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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Bhaichung-Golay meeting likely on Tues

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:
Hamro Sikkim Party vice president Bhaichung Bhutia and SKM president PS Tamang [Golay] are slated to meet soon. The meeting, sources inform, is the first round of talks between the two political parties on various issues of Sikkim along with discussing possible electoral alliance. The meeting is likely to be held on 15 January in Gangtok, sources add.

State Govt should withdraw support to Citizenship Amendment

Bill: SSS
SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:
Save Sikkimese Soul, a Sikkim-based organization, has demanded that the State Government withdraw its support to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019. SSS remains convinced that the Bill, which has also received the assent of the President, if extended to Sikkim, would be in violation of Article 371F of the Constitution of India because it has the potential to do away with Sikkim Subjects and Certificate of Identification in the near future.

Apart from the SDF's support for the Bill in Parliament, SSS has also demanded that Opposition parties also clear their stand on the Bill. "Failing to which, the future will held all of us responsible for our cowardliness," a press communiqué issued by SSS co-ordinator, Passang Sherpa, contends. The release also points out to the CM's recent statement that he is yet to study the Bill and its implications to argue that support was extended without any study, discussion or deliberations on its merits and demerits.

Home Guards want salaries at with constables and regularization of service



SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:
Home Guards attached with different departments and other organisations in Sikkim have appealed to the State government to provide them salaries at par with police constables. They have also demanded regularization on completion of five years of service like

is being done for other ad-hoc, MR and WC employees of Sikkim. They are seeking an appointment with the Chief Minister to place their issues and grievances directly with him. Addressing a press conference here today, a section of Home Guards informed that despite repeated efforts, they have

not been able to get an appointment with the CM to place their issues. They stated that although the CM had mentioned in his recent speech that Home Guards of Sikkim receive the best salaries among Home Guards in the country, Home Guards in Delhi and Goa draw much higher reimbursements.

Where Home Guards in Sikkim are paid Rs 312 per day and take home Rs 9,672 in a 31-day month, Home Guards in Delhi are drawing Rs 20,190 per month and those in Goa receiving Rs 18,770. "We are not satisfied with our salaries when compared to salaries of home guards in other States as it is very dif-

ficult for us to run our families on this salary so we are urging the government to provide us salary at par with police constables," they told the press conference.

They informed that home guards go through a written and viva examination to get the job and also undergo a 90-day police training.

They are also demanding regularization of service on completing 5 years. In this regard, the mentioned that some Home Guards in Sikkim have already put in 30 years of service.

"We are very hopeful that the CM will understand our problems and regularise our services on completion of five years of service," they said.

They mentioned that the CM had announced such a regularisation last year and following the same a notification had also been issued but no follow-up action has been taken since then.

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Rock-climbing event begins at Rock Garden



JORETHANG, 13 JAN (IPR): Minister AK Ghatani inaugurated the five-day long rock climbing adventure sports event at Rock Garden, Zoom, today.

The activity is being organized by Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Eco-Tourism (IHCAE), Chemchey with Passang K. Sherpa, Senior Instructor, IHCAE, guiding the participants.

The inaugural programme was attended by SE Electrical, Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, LD Pradhan, SE Civil (S/W) Milan Pradhan, Administrator IHCAE Ujirman Rai along with in-

structors, Panchayats and other concerned officials.

The Minister said that Rock Garden has been constructed as a tourist destination with a view to generate employment and promote local tourism.

The State Government has developed the area as a potential hub of village tourism, eco tourism and adventure tourism, he added.

He directed the concerned officials to further develop this garden in terms of infrastructure and other allied facilities and improve the existing facilities which will in turn create huge tourism

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Golay announces dist status for Soreng if SKM forms Govt



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:
Sikkim Krantikari Morcha president, PS Tamang [Golay], inaugurated a zonal party office for West District at Soreng Bazaar in West Sikkim on Sunday. On the occasion, he also announced that should SKM form the next government in Sikkim, Soreng sub-division will

be upgraded to a district and that national level sports persons of the State will be offered suitable posts to serve the State. Addressing the people, the SKM president stressed that he will work tirelessly for the underprivileged and urged the people to support the party to bring change in the State.

He further dismissed the recent Rojgar mela and the 20,000 jobs given to youth as a political stunt of limited durability.

He further alleged that the SDF government has discriminated the needy when distributing blankets but the SKM has provided blankets without any partiality.

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Mohammad Mazaruddin and Ranjana Tamang win Sikkim Great Run in Jorethang

SUMMIT REPORT
JORETHANG, 13 JAN:
Mohammad Mazaruddin today won the Great Run [10KM] segment of Sikkim Run held here today in the 11-17 boys' category. In the girls category, Ranjana Tamang bagged the first position followed by Sabina Rai and Siksha Rai in second and third positions. Similarly, Riwaj Chhetri and Abhinash Deokota came second and third in the boys category. In the half Marathon of 21 kms in the age group of 18 to 45 years, the first position was grabbed by Bikash Bhu-



jel with Saroj Mangar and Prabal Chhetri coming second and third. In women's category, Chandrakala bagged the first position followed by

Preeity Rai and Eaksahang Limbu. Similarly, in the Dream Run of 5kms in the age group of 18 and above, Sheikh Mizaz fin-

ished first, followed by Prashant Rai and Poonam Cintury. Additionally, in the Veterans' Run of 10kms

turn to pg02

Swachh Survekshan 2019
The Biggest Cleanliness Survey Of Urban India

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

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Gangtok on Monday,

14 Jan

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

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

India invites Chinese participation in its plans to expand Electric Vehicles

BEIJING, JAN 13 (PTI): India plans to achieve electric mobility by 2030 and welcomes Chinese industries participation and investment in the expansion of Indian Electric Vehicles (EV) Market, NITI Aayog Principal Advisor Anil Srivatsava has said.

Srivastava, who led an industry delegation from India and addressed summit forum 'Global Zero Emission and All Electric Vehicle' held from January 11-13, met Chen Qingtai, President of China EV100, and invited China's participation in India's ambitious plans to go for full electric mobility.

"He mentioned that for India's ambitious objective of achieving electric mobility by 2030, we see very substantive role for the Chinese EV players," a press release from the Indian Embassy here said on Sunday.

China EV100, a private electric vehicle association of over 200 leading Chinese electric mobility industries, is organising the 5th China EV100 Forum in Beijing. The government as well as industry representatives from all over the world attended the event. China is both the biggest manufacturer and the biggest market for cars globally. But the car sales fell in 2018 by about six per cent to 22.7 million units for the first time in 20 years, sending shock waves across the industry.

The drop is largely attributed to the continued slowdown of the Chinese economy, stringent measures to restrict new car sales to cut automobile pollution and the ongoing trade war with the US.

The most recent figures show that New Energy Vehicles (NEVs), a category which includes electric and hybrid models, has defied trend of slowdown, growing substantially over the past year, a recent BBC report said. China's NEV market made a major gain this month with Elon Musk, the CEO of US electric carmaker Tesla, on Monday laying foundation to set up USD seven billion plant in Shanghai. Tesla became the first to benefit from a new C policy allowing foreign carmakers to set up wholly-owned subsidiaries in China.

The new plant, Tesla's first outside the US, is located at a high-end manufacturing park in the southeast harbour of Shanghai. It is designed with an annual capacity of five lakh electric cars.

In his meeting with Chen, Srivatsava said that given the market size of India and China together, there is huge cooperation potential for EV industries of both countries.

Rimbi Maghey Mela begins

GYALSHING, 13 JAN (IPR): UD&HD Minister NK Subba inaugurated the Rimbi Maghey Mela, which is also being pegged as an Eco Tourism Festival, at Sewaro Rock Garden at Rimbi here in West Sikkim today.

The Minister was accompanied by Yuksam MLA Sonam Dadul Bhutia, chairperson Social Welfare CB Gurung; ADC West Karma L. Lepcha along with SDM and BDO Yuksam and HoDs of line departments posted in West District.

The Mela features various cultural programs, stalls of Sikkimese ethnic groups and also departmental stalls of Election Department, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, KVK and Social Welfare Departments.

In his address, the Minister commended



how efficiently the program was conducted and also called on the people to work with the District authorities to ensure that the peace of the area

was not disturbed. He also urged the youth to be more enthusiastic about the festival and enjoy responsibly. The MLA also acknowledged help received

from the District officials who helped them to make the event a success.

A stall dedicated to the EVMs and VVPAT awareness and sensitiza-

tion by the Election Department of West Sikkim was one of the chief attractions with more than 100 mock votes cast on the first day by visitors.

India's largest startup ecosystem inaugurated in Kerala

KOCHI, JAN 13 (PTI): India got its largest startup ecosystem Sunday when Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurated here a 1.8-lakh-square-foot facility housing incubation set-ups across a string of segments in modern technology.

The Integrated Startup Complex under the Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) includes the ultra modern facilities of Maker Village that promotes hardware start-ups, the BioNest that promotes medical technologies, BRINC which is the country's first international accelerator for hardware startups; BRIC which aids developing solutions for cancer diagnosis and care, and a Centre of Excellence set up by industry majors such as UNITY.

Overall the Kerala Government is working for the state to have a total area of 2.3 crore sq ft of IT space (up from 1.3 crore sq ft last year). The opening of the new complex at the Technology Innovation Zone (TIZ) is a major step towards achieving the objective, Vijayan said in his speech at KINFRA Hi Tech Park, Kalamassery.

"We are also planning to give direct jobs to 2.5 lakh in IT," he said, adding that the government was working to ensure that information technology fosters social development.

After the completion of three more projects, Kerala will have startup and incubation space of 5 lakh sq ft, which will be the largest of this type in the world.

No less than 30 applications for patent has gone from startups with the 13.5-acre TIZ, the CM noted, lauding it as a sign of the high-quality work in the zone. Simultaneously, Kerala was sensing increasing optimism in boosting software export from the state.

M Sivasankar, secretary, IT (Kerala), pointed out that the entire space at the TIZ facility has been sold out.

"This has never happened in our country,

where it usually takes a couple of years for an incubator to get the whole area occupied," he said. "The first three floors of the new complex have been furnished, while the rest of the floors have already got allotted to various startups."

"The campus has another incubator complex coming up and it will be opened early next year," Sivasankar said.

