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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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**Ayushman Bharat a channel to transfer public money into private hands: Doctors at AIIMS event**

**NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI):** Public health experts, including doctors from the AIIMS, Wednesday questioned the potential of government's flagship healthcare scheme, Ayushman Bharat, claiming it was an "official channel" through which public money will go to the private sector.

Referring to implementation of such healthcare schemes in the past, sector experts pressed for urgent need to strengthen publicly funded hospitals to offer universal health care, while speaking at a panel discussion on 'Ayushman Bharat: Fact and Fiction', organised by AIIMS Front for Social Consciousness in the campus of country's premiere medical institution here.

The Ayushman Bharat scheme was nothing but an old wine in a new bottle, said Dr Vikas Bajpai, professor at the Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health of Jawaharlal Nehru University.

He stressed on the need to analyse the "failures" of the various publicly-funded health insurance schemes, including the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana or RSBY, to ensure that "inadequacies" in their implementation were not repeated.

"Apart from lack of desire to commit the required financial resources, the scheme is oblivious and irrespective of the real causes of ill-health of the people, especially the poor," he said.

"This was the creation of just another official channel through

turn to pg02

## ITFT students repose faith in HC; Rue lack of govt action against institute



**SAGAR CHHETRI  
GANGTOK, 20 MAR:**

Sikkimese students enrolled in ITFT College, Chandigarh, under Punjab Technical University, who have still been fighting to get their degrees recognized by the University Grants Commission, have now reposed their hopes in the Courts. After facing disappointment from all concerned agencies, affected students had approached the High Court

of Sikkim with a petition in November 2016, the 21st hearing of which was held today.

Addressing a press conference, advocate Dr Doma Bhutia shared that the case was proceeding in very positive direction and urged students to keep hope afloat and have faith in the Courts.

She urged students not to get discouraged as they have now approached the right place.

"We are very positive that we will get justice," she said.

She asserted that bureaucrats should look into such matters in earnest and with the seriousness it deserves to ensure that no more students from Sikkim suffer such harassment and injustice.

Sikkim Students' Welfare Association of Chandigarh [SSWAC] general secretary, Sujendra Rai, mentioned that affected students had

approached all concerned authorities and took all possible steps but did not get justice anywhere.

He informed that students approached the concerned departments and authorities within and outside State and submitted numerous memorandums but their concerns remained unaddressed.

"After not getting the justice from any side, we finally decided to approach the High Court," he said.

SSWAC president, Karma Gyatso Bhutia, informs that there are a total of 226 affected students from four batches who have been suffering stress, trauma and uncertainty as they can neither go for further studies nor get jobs in the government sector because the courses they completed at ITFT was not recognized by the UGC recognition, something that they were kept in the dark about until they completed their respective courses.

These were students sent on scholarship to the institute by the State Government.

"We have not lost hope even after 2 years and 5 month of our case and we are very positive we will get justice from the court," he said.

Affected students and their guardians have also stressed that there should be strong action against all responsible officials in the matter.

They stated that even after three having passed since the issue came to light, no action has been initiated the college of the university by the State government.

## BLPF reiterates importance of Article 371F, says BL unaware of rights



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK 20 MAR:**

Bhutia Lepcha Protection Force [BLPF] asserted that politicians should study and understand Article 371F and Representation of Sikkim Subjects Act, 1974 properly before entering the State Assembly. BLPF president, Phigu T Bhutia further asserted that candidates of different parties in this election should make people aware at the grassroot level about rights provided under Article 371F. He added that it was important for the people at the grassroot level to be aware about their rights otherwise they may face injustice in their own state.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Bhutia stressed that there should not be any violation and dilution of Article 371F. He stated that people's representatives should make people aware of their rights.

He stated that Bhutia-Lepcha people in the State are still not aware about their rights as BL representatives in the Assembly have not been working for their community. He added that distributing small bene-

fits to the people is not enough.

Mr Bhutia also registered his strong objection to the allegation of the ruling party on BL organisations and SKM MLAs for obstructing the Limboo-Tamang Assembly seat reservation. The ruling party does not have any proof and is only making baseless allegations, he added.

He also objected to Bhutia-Lepcha seats being termed as Scheduled Tribe seats and Gurudongmar Jhil Gurudwara at Gurudongmar Lake in North Sikkim being listed among three Gurudwaras in Sikkim in the Gazetteer of Sikkim, 2013. He informed that the Gazetteer of Sikkim, 2013 calls Bhutia-Lepcha seats as Scheduled Tribe seats in page number 268 and lists Gurudongmar Jhil Gurudwara at Gurudongmar Lake in North Sikkim among three Gurudwaras in Sikkim in page number 223.

Mr Bhutia mentioned that all these issues would be discussed in the upcoming Bhutia-Lepcha convention at BL House on 24 March. He also stated that the organisation will burn the Gazetteer of Sikkim, 2013 for these two reasons.

## Two SDF candidates file nominations



**GANGTOK, 20 MAR (IPR):** On the third day of nomination filing, the District Election Officer (East), Kapil Meena informed that two candidates namely GT Dhungel and Em Prasad

Sharma filed their nomination from Upper Tadong and Namcheybung Assembly constituencies respectively for the upcoming General Election 2019.

The DEO also in-



formed that there will be no filing of nomination on 21 Mar, 2019 (Holi) and 23 Mar, 2019 (fourth Saturday) as per the instructions from Election Commission of India.

On 19 Mar, Pintso Chopel Lepcha and DT Lepcha, both from SDF, had filed nominations for Gangtok and Gnathong Machong constituencies respectively.

## India loses 7 spots in global list of happiest nations, ranks 140th

**UNITED NATIONS, MAR 20 (PTI):** Indians are not as happy in 2019 as they were in 2018 and the country figures at 140th place, seven spots down from last year, on this year's UN World Happiness Report released Wednesday which is topped by Finland for the second year in a row.

The report was released by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the United Nations on March 20 which has been declared as World Happiness Day by the UN General Assembly in 2012.

The report ranks countries on six key variables that support well-being: income, freedom, trust, healthy life expectancy, social support and generosity.

According to the report, the overall world happiness has fallen over the past few years,



which has mostly been fuelled by a sustained drop in India, which came in 140th place this year compared with 133rd place in 2018.

The UN's seventh annual World Happiness Report, which ranks the world's 156 countries

on "how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be", also noted that there has been an increase in negative emotions, including worry, sadness and anger.

Finland has been ranked as the happiest country in the

world for the second year in succession. The Nordic nation is followed by Denmark, Norway, Iceland and The Netherlands.

Pakistan is ranked 67th, Bangladesh 125th and China is place at 93rd, according to the report.

People in war-torn South Sudan are the most unhappy with their lives, followed by Central African Republic (155), Afghanistan (154), Tanzania (153) and Rwanda (152).

The happiness study ranks the countries of the world on the basis of questions from the Gallup World Poll. The results are then correlated with other factors, including GDP and social security.

The United States ranks at 19th place for happiness, despite being one of the richest countries in the world.

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**FAQ**

**EVM with VVPAT Unit**

Ballot Unit (BU)

Control Unit (CU)

VVPAT

**Q8. Where were VVPATs used for first time in India?**

**Ans:** VVPATs with EVMs were used for first time in a bye-election from 51-Noksen (ST) Assembly Constituency of Nagaland.

**Q9. In our country a sizeable section of the population is illiterate. Will it not cause problems for the illiterate voters?**

**CALL 1950 FOR ANY ELECTION RELATED QUERIES**  
Contact Hours : 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM



# Himalaya World Museum organizes Bagan Mahotsav, 2019



## SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 20 MAR:

The Himalaya World Museum, a unit of Himalayan Heritage Research and Development Society, Gurung Basti, Central Pendam, Sikkim organized a three-day Bagan Mahotsav, 2019, a national cultural festival and seminar on the legacy of the Tea Gardens, Bagdogra on 16 Mar, 2019. The festival is being organized in association with Ministry of Culture, Government

of India, a press release informs.

The festival started with traditional games of Tea Gardens of the region while the seminar was chaired by Dr Om Prakash Bharti.

“Himalaya World Museum is an initiative to showcase treasures to the world and help in the economic development and conservation of the rich heritage of the Himalayas,” said Dr Bharti.

Other dignitaries such as Dr Jayanta Ku-

mar Barman, Assistant Prof. Dept of Music (Sikkim University), Dr Pompi Paul, Hari Shankar Gupta, Dharm Prakash Manto also presented their papers.

The second day of Bagan Mahotsav began with a procession showcasing the different colorful diversities of various tribal communities followed by performances of various eminent artists and groups from all over India. Padmashri Sonam Tshering Lepcha attend-

ed the inaugural ceremony as the chief guest.

He praised the initiative saying, “The culture and heritage of most tribes and local residents of the Himalayas are in danger due to the lack of awareness and poor economic conditions. This is a great effort from Himalaya World Museum to uplift, inspire and conserve these traditions and present them on a platform that will create awareness.”

There were several

performances by notable tribal and folk artists.

The concluding day, 18 Mar, was attended by chief guest Padmashri Karimul Haque.

“I am mesmerized with the huge collection of rare masks and artifacts brought about from different parts of the Himalayas and the world. We need more museums like these, for tourists, art enthusiasts and also our local people to learn about our rich history,” said Mr Haque.

## First software based randomization in West

**GYALSHING, 20 MAR (IPR):** The First Software based Randomization was successfully completed at the Conference Hall, NIC. Present during the Randomization process were DEO, Karma R Bonpo, ADC (W), Karma L Lepcha, SDM (Gyalshing), Gilbert Lepcha and political representatives of

Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM).

The physical randomization of the EVM and VVPATs would be done on 21 Mar, 2019 at the Kyongsa Girls School Auditorium and shifted to the strong room in presence of the representative from political parties.

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### Ayushman Bharat...

which public money will go to private set-ups,” Dr Bajpai added.

Subrato Sinha, head of department of Biochemistry at AIIMS, said Ayushman Bharat does not provide out-patient department care support, which is a major component of health expenditures and is as expensive as the in-patient care.

“Also, the main thrust of any healthcare programme should always be on improving and strengthening the public health infrastructure as insurance is always less efficient than direct provision of health services by the government,” he said.

Dr Pratap Sharan, professor in the department of Psychiatry at AIIMS, said the government is shifting its stance from providing services to purchasing services mostly from the private sector and “it is an abdication of its basic responsibility.”

Dr Shah Alam Khan, professor in the department of Orthopaedics at AIIMS, referring to a recent report released by the WHO, which showed that the out-of-pocket expenditure on health in two countries -- India and Pakistan -- was the maximum, said, “This means people were spending more money in these two nations, which almost went to war after the Pulwama attack. This shows that both the countries do not care about what is happening to the health of their people.”

He pointed out the hurdles people face to avail the benefits once they enrol into the scheme and stressed on the need for identification of those hindrances.

“The crux of the problem is in the very first Budget presented by the current government in May 2014, they slashed the budget for health by 20 per cent. The only way you can help the poor and the needy is by increasing by spending on healthcare in public hospitals and that is not happening,” Dr Khan said.

Former chief of AIIMS Resident Doctors' Association, Harjit Bhatti, said budget allocations “do not reflect the government’s good intentions” because Rs 6,400 crore for 10 crore families comes down to Rs 640 per family and Rs 128 per person, which was “too low” to expect good treatment from hospitals.

