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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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*China, Nepal
sign protocol to
operationalise
key transit
treaty to access
Chinese ports*

BEIJING, APR 30 (PTI): China and Nepal have signed a protocol to operationalise their 2016 Transit and Transport Agreement (TTA) which will enable the landlocked Himalayan country to access Chinese sea and land ports for its foreign trade ending Nepal's dependence on India for goods and trade.

The agreement on protocol along with six other deals were signed during Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari's meeting with her Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping here on Monday.

Bhandari, who is on nine-day visit to China, earlier took part in China's 2nd Belt and Road Forum (BRF) held here from April 25-27. Nepal is signatory to the China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

While the official media here said, several agreements have been signed between the two countries, the Nepalese media reported that the protocol was among the agreements signed.

The protocol operationalises the TTA signed by Nepalese Prime Minister K P Sharma Oil during his visit to China in 2016 at the height of the Madhesi agitation leading to blockade of Nepal's access to Indian ports which had resulted in heavy shortages of goods and fuels.

Oli, widely regarded as pro-China, sought to open the second trade route for landlocked Nepal through Tibet and access Chinese ports, though transportation of goods through the rugged Himalayas would entail heavy costs.

The protocol will provide access to Nepal to the Chinese ports of Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang and Zhanjiang -- and three land ports--in Lanzhou, Lhasa and Shigatse--for third-country import. It will also allow Nepal to carry out exports through six dedicated transit points between Nepal and China, the Kathmandu Post reported.

Nepalese official Rabi Shankar Sainju, who held a series of negotiations with the Chinese side, said that Chinese ports are not a replacement for Indian ports. They are additional ports which we can use, Sainju was quoted as saying by the paper.

Since 2017, India has improved Nepal's access to Indian ports to ensure steady supplies of essential goods to Nepal besides rail and road connectivity. Till now, Nepal uses ports of Visakhapatnam and Haldia in Kolkata for trade. Recently Nepal

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Army claims 'Yeti' footprints found by its expedition team, releases pics

NEW DELHI, APR 30 (PTI): The Army has claimed its mountaineering expedition team in the higher Himalayas had found "mysterious footprints" in the snow that they believe belong to the Yeti or the abominable snowman, triggering a barrage of reactions.

Sources said on Tuesday that the Indian Army will send to domain experts the pictures and videos of the "large" footprints captured close to the Makalu Base Camp in Nepal earlier this month.

On Monday night, the Army tweeted, "For the first time, an #IndianArmy Mountaineering Expedition Team has sited (sic) Mysterious Footprints of mythical beast 'Yeti' measuring 32x15 inches close to Makalu Base Camp on 09 April 2019. This elusive snowman has only been sighted at Makalu-Barun National Park in the past."

The Army also re-



leased photos along with the tweet showing large footprints in the snow which they claim belong to the creature.

In Nepali folklore, Yeti is a mythical ape-like creature taller than an average human that is said to inhabit the Himalayas, Siberia, Central and East Asia.

An Army team of 18 personnel led by Major Manoj Joshi embarked on an expedition to Mount Makalu in Nepal on April 2. On April 9, the team spotted "mysterious

footprints" measuring 32 x 15 inches to close to the Makalu base camp, the sources said. The picture was retweeted 7,700 times and received over 17,000 likes until Tuesday evening.

The sources said the pictures were sent by the team using satellite communication. "We will share the photos and videos with domain experts to understand more about this," a source said.

The sources did not elaborate on which domain experts they will

approach. The team is expected to be back in India next month.

The pictures posted by the Army received a barrage of reaction on Twitter -- some were overwhelmed while some had a field day mocking the Army.

Makalu is the fifth highest mountain in the world at 8,485 m. It is located in the Mahalangur Himalayas, some 19 km southeast of Mount Everest, on the border between Nepal and Tibet, China. Stories of the Yeti first emerged as a facet of

Western popular culture in the 19th century.

Given the lack of evidence of its existence, the scientific community has generally regarded the Yeti as a legend.

In one genetic study, researchers matched DNA from hair samples found in the Himalaya with a prehistoric bear from the Pleistocene epoch.

