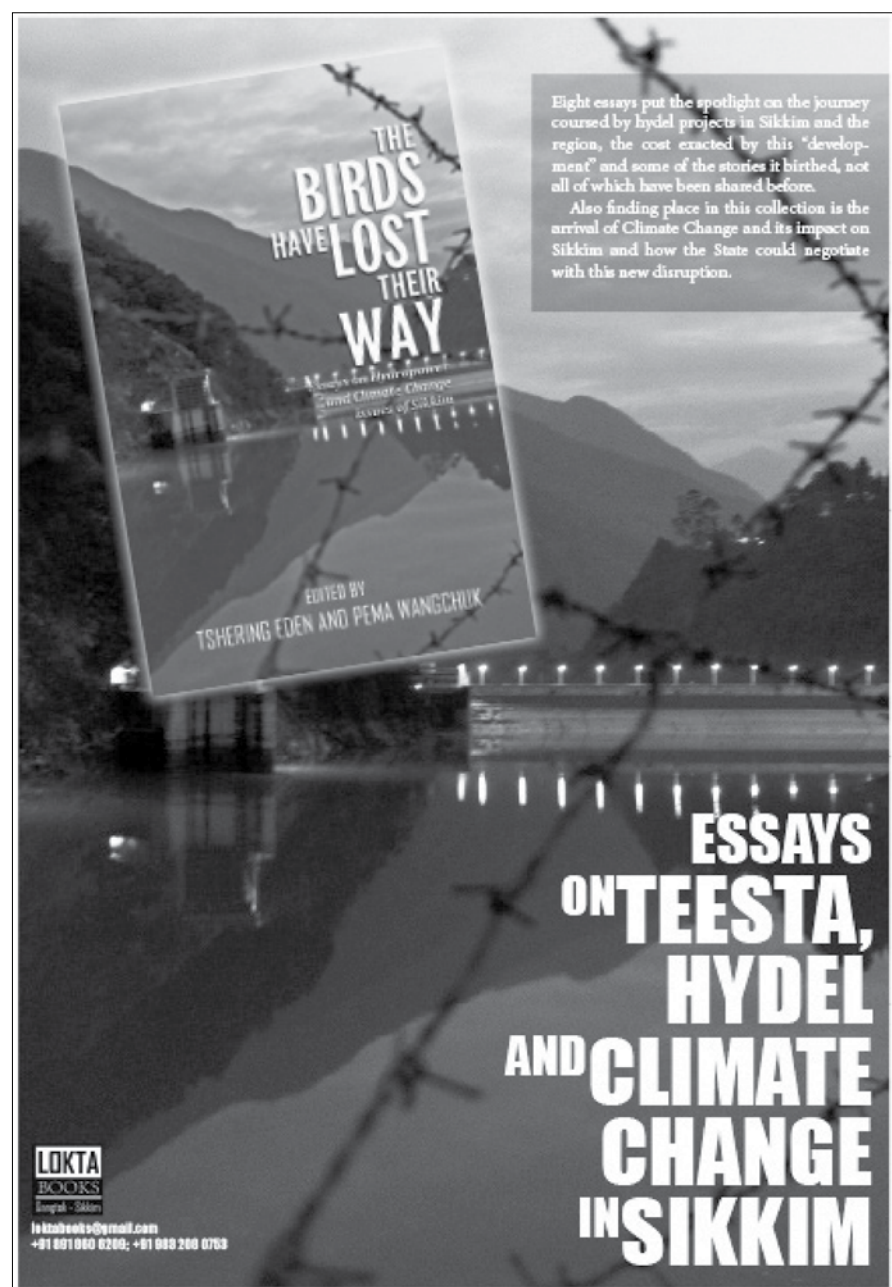
"The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 is violative of Article 14 of the Constitution since it discriminates only on the ground of religion, inasmuch as identically situated persons who face persecution in India's neighbourhood stand excluded from the beneficial embrace of the act only because they do not

fall within the six religious communities listed in the Act," the plea said.

On December 18, 2019, the top court had issued a notice to the Centre and sought its response by the second week of January on a batch of pleas challenging the CAA's legality.

The apex court had fixed January 22 for hearing several anti-CAA petitions, including those filed by the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh. RJD leader Manoj Jha, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra and AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi have also filed pleas against the act. Later, Kerala government became the first state to challenge the CAA in the Supreme Court.

Other anti-CAA petitioners include the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, All Assam Students Union (AASU), Peace Party, CPI, NGOs 'Rihai Manch' and Citizens Against Hate. Several law students have also approached the apex court challenging the act.



Conor McGregor visits 40-second destruction on Donald Cerrone in UFC return

LAS VEGAS, 19 JAN [AP]: Conor McGregor came back with a big bang.

McGregor stopped Donald Cerrone with a head kick and punches 40 seconds into the first round at UFC 246 on Saturday night, announcing his return to mixed martial arts with his first victory since 2016.

The Irish former two-division champion came out of a three-year stretch of relative inactivity and outside-the-cage troubles with a performance that echoed his greatest fights during his unparalleled rise.