“The Ayushman Bharat is an eyewash to hide the incompetence of the government which is not able to provide required healthcare infrastructure effectively,” he said.

Imrana Qadeer, faculty at Council for Social Development, said in western countries, where national insurance was successful in providing basic health services, its universality and strong regulatory mechanisms of the state that controlled the private sector were critical.

“Neglect of basic healthcare infrastructures under the National Rural Health Mission by drastically curtailing investments, increases the load on secondary and tertiary care institutions and rationalises partnerships with private sector, which are waiting to enhance its profits through schemes like RSBY and PMJAY,” she said.

## Independent candidate joins the fray in Daramdin

### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 20 MAR:

Sonam Gyatso Sherpa has announced that he will contest the upcoming Assembly election from Daramdin constituency in West Sikkim as an independent candidate. Failure of political parties to provide a suitable Sherpa candidate from Daramdin has compelled him to enter electoral politics, he stated.

34-year-old Mr Sherpa hails from Padamchen in East Sikkim and is currently residing in Tikjuk in West Sikkim. He was former chief convener of Sherpa Protection Board and also former president of Adhoc Teachers Association and is presently associated with different social organisations.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Sherpa stated that the people of Daramdin have



never received an efficient Sherpa candidate from any political party so far. He further added that the people of the constituency have been facing different problems as their representative has never spoken in the Assembly for the area.

“We have no hope from candidates given by the political parties in the area. We need a Sherpa candidate who can speak in the Assembly for Sherpa people and their rights. As I have

been speaking for my people and raising issues of the State, I have decided to contest the election to work more efficiently for the people,” he said.

It is informed that Mr Sherpa, who was working in Rural Management & Development Department on adhoc basis, was served notice by the department for supporting adhoc teachers during their recent protest in the capital. Following the notice, he resigned on 26 Feb, 2019.

## Rural farmers trained in Oyster Mushroom Cultivation

**GANGTOK, 20 MAR (PIB):** Twenty-one farmers from 5 different places namely Lindok, Pangthang, Yangthang, Pakyong and Rumtek, East Sikkim were trained on Organic Spawn Production and Oyster Mushroom Cultivation Technology providing them an opportunity to carve out a livelihood option for them.

ICAR-National Organic Farming Research Institute, Tadong conducted a five-day organic Organic Spawn Production and Oyster Mushroom Cultivation Technology for en-

trepreneurship development for the rural youth and women folk of Sikkim during 14-18 Mar, 2019.

The training was organized in several technical sessions where the participants had an overview of the current scenario and scope of organic spawn and mushroom production in Sikkim. They also had hands on exposure to preparation of mushroom cultures, production of mushroom spawn and beds.

Besides, there were technical sessions on pest and disease management, maintenance

and storage of mushroom beds, post-harvest processing and value addition in mushrooms. The trainees also had an opportunity to visit the ICAR Research Farm where they were briefed about the ongoing agricultural research and technologies developed at the ICAR-NOFRI.

At the end of the training, the participants were provided with necessary inputs like spawn packets, plastic bags and other small resources to encourage them to take up mushroom cultivation.

### Organic farming training at Gelling Samsing

#### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 20 MAR:

Mevedir, Service Provider Agency conducted a ward level farmers training at Middle Gelling ward under Gelling Samsing GPU, West Sikkim, a press release informs. The program

was chaired by Panchayat Member, Parbati Rai along with Mevedir Master Trainer, Tika Devi Sharma.

In the first session of the training program, Tika Devi Sharma explained soil nutrient management as well as preparation & usage of

herbal spray for controlling red ants and other pests.

Before concluding, Parbati Rai, the guest of honor, explained the importance of organic farming.

More than 20 farmers participated in this training program.

## Demonstration & Training on Maize cultivation at Tumlabong



### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 20 MAR:

Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA), East District organized a training program on Demonstration & Training programme on preparation of Beejamrit for Maize Seed treatment at Farm School, Tumlabong, under Namli, GPU in the East District, a press release informs.

The training was organized in association with International Pannacea Limited a Service

Provider Agency under Sikkim Organic Mission, Government of Sikkim.

Agriculture Inspector cum Mission Officer, Meena Sharma, VLW Darpana Basnet, FS & ADD, Block Technology Manager, Chandra Poudyal and ATM Tenzing Bhutia from ATMA and the Farmers from Farm School were present in the programme.

Meena Sharma demonstrated line sowing of maize at the Farm. Field Executive of Namli, Maya Sharma, Tuka

Devi Sharma and Manju khalan demonstrated of Bijamrit. It is one of the effective local formulations prepared for seed treatment through Organic methods. The solution can be prepared in house by the farmers Maya Sharma, Tuka Devi Sharma explained the required materials and method of preparation to the farmers.

All the farmers thanked Departmental Officers, Field Executives of IPL for providing remedy for seed treatment.

## Central Expenditure Observers arrive in West District



**GYALSHING, 20 MAR (IPR):** The Central Expenditure Observers Team arrived at West District Headquarters on 18 Mar, 2019. The Central Observer Team consists of two members namely Anil Kumar Bharadwaj from Guwahati and Alok Malviya from Mumbai.

The Expenditure Observers met with the teams of Expenditure monitoring team including AEOs, Static Surveillance Team (SST), Video Surveillance Team (VTS), Video Viewing Team (VVT), Control Room Operatives, the Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) and others at the Conference hall, Zilla Bhawan Kyongsa on 19 Mar, 2019. The meeting was also attended by ADC (W), Karma L Lepcha, ADC (Dev.),

Gayas Pega and other officials.

During the meeting, the Expenditure Observers (EOs) interacted with the different teams formed for the General Elections whilst giving them valuable suggestions and advises regarding the various problems faced by the team members in the field. They conducted an in depth review of the works being conducted across the West District by the different teams.

Later, the EOs also met with the DEO, Karma R Bonpo and SP (W), Tenzing Loden Lepcha in the DEO's chamber.

The contact numbers of the EOs are Anil Kumar Bharadwaj: 9408708608/7407414151 and Alok Malviya: 9734026750/7588182149.

## GJMM Sikkim thanks GNLF

### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 20 MAR:

Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha, Sikkim, has expressed that the steps taken by Gorkha National Liberation Front for the community would never be forgotten by the Gorkha community. GJMM Sikkim has expressed its deep gratitude to leaders

of both parties and intellectuals of the hills.

A GJMM Sikkim press release states that the entire Gorkha community spread over the world salutes GNLF president, Man Ghishing and Neeraj Zimba and all its workers for its work for the community ignoring all political differences.

GJMM Sikkim presi-

dent, Ganesh Rai stated that this election is very important for the existence of the community and further appeals to CPRM president, RB Rai and all political parties and organisations of the Hills, Terai and Dooars to take this issue of the community to its logical end.

## Skill Development Training on Manufacturing of Farm Tools and Equipment



### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 20 MAR:

The College of Agricultural Engineering and Post Harvest Technology (Central Agricultural University) Ranipool, Sikkim had organized 90 days (20 Mar, 2018 to 19

Mar, 2019) skill development training on “Manufacturing of Farm Tools and Equipment” sponsored by Power Finance Corporation of India, New Delhi, a press release informs.

The trainees were im-

parted on-floor skills in workshop practices for manufacturing of farm machinery and equipment. The training concluded on 19 Mar, 2019 in which 25 youths of NEH region successfully completed the training.

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## Mozambique, Zimbabwe cyclone deaths exceed 300 as UN boosts aid

**BEIRA (MOZAMBIQUE), MAR 20 (AFP):** The death toll from a cyclone that smashed into Mozambique and Zimbabwe rose to more than 300 as rescuers raced against the clock to help survivors and the UN led the charge to provide aid.

"We already have more than 200 dead, and nearly 350,000 people are at risk," Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi announced Tuesday, while the government in Zimbabwe said around 100 people had died but the toll could be three times that figure.

The UN, meanwhile, said that one of the worst storms to hit southern Africa in decades had also unleashed a humanitarian crisis in Malawi, affecting nearly a million people and forcing more than 80,000 from their homes.

Four days after Tropical Cyclone Idai made landfall, emergency teams in central Mozambique fanned out in boats and helicopters, seeking to pluck survivors from roofs and treetops in an inland sea of floodwater, sometimes in the dead of night.

Air force personnel from Mozambique and South Africa were drafted in to fly rescue missions, while an NGO called Rescue South Africa said it had picked up 34 people since Friday night, using three helicopters.

"It is the only way to access the people that are stranded," Rescue SA's Abrie Senekal told AFP, saying the NGO was trying to hire more helicopters.

Ian Scher, who heads Rescue SA, said the helicopter teams were having to make difficult decisions.

"Sometimes we can only save two out of five, sometimes we drop food and go to someone else who's in bigger danger," he said.

"We just save what we can save and the others will perish."

In Nhamatanda, some 60 kilometres (40 miles) northwest of Beira, 27-year-old Jose Batio and his wife and children survived by climbing onto a roof.

But a lot of their neighbours "were swept by the water," he said.

"Water came like a tsunami and destroyed most things. We were prisoners on the roof," he told AFP after they were rescued by boat.

The city of Beira, Mozambique's second largest city and a major port, was immediately cut off after the storm.

According to the Red Cross, the cyclone damaged or destroyed 90 percent of the city of half a million people.

President Nyusi, speaking on Tuesday after attending a cabinet meeting in the ravaged city, said the confirmed death toll stood at 202 and nearly 350,000 were "at risk". The government had declared a national emergency and ordered three days of national mourning, he said.

## Holi celebration at Raj Bhavan



### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 20 MAR:**

Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad accompanied by his family members today celebrated Holi at Raj Bhavan with the members of various groups representing business communities from across the state, a press release informs.

A 30-member group

of Marwari Samaj of Gangtok and Marwari Prerna Manch led by Hari Prasad Agarwal and Kailash Agarwal called on the Governor for exchange of Holi greetings and colours and celebrated the festivity with songs and dances.

Similarly, a 25-member group of Aam Bihari Kalyan Manch led by its

president, Chotey Lall Prasad and 70-member group of Sikkim Bihari Jagaran Manch led by its general secretary, Birendra Prasad exchanged greetings and colours with the Governor. The Holi celebrations took place at front lawn of New Raj Bhavan where all members presented colourful songs

and dances.

The Governor expressed gratitude for the participation of all members of business community from different parts of Sikkim making the festival eventful and memorable. He also extended his greetings for a happy, harmonious and prosperous time ahead.

## Holi greetings from Governor

### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 20 MAR:**

On the festive occasion of Holi, Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad has extended warm greetings and best wishes to the people of Sikkim.

As per a Raj Bhavan press communiqué, the Governor said, "Holi, the festival of colours, is symbolic to new hopes and aspiration commemorating the arrival of spring, the prime season of nature's glory af-

ter winter. Vasantotsav, as it is popularly known with immense significance in our rich Indian culture, brings with it the renewed perspective and optimism in the life of people across faiths, sects and culture.

As Vasant Ritu brings with it the hues and colours with renewed charm and fragrance in the nature, may this festival of colours bring prosperity, happiness and joy in the lives of my fellow Sikkimese."

## Mizo assembly resolution asks Centre not to reintroduce citizenship bill

**AIZAWL, MAR 20 (PTI):** The Mizoram assembly Wednesday unanimously adopted a resolution asking the Centre not to reintroduce the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in any form in future.

The civil societies, churches, political parties and the people of the state are against the bill, Home Minister Lalchamliana said after moving the resolution.

