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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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DEO-East calls final briefing for candidates

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAY:**

The final briefing for all contesting candidates and their election agents for the Sikkim Parliamentary constituency and all assembly constituencies of East district has been called for 21 May by the District Election Officer, East.

In a notice issued today, the DEO informs that this "important briefing meeting" will be held between the contesting candidates, their election agents and Returning Officers of the district at 2PM in the District Administrative Centre conference hall

here at Sichey.

The briefing has been called in pursuance of the latest instructions received from the Election Commission of India and in order to ensure "timely and systematic completion of the counting process," the notice details.

Apparently, some changes have also been made in the counting day arrangements which will be explained at the meeting.

Additionally, the candidates/ election agents will also be briefed on the final security deployment plan and the requirements for entry and presence during the counting process.

Most exit polls project majority for NDA, predict Sikkim LS seat for SKM

NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI): New Delhi, May 19 (PTI): Most exit polls Sunday forecast another term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with some of them projecting that BJP-led NDA will get more than 300 seats to comfortably cross the majority mark of 272 in the Lok Sabha.

Interestingly, most exit polls are also predicting that the lone Lok Sabha seat in Sikkim will get snapped up by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha even though most report it under the "others" category.

Meanwhile, exit polls were, however, divided in their prediction for the politically most crucial state of Uttar Pradesh with some like ABP-Nielsen saying that the BJP's tally may fall to 22 from 71 while a few

others like New 18-Ipsos and News 24-Chanakya tipping its tally over 60 seats.

The saffron party appeared to make major gains in eastern states of West Bengal and Odisha.

Exit polls by News 18-Ipsos, India Today-Axis and News 24-Chanakya projected 336, 339-368 and 336-364 seats respectively for the NDA, with the BJP tipped to cross the majority on its own for another term after the 2014 polls.

However, two exit polls -- one by ABP News-Nielsen and another by Neta-News X -- said the ruling alliance may fall short of a majority. ABP News forecast 267 and NewsX 242 seats for the ruling NDA.

Elections to 542 seats of the 543-member Lok Sabha

ended Sunday. The Election Commission has deferred election for Vellore in Tamil Nadu over allegations of misuse of money power.

The counting of votes is slated for May 23.

Some of the polls put the NDA's vote share at more than 40 per cent, with News18-Ipsos giving 49 per cent to the ruling alliance, which had garnered close to 39 per cent votes in 2014.

Times Now telecast two exit polls giving the NDA 296 and 306 seats, while projecting 126 and 132 for the Congress-led UPA.

News 18-Ipsos, India Today-Axis and News 24-Chanakya have predicted 82, 77-108 and 86-104 seats for the Congress-led UPA, with

the main opposition party likely to improve on its all-time low of 44 seats but still set to fall to a poor second this time as well.

The CVoter-Republic exit poll has forecast 287 and 128 seats for the NDA and UPA respectively.

ABP News-Nielsen and Neta-NewsX predicted 127 and 164 seats respectively for the UPA.

The CNN News18-Ipsos projected only 46 seats for the Congress and 82 for its allies.

In 2014, the NDA had won 336 seats and the Congress 44. The BJP had notched up its maiden majority by bagging 282 seats.

Some exit polls predicted that the SP-BSP alliance is likely to trump the BJP in Uttar Pradesh. The BJP had won 71 and its ally Apna Dal two of its 80 seats in 2014.

The CVoter-Republic fore-

cast gave the grand alliance in UP 40 seats against 38 for the NDA, while the Jan Ki Baat said the NDA may win 46-57 seats against 15-29 of the SP-BSP combine.

ABP News predicted a huge loss for the BJP in the state, saying it may get only 22 seats while the opposition alliance may emerge victorious in 56 constituencies.

On West Bengal's 42 seats, CVoter-Republic and ABP respectively gave 11 and 16 to the BJP, a big improvement on its tally of two in 2014.

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee dismissed the exit polls as a "gossip" and a gameplan to "replace" EVMs.

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SummitTimes wins inaugural edition of media inter-house futsal tournament

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAY:**

SummitTimes emerged the champion of the first edition of the Media Inter-House Futsal Tournament 2019 played at the Futsal Arena here at Cafe Infinity in Tadong on Sunday.

In a very contesting final match, SummitTimes defeated Sikkim Express 04-02 to lift trophy.

Six teams had participated in this first edition of a futsal tournament for media houses of the State. The daylong tournament was organised



by the Press Club of Sikkim. The participating teams

were divided into two groups for the league round.

Team Avengers, Nayuma Television and

SummitTimes were placed in Group A, while in Group B, the teams were Samay Dainik, Hamro Prajashakti and Sikkim Express.

Each team played two matches in the league stage with the toppers proceeding to the finals.

Press Club of Sikkim has been organising sporting events for its members from time to time to provide a healthy recreation and break to journalists from their busy daily schedule.

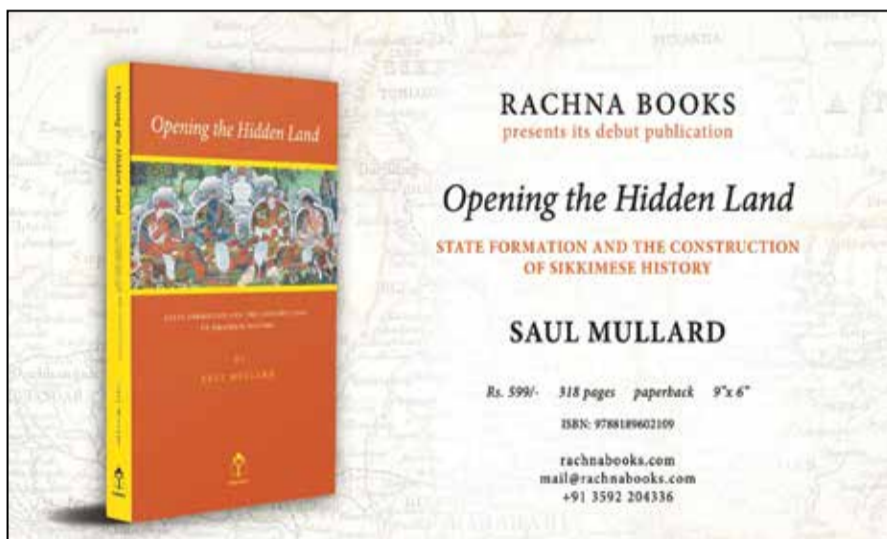
Rachna Books turns 40 with release of book on history of Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 MAY:**

Rachna Books, the book store at Development Area, entered its fortieth year with an ambitious foray into publishing. For its first title, Rachna Books has aptly chosen a seminal academic book on the history of Sikkim, Dr Saul Mullard's, "Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation & the Construction of Sikkimese History."

Dr Mullard from the Department of South and Inner Asia, University of Oxford, is currently a Senior Researcher at the Chr Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway. He has authored several publications on the social history of Sikkim on issues ranging from social regulation, compulsory labour, social stratification including issues of ethnicity and social status, migration and the social

turn to pg02



India's first voter Shyam Saran Negi casts his vote

**DHARMENDRA JOSHI
SHIMLA, MAY 19 (PTI):**

Notwithstanding his failing vision and aching knees, India's "first" voter Shyam Saran Negi Sunday reached his polling booth in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district to exercise his franchise.

The 102-year-old was given a warm welcome by election staff at the Kalpa booth in Mandi Lok Sabha constituency, which went to polls in the last and seventh phase of the general elections.

"A resident of Himachal Pradesh's tribal district Kinnaur, Shyam Saran Negi is India's first voter and very important for the state election depart-



ment," Kinnaur District Election Officer Gopal Chand told PTI.

Negi, a retired school teacher was born on July 1, 1917, as per his official records.

The centenarian still vividly remembers how he became India's first voter.

"India's first elec-

tion was held in February 1952, but the voting for remote, tribal areas in Himachal Pradesh was held five months in advance on October 23, 1951, owing to fears of inclement weather rendering the exercise impossible here during winter," Negi said.

"I was a school teacher then and had been put on election duty. Due to it, I reached my polling booth at Kalpa primary school in Kinnaur at 7 am to cast my vote. I was the first one to reach there and cast my vote," he said.

"Later, I was told I was the first to cast my vote anywhere in the area," he said with a glint in his eyes and added that he proceeded to join his election duty after voting.

Negi, who also made a special appearance in Hindi film "Sanam Re", said he never missed casting his vote ever since then whether it

be a panchayat election or the Lok Sabha polls.

He on Saturday had appealed to people to elect "honest" candidates for all the four Lok Sabha seats in the state.

"Elect honest and active candidates for your parliamentary seats instead of voting for particular parties," Negi told PTI.

"It's my last wish to vote again. But I have got immobile legs and aching knees now, besides failing vision and hearing," he had said.

The Shimla (SC), Hamirpur, Kangra and Mandi seats went to polls on Sunday along with 55 other Lok Sabha constituencies in the country.

Summit Times in Nepali



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Darjeeling : 22nd May 2019, 10 am to 5 pm, Gymkhana Club **Siliguri :** 25th & 26th May 2019, 11 am to 5 pm, City Centre, Uttarakhand

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C'garh BJP leader held for molestation

RAIPUR, MAY 19 (PTI): A BJP leader was Sunday arrested for allegedly molesting a 34-year-old woman here, police said. Prakash Bajaj (42) was arrested on charges of molestation following a complaint lodged by the woman at Civil Lines police station here, an official said.

Bajaj is a member of the state working committee of the BJP.

“In her complaint, the victim, a resident of Gayatri Nagar, claimed that she had given Rs 10 lakh to Bajaj for purchasing a house in 2016 through him and

was trying to arrange remaining amount through bank finance,” Station House Officer (SHO) Civil Lines Mohsin Khan told PTI.

“However, when loan was not sanctioned to her, the victim demanded her money back from Bajaj citing that she was not able to purchase the house,” he added.

On the pretext of returning the money, Bajaj allegedly molested the victim at his office many times between 2016 and 2018.

“The accused also allegedly threatened the victim, asking her not

approach the police or narrate the incident to anyone. He also did not return her money,” the SHO said.

Bajaj was booked under IPC sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 506 (criminal intimidation), he said.

After his arrest, Bajaj was produced in a local court, which sent him to judicial remand for 15 days, Khan said.

In October 2017, Bajaj was a complainant in the case related to the purported ‘sex CD’ allegedly involving the then state minister Rajesh Munat.

EC orders action against presiding officer in Chandni Chowk for not deleting test votes

NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI): The Election Commission has directed disciplinary action against the presiding officer of a polling station in the Chandni Chowk parliamentary constituency who forgot to delete test votes, necessitating the need for a repoll, officials said Sunday.

The polling station 32 in the constituency saw a repoll on Sunday and re-

corded a voter turnout of 42.14 per cent.

According to an official, the EC directed disciplinary action against the presiding officer after a report was sent about the error to it by the Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi.

Tanvi Garg, district election officer of the Chandni Chowk parliamentary constituency, said a show cause notice has been to the polling

party seeking a reply in the matter.

The need for a repoll was necessitated since the presiding officer forgot to delete the test votes from the EVM cast during mock poll on May 12.

Mock poll is carried out before actual polling to test whether an EVM is working properly and at least 50 test votes are cast, one for each candidate.

Pak considering appointing NSA to resume backchannel diplomacy: Official sources

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, MAY 19 (PTI): The Imran Khan-led Pakistan government is actively considering appointing a National Security Advisor to revive backchannel diplomacy with India to iron out issues hindering the resumption of peace talks between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, official sources said on Sunday.

Since assuming the office in August last year, Prime Minister Imran Khan repeatedly reached out to India for the resumption of peace talks on all outstanding issues.