After bloodying Cerrone's nose with his first punch, McGregor (22-4) then floored Cerrone (36-14) only 20 seconds into the bout with a perfectly placed left kick to the head. He mercilessly finished on the ground to the delight of a sellout crowd of 19,040 at T-Mobile Arena.

"I feel really good, and I came out of here unscathed," McGregor said. "I'm in shape. We've got work to do to get back to where I was."

McGregor's hand hadn't been raised in victory since November 2016, when he stopped lightweight Eddie Alvarez to become the first fighter in UFC history to hold two championship belts simultaneously. With his fame and fortune multiplying, McGregor fought only his boxing match with Floyd Mayweather in 2017, and he lost a one-sided UFC bout to lightweight champion Khabib Nurmagomedov in late 2018.

After a year spent out of competition and in repeated trouble with the law, McGregor got back into training and vowed to return to elite form. This dramatic victory over Cerrone indicated he's well on his way, and McGregor has vowed to fight multiple times in 2020. Welterweight



champion Kamaru Usman and veteran brawler Jorge Masvidal watched UFC 246 from cageside. Either man could be McGregor's next opponent.

"Any one of these mouthy fools can get it," McGregor yelled into the microphone. "Every single one of them can get it. It does not matter. I'm back and I'm ready."

Cerrone is the most successful fighter in UFC history with 23 victories, a mark that reflects both his durability and commitment to an uncommonly busy schedule. Cerrone, who also holds the UFC record with 16 championship wins, had fought a whopping 11 times since McGregor's win over Alvarez, and he was in

the cage for the 15th time since he lost his only UFC title shot in December 2015.

But Cerrone's last two fights were stopped when he took too much damage, and he couldn't block McGregor's decisive kick or recover from the punishment on the ground.

"I'd never seen anything like that," Cerrone said. "He busted my nose, it started bleeding, and he stepped back and head-kicked me. Oh, man. This happened this fast?"

Although many observers have scoffed, the 31-year-old McGregor believes he can reclaim the fearsome form he showed during his meteoric rise to unprecedented MMA suc-

cess. He won 15 consecutive fights during a five-year run from low-profile shows in Dublin to the world's biggest MMA events, stopping five straight elite UFC opponents with punches on the way up.

McGregor walked to the cage at UFC 246 with the Irish flag wrapped around his shoulders. The bearded fighters touched gloves beforehand in an extension of this bout's unfailing sportsmanship not always a hallmark of McGregor's previous bouts.

After the referee stopped the bout, McGregor peeled away briefly to celebrate, but quickly returned to comfort his disoriented opponent. When Cerrone's grandmother, Jer-

ry, entered the cage after the fight to hug her grandson, McGregor also hugged Jerry and got a kiss on the cheek. Even after his prolonged absence or maybe because of it McGregor's return is expected to be a huge seller on pay-per-view. The UFC said it made more than \$11 million in ticket sales at T-Mobile Arena for the fourth-biggest gate total in the promotion's history.

An eager sellout Vegas crowd showed up in person, with celebrities including Matthew McConaughey, Jeremy Renner and Dave Bautista, along with NFL stars Tom Brady, Christian McCaffrey, Baker Mayfield, Myles Garrett and Jon Gruden.

Former bantamweight champion Holly Holm beat Raquel Pennington by unanimous decision in the penultimate bout of UFC 246. The 38-year-old Holm (13-5) had lost five of her seven fights since she memorably knocked out Ronda Rousey in November 2015.

On the undercard, 37-year-old flyweight Roxanne Modafferi pulled off one of the biggest upsets in recent UFC history with a one-sided decision victory over previously unbeaten 21-year-old Maycee Barber, the UFC's top 125lb prospect.

Barber (8-1) injured her left knee during the bout, but Modafferi (24-16) was already dominating with the superior jiu-jitsu she has been practicing for Barber's entire life. Modafferi was the biggest betting underdog on the UFC 246 card, facing 10-1 odds at some sports books.

Aleksei Oleinik, a 42-year-old heavyweight who made his pro debut in 1996, also beat Maurice Greene by submission in the second round.

Bajrang, Ravi Kumar claim gold medals in Rome Ranking Series

ROME, JAN 19 (PTI): India's star wrestlers Bajrang Punia and Ravi Kumar Dahiya kicked off the Olympic year in style, winning a gold medal each in their respective weight categories at the Rome Ranking Series here.

The 25-year-old Bajrang staged a remarkable comeback to secure a 4-3 win against USA's Jordan Michael Oliver in the summit showdown of the 65kg freestyle category.

Ravi, who competed in the 61kg category instead of his regular 57kg, also bagged gold after getting the better of Kazakhstan's Nurbolat Abdualiyev 12-2 in his final bout late on Saturday night.

The 23-year-old from Sonapat had made the final round after securing impressive wins over Moldova's Alexaandru Chirtoaca and Kazakhstan's Nurislam Sanayev.

Up against one of India's biggest medal prospects in the Tokyo Olympics, Oliver conceded that it was not his night against Bajrang. The American lauded the competitive spirit of Bajrang.