The people of the northeastern region are also against the bill, Lalchamliana added.

The state cabinet on January 10 had also opposed the bill, he said.

Chief Minister Zoramthanga had informed Prime Minis-

ter Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh that the people of Mizoram and the state government opposed the passage of the bill, Lalchamliana said.

Zoramthanga also attended a meeting of political parties of the Northeastern region on January 29, in which chief ministers of the regional states and other leaders opposed the move of the Centre on the bill, he said.

Leader of Opposition Zodintluanga of the Congress supported the resolution and said the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) should sever ties with the BJP, as the MNF is a constituent of the NDA.

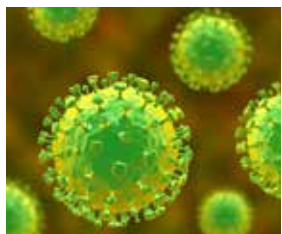
## Nipah virus alert sounded in Tripura

**AGARTALA, MAR 20 (PTI):** Tripura government Tuesday sounded an alert after the death of five members of a family in Nipah virus attack in a Bangladesh village bordering West Bengal, an official said here.

The Tripura government issued a notice to all district chief medical officers Monday to stay sensitized and alert on any impending Nipah virus attack in the state.

The alert was sounded to all district chief medical officers, Joint Director of Family Welfare and Preventive Medicine Dr P Chatterjee said.

"Five persons of a family died in Bangladesh due to Nipah virus attack. The deaths



occurred near the West Bengal border, not the international border adjoining Tripura. Since the incident occurred in Bangladesh, Government of India asked us to stay alert," the official said.

Nipah virus usually transmits from infected bats carrying the virus.

Drinking raw date palm sap is the most common way of transmission of the virus and the health department notice advised people not to drink that sap.

## 4 Singtam pugilists to participate in East Zone C'ship



### YOGEN THATAL

**SINGTAM, 20 MAR:**

Four pugilists from Singtam will be participating in the 1st East Zone Boxing Championship, 2019 to be held from 23-27 Mar in the Sub-Junior Boys and Girls categories.

Organized by the Assam Amateurs Boxing Association the tournament

will be held in Golaghat, Assam.

The four pugilists are Tshering Sherpa (34-36kg), Sneha Tamang (32-34kg), Esha Rai (46-48kg) and Prava Gajmer (48-50kg).

The participants will be guided by Pritam Shilal who runs a Boxing Club at Singtam.

## Sewon Rai's solo art exhibition concludes



### REBYNA RANA

**GANGTOK, 20 MAR:**

A month-long solo art exhibition themed "Death/Longing/Memory" by artist, Sewon Rai, held at People's Studio [Artem], Gangtok, concluded on Tuesday.

"During the exhibition, we had three days woodcut monocolour print making workshop with the students from four different schools namely TNSSS, Modern School, Enchey School and West Point School. This was probably the first printmaking workshop in Gangtok. Students loved the whole process of the workshop," said artist, Sewon Rai while talking to SummitTIMES.

This was the 27-year-old artist's first solo exhibition in Sikkim although he has participated in many art exhibitions and workshops in different parts of the country.

Sewon has studied fine arts in Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata and has also completed BFA in painting from Indian College of Arts & Draftsmanship, Kolkata.

He has also been a scholar at the Kala National Research Scholarship, Kolkata [2017-18].

Talking to SummitTIMES, he shared that art and art lovers are growing in numbers in Sikkim. Formally trained artists from Sikkim are mostly working outside and local talents are held back by the lack of an art institution in the State, he added.

"We even don't have a gallery to present our work. We should have more and more post-modern art pieces in public spaces," he said.

His work leans more towards expressionism than impressionism with thick layers of colours and textures.

## PAYING GUEST AVAILABLE

PG available for working women & girls at EPCS Church premises, near Primula Lodge at Churuch Road, Gangtok, Sikkim. Contact: Mob: 9064804782/ Whatsapp No: 9641549764.

## First randomization of EVMs and VVPATs in East

### GANGTOK, 20 MAR (IPR):

As per the guidelines of Election Commission of India first randomization of EVMs and VVPATs for 12 Assembly Constituencies and Parliamentary Constituency was conducted at DC Office, today. The randomization was conducted through EMS Software in the presence of District Election Officer (East), Kapil Meena, District NIC Officials and representatives of Political Parties. The randomization of Sangha was conducted through EVM Randomization software v1.0 developed by NIC Sikkim State Unit.

The District Election Officer, Kapil Meena briefed about the randomization process and EMS software to the represen-



tatives of Political Parties.

The District Election Officer informed that on Thursday, ADC (Hq), Jamyang Bhutia shall be in-charge officer for shifting and transportation of all EVMs and VVPATs from existing warehouse to the Strong

Room prepared at Brihaspati Parsai Senior Secondary School, Ranipool.

This exercise will be done in presence of political parties and warehouse opening will take place at 8 am in CEO Office, Baluwakhani.

## State kickboxing team to participate in Federation Cup



### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 20 MAR:**

A seven-member Sikkim Association of Kickboxing Organisations [SAKO] will be representing Sikkim in the WAKO India Federation Cup Kickboxing Championship 2019 to be held from 24 to 28 March at Pune in Maharashtra. The team left for Pune today.

The State team members are Anurodh Rai, Passang Norbu Sherpa, Prashant Rai, Mandira Karki, Sakima Rai, Purni Maya Rai and Samkisha Rai. The team will be accompanied by team coach, Hemu Rai and team manager, Binam Gurung.

In a small function organised by SAKO here at Paljor Stadium this morning, Sports & Youth

Affairs Department, Joint Director, RB Biswakarma and chief technical director, Bidhan Ballav Subba, president, Bijoy Gurung and other executive members of SAKO expressed their best wishes to the State team by offering khadas. SAKO has expressed hope that the team will return with medals and laurels for the State.

## हार्दिक आमन्त्रण

सूचित गरिन्छ कि हाम्रा पिता पथल प्रसाद गत ४ मार्च २०१९ को राति १० बजे भौतिक शरीर त्यागेर परमधामको यात्री बने। स्थानीय महानन्द घाटमा अर्को दिन उहाँको शव दाहसंस्कार सम्पन्न गरियो। दिवंगत आत्माको सत्पतिको कामनद्वारा उनको परम्परागत अन्तिम संस्कार कर्म निम्न कार्यक्रम अनुसार आगामी २० मार्च २०१९ को दिन २ बजेदेखि निज निवास चम्पासरी विद्यानगर, नियर होलिबर्ल्ड स्कूल, प्रधाननगर सिलगढीमा हुने भएकोले सबैलाई आमन्त्रित गरिन्छ।

शोकाकूल परिवार  
छोराहरू: मनोज प्रसाद, विरेन्द्र प्रसाद,  
नातिहरू: भुवर प्रसाद, रितिक प्रसाद, शुभम प्रसाद, विकास प्रसाद, पवन प्रसाद एवं समस्त प्रसाद परिवार  
सम्पर्क : 9232698916, 9434188173

## MCC IS IN EFFECT

# WHAT IS MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT?

Model Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections. The Model Code of Conduct comes into force immediately with the announcement of the election schedule by the Commission for ensuring free and fair elections.

Visit the website: [eci.gov.in](http://eci.gov.in)



# SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

## How did we come to this?

*Because, let's accept it, it's a shame*

Kashmiris studying in colleges outside their state were assaulted by jumla-inspired mobs. Kashmiri professionals were suspended when similarly demented groups harangued institutions. Why, even a Governor, of a northeastern state to boot, tweeted that all things Kashmiri should be boycotted. This is how we responded to a terror attack; playing right into the hands of agents who want to drive a wedge between people, further alienate a community and water the seeds of divisions that forces within the country have sown. And none of this surprised, because we have become habituated to hate and insularity. Even the National Capital Region often reports incidents of such assaults on non-North Indians, like people from the Northeast. For a while, these have been isolated incidents born from the parochial entitlements manifesting in occasional recourse to violence by the odd goon and his sidekicks. But then again, it is perhaps this mistaken response of seeing the earlier assaults as isolated aberrations that led to the latest shame.

Stereotyping and racial attitudes, let's accept it, are much more widespread afflictions and given that intolerance has become the new normal for our country, acting violently on baser impulses born from ignorance, misinformation and chauvinism should not come as a surprise. We have, after all, made it a habit of lionizing agent provocateurs and even electing them to office and riding electoral waves consolidated by alienation. What we have reaped hence is hate on a hair-trigger. Those shocked by the mobs conviction that Kashmiris are to blame for the terrorism even they suffer would do well to recall that a similar mob had also set upon a Muslim family and lynched Akhlaq convinced that he had beef at home. As much as we should be scared that such conspiracies can now be so easily sold in our country, what should scare even more is that such shallow arguments can incite such ugly violence just as easily.

But since we continue to see these as isolated aberrations, we will continue to be confronted by such hate crimes. It is only a matter of time before anti-Romeo squads or the anti-meat goons, the kind who shout and scream every evening on prime-time shouting matches, currently plying their hate under the cover of morality and nationalism, reveal their real faces and unleash a demon will require no more than a bribe or a gratuitous smartphone video and will not stop with just having chased the "others" out to establish pure localities.

This is not a situation we can dodge with "whataboutery". Yes, such hate is becoming common across the world. And yes, "Indians" have also been at the receiving end of such hate outside. But can anyone name one hate crime targeting any community anywhere else in the world carried out by a mob? Hate-crimes that disturb us so much when they happen to "us" elsewhere, are crimes carried out by mentally unstable lone wolves. Hateful graffiti on places of worship elsewhere are scribbled in the dark of the night with no one claiming responsibility. We, however, have become a country where processions from middleclass colonies mutate into mobs thirsting for blood (of a particular community) and where people march out in open shutting shops (meat shops for now) and overground political parties claim responsibility.

**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](mailto:news@summittimes.com)



## Indian summer monsoon amplified global warming 130,000 years ago, helping end ice age

KATRINA NILSSON-KERR & PALLAVI ANAND  
*theconversation.com*

The past may be a surprisingly useful guide for predicting responses to future climate change. This is especially important for places where extreme weather has been the norm for a long time, such as the Indian subcontinent. Being able to reliably predict summer monsoon rainfall is critical to plan for the devastating impact it can have on the 1.7 billion people who live in the region.

The onset of India's summer monsoon is linked to heat differences between the warmer land and cooler ocean, which causes a shift in prevailing wind direction. Winds blow over the Indian Ocean, picking up moisture, which falls as rain over the subcontinent from June to September.

The monsoon season can bring drought and food shortages or severe flooding, depending on how much rain falls and in what duration. Understanding how the monsoon responded to an abrupt climate transition in the past can therefore help scientists better understand its behaviour in the future.

When we researched this weather system's ancient past, we found it was highly sensitive to climate warming 130,000 years ago. Our new study published in Nature Geoscience showed that the Indian summer monsoon pulled heat and moisture into the northern hemisphere when Earth was entering a warmer climate around 130,000 years ago. This caused tropical wetlands to expand northwards – habitats that act as sources of methane, a greenhouse gas. This amplified global warming further and helped end the ice age.

The rate at which today's climate is changing is unprecedented in the geological record, but

our study shows how sensitive the Indian summer monsoon was during a global transition into warming in the past and may still be.