But India has made it clear to Pakistan that terrorism and dialogue will not go hand-in-hand.

The likely appointment of the NSA is meant for reviving the backchannel diplomacy with India to sort out some of the pressing issues between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, the official sources privy to the development was quoted as saying by the

Express Tribune.

A senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the government was likely to appoint a retired military official as the National Security Advisor (NSA).

He said certain names were under consideration but no final decision has been taken yet.

The relationship between the two neighbouring nations currently is at all-time low after a Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) suicide bomber attacked a CRPF convoy in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir on February 14 that killed 40 soldiers.

Amid mounting outrage, the Indian Air Force (IAF) carried out a counter-terror operation, hitting what it said was a JeM training camp in Balakot, deep inside Pakistan on February 26.

The next day, the PAF retaliated and downed a MiG-21 in an aerial combat and captured IAF Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, who

was later released and handed over to India on March 1.

Now, with the almost two-month long election exercise getting over, the Pakistan government is considering options on how to resume talks with India.

Pakistan believes that the new government in India after the general elections would be more receptive to Khan's offer of peace talks.

When asked about the prospects of resumption of talks given the current hostilities, the official said Pakistan was optimistic.

The reason for this optimism stems from the fact that new government, whether it is formed by the ruling BJP or the Congress, is unlikely to follow the pre-election rhetoric, he said.

One of the options include the appointment of the NSA to revive the backchannel with India.

In the past, the two countries often used backchannel through the NSAs to prepare ground for any talks.

Nepali Congress warns of stalling Parliament proceedings over ‘anti-press’ bill

SHIRISH B PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, MAY 19 (PTI): The main opposition party in Nepal on Sunday warned of stalling the Parliament proceedings if the government tried to pass a controversial bill that aims to curtail press freedom by imposing strict penalty on media outlets.

“The government wants to curtail press freedom through the bill which is unacceptable. We will not allow the government to pass the bill,” Nepali Congress (NC) president Sher Bahadur Deuba told reporters at Biratnagar Airport here.

He said his party would stall the Parliament proceedings if the ruling Communist Party of Nepal tried to pass the Me-

dia Council Bill.

“The bill that curtails press freedom and human rights has to be withdrawn. We will not let the bill pass at any cost,” he said, adding that the party, however, would not resort to violence and vandalism to press the government to withdraw the bill.

The bill, proposed by K P Sharma Oli-led government, has provisions to impose a fine up to Rs 1 million on media outlets, editors, publishers and journalists if they were found “guilty of damaging someone’s reputation”.

The bill also stipulates that the Nepal Media Council (NMC) can order the erring parties to pay compensation if the content in media outlets damages the reputation of the affected party.



It also proposes punishment for violating the code of conduct which includes suspending press pass of media-persons and downgrading the classification of media outlets.

The bill has raised alarm among journalists

who say that the government seeks to punish the press in the name of regulation.

Along with the NC, the Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal is also planning to stall House proceedings to prevent the passage of the draft legis-

lation, said Laxman Lal Karna, a senior leader of the Madhesi-based party.

Meanwhile, Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) has announced the second phase of protests against the Media Bill being tabled in the Parliament.

Over 900 posts taken down from social media platforms during LS polls

NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI): Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, removed a total of 909 posts during the Lok Sabha election, following directions from the Election Commission (EC).

Facebook alone took down 650 posts, followed by Twitter (220), ShareChat (31), YouTube (five) and WhatsApp (three), Director General (Communications) in the EC

Dhirendra Ojha said on Sunday, after the seventh and final phase of polling was concluded.

Of the 650 posts taken down by Facebook, 482 were political messages posted during the “silence period”.

The “silence period” starts 48 hours before the hour set for conclusion of polling in a particular phase. The seventh phase of polling came to a close at 6 pm on Sunday, so the “si-



lence period” had begun at 6 pm on Friday for this phase.

As many as 73 social media posts were po-

litical advertisements in the “silence period”, two were violative of the Model Code of Conduct, 43 were related to

voter “misinformation”, 28 were dubbed as those crossing the limits of decency, 11 were related to exit polls and 11 were hate speeches, Ojha said.

There were also 647 confirmed cases of paid news, of which the maximum of 342 were reported in the first phase itself, he added.

During the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, 1,297 confirmed cases of paid news were reported, Ojha said.

Thousands gather to remember victims of civil war in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, MAY 18 (PTI): Thousands of Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka observed the 10th anniversary of the brutal civil war between the government and LTTE by lighting oil lamps and remembering those who lost their lives in the over three-decade-long conflict.

Tamils gathered at Vellamullivaikkal, the scene of the final battle on May 18, 2009 when the government forces killed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, bringing to an end the bloody armed conflict fought mainly in the north and east of the island nation.

At least 100,000 people were killed in the conflict. Thousands of people, including security personnel, are still reported to be missing after the war.

According to the Army, 27,000 soldiers were lost in the war.

The anniversary falls nearly a month after Easter Sunday bombings, the worst terror attack in the country that killed 258 people and injured over 500 others.

The event saw attendance from people of all age groups. A child who lost her mother during the war lit an oil lamp to start the programme.

We would like to declare today as the Awakening Day of Tamil Nation against genocide and we declare year 2019 is a year to heighten the international support for political justice and campaign against genocide,” Mullivaikkal Remembrance Forum, an organisation voicing the concern of Tamils, said

during the event.

They vowed to strengthen the call to refer Sri Lanka to the International Crimes Court for alleged war crimes committed during the war with the LTTE.

The government gained victory over the LTTE which had been fighting for a separate state for nearly three decades.

The Tamils alleged that thousands were massacred during the final battle, while the Lankan Army denies the charge, claiming it as a humanitarian operation to rid the Tamils of LTTE's control.

Students of the Jaffna University also held a commemoration ceremony at the institution's premises and stressed on the need for justice for Tamils in the country.

The government will commemorate the war heroes during the Victory Day celebrations on Sunday, the Ministry of Defence said in a statement.

President Maithripala Sirisena will preside over the programme.

“To coincide with the “Dasavarshikabhisheka” commemoration, it is requested from the general public to light a ‘Lamp of Peace’ at all places of worship, state and private sector organizations, homes, police stations and tri-forces establishments island-wide on 2019.05.19 at 1900hrs,” it said.

However, human rights organisations blamed the government of failing to provide justice to the victims even after a decade after the war, the Colombo Gazette reported.

LS polls come to close; nearly 64 pc voting recorded in last phase

NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI): Voting for the marathon seven-phased Lok Sabha elections came to a close on Sunday as nearly 64 per cent turnout was recorded in the last phase of polls in 59 seats, which also featured Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency Varanasi.

In the 2014 general elections, the highest ever voter turnout of 66.40 per cent was recorded.

Over 8,000 candidates were in fray for 542 Lok Sabha seats across the country this year. Polling in Vellore seat in Tamil Nadu was deferred due to excessive use of cash.

An average of 66.88 per cent voters exercised their franchise in the last six phases and the entire polls were spread over 38 days. Counting of votes will be taken up on May 23.

Incidents of violence in West Bengal and clashes in Punjab were reported Sunday in the last phase which also saw EVM glitches and poll boycott at some booths. The fate of 918 candidates was decided in this phase.

Voting took place in 13 seats of Punjab and an equal number of seats in Uttar Pradesh, nine in West Bengal, eight seats each in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, four in Himachal Pradesh, three in Jharkhand and the lone seat Chandigarh.

In Uttar Pradesh, 56.84 per cent voting was recorded in 13 Lok Sabha seats, officials said. The turnout in Varanasi was 58.05 per cent, while in Gorakhpur, it was 57.38 per cent, the Election Commission said.

The highest turnout was 62.40 per cent in Maharajganj, while Ballia reported the lowest turnout of 52.50 per cent.

Violence erupted in Chandauli Lok Sabha constituency, where state BJP chief Mahendra Nath Pandey is seeking re-election, when supporters of the saffron party and the Samajwadi Party clashed.

A report from Chandauli said the fingers of Dalits had been inked before they could actually cast their vote in Tara Jivanpur village under Alinagar police station. Officials said an FIR was registered in the matter.

There were also reports of poll boycott from certain places in Gorakhpur, Mirzapur, Varanasi and Mau.

Incidents of violence were reported in West Bengal where 73.51 per cent of over 1.49 crore electorate exercised their franchise in nine Lok Sabha seats.

According to BJP's North Kolkata candidate Rahul Sinha, a crude bomb was hurled near Girish Park in the constituency around noon. Police, however, said crackers were burst in the area, and polling was underway peacefully.

In Kolkata south, TMC candidate Mala Roy alleged that she was stopped from entering polling booths.

Sporadic clashes were reported in Kolkata and its surrounding areas, with TMC workers claiming that voters were being intimidated by central forces outside booths.

BJP candidate Nilanjan Roy in Diamond

Harbour constituency alleged that his car was vandalized in Budge Budge area. Similar reports also came in from Jadavpur constituency, where BJP candidate Anupam Hazra's car came under the attack of unidentified men.

“Polling has by and large been peaceful in the nine seats. There have been no complaints of any violence from any of the polling booths,” an election official told PTI.

“There were also reports of EVM glitches in several polling stations. We have sent reserve EVMs to booths, where the voting process was temporarily hampered due to technical glitches,” he added.

There were reports of clashes, allegedly between the BJP and TMC activists, from Kankinada under the Bhatpara Assembly seat where a by-poll was underway.

The Barrackpore Police Commissionerate deployed Rapid Action Force (RAF) to control the situation there, a senior polling official said.

Punjab saw a polling percentage of 59 per cent in 13 Lok Sabha seats. In Chandigarh seat, about 64 per cent turnout was registered. Maximum polling percentage was witnessed at 64.18 in Patiala and the lowest was in Amritsar at 52.47.

In the morning, there were some reports of technical glitches in EVMs at several places including Ludhiana, Samana and Moga. Punjab's Chief Electoral Officer S Karuna Raju said eight ballot units, 13 control units, and eight voter-verified paper audit trail have been replaced.

Rachna Books turns 40...

transformation of Sikkim from obligation labour to wage labour.

The book published by Rachna Books is arguably the first monograph on the history of Sikkim, and one in which the author challenges the traditional Sikkimese historiography through rigorous historical enquiry by comparing it to original seventeenth and eighteenth century sources and exposes the contradictions found within traditional narrative traditions.

The book highlights not only how and why traditional historiography was developed, but also redefines contemporary knowledge of the history of Sikkimese state formation.

The book touches on key themes such as Tibetan understandings of state, kingship and the role of Buddhism in justifying political administration as well as social stratification and the economy of pre-modern Sikkim.

Most exit polls project...

“I don't trust Exit Poll gossip. The game plan is to manipulate or replace thousands of EVMs through this gossip. I appeal to all Opposition parties to be united, strong and bold. We will fight this battle together,” she tweeted.

News channel ABP said the BJP may win nine seats in Odisha. It had won only one in 2014.

Exit polls in the country have had mixed record on accuracy.

However, Congress ally and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah, said every single exit poll cannot be wrong. “Time to switch off the TV, log out of social media & wait to see if the world is still spinning on its axis on the 23rd (May),” he tweeted.

Some social media users pointed out that election results in Australia proved most psephologists and news polls wrong.

BJP spokesperson Gopal Krishna Agarwal said people have given their approval to the Modi government's work and asserted that the NDA will win more than 300 seats when votes are counted.

Congress spokesperson Sanjay Jha slammed the exit polls as ridiculous and claimed that silent voters will be kind on May 23. The UPA will do better than the NDA, he claimed.

Justice Rastogi tours North Sikkim

MANGAN, MAY 19 (IPR): Justice Ajay Rastogi of the Supreme Court of India, accompanied by his spouse and family members, is in Sikkim on a ten-day visit starting 16 May, 2019.