Besides the Maker Village with its 30-odd startups, the facility has nascent firms working in fields such as biotechnology, computer-aided design, augmented/virtual reality and advanced communication.

Kalamassery MLA Ebrahim Kunju, in his presidential address, said Kerala has been proving to be a superpower in south India in the field of IT and incubation. "We expect more help from the government in its related endeavours," he added.

Ernakulam MP Prof K V Thomas launched BioNest, which is a startup the KSUM has established in association with Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology with financial aid from BIRAC, under the union government's Department of Bio Tech.

It has 20 companies involved in deep research in biotechnology and allied fields.

The BRIC, which was inaugurated by Kerala Health Minister K K Shailaja, will chiefly work in fighting cancer. The state has 50,000 additions to its cancer patients every year, the minister noted, adding that the BRIC will work in accordance with a Cancer Strategic Action Plan and funds totalling Rs 350 crore.

Officials pointed out that TIZ was set to become the country's largest Work-Live-Play space exclusively dedicated to startups. The Maker Village, set up by the IITM-K in association with KSUM and supported by Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, houses 65 startups working in electronics hardware technologies.

Young Saudi asylum-seeker arrives in Canada to official welcome



TORONTO, JAN 12 (AFP): A young Saudi woman who caused a sensation by defying her family and seeking asylum abroad was welcomed with open arms in Toronto Saturday at the end of an exhausting international odyssey.

Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland greeted Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, 18, after she landed in Toronto, wearing a blue ball cap and a gray hoodie emblazoned in red with the word "CANADA." Smiling broadly, she posed for photographers with Freeland at her side, but made no statement.

"She had a pretty long journey and is exhausted and prefers not to take questions for the moment," Freeland said.

Qunun captured the world's attention with a trail of Twitter posts that ignited a #SaveRahaf movement as she fled what she said was an abusive family in ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia.

Thai authorities backed down on an attempt to deport her after she arrived in Bangkok on a flight from Kuwait a week ago, turning her over to the US's refugee agency instead.

Then on Friday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made the surprise announcement that Canada would take her in.

The move is sure to further strain Canada's relations with the kingdom. That relationship went sideways last August over Ottawa's rights criticism of Saudi Arabia, prompting Riyadh to expel the Canadian ambassador and sever all trade and investment ties in protest.

Canada also sparked fury in Riyadh by demanding the "immediate release" of jailed rights campaigners, including

Samar Badawi, the sister of jailed blogger Raif Badawi, whose family lives in Quebec.

Qunun's attempt to flee Saudi Arabia was embraced by rights groups as a beacon of defiance against repression.

"Ms. al-Qunun's plight has captured the world's attention over the past few days, providing a glimpse into the precarious situation of millions of refugees worldwide," said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"Refugee protection today is often under threat and cannot always be assured, but in this instance international refugee law and overriding values of humanity have prevailed." Raif Badawi's wife Ensaf Haidar also praised Canada, calling Freeland on Twitter "the real hero" behind efforts to prevent Qunun's repatriation to Saudi Arabia.

Qunun alleged that she was abused by her family -- who deny the allegations -- and rights groups also said she had renounced Islam, risking prosecution in Saudi Arabia.

Qunun first said she was aiming for Australia, where officials had suggested they would give serious consideration to her claim for asylum, which was endorsed as legitimate by the UNHCR on Wednesday.

But late Friday Thailand's immigration police chief Surachate Hakparn said a smiling and cheerful Rahaf was bound for Toronto and had left on a flight after 11pm (1600 GMT).

"She chose Canada ... (and) Canada said it will accept her," Surachate told reporters at Bangkok's main airport.

"She is safe now and has good physical and mental health. She is happy." Qunun left from the

same airport where her quest for asylum began in a swift-moving process that defied most norms.

On Friday afternoon Qunun posted a cryptic tweet on her profile saying, "I have some good news and some bad news." Her account was deactivated shortly afterward in response to death threats she had faced, her friends said.

But she was back online later in the day, tweeting: "I would like to thank you people for supporting me and saving my life. Truly I have never dreamed of this love and support." Qunun's skillful use of Twitter saw her amass tens of thousands of followers within a week, highlighting her plight at a time when Saudi Arabia's human rights record is under heavy scrutiny following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year.

Her deployment of social media allowed her to avoid the fate of countless other refugees who are quietly sent back home or left to languish in Bangkok detention centers. She refused to see her father, who traveled to Thailand and expressed opposition to her resettlement.

Surachate said her father and brother were due to return home on a flight in the early hours of Saturday.

Although Qunun's asylum case moved quickly, the final maneuvers that led to her flight to Canada remain largely a mystery.

Surachate had told reporters earlier Friday that "two or three" countries were ready to offer her asylum.

SMTWA president thanks CM for Rojgar Mela

SUMMIT REPORT SINGTAM, 13 JAN:

President, Singtam Motors Transport Workers Association, Tinku Adhikari, has thanked Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, for the Rojgar Mela in which 12,000 youth were given government service.

"This is a historic event and the date will be always remembered

because now the unemployed youth will respect the value of life which has been devalued and disrespected due to unemployment. With such effort and declaration, democracy has won and it has been proven that the SDF government is the government by the people, of the people and for the people," the SMTWA president said.

SKM keeps up condemnation of CM's comments on menstruation

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha today refuted allegations of misrepresentation leveled on it by the women's front of the Sikkim Democratic Front and said that they stand by their demand for an apology from the Chief Minister for his comments on menstruation and has even announced plans to take legal action against the Chief Minister if he does not apologise.

Zamyang Bhutia, the North District Secretary of the SDF, today claimed that the CM's comments had outraged the modes-

ty of women.

She informed that they were preparing documents and will definitely lodge a legal complaint in the appropriate forum within a day or two.

Pabitra Bhandari, who also the SKM Nari Morcha general secretary, echoed the sentiment and remains insistent that the Chief Minister was insulting women.

SKM's students' wing has also taken the same position and the SKM Nari Morcha has urged the National Women's Council and other NGOs to come forward to address the matter appropriately.

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Home Guards want...

However, they have urged the government to regularise them on completing five years instead of the currently proposed 15 years. They have also demanded medical facilities, travel allowance and an end to the practice of withdrawing them from service in case of any mistakes.

Rock-climbing...

opportunities, thereby boosting the local economy.

The Minister further asked the gathering to organise the rock climbing events here throughout the year for the greater benefit of locals and also called on the Tourism & Civil Aviation Department to promote the Rock Garden as one of the best rock climbing centres in the state.

The IHCAE Administrator spoke about the importance of basic minimum training required for rock climbing and urged the young enthusiasts to opt for it.

Earlier in the afternoon, the Minister also flagged off four bus services for Maghey Mela celebrations. The bus service will be free on 15 January.

Golay announces dist...

He urged the people to support SKM to establish democracy in the truest sense in the State. He alleged that the CM has been misleading and lying to the people on different issues of the State.

Mr Tamang also said that the CM's allegation that SKM was indulging in smuggling was totally baseless and had been fabricated to deceive the people. He countered that Ministers of SDF Government could be involved in smuggling as they have been moving freely with the help of the police escorts. On the same, he demanded that police undertake proper checking of vehicles of ministers.

Mohammad Mazaruddin...

in the age group of 45 and above, in the men's category Subarna Subba came first, followed by Kamal Thapa and Karma Tshering Bhutia in the second and third positions respectively.

Also today, Susan Bhutia was felicitated in the Veteran women's category as were the youngest runner Master Behang Subba and the oldest runner MK Pradhan.

One guest participant from Sweden, Cavli Joacim Aslim was also felicitated.

The 5th Sikkim Run was flagged off by Minister AK Ghatani, and has been organised by Zest, a Gangtok-based NGO, in collaboration with the Maghey Mela Celebrations Committee 2019 as a prelude to the Maghey Mela Celebrations here.

The Sikkim Run was also supported by Self Help Groups, entrepreneurs and local community along with Government of Sikkim.

Delhi police launches pilot project on separating investigation, law and order



NEW DELHI, JAN 13 (PTI): The Delhi Police has initiated a pilot project in 30 police stations in the national capital to study the feasibility of separating investigation and law and order.

Sanjay Singh, the Special Commissioner of Police (Headquarters and Recruitment), said the pilot project setting up separate investigation wings has been initiated in 30 police stations in the first phase.

"This step shall ensure specialisation as well as improve police response to the victims and families affected by crime, especially in heinous cases," he said.

As many as 1,409 teams consisting of one sub-inspector, one head constable and one constable (4,227 personnel in total) have been constituted and allocated to two police each in 15 police districts, said another officer.

The pilot was started in mid-September and under this project police personnel tasked with investigation have been given laptops and are engaged in law and order duties, apart from big events like the new year eve, the Republic Day, he added.

The investigation team staffers have been trained and equipped with legal, forensic, scientific and technological aids. The objectives of this are to improve quality of investigation, ensure timely disposal of cases, improve conviction rate and ensure co-ordination with prosecuting agency for speedy trial, the officer added.

He said this allows more time for investigating teams to probe cases, prepare chargesheets and "we have seen that there has been a speedy disposal of cases".



Lions distribute food grains in Rangpo

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

Lions Club OF Rangpo, Gateway of Sikkim, organised a food-grains distribution program at Rangpo and also the neighbouring area falling in West Bengal to those in need. The distribution

was held as part of New Year celebrations and to mark Makar Sankranti. The program coordinator, Namita Chhetri, informs that the program was attended by Club's District Chairman Mangilal Jain, president Hem Kumar Gurung and other members.

Pema's Gym celebrates selection of 3 members in Indian strength-lifting squad



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

Members of Pema's Gym & Health Club, Martam, East Sikkim, have conveyed best wishes to three of their fellow Gym members who will be representing India at the upcoming International Strength Lifting & Incline Bench Press Championship to be held from 17 to 20 January at Karmazari, Pench in Madhya Pradesh.

Pema Dorjee Bhutia, who is the founder and chief coach of Pema's

Gym and Health Club, Homnath Siwakoti and Thinlay Wangdi Bhutia will be competing for India in the competition.

A special function at Pema's Gym with retired headmaster, Sonam Tshering Bhutia, as chief guest and Zamyong Bhutia and Rapzang Bhutia as special guests, was held to celebrate the selection of athletes from rural Sikkim in the national team.