Though the hunt for the mythical beast stretches back centuries, tales of a wild hairy beast roaming the Himalayas captured the imagina-



tion of climbers in Nepal in the 1920s, prompting many, including Sir Edmund Hillary, to go looking for the creature. Sightings have been re-

ported for centuries. Footprints have been spotted and stories have been passed down from generation to generation.

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After Asaram, son Narayan Sai gets life in jail for rape; 10-yr prison for 3 aides

SURAT (GUJ), APR 30 (PTI): A sessions court here Tuesday sentenced Narayan Sai, the son of jailed self-styled 'god-man' Asaram, to life imprisonment in a rape case filed against him by a former woman disciple in 2013. Additional Sessions Judge P S Gadhi handed down the life sentence to 47-year-old Sai and imposed a fine of Rs 1 lakh on him. The court also directed Sai to pay Rs 5 lakh as a compensation to the victim.

Sai's father Asaram was convicted by a Jodhpur court in a rape case in April last year and sentenced to life term.

Besides Sai, lodged at the Lajpore Jail here since his arrest in 2013, the court on Tuesday sentenced his three aides, including two women, to 10 years each in jail for various offences related to the case.

His driver Rajkumar alias Ramesh Malhotra was sentenced to six months in jail.

The court had pronounced the judgement in the case on April 26 when it convicted five of the 11 accused and acquitted the rest. The judge had fixed April 30 for deciding the quantum of sentence to the convicts. The court had convicted Sai under IPC sections 376 (rape), 377 (unnatural offences), 323 (assault), 506-2 (criminal intimidation) and 120-B (conspiracy), while his aides were found guilty of abetment to the crime. Sai's three

aides, Dharmishtha alia Ganga, Bhavna alias Jamuna and Pavan alias Hanuman, were sentenced to 10 years each.

Dharmishtha, Bhavna and Pavan were held guilty of being part of a conspiracy, while Sai's driver Malhotra was convicted under IPC section 212 (harbouring offender). The two women disciples (sadhvis) were accused of putting the victim in illegal confinement and thrashing her at Sai's behest.

Pavan, a "sadhak" (disciple) of Sai, was accused of abetment, including taking the victim to Sai's room. Dharmishtha, Bhavna and Pavan were fined Rs 5,000 each by the court.

Of the 11 accused, the court had acquitted six for lack of evidence against them. Earlier in the day, while arguing over the quantum of sentence, special public prosecutor P N Parmar sought "exemplary punishment" for Sai to set an example in society and Rs 25 lakh compensation for the victim. Defence lawyer B M Gupta pleaded for minimum sentence and argued there was no evidence of use of force, allurement or pressure on part of the convict. He said the FIR was delayed by over a decade and lodged more than 11 years after the crime was committed.

Gupta sought the minimum possible punishment of no more than four years in jail -- on the grounds that the convict had

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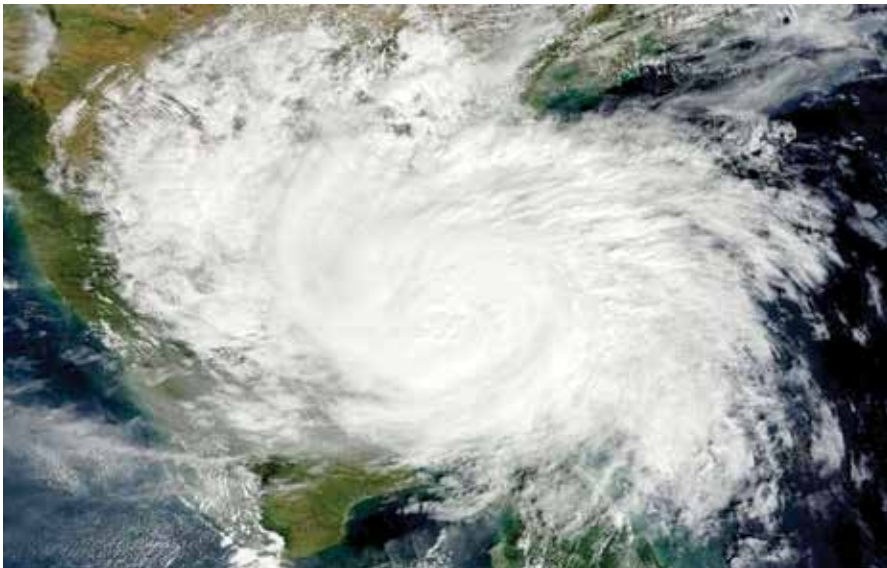
Cyclone 'Fani' likely to hit Odisha coast by Friday: Official