### THE MONSOON RAINS OF YESTERYEAR

Over the last one million years, the climate fluctuated between a cold glacial – known as an ice age – and a warm interglacial as the Earth's position relative to the sun wobbled in its orbit. The last transition from an ice age into the warm climate of the present interglacial – known as the Holocene – occurred around 18,000 years ago. This period of Earth's history is relatively well understood, but how Earth system processes responded to these climate changes deeper in time is still something of a mystery.

A recent expedition to drill deep into the ocean floor of the Bay of Bengal gave an opportunity to reconstruct past Indian monsoon behaviour over hundreds of years before the last ice age.

Our study used these deep sea sediments from the northern Bay of Bengal to capture a direct signal of the Indian summer monsoon from 140,000 to 128,000 years ago, hidden in the fossilised shells of tiny microscopic creatures called foraminifera. These plankton species once lived in the upper ocean water column and captured the environmental conditions of the surrounding seawater in the chemical make up of their shells.

We detected the ocean surface water freshening from river discharge induced by the rains of the Indian summer monsoon from 140,000 to 128,000 years ago – a sign of the strengthening monsoon system. This occurred when the Earth was coming out of a glacial state and into the interglacial which occurred before the one we live in, separated by a single ice age. During this period – which we'll refer to as the penultimate deglaciation – sea levels

rose from six to nine metres worldwide.

Ice-core records show that Antarctica began to warm first during the penultimate deglaciation. Southern Hemisphere warming provided a source of heat and moisture which fuelled the strengthening of the Indian summer monsoon, as seen in our records of surface freshening and river runoff from the northern Bay of Bengal.

During this warming period around 130,000 years ago, the Indian summer monsoon responded to southern hemisphere warming while the northern hemisphere and other monsoon systems, such as the East Asian summer monsoon – which affects modern day China, Japan and the Far East – remained in a glacial state.

The Indian summer monsoon pulled heat and moisture northwards, driving glacial melting in the northern hemisphere and helping tropical wetlands expand their range. These expanding tropical wetlands resulted in more methane release into the atmosphere which caused even more warming, setting changes in motion which ended the global ice age.

The Indian summer monsoon is an incredibly dynamic system. Though confined to the tropics, the system is sensitive to climatic conditions in both hemispheres. Due to its role in contributing to methane emissions, the Indian summer monsoon also has an outsized impact on the global climate. Monsoons should not be viewed in isolation, just as the polar ice sheets shouldn't. Earth's internal climate system is intrinsically linked and abrupt changes at one place can have significant consequences over time elsewhere.

[Katrina Nilsson-Kerr is PhD Researcher in Climatology, The Open University; Pallavi Anand is Lecturer in Ocean Biogeochemistry, The Open University]

## Four ways social media platforms could stop the spread of hateful content in aftermath of terror attacks

BERTIE VIDGEN  
*theconversation.com*

The deadly attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in which 50 people were killed and many others critically injured, was streamed live on Facebook by the man accused of carrying it out. It was then quickly shared across social media platforms.

Versions of the livestream attack video stayed online for a worrying amount of time. A report by the Guardian found that one video stayed on Facebook for six hours and another on YouTube for three. For many, the quick and seemingly unstoppable spread of this video typifies everything that is wrong with social media: toxic, hate-filled content which goes viral and is seen by millions.

But we should avoid scapegoating the big platforms. All of them (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google, Snapchat) are signed up to the European Commission's #NoPlace4Hate programme. They are committed to removing illegal hateful content within 24 hours, a time period which is likely to come down to just one hour.

Aside from anything else, they are aware of the reputational risks of being associated with terrorism and other harmful content (such as pornography, suicide, paedophilia) and are increasingly devoting considerable resources to removing it. Within 24 hours of the Christchurch attack, Facebook had banned 1.5m versions of the attack video – of which 1.2m it stopped from being uploaded at all.

Monitoring hateful content is always difficult and even the most advanced systems accidentally miss some. But during terrorist attacks the big platforms face particularly significant challenges. As research has shown, terrorist attacks precipitate huge spikes in online hate, overrunning platforms' reporting systems. Lots of the people who upload and share this content also know how to deceive the plat-

forms and get round their existing checks.

So what can platforms do to take down extremist and hateful content immediately after terrorist attacks? I propose four special measures which are needed to specifically target the short term influx of hate.

### 1. ADJUST THE SENSITIVITY OF THE HATE DETECTION TOOLS

All tools for hate detection have a margin of error. The designers have to decide how many false negatives and false positives they are happy with. False negatives are bits of content which are allowed online even though they are hateful and false positives are bits of content which are blocked even though they are non-hateful. There is always a trade off between the two when implementing any hate detection system.

The only way to truly ensure that no hateful content goes online is to ban all content from being uploaded – but this would be a mistake. Far better to adjust the sensitivity of the algorithms so that people are allowed to share content but platforms catch a lot more of the hateful stuff.

### 2. ENABLE EASIER TAKEDOWNS

Hateful content which does get onto the big platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, can be flagged by users. It is then sent for manual review by a content moderator, who checks it using pre-defined guidelines. Content moderation is a fundamentally difficult business, and the platforms aim to minimise inaccurate reviews. Often this is by using the "stick": according to some investigative journalists, moderators working on behalf of Facebook risk losing their jobs unless they maintain high moderation accuracy scores.

During attacks, platforms could introduce special procedures so that staff can quickly work through content without fear of low performance evaluation. They could also introduce temporary quarantines so that content is flagged for immediate removal but then re-examined at a later date.

### 3. LIMIT THE ABILITY OF USERS TO SHARE

Sharing is a fundamental part of social media, and platforms actively encourage sharing both on their sites (which is crucial to their business models) and between them, as it means that none of them miss out when anything goes viral. But easy sharing also brings with it risks: research shows that extreme and hateful content is imported from niche far-right sites and dumped into the mainstream where it can quickly spread to large audiences. And during attacks it means that anything which gets past one platform's hate detection software can be quickly shared across all of the platforms.

Platforms should limit the number of times that content can be shared within their site and potentially ban shares between sites. This tactic has already been adopted by WhatsApp, which now limits the number of times content can be shared to just five.

### 4. CREATE SHARED DATABASES OF CONTENT

All of the big platforms have very similar guidelines on what constitutes "hate" and will be trying to take down largely the same content following attacks. Creating a shared database of hateful content would ensure that content removed from one site is automatically banned from another. This would not only avoid needless duplication but enable the platforms to quickly devote resources to the really challenging content that is hard to detect.

Removing hateful content should be seen as an industry-wide effort and not a problem each platform faces individually. Shared databases like this do also exist in a limited way but efforts need to be hugely stepped up and their scope broadened.

In the long term, platforms need to keep investing in content moderation and developing advanced systems which integrate human checks with machine learning. But there is also a pressing need for special measures to handle the short-term influx of hate following terrorist attacks.

[the writer is PhD Candidate, Alan Turing Institute, University of Oxford]



## I-T Dept deploys surveillance teams in NE states for LS polls

**GUWAHATI, MAR 20 (PTI):** The Income Tax Department has deployed surveillance teams and set up control rooms in seven north eastern states, to deal with any reported movement of unaccounted money ahead of the Lok Sabha elections next month.

The Investigation Directorate of the department has gone ahead with the measure in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, an official release said here on Wednesday.

It has also deployed air intelligence units at airports of the seven states.

The department is “continuously gathering intelligence and keeping close surveillance over movement of cash/valuables or other items suspected to be used for bribing of electors during the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections”, the release said.

A dedicated email id and toll-free complaint numbers have been created to enable people to communicate with the I-T Department, it added.

# India signals to boycott China's Belt and Road Forum for 2nd time

**KJM VARMA**

**BEIJING, MAR 20 (PTI):** India on Wednesday signalled that it will boycott China's second Belt and Road Forum for a second time, saying no country can participate in an initiative that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity.

India boycotted the first Belt and Road Forum (BRF) in 2017 after protesting to Beijing over the controversial China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is being laid through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) overriding New Delhi's sovereignty concerns.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi recently said that next month China plans to hold a much bigger, second BRF which will also be attended by Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Speculation is rife whether India would attend the second BRF as China has deepened its commitment to expand the USD 60 billion CPEC, which aims to connect China's Xinjiang province with Pakistan's Gwadar port with a host of road, rail, gas and oil pipelines.

China has also undertaken a host of energy projects under the aegis of the CPEC. India's



Ambassador to China Vikram Misri told the state-run Global Times that “above all, connectivity initiatives must be pursued in a manner that respects sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity of nations”.

“No country can participate in an initiative that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity,” he replied to a question about India's concerns over the BRI and whether India would take part in the second BRF meet.

The Indian envoy's interview was carried by

the daily on Wednesday.

“To be honest, we have made no secret of our views and our position on the BRI is clear and consistent and one that we have conveyed to the authorities concerned.”

“India shares the global aspiration to strengthen connectivity and it is an integral part of our economic and diplomatic initiatives. We ourselves are working with many countries and international institutions in our region and beyond on a range of connectivity initiatives,” Misri said.

“However, it is also our belief that connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognised international norms, good governance and rule of law. They must emphasise social stability and environmental protection and preservation, promote skill and technology transfers and follow principles of openness, transparency and financial sustainability,” the Indian envoy said.

India along with the US and several other countries have been highlighting the con-

cerns over the BRI projects, leaving a number of smaller countries in debt traps. The concerns grew louder after China took over Sri Lanka's Hambantota port on a 99-year lease as debt swap.

Several countries including Malaysia and even Pakistan have wished to reduce the Chinese projects over debt concerns.

Asked whether India-China ties are back on track, Misri said: “the bilateral relationship between India and China is of great significance not just to the two countries,

but also to the larger region and the international community”.

He said that the Wuhan summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in April, 2018 was a “milestone in bilateral relations during which the two leaders exchanged views on overarching issues of bilateral and global importance, and elaborated their respective visions and priorities for national development in context of the current international situation”. Last year, the two leaders also met on

the sidelines of multi-lateral summits. “These meetings have reinforced strategic communication between the two countries at the highest levels and helped in elaborating a road map for continuing contacts. China is India's biggest neighbour and we assign a very high priority to this relationship,” the Indian envoy said.

“Unlike some 50 years ago, when our relationship had a much narrower basis and there was not much communication, today we have what one would call a full-spectrum relationship. “This has been possible because our respective leaders have realised that mutually-beneficial cooperation responds to the most urgent developmental needs of our people and these needs to be prioritised over other issues,” Misri said.

Asked about the impact of India's elections on India-China ties, Misri said: “my own feeling is that on foreign policy issues there is a broad political consensus in India on where our national interests lie. I do not think therefore that the outcome of the elections will impact the broad contours of India's foreign policy in general or the very important relationship with China in particular”.

## LS polls: a question of existence for Left parties in Bengal

**PRADIPTA TAPADAR**

**KOLKATA, MAR 20 (PTI):** Once a formidable force in West Bengal politics, the CPI(M)-led Left Front will be fighting one of its toughest political battles in this Lok Sabha polls to prove its political and electoral existence in the state. The Left Front which had ruled the state for 34 long years since 1977 is now just a shadow of its past. Faced with steady erosion of its vote bank, leadership crisis and exodus of cadres to the ruling TMC and resurgent BJP, it struggles to hold on to its ground with the saffron party replacing it as the main opposition to the ruling party.