On the fourth day of his stay here, Justice Rastogi visited North Sikkim. On his arrival at ITBP Camp, Rangrang, he was accorded a warm welcome by Judicial Magistrate Jabyang Dorjee Sherpa, Mangan, and DSP LB Chettr, Chungthang



and ITBP Officials.

Thereafter, Justice Rastogi made a brief halt at the ITBP camp at Chungthang and proceeded for Lachen in the afternoon.

As informed by his Liaison Officer, Raju Sharma, Justice Rastogi will visit Gurudongmar and Yumthang on 20 May and 21 May respectively and then return to the capital.

EVM glitches, sporadic violence mark final phase of polling in Bengal; 72.91pc turnout recorded

KOLKATA, MAY 19 (PTI): Voting machine glitches and sporadic incidents of violence in parts of West Bengal marked the final phase of Lok Sabha elections, which recorded 72.91 per cent turnout till 5pm in the nine parliamentary constituencies of the state on Sunday, officials said.

Till 5pm, Mathurapur (SC) recorded the highest turnout at 78.52 per cent, followed by Basirhat at 77.77 per cent and Diamond Harbour at 77.40 per cent, a senior Election Commission official said.

Jaynagar (SC) recorded 75.81 per cent turnout, Barasat 74.41 per cent, Dum Dum 73.05 per cent, Jadavpur 70.97 per cent, Kolkata Dakshin 67.09 per cent and Kolkata Uttar 61.18 per cent till 5pm of polling, they said.

Polling was also conducted for by-elections to four Assembly constituencies in Bengal, necessitated due to resignations by sitting MLAs who are contesting the parliamentary polls.

There have been reports of clashes, allegedly between the BJP and TMC activists, from Kankinada under the Bhatpara Assembly constituency where by-election was underway, officials said.

Bombs were hurled at an office of the ruling TMC in Kankinada and was then set on fire with the central forces stepping in to bring the situation under control, they said.

The Barrackpore Police Commissionerate had to deploy Rapid Ac-

tion Force (RAF) to control the situation there, a senior polling official said.

The Election Commission has sought a report from the North 24 Parganas district magistrate in connection with the violence in Bhatpara, which recorded 61.30 per cent polling, he said.

“Polling was absolutely peaceful. There was no report of any violence from anywhere in the nine constituencies. The incidents reported were very minor and necessary action was immediately taken,” the official said.

“There were, however, reports of EVM glitches in several polling stations. We had to send reserve EVMs to the booths, where the voting process was temporarily hampered due to technical glitches,” he told PTI.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, however, alleged that the central forces and the BJP carried out “tortures” during Sunday’s election.

“Since this morning, BJP workers and CRPF personnel carried out unprecedented tortures on voters. I have not seen such thing ever,” Banerjee told reporters after casting her vote.

Former Trinamool Congress MLA and now BJP leader Arjun Singh, whose son Pawan Singh is contesting the Assembly by-election from Bhatpara seat against TMC’s Madan Mitra, alleged that he was “confined inside a room” by state police and his movements were “totally restricted”.

“I have been cooper-

ating with the administration as well as police all through so that polling is conducted peacefully. But it was Madan Mitra who started creating problems in the area. And when we tried to stop him, the state police confined me inside a room saying that they were trying to control the situation,” Arjun Singh said.

Habibpur (ST) Assembly constituency saw 71.60 per cent turnout, Islampur 71.53 per cent, Bhatpara 67.26 per cent, while Darjeeling recorded 60.80 per cent, the EC official said.

Meanwhile, BJP’s Kolkata Uttar candidate Rahul Sinha claimed that a crude bomb was hurled near Girish Park area in the constituency around 12pm, creating panic among voters.

Police, however, said those were crackers and polling was peaceful.

In the Kolkata Dakshin constituency, TMC candidate Mala Roy alleged that she was stopped from entering polling booths.

There were also reports about vandalisation of cars of Nilanjan Roy, the BJP’s Diamond Harbour constituency candidate, and Anupam Hazra, the party’s nominee from Jadavpur.

A total of 1,49,63,064 voters decided the fate of 111 candidates from West Bengal in the final phase.

Altogether 710 companies of central forces were deployed at 17,042 polling booths in the state to ensure free and fair voting, the official said.

Nearly Rs 3,500 crore worth cash, liquor, drugs seized during LS polls

NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI): Cash, drugs, liquor and precious metals worth Rs 3449.12 crore were seized by enforcement agencies since the Lok Sabha polls were announced on March 10, the Election Commission said on Sunday.

The seizure is nearly three times the figures of the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, the figures show.

In 2014, the overall seizure was Rs 1,206 crore, Director General (Election Expenditure) in

the EC Dilip Sharma told a press conference.

Between March 10 and May 19, Rs 839.03 crore in cash, liquor worth Rs 294.41 crore, drugs worth Rs 1270.37 crore, precious metals, including gold, worth Rs 986.76 crore and “freebies”, including sarees, wrist watches, aimed at inducing voters worth Rs 58.56 crore were seized, he said.

The total comes to Rs 3449.12 crore.

Exit polls gossip, don’t trust them: Mamata

Kolkata, May 19 (PTI): Dubbing exit polls as “gossip”, West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said she doesn’t trust such surveys, as the “game plan” is to use them for “manipulation” of EVMs.

Most exit polls telecast a majority for the ruling BJP-led NDA in Lok Sabha elections with varying numbers, as the seven-phase democratic exercise ended Sunday.

“I don’t trust Exit Poll gossip. The game plan is to manipulate or replace thousands of EVMs through this gossip. I appeal to all Opposition parties to be united, strong and bold.

We will fight this battle together,” Banerjee said in a tweet.

In West Bengal, some of the exit polls suggested the TMC getting 24 seats, the BJP bagging 16, the Congress two seats and the Left Front drawing a blank.

Two exit polls telecast by Times Now gave the NDA 296 and 306 seats, while they projected 126 and 132 for the Congress-led UPA.

Nearly 61 per cent voters turned out to cast their vote on Sunday in the seventh and the final phase of the Lok Sabha election held in 59 constituencies across eight states and Union Territories.

Manaw Utthan Sewa Samiti celebrates Buddha Jayanti

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 MAY:

Manaw Utthan Sewa Samiti, Rongneck branch, celebrated Buddha Jayanti at Rongneck Gram Prasashan Kendra in East Sikkim on Saturday. The celebration was attended by local Panchayat Members, social workers and residents of the area, a press release informs.

MUSS Sadhvis spoke on the life of the Buddha and stressed upon the need to follow the message of Lord Buddha.

On the occasion, the



Sadhvis also presented gifts to the panchayats, social workers and Mem-

bers of Aprajita Self Help Group on behalf of the Samiti.

NOTICE

In view of ensuing counting for Lok Sabha/Assembly Election 2019,

this is to inform to the General Public that all the public related official

work will be suspended from 13/5/2019 till 25/5/2019.

By Order.

DISTRICT COLLECTOR/EAST

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CHANGE OF NAME

I, SANTOSH KUMAR PRADHAN, S/O SHRI DURGA PRASAD PRADHAN, R/O Pipalay, Gelling Samsing, P.O. Pipalay, P.S. Naya Bazar, West Sikkim solemnly declare that previously my name has been recorded as “SANTOSH KUMAR SHRESTHA” instead of “SANTOSH KUMAR PRADHAN”. I have changed my name “SANTOSH KUMAR SHRESTHA” to “SANTOSH KUMAR PRADHAN” for all purpose and farther records vide affidavit dated 26th March 2019. Sl. No- 054038 before the Oath Commissioner, East Sikkim Gangtok.

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Rohtang Pass reopens after 6 months

Manali (HP), May 19 (PTI): The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) on Sunday opened the Rohtang Pass, the gateway to Lahaul and Spiti valley, after a gap of six months.

A large number of Lahaul residents, living in the Kullu-Manali area had a sigh of relief as one has to travel through the Rohtang Pass to commute between Kullu and Lahaul valley.

Meanwhile, the district administration has restricted the movement of tourist vehicles towards the Rohtang Pass for safety reasons. They have been allowed to go up to Gulaba.

“We are allowing the movement of Lahaul-Spiti residents towards Lahaul from the Manali side. The tourists can go up to Gulaba only for snow-related activities,” Manali sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) Ashwani



Kumar said.

According to the BRO, they opened the road despite several challenges in sub-zero temperature.

A BRO official said despite all odds like heavy snowfall, landslides and rough weather, the BRO has been able to connect Lahaul valley with Manali through the Rohtang Pass around 4 am.

As the opening coincides with the day of voting, the voters were also able to move to La-

haul to cast their votes.

This year, it has been a tough task as the snow clearance teams encountered 30-40 feet of snow at Beas and Rani nullahs and area around the Rohtang Pass, the official said.

The team also encountered a lot of avalanches, the official said.

Although it was snowing as latest till May 17 at the Rohtang Pass, in spite of that, the BRO was able to achieve the target, he added.

Corrupt Practices

To stem the wrong, people need to step up

Corruption, most accept, is a necessary evil. Work just won't get done if there was no graft involved, many would like to believe. Is it really so? It shouldn't, but it is, and this is because the two common interpretations of corruption are skewed. First, let us take the example of how the government sees corruption. Corruption for regimes in power the world over is something that the Opposition does. In a democracy, this Opposition is almost always the former government [of a government in waiting] and graft charges are the most convenient ploy to nail opponents. This is not necessarily because there are too many instances of corruption [given India's dismal track-record of convictions, there appears to be too little corruption in higher places], but because corruption allegations demand no substantiation. The people will believe the corruption charges because according to them everyone is corrupt and because the investigating agencies are controlled by the State, the investigations can be made to stretch ever longer and then the courts can take up more time. Few expect corruption charges to stick, but it at least keeps an opponent occupied on another front. Examples abound, the Hawala scandal, the Bofors issue, the coal and the 3G cases, more recently the Rafale murkiness and while on it, there has always been a steady march of Sikkim's leaders in-waiting and leaders past their prime making frequent trips to Delhi with corruption charges against the present dispensation. And the list keeps growing longer with still more cases, still more allegations still more complaints. The bottomline however is that corruption charges are just a stick in the hands of the politicians to whip up a witch-hunt with. Now, let's see how the people understand corruption. For most, it is something that gets their work done. They feed the monster to make their own lives better. That said, they still see themselves as suffering because of the corruption, not as cogs of the nexus. Many who make a noise about corruption are either politically motivated [as the slew of dismissed PILs in the Courts will bear out] or are offended because someone else benefited from the graft when even they were in the race. This perhaps is the crowning corrupt practice of all.

Does that mean that things cannot be changed?

That cannot be so. Democracy cannot fail the people so hopelessly. Of course things can change, the Right to Information Bill was one step towards that end. The powers-that-be will keep trying to wrap it in reams of red-tape, but it is bound to unspool ever so often and will stay empowered from the day the people realize that it is their right to know that matters not their right to be informed. To illustrate this point further one needs to look at the history of information in Indian history. In the immediate years after Independence, the nation produced personalities who were undoubtedly "genuine leaders" - leaders who did their homework, were committed to the people and exposed scams in the Parliament. Those leaders did the job for the people, they kept them informed, built public consensus, followed up on it and demanded justice. Then Indira Gandhi happened and the coterie raj began. Leaders became yes-men and politics failed India and reached its nadir with the two-year Emergency. Then, the fourth estate stepped in and took on the role of informing the people. Almost all post-80's scams were unearthed by committed journalists. But the media scene has changed since, tokenism has replaced commitment and the people have failed the media too; how else does one explain the irony of the most consistently pathbreaking newspaper [read Indian Express] not even figuring in the circulation race and losing out to publications that seek to primarily.