"Wasn't my night but I got a lot of work to do

to be where I want to be! Hats off to @Bajrang-Punia dude is heck of a competitor! Until next time my friend," the American tweeted.

Bajrang had to sweat it out in the first round against Zain Allen Retherford of the USA before prevailing 5-4.

In the quarterfinal, the ace Indian wrestler went past another American Joseph Christopher McKenna 4-2, before getting the better of Vasyl Shuptar of Ukraine 6-4 in the semi-finals.

However, it was curtains for Jitender in the 74kg and world championship silver medalist Deepak Punia in the 86kg category.

Jitender won his first bout against Denys Pavlov of Ukraine 10-1 before going down in the quarterfinals against Turkey's Soner Demirtas 4-0.

Jitender got a change to fight in the repechage after Demirtas entered the final, but the Indian wasted the opportunity, losing 2-9 to Daniyar Kaisanov of Kazakhstan.

In the 86kg category, Deepak crashed out in the opening round, losing 1-11 to Ethan Adrian Ramos of Puerto Rico.

Isaac Hayden breaks Chelsea hearts with late winner for Newcastle



LOUISE TAYLOR

NEWCASTLE, 19 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Is possession overrated? It certainly seemed so for Chelsea as they manoeuvred the ball up and down a series of apparent blind alleys and culs-de-sac before ultimately seeing all that effort reduced to nothing when Isaac Hayden headed Newcastle's stoppage time winner.

At times Steve Bruce's side appeared to have developed an alarming allergy to passing between themselves but few occupants of the Gallowgate End were worrying about that as Allan Saint-Maximin redirected the fallout from a poor, partially cleared, Matt Ritchie corner and Hayden rose above all comers to clinch three precious points.

As T-Rex's triumphalist lyrics of "we love to boogie on a Saturday night" blared out of the sound system at the final whistle, Newcastle celebrated a victory rooted in superb defending.

If it helps erase lingering relegation worries on Tyneside, Frank Lampard saw Chelsea's grip on a top-four place slacken. "It's been the story of parts of our season, we don't score enough goals," he said. "We controlled the whole game but Newcastle were very well organised. We had the lion's share of possession but it's not easy to get behind Newcastle, they don't come out. We had to go from side to side. We're controlling games without being clinical. We need a killer instinct."

Steve Bruce – close to securing the Austria winger Valentino Lazaro on loan from Internazionale – was considerably hap-

pier with his side's smash-and-grab masterclass. "We could look after the ball better," he said. "But we've proved that, especially against the big teams, we're difficult to play against, hard to beat and we never give up."

The game had barely begun before his already extensive injury list grew a little longer. Jetro Willems twisted a knee and landed awkwardly following a tussle with Callum Hudson-Odoi before departing on a stretcher, in tears. "It looks a horrendous injury for Jetro," said Newcastle's manager, amid fears the left wing-back has ruptured a cruciate ligament.

A hip problem had left Andy Carroll in the stands, protecting his ponytail from Tyneside's bitter January chill with a flat cap. He was out of his seat when the much-improved Joelinton connected with Federico Fernández's fine cross and powered in an unstoppable, distinctly Carroll-esque, header only to see it rebound off the underside of the crossbar.

Already Chelsea commanded around 70% possession, yet despite some high-calibre crosses and passes from the exciting, intelligent Reece James, they were largely restricted to half-chances. Granted Martin Dubravka saved well to deny N'Golo Kanté and Tammy Abraham but Bruce's team arguably created the better openings, most notably when Jonjo Shelvey's fabulously lofted free-kick was headed off target by Fernández.

As the subzero evening cold intensified the biggest winners seemed to be Newcastle's new sponsors, Barbour International, the South Shields-based clothing company

and winter coat specialists.

While Bruce's players had all arrived at St James' Park swaddled in insulated Barbour jackets, too much of Chelsea's play had seemed semi-frozen, lacking the fluency and fluidity required to unhinge the excellent home back three of Fernández, Jamaal Lascelles and Ciaran Clark.

Much as James delighted in reminding everyone that England's Gareth Southgate is spoiled for choice at right-back, too many of his teammates saw their undeniable technical assurance undermined by the sheer obduracy of Newcastle's often immaculate organisation.

On this evidence Southgate should sign Bruce up to choreograph those out-of-possession coaching sessions beloved of FA technocrats. The way in which Willian was persistently, diligently and rapidly closed down looked testament to plenty of hard yards on the training ground.

As the clock ticked down, Lampard's demeanour was increasingly that of a man fiddling with the dials as he struggled to find the correct frequency on a portable radio with slightly unreliable reception. His team were not quite on the right wavelength and even when Sean Longstaff's mistake virtually gifted Abraham a goal, the striker miscued.

A draw beckoned but then Joelinton won that 11th-hour corner, the impressive Hayden eluded Kepa Arrizabalaga and Bruce defied a suspect knee and hip to make a celebratory leap almost as high as the scorer's. Who needs high percentage possession?

Liverpool have not eclipsed Man Utd's greatest teams, says Solskjaer

MANCHESTER, JAN 19 (AFP): Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer will not call Liverpool the greatest team in Premier League history until they have the trophies to prove it.