Eleven strength lifters from Sikkim have been selected for India team.

Only 73 women judges in high courts: Govt tells par panel

NEW DELHI, JAN 13 (PTI): Only 73 judges out of the 670 judges serving in various high courts are women, the government has informed a parliamentary committee.

The government also pointed out that against the sanctioned strength of 1,079 judges as on March 23, 2018, only 670 judges are working in 24 high courts of the country, leaving 409 vacancies. "There are 73 women judges working in different high courts as on March 23, 2018, which in percentage terms is 10.89 per cent of the working strength," the Department of Justice in the Law Ministry informed the department-related Standing Committee on Law and Personnel.

Responding to the concerns of the parliamentary panel on inadequate representation of women and people from marginalised communities, the ministry said the Centre had been requesting chief justices of high courts that while sending proposals for appointment of judges, "due consideration" be given to "suitable candidates" belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward

classes, minorities and women. "This is being done to ensure a fair representation of different sections of the society in the higher judiciary," the government said.

It, however, made it clear that there was no proposal to amend Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution to allow reservation in the higher judiciary. "The committee feels that a timeline of six weeks given to chief minister/governor may be reduced to expedite the process of appointment of judges. It also feels since there is no proposal to raise the retirement age of judges in higher judiciary by the government, unnecessary delay in recruitment of judges should be avoided at any cost," it said.

As of now, Governors and chief ministers are given six weeks to recommend proposal received from the chief justice of the high court to appoint a candidate as a judge. There were 24 high courts when the committee had prepared its report.

From January 1, the number of high courts have gone up to 25 with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana getting separate high courts.

Red Panda Bikers Meet this weekend



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

Open Road Wanderers Motorcycle Club (OR-WMC) has announced plans to organise a three-day long, Red Panda Bikers Meet 2019, from 18 to 20 January at River View Resort, below Saramsa Garden in Ranipool. The club has invited all the local Enfield riders to attend.

Addressing a press

conference here today, ORWMC president Naresh Chhetri, accompanied by treasurer Sangay Bhutia, general secretary Moses Rai, Roshan Nepal and Tikaram Sapkota, informed that this was the second edition of the event.

A hundred riders from the North East Region, North Bengal and Bhutan have already registered for the event.

Registration fee for the event has been fixed at Rs 2,200 per head and will open at the river view resort on the morning of 18 Jan. On the day, a ride will be held from the said venue to Ray Khola, Green Valley on to Ranka road and back to the venue.

Later in the day, the venue will have live music by popular local bands.

Netanyahu confirms weekend strike by Israel on Iran target in Syria

JERUSALEM, JAN 13 (AFP): Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that Israel had at the weekend carried out an air strike on Iranian weapons in Syria, a rare public confirmation of such attacks.

"Just in the last 36 hours the air force attacked Iranian warehouses containing Iranian weapons in Damascus international airport," Netanyahu said at the start of a cabinet meeting, according to his

office. "The accumulation of recent attacks shows that we're more determined than ever to act against Iran in Syria, just as we promised."

Late Friday Syrian air defences shot down Israeli missiles, Syria's official SANA news agency reported that day quoting a military source.

"Only a ministry of transport warehouse at Damascus international airport was hit," SANA cited the military source as saying at the time.

On Sunday Netanyahu said that Israel had attacked Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria hundreds of times.

Israel has pledged to prevent its main enemy Iran from entrenching itself militarily in Syria, where it is backing President Bashar al-Assad's regime alongside Russia and Hezbollah. It rarely publicly confirms such strikes, though outgoing military chief of staff Gadi syria has spoken of them in interviews in recent days.

NOTICE

NOTICE INVITING TENDER FOR RUNNING CANTEN IN THE PREMISES OF THE DISTRICT & SESSIONS COURT AT SICHEY, GANGTOK, EAST SIKKIM.

For and on behalf of the Bar Association of Sikkim, sealed tender in the prescribed form are invited from interested parties having experience in catering/canteen/restaurant business, for running Canteen at the District Court Complex at Gangtok for a period of 2 (Two) years.

TIME SCHEDULE

1. Date of issue of tender forms: 15th January 2019 - 21 January 2019.
2. Last date of submission of tender form: 28th January 2019.
3. Date time and venue of tender opening: 1st February 2019 at the Bar Room, District Court Complex. 3.30 PM
4. Tender forms shall be available at the Bar Room, District Courts Complex, Gangtok, East Sikkim during office hours. Contact: Mr. Pramod: 9647972160.

Tender forms shall be issued on payment of Rs. 1000 (Rupees One Thousand) only per form, which shall be Non-refundable.

TERMS & CONDITIONS:

1. The Schedule rate of tender shall be Rs.2, 40,0000 (Rupees Two Lakh Forty Thousand) only per annum.
2. The tenderers are free to quote above the schedule rate and the highest bidder shall be given preference subject to the pricing /rate fixed for the food products on the Menu.
3. The tenderers are required to abide by the terms and conditions as specified in the tender form.
4. The Bar Association of Sikkim reserves the right to cancel/reject any tender form.

S/d

(Sh. Karma Thinlay Gyatso)

Treasurer,
Bar Association of Sikkim.
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Sarjan is ready with new music video



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN: Sarjan Rai recently released his Nepali music video, 'Chanchal Yo Maan', on YouTube and has been receiving encouraging response from the people.

This is his second music video since his debut, 'Maya Le', which was released in the year 2017. Meanwhile, shooting for his next music video, 'Tutyo Tutyo', is currently

underway. 36-year-old Sarjan Rai hails from Ranka in East Sikkim and is a lyricist, music composer and singer.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Rai said, "I have recorded six songs in Kathmandu and I have been making music videos for them. Music videos on two songs have already been released on YouTube and now work

on the video of my third song is going on."

Speaking on his latest music video, 'Chanchal Yo Maan', Mr Rai informed that this song also features the voice of renowned Nepali singer, Melina Rai, and other artists from Nepal.

He further informed that he was ready with 25 more songs which will be recorded and featured in music videos in the near future.

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

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

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

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

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SummitTIMES

Don't Allow Delinquency to Harden into Crime

Pause... listen... care...

Localities across the State are reporting crimes which might appear petty on first read, may become conversation starters for a while, but because they are not scandalous or bloody enough, fade away from memory and conversations. That, however, would be the wrong response. These are desperately disturbing trends and require deeper deliberations. Burglaries have now become routine, and there have been instances when even the donation boxes from temples and monasteries have been raided. Unattended LPG cylinders are often lifted away, and now, at least in Gangtok, there have been enough instances of muggings and bag snatching to flag them as a worry as well. The one common thread running through this span from piggy-bank lifting to actual mugging is that these are opportunist crimes not necessarily committed by a "career criminal", but those carried out by the criminally inclined.

And that is a worry.

Career criminals have a track record – a history-sheet as the cops like to call it – and can be traced down, interrogated, charged and locked away. The criminally inclined move around with their tendencies and act upon it when opportunity allows or when they are egged on by others with similar dispensations. Unless identified, they cannot be traced down, as is obvious from the fact that none of those involved in muggings or bag-snatching incidents have been rounded up thus far. As the heat of increased police patrolling and brighter street lighting ramps up, this group lays low, and once policing relaxes, they will surface again. Locking them away is not recommended either because that would be condemning them before any efforts were made to reclaim them back into the folds of society.

Policing, hence, does not offer permanent solutions. But we all always knew that. The Indian experience with the police is not one of reforming but one of hardening criminals, so, that might not even be the advisable route to take. What Sikkim faces is a growth in opportunist/casual crime, and that is a whole different ball game since it is infused into the societal make-up, occupying that grey area where delinquency starts fermenting into harder stuff. Because it infiltrates slowly, it catches everyone off guard when it explodes. These are not situations which developed overnight, but surface after decades of failure to notice. A brawl ending up in a stabbing, a scuffle leading to a fatal bludgeoning, a bag violently snatched in a dark alley, a vehicle torched in the dead of the night... These are not instincts born overnight, but impulses acted upon after years of experienced disinterest and uncaring. These are still not the handiwork of 'criminals'. These are obviously expressions of a bored and frustrated youth to begin with, and also suggestive of growing habits and dependence which need to be financed through such risky undertakings.

Irrespective of how one sees it – as adventures undertaken to relieve boredom, outbursts to rage against the system, or signs of a generation screaming for attention - these are all evidence of increasing delinquency that could go out of hand if left unattended, and the response required is the same – the generation above needs to pause and listen, share and care.

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

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

The environmental impact of music: digital, records, CDs analysed

SHARON GEORGE & DEIRDRE MCKAY
theconversation.com

Although streaming remains the most popular way people listen to music, old formats like cassettes and vinyl have both seen an increase in sales. In fact, vinyl has seen a remarkable sales increase of 1,427% since 2007, selling around 4m LPs in 2018 in the UK alone. Since the popularity of vinyl shows no signs of stopping soon, this means that more non-recyclable discs will be manufactured – which could have a negative impact on the environment.

Although album covers are generally made of recyclable cardboard, records were originally made of shellac, before non-recyclable vinyl was used as a replacement. Shellac is a natural resin secreted by the female Kerria lacca bug, which was scraped from trees to produce gramophone records. Since shellac isn't from fossil fuel-derived feedstock (chemicals, such as ethylene, used to make substances like plastic), its carbon footprint was lower than that of modern records.

Shellac records were brittle and prone to water and alcohol damage though, so PVC plastic records were developed to last longer. In ideal conditions (low oxygen, without movement), discarded PVC could take centuries to decompose. However, the environmental conditions of most landfill sites (which have varying soil acidity and temperatures) can cause discarded PVC albums to leach plasticisers (solvents added to plastics to make them more flexible and resilient). They may even outlive the site itself or escape into the environment as pollutants.

Modern records typically contain around 135g of PVC material with a carbon footprint of 0.5kg of CO₂ (based on 3.4kg of CO₂ per 1kg of PVC). Sales of 4.1m records would produce 1.9 thousand tonnes of CO₂ – not taking transport and packaging into account. That is the entire footprint of almost 400 people per year.