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Rwanda and Sri Lanka: A tale of two genocides

SHARRY AIKEN & CHERAN RUDHRA-MOORTHY
theconversation.com

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide and the 10th year since the Tamil genocide in Sri Lanka. While the 1994 Rwandan genocide has become part of the world's collective memory, the 2009 Tamil genocide has not.

Mullivaikkal Genocide Remembrance Day on May 18, named after the village that was the site of cataclysmic violence, is a day to remember those who died in the Sri Lankan conflict. Mullivaikkal commemoration events have been taking place around the world this month.

However, 10 years and a series of United Nations reports and resolutions have made little progress toward truth, accountability or reparations for the survivors of atrocity crimes in Sri Lanka. In the aftermath of the recent Easter Sunday bombings, the spectre of ethnic violence has resurfaced.

The Rwandan genocide offers important lessons for Sri Lanka.

TUTSIS SLAUGHTERED

An estimated 800,000 Tutsis and politically moderate Hutu were killed in just 100 days in 1994. Thousands more were subjected to sexual violence and tortured in a systematic campaign by the Hutu ethnic majority.

Fifteen years later, another slaughter unfolded — this time in northern Sri Lanka. The protracted civil war between the national government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was coming to a catastrophic end. The goal of an independent state for the minority Tamils was slipping away.

Throughout the conflict, both sides failed to respect human rights and international humanitarian law. Unlawful killings and enforced disappearances carried out by the Sri Lankan security forces were daily occurrences. The LTTE was condemned for its suicide bombings and forcible recruitment of child soldiers.

For most of the 2000s, the LTTE was operating as a de facto state in



the north and east. By early 2009, military losses had gradually crushed the LTTE's civil administration of these areas.

The LTTE and an estimated 330,000 Tamil civilians were trapped in a small piece of land on the north-east coast in the Mullaitivu District. The government ordered the UN to evacuate their last few international workers from the region while international media were excluded and local journalists silenced.

CARNAGE UNFOLDED

Transatlantic cellphone photos and a few video clips had begun circulating with images of the unfolding carnage. Hospitals on the front lines were systematically shelled, as were food distribution lines and even Red Cross ships attempting to evacuate the wounded.

Within a few months, a brutal siege of the officially declared "safe zone" and the indiscriminate shelling of Tamil civilians concentrated there brought the war to an end. The Sri Lankan government celebrated its successful "humanitarian rescue operation." In fact, it was genocide.

By August 2009, Britain's Channel 4 News was broadcasting gruesome footage of summary executions and rape perpetrated by Sri Lankan soldiers. Dozens of surrendering Tamils, including senior Tiger political leaders and their families, had been shot dead by soldiers as they walked out

of the safe zone hoisting white flags.

In 2012, the UN Secretary General estimated that 40,000 civilians were killed over the final five months of the conflict. The exact number, as in many conflict situations, remains contested and is likely higher.

Once the conflict ended, hundreds of thousands of Tamils were interned in squalid camps in the northern Vanni region. Even today, thousands of Tamils remain displaced in their own country.

'WAR WITHOUT WITNESS'

If the Rwandan genocide was a genocide foretold, yet no action was ever taken by the international community, then the Tamil genocide was deliberately hidden and dubbed the "war without witness."

In both cases, the UN and the European Union had direct warnings but opted against taking action. The international community's inertia in Rwanda and Sri Lanka has been acknowledged as "grave failures."

The establishment of an international criminal tribunal was an explicit attempt to grapple with Rwanda's past. Convictions were secured in the cases of 61 "ringleaders." A groundbreaking decision on sexual violence as an act of genocide was among its many rulings. Local "gacaca courts" conducted some two million trials. A truth commission continues efforts to promote reconciliation between the Hutu and Tutsi peoples.

Climate change is putting even resilient and adaptable animals like baboons at risk

ISABELLE CATHERINE WINDER
theconversation.com

Baboons are large, smart, ground-dwelling monkeys. They are found across sub-Saharan Africa in various habitats and eat a flexible diet including meat, eggs, and plants. And they are known opportunists — in addition to raiding crops and garbage, some even mug tourists for their possessions, especially food.

We might be tempted to assume that this ecological flexibility (we might even call it resilience) will help baboons survive on our changing planet. Indeed, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which assesses extinction risk, labels five of six baboon species as "of Least Concern". This suggests that expert assessors agree: the baboons, at least relatively speaking, are at low risk.

We know people are having huge impacts on the natural world. Scientists have gone as far as naming a new epoch, the Anthropocene, after our ability to transform the planet. Humans drive other species extinct and modify environments to our own ends every day. Astonishing television epics like *Our Planet* emphasise humanity's overwhelming power to damage the natural world.

But so much remains uncertain. In particular, while we now have a good understanding of some of the changes Earth will face in the next decades — we've already experienced 1°C of warming as well as increases in the frequency of floods, hurricanes and wildfires — we still struggle to predict the biological effects of our actions.

In February 2019 the Bramble Cay melomys (a small Australian rodent) had the dubious honour of being named the first mammal extinct as a result of anthropogenic climate change. Others have suffered range loss, population decline and complex knock-on effects from their ecosystems changing around them. Predicting how these impacts will stack up is a significant scientific challenge.

We can guess at which species are at most risk and which are safe. But we must not fall into the trap of trusting our expectations of resilience, based as they are on a species' current success. Our recent research aimed to test these expectations — we suspected that they would not also predict survival under changing climates, and we were right.

BABOONS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Models of the effects of climate change on individual species are improving all the time. These are ecological niche models, which take information on where a species lives today and use it to explore where it might be found in future.

For the baboon study, my masters student Sarah Hill and I modelled each of the six baboon species separately, starting in the present day. We then projected their potential ranges under 12 different future climate scenarios. Our models included two different time periods (2050 and 2070), two different degrees of projected climate change (2.6°C and 6°C of warming) and three different global climate models, each with subtly different perspectives on the Earth system. These two different degrees of warming were chosen because they represent expected "best case" and "worst case" scenarios, as modelled by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Our model outputs allowed us to calculate the change in the area of suitable habitat for each species under each scenario. Three of our species, the yellow, olive and hamadryas baboons, seemed resilient, as we initially expected. For yellow and olive baboons, suitable habitat expanded under all our scenarios. The hamadryas baboon's habitat, meanwhile, remained stable.

Guinea baboons (the only one IUCN-labelled as Near Threatened) showed a small loss. Under scenarios predicting warmer, wetter conditions, they might even gain a little. Unfortunately, models projecting warming and drying predicted that Guinea baboons could lose up to 41.5% of their suitable habitat.

But Kinda baboons seemed sensitive to the same warmer and wetter conditions that might favour their Guinea baboon cousins. They were predicted to lose habitat under every model, though the loss ranged from a small one (0-22.7%) in warmer and dryer conditions to 70.2% under the worst warm and wet scenario.

And the final baboon species, the chacma baboon from South Africa (the same species that are known for raiding tourist vehicles to steal treats) is predicted the worst habitat loss. Under our 12 scenarios, habitat loss was predicted to range from 32.4% to 83.5%.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS

The IUCN identifies endangered species using estimates of population and range size and how they have changed. Although climate change impacts are recognised as potentially causing important shifts in both these factors, climate change



effect models like ours are rarely included, perhaps because they are often not available.

Our results suggest that in a few decades several baboon species might move into higher-risk categories. This depends on the extent of range (and hence population) loss they actually experience. New assessments will be required to see which category will apply to chacma, Kinda and Guinea baboons in 2070. It's worth noting also that baboons are behaviourally flexible: they may yet find new ways to survive.

This also has wider implications for conservation practice. First, it suggests that we should try to incorporate more climate change models into assessments of species' prospects. Second, having cast doubt on our assumption of baboon "resilience", our work challenges us to establish which other apparently resilient species might be similarly affected. And given that the same projected changes act differently even on closely related baboon species, we presumably need to start to assess species more or less systematically, without prior assumptions, and to try to extract new general principles about climate change impacts as we work.

Sarah and I most definitely would not advocate discarding any of the existing assessment tools — the work the IUCN does is vitally important and our findings just confirm that. But our project may have identified an important additional factor affecting the prospects of even seemingly resilient species in the Anthropocene.

[the writer is Lecturer in Zoology, Bangor University]

While highly imperfect, these transitional justice mechanisms have generated a record of what really happened and why it happened.

In contrast, Sri Lanka has repeatedly reneged on pledges to investigate and prosecute war-time atrocity crimes. Abductions, torture in custody and sexual violence remain rampant amid a long history of failed promises.

OCCUPIED LAND NOT RETURNED

The harassment of Tamil activists as well as targeted violence against the Muslim community continue. Commitments to demilitarize and return occupied land are unfulfilled. Weak state structures, the lack of an independent judiciary and a culture of impunity remain significant obstacles.

As Harvard University scholar Martha Minow suggests, the relentless repetition of atrocity requires a pathway between "too much forgetting" and "too much memory," between vengeance and forgiveness. In Sri Lanka today, memory and memorialization are radical counterpoints to official state narratives that resist accounting for the past.

Holocaust survivor Primo Levi once said:

"It happened; therefore, it can happen again... it can happen everywhere."

So long as impunity and the failure to address the root causes of atrocity crimes continue in Sri Lanka, lasting peace will remain elusive. Acknowledging the past must be a precondition to meaningful reconciliation.

A poem in Cheran's anthology *In a Time of Burning* evokes the challenge of closure in the wake of mass violence:

"there is neither sea nor wind
for us to dissolve the ashes
proclaim an end
and close our eyes."

[Sharry Aiken is Associate Professor of Law, Queen's University, Ontario; Cheran Rudhramoorthy is Associate Professor, University of Windsor]

TMC alleges central forces ‘intimidating’ voters

KOLKATA, MAY 19 (PTI): The Trinamool Congress Sunday alleged that the central forces were “brutally torturing” and “intimidating” voters in West Bengal and acting as per orders of BJP leaders.

In a statement, Trinamool Congress lawmaker Derek O’ Brien said, Bengal wants peaceful polling, which BJP doesn’t.

“Today, in Bengal, central forces are brutally torturing and intimidating common citizens, especially the marginalised. Even physically handicapped persons are being tor-



tured. Central forces are also threatening voters ‘kamal dabao nahin toh thok dega’ (vote for BJP or will shoot you),” he said.

“Media has all these videos. Many are already in the public domain,” he added.

O’Brien alleged that central forces were “mercilessly” beating

up Trinamool Congress workers.

“We are against violence and want the polling process to be peaceful. But the BJP is resorting to high level of violence in the Bhatpara Assembly bypoll. This is dangerous for democracy,” he said.

“This is a horror story being executed with the

full support of central forces,” O’Brien said.

In Bhatpara, an Assembly bypoll is on with TMC candidate Madan Mitra taking on BJP’s Pawan Kumar Singh.

The Bhatpara seat was previously held by Arjun Singh of the Trinamool Congress, who recently defected to the BJP and is now the saffron partys Lok Sabha candidate from the Barrackpore constituency. Pawan is son of Arjun Singh.

The BJP termed the allegations baseless and said it was goons supported by the TMC who were trying to intimidate

voters.

“They are afraid of their defeat, that is why TMC is resorting to violence. Had they been so confident about their victory then what is the need for so much of violence,” BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya said.

In Delhi, BJP leader and Union minister Nir-mala Sitharaman also urged the poll body to order the central forces to remain in Bengal till the Model Code of Conduct is in place, as it expressed concern that the TMC may target a section of voters after polling is over.

Bangladeshi man to return home after 23 years



TEZPUR (ASSAM), MAY 19 (PTI): A mentally challenged Bangladeshi, who had crossed over to India accidentally over two decades ago, finally met his family in a jail here on Sunday, officials said.