He still thinks that honour should be bestowed upon Alex Ferguson's treble-winning United side in 1999.

Solskjaer scored the dramatic late winner against Bayern Munich in the Champions League final that year to cap United's incredible campaign.

Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool are on course for a historic season of their own, holding a huge lead in the Premier League as they chase a first English league title since 1990. They remain in the FA Cup and face Atletico Madrid in the last 16 next month as they try to defend their Champions League crown.

But Solskjaer believes Liverpool have to demonstrate the ability to keep winning year after year before they deserve to be ranked alongside United's best outfits.

"I would say our 1999 team was the best, but let's see when the season has finished," Solskjaer said. "That showed we as a squad could cope with three tournaments. It was an amazing season, an amazing group, the personalities, the camaraderie. "I'm sure Liverpool can win all three, so I'm not going to say yes or no, but let's see in May."

"You have to do it again and again and again and Sir Alex is the only manager who has won it three times."

"He had an exceptional way of motivating us and getting us ready, a way of just letting trophies be trophies, win them and move forward." - "THE SPIRIT IS THERE" -

After so many years of watching United rule English football, it now appears to be Liverpool's turn again. As United manager, Solskjaer would not want to admit to copying their Merseyside rivals, but he would love to create a side like Klopp's high-energy unit. He believes he has taken the first steps to doing so, but more time is needed to complete the job.

"I can see a time when we have a team like Liverpool. The spirit is there, they are humble and they want to improve and that is a great starting point and foundation," he said.

"We know we need to sign a few players, but that's the club and we all understand that."

"We look at when Jurgen took over at Liverpool and he finished eighth in his first season so this is our first season together. "Of course we want to build step by step, and layer by layer and in the end you can just send them out without having to wait until Saturday to do the last preparations because you know what they are able to do. "If you look at Liverpool now with their front three, they all understand each other so they understand when he moves there and him there they drop and rotate. That's where we want to get to but that takes time."

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‘You can’t handcuff my spirit’: jailed writer wins freedom of expression prize

ALICE MCCOOL
KAMPALA, 19 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: The Ugandan academic, writer and feminist activist Dr Stella Nyanzi, imprisoned for criticising the country’s president, has been awarded the Oxfam Novib/PEN International award for freedom of expression.

Nyanzi has been in Luzira women’s prison in Kampala, the capital, for nearly 15 months after writing a poem about President Yoweri Museveni’s mother’s vagina. The poem uses the metaphor of her vagina and Museveni’s birth to criticise his near 35-year rule.

In 2017, she spent 33 days in prison for a Facebook post in which she described Museveni as a “pair of buttocks”, after the president backtracked on a pledge to distribute sanitary towels to schoolgirls.

At the award ceremony, held during the opening of the Writers Unlimited festival in The Hague,



an empty chair was used to symbolise the absence of Nyanzi. “For her, writing is a permanent form of resistance in front of a regime that is trying to suppress her,” said Carles Torner, director of PEN International.

In an acceptance speech smuggled out of prison, Nyanzi wrote: “Unlawful laws are used in unjust courts to punish citizens whose only crime is exercising their

constitutional freedom to write boldly about the dictatorship.” She added: “My custodial sentence in a maximum security prison highlights how fearful this dictator and his cronies are of writers. Isn’t the pen, indeed, mightier than the sword?”

Nyanzi recounted using handcuffs while in solitary confinement to scratch words into the prison walls, including: “You can handcuff my

body but you can never handcuff my spirit – Stella Nyanzi.” She has also spoken in the past about using lipstick secretly given to her by other prisoners to write on walls during the five days she spent in solitary confinement.

Jennifer Clement, PEN International president, said of Nyanzi: “Though her words might be colourful and shocking to some, this

is not enough to justify the imposition of penalties, and public officials should tolerate a higher degree of criticism than ordinary citizens.”

Nyanzi is due to appear in court on Friday for another hearing to appeal against the court’s decision last August to sentence her to nine more months’ imprisonment for cyber harassment of the president.

She was convicted under the Computer Misuse Act 2011, a law that Amnesty International wants scrapped because it “has been used systematically to harass, intimidate and stifle government critics like Stella Nyanzi”.

Previous winners of the international award for freedom of expression include Nobel Laureate Svetlana Alexievich, Palestinian poet Dareen Tatour, Eritrean poet and writer Amanuel Asrat, Honduran activist Dina Meza and Cameroonian journalist Enoch Meyomesse.

Coronavirus: China reports 17 new cases of Sars-like mystery virus

BEIJING, 19 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: China reported 17 new cases of the mysterious Sars-like virus on Sunday, including three in a severe condition, heightening fears ahead of China’s lunar new year holiday, when hundreds of millions of people move around the country.

The new coronavirus strain has caused alarm because of its connection to severe acute respiratory syndrome, which killed nearly 650 people across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-03.

Of the 17 new cases in the central city of Wuhan – believed to be the epicentre of the outbreak – three were described as “severe”, with two patients were too critical to be moved, authorities said.

Those infected range from 30 to 79 years old. The virus has now infected 62 people in Wuhan, city authorities said, with eight in a severe condition, 19 cured and discharged from hospital, and the rest remaining in isolation receiving treatment.