As the state probably faces a four cornered contest among the Trinamool Congress (TMC), the BJP, the Left Front and the Congress, the Left would fight a lone battle. “This election indeed will be one of our toughest political battles in Bengal. We had never thought that we would be in such a position in state politics. We hope things will change in the days to come once people realise that only the Left, and not the BJP, can provide an alternative to the TMC,” CPI(M) politburo member Hannan Mollah told PTI.

“It is a fight to prove our political and electoral existence and hold ground against the BJP. It's true that you can't wipe out the Left, but at the same time you need to be electorally significant to make your voice heard in parliamentary politics,” another senior CPI(M) leader said.

Besides the CPI(M), the 10-party Left Front has All India Forward Bloc (AIFB), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and Communist Party of India (CPI) as its key constituents which contest Lok Sabha polls in the state. The CPI(M) as well as the Left Front has won only two of the 42 Lok Sabha seats from the state in 2014 polls.

The Left Front had initiated a seat sharing deal the Congress but the talks failed at the last moment and both the sides decided to go it alone. “Had we been able to clinch the seat



sharing deal, results in various seats would have been different. We could have been a more credible secular alternative to the TMC,” CPI(M) central committee member Sujana Chakraborty said. Party insiders said, after the failure of seat sharing dialogues, the CPI(M) is at its wits end on how to retain its two seats. Over the years, the party has lost its vote bank of the minorities and rural Bengal to the TMC and refugee vote bank to the BJP.

Adding to its woes, the present Left leadership lacks the dynamism of Jyoti Basu and former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, who despite being ill is still the tallest leader of the CPI(M) and the Left in Bengal. According to an internal party report, the CPI(M) does not have organisation to arrange for polling agents in at least 30 per cent of the 77,000 polling stations of the state.

“Being in power for three long decades probably led to decay in our organisation. Had we lost once and returned to power during this period, the situation could have been better,” Mollah said. Major party programmes of the Left Front, like its Brigade Parade Ground rally last month, still attract a large number of workers and supporters but that

success could not be translated into votes. As the CPI(M) with its depleted strength fights to retain its ground, it also helplessly watches TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee taking over its earlier role of uniting the opposition forces against the BJP.

The slide of the CPI(M) in Bengal is quite astonishing given the fact of its long history of mass movements during the '60s and '70s. Over the years since Independence, the Left has witnessed a steady growth in the state.

The undivided communist party, the CPI, became the main opposition party in the state after the 1952 general and assembly polls with Jyoti Basu becoming Leader of opposition.

In 1964, after the split in the party over ideological issues and formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the latter outsmarted the CPI to establish itself as the prime Left force in West Bengal. During the tumultuous days of Naxalite movement, the CPI(M) along with the Bangla Congress, a splinter group of the Congress, formed two short lived governments in the state in 1967 and 1969.

The party under the leadership of Basu and Promode Dasgupta has become an alter-

native to the Congress in Bengal. After the CPI(M)-led Left Front came to power in 1977, its key programmes ‘Operation Barga’ - giving land to landless farmers which benefited lakhs including Muslims - and setting up of three-tier panchayat system cemented its support base among the minorities and the rural Bengal. These two vote banks turned to be blank cheques for the Left for next three decades to win one elections after another in the state.

In the 1980 general elections, the Left Front won 38 seats in the state - its highest tally in West Bengal - and since then, its vote percentage hovered around 50 per cent in the subsequent polls. The Left Front in 1996 and 2004 with its bloc of 33 and 34 MPs respectively, played a deciding factor in the government formation.

But things started falling apart for the Left Front after the Sachar Committee report in 2008 painted a dismal picture on the condition of minorities in the state.

The anti-land acquisition movement in Nandigram and Singur led by TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee further eroded its vote bank in rural Bengal.

## BJP panchayat president shot dead in Assam

**SILCHAR (ASSAM), MAR 20 (PTI):** A BJP panchayat president in Assam has been shot dead and another party worker critically injured by unidentified gunmen in Cachar district ahead of the three-phase Lok Sabha polls in the state next month, police said on Wednesday.

Unidentified gunmen opened fire on Sukhen-

du Das, the president of Borkhola Hatichora panchayat, in front of his residence in the village on Tuesday night in which he and another person was grievously injured.

The two were rushed to Silchar Medical College Hospital, where Das succumbed to his injuries. The injured person, who was identified as Rinku Senapati, was admitted

to the intensive care unit where his condition was stated to be critical.

The police rushed to the spot and launched a search to nab the culprits.

Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has condemned the incident and directed the authorities to take measures arrest those responsible for the killing at the earliest.





# Amit Panghal, Shiva Thapa in Indian men's boxing team for Asian Championships

**NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI):** Asian Games gold-medallist Amit Panghal will be making his competitive debut in the 52kg category while Shiva Thapa (60kg) will eye a record-breaking fourth successive medal after the duo found a place in the Indian men's boxing team for the Asian Championships, next month.

The Asian Championships are scheduled to be held in the Thai capital of Bangkok from April 19 to 28.

Panghal won a second successive 49kg category gold medal at the prestigious Strandja Memorial Tournament in Bulgaria last month and trained in his new weight division in Germany earlier this month.

The Haryana-boxer has been forced to shift divisions after the 49kg category was dropped from the 2020 Olympic programme.

Thapa also started the new season on a positive note with a silver medal at the GeeBee Tournament in Finland this month.

The former world championship bronze-medallist from Assam has won medals in three previous editions of the Asian show-



piece event -- gold in 2013, bronze in 2015 and silver in 2017. "The boxers who win gold or silver medals at the Asian Championships in the Olympic weight categories will be our automatic choices for the world championships later this year," national coach C A Kuttappa told PTI. The 49kg category will be represented by national champion Deepak Singh, who clinched a gold medal in the Makran Cup in Iran earlier this month.

Kavinder Singh Bisht, the gold-winner in the GeeBee Tournament, has been picked for the 56kg

category, while Commonwealth Games silver-medallist and Satish Kumar was expectedly the choice for the +91kg division. Satish won a bronze medal at the 2015 Asian Championships.

The World Championships, to be held from September 7 to 21 in Yekaterinburg, Russia in September, will be conducted in the new Olympic weight categories as the event will double up as a qualifier for the 2020 Games in Tokyo.

The other weights to have been dropped from the Olympic roster, apart from the 49kg division,

are 56kg, 60kg and 64kg. In their place, the International Boxing Association (AIBA) has brought back 57kg and introduced the 63kg division.

Due to the re-jigging, the 60kg category boxers such as Thapa and Commonwealth Games silver-medallist Manish Kumar will be moving to the 63kg division.

"That is why, the world championship selection in the 63kg category will be done on the basis of probably trials and an assessment of their sparring performance in the camp," Kuttappa said. The

women's competition will be held alongside the men's event at the continental showpiece.

The celebrated M C Mary Kom has decided to give it a miss this time to focus on the world championships and Olympic qualification.

Asian Championships men's team:

Deepak (49kg) Amit Panghal (52kg), Kavinder Singh Bisht (56kg), Shiva Thapa (60kg), Rohit Tokas (64kg), Ashish (69kg), Ashish Kumar (75kg), Brijesh Yadav (81kg), Naman Tanwar (91kg), Satish Kumar (+91kg).

## Shami will be given adequate rest: KXIP coach Mike Hesson

**BHARAT SHARMA**

**NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI):** Mohammad Shami is keen to make an impact for Kings XI Punjab in the upcoming IPL but will be given adequate rest in between matches, said Kings XI Punjab coach Mike Hesson.

There is a lot of talk around the workload of Indian players going into the IPL with the all important World Cup beginning two weeks after lucrative T20 league and India captain Virat Kohli has left it to the players to manage their workload during the competition.

Shami has been one of India's best performers in 2018 and is expected to share the new ball with Jasprit Bumrah during the World Cup, starting May 30.

"It is going to be on a case by case basis. I have had chats with KL Rahul and Mohammed Shami. They are keen to make a big contribution for KXIP and we are certainly very keen to have them. We will manage them like every player throughout the tournament, former New Zealand coach Hesson told PTI.

While Shami is workload definitely needs to be monitored, Rahul will be more than happy to play as many games as possible to get back into the groove.

"If they feel little jaded during the course of the IPL, we will rest them. Whether they need extra training or rest, I am not sure for how many games we will rest them. We also have to see how the season goes for the team but they both are very keen to make a big contribution," said the 44-year-old, who was appointed as head coach in October.

Most teams including KXIP will have to factor in the availability of foreign players in a World Cup year. West Indian Chris Gayle, South African David Miller and Afghanistan's Mujeeb Zadran, who all play for the Punjab franchise, are certain for their respective ODI teams.

"Availability will be an issue but we will be least affected than most teams. Afghanistan players will probably leave later in the group stage, South African players



towards the play-offs, not sure if they will be asked to go back. There is a Sheffield Shield final in Australia also but we certainly have got enough players to deal with that," said Hesson.

With the training camp underway in Mohali, the New Zealander is getting to know the players and enjoying his cricket conversations with captain Ravichandran Ashwin.

"We have similar thoughts around the way we want to play the game. We have had some good discussions on the game along with the rest of the support staff. Ashwin reads the game well and is very clear in his mind. We just have to give him the best group of players to work with on the park," said Hesson, who is determined to guide KXIP to their maiden IPL title.

Ashwin may not be in India's limited overs set-up at the moment but remains as motivated as ever to give his best in the shorter formats, said Hesson.

"What I know about Ashwin is that he is a highly competitive person. That has not changed. He has been training well for the tournament and is fiercely determined. I don't think has changed (despite he not being in India's World Cup plans).

Hesson also has high hopes from veteran Gayle, who silenced

his critics last year by scoring a hundred and three half centuries.

"Look he (Gayle) is a world class performer. He has come off a series against England and he was in superb form there. He is a good frame of mind and we are keen to see how he goes this year. We are expecting big things from him.

Amongst the uncapped Indian players, he has been impressed with UP's right-arm pacer Ankit Rajpoot and Punjab left-arm Arshdeep Singh besides spinner Harpreet Brar.

"We have got a lot of flexibility in the squad. When you play 14 games in a variety of conditions, flexibility is critical. We can't just rely on 11-12 players. When you come across different surfaces you need to be able to adapt and we have the resources to do that," said Hesson.

Talking about the World Cup in the UK, Hesson said India and England remain the favourites.

"New Zealand too have a good chance. Their batsmen are in form at the moment, if the ball swings in England, New Zealand have a big chance.

"Outside of that, India and England are still the two form teams, Australia are sneaking up and South Africa are useful. Those five sides are ahead of others at the moment," Hesson added.

## Badminton's Lee out of Malaysian Open in blow to Olympic hopes

**KUALA LUMPUR, MAR 20 (AFP):** Badminton great Lee Chong Wei has pulled out of next month's Malaysian Open, despite being given the all-clear after cancer, throwing his Tokyo 2020 Olympics dream into jeopardy.

Lee was advised by doctors against putting "undue stress" on his recovering body, the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) said in a statement late Tuesday, after the 36-year-old travelled to Taiwan at the weekend for a post-treatment check-up.

"In order not to put his body under undue stress, Chong Wei has been advised to withdraw from the upcoming Malaysia Open," the BAM said.

"We also urge everyone to give him the space and time required for his recovery."

The triple Olympic silver medallist has been out since July last year

when he was diagnosed with early-stage nose cancer. The former world number one endured a tough treatment programme in Taiwan but opted not to retire and resumed training in January.