BHUBANESWAR, APR 30 (PTI): Severe cyclonic storm 'Fani' intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm on Tuesday, and is likely hit the Odisha coast between Puri and Kendrapara by Friday, a senior official said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) is yet to specify the exact location of landfall.

However, in its 12 pm bulletin, the Cyclone Warning Division of the IMD said Fani lays over southeast and adjoining southwest Bay of Bengal, about 830 km nearly south of Puri, 670 km south-southeast of Vishakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) and about 680 km northeast of Trincomalee (Sri Lanka).

"The IMD module indicates that cyclone Fani is expected to make a landfall somewhere between Satapada or Chandrabhaga in Puri district



and Gupti in Kendrapara late on May 3," Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) B P Sethi said.

According to a forecast issued by the US Navy, the cyclonic system is likely to cross Odisha through the coast, he said, adding, the exact location of the landfall will be clear on Wednesday after the cyclone

recurses. The Ministry of Home Affairs, meanwhile, has released funds from State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF) in advance to four states -- Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Of the total financial assistance of Rs 1,086 crore, Odisha will get Rs 340.87 crore.

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WB govt takes all precautionary measures for Cyclone Fani

KOLKATA, APR 30 (PTI): With the IMD issuing a formal alert that Cyclone Fani is likely to hit the coastal areas of West Bengal, the state government has taken all precautionary measures to avert any untoward incident, officials said Tuesday.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has extended cyclone alert to north Andhra Pradesh coast and West Bengal coast, apart from Odisha, which it is expected to cross by Friday.

The state disaster management department in a message issued a warning to the fishermen asking them not to venture into the deep sea and urged those already there to return to the coast by Wednesday evening.

The MHA has released in advance fund for financial assistance to the state disaster management

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SBI savings a/c holders with Rs 1 lakh plus balance to get lower interest from Wed

NEW DELHI, APR 30 (PTI): Savings bank account holders in SBI having more than Rs 1 lakh balance will earn a quarter percentage point less interest from Wednesday with the country's largest lender linking the interest rate to the RBI's repo or short-term lending rate.

However, SBI savings bank account holders with less than Rs 1 lakh balance will continue to get 3.5 per cent interest on deposits.

According to the information provided on the website of State Bank of India (SBI),

the interest rate on savings bank accounts with balances above Rs 1 lakh will be 2.75 per cent below the RBI's repo rate, which currently stands at 6 per cent. Hence, the SBI will give 3.25 per cent interest on savings bank deposits with a balance exceeding Rs 1 lakh. At present, the interest rate is 3.5 per cent. The interest is paid quarterly.

The interest rate on such balances will go up in case the Reserve Bank hikes repo rate (the rate at which it lends to banks) and may fall further

if the repo rate continues its downward journey.

The SBI, which controls nearly a quarter of the banking system, was giving interest at a rate of 3.5 per cent for savings bank deposits up to Rs 1 crore and 4 per cent for deposits above Rs 1 crore till Tuesday (April 30). Earlier in March, the SBI had announced that it will be linking its savings deposits rates and short-term loans to the RBI's repo rate from May 1 with an aim to ensure faster monetary transmission.

The bank further said all cash credit accounts and overdrafts with limits above Rs 1 lakh will also be linked to the benchmark policy rate, plus a spread of 2.25 per cent.

"The Risk premiums over and above this floor rate would be based on the risk profile of the borrowers, as is the current practice," according to its website.

SBI's domestic savings bank deposits stood at more than Rs 10.64 lakh crore at end-December 2018.