In the 80s, records were replaced by CDs, which promised durability and better sound quality. CDs were made of layered polycarbonate and aluminium, which has slightly less environmental impact than PVC, and are manufactured using less materials than records. However, CDs can't be recycled because they're made of mixed materials that are difficult and uneconomical to separate into their component parts for recycling. CDs were also encased in fragile polycarbonate cases, which, despite being a single material, aren't widely recycled. They also aren't as indestructible as many people first thought, which meant many ended up in landfills.

As new formats of music emerged throughout the years – first albums, then cassettes, CDs, and now streaming services – there was a cycle of waste and destruction as old technologies were replaced by new ones. But we didn't move to CDs by choice – it was simply what companies manufactured at the time. While high-quality CDs could last for 50

a year and costs £5 to run.

So which is the greener option? It depends on many things, including how many times you listen to your music. If you only listen to a track a couple of times, then streaming is the best option. If you listen repeatedly, a physical copy is best; streaming an album over the internet more than 27 times will



to 100 years under ideal conditions, this isn't true for many low-quality, cheap CDs. These were easily damaged by direct exposure to sunlight and heat, warped by fast-changing temperatures, gravity, scratches, fingerprints and smudges – subsequently resulting in them getting thrown out.

THE DIGITAL DILEMMA

Current digital technology gives us flawless music quality without physical deterioration. Music is easy to copy and upload, and can be streamed online without downloading. Since our digital music is less tangible than vinyl or CDs, surely it must be more environmentally friendly?

Even though new formats are material-free, that doesn't mean they don't have an environmental impact. The electronic files we download are stored on active, cooled servers. The information is then retrieved and transmitted across the network to a router, which is transferred by wifi to our electronic devices. This happens every time we stream a track, which costs energy. Once vinyl is purchased, it can be played over and over again, the only carbon cost coming from running the record player. However, if we listen to our streamed music using a hifi sound system it's estimated to use 107 kilowatt hours of electricity a year, costing about £15.00 to run. A CD player uses 34.7 kilowatt hours

likely use more energy than it takes to produce and manufacture the same CD.

If you want to reduce your impact on the environment, then vintage vinyl could be a great physical option. For online music, local storage on phones, computers or local network drives keeps the data closer to the user and will reduce the need for streaming over distance from remote servers across a power-hungry network.

In a world where more and more of our economy and social relations happen online, records, and other vintage music formats, buck that trend. Instead, the record revival shows us what we want to see in our media and material world more widely – experiences that hold their value and with loving care endure. Older music formats have a sense of importance and permanence attached to them, belonging to us in a way that our virtual purchases simply don't.

It seems that whatever the format, owning copies of our favourite and most treasured music, and playing them over and over again, might just be the best option for our environment.

[Sharon George is Lecturer in Environmental Science, Keele University; Deirdre McKay is Reader in Geography and Environmental Politics, Keele University]

The Art of Distraction

STEPHANIE TRIGG
theconversation.com

Guiltily as charged. Yes, I spend too much time on social media. Yes, I have become more easily distracted. Yes, I have given up too much personal information to various apps and websites over the years. And yes, I have read a number of articles that articulate precisely how foolish, or at least, misguided this behaviour is.

And so when I opened up Sebastian Smee's Quarterly Essay, *Net Loss: The Inner Life in the Digital Age*, I was primed to feed my own anxiety as I read his confessions: first, about how much time he spends on his phone, checking messages, listening to podcasts, watching videos, keeping an eye on Twitter and the news; and second, how conscious he is that he has given over various degrees of information about himself to the various interfaces and apps that relentlessly market this information on to other agencies in order to market other products back to the reduced versions of our selves we willingly project online.

If these were Smee's confessions, I could easily make them my own too. Indeed, this is one of the ironies of contemporary digital life: the more Facebook, for example, extends its global reach, the more people can become instantly aware of discussions on Facebook about Facebook's use and sale of the data it accumulates through our global conversations about why and how we use it, and its affects on our sense of self.

Smee is concerned with the fate of the "inner life" in contemporary culture: how we can any longer preserve the illusion that we each have a private inner core of being or selfhood that is untouched by the dispersal and dissemination of our public selves across a wide range of media. Has not that "inner life", he asks, become weakened and thinned out, as a result of our perpetual, seemingly uncontrollable engagement with the algorithms and formulae of digital life and the surveillance cultures and technologies of late capitalism:

"Once nurtured in secret, protected by

norms of discretion or a presumption of mystery, this 'inner' self today feels harshly illuminated and remorselessly externalised, and at the same time flattened, constricted and quantified."

Smee argues that we have become complicit in this process of our own

don entertainments:

"There was an exceeding good concert, but too much talking to hear it well. Indeed I am quite astonished to find how little music is attended to in silence; for, though every body seems to admire, hardly anybody listens."



commodification and "reduction". We are, he writes, "betrayed ... by ourselves — by our willingness, what can often seem our eagerness, to make ourselves smaller

He claims, sometimes directly, sometimes more cautiously, that human nature is changing: "Today, being human means being distracted. It is our new default setting."

This kind of claim is not new, of course. Anxiety about the contemporary age and its difference from the past dates back at least to medieval culture. More recently (but over a century ago), Virginia Woolf famously suggested that human nature changed "on or about December 1910". Indeed, Smee's machinic metaphor — "our new default setting" — demonstrates the extent to which industrialisation naturalised the idea of humanity as something that can be programmed. This metaphor would have been impossible, say, in the renaissance.

Nor is distraction a new phenomenon. In Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), a well-educated young girl, brought up in the country, is astonished to find how little attention is paid to the music and singing at the opera and other Lon-

Smee is not particularly interested in history, though. He offers many instances of what he sees as the problem: the way social media and our digital selves offer us only diminished, impoverished versions of ourselves that threaten to displace our inner lives. These lives are "tangled knots of narrative, with feelings and hurts and elaborate, fantastical dreams, which can be as enduring as mountains or as fleeting as clouds", he writes.

To help us register what he thinks we are losing, Smee takes us through a range of examples from literature and art. Chekhov looms largest in his intellectual landscape, as a writer who most eloquently dramatizes the schism between the inside and the outside of the self, between a "true core" and a "sham exterior". Cézanne, too, offers a vision of the self and "life" that is "fluid and multifaceted, like a rippling mosaic". Smee insists that these rich and intense visions of human life are increasingly lost to us.

Yet his essay is itself a powerful demonstration of the inner life at work. It is not structured by argumentative sequence, empirical data

or any theoretical work on contemporary digital culture; if anything, Smee defers judgments, sets problems aside, asks questions and refuses to push further.

Net Loss is a classic essay in Montaigne's sense: experimenting and

testing ideas (the French word *essai* comes from Latin *exagium*, "weighing": itself appropriate to Smee's astrological identity as a Libra, another account of the self he toys with then sets aside).

At one point he is tempted to read another story by Chekhov as "a prescient commentary" on the envy-inducing affects of Facebook. "I won't go there," he says. "But I will say two things that strike me about it now."

For all his fear about loss, or losing the inner life by giving too much of it away through panic at our own mortality, Smee's own choices, questions, worries, recollections, selections from books still structure his essay, which juxtaposes memories, quotations and descriptions of works of art, music, cinema and literature. The essay is a mosaic of cultural allusion that is meaningful precisely because it is held together by the narrative self that analyses and makes these connections. It is an example of distraction as an art form.

[The writer is Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor of English Literature, University of Melbourne]

Mugger croc count goes up in Ghodahada reservoir in Ganjam

BERHAMPUR (ODISHA), JAN 13 (PTI): The number of mugger crocodiles in a reservoir and waterbodies around it in Odisha's Ganjam district has increased by 13 in a year, forest officials said.

During a three-day-long census that ended on Friday, 58 crocodiles of the endangered species were found in and around the in Ghodahada irrigation reservoir, and nearby waterbodies, the officials said.

While 43 mugger crocodiles were found in the five sq km reservoir, 15 crocodiles were located in the waterbodies nearby, the Forest Range Officer of Digapahandi, Paramananda Panigrahi, said. Last year, the population of mugger crocodiles in the area was around 45. While 28 were found inside the reservoir, 17 were found in the adjoining waterbodies, Panigrahi said.

The population of the crocodiles remained stagnant at 55 in 2016 and 2017.

The number was 49 in 2015, official sources said. Improvement of the habitat is stated to be the cause behind the increase in population of the mugger crocodiles, the range officer said.

The mugger crocodile is one of the three crocodile species found in the state. The other species are gharial and saltwater crocodile or estuarine crocodile. Forest officials said they did not find any dead mugger crocodile in the area in the last two to three years. Though the fishermen use the waterbodies for fishing, the muggers in Ghodahada are safe since the local fishermen do not harm them, the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Berhampur, A K Behera, said.

The fishermen do not cause any harm to the crocodiles despite frequent reports of destruction of the fishing nets by the animal, Behera said.

The forest officials in the area are also creating awareness among the local people about the need for man-animal co-existence, he said.

What to read in 2019? Options galore

ZAFRI MUDASSER NOFIL NEW DELHI, JAN 13 (PTI): An interesting line-up awaits bibliophiles this year - memoirs by Mithali Raj and Yashwant Sinha, the last work of Kuldip Nayar and books by Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Sachin Pilot and Raghuram Rajan among others.

While Bloomsbury will publish Sinha's "Relentless", Penguin Random House will bring out Raj's memoir "Unguarded". Nayar finished "On Leaders and Icons: From Jinnah to Modi" weeks before he passed away on August 23, 2018 and it will be published by Speaking Tiger.

Other autobiographies include Prashant Bhushan's "My Life in Movements" (Rupa) and Lisa Ray's "Close to the Bone" (HarperCollins India). Pilot's book, co-written with Pratishtha Singh, is titled "Rooted" (Penguin).

Films, music and the entertainment and lifestyle industry will also be amply represented.

Lyricist Sameer pens down his life in Bollywood through some of his most famous songs in "Life of a Songster" with filmmaker Shuja Ali (Rupa). Designer Manish Malhotra chronicles his journey so does Masaba Gupta (both Rupa).

Other books on films include those by Rakesh

Omprakash Mehra (Rupa) and Deepti Naval (Aleph); and biographies of composer duo Laxmikant-Pyarelal, Danny Denzongpa (both Rupa), Gulshan Grover and Sri-devi (both Penguin); and "Reel India: Cinema and the Mofussil" (Hachette) by Namrata Joshi; "The Three Khans" by Kaveree Bamzai (Westland).