Two people have died so far from the virus, including a 69-year-old man who died on Wednesday after the disease caused pulmonary tuberculosis and damaged multiple organ functions.

Authorities said they had begun “optimised” testing of pneumonia cases across the city to identify those infected, and would begin “detection work ... towards suspected cases in the city” as a next step, as well as carrying out “sampling tests”.

Scientists with the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis at Imperial College in London warned in a paper published on Friday that the number of cases in the city was likely to be closer to 1,700, much higher than the number officially identified.

Authorities said on Sunday that some of the cases had “no history of contact” with the seafood market believed to be the centre of the outbreak.

No human-to-human transmission has been confirmed so far, but Wuhan’s health commission has previously said the possibility “cannot be excluded”.

Three cases have also been reported overseas – two in Thailand and one in Japan.

Although there has been no official announcement of screening measures on the mainland, Wuhan deputy mayor Chen Xiexin said on state broadcaster CCTV that infrared thermometers had been installed at airports, railway stations and coach stations across the city.

Chen said passengers with fevers being registered, given masks and taken to medical institutions, with nearly 300,000 body temperature tests carried out, according to CCTV.

Authorities in Hong Kong have stepped up detection measures, including rigorous temperature checkpoints for inbound travellers from the Chinese mainland.

The US said from Friday it would begin screening direct flights arriving from Wuhan at San Francisco airport and New York’s JFK, as well as Los Angeles, where many flights connect.

Thailand said it was already screening passengers arriving in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket and would soon introduce similar controls in the beach resort of Krabi.

Wuhan is a city of 11 million inhabitants that serves as a major transport hub, including during the annual lunar new year holiday starting this week, when hundreds of millions of Chinese people travel across the country to visit family.

Masculine, feminist or neutral? The language battle that has split Spain

STEPHEN BURGEN
MADRID, 19 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: A showdown is looming between Spain’s conservative language academy and its newly elected socialist government over proposals to rewrite the nation’s constitution using gender-neutral language.

The Royal Spanish Academy, which has the final word on the correct use of Spanish, has been sitting on a report commissioned over a year ago by Carmen Calvo, the deputy prime minister, that calls for the wording of the 1978 constitution to be altered, replacing generic masculine nouns with more inclusive forms. But, after a tumultuous 12 months in Spanish politics that saw two general elections and months of political manoeuvring before a government could be formed, the swearing-in last week of Pedro Sánchez’s leftwing coalition has seen the issue return.

In the latest exchange between the two sides, the academy declared on Thursday it was “grammatically unacceptable” for Yolanda Díaz and Irene Montero of the junior coalition partner, Unidas Podemos, to refer to the government’s cabinet (a council of ministers) as a consejo de ministros, instead of the approved consejo de ministros. It said the former would only be applicable if the cabinet were all-female, something that has never happened.

Calvo disagrees. “It’s time the constitution had a language that respects both genders,” she said. “It only has masculine language and this isn’t appropriate in a modern democracy.”

In common with many gender-based languages, Spanish defaults to a generic masculine when it isn’t specified whether the subject is male or female. For example, a girl is a niña and a boy a niño, but collectively children are niños.

One solution hit upon by supporters of inclusive language is to “double up” on genders so that “the neighbourhood children” becomes “the neighbourhood boys and girls”, but such innovations can infuriate traditionalists. Montero, the equality minister, was ridiculed when she referred to a spokeswoman (portavoz) as a portavoza because voz is a feminine noun, whether it pertains to a man or a woman. Rewriting the constitution to be more inclusive would entail replacing about 500 words and considerable doubling up, starting with “Spanish citizens” – ciudadanos/ciudadanas españoles/españolas.

The conservative-minded academy has so far managed to evade the question but has previously defended the gender neutrality of masculine nouns. “Doubling up is artificial and unnecessary from a linguistic perspective,” it said in an official statement. “In the case of nouns that describe living beings it is possible to use the generic masculine to designate the type of being, that is to say, all of the individuals of the species, regardless of sex. The explicit use of the feminine is only justified when the opposition of the sexes is relevant.”

Sources at the academy claim the government’s demand is politically rather than linguistically motivated. “We think inclusive language is the language we habitually speak,” said one member.

The battle over language is only the latest fought by Spanish feminists, whose movement flowered in the 1930s during the second republic when women such as Clara Campoamor campaigned for women’s suffrage and Dolores Ibárruri, better known as La Pasionaria, was a leader of the Communist party and the anti-fascist

movement.

When the fascist victory in 1939 installed a Catholic dictatorship, feminism was delayed but has since been making up for lost time. In fact, the first feminist congress was held just 17 days after General Franco’s death in 1975.

Today, the spokeswoman for the #MeToo movement in the European parliament, Amelia Martínez Lobo and Arantxa Calvera, are both Spanish. Now, in what is considered its fourth wave, the movement has become more militant, especially in the wake of two recent and notorious gang-rape cases where the judges ruled that the victim’s passivity implied consent.