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Army claims...

According to a clip on the subject on the National Geographic's YouTube channel, in November 1951, British explorer Eric Shipton and Michael Ward spotted footprints, 12 inches long and five inches wide, near glacier near the Mount Everest Base Camp. The clip posted in November 2013 has over 1.5 million views.

Their picture created furore that led to West's interest in 'Yeti'.

A 2017 DNA study of purported Yeti samples from museums and private collections provided insight into the origins of this Himalayan legend.

The research, published in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B, analysed nine "Yeti" specimens, including bone, tooth, skin, hair and faecal samples collected in the Himalayas and Tibetan Plateau.

Of those, one turned out to be from a dog. The other eight were from Asian bears -- one from an Asian black bear, one from a Himalayan brown bear, and the other six from Tibetan brown bears.

"Our findings strongly suggest that the biological underpinnings of the Yeti legend can be found in local bears, and our study demonstrates that genetics should be able to unravel other, similar mysteries," said lead scientist of that study, Charlotte Lindqvist, an associate professor at the University at Buffalo College of Arts and Sciences.

Lindqvist's team was not the first to research the "Yeti" DNA, but past projects ran simpler genetic analyses, which left important questions unresolved.

"This study represents the most rigorous analysis to date of samples suspected to derive from anomalous or mythical 'hominid'-like creatures," Lindqvist and her co-authors wrote in their paper.

Former BJP MP Tarun Vijay urged the Army not to call Yeti a "beast" but a "snowman".

"Congratulations, we are always proud of you. salutes to the #IndianArmy Mountaineering Expedition Team. But please, you are Indian, dont call Yeti as beast. Show respect for them. If you say he is a 'snowman'," he said.

One Twitter user came up with her own hypothesis. She said Yeti could be 'Ashwathama', a character from Mahabharat who was cursed to remain alive forever by Lord Krishna.

"Foot-print suggests that this Yeti is one-legged. Looks like he lost his other leg in Balakote air strike!" tweeted Shah Faesal, the former IAS officer from Kashmir who launched his political party last month.

"What the hell is wrong with you guys? Just look at those pics for heaven's sake. That's not a bipedal. Couldn't you guys call a single animal expert before posting this? Unless you are claiming your yeti walks on a single foot and travels by jumping," another tweet user posted.

WB govt takes...

department for undertaking preventive and relief measures in response to Cyclonic storm Fani, officials said.

Of the total financial assistance of Rs 1,086 crore, Odisha will get Rs 340.87 crore, Tamil Nadu Rs 309.37 crore, West Bengal Rs 235.50 crore and Andhra Pradesh will get Rs 200.25 crore, a home ministry statement said.

The cyclone is very likely to intensify further into an extremely severe cyclonic storm shortly, the IMD said in a bulletin in the evening.

Cyclone 'Fani'...

The impact of 'Fani' is likely to be much more severe than 'Titli', which had hit the Odisha-Andhra coast last year, Biswas said.

At least 60 people had been killed when cyclone 'Titli' struck Odisha in October 2018.

Biswas said 'Fani' is very likely to intensify further into an extremely severe cyclonic storm during the next 36 hours, and expected to move north-westwards till May 1 evening, and, thereafter, recurve north-northeastwards towards Odisha coast.

The cyclone will trigger heavy to very heavy rainfall in the south and east coastal districts, while there will be isolated heavy rainfall at one or two places in the north Odisha districts, he said.

Sethi said rains will lash many coastal areas on May 2 and the intensity will assume severe shape on May 3, while windspeeds will be up to 70 kmph.

The IMD said squally winds with speeds of 40-50 kmph and gusting to 60 kmph is very likely to commence along and off north Andhra Pradesh and Odisha coasts from May 2, and very likely to become gale wind, with speeds reaching 60-70 kmph gusting to 85 kmph from the morning of May 3.

As the sea will be very rough, fishermen have been advised not to venture into the waters from May 2 off Odisha and West Bengal coasts. Those who are out in the deep sea are advised to return to the coasts, said an official.