Azbdar Peada (55) had accidentally crossed over to India from Bangladesh 23 years ago, they said.

Peada is fit now and he would leave for his country next month, the officials of Tezpur Central jail said.

His brother, Iqbal Peada (28), who was a toddler at that time, after years of rigorous search finally managed to trace his elder brother to Tezpur Central Jail in Assam and met him on Sunday morning and the 55-year-old man was united with his younger brother once again.

It was an emotional moment for both the siblings and Iqbal thanked the Indian authorities for providing treatment to his elder brother, a mentally challenged person.

“Mother told me that my brother was a mental patient and he was missing for the last 23 years,”

Iqbal said.

“When I was a small boy, he somehow entered India. I am happy to see him fully fit now and he spoke to me at length,” Iqbal added.

Azbhar has fully recovered and can write details about his parents as well as his home in Bangladesh, the Superintendent of Tezpur Central Jail, Mrinmay Dawka, said.

“I want to go to my native place. I am eagerly waiting to meet my mother and other family members,” Azbhar said.

A resident of Satkhira district in Khulna division, Azbhar had gone missing around 23 years ago. His parents Abdul Karim Peada and Momena Khatun searched for but failed to find him.

Azbhar, after accidentally crossing over to India, had stayed in Assam for some years, and then he was caught in the state’s Dhemaji district on July 1, 2015.

He was convicted and sent to jail for two years on November 16, the same year, under various sections under various sections of the Passport Act and Foreigners Act.

He served his sentence till December 30, 2017 and he was sent to Tezpur Central Jail the following day so that he could be deported to Bangladesh.

Since Azbhar could provide any information about his home due to his mental condition, he was kept there.

The authorities of the jail then started treating him for his illness. Azbhar responded to the treatment and became well.

After tracing the whereabouts of his elder brother, Iqbal, who is an established businessman now, contacted Bangladeshi social worker Amlendu Das to help meet Azbhar and bring him back home.

Das then contacted Shah Mohammad Tanvir Monsur, the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Guwahati, for the necessary support.

The Superintendent of Tezpur Central Jail, Mrinmay Dawka, said that Azbhar will be allowed to leave the jail next month as soon as the necessary paper works are complete.

TMC writes to EC over PM’s Kedarnath visit

NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI): The TMC wrote to the Election Commission Sunday alleging the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Himalayan shrine of Kedarnath is a violation of the model code of conduct.

“Even though the Election campaign for the last phase of polling for 2019 Lok Sabha is over as long as back on May 17 at 6 pm, surprisingly Narendra Modi’s Kedarnath Yatra is being covered and widely televised for the last two days in all national as well as local media. This is a gross violation of the Model Code of Conduct,” Trinamool Congress spokesperson Derek O’Brien said in the letter.

He said the prime minister even announced that the master plan for the Kedarnath Temple is ready and also addressed the public and the media at the temple town.

“It is absolutely unethical and morally in-



correct.

“Every minute detail of his activities during the visit is being widely publicised with an ulterior motive to influence voters directly and/or indirectly. “Modi Modi” chants are also being heard from the background,” he said.

The TMC leader said all these moves were well calculated with the “ill intention to influence the voters” on the polling day.

It is unfortunate that the poll body has not taken any action against

the PM, it added.

“Election Commission, the highest body and the eyes and ears of the democratic process, remains blind and deaf to the gross violation of the MCC. I would request you to take immediate action and stop telecast of such surreptitious and unfair campaign which is also morally wrong,” he said.

Modi, who is on a two-day visit to Uttarakhand, reached Kedarnath on Saturday and is expected to be at Badrinath temple Sunday.

Maha: Parched villagers damage dam gate for water

NASHIK, MAY 19 (PTI): In an incident underlining severity of water crisis in drought-hit Maharashtra, some villagers allegedly damaged a gate of the Dhanoli dam in Nashik district to divert stored water, police said Sunday.

The breach led to flooding of fields of farmers and wastage of lakhs of litres of water.

Police have arrested four persons from Dalwat village for allegedly damaging the gate of the dam on Saturday evening.

The incident has further worsened the water scarcity situation in the north Maharashtra district, with nearly 50 per cent of total 15 TMC feet water stock in the dam being wasted after the breach, said Irrigation department Executive

Engineer Abhijit Roundal.

“This is an unfortunate incident,” he added.

Several districts in Maharashtra are reeling under severe drought this year, with many villagers totally dependent on water tankers.

Several villages have been receiving water tankers once in three days.

According to police, some people lost their patience and damaged the gate of the dam at around 6 pm Saturday.

A police official said that sudden gushing of water in fields caused panic.

The arrested persons are identified as Pramod Pawar (60), Shankar Chavan (55), Sonu Gavit (60) and Subhash Pawar (60), all residents of Dalwat village, he said.

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Mary Kom and Co. aim to pack a punch in India Open

Tapan Mohanta Guwahati, May 19 (PTI): All eyes will be on six-time world champion Mary Kom as 72 Indian boxers vie for honours against 200 pugilists from 16 nations in the second edition of India Open beginning here Monday.

Asian Games champion Amit Panghal and World Championship bronze medallist Shiva Thapa will be among the other top Indian boxers in the tournament which will serve as a preparatory meet for the World Championships (an Olympic qualification event) from September 7-21 in Yekaterinburg (men’s) and from October 3-13 in Ulan Ude (women’s), both in Russia.

Having opted out of the Asian Championships last month in order to prepare for the World Championships, 2012 London Olympics bronze medallist Mary Kom will make her competitive debut at home in 51kg in the USD 70,000 five-day meet at the Karmabir Nabin Chandra Barmdolo Indoor Stadium here.

“Yes, of course, there are expectations from me. I feel more confident in 51kg after the last few months of rigorous training. It feels like a homecoming to come here



(Guwahati) and I hope there will be tremendous support for all the Indian boxers,” said the star pugilist who had won gold in 48kg category at the first edition of India Open in 2018.

While Mary Kom will be India’s biggest medal hope yet again, Amit Panghal (52kg) will be looking to continue his dominance after winning the Asian Championships gold.

Assam’s Shiva Thapa (60kg), who created a record by winning medals in four consecutive Asian Championships, will be aiming to impress the home crowd and so will Ankushita Boro (64kg), a gold medallist at the 2017 World Youth Championship.

2017 World Boxing Championships bronze medallist Gaurav Bidhuri (56kg) will be another big medal hope from India.

It will be an emotional homecoming for Thapa who will look to make it special three years

after being crowned the national champion here.

The Guwahati pugilist recently created history in Bangkok when he won a bronze at the Asian Championship that made him the first Indian male boxer to claim four consecutive medals at the continental meet.

“I am hungry to change the colour of the medal. am very excited to get a chance to play in my hometown,” said Thapa who will next switch to 63kg to earn a successive Olympic berth.

Thapa is among six Assamese boxers who will be seen in action in the tournament.

Keeping in mind the approved weight categories for Olympic qualification, some of the Indian pugilists have changed their weight categories including Asian Games gold medallist Panghal, who has changed his weight category from 49kg to 52kg.

“This will be a good platform for us to face top-notch boxers and

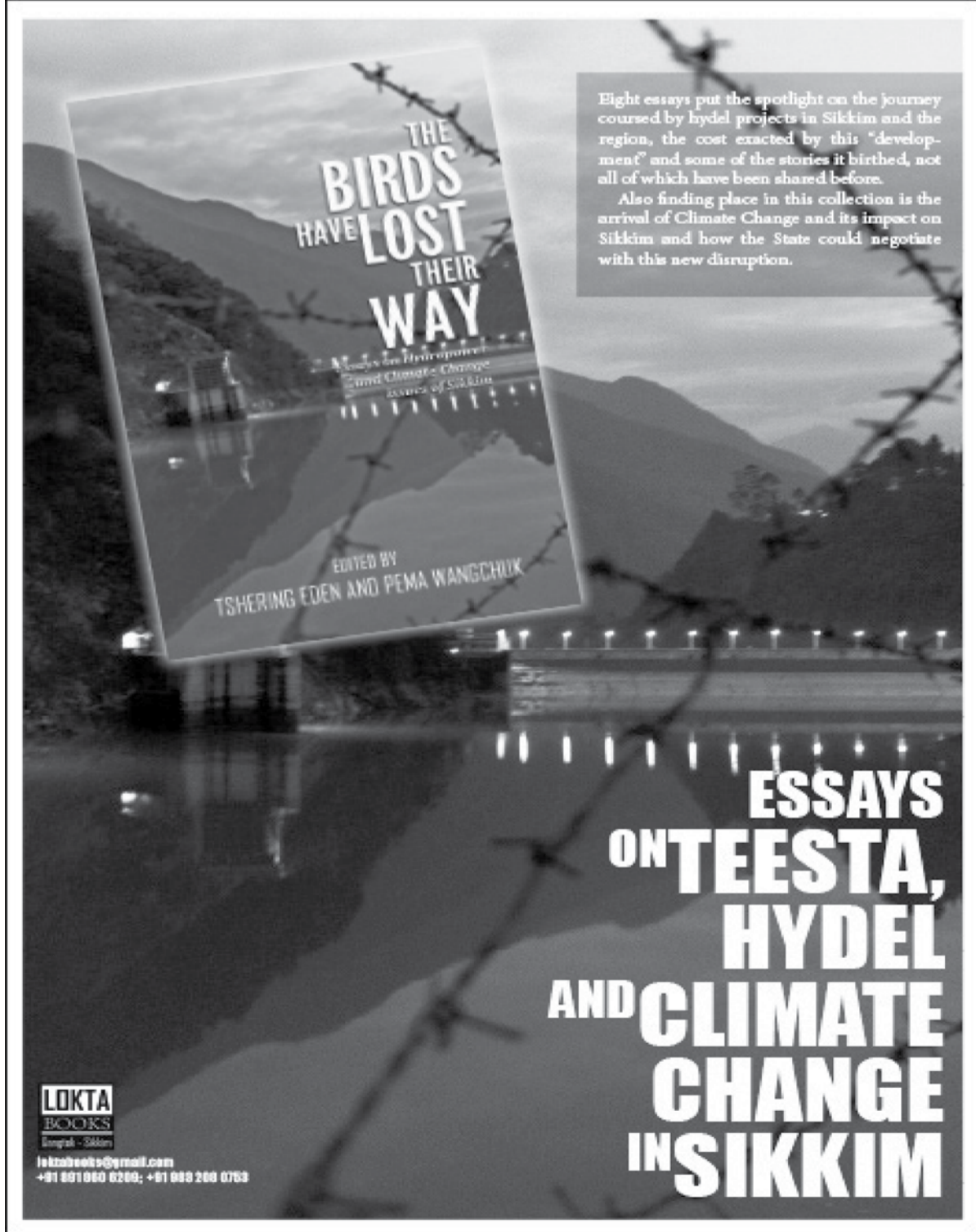
gauge the competition as we gear up for the World Championships,” Panghal said.

Assam’s Bhagyabati Kachari too has made a similar change in weight category while Asian Championships bronze medallist Manisha Moun will be fighting it out in 57kg for the very first time.

Simranjit Kaur, a silver medallist at the continental tournament in 64kg, has switched to 60kg as well and will be competing with former world champion Sarita Devi, who added her eighth Asian medal this year.

After her stunning performance at the Asian Championships, where she became the first Indian to win a gold in 81kg, Pooja Rani has gone back to her original weight category of 75kg.

The top international boxers lineup includes Asian Games gold medallist Batur Bobo, Asian Games champion Mirzakhali Mirazizbek, two-time World Championships medallist Jasurbek Latipov of Uzbekistan, Youth Olympic champion Brian Agustín Arregui of Argentina, world champion and reigning Asian Championships Josie Gabuco of Philippines.