Lee originally planned to come back at the All England Open earlier this month but then delayed his return to April's Malaysia Open, where he is the defending champion and has won 12 times.

Lee, silver medallist at each of the last three Olympic Games, has dropped to 41st in the world since his illness with two other Malaysians ranked above him.

He will need to begin climbing up the rankings to get a shot at elusive gold as countries are able to send a maximum of two singles players to the Olympics, provided they are both in the world's top 16.

## New F1 grand prix can tap into Vietnam 'passion' for racing: Todt



**HANOI, MAR 20 (AFP):** Formula One chief Jean Todt on Wednesday hailed next year's inaugural Vietnamese Grand Prix in Hanoi as a great opportunity to open doors for people with "a passion" for motorsport in south-east Asia.

The communist Vietnamese capital will get its first taste of the high-octane glitz and glamour of Formula One when it hosts its first grand prix from April 2020 next year as the sport bids to tap into new markets in Southeast Asia.

Todt said he hoped Vietnamese fans seeing the likes of five-time world champion Lewis Hamilton and Sebastian Vettel battling wheel-to-wheel on the streets of Hanoi would lead to an explosion of interest in racing of all kinds in football-mad Vietnam.

"It's... fantastic for the development of the motorsport in Vietnam and in the region," Todt, who president of motorsport's world governing body the FIA, told reporters Wednesday at a groundbreaking ceremony for the new street circuit in Hanoi.

"I really hope that soon here will also be facilities to host cart racing, drifting racing," he added.

Todt hopes the event will breed a new generation of Vietnamese drivers.

"You have young people, talented with a passion of motorsports, that's why I think it's very important to involve very quickly a new category of motorsport," he said.

The 5.6 kilometre (3.5 mile) street track will incorporate existing and yet-to-be-built roads in the My Dinh area of Hanoi near the national sports stadium, about 13 kilometres from the city centre.

Organisers said they decided against holding the race in Hanoi's historical Old Quarter because of logistical challenges and steep costs.

Hanoi has bet big on the event's popularity, signing a 10-year, multi-million-dollar deal with Formula One last year reported in state media to be costing Vietnam 60 million per year.

Vietnam said it will not dip into government

coffers to pay for the event but instead has secured full financial backing from the country's largest private conglomerate VinGroup.

"F1 is always considered the king of all races... we have designed a challenging street circuit imprinted with Vietnamese identity and architecture," VinGroup deputy chairman Nguyen Viet Quang said at the ceremony.

He added that the track will bring "racers the opportunity to show off their speed as on professional routes together with their super skills in difficult turns of the street circuit".

Vietnam is hoping to emulate the popularity of Singapore's glittering street track night race and fill the void in the region left after Malaysia pulled the plug on its long-standing race in 2017 for cost reasons.

Hanoi will also hope avoid the problems that dogged Formula One's ventures into South Korea in 2010 and India in 2011 that saw the races in both countries axed after four and three editions respectively.

## South Africa beat Sri Lanka in Super Over after thrilling tie

**Cape Town, Mar 20 (AFP):** David Miller shone with gloves and bat as South Africa beat Sri Lanka on a Super Over in a dramatic first Twenty20 international at Newlands. In the unaccustomed role of wicketkeeper, Miller held a catch and made a stumping as Sri Lanka were restricted to 134 for seven after being sent in.

Miller then hit 41 off 23 balls but South Africa's lower order collapsed as the home side lost eight wickets and could only match Sri Lanka's total. Miller followed up with 13 runs as South Africa scored 14 off the Super Over, bowled by Sri Lankan captain Lasith Malinga.

Sri Lanka could only manage five runs off Imran Tahir's over in reply.

"We didn't handle it well with the bat in the last five or six overs but getting another opportunity in the Super Over I thought we handled it beautifully," said South African captain Faf du Plessis.

Miller was handed the wicketkeeping gloves in preparation for his likely role as Quinton de Kock's back-up in the World Cup. He caught Niroshan Dickwella off Dale Steyn's bowling off the second ball of the match and made a stumping when Kamindu Mendis ran past an Imran Tahir googly. Mendis top-scored for Sri Lanka with 41.

South Africa looked set for a comfortable win when Miller and Rassie van der Dussen (34) put on 66 for the fourth wicket but both were out within three balls before the rest of the bat-

ting crumbled. Van der Dussen was caught at fine leg off Malinga and two balls later man-of-the-match Miller was run out. "It was unnecessary," Miller admitted. Malinga was superb in the closing overs, finishing with two for 11, while Isuru Udana bowled a tight final over, conceding only four runs.

"T20 is a different game," said Malinga, adding that the tactic of using mainly spin bowlers worked, even though his team were not able to get across the line. "But still, I am really happy with what we are doing," he said.

Tahir scrambled a single to tie the match off the last ball, with wicketkeeper Dickwella missing the stumps with a throw which would have won the match for Sri Lanka.

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# Nirav Modi arrested in UK

ADITI KHANNA

**LONDON, MAR 20 (PTI):** Nirav Modi, the main accused in the USD 2 billion PNB scam case, has been arrested in London, Scotland Yard said Wednesday, in a major boost to India's efforts to bring back the fugitive diamantaire.

The arrest came days after a London court issued an arrest warrant against him in response to a request by the Enforcement Directorate for his extradition in a money laundering case.

"Nirav Deepak Modi, (Date of Birth 24.02.71), was arrested on behalf of the Indian Authorities on Tuesday, 19 March, in Holborn," the Metropolitan Police said in a statement.

"He will appear in custody at Westminster Magistrates' Court on Wednesday, 20 March," the statement added.

The location of the arrest indicates that Nirav Modi, wanted in India in connection with the Rs 13,500 crore Punjab National Bank scam case, was arrested from where he is believed to have been living in a plush apartment in Cen-



tre Point in the West End.

It would seem that his arrest is on an extradition warrant, details of which would become clear when he appears before Westminster Magistrates' Court in London.

The 48-year-old's arrest would lead to him being produced before a District Judge at Westminster Magistrates' Court in London to be formally charged, following which he is expected to seek bail.

The case will then follow a similar pattern through the UK courts as

that of liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya, who remains on bail since his arrest on an extradition warrant in April 2017 on fraud and money laundering charges.

The 63-year-old businessman has since filed an application seeking leave to appeal against his extradition ordered by UK home secretary Sajid Javid last month.

Javid had certified India's extradition request for Nirav Modi earlier this month, triggering the legal process in the courts, kick-started with

the issuance of a warrant.

News of the certification of India's request came just as Modi was tracked down to a three-bedroom flat in the Centre Point tower block of luxury apartments in the West End of London.

He is believed to have arrived in London last year and was able to travel in and out of Britain at least four times since his passport was cancelled by the Indian authorities in February 2018.

During some of his stay in London he was reportedly also living in the heart of

the city above his jewellery boutique called Nirav Modi on Old Bond Street, which has since closed down. Modi is now believed to be running a new business, which describes itself on the UK's Companies House register as a wholesale trader in watches and jewellery and a retailer of watches and jewellery in specialised stores.

Modi and his uncle, Mehul Choksi, are the main accused in the PNB scam and they both left India before the details of the fraud came to light in January 2018.

## Monsanto's Roundup weedkiller contributed to US man's cancer: jury



**SAN FRANCISCO, MAR 20 (AFP):** The weedkiller Roundup was a "substantial factor" in the cancer of a US man who developed a lump in his throat after decades of spraying his garden -- the second major legal defeat to agrochemical giant Monsanto in a year.

Edwin Hardeman, 70, treated his property in Sonoma County, California, regularly with the herbicide from 1980 to 2012 and was eventually diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

His lawyers Aimee Wagstaff and Jennifer Moore said in a joint statement their client was "pleased" with the decision.

"Now we can focus on the evidence that Monsanto has not taken a responsible, objective approach to the safety of Roundup," they added.

"Instead, it is clear from Monsanto's actions that it does not particularly care whether its product is in fact giving people cancer, focusing instead on manipulating public opinion and undermining anyone who raises genuine and legitimate concerns about the issue." Jurors had been asked to decide whether the ingredient glyphosate -- the world's most widely-used herbicide that has long been linked to cancer by environmentalists -- was a "substantial factor" in Hardeman's condition.

Hardeman and his lawyers hugged as the jury announced its decision, which came after

a week of deliberations and follows a groundbreaking state-level trial last year brought by another plaintiff with the same condition as Hardeman.

The trial now moves to phase two -- deciding whether Monsanto's conduct makes it liable.

"We look forward to presenting this evidence to the jury and holding Monsanto accountable for its bad conduct," Hardeman's legal team added.

Monsanto, which has sold Roundup worldwide for more than 40 years, contends that scores of studies show the products are not dangerous if properly used.

The case is the first in US federal court on the alleged cancer risk posed by Roundup, and will be seen as a test case, with thousands of other similar lawsuits already underway in the United States.

It follows the groundbreaking state trial last year brought by school groundskeeper Dwayne "Lee" Johnson.

In August, California jurors unanimously found that Monsanto acted with "malice" and that its glyphosate weedkillers Roundup and Ranger Pro substantially contributed to Johnson's terminal illness.

Monsanto was initially ordered to pay 289 million to Johnson, who has two young sons and in the end stages of his cancer, before the damages were reduced to 78.5 million. Germany's

Bayer, which bought Monsanto last year, filed an appeal.

Hardeman testified that he sprayed Roundup on his property on the outskirts of San Francisco to get rid of poison ivy, which causes an irritating, sometimes painful rash.

Monsanto has argued that Roundup was not to blame for Hardeman's cancer, citing his age -- 66 when he was diagnosed -- and the complicating factor that he suffered from Hepatitis C.

Hardeman's lawyers countered that as he had been cured of Hepatitis C, it could not have been a factor in his development of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

One of the experts called by Hardeman's team suggested that Roundup is even more dangerous than glyphosate on its own, because of additives in the weed killer. "Look at all the studies, all the data," Hardeman's lead attorney Aimee Wagstaff told the jury. "Studies are pieces of a puzzle you have to put together." Unlike the US Environmental Protection Agency, the International Agency for Research on Cancer -- which is part of the World Health Organization -- has listed glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic."

Bayer expressed disappointment with the decision, but maintained that the science confirmed that glyphosate-based herbicides do not cause cancer.

## EU fines Google \$1.7 billion for abusing online ads market

**BRUSSELS, MAR 20 (AP):** European Union regulators have hit Google with a 1.49 billion euro (USD 1.68 billion) fine for abusing its dominant role in online advertising. It's the third time the commission has slapped Google with an antitrust penalty, following multi-billion-dollar fines resulting from separate probes into two other parts of the Silicon Valley giant's business. The EU's competition commissioner, Margrethe Vestager, announced the results of the long-running probe of Google's AdSense advertising business at a news conference in Brussels on Wednesday. "Today's decision is about how Google abused its dominance to stop websites using brokers other than the AdSense platform," Vestager said.

The commission found that Google and its parent company, Alphabet, breached EU antitrust rules by imposing restrictive clauses in contracts with websites that used AdSense, preventing Google rivals from placing their ads on these sites. Google "prevented its rivals from having a chance to innovate and to compete in the market on their merits," Vestager said.

"Advertisers and website owners, they had less choice and likely faced higher prices that would be passed on to consumers." AdSense is an older Google product that lets web publishers such as bloggers place text ads on their websites, with the content of the ads based on results from search functions on their sites. Microsoft filed an EU antitrust complaint about the service in 2009 and the EU Commission formally launched its probe in 2016, although it said at the time that Google had already made some changes to allow affected customers more freedom to show competing ads.