The SRC said the Odisha government has put the coastal districts on high alert and is prepared to face any eventuality.

Sethi said 20 units of the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF), 12 units of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and 335 units of fire services have been kept in a state of preparedness.

Instruction has been issued to undertake prompt evacuation of people from all vulnerable areas and shift them to the cyclone centres from May 2, he said, adding, all the 880 such centres have been readied for the purpose.

Boats are also kept in readiness for rescue operations if required.

The Indian Air Force, the Navy and Coast Guards have been alerted and their services will be utilised if necessary, Sethi said.

The district collectors of Ganjam, Khurda, Puri and Kendrapara have cancelled leaves of state government employees, as a part of the preparedness.

Cold storage at Mangan to function by May



MANGAN, 30 APR (IPR):

A meeting regarding operation of the cold storage located at Lal Bazaar, Mangan which was remained non-functional for a couple of month took place here at the chamber of District Magistrate (DM), North.

Meeting was chaired by DM, North, Raj Yadav in presence of District Planning Officer (DPO), North, Pempa Bhutia, District Zilla Panchayat (NDZP), Councilor of Mangan Nagar Panchayat, Karma Jigdal Bhutia and concerned officers of line department.

Sole purpose of the meeting was to preserve organic vegetables for long time at cold storage and to levy consistent price of vegetables in the district, buying of vegetables directly from farmers and keep proper

maintenance of account for cold storage.

It was decided in the meeting that a new Bank Account for marketing and other transaction related to cold storage will be opened by the month of May.

The meeting also decided that the cold storage will remain open daily from 8am to 4pm after the storage is operational.

The DM said that the Cold Storage situated at Lal bazaar, Mangan will be public by 05 May, 2019. A rate board will be placed outside the cold storage in which rate of vegetables will be displayed in a daily basis. Vegetable vendors who wish to keep their vegetable in the Cold Storage will be charged as per the rate fixed by the concerned department.

Yangthang farmers trained on aspects of organic agriculture



SUMMIT REPORT

YANGTHANG, 29 APR:

Farmers from Yangthang were given a training on various aspects of Organic Farming by Mevedir at Aarigaon ward under Yangthang GPU, West Sikkim. Mevedir Master Trainers Ashish Chettri and Yangden

Bhutia were present as resource persons.

Mr Chettri spoke on crop production and explained the need to focus on seed source, how they are to be treated before planting, the spacing and timing of sowing seeds and irrigation methods.

The farmers were also

trained on how to follow organic practices for running crop like maize and paddy. Mr Chettri explained aspects of bed preparation of paddy, seed treatment and major irrigation period of paddy.

More than 20 farmers attended the training program.

BDO leads visit to Phidang Aanganwadi

SUMMIT REPORT

DIKCHU, 30 APR:

A team led by BDO [Dzongu], Roshan Subba, AE Passingdang BAC, Rajesh Upreti, Panchayat President, Phurmith Lepcha, vice president Duptang Lepcha of Lumgor-Sangtok GPU, CDPO/Dzongu, Netuk Lepcha and Supervisor Aruna Rai visited Phidang Aganwadi Centre today.

The AWC (ICDS) was established in the year 1992-93 in a temporary structure donated by the late Pemtuk Lepcha of Phidang and in the year



2013, the centre was reconstructed at a cost of Rs 2,00,000 but without a toilet.

Today, the BDO sanctioned Rs 12,000 for the construction of toilet along with a white board for the Aganwadi centre and the AE offered

to contribute a table fan, whiteboard marker pen and a duster. The Panchayat President handed over baby boxes to mothers recently blessed with daughters.

The programme was attended by AWWs of Lower Dzongu.

Two ASIs, missing with over Rs 6 cr seized during raid, arrested from Kerala: Punjab Police

CHANDIGARH, APR 30 (PTI): Punjab Police Tuesday said two of its assistant sub-inspectors of police, absconding for the past one month with a sum of over Rs 6 crore recovered during a raid at a house, have been arrested by Kerala Police from Kochi. According to Punjab Director General of Police Dinkar Gupta, based on specific inputs, Kerala Police arrested ASIs -- Joginder Singh and Rajpreet Singh -- from a hotel in Kochi late afternoon on Tuesday. Special Investigation Team head Praveen

Kumar Sinha, who is Inspector-General of Police Crime, Punjab, has left for Kochi to bring back the two accused, as per the DGP.