Sports biographies include that of Sanath Jayasurya (Rupa) and Raj's memoir "Unguarded"; "The Nine Waves" by Mihir Bose (Aleph); "The Miracle Men" by Nikhil Naz; and an account by Viswanathan Anand with Susan Ninan (both Hachette).

Penguin's titles include "Gun Island" by Amitav Ghosh; Pico Iyer's "Autumn Light"; Ruchir Sharma's "Democracy on the Road"; Arundhati Roy's collected non-fiction "My Seditious Heart"; "Past Present: India in the Geopolitics of Asia" by ex-NSA Shivshankar Menon; "Tell it on the Mountain" by Nirupama Rao; and SY Quraishi's "The Great March of Democracy".

HarperCollins will release books like "The Third Pillar: How Markets and the State Leave the Community Behind" by Raghuram Rajan; "Resurgent India" by Bimal Jalan; "All Against All" by former foreign secretary S Jaishankar; "The Shape

of Things to Come" by Markanday Katju; and "Every Vote Counts: The Story of India's Elections" by Navin Chawla. It will also publish "The Forest of Enchantments" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and "Superior: The Fatal Return of Race Science" by Angela Saini.

Oxford's will publish Manmohan Singh's "Changing India" and books by Indira Jaising, Ashis Nandy and Upinder Singh among others.

Rupa Books' list includes "Holding to Account" by ex CAG Vinod Rai; a biography of former PM Chandrashekar by Rajya Sabha deputy chairman Harivansh; and books by Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Subramanian Swamy.

Aleph will publish "Which of Us Are Aryans?" by Romila Thapar; Michael Witzel, Jaya Menon, Razib Khan and Kai Friese; "The Prospect of Miracles" by Cyrus Mistry and "Wild Himalaya: A Natural History of the Highest Mountains on Earth" by Stephen Alter.

Some titles of Hachette are "The Hachette Anthology of South-Asian Speculative Fiction", edited by Tarun Saint; "History of Sufism in India" by Rana Safvi; "To Kill the Truth" by Sam Bourne; and "King of Scars" by Leigh Bardugo.

Pan Macmillan will publish biographies of

MA Jinnah (Yasser Latif Hamdani) and Umar Khalid (Adi Prakash) besides books on Flipkart's story (Mihir Dalal), history of circus in India (Anirban Ghosh), and the Deoliwallahs (Joy Ma, Dilip D'Souza) and a 10th anniversary edition of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Palace of Illusions".

Speaking Tiger's list includes "Classic Indian Journeys", edited by Mark Tully; Nayantara Sahgal's "The Fate of Butterflies"; "The Assassination of Indira Gandhi: Collected Stories" by Upamanyu Chatterjee; and a book of short stories by famed vocalist Shubha Mudgal.

Palimpsest will bring out veteran history writer Rob Walters' "The South Asian Stars of Oxford". Amarylilis will publish the memoirs of Nidhi Chapekar, the flight attendant who became the tragic face of the Brussels terror attack, and celebrated hairstylist Shivarama Bhandary; and also "The Kitchens of the Prime Ministers of India" by Purabi Sridhar and Sanghita Singh.

Bloomsbury will bring out Elizabeth Gilbert's next novel "City of Girls", William Dalrymple's account of East India Company's takeover of India "The Anarchy" besides five JK Rowling books in seven Indian languages and Batman

series DC Comics novels for children.

Juggernaut's list includes Poomani's "Heat"; Samhita Arni's "The Prince"; Pankaj Mishra's "How Not to be a Man"; Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee's "What Do Economists Do"; Aditya Ghosh's "Building Companies that Work"; Falguni Nayar's book on start-up and "Ultimate Food Rules" by Rujuta Diwekar.

Westland has "Bombay Balchao" by Jane Borges; "Raavan" by Amish; Devdutt Pattanaik's "Aranyaka"; Rujuta Diwekar's "Notes for Healthy Kids"; Dhirendra Jha's "The Akharas of Banaras" and books by Surjit S Bhalla and Pavan K Varma.

Simon and Schuster's titles include "I Have Become the Tide" by Githa Hariharan; "Life Lessons from the China Dragon" by Chandras Choudhury; and "Upon a Burning Throne" by Ashok Banker.

Niyogi Books will come out with "Beyond the Himalayas: Journeying through the Silk Route", a book by director Goutam Ghose who was part of a Central Asian expedition in 1994; "I, Anupam" by Nabaneeta Dev Sen; and books on Delhi's top 10 Baolis, design movement in Santiniketan and Indian churches.

Nepal NGO demands return of territories from India

SHIRISH B PRADHAN KATHMANDU, JAN 13 (PTI): A Nepalese non-governmental organisation has launched a signature campaign demanding the return of territory that Nepal lost to British India through the historic Sugauli Treaty of 1815.

The campaign was initiated here by the Greater Nepal Nationalist Front on Friday coinciding with National Unity Day, according to "The Rising Nepal", a government-owned national daily. Signatures will be collected from within and outside the country, and the campaign will continue until coming mid-April, according to the front's chairman Fanindra Nepal.

Nepalese territories including Darjeeling were handed to the British East India Company as concessions under the treaty which was signed in 1816 on the conclusion of the Anglo-Nepalese War.

Under the treaty, Nepalese-controlled territory that was ceded included all areas that the king of Nepal had won in earlier wars such as the kingdom of Sikkim in the east and Kumaon and Garhwal in the west.

The signatures collected will be handed over to the Nepal president, UN secretary general, the five members of the UN Security Council, and to the SAARC secretary general, according to the report.

Court says nerves could jinx Serena's record Slam bid

MELBOURNE, JAN 13 (AFP): Australian great Margaret Court has predicted nerves could undermine Serena Williams' bid to match her record 24 singles majors at Melbourne Park, clearing the way for an outsider to snatch the title.

She disputed the bookies' assessment that Serena is red-hot favourite to lift the Australian Open trophy for an eighth time, taking her overall Grand Slam tally to 24 and equalling Court's mark.

"I think it's possible for Serena to equal me, if anybody's gonna do it, it's Serena, but I don't think there's a clear-cut favourite," Court told Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper Sunday.

"I think it's a pretty open tournament and I think an outsider can win it," Williams, 37, has won 23 singles Grand Slams since 1999 -- seven Australian Opens, three French Opens, seven Wimbledon and six US Opens.

Court, now 76, won 24 singles Grand Slams from 1960-73 -- 11 Australian Opens, five French

Opens, three Wimbledon and five US Opens.

However, 13 of Court's titles came before 1968, when the women's game entered the Open era and became fully professional. For that reason many pundits, including 18-time Slam champion Chris Evert, believe Williams is already the greatest of all time.

Another win at Melbourne Park would settle the argument once and for all, but Court said the American no longer had the fearlessness of youth on her side.

"When you're young, you tend not to think about it too much," she said. "I won my first Australian championship when I was 17 and I had no nerves. As I went along... it became harder."

Williams has been one shy of Court's record since winning the 2017 Australian Open, when she was eight weeks pregnant. She has spoken in the past about the mental hurdles she faced before reaching Steffi Graf's Open-era milestone of 22 majors at Wimbledon in 2016.

MCI ordinance reissued



NEW DELHI, JAN 13 (PTI): An ordinance to allow a committee run the scam-tainted Medical Council of India (MCI) has been re-issued.

A bill to convert an earlier ordinance into a law is awaiting Parliament's approval, hence a fresh ordinance was issued Saturday.

While the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill 2017 that seeks to overhaul the medical education system in India and replace MCI is yet to be passed by Parliament, the term of MCI's elected body members ends soon.

To overcome the situation, the government

had recently issued an ordinance to supersede MCI and give its powers to a board of governors (BoG).

The BoG will continue to perform till a council is constituted in line with the provisions of the MCI Act in one year.

Amid allegations of corruption against

MCI office-bearers and probes into opaque accreditation to medical colleges, the Supreme Court had in May 2016 directed the government to set up an oversight committee with the authority to oversee all statutory functions of MCI till the new legislation comes in.

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Smartphone-- a gadget-turned-addiction among youngsters

PUNE, JAN 13 (PTI): Harshal (name changed) would spend hours glued to his smartphone, chatting on nearly 30 groups on WhatsApp and surfing other social networking sites.

The 27-year-old Pune-based painting contractor did not realise that he was suffering from 'screen-addiction' till it started taking toll on his health and professional life. Now, having undergone a de-addiction treatment, he is happy to be a "digitally detoxed" person.

After undergoing rehabilitation at the Manovikas screen de-addiction centre here, Harshal is now following strict rules about the use of smartphone and internet.

He has not only deleted several social media applications from his phone, but also reduced the number of WhatsApp groups to three and prefers reading books and practising meditation. His is not the only such case.

As many as 95 cases of internet/screen addiction have been reported at this centre in the last two months, said Dr Ajay Dudhane, chairman of Anandvan (drug and alcohol) De-Addic-



tion and Rehabilitation Centre, which runs the screen de-addiction facility in Pune. The addicts are mostly in the age group of 16 to 27 years. Two of them were so severely addicted to internet gaming, online shopping and surfing social media sites that they had to be admitted at the facility, he said.

"Of late, during our alcohol and drug addiction rehabilitation work, we got requests from some colleges about students

being addicted to their smartphones so much that it was affecting their studies and attendance," said Dudhane. The NGO, in its questionnaire for students, was surprised to find out that the 'last seen' status of majority of them on the messaging apps were 2.30 am, 3 am and 3.30 am.

"The findings showed that students, who had morning classes, used to be on social media sites till late hours and it was affecting their health and stud-

ies," he said. Elaborating on the case of a 17-year-old youth from Mumbai, he said the boy used to be on several social media sites and had the habit of posting his locations to invite cheers and comments from his friends.

He said the boy used to share locations, like of five-star hotels, where he was not even present. One day, he posted a fake message, saying he was on way to London and shared a location of the Mumbai international airport.

Seventh heaven beckons for Federer, Djokovic at Open as Murray bows out

MELBOURNE, JAN 13 (AFP): Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic are both gunning for a record seventh Australian Open crown from Monday, but Andy Murray will make his last appearance in Melbourne as the era of the "Big Four" draws to a close.