## Italy to join China's Belt and Road initiative over US worry



**MILAN, MAR 20 (AP):** Premier Giuseppe Conte pledged Tuesday to make Italy the first Group of Seven nation to join China's ambitious Belt and Road initiative, despite objections from the United States and concerns within his governing coalition.

Speaking to parliament, Conte said that Italy's signing of a memorandum of understanding for the infrastructure-building venture, which is due to happen during the Chinese premier's visit this week, would not "in the least" put into question Italy's position within the strategic trans-Atlantic alliance or with European partners.

Italy's signature would be considered a major legitimization of the project that envisions overland and maritime routes connecting China with Europe.

A White House official has warned Italy against joining, calling it a Chinese "vanity project."

European governments declined to sign a

joint declaration on the "Belt and Road" at a forum last year in Beijing.

They argued it lacked standards on financing and transparency.

In his first remarks to lawmakers on the deal on the eve of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit, Conte said the details have been worked out over months of consultations at every level of government.

He emphasised that the memorandum is not legally binding and that it would give Italy access to an enormous market.

"We want to first and foremost rebalance our trade, which is not favourable to us now. Our exports to China are far lower than other European countries," Conte said.

"The infrastructure will redefine commercial traffic routes. We will have new airports, new trade corridors, and it will certainly influence our economic growth. We don't want to lose any opportunity."

China's foreign ministry said Wednesday that Xi will visit Sicily in addition to Rome, with plans

to meet with Italian President Sergio Mattarella as well as Conte. It also defended the Belt and Road initiative against naysayers in Italy.

"During the process of developing the Belt and Road initiative cooperation, it is inevitable that we may encounter some misunderstandings and even doubts," said Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Chao.

"But facts will always speak louder than words."

Wang said an agreement between China and Italy would be beneficial for both countries' economic development.

"As for ... whether it will help promote trade for Italy, I think it is absolutely 'Yes,'" he said.

Pressed about Chinese investments in Italian ports and whether there is an excess in infrastructure developments, given Chinese existing investments in the area that could lead to additional debt, Wang said Chinese investments are decided by market rules.

"Whether to invest in

a region or not, I believe that will be decided by the market" Wang said without elaborating.

In parliament, the opposition attacked the planned memorandum and the lack of detail provided to lawmakers, warning that the deal could be a Trojan horse for China to undermine Italian industries. Concerns also center around whether the accords include 5G access.

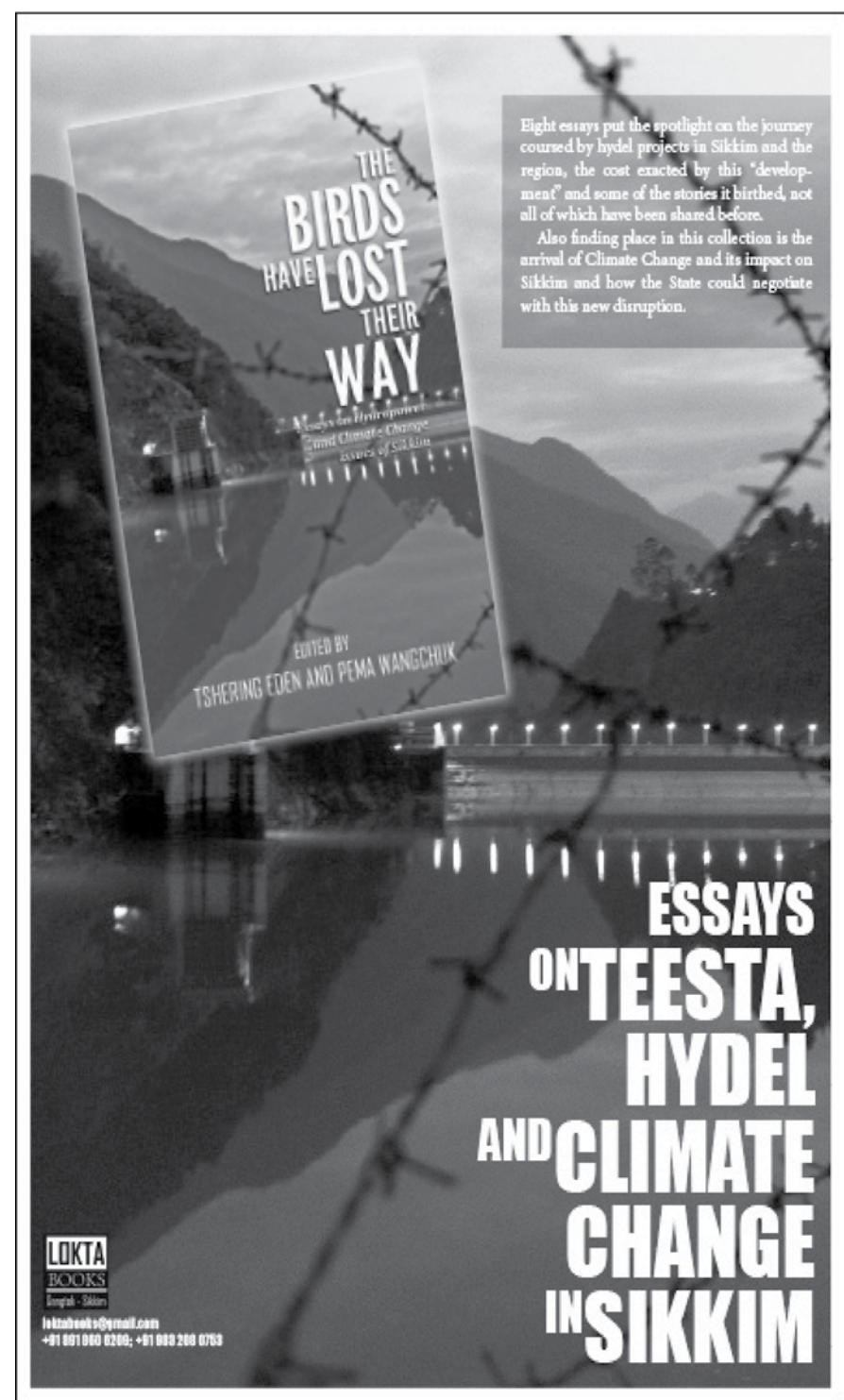
Even lawmakers from the right-wing League, part of Conte's coalition, say their support for the memorandum is conditional on it not harming Italy's relations with its partners.

"If it opens exports for Italian companies, it is great. The only constraints are security, the control of Italians' data, and energy. I would not like someone to wake up on the other side of the world and turn off the switch," League leader Matteo Salvini said this week.

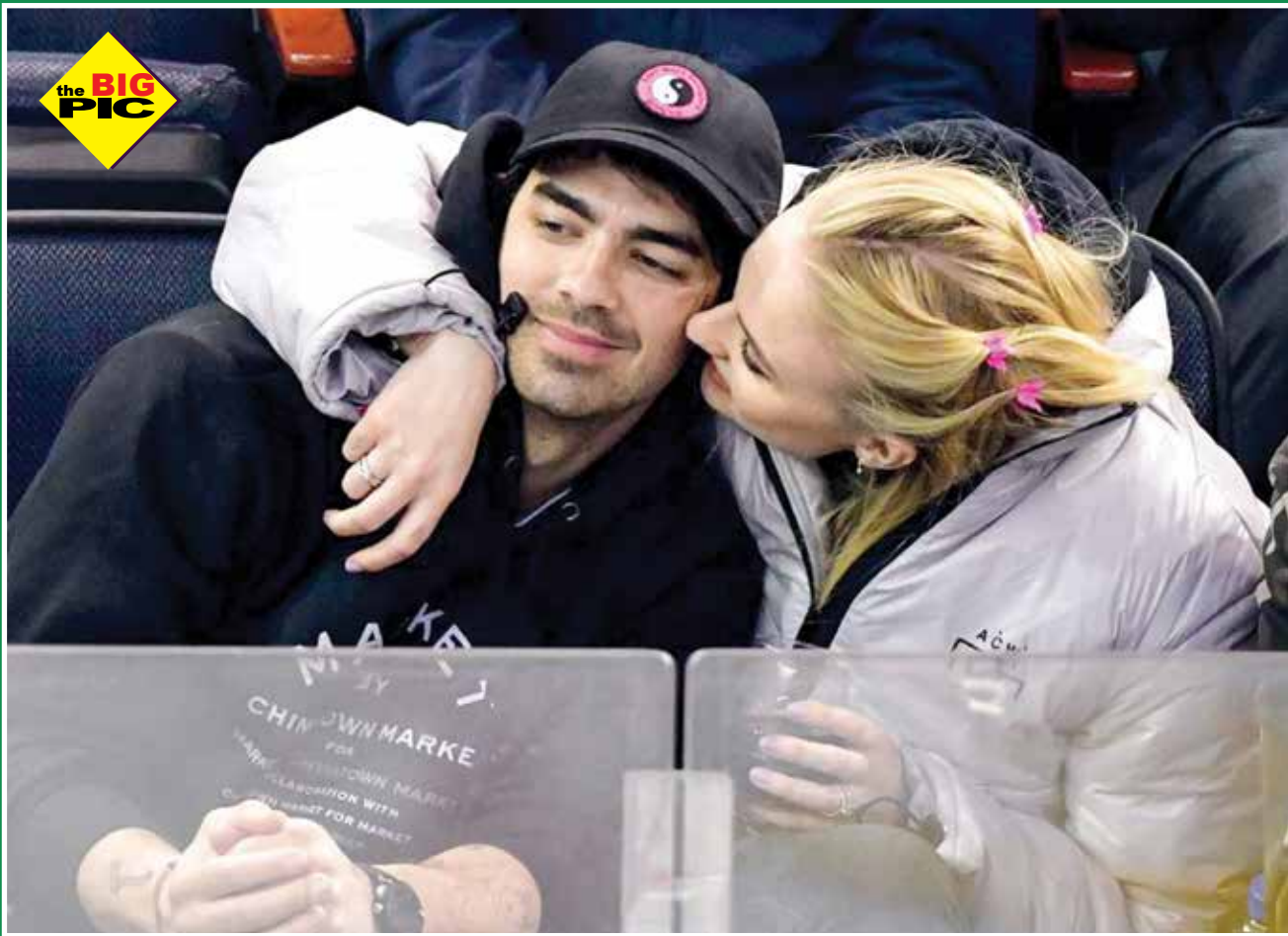
"If the Chinese want to invest in railways and ports, fine. What is important that control remains in Italian hands."

Francesco Sisci, a China expert currently working as a researcher at Renmin University in China, said the biggest problem with the deals with China is that Italy pursued them without properly keeping its allies informed.

"There was a lack of professionalism and political know-how. Whatever the deal is, they need to speak first with the Americans and the Europeans, agreeing to a common approach, then speak with China," Sisci said. "Italy is part of NATO. It is part of the European Union and shares a currency. How do they not speak with their allies? It is crazy," he said.







**COLORBLOCKING QUEEN!** The Black Panther star, Lupita Nyong'o is bright and beautiful heading into The Late Show with Stephen Colbert in NYC.

**James Corden to emcee 2019 Tony Awards**

**NEW YORK, MAR 20 (PTI):** Actor-comedian James Corden has been announced as the host of 73rd Annual Tony Awards.

American Theatre Wing, which presents the awards in collaboration with The Broadway League, made the announcement Tuesday.