Earlier, the SIT, probing the pilferage of the amount from Rs 16.65 crore cash recovered from a priest's house in Jalandhar last month, had arrested one more ASI-rank policeman for his collusion with the other accused. After the raid, police said the Income Tax Department officials were informed about the cash seizure and investigations were

launched. The priest had claimed the money to be from business proceeds and had accused that police recovered Rs 16.65 crore from his house, but claimed it to be Rs 9.66 crore, while misappropriating the remaining amount.

The priest had reportedly claimed that the money was kept at his house because company employees had refused to go and deposit it in the bank due to the model code of conduct in view of the Lok Sabha polls.

Golay's greetings on International Labour Day

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 30 APR:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha president, PS Tamang [Golay] has greeted people of Sikkim on the occasion of International Labour Day 2019, also known as May Day and expressed hope that this special day will remind everyone of the significant role played by the labour class in building a world befitting human civilization down the ages.

He said that this is the day to pay gratitude to the building blocks of our society, who through their sheer toil and hard

work make the world a better place to live in. He pointed out that in the race for materialistic progress, many forget the importance of the labour class and the International Labour Day is a reminder to them to recognize and acknowledge the importance of the working class in our lives.

"On this day I salute the members of the labour class, who despite hardships work day in and day out to build our world. We are indebted to them and owe them our support, cooperation and respect," Mr Tamang adds.

"We for Her" drive by Rotaract Club of Gangtok



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 30 APR:

The Rotaract Club of Gangtok [RAC] organized "We for Her" 2.0: a sanitary pad awareness and donation drive, initiated by the RAC of Guwahati and Siliguri Greater.

In this drive, 300 sanitary napkins were distributed at Aho Senti

School, East Sikkim.

The drive was initiated by Minsang Tamang in collaboration with APTECH Institute, Tadong, Daragaon, Gangtok.

"We are immensely grateful to the APTECH Institute for being an active contributor to our movement," said Mr Tamang.

SBI savings...

In December 2018, the RBI had proposed that floating interest rates on personal, home, auto and micro and small enterprises (MSEs) loans should be linked to external benchmarks like repo rate or treasury yields, from April 1, 2019.

However, the RBI later deferred the deadline saying it will hold further discussions with banks on linking interest rates.

As of now, banks follow a system of internal benchmarks, including Prime Lending Rate (PLR), Benchmark Prime Lending Rate (BPLR), Base rate and Marginal Cost of Funds based Lending Rate (MCLR).

China, Nepal...

had reportedly sought access to use Mundra port in Gujarat as well as Dhamara in Orissa.

China, which has enhanced its ties with Nepal with heavy investments, has vastly improved road connectivity with the country through Tibet and finalising plans to extend the Tibetan railway line to Nepal.

In the just concluded BRF meeting, the Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, including Nepal-China cross-border railway has been listed as one of the 35 corridors to be laid by China under the BRI format.

In his talks with Bhandari, Xi said China and Nepal should strengthen cooperation on infrastructure construction and continue to promote the construction of the China-Nepal cross-border economic cooperation zone.

Xi said China greatly values its ties with Nepal, and supports Nepal in maintaining its national independence, state sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as exploring a path of development that suits its national conditions.

He said that China will continue to support Nepal's economic and social development.

Bhandari said the Belt and Road is a historic initiative and has served as a good platform for Nepal-China cooperation.

After Asaram...

already spent over five years in jail and was all of 32 years of age when the offence was committed.

The defence lawyer also said the victim was not a minor. The Surat police had filed a 1,100-page charge-sheet against Sai in 2014.

In 2013, after Asaram was arrested for allegedly raping a girl in Rajasthan, two Surat-based sisters had accused Asaram and his son of sexual exploitation.