Over the past two years this growing militancy has seen millions of women take to the streets on International Women’s Day, which takes place on 8 March this year. The movement’s main focus is on sexual consent, equal pay, parental leave and violence against women.

The language issue may seem odd to some British feminists. On the one hand, Spanish activists want to replace the generic masculine by doubling up. On the other, they insist on denoting gender in words like juez/jueza (judge) and alcalde/alcaldesa (mayor), precisely the sort of distinction – mayoreess, conductress – that their British counterparts have opposed as unnecessary.

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Locusts swarm into Kenya as UN warns of ‘extreme danger’ to food supply

GINGER HERVEY
NAIROBI, 19 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: The UN has warned of a “significant and extremely dangerous” escalation in the number of desert locusts descending on Kenya, as the government strives to contain the threat before it reaches the country’s food-producing regions.

The tropical grasshoppers have been wreaking havoc on Kenya’s neighbours to the north and east, devouring tens of thousands of hectares of crops in Ethiopia and Somalia since last June.

Swarms crossed over into north-east Kenya on 28 December. In a statement released on Monday, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) predicted that their “potential spread” could include the breadbasket counties of central Kenya.

If it does, the insects could destroy crucial parts of the country’s food supply, at a time when food insecurity is already on the rise owing to droughts and floods last year.

Each square kilometre of locusts in a swarm can eat as much in a day as 35,000 people, according to the FAO. One locust swarm seen in Kenya

measured 2,400 sq km. “There is an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods” across the Horn of Africa, the FAO said.

David Mwangi, head of plant protection services at Kenya’s Ministry of Agriculture, said the locusts had primarily destroyed grazing land in counties in the north-east so far. Pesticides have been sprayed by planes in several counties to exterminate the insects, and the expectation is that the swarms will be contained there.

“So far, they have not gotten to the cropland,” Mwangi said. “We are working hard to prevent them from spreading to food production areas.”

Kenya’s newly appointed agriculture minister, Peter Munya, announced on Wednesday that the government has allocated nearly \$300,000 (£229,000) to fight the threat. As the swarms in Kenya haven’t yet reached maturity, Mwangi is optimistic about cutting off the worst threat – mature locusts laying eggs and giving rise to even larger swarms in a few weeks when they hatch.

Locust plagues occur intermittently in the Horn of Africa, but this invasion is the worst in

25 years, according to the FAO. Originating at the India-Pakistan border, the insects migrated into Somalia and Ethiopia and destroyed nearly 71,000 hectares of farmland in the two countries.

“The locusts were so many,” said Abshir Mohamed Abdi, who works for the NGO Action Against Hunger and saw the swarms in Somalia. “When they landed on one crop, it would fall down.” He said the swarms were another blow to farmers already reeling from natural disasters last year.

“Those farmers that were not affected by the floods are affected by the locusts,” he said. “They have created another disaster on top of the current one.”

And the threat is not over yet. Swarms have laid eggs in northern Somalia that are now hatching and may migrate again, in even larger numbers, according to Abdurahman Hussein Ismail, a migratory pests expert and director of the Somaliland environmental and agricultural protection institute.

“Locusts are highly mobile and destructive,” he said, adding that they can travel up to 150 km per day. “The situation is very, very serious.”

Maduro says still in control, open to talks with US: report

WASHINGTON, JAN 19 (AFP): Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said he was still comfortably in charge and open to direct negotiations with the US, in an interview published Saturday by The Washington Post.

The interview was Maduro’s first with a major US outlet since February of last year, when he abruptly ejected all Univision journalists from Venezuela.

“If there’s respect between governments, no matter how big the United States is, and if there’s a dialogue, an exchange of truthful information, then be sure we can create a new type of relationship,” Maduro told the Post.

The socialist leader said he was ready to hold talks with the US to negotiate an end to sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump intended

to throttle the South American country’s oil industry and force Maduro from power.

Maduro indicated that, if Trump were to lift sanctions, US oil companies could benefit immensely from Venezuela’s oil.

“A relationship of respect and dialogue brings a win-win situation. A confrontational relationship brings a lose-lose situation. That’s the formula,” Maduro said.

The US, along with more than 50 other countries, recognizes Maduro’s opposition rival Juan Guaido as the country’s legitimate interim president.

Guaido has called for a new presidential election to be held, on the grounds that Maduro is an “illegitimate” president because his 2018 re-election was tainted by fraud.

Oil-rich Venezuela’s

economy is crumbling under Maduro’s rule, and millions have fled the country.

But despite the humanitarian catastrophe and biting US sanctions, Maduro maintains power with the support of the military as well as Russia, China and Cuba.

While speaking to the Post, Maduro also expressed willingness to talk with Guaido, but appeared to dismiss his opponent’s main demand that he step down.

Norway has mediated talks between Maduro’s and Guaido’s representatives, but the meetings broke down in August.

The US in early January threw its support behind negotiations in Venezuela, saying talks could establish a transitional government, lead to fresh elections and bring an end to the country’s long-running political crisis.

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Céline Dion Pays Touching Tribute to Late Mother Onstage at Concert

Céline Dion dedicated her concert in Miami on Friday to a very special person: Her late mother.