Corden, who hosts "The Late Late Show" on CBS, had previously emceed the 2016 award ceremony, which was overshadowed by a mass shooting in an Orlando gay club.

He was lauded by the audiences after he paid tributes to the victims of the incident in his opening monologue.

"I'm thrilled to be returning to host the Tony Awards. The Broadway community is very dear to my heart and I'm beyond proud to be part of this incredibly special night," Corden said in a statement.

The 40-year-old comic has also been a Tony recipient, having won the trophy for best actor in a play for his performance in "One Man, Two Guvnors" in 2012.

"James is not only a beloved talent, he is also a veteran of the stage and has a true passion for Broadway. We cannot wait to see what he has in store for us this year at the Tony Awards," said Charlotte St Martin, President of The Broadway League, and Heather Hitchens, President of the American Theatre Wing.

The 2019 ceremony will take place at Radio City Music Hall in New York City.

**Ali Fazal, Shraddha Srinath find love in the time of anti-Romeo squads**

There is a moment in Milan Talkies when electricity goes off in the middle of Mughal-e-Azam. The film is playing in an Allahabad theatre -- we are eight years away from



Prayagaraj -- called Milan Talkies and the audience is none too pleased about missing the electric face-off between Akbar and his lovelorn prince. Ali Fazal's wannabe director jumps in with gusto. Backlit by mobile phones screens, he mimics both Dilip Kumar and Prithviraj Kapoor and the audience applauds -- both in the real-life theatre and the make-believe Milan Talkies.

The Tigmanshu Dhulia film's a collection of such moments -- mining into our love of movies and a love story well told. Ali Fazal and Shraddha Srinath's story has its guardian angels -- a Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol poster here, a Shammi Kapoor song there. With its film-within-a-film set-up -- Ali Fazal is shooting his dream project in the bylanes of Allahabad with money borrowed from his mother and often supplemented by helping weak students cheat.

That is how he meets Shraddha, a BA fail who needs to be a graduate so that her father, Ashutosh Rana, can marry her to the educat-

ed boy of his choice. Love blossoms but this is Uttar Pradesh of anti-Romeo squads and caste lines etched in stone, here represented by a stone-faced Sikandar Kher. We see him early on in the film, castrating a boy for falling in love with a girl of other caste.

To Ali Fazal's Annu, Mumbai is the city of his dreams -- away from the patriarchal stronghold of Allahabad, where dreams do come true. And single-screen Milan Talkies stands for Bollywood in the film -- Annu and Maithili romance in the flickering lights, kiss in front of posters and the projectionist Sanjay Mishra is their personal cupid. Annu does finally reach Mumbai but after bloodshed

and without the woman he loves. The tenuous relationship between him and Maithili is again films. Dhulia is in fine form -- he plays Annu's dad in the film besides writing and directing the film. As a man-child whose own Bollywood dreams came to naught, he is a delight. However, it is the way he captures the essence of small-town India, and especially Allahabad -- he is from the city himself, that he truly wins. From the idiom to attitude, he gets the city pat-on.

He is ably supported by the cast -- Ali



Fazal, Shraddha, Ashutosh and Sanjay are particularly delightful. There are a few road bumps though -- the film's length and entirely forgettable music.

**Only woman officer could have solved Nirbhaya case so promptly, says Shefali Shah**



**RADHIKA SHARMA**

**NEW DELHI, MAR 20 (PTI):** She came to be known simply as "Nirbhaya", the fearless one, and only a woman police officer could have cracked the case of her brutal gangrape on the night of December 16, 2012, within 72 hours, says actor Shefali Shah, in a hat tip to former Delhi Police DCP Chaya Sharma.

The dedication and conviction of the then deputy commissioner of police of South Delhi district was pivotal in the case of the gangrape and murder of the physiotherapy intern, who was assaulted on a cold December night in a moving bus by six men and died of her grievous injuries 13 days later in a Singapore hospital, said Shah.

Shah, 46, plays Vartika Chaturvedi, whose character is based on Sharma, in the upcoming Netflix series "Delhi Crime".

Everyone who has been on this project believes that if it wasn't a woman, the case probably would not have cracked in the span that it did. It was her intensity, passion and conviction that I will get them'.

All the case had was scattered leads but I don't think she let herself believe for a moment that it's not going to happen. All she wanted to do was crack the case in the fastest way possible, Shah told PTI in an interview.

The seven-part series, directed by Indian-Canadian filmmaker Richie Mehta, is inspired by and follows the investigation by Delhi Police to nab the six males who raped the 23-year-old in the national capital.

The series is not the first project to bring the highly publicised case on screen. Leslie Udwin's 2015 documentary India's Daughter and Deepa Mehta-directed drama Anatomy of Violence (2016) have also dealt with the case, which led to a change in India's rape laws.

What separates Delhi Crime from its predecessors is that it explores the event based on police case files.

While the show dramatises the incident, it brings in the back stories of the cops, the condition of the police force, their power struggle with the bureaucracy and managing the scoop-hungry media. Shah recalls struggling with feelings of anger and angst about the gangrape. Amidst the blame game, the biggest question in her mind was, "Who's there to protect us?" And when I heard this script, I felt there is someone who's doing something about this. And they did a fantastic job of it. So it's a certain sense of security and extreme respect for what they did given the circumstances they work under are not

exactly congenial, she said.

It takes a lot to sustain your honesty, relentlessness and will, not just to do the job but actually believe in it. It's a huge onus to take care of this entire city and the country with the kind of population we have. They can simply do their job, that's what we expect them to do but this case wasn't just a job for them. It was personal, it was a mission. There was someone who had the power and who said I'm going to use it and get those guys', she added.

Mehta does not reduce Shah's character to a top officer who has to be 'one of the guys' in the police force. Instead, the viewer will see Vartika as an able leader who reacts to situations like a regular human being would.

I don't think he planned to show any of the characters in a typical boxed image that you probably have (of the police). The fact being that the series goes onto their emotional world, their families, their small moments together.

We couldn't take away from the honesty. Yes, it's an inspiration and a fictionalised version of what happened but it's not popcorn entertainment. There are no roles that we play here. I play a real person who did this.

The actor says it is strange how a display of emotion is treated as a sign of weakness.

I feel any kind of emotion -- pain, hurt, anger, happiness or blushes -- is very strong in its own right. Everyone has a different way of expressing it. But that doesn't mean someone who cries is weaker, she said.

Shah, who describes herself as a spontaneous actor, says Mehta was so specific in his vision that he had marked two places on the script where Vartika would allow herself to cry.

As Shefali, I might choose to react differently but what Vartika does is that she channelises all the pain and anger into a single-point focus of getting the guys. It works better because it is held back.

There's a moment when the police gets the detailed medical report of the crime. My character feels that somebody had hit her in the gut. It's sickening. But by the end of the scene, she only turns around and says 'Let me know when she's ready for a statement,' to which I'm like you can't react like this! she said.

Also featuring Rajesh Tailang, Rasiqa Dugal and Adil Hussain, Delhi Crime starts streaming on Netflix worldwide from March 22.

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THE DAY AHEAD

**ARIES:** Time to make one of your legendary comebacks as the Sun shimmers in your sign until April 20! Take a fresh look at your personal goals and desires. Focus on projects that truly light your fire and let go of anything that threatens to extinguish that flame. There's no telling where that go-getter mindset will lead you over the next four weeks. Just as your indie spirit begins soaring, a luminous full moon in Libra—the first in a rare pair—lights up your partnership zone.

**TAURUS:** Give it a rest, Taurus, and we mean that in a good way! With the Sun slipping into your rejuvenating twelfth house until April 20, you'll find it impossible to push yourself into "beast mode." Use this four-week time-out to refill your cup and make self-care a priority. And if, during that quiet time, you decide to let some things go (which you might, since the twelfth house rules endings and may prompt a need for closure), do so gently.

**GEMINI:** Rally your soul squad, Gemini! The Sun bursts into Aries and your communal eleventh house, igniting the spirit of bonhomie

until April 20. Over the next four weeks, be fearless about sharing your idealistic visions with any group you're a part of. Don't limit your imagination when it comes to fostering connections. Tap into tech and keep building a network that extends around the world.

**CANCER:** If you can't beat 'em, join 'em? This Saturday, collaborating with the so-called competition might bring the win-win you're both looking for...IF you can set aside your differences. The trick is to test the waters slowly small instead of trying to resolve every difference in one day. If you've been gasping for air—or maybe just a change of scenery—the next ten weeks could send you on some amazing adventures.

**LEO:** This Saturday, a refreshingly honest conversation can move the needle on a stuck relationship. Don't get hung up with saying the "right" thing, Leo; just speak your piece in a non-blaming way. And make sure you extend that open-minded courtesy to the other party as well. Of course, sometimes these sentiments are

best expressed in a letter—one that you don't send, but rather write, then rip up and burn as a ceremonial release.

**LIBRA:** Who says February 14th gets to have all the fun? Saturday's playful pairing of Mercury and Uranus could bring an early visit from St. Valentine. A scintillating conversation could lead to a dinner date that lingers on for hours. If you're already spoken for, Saturday could be like a V-Day prequel. Reserve a table for two or pick up a pair of tickets for a raved-about show.

**VIRGO:** Thoughts are swirling through your head this Saturday, but don't let them evolve into an epic work of fiction. With analytical Mercury getting a boost from innovative Uranus, talk to people who can help you see the situation from an enlightened perspective. Everything happens for a reason, Virgo, even if it makes zero sense in the moment.

**SCORPIO:** Is it a fact or just a feeling? Saturday's Mercury-Uranus mashup brings some much-needed objectivity to a situation that's been hitting all your emotional buttons. While you don't want to ig-

nore your intuition, what's bothering you might be a result of a past trigger rather than something that's actually occurring in the here and now. The surest way to find out? Investigate, as only a Scorpio can! Your inner bon vivant takes the wheel this Sunday as social Mercury high-kicks into Pisces and your flamboyant, fun-loving fifth house!

**SAGITTARIUS:** If other people are slowing you down this Saturday, no need to drag those stragglers along for the ride. Enjoy a day of independence, allowing yourself to come and go as you please without checking for approval. The dedicated alone time will refresh your feed and you'll be ready to reign as life of the party come sundown. Avoid any venues that feel stuffy or elitist!

**CAPRICORN:** Anyone can dazzle you with a first impression—but can they actually walk their talk? Under Saturday's convivial alignment of Mercury and Uranus, you might not be the best at separating the wheat from the chaff. Enjoy the magic moments you share with people

socially, remembering that only time can tell the true story about their integrity and character. Reserve judgement, one way or the other, because it's equally possible that someone you wrote off as annoying could start to grow on you!

**AQUARIUS:** Chat up strangers this Saturday, because at any moment, random banter could reveal a serendipitous spark. The fateful encounter could happen during an espresso run or while you're rolling up your yoga mat after class. One thoughtful comment on an Instagram-friend's feed could lead to a DM exchange—and one bold right swipe could swiftly evolve into a Saturday night date!

**PISCES:** The Sun will spend the next four weeks in Aries, dazzling your money zone until April 20. Have no regrets as you shift from party mode to priority mode. Whatever you've conjured up in your vivid Pisces imagination can now evolve from dream to reality. With a realistic budget and outlined goals, you'll open the door to fresh opportunities AND cash flow.