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A sixth triumph looks realistic for Australia

ABHISHEK HORE
NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI): Synonymous with World Cup success, Australia will enter the showpiece with realistic hopes of widening the gulf between them and the rest, having tenaciously rallied from the ball-tampering saga that prompted radical changes in their cricketing culture.

The five-time winners have showed exemplary resilience in navigating the tempestuous phase that nearly broke their back and spirit, and the recent away series victories against India and Pakistan are proof of their never-say-die attitude.

The much-awaited return of David Warner and Steve Smith from their one-year bans has bolstered the team and boosted the morale of those, who will wear the yellow jersey in the United Kingdom.

The squad has com-

pleted its World Cup preparatory camp in Brisbane and headed to the the United Kingdom via a stopover in the Gallipoli peninsula.

Located in the southern part of East Thrace, the European part of Turkey, Gallipoli peninsula holds great significance in Australia's history as this was the place where 11,000 Australian and New Zealand soldiers lost their lives in a disastrous Allied military offensive.

The most successful one-day side in history, Australia have lifted the trophy a record five times, including three consecutive wins between 1999 and 2007.

Winning three on the trot is no doubt unprecedented but such has been Australia's dominance in the tournament that they emerged victorious



even in the 1987 edition when they entered as rank outsiders after the exodus of some of their best players.

Hosting the tournament for only the second time four years ago along with New Zealand, Australia were not overwhelming favourites to lift the trophy but they still became champions at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground.

It will not be surprising at all if the current team, captained by Aaron Finch, triumphs at the hallowed Lord's on July 14.

They certainly have the wherewithal to go all the way and record what could be an unprecedented sixth title.

Warner's year-long international exile has come to an end and with nearly 700 runs in the In-

dian Premier League, he has sounded a warning to rival bowlers bracing up for the mega event.

While he did not quite set the IPL on fire like Warner, Smith showed glimpses of his old touch in the three warm-up matches against New Zealand recently.

After finding form in the latter part of the IPL, Smith played well for unbeaten innings of 89

and 91, enough for Justin Langer to say he had "slept better".

Stripped of their roles as captain and vice-captain respectively and banned for 12 months for their involvement in the ball-tampering scandal during the Test series against South Africa in March last year, both Smith and Warner will be using the sport's biggest platform to make amends for their indiscretion in Cape Town.

It remains to be seen if Warner is given his usual opening slot or made to bat at number three. Only once in 104 ODI innings has Warner not gone in as opener.

Given the depth of talent and competition for spots there were a number of tough calls the selectors had to make to settle on the 15-man squad.

Dutee faces expulsion from family after revealing same sex relationship

New Delhi, May 19 (PTI): Unapologetic about her same-sex relationship with a younger relative, India's fastest woman Dutee Chand is facing a tough battle of acceptance in her family.

Dutee, who won two silver medals at the 2018 Asian Games, became one of the few athletes in the world to openly admit same-sex relationship.

"I am having a relationship with a 19-year-old woman from my village for the past five years. She is studying B.A. 2nd year in a Bhubaneswar college. She is a relative of mine and whenever I come to home, I spend time with her. She is a kind of soul-mate for me and I want to settle down with her in future," Chand, 23, told PTI from Hyderabad where she is training.

A landmark judgement of the Supreme Court last year had made same sex relationship between consenting adults a non criminal act though marriage between such individuals is still not legal in India.

Dutee, the 100m national record holder (11.24 seconds), says while her parents have not yet raised any objection to her relationship, her eldest sister has threatened to not only expel her from the family but also send her to jail.

"My eldest sister kind of wields power and authority in my family. She has thrown out my elder brother from home because she does not like his wife. She has threatened me that same will happen to me. But I am also an adult who has individual freedom. So, I decided to go ahead with this and make it public.

"She said another reason for coming out in the open was that she did not want something which happened with sprinter Pinki Pramanik, who was accused of rape by her live-in partner.

Pinki was a member of the 2006 Asian Games 4x400m relay gold winning team.

"We did not want this kind of situation happening in future," Dutee said.

Dutee, who was banned for one year by the international athletics federation in 2014 for having higher testosterone (male sex hormone) level than permissible, hails from Chaka Gopalpur village at Jajpur district of Odisha and she was born to Chakradhar Chand and Akhuji Chand.

Dutee won a landmark 'gender' case against the IAAF in an appeal to the Court of Arbitration in 2015 and she was allowed to compete after being banned for one year.

The CAS suspended the IAAF's policy on hyperandrogenism for two years.

Later the world body changed the policy, which applicable only on female athletes competing in the range of 400m to 1500m, leaving out Dutee, who competes in 100m and 200m, from its ambit.

Dutee said her partner is free to marry whoever she wants to if she decides to do so in future.

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Afridi says he did not blow whistle on spot-fixing scandal of 2010

KARACHI, MAY 19 (PTI): Former captain Shahid Afridi Sunday said that he did not blow the whistle on the spot-fixing scandal that rocked world cricket during Pakistan's tour of England in 2010.

Having discussed in detail about the spot-fixing scandal in his autobiography 'Game Changer', Afridi insisted he did not pass on the information or messages to the tabloid 'News of the World' which eventually broke the story.

"These players (Salman Butt, Muhammad Asif and Muhammad Aamir) still think that Lala (Afridi) blew the whistle about them to the newspaper that is not true. It was one of my friends in England who passed on the information without informing me and even after that the newspaper carried out its own investigation and sting operation to confirm and trap the players," Afridi said on a news channel.

Afridi said his former team-mate Abdul Razzaq had first talked about the involvement of some players with fixers when the team was playing the World T20 in West Indies in 2010.

"Razzaq kept on telling me after one match against Sri Lanka that he had doubts about Salman



Butt but I did not believe him at that time. I said they are like our younger brothers. Later on as fate would have it a damaged mobile which went to a repair shop and whose owner knew my friend in England revealed messages that surprised me and made me suspect that these players were indeed spot-fixing matches," he said.

Afridi, who retired from international cricket in 2016, said he was hurt and disappointed when Butt's involvement in the scandal was confirmed as he liked him a lot.

He also maintained when he first saw the messages about Butt, Asif and Aamir, he could not sleep for few days and did not have the courage to share it with Razzaq who realised something was wrong.

Asked why he did not confront Butt and the other players about the messages, Afridi said he was let down by the reac-

tion of the team management including Waqar Younis and Yawar Saeed when he first showed them the messages.

"It was disappointing for me. My first job was to inform the management, I did that they said 'beta kya karsakta hai ab (son, what we can do now)'. That is also why I gave up Test cricket and the captaincy and returned home."

He conceded that the management did try to warn the players not to meet or mix up with suspicious characters like Mazhar Majeed who was also eventually jailed for his role in the spot-fixing scandal.

Afridi also revealed why he had supported the comeback of Aamir to the Pakistan team after he completed his ban.

"When the 'News of the World' broke the story and I had returned to England for the limited over matches, I confronted the three players and told them to

admit if they had done it as we could help them. Butt kept on denying and even took oath he had done nothing wrong. In contrast, the first time I confronted Aamir he came to me and admitted he had made a big mistake. He also confessed in court," Afridi said.

Afridi also repeated his comments about Javed Miandad and Waqar Younis which he made in his book.

"I still have a lot of respect for both as players. But it is not necessary that a big player can be a good coach and it applied to both. Waqar changed after becoming captain and he had a different personality for the worst after becoming coach.

"He used to interfere in everything and tried to dictate terms. He even used to give me pieces of paper before we went onto the field as who to bowl, when and where to set fielding. As captain this was annoying for me."

He also said that Waqar tried to spread rumours about him in the team and there was a lot of back biting.

Afridi said Miandad had a habit of getting involved in tussle with players.

"The reason we rate Bob Woolmer highly is he gave us space and never got involved in any tussle with the players.

Gogoi, Sirimalla get top billings in Ramesh Desai Tennis



MUMBAI, MAY 19 (PTI): Udit Gogoi of Assam and Sanjana Sirimalla of Telangana have got the pride of place in the singles draw at the MSLTA 13th Ramesh Desai Memorial CCI All India National Under-16 Tennis Tournament commencing here on Monday.

Haryana's Chirag Duhan, India number five, follows number four Gogoi as the second seed followed by Madhya Pradesh's Denim Y1adav (6th-ranked) and Punjab's Dhruv Tangri (number 7) who are seeded third and fourth respectively in the boys' singles.

India number five Renee Singh is seeded second behind national girls' number one Sanjana while Maharashtra's Rutuja Chaphalkar (8th-ranked) and Telangana's

Veda Raju Prapurna (9th-ranked) are the third and fourth seeds respectively, a media release said.

The boys' and girls' singles events will be 64-player draw, while the doubles events for both boys and girls will be a direct 16-pair draw.

Seedings:
Girls' singles: 1. Sanjana Sirimalla (TS); 2. Renee Singh (RJ), 3. Rutuja Chaphalkar (MH), 4. Veda Raju Prapurna (TS), 5. Radhika Mahajan (MH), 6. Sairajesh Bhojar (MH), 7.

Renne Singla (HR), 8. Pari Singh (HR)

Boys' singles: 1. Udit Gogoi (AS), 2 Chirag Duhan (HR), 3. Denim Yadav (MP), 4. Dhruv Tangri (PB), 5. Krishna Hooda (HR), 6. Arjun Kundu (GJ), 7. Aayush Bhat (KA), 8. Heerak Vora (GJ).

It was like watching Sachin bat, Langer on Steve Smith after first hit in England

London, May 19 (PTI): Head coach Justin Langer was in awe of Steve Smith while watching him play during Australia's first practise session here ahead of the World Cup, so much so that "it was like watching Sachin bat".

Comparing Smith to master blaster Sachin Tendulkar was a huge compliment that also sent out a warning to rivals teams ahead of the World Cup beginning on May 30.

Smith, who made his comeback with the IPL after serving out a one-year ban for ball tampering alongside opener David Warner, was in no mood to spare the bowlers in the team's first training session following its arrival in England.

After smashing Pat Cummins for a six over third-man, Smith played another scintillating stroke off Nathan Coulter-Nile, that made Langer say "it was like watching Sachin bat", according to cricket.com.au.

While Warner was on fire in the IPL, Smith found form towards the end of his team's campaign. The former captain then joined the national team back home and made 89 and 91 in two warm-up games against New Zealand.

"As batsman it's brilliant. I watched Steve Smith batting against New Zealand in those three practice games, he's literally a master of the game, so it's nice to have him back," Langer said.

"It's been hilarious for me because whether on the ANZAC cove or in the lunch room or we're in the bus playing cards, he's just shadow batting the whole time.

"He's literally he loves batting, he's shadow batting on the sand, he's shadow batting in the shower I'm not joking! You should see him mate! He just loves batting. From that point it's great to have him back," said Langer.

India go into World Cup as the best bowling side, says Rajput

MUMBAI, MAY 19 (PTI): Former India opener Lalchand Rajput believes the Virat Kohli-led side has the best bowling attack among the 10 teams to take part in the upcoming World Cup, making it one of the favourites for the 50-over showpiece event.

"I think India has got best bowling attack and we have got a very well balanced team. We have got very good all-rounders and if we look at any other team, India is best equipped for that," Rajput, who is also the mentor of Triumph Knights Mumbai

North East, said here on Sunday.

"And if it is a good day our team, it is very difficult to beat them. And Hardik (Pandya) is a great X-factor in the team and (Ravindra) Jadeja who can get going at the lower order, so overall I think we have got a very good chance and I think we should be in the top four," added Rajput, who is now Zimbabwe's coach.

India begin their campaign against South Africa at Southampton on June 5.