Thérèse Tanguay Dion, a TV host, philanthropist and mother of 14, died at age 92 on Thursday night while surrounded by family, the CBC reported. Her death followed Céline's dad Adhémar Dion's passing at age 80 in 2003, and the 2016 death of the singer's husband and father of their three boys, René Angélil, at age 73.

"I'm a little shaky today. My legs are a little wobbly," Céline, 51, told the crowd at American Airlines Arena in Miami on Friday. "I'm pretty sure that you heard the news about my mom passing away early this morning. But I'm doing OK."

"My mom was 92," the French-Canadian Grammy singer continued. "She was ill for quite a while and we knew she wouldn't be with us for long. Two days ago, we got a call from the nurses who were taking care of her so well, saying that her time

was coming soon, very soon. So last night, I joined my brothers and sisters in Montreal and I spent the evening at her

for sure that she wanted me to be the best of myself tonight and I also know that she wanted all of you to have the



bedside. We told stories. We sang songs. We hugged each other. And we said our goodbyes. We are pretty sure that Mom waited for us to be all together before [she passed]." The singer added, "I know

time of your life."

Thérèse helped Céline at the start of her music career. She wrote the song "Ce n'était qu'un rêve," her then-12-year-old daughter's first hit, released in 1981.

Hank Azaria will no longer voice Apu on **The Simpsons**

LOS ANGELES, JAN 18 (PTI): Actor Hank Azaria has said that he will no longer be voicing Apu Nahasapeemapetilon on "The Simpson" in the wake of a controversy over the character's portrayal in the show.

The long-running animated series came under intense scrutiny in recent years after Hari Kondabolu's 2017 documentary "The Problem with Apu" highlighted the stereotypical depiction of Indian immigrants in Hollywood.

Talking to Slash Film, Azaria said he has decided to part ways with the character.

"I won't be doing the voice anymore, unless there's some way to transition it or something... What they're going to do with the character is their call.

"It's up to them and they haven't sorted it out yet. All we've agreed on is I won't do the voice anymore," the 55-year-old actor said.

Last year, "The Simpsons" had addressed the criticism over Apu's characterisation in the episode "No Good Read Goes Unpunished". However, the show failed to pacify the viewers and was slammed on social media for its tone-deaf response to the controversy.

Later, Azaria also opened up about the controversy during his appearance on the "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert".

The actor said he is willing to step aside from the part as it would be the right thing to do.

"I think the most important thing is to listen to Indian people and their experience with it. I really want to see Indian, South Asian writers in the writers room including how (Apu) is voiced or not voiced. I'm perfectly willing to step aside. It just feels like the right thing to do to me," he had said.



Oscar Isaac to headline 'The Great Machine' for Legendary

LOS ANGELES, JAN 18 (PTI): Actor Oscar Isaac is set to star in and produce Legendary's adaptation of author Brian K Vaughan's comic book "Ex Machina".

Titled "The Great Machine", the film will be produced by the 40-year-old actor in collaboration with his longtime manager Jason Spire and Vaughan.

Legendary recently acquired the rights of the comic book which follows the story of civil engineer Mitchell Hundred, who after a mysterious accident gains powers making him the world's first and only superhero.

In the wake of his actions during 9/11, he is elected mayor of New York City, turning his back on life as a masked vigilan-

te. But his political career is threatened when the source of his powers returns to claim its debt.

Since Isaac has already featured in a sci-fi film called "Ex Machina", the studio decided to change the title of the new movie to "The Great Machine", according to The Hollywood Reporter.

The film will have a script from Anna Waterhouse and Joe Shrapnel, best known for their work on Kristen Stewart-starrer "Seberg".

Isaac, who most recently featured in "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker", will next be seen in Paul Schrader's "The Card Counter" and Denis Villeneuve's film adaptation of Frank Herbert's "Dune".

Robert Downey Jr responds to Iron Man cameo rumours in 'Black Widow'

LOS ANGELES, JAN 18 (PTI): Actor Robert Downey Jr is maintaining ambiguity over his much-talked about appearance in Marvel Studios' "Black Widow". The actor exited the studio's money-minting Marvel Cinematic Universe as Tony Stark aka Iron Man last year with "Avengers: Endgame".

However, soon after there were reports that Downey Jr will be making one last appearance as Iron Man in Scarlett Johansson-led "Black Widow".

In an interview with Entertainment Tonight, Downey Jr was coy about the reports.

"Right. Great. I mean, it would be nice if they notified me. Forewarned is forearmed. They can do anything now. This could be a deep fake interview for all we know," the actor responded. "Black Widow" will feature Johansson as Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow, an agent of the fictional spy agency S.H.I.E.L.D and a member of the superhero team, the Avengers.

Directed by Cate Shortland, "Black Widow" also stars Rachel Weisz, Florence Pugh, David Harbour and O T Fagbenle. The film is scheduled to be released on May 1.

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GOING FOR THE GOLD! Eva Longoria is serving bawdy and face at the 2020 Producers Guild Awards. The 44-year-old star lit up the red carpet on Saturday night, as she arrived to the annual ceremony with a glitzy gold gown.