Number one Djokovic and third seed Federer face a stern challenge from the likes of youthful force Alexander Zverev, seeded four, who is still looking for a first major to cement his place as torch-bearer for the next generation. But Murray dropped a pre-Grand Slam bombshell, breaking down during a tear-filled press conference as he revealed chronic hip pain means he will retire after Wimbledon -- if he can carry on that long.

And question marks remain over the fitness of world number two Rafael Nadal who pulled out of his Brisbane warm-up but arrived in Melbourne professing he was "fully fit" and promising to unleash a remodelled serve. It all means the era of the "Big Four" is almost over after a season in which Federer -- who opens his title defence against Denis Istomin on Monday -- rolled back the years on Rod Laver Arena to lift an emotional 20th Grand Slam.

It put him on a par with other six-time Australian Open winners Djokovic and Roy Emerson -- although the Australian great's victories all came before the Open era. By contrast, the 31-year-old Djokovic endured a miserable early Melbourne exit in 2018, followed by elbow surgery and a string of disappointing results that saw him drop outside the top 20.

But since winning a fourth Wimbledon in July, the Serb rose inexorably back to number one by losing only three further matches -- one of which was to Zverev at the ATP Finals.

Djokovic won his third US Open in September to put him on 14 Grand Slams -- three behind Nadal and six behind Federer.

And Djokovic said Sunday he was delighted to be back in Melbourne where his rise to greatness all began in 2008 with his first Grand Slam win. "It was my first major trophy, that obviously served as a great springboard for my career," Djokovic said as he

prepared to open his assault on a seventh crown against American Mitchell Krueger on Tuesday.

"It opened a lot of doors for me. It allowed me to believe in myself that I can actually win the biggest tournaments in the world, challenge the best players in the world." - Nadal 'feels good' - Federer, now 37, remains the chief threat to the Serb and he sounded a warning Sunday.

"I'm playing good tennis. I'm confident that I think it needs a good performance by my opponent probably to beat me," said the Swiss master, who warmed for Melbourne with victory in Perth's Hopman Cup.

Second-ranked Nadal, 32, pulled out of Brisbane with a thigh strain although he returned for an exhibition in Sydney and insisted at the weekend his fitness woes were behind him.

"I feel good. I am not feeling good, I will not be here," he said before revealing he had remodelled his serve.

"There are always things to improve," said the Spaniard, who faces Australian wildcard James Duckworth on Monday. Djokovic picked young guns Zverev of Germany, Borna Coric of Croatia, Karen Khachanov of Russia and Greece's Stefano Tsitsipas as key threats to the top three.

"It's just a matter of time when we will see some of them competing in the last stages of Grand Slams," said Djokovic.

Zverev, 21, starts the Australian Open full of confidence after an impressive warm-up to reach the final of Perth's mixed teams Hopman Cup, despite his terrible record at Grand Slams.

He has never got beyond the third round in Melbourne and faces Slovenia's Aljaz Bedene in his opener on Tuesday.

Last year, seeded four, he crashed out in the last 32 to South Korea's Chung Hyeon and has only reached one quarter-final in 14 major appearances. Home fans will look to new Sydney champion and 27th seed Alex de Minaur, who faces Portugal's Pedro Sousa on Monday, and the temperamental Nick Kyrgios.

Kyrgios has a tough opening match against former world number three Milos Raonic and then a possible clash with former Australian Open champion Stan Wawrinka in round two.

Asian Cup: India aim historic knock-out berth in Chhetri's record-equalling match against Bahrain

SHARJAH, JAN 13 (PTI): A heartbreaking loss after a stunning win denting their confidence, India will still be fired up by the prospect of a maiden knock-out round berth when they take on Bahrain in their final Asian Cup group league match here on Monday.

A draw against the West Asian side, currently ranked 113, will be enough for India (ranked 97) to qualify for the round of 16 for the first time in the continent's showpiece event after failed attempts in 1984 and 2011.

Monday's match at the Sharjah Stadium, which may turn out to be the biggest night of Indian football after its achievements during the Golden Years (1951 to 64), is also significant as talismanic skipper Sunil Chhetri will equal former captain Bhaichung Bhutia's record of highest appearances for the country at 107 each.

India had finished runners-up in the 1964 edition in Israel but that tournament was played in a round-robin format comprising four countries with the winners being decided on the basis of points collected in the league. There was not a single knock-out match in that edition.

But even a defeat on Monday may still see India (3 points from 2 matches) through to the knock-out rounds as one of the four third-placed teams if hosts United Arab Emirates (4 from 2 matches) beat Thailand (3 from 2 matches) in Al Ain in the other Group A match to be played simultaneously.



Four third-placed sides from the six groups of four team each will also advance to the knock-out rounds, along with the top two countries.

Under the competition rules of the Asian Cup, if two teams end their group stage engagements on equal points, the ranking will be decided first on the basis of head to head result.

So, if both Thailand and India lose their matches on Monday, India will end at third as they have defeated the 'War Elephants' 4-1 in their opening match.

But the Stephen Constantine side cannot lose to Bahrain -- to whom India lost 2-5 in the 2011 Asian Cup -- by a big margin as goal difference will get the first preference while deciding which team makes it to the Round of 16 among third place sides of equal points.

In Groups C and D, two bottom-placed teams have not yet opened their accounts af-

ter playing two matches each and they have minus goal difference as against India's plus one. Courtesy, the stunning win against Thailand has shown that India are no longer an 'also ran' side and the second match against the UAE -- though lost 0-2 -- strengthened the thought that this side can hold onto their own without fear and take the game to the opposition, unlike the teams of the past.

Luck also eluded India in the match against UAE as the woodwork denied them on two occasions while Ashique Kuruniyan and Chhetri had the goalkeeper at their mercy but failed to beat him. India had more shots at opposition goal though UAE had the overwhelming possession.

Constantine has built India into a compact and largely defensive unit which tries to score on the counter. The team largely maintained its shape

and intensity in the first two matches against Thailand and UAE. The lack of creativity in the midfield as compared to other top sides was, however, evident and a lot will depend on Chhetri, who has become the highest Indian goal scorer in the Asian Cup (with four strikes) as well as second highest international goal scorer (67 from 106 matches) among active players.

India may again deploy a defensive approach and hit on the counter against a physical Bahrain as they need just a draw while it is a must-win for the West Asian side as they are with just one point from two matches after their 0-1 loss to Thailand.

The Thais defended deep in the first half against Bahrain and hit on the counter and the 'War Elephants' were able to get a second half goal. So, it is not beyond India's reach to get a favourable result

against Bahrain.

Constantine fielded the same starting eleven in both against Thailand and UAE in a 4-4-2 formation and it will have to be seen whether he does the same against Bahrain. The central defender duo of Sandesh Jhingam and Anas Edathodika largely marshalled the back-line well so far but there were periods of lack of understanding between them which led to the two goals by UAE.

The head coach is unlikely to make changes at the heart of the defence as well as in the upfront duo of Chhetri and Kuruniyan. However, Constantine may try out Balwant Singh at some point in time considering the physicality of the Bahrain side.

Jeje Lapekhluha has been the preferred forward for Constantine to come in as substitute.

Rowlin Borges is an option for Pranoy Halder in the role of a defensive midfielder while attacking midfielder Anirudh Thapa was a bit subdued against UAE. Right winger Udanta Singh was brilliant in the match against Thailand as he was involved in three goals and he was denied by the crossbar against UAE as well.

Historically, India have won just one match against Bahrain in seven matches played so far between the two countries. That win (2-0) had come in an international friendly in Bahrain in October, 1979 with striker Shabir Ali scoring both the goals.

Bahrain have won on five occasions while one match had ended in a draw.

Shankar replaces Pandya in India squad, Gill receives maiden call-up

NEW DELHI, JAN 12 (PTI): Tamil Nadu all-rounder Vijay Shankar on Sunday replaced the suspended Hardik Pandya for India's ongoing ODI series in Australia while rising star Shubman Gill received his maiden call-up to the national team for the New Zealand tour beginning on January 23.

Shankar is a like-for-like replacement for Pandya while Gill replaces Rahul in the squad for the five ODIs and three T20s in New Zealand. Both Pandya and Rahul have been suspended pending inquiry for their controversial comments on women during a TV show.

"With KL Rahul and Hardik Pandya set to return from Australia, the All-India Senior Selection Committee has decided to send all-rounder Vijay Shankar & batsman Shubman Gill as replacements," said the BCCI in a statement issued late



last night. "Vijay Shankar will join the team before the start of the 2nd ODI in Adelaide. He will be a part of the squad for the ODI series in Australia and the tour to New Zealand. Shubman Gill has been picked for the ODI & T20I series in New Zealand," it added.

The inclusion of the highly-rated Gill in the Indian team was a matter of time but he has got his big break sooner than he expected. His KKR captain Dinesh Karthik and more recently senior Punjab teammate Yuvraj

Singh has already predicted a long India career for Gill. Yuvraj called Gill a "very special talent" on the sidelines of a Ranji Trophy game in Kolkata last week.

"He is a young guy whose batting I like to watch. He is very exciting. He should serve India for a long time but that will also depend on how well he is looked after," said Yuvraj.

Gill was part of the India A squad that toured New Zealand last month. The top-order batsman is in sublime form and scored 790 runs for Punjab in the Ranji Trophy, averaging 98.75. He was also named player of the tournament following India's win in the U-19 World Cup in New Zealand last year.

Mayank Agarwal, who did well in his debut Test series in Australia, was in line to replace his Karnataka teammate Rahul but

it has been learnt that he is nursing a niggle. "Initially, the selectors had picked Mayank Agarwal for K L Rahul and Vijay Shankar for Pandya but it has been learnt that Agarwal is nursing a niggle.

"That is why the team management has asked for only one replacement in Australia and that is Shankar. And Gill is being rewarded for his good show in Ranji Trophy and A-tours," a source close to the selection committee told PTI.

Shankar, on the other hand, has been included in the Indian team for the second time after T20 Nidahas Trophy in Sri Lanka. Shankar too did well during the A tour of New Zealand, finishing as the highest run-getter in the three one-dayers.

The 27-year-old middle-order batsman from Tamil Nadu can also bowl medium pace. He has played in five T20s.