Rajput, who was the team's cricket-manager

when India lifted the inaugural T20 held in South Africa in 2007, feels that this team has the a heavy top three in Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma and skipper Kohli.

Asked about the similarities between the World Cup winning 2007 side and the current team, Rajput said, "As I said, there are lot of all-rounders, all-rounders makes lot of difference and I think we have got good all-rounders, the strikers as well, we got a very heavy

top three (batsmen) and that's very important.

"Earlier also there was (Virender) Sehwag, Sachin (Tendulkar), now we have got Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit (Sharma) and Virat (Kohli) and then we have got the X-factor, somebody can really bang like a Hardik Pandya, (Mahendra Singh) Dhoni as usual a great finisher, so we have got a very well balanced team," said the former Afghanistan coach.

Rajput heaped praise on the ongoing T20 Mumbai League saying it will only grow.

"I will continue my athletics career. I am going to take part in the World University Games next month and hope to qualify for the World Championships later this year. My aim to qualify for next year's Olympics, so I am training hard," she said.

While Dutee refused to name her partner, she said the Supreme Court judgement on the issue gave her the courage to go public.

"My partner also agreed that we should make this public and face whatever repercussions it may bring to us. I believe in individual freedom and right to decide how and with whom I will live my life."

She said another reason for coming out in the open was that she did not want something which happened with sprinter Pinki Pramanik, who was accused of rape by her live-in partner.

Pinki was a member of the 2006 Asian Games 4x400m relay gold winning team.

"We did not want this kind of situation happening in future," Dutee said.

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I'm more aggressive now: Shiva Thapa

TAPAN MOHANTA
GUWAHATI, MAY 19 (PTI): World champion-

ship bronze medallist pugilist Shiva Thapa said he is more aggressive in his approach and hungrier for success as he gears up for the India Open boxing tournament beginning here Monday.

The 25-year-old from Assam became the first Indian male boxer to claim four consecutive Asian medals with a 60kg category bronze in last month's Asian Championship in Bangkok.

He had won a gold in 2013, a bronze in 2015, followed by a silver in 2017 at the same tournament.

"You saw in the last Asian Championships too that I play much more freely now. Even more than that, I can readily impress the judges now. I am being more aggressive now," the 25-year-old said at the pre-tournament news conference here.

Armed with a record fourth Asian Championship medal, local favourite Thapa will be fighting it out in the 60kg category in the India Open before

switching to 63kg keeping in mind the approved weight categories for Tokyo Olympic qualification.

"The more punches I can give, the more chances of winning the rounds I have. This is the style of boxing I have adopted now and our coaches too are helping me with this approach. Santiago Sir is working a lot on my technique and I am building on that," he said giving credit to India's chief performance director Santiago Nieva.

The second edition of the India Open kickstarts with 35 men and 37 women boxers from India vying for glory in the competition which will see close to 200 pugilists from 16 boxing powerhouses participating at the Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Indoor Stadium.

Thapa is among six Assamese boxers who will vie for the title in front of their home crowd.

Acknowledging the tremendous support at home, Thapa said: "Every boxer is getting ready to give his best. The competition is very strong so we have been training very well for it.

Austrian president calls for September poll in wake of scandal

Vienna, May 19 (AFP): Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen on Sunday called for fresh elections in September after a corruption scandal embroiling the far-right brought down the coalition government in spectacular fashion.

Just days before key EU elections, Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache was forced to resign in disgrace Saturday following explosive revelations from a hidden camera sting.

Conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz -- whose 18-month coalition with the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) had been held up as a European model -- reacted by pulling the plug on their union.

"My preference is for early elections in Sep-

tember, if possible the beginning of September," Van der Bellen told journalists on Sunday after holding talks with Kurz.

The president will hold further talks with other party leaders over the coming weeks in order to fix a date.

The dramatic developments followed the publication by two German newspapers on Friday of footage from a sophisticated hidden-camera sting months before Austria's last parliamentary elections in 2017.

In the tapes -- of unknown provenance -- Strache is seen openly discussing the possibility of awarding public contracts in return for campaign help for the FPÖ from a woman posing as the niece of a Russian oligarch.



The woman says she specifically wants to gain control of the country's largest-circulation tabloid, the Kronen Zeitung.

Strache is seen suggesting that new owners could make staff changes and use the paper to help his party in its election campaign.

Kurz said Saturday the latest revelations

were the final straw after a string of FPÖ-related scandals dogging the government.

"Enough is enough," the chancellor told a press conference in Vienna.

Strache for his part insisted in his emotional resignation statement that he had been the victim of a "targeted po-

litical attack" but also described his own actions as "stupid" and "irresponsible".

The FPÖ was also due to meet on Sunday to confirm leadership changes after Strache's exit.

Neither Van der Bellen nor Kurz commented on who would replace

the vice-chancellor in the run-up to elections and whether top FPÖ politicians -- including controversial Interior Minister Herbert Kickl -- would be allowed to stay in post.

The damning revelations, which saw protesters take to the streets on Vienna on Saturday, broke as the campaign for European Parliament elections on May 23-26 was nearing its climax.

They risk dealing a blow to a far-right populist alliance marshalled by Italy's Interior Minister Matteo Salvini and in which the FPÖ plays a key part.

The FPÖ's lead MEP candidate Harald Vilimsky had been due to attend a rally organised by Salvini in Milan on Saturday, but cancelled the trip because of the

scandal.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel reacted to the news out of Austria by warning of the dangers of far-right politicians "for sale", who wanted to "destroy the Europe of our values".

The tapes contained a litany of other embarrassing material for Strache, and analysts predicted setbacks for the FPÖ from its current position in the polls.

As well as repeating unsubstantiated rumours about Kurz, Strache also hinted at ways political donations could escape legal scrutiny by going to a foundation linked to the FPÖ.

Elsewhere in the recordings, he discussed the possible part-privatisation of public broadcaster ORF and expressed admiration for

the media landscape in neighbouring Hungary, where press plurality has been severely curtailed under nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Observers said the dramatic events of the past two days were almost a re-run of the last time that the centre-right People's Party (ÖVP) and FPÖ went into coalition, in 2000.

Then as now, after only two years the ÖVP chancellor -- in that case Wolfgang Schuessel -- felt compelled to call snap elections due to strife with his FPÖ coalition partner.

In 2002, the ÖVP emerged strengthened from the elections but it remains to be seen if Kurz, like Schuessel before him, can avoid damage from the fallout.

Australian PM Scott Morrison declares victory; Bill Shorten steps down as Labor leader

By NATASHA CHAKU MELBOURNE, MAY 19 (PTI): Australia's ruling Conservative Coalition led by Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Sunday made a "miraculous" comeback in the general election, defying exit polls and devastating the opposition Labor Party, forcing its leader Bill Shorten to step down.



Around 16 million Australians swarmed to the polling booths across the country on Saturday to elect the nation's 31st prime minister, in what was widely referred to as the climate-change election.

The latest results showed that the Conservative Coalition has won 74 seats while labour secured 66. A party needs 76 seats for a simple majority in the 151-member House of Representatives. It was not clear if 51-year-old Morrison will require the support of independent MPs to govern.

But an independent, Helen Haines, who won from the seat of Indi, said that she would be working with the Coalition in the scenario of a hung parliament. Haines said she was very determined to work with the government on addressing climate change.

Morrison along with his wife Jenny visited a church in Sydney's Sutherland Shire on Sunday in his electorate of Cook where he thanked his local voters.

"I have always believed in miracles... for me and for my government, for all of my team it's all about you...tonight is about every single Australian," a beaming Morrison told his supporters.

"You don't get to be a Prime Minister and serve in that capacity unless you first are a member for your local electorate. I want to thank everybody here in my local electorate and local team," said Morrison, who has only led the government since

last August, when Liberal Party colleagues lost confidence in his predecessor Malcolm Turnbull.

Morrison had wooed voters by saying if re-elected, the Coalition would deliver a stable economy, more jobs and tax cuts. He also promised funds for women's career initiative and domestic violence and conservative plans to deal with climate change.

"Our government will get back to work just as Gladys Berejiklian got back to work in New South Wales, just a few months ago," he told his supporters.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump congratulated Morrison on his election victory.

President Trump congratulated Prime Minister Morrison on his Coalition's victory in Australia's federal election, White House deputy press secretary Judd Deere said.

"The two leaders reaffirmed the critical importance of the long-standing alliance and friendship between the United States and Australia, and they pledged to continue their close cooperation on shared priorities," Deere said.

Center-left Labor Party leader Bill Shorten, who campaigned heavily on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conceded his defeat and said he would resign as the party leader.

"I called Scott Morrison to congratulate him... wished him good fortune and good courage in the service of our great nation. The national in-

terest required no less," Shorten said while addressing his supporters in Melbourne.

A Nine-Galaxy poll released shortly before the voting stations closed in the east of the country showed a victory for the Labor party and Liberal Party-led coalition losing its bid for a third three-year term.

The poll showed the Labor winning as many as 82 seats, beating the ruling Coalition.

On Friday, media reports also endorsed Labor leader Shorten as the best chance to end a "cycle of instability" in Australian politics.

Before elections, the Coalition held 73 seats, while Labor 72 in the House of Representatives.

According to media reports, the ruling Liberal supporters started celebrations at the party headquarters after it became clear that it may form the next government.

The Greens, Centre Alliance and other Katter's Australia party has all taken one seat each. The Coalition managed to make significant gains in Queensland and Tasmania and limited its loss in New South Wales and Victoria.

Former prime minister Tony Abbott, who once described climate change as "crap", lost his seat of Warringah in northern Sydney to independent Zali Stegall, a lawyer and Olympic medallist in Alpine skiing, after suffering a swing of over 13 per cent votes against him.

"This is really ex-

traordinary results, it is a stupendous result, it is a great result for Scott Morrison and the rest of the Liberal team, and Scott Morrison will quite rightly enter the Liberal Pantheon forever," Abbott said, conceding his defeat.

According to last week's Newspan survey, even though Labor took the swing in its favour, the leader approval rating favoured Morrison with 45 per cent saying he would make a better prime minister as compared to Shorten.

Anger over the government's inaction on climate change is said to prove the real difference between the two parties. Australia has experienced some of the worst effects of climate change in recent few years, from deadly bush fires to the destruction of natural wonders like the Great Barrier Reef.

Concern about climate change is now at a 10-year high among Australians, with 64 per cent believing it should be a top priority for the government, according to an Ipsos poll released in April.

The Labor party is promising to cut Australia's carbon emissions by 45 per cent on 2005 levels, compared to the government's minimum pledge of 26 per cent.

Australia has compulsory voting and a complex system of ballots ranked by voter preference. The political, economic and cultural differences varies from state to state on the vast island-continent.

Bangladesh ex-PM Zia trapped between life and death: BNP

DHAKA, MAY 19 (PTI): Jailed former prime minister Khaleda Zia is trapped between life and death as her health has massively deteriorated over the last week due to unhealthy environment, according to her Bangladesh Nationalist Party.



Demanding the immediate release of the 73-year-old three-time former prime minister, the BNP standing committee member Jamiruddin Sircar said that due to the loneliness and lack of proper treatment, Zia is suffering from various ailments including heart disease.

She is lodged in a 200-year-old prison in Dhaka since February last year, serving a 10-year jail term in two graft cases.

"Khaleda Zia is trapped between life and death. Keeping Khaleda in jail, depriving her of bail, is contrary to the Constitution and human rights, since her conviction in any of the case had not been finally disposed off by the Supreme Court," Sircar was quoted as saying by the Dhaka Tribune.

The former parliament speaker asked the

government to allow her to receive proper treatment at a hospital of her choice.

"The government had assured it would make proper arrangement for Khaleda Zia's treatment, but not enough initiatives were taken yet.