Gal Gadot to executive produce new **Nat Geo** series

LOS ANGELES, JAN 19 (PTI): Hollywood star Gal Gadot will be executive producing a short-form documentary show for National Geographic.

The six-part series will chronicle the stories of young women around the world who overcome obstacles and do extraordinary things. Vanessa Roth will direct the yet-untitled show and also executive produce it alongside Gadot, Jaron Varsano, Ana De Diego and Ryan Harrington. Ryan Pallota will be the director for the pilot episode, reported Deadline.

"I'm deeply honoured to bring awareness to these young women who are the true heroes among us. By partnering with National Geographic, I'm tapping into their massive and unparalleled global reach to ensure that #impact is followed by the larg-

est audience possible. "Together we're making a true impact by sharing these incredible stories that will empower, lift and inspire women all over the world," Gadot said in a statement. The



34-year-old actor will next feature in "Wonder Woman 1984", a follow-up to her 2017 blockbuster on the iconic DC superhero. She will also star in filmmaker Kenneth Branagh's "Death on the Nile" adaptation.

ARIES: You did the best you could, Aries. Release yourself from the burden of guilt. You cannot go back in time and change things. Remembering this will help you move forward and awaken to the blessings. Some of you could be dealing with the demon of loneliness at this point. But are we ever truly alone? Turn inwards and you will find an inexplicable joy in your own company.

TIP: Find a sense of home within yourself.

TAURUS: What an anti-climatic start to the week! Things don't go as planned. In fact, they turn out better. Release the need to control the situation and trust the flow, Taurus. This is the only way to get to the desired destination in style. Some of you may find that this is also a time of endings.

TIP: To feel is to heal.

GEMINI: Daily reminder, Gemini: it doesn't matter how many times you have had your heart broken. You are being of light, who was born to spread the message of love. The Universe is testing your resolve at this moment. Apply the lessons you have learned

in the recent past and keep your vibrations high, no matter what.

TIP: You are a being of light and love.

CANCER: Overheard at the cosmic conference: your gut feelings are nothing but messages from your spirit guides. Take the so-called illogical into consideration, especially if you're making an important decision. If you have been 'feeling' something, it must be for a higher reason.

TIP: Follow the signs. You are being guided by something higher.

LEO: Sometimes you just have to light a candle, put on some meditative music, and call upon your spirit team for guidance. Leo, you are a vehicle for higher consciousness and are beginning to undo the layers that are keeping you from accessing your inner wisdom. What this phase of your life requires you to do: awaken your empathy as you understand the pain and suffering of another.

TIP: Awaken your empathetic side.

VIRGO: We're so quick to judge others or to look at them from the lens of our precon-

ceived notions. The truth is, we know nothing about them, their struggles, their fears, their insecurities or their challenges. So it's best to keep our biases aside and approach other from a space of purity and openness.

TIP: Approach the situation with a clean slate.

LIBRA: "There is a passion inside you, a unique talent that gives meaning to your days and drives you to share the best of yourself until the very end. If you don't know what your ikigai is yet, as Viktor Frankl says, your mission is to discover it." Here's some new-age wisdom for you to consider, Libra.

TIP: Nurture your many gifts.

SCORPIO: "We are the products of our past, but we don't have to be prisoners of it," said Rick Warren in his book The Purpose Driven Life. What have you traversed to the earthly realm for? What gives you a reason to jump out of bed every morning? Understand how your past failures are holding you back from making empowered choices and breaking free from the shackles.

TIP: Where is your true North?

SAGITTARIUS: Sagittarius, this is the week to redefine fitness goals. Take a break from routine if the monotony is getting to you, and try something different. How about giving Zumba or rock climbing a shot instead. You're also being asked to pay attention to what you put into your body. Consider more plant-based meals. Think fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and seeds—straight from the farmer's market.

TIP: Health and wellness take centre-stage.

CAPRICORN: You never thought you'd make it here, yet you did. Focus not on the failures, but the breakthroughs. Forgive yourself for the times you stumbled and understand where you need to realign in order to fulfill your sacred purpose. You are at an important juncture, where new pathways are opening for you. Resist the urge to choose the easy one. Exorcise the demon of self-doubt. An affirmation that will help you in your journey: "I release any beliefs that no longer assist in my soul's growth."

TIP: Trust yourself to make empowered choice.

AQUARIUS: Generosity is a virtue, one that your humanitarian soul understands all too well. As somebody who is blessed with the gift of abundance, you often find yourself thinking 'how can I give back?' Today, take a conscious step in this direction. Share the bounty, pay the kindness forward and show some love. Is there a cause that has been calling out to you for a while now? Know that no contribution is too big or small.

TIP: The joy of giving.

PISCES: You are both soulful and sensual. In this world but not of it. Don't deny yourself any aspect of this beautiful human experience. You will find that the more you accept the duality within, the more enlivened you will feel. Those who are at odds with their loved one, remember there is no right and wrong. There are simply different ways of looking at the same thing. Broach the subject with an open heart and mind in order to find a solution.

TIP: Embrace every aspect of the human experience.