Resurgent Man City resume title quest against in-form

Manchester, Jan 13 (AFP): Pep Guardiola's rejuvenated Manchester City face a potentially tricky challenge at home to Wolverhampton Wanderers on Monday as they continue their Premier League title defence.

But the early days of 2019 suggest their uncharacteristic December collapse is firmly behind them. The final month of last year saw City lose successive league games, against relatively modest opposition in both Crystal Palace and Leicester City, following an end to their unbeaten domestic start to the campaign earlier at the beginning of December.

But a victory over leaders Liverpool to kick off New Year completely rejuvenated the mood at the Etihad Stadium after City had been denied the services of injured playmaker Kevin De Bruyne for most of the first half of the campaign.

And two stunning cup victories in the space of four days -- albeit against lower league clubs Rotherham and Burton Albion -- suggested the clinical, cutting edge that characterised City's play during last season's record-breaking title-winning campaign was back.

Championship side Rotherham were swept aside 7-0 at the Etihad, with third division Burton suffering an even more painful fate in a lopsided first leg of League Cup semi-final, when City scored nine goals without reply. That latter victory not only all but assured City of a place in the final against Tottenham or Chelsea next month but also indicated the demanding Guardiola will not tolerate any

set-up in his quest to add more silverware to the club's trophy cabinet.

It was a mood reflected by De Bruyne against Rotherham when he showed visible dissatisfaction at being brought off after an hour, even though City were already leading by five goals.

Some reports even suggested De Bruyne refused to return to the bench to watch the remainder of the match, remaining, instead, in the City dressing room.

"No, I didn't speak with him," said City manager Guardiola curtly, when asked if he had addressed De Bruyne's reaction to being replaced.

But given the Belgian has started just one league game so far this campaign, he is likely to be chomping at the bit to play from the kick-off against Wolves.

Sergio Aguero, too, has returned after being absent since the Liverpool win due to illness and inspirational club captain and defender Vincent Kompany is another player winning his battle to be fit for Monday's match. The general picture suggests that, having weathered a brief loss of form, City have not only returned to their clinical best but also have a number of key players hitting fitness at the right time, as Guardiola insists his squad can maintain their chase for honours on four fronts.

Even long-term injury victim Benjamin Mendy is making progress and expected to return to the fold shortly. Meanwhile second-placed City will want to close the seven-point gap at the top of the table created by Liverpool's 1-0 win away to Brighton on Saturday when they face Wolves.

China's moon rover to measure lunar freezing night temperature

KJM VARMA BEIJING, JAN 13 (PTI): China's Chang'e-4 lunar rover, which is exploring the dark side of the moon, will measure the freezing night temperature, scientists said Sunday.

Chang'e-4, named after a Chinese moon goddess and comprising a lander and a rover, touched down on the dark side of the moon on January 3, the first-ever soft landing on the far side of the moon by any country.

It was a giant leap for cosmic exploration and a major boost to the Communist nation's quest to become a space superpower.

Since the moon's revolution cycle is the same as its rotation cycle, the same side always faces the Earth. The other

face, most of which cannot be seen from the Earth, is called the far side or the "dark side" of the moon, not because it is dark, but because most of it is uncharted. A lunar day equals 14 days on the Earth, and a lunar night is the same length. Temperatures vary enormously between day and night on the moon.

Scientists estimate that the highest temperature during the day might reach 127 degrees Celsius, while the lowest at night could fall to minus 183 degrees Celsius.

In 2013, China launched Chang'e-3, the country's first spacecraft to soft-land on the moon. The scientific instruments on its lander are still operating after more than 60 lunar nights in the past five

years, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

"It was a success, but Chang'e-3 was designed according to foreign temperature data," Zhang He, the executive director of the Chang'e-4 probe project from the China Academy of Space Technology (CAST), told Xinhua.

"Without our own data about lunar temperatures, we don't know how cold a lunar night can actually be," Zhang said.

"Chang'e-4 will measure the temperature differences between the day and night on the moon, helping scientists estimate the properties of the lunar soil," she said.

Tan Mei, a consultant for the probe from CAST, said Chang'e-4 will switch to a

"sleep mode" during the lunar night due to the lack of solar power, and rely on the radioisotope heat source, a collaboration between Chinese and Russian scientists, to keep warm.

"We need to transform heat into power to run the thermometry to measure the temperatures of the lunar surface at night," Tan said.

The lander is equipped with dozens of temperature data collectors and the data they collect at night will be transmitted after the probe is awakened during the moon's daytime, said Li FEI, a designer of the lander from CAST.

Sun Zhezhou, the chief designer of the Chang'e-4 probe from CAST, said the probe will get first-hand data by directly

measuring the temperatures of the lunar soil, probe's surface, and its key interior equipment during the lunar night.

Used for the first time in a Chinese spacecraft, the isotope thermoelectric generation technology on Chang'e-4 is a prototype for future deep-space explorations, Sun said.

NASA's Curiosity rover also adopts this power technology, freeing it from the sunshine, sand and dust restrictions that have bothered its predecessors Opportunity and Spirit, he explained.

"It is a technology that we must master if we want to go to the moon's polar regions or deep space farther than Jupiter, where solar power cannot be used as the primary power source," he said.

India, Afghanistan, Central Asian nations agree to cooperate in countering terror

SAMARKAND (UZBEKISTAN), JAN 13 (PTI): India and five Central Asian countries along with Afghanistan on Sunday condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and agreed to cooperate in countering the menace which poses a threat to people across the world.

This was part of a joint statement issued at the end of the first ever meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue which also saw the participation of Afghanistan at the ministerial level in Samarkand.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj along with the foreign ministers of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan took part in the meeting.

"All sides condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and agreed to cooperate in countering terrorism which posed a threat to the people and economies of the world," the statement said.

It referred to the ancient civilisational, cultural, trade, and people-to-people links between India and Central Asia and expressed commitment to dynamic and fruitful friendly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation between India and the Central Asian countries at bilateral and multilateral formats.

"The countries reaffirmed their willingness for cooperation, mutual support, joint solution on relevant issues in order to ensure security, stability and sustainable development," the statement said. The ministers welcomed the participation of Afghanistan in the India-Central Asia Dialogue as an important link in the regional cooperation, transit of goods and energy and expressed support and commitment of Central Asian countries and India to peace, security and stability of Afghanistan.

They also called for an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and reconciliation, and assistance in economic reconstruction of Afghanistan through the implementation of joint infrastructure, transit and transport, energy projects including regional cooperation and investment projects, the statement said.

The ministers noted the importance of sustainable economic growth in Afghanistan by attracting Afghan women to participate in the public life of the country and welcomed the successful holding of forums and conferences on this issue in the countries of Central Asia.

They also noted the results of the seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA VII), held in Ashgabat in November 2017, and expressed willingness to cooperate in preparation for the RECCA VIII meet in Tashkent in the second half of 2019.

Palestinian president plans anti-Hamas measures as split widens

RAMALLAH (PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES), JAN 13 (AFP): The decade-long Palestinian split looks set to deepen in the coming months, with president Mahmoud Abbas poised to take multiple measures against Gaza to squeeze its Islamist rulers Hamas.

The moves raise concerns of more suffering for Gaza's two million residents, already under an Israeli blockade and facing severe electricity shortages, while a cornered Hamas could renew violence against Israel. Analysts say the measures will also widen the gap between Hamas-run Gaza and the occupied West Bank, where Abbas's government has limited self-rule.

Hamas and Abbas's secular Fatah party have been at loggerheads since the Islamists seized control of Gaza from Abbas's forces in a near civil war in 2007, a year after sweeping parliamentary elections.

Hamas has since fought three bloody wars with Israel and fears of a fourth remain.

Multiple reconciliation attempts between the Palestinian factions have failed but Egypt thought it had made a breakthrough in late 2017 when the two sides agreed to eventually share power.

As part of that agreement Hamas withdrew from border crossings between Gaza and Egypt and Israel, allowing the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority to return and the Egyptian border to be reopened regularly. The reconciliation agreement has since collapsed acrimoniously.

On Sunday, the PA announced it would withdraw from the Egyptian



border crossing, creating a dilemma for Cairo about whether to leave it open with Hamas in control.

So far they have indicated they will. Senior officials close to Abbas say he is looking for other measures to punish Hamas.

Among these could be removing staff from the crossings between Israel and Gaza -- making it hard for the Jewish state to allow anything into the territory without dealing directly with Hamas, which it and many other countries label a terrorist organisation.

They could also include cutting salaries to families of Hamas prisoners or rescinding Palestinian passports for Hamas employees. Abbas has also pledged to dissolve the Hamas-dominated Palestinian par-

liament, which though it hasn't met since the 2007 split is still nominally the basis for new laws. "Very important decisions against Hamas are being discussed," a senior official said on condition of anonymity.

It follows a series of arrests of those affiliated with Fatah in Gaza, according to Abbas allies.

The official said the PA spent around USD 100 million per month in Gaza, including for electricity subsidies, and was looking to cut back significantly. "Those that want to rule Gaza must bear the responsibility of governing it," the official said.

Azzam al-Ahmad, a senior Abbas ally and negotiator of the 2017 reconciliation agreement, told AFP "the leadership is considering a number of measures". Senior Hamas official

Bassem Naim said the Islamists had seen similar threats before.

"Any type of sanctions such as electricity, preventing medicine, closing the border or cutting the salaries are intended to blackmail residents into rising against Hamas and they fail," he told AFP.

"This is the most that Abbas can do." The Palestinians have faced stark challenges over the past two years, with US President Donald Trump leading what he has called the most pro-Israel administration in the country's history. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government has meanwhile continued to expand settlements in the West Bank. Abbas's government froze contacts with the Trump administration after it recognised the

disputed city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017.

The deepening split between the two factions weakens their ability to respond to such pressure, said Hugh Lovatt of the European Council on Foreign Relations think-tank.

He said the PA withdrawal from the border crossings was part of a "package of measures designed to try and squeeze Hamas."

"It is not irreversible but it is certainly a very negative step. This is short-term thinking triumphing longer-term strategy."

Nadia Hijab, president of the Al-Shabaka Palestinian think-tank, said the infighting prevented a united front against Israeli policies.

"Palestinians fear that this latest move will cement the division and lead to a complete break between Gaza and the West Bank, something Israel has been pushing," she said.