"It is a bad sign that they are not letting Zia out for treatment, even in this worsening condition," Sircar said, adding that she is at a serious risk of sudden cardiac arrest.

He also claimed that the cases against Zia are "politically motivated".

BNP Vice Chairman and one of Zia's personal physicians AZM Zahid Hossain, said: "Zia is suf-

fering from high blood sugar... and always needs to be on insulin. She has a sore tongue, which is not healing due to the high blood sugar. Her left shoulder and elbow joint have become insensitive.

"According to her doctors, Zia is a special care patient. It is important to ensure all the facilities needed for her personal care".

The committee claimed that the government has decided to hold trials of the pending cases against her at Dhaka Central Jail in order to prevent her release from jail.

Last year, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina accused Zia of "faking" her illness in jail to avoid ap-

pearances in court where graft cases are pending against her.

The Bangladesh government, citing security reasons, last week set up a new makeshift court adjacent to a prison outside Dhaka to try Zia who is facing several criminal and graft cases.

She was sent to jail in February last year by a local court on charges of embezzling foreign donations meant for an orphanage, named after her slain husband and president Ziaur Rehman, during her premiership between 2001 and 2006.

Rehman, a military ruler-turned-politician, was the founder of the BNP.

Five killed in Honduras plane crash, no survivors

TEGUCIGALPA, MAY 19 (AFP): Four Canadians and an American pilot died Saturday when their small plane plunged into the sea off the Honduran island of Roatan where they were vacationing, firefighters said.

The plane crashed near the town of Dixon



Cove, a few minutes after taking off from the

island's airport, rescuers said.

The dead were identified as Bradley Post, Bailey Sony, Tomy Dubler and pilot Patrick Forseth. The other Canadian pilot, Anthony Dubler, briefly survived the crash but died at the Roatan hos-

pital of his injuries.

The causes of the crash and the registration information for the aircraft were not immediately available.

It occurred as the tourists were headed toward the city of Trujillo, about 77 kilometers (48 miles) from Roatan.

You can contact SummitTIMES @ 03592 208698











PARTY TIME! The socialite, Paris Hilton is spotted backstage at Electric Daisy Carnival in Las Vegas.

'John Wick' director teases more films and TV series

LOS ANGELES, MAY 19 (PTI): "John Wick" franchise director Chad Stahelski says he wants to helm the fourth film in series on the fictitious deadly assassin.

The filmmaker, who directed "John Wick: Chapter 3: Parabellum" in which Keanu Reeves reprised the title role, said he enjoys making these films as there is no limit to the content.

"We create our own mythology, and we have a studio (Lionsgate) that both stays out of our way and supports us on the wacky decisions. If people go see the movie, and it makes money, and they came back to us, Keanu and I have ideas for days.

"It's a fun world. I could live here for the rest of my career. If people like it and want to watch more, I could think of way worse ways to spend your career. We'll let the audience figure that out," Stahelski told Entertainment Weekly.

Lionsgate is also planning to launch the John Wick universe for television.

Last year, it was announced that the studio and Starz are developing a spin-off TV show titled "The Continental"



whose executive producers include both Stahelski and Reeves.

"They have a writers' room working on it right now, trying to develop the first season. Keanu and I have sat with that creative element, and laid out what we

feel makes John Wick special, and what would make the TV show unique. Now, it will be a round of back and forths. But, yeah, Lionsgate is in actual full development of it and it's called 'The Continental'. It should be fun," Stahelski said.

Britney Spears says she will perform again

LOS ANGELES, MAY 19 (PTI): Days after her longtime manager Larry Rudolph said Britney Spears may never perform again, the singer said "of course" she would go back to making music.

On Friday, the singer went out with her boyfriend trainer Sam Asghari to Camarillo Premium Outlets in northwest of Los Angeles, when they were approached by paparazzi.

The couple was accompanied by a bodyguard and the singer appeared in good spirits.

In a video posted by The Blast, a photographer touches upon the claim made by Rudolph regarding her health and career.

When he asked her "are we gonna see you perform again, Brit?", Spears replied with a smile, saying "Of course."

She also said she wanted to tell her fans, "I love you guys."

Rudolf, whose association with the singer goes back as far as her debut album "Baby... One More Time", in 1999, said he wants her to find a "peaceful, happy" place.

Spears, who recently postponed her Las Vegas residency in the wake of her father's Jamie Spears' recent treatment for a ruptured colon, is scheduled to undergo psychological evaluation.

She reportedly told a judge that her father forced her to enter a mental health facility and take medication against her will. The 37-year-old singer had checked herself into a 30-day programme in March in the midst of her father's ongoing health issues.

Rudolf said the decision not to go ahead with the Vegas residency stemmed from the fact that she is "taking time to regroup and get her head together".

Last month, fans protested Spears' hold in a psychiatric facility with "Free Britney" banners, chanting slogans such as, "Hey, ho, Larry Rudolph has got to go," claiming it was her manager's decision to put the star in the facility.

A day after the protest, the singer went on social media to comfort worried admirers, saying she will be "back very soon".

ARIES: If you choose to ignore every bleeping device and message thread for the next 48 hours, don't apologize, Aries! This is a restful, "me first" kind of weekend. Taking care of yourself and enjoying a few scintillating one-on-ones is all you need to focus on! The moon is in private, internal Scorpio and your eighth house of strong emotions, intimacy and eroticism!

TAURUS: With a Scorpio moon activating your partnership realm all weekend, two heads (and hearts) are better than one! What you don't want, however, is another half who can't hold their own next to you. When you're on, you're a force of nature, Taurus, and anyone who's going to team up with you needs to be an equal.

GEMINI: You might have to assume the mantle of authority today, Gemini, so be ready to step up to the plate. Someone is NOT carrying their weight, and if you don't say something, nothing is going to change. Ack! Rather than pretending it's not the case or tiptoeing around the issue, address it directly.

CANCER: Even if you're just running out for coffee or a quick grab-and-go at the farmer's market, spruce yourself up a little. With the moon in aesthetic Scorpio and your amorous, glamorous fifth house, you could be in for a weekend of surprises. You never know who you might run into at the beekeeper's honey stall—or where a random conversation might lead.

LEO: Home is where your head, heart and hustling hands are all weekend, as the Scorpio moon hovers in your domestic fourth house. Don't rush to do work that can hold till Monday—and don't be too quick to tend to a friend who needs a pep talk. You've got a dozen household projects that have been in the pipeline for too long already, and now is the perfect time to put your desires front and center. Change that light fixture; put the new bedding on and maybe shop for your dream sofa.

VIRGO: Whatever was dragging you down last week, let it go, Virgo! The Scorpio moon is beaming down in your playful third house, beckoning you to get out and

interact with your favorite band of merry-makers. Link up with friends who have the pulse of the cultural scene and mix it up with some let-your-hair-down fun like karaoke or a burlesque show.

LIBRA: Are you waiting for this magic moment to arrive where your schedule just opens up? Reality is, you're the one setting the pace for your life. If you keep go-go-going at breakneck speed, you're going to burn out eventually. Preempt that from happening, asap. This weekend dangles the perfect carrot. The moon will be in introspective Scorpio both days, giving you a chance to hit reset on those wildly tipping scales.

SCORPIO: With la luna floating through your sign all weekend, you have planetary permission to take all the "Scorpio time" you need! Start by looking at your calendar. What do you wish you could magically erase? It's okay that you've come down with a case of reverse-FOMO and want to sit everything out until next week. Anyone who adores you or cares about your wellbeing will understand!

SAGITTARIUS: Clear the excess from your calendar and plan to put your own needs and desires first this weekend, Sagittarius. The moon is hunkered down in introspective Scorpio and your internally focused twelfth house for the next two days, and anything too crowded or cacophonous will fry your circuits. Apologize to anyone you might disappoint—or ask if they're open to shifting plans around!

CAPRICORN: Hole up at home base and unplug for the next two days? Sorry, Capricorn—not with the Scorpio moon lighting up your communal eleventh house. People are your priority this weekend, especially the ones whose sense of adventure is matched only by their amazing taste in food and bands! Take the reins and play social director or let your innermost circle know that the Sea Goat is down for whatever fun is in the offing.

AQUARIUS: With the moon beaming in your career zone on both Saturday and Sunday, you'll find it hard to leave work at the office. Even if you're physically engaged in

other activities, mentally you'll still be mulling something you didn't finish (or complete to your standards) when you logged out on Friday. So here's a thought: Instead of being an apparition at brunch or your friend's gallery opening, duck home and devote a finite amount of time to getting this done.

PISCES: Get up and get OUT! With the Scorpio moon jetting through your nomadic ninth house, the weekend is like a two-day treasure hunt for all the coolest hangouts. And guess what, Pisces? They might not be found in your zip code. Maybe it's time to pack a bag for a quick road trip or perhaps a cheap, last-minute flight to a friend two states away. (Cough, cough: Do we feel a Monday sick day coming on?) Or just stay home and play tourist in your own town. Any change of scenery would be an instant mood booster. Check out a different live-music venue; eat at an authentic restaurant in another part of town. Are there any foreign films showing or outsider-art shows you could patronize? On Sunday, indulge your interest in the mystical side to life.

Bill Murray confirms his appearance in Jason Reitman's 'Ghostbusters'



LOS ANGELES, MAY 19 (PTI): Veteran actor Bill Murray has revealed that he will be making an appearance in the upcoming "Ghostbusters" reboot, directed by Jason Reitman.

The 68-year-old actor played paranormal investigator Peter Venkman in the first two "Ghostbusters" movies opposite Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis and Ernie Hudson.

In 2016, he made a cameo in Paul Feig's female-centric reboot.

"This franchise paid for my son's college. We made this thing. We are the caretakers

of it. It's a great thing and it was a really fun movie to make. It's a real movie with some really funny stuff in it," Murray told IndieWire on the sidelines of the Cannes Film Festival.

Sharing how he got involved with Feig's latest instalment of the franchise, Murray said, "I was in that movie just because they asked me, and I knew if I said no, I was saying I didn't support that movie. I felt like, 'OK, I'm going to support them because I support them as people.' So I did that one and I would do this next one.

Zoe Saldana to star in 'Keyhole Garden'



Los Angeles, May 18 (PTI): "Avengers: Endgame" star Zoe Saldana will be toplining the upcoming romance drama "Keyhole Garden".

The film will mark the directorial debut of the actor's husband, Marco Perego-Saldana. He has also penned the script along with Rick Rapoza, reported Variety.

The film is about the sprawling romance of a man and woman whose love for each other struggles to overcome the divisiveness of life on America's southern border.

Described as a "timely exploration of the humanity of immigration and the fragility of life", the story will be told through three interwoven narratives: a young boy trying to save his undocumented friend from deportation; an immigration agent unknowingly dooming a former lover; and a cartel trafficker carrying out his last mission.

Julie Horn, Alexandra Milchan, Perego-Saldana, Robert Kravis and Karl Herrmann will produce the project. Rick Yorn will serve as executive producer.

Saldana, 40, most recently portrayed Gamora in Marvel's "Avengers: Endgame". The actor is currently working on "Avatar" sequels, where she is set to reprise her role of Neytiri from the 2009 original.

Alexandra Daddario to star in 'Celestial Blue'

CANNES, MAY 19 (PTI): Actor Alexandra Daddario is set to headline horror thriller "Celestial Blue".

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Australian writer/director Zak Hilditch will helm the project.

The "Baywatch" star will play a flight attendant faced with a deadly pandemic on-board a Sydney-bound flight from Los Angeles. She is forced to summon inner strength she never knew existed.

Covert Media, headed by CEO Paul Hanson, will finance, produce and handle worldwide rights on the project.

Liz Kearney is also on board as producer.

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