Both sides were "playing politics with people's lives instead of taking on Israel's 50-year-plus occupation," she said. At least 241 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza since mass protests along the border began in March 2018. Two Israeli soldiers have been killed.

The protests had calmed in recent months after Hamas and Israel struck an agreement that saw Qatari aid allowed into the territory.

This week, it was reported that Israel had blocked a third tranche of Qatari funding, which could lead to increased tensions.

"If the Israelis do block the money, then I think it is almost a certainty you will see Hamas increasing the tension on the border," Lovatt said.

In Washington, three weddings (whew!) and a shutdown



WASHINGTON, JAN 13 (AFP): There doesn't seem to be much love in the air in Washington these days, as a long and bitter government shutdown drags on with no end in sight.

But couples whose marriage plans were thwarted by the partial shutdown have gotten a break, thanks to the action of Mayor Muriel Bowser and city council.

The city's Marriage Bureau, part of the US capital's federally funded court system, had been deemed "nonessential" and shuttered as part of the thorny standoff between President Donald Trump and congressional Democrats.

But on Friday, Bowser signed an emergency measure authorising city officials to validate marriages in the absence of the Marriage Bureau, which closed when the budget standoff began on December 22.

"They can shut down the US government, but they cannot shut down love in the District of

Columbia," City Council member Brandon Todd said when he introduced the measure.

Titled the Let Our Vows Endure Emergency Amendment Act, or LOVE act, the law is valid for 90 days and will spare future brides like Claire O'Rourke from finding themselves in Kafkaesque situations.

"Practically, we couldn't sign all the legal certificates during the shutdown without having a marriage license," O'Rourke, a Washingtonian who was preparing to wed fiance Sam Bockenhauer, told AFP.

"So we were going to have a wonderful party, of course, but couldn't be legally married in DC until we got our marriage license."

Some couples, like Dan Pollock and Danielle Geanacopoulos, had no time to spare.

They managed to get their wedding license on December 27, just two days before their scheduled wedding.

"By the time we fig-

ured out we couldn't get a license, we were running out of time before friends and family were coming to Washington to celebrate with us," Geanacopoulos said.

"So we focused on the really important thing -- celebrating -- and decided to figure out the rest later."

Her mother, Daphne, said she was "delighted." "We had a really great big wedding two weeks ago... (but) it feels wonderful to have it official."

For Caitlin Walters, who plans to wed Kirk Kasa on February 2 on the campus of Catholic University, the shutdown was simply "a small speed bump in the road."

"Obviously we knew about the shutdown, but we didn't know that it would directly affect our ability to get married in DC legally," said Walters, a New York resident who was determined to get married in the nation's capital.

But while some have taken the shutdown in stride, it has brought

"chaos" to those in the wedding business.

"It's a lot of chaos, it's a lot of uncertainty," said Rachel Rice, a wedding planner who recently had to shift a wedding ceremony from Washington to nearby Virginia.

Even if the shutdown were to end next month, Rice said, "some people might say, 'I can't wait to book my venue; I have to book my catering, my photographer.'"

On top of that, the approximately 800,000 federal employees sent home or forced to work without pay -- some of them with wedding plans, no doubt -- have just missed their first paycheck and will be forced to scale back their plans.

Claire O'Rourke has her own shutdown-related regret.

She had hoped to have her official wedding photo taken in the National Portrait Gallery.

But like most of the capital's vast Smithsonian system, the popular museum remains closed.

Mining accident in China kills 19, two remain trapped

BEIJING, JAN 13 (AFP): Nineteen people were killed while two remain trapped underground after a roof collapse at a coal mine in northern China, state media reported.

A total of 87 people were working underground in the Shaanxi province mine at the time of the accident on Saturday afternoon, official news agency Xinhua reported, citing local authorities.

The search for the two trapped miners continues while 66 others have been airlifted to

safety, Xinhua reported. The cause of the accident at the site, run by Baiji Mining, is still under investigation.

Deadly mining accidents are common in China, where the industry has a poor safety record despite efforts to improve coal production conditions and crack down on illegal mines.

In December last year, seven miners were killed and three others injured in an accident at a coal mine in China's southwest.

In October, 21 miners died in eastern Shandong province after pressure

inside a mine caused rocks to fracture and break, blocking the tunnel and trapping workers. Only one miner was rescued alive.

According to China's National Coal Mine Safety Administration, the country saw 375 coal mining related deaths in 2017, down 28.7 percent year-on-year.

But despite improvements, "the situation of coal mine safety production is still grim," the bureau said in a statement following a coal mine safety conference last January.

Ranveer Singh starts prepping for '83'

MUMBAI, JAN 13 (PTI): Ranveer Singh has started preparing for sports drama "83".

Touted as the "biggest sports film" of the country, the film slated to be released on April 10, 2020.

The actor took to on Instagram share a glimpse of himself practising at the nets for the film, to be directed by Kabir Khan.

Ranveer, who is currently basking in the success of

"And the glorious journey begins... #83 #kapildev @83thefilm #balwindersingsandhu @kabirkhankk," Singh posted the photo on Saturday.

"83" will chronicle India's win under Dev's captainship, when the Men in Blue defeated West Indies in the final to clinch their first-ever World Cup trophy in 1983.

The actor will play former Indian cricket skipper Kapil Dev in the film.

Former Indian Test cricketer Balwinder Singh Sandhu is training Singh for the role.

"Training begins... #83 #kapildev @ranveersingh @83thefilm #balwindersingsandhu," Khan wrote on social media.

"Simmba", has another release ready in "Gully Boy", which hits the screens on February 14.



CIAO, BELLA! Supermodel Bella Hadid is spotted leaving the Versace show during Milan Fashion Week.

Steve Trevor is tonally different in 'Wonder Woman 1984: Chris Pine

LOS ANGELES, JAN 13 (PTI): Actor Chris Pine says his character Steve Trevor is "tonally different in "Wonder Woman 1984" as "tables have turned" for him.

Director Patty Jenkins, who helmed Warner Bros blockbuster "Wonder Woman" fronted by Gal Gadot, is back for the sequel and so is Pine.

Last year, Jenkins made a startling revelation that the actor will reprise his role of Trevor, an American pilot and the love interest of Diana Prince/ Wonder Woman. The character had sacrificed himself at the end of the 2017 film.

The filmmaker had also shared Pine's still from the film which features him dressed in an '80s avatar, along with the extras rocking

yesteryear's look.

Talking about his return in the sequel, Pine told Variety, "This one is a little different for me tonally. The tables are turned, and I'm more of the deer in the headlights."

The actor also said that he got emotional while filming in Washington DC for the movie.

"I cried in front of the Supreme Court. I was like, man, for all that we f**ked up, we're still at it. We're still trying. So I was super energised and pro-America," he added.

The sequel will see Gadot's Wonder Woman face off against Kristen Wiig's Cheetah. The film will also feature "Game of Thrones" and "Narcos" star Pedro Pascal in a pivotal role. It is set to release on November 1 this year.



Avengers Infinity War: A look at the epic duel between Thanos and Doctor Strange that couldn't make the final cut



Doctor Strange and Thanos had one of the most spectacular duels in the movie, with loads of VFX shots and special effects. The Sorcerer Supreme successfully held off the Mad Titan for a while until he was overwhelmed by the Infinity Gauntlet.

An unused clip from Marvel's Avengers: Infinity War has surfaced online. The short clip, posted on Reddit by a user called Tricker002, shows Thanos sort of launching a giant purple phantom hand towards Doctor Strange during their duel at Titan as a ranged weapon. The user writes, "A feature of what the power stone also can do was cut out. Thought this would've looked really cool if it was finished." The clip is cartoony and unfinished and was clearly not rendered for the final cut. It would certainly have looked interesting to see the impact of the attack on Doctor Strange and whether he would have dodged it.

Doctor Strange and Thanos still had one of the most spectacular duels in the movie, with loads of VFX shots and special effects. The Sorcerer Supreme successfully held off the Mad Titan for a while until he was overwhelmed by the Infinity Gauntlet.

The scene — like probably many others — was doubtless cut to shorten the runtime for a movie that was deemed overstuff. At the end of Infinity War, Thanos was able to acquire all the Infinity Stones and extinguished half of all living beings in the universe, including the newer superheroes in the Marvel Cinematic Universe like Black Panther, Spider-Man, Doctor Strange among others.

It is being kept under wraps if the 'dead' superheroes (if they are indeed dead) will be resurrected in Endgame, the concluding chapter of the franchise that will wrap up the Thanos arc of the MCU. Brie Larson's Captain Marvel will join the Avengers for an epic showdown against the Mad Titan.

Avengers: Endgame will release on April 26, 2019.



Hrithik Roshan-starrer 'Super 30' release postponed to July 26



MUMBAI, JAN 13 (PTI): Hrithik Roshan-starrer "Super 30" will now hit the theatres on July 26. The actor made the announcement on Twitter Saturday.

"Happy to announce that #Super30 is headed for release on July 26, 2019. Bahut jald samay badalne wala hai (The times are going to change soon)," Roshan wrote.

"Super 30" is based on the life of the Patna-based scholar Anand Kumar, who trains 30 deserving, economically backward students for IIT-JEE entrance exams every year with commendable success rate.

Produced by Reliance Entertainment and Nadiawala Grandson Entertainment, the film also stars Mrunal Thakur, Amit Sadh and Nandish Sandhu.

The film has been directed by Vikas Bahl, who has been accused of sexual harassment by a former employee of the now dissolved production company, Phantom Films, of which the director was a founding member. Phantom was also attached as co-producer.

After several changes in release date, "Super 30" was earlier set to hit the theatres on January 25 and clash with "Thackeray" and "Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi".

Last October, Roshan had broken his silence on allegations against Bahl, saying it is "impossible" for him to work with any person "guilty of such grave misconduct".

"It is impossible for me to work with any person if he/she is guilty of such grave misconduct. I am away and have access to only sporadic information. I have requested the producers of 'Super 30' to take stock of the apparent facts and take a harsh stand if need be. "This is not to be hushed or brushed under the carpet. All proven offenders must be punished and all exploited people must be empowered and given strength to speak up," Roshan had said in the statement shared on Twitter. Bahl has repeatedly denied the allegations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SCORPIO: The pen—and the voice—are

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

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

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

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

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

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