The elder sister had accused Asaram of sexual assaults between 1997 and 2006 when she lived at his Ahmedabad ashram.

The younger sister had accused the godman's son of sexual assaults when she lived at Asaram's ashram in the Jahangirpura area of Surat between 2002 and 2005.

The incidents of multiple sexual assaults and unnatural sex with the victim had taken place between 2002 and 2005, but the case against Sai had been filed only in 2013. Sai was arrested from the Delhi-Haryana border in December 2013.

When Sai was in jail, Surat police had claimed to have unearthed elaborate plans to bribe police officers, doctors and even judicial officers to weaken the case against him.

The trial against Asaram in the case filed by the Surat-based woman is going on at a Gandhinagar court.

CPWD constitutes 10-member committee to bring 'Safety Manual' of dept

NEW DELHI, APR 30 (PTI): The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) has constituted a 10-member committee to bring out 'Safety Manual' of the department. According to a CPWD official, the committee, headed by Additional Director General (ADG) K M Soni, has been asked to submit its report within two months. The move is aimed at ensuring safety of engineers and workers working in various projects of the agency which comes under the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry. The official said several senior CPWD officers, including Chief Project Manager J S Sharma, Deputy Director General Harish Kumar and DMRC member Daljeet Singh have been included in the panel.

"Till now, there was no such safety manual and in view of this, the committee has been formed. It will submit its report within two months," official also said. It comes a few days after it constituted an expert committee to formulate a design policy for building construction and infrastructure development.

Hridai Raj Chettri from Holy Cross School wins Spellbound' 19

SAGAR CHHETRI GANGTOK, 30 APR:

Hridai Raj Chettri of Holy Cross School, Tadong emerged as the winner of Spellbound' 19, an inter-school Spelling Bee contest, held at Science Block of Shri Ramasamy Memorial [SRM] University, Sikkim here at Tadong, East Sikkim on Tuesday. Likewise, Pema Tashi Wangchuk Bhutia of Tashi Namgyal Academy was the runners-up of the contest.

This inter-school contest was organised by the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Department of English of SRM University, Sikkim for students of classes X to XII. A total of 32 students from 16 schools from East District participated in this contest. Department of English, Assistant Professor, Anup Sharma was the Spell Bee Master.

Out of 32 students in the qualifying round [Rapid Fire], only the top 15 students were shortlisted for the Oral round and then the top 7 students competed in the final round [knock-out round].

The main objective



of Spellbound was to encourage students to explore and study the English language and its roots and to help students to learn how to spell quickly, accurately and with comprehension. The contest also aims to promote student's knowledge of proper word usage and encourage students to strive for excellence in spelling skills and provide an opportunity to students to meet and compete with their peers in an atmosphere of fun and friendship.

In his inaugural ad-

dress, SRM University Sikkim Vice-Chancellor [I/C], Prof Ch Satish Kumar expressed happiness that a Spell Bee competition was finally held in Sikkim. He stated that the basic objective of the competition is to improve spelling skills and vocabulary among students. He stated that Spellbound is just the beginning as the university plans to conduct this Spell Bee competition in the district and state level and ultimately to connect it with the national level. The VC encouraged students to prepare better

for future competitions.

Department of English HoD, Assistant Professor, Dr Sonal Sharma stated that the competition aims to introduce competitive spirit amongst students and further to encourage, appreciate and nurture talents of students and also provide them exposure to connect with the university through such events. Such competitions will help students in improving vocabulary and pronunciation, she said and encouraged students to make the best out of such competition.

Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities, Manisha Thakuri thanked the Vice-Chancellor of the university for extending all support and encouragement for the event. She stated that it was not only a competition but an occasion for students of private and government schools to come together to have a stronger bond. She also thanked heads of all participating schools for sending their students for the competition. She also assured to organise the Spell Bee competition in grander manner in near future.

Chit fund case: SC asks CBI to place evidence for seeking custodial interrogation of Kolkata's ex-CP

NEW DELHI, APR 30 (PTI): The Supreme Court Tuesday asked CBI to furnish evidence for seeking custodial interrogation of former Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar in Saradha chit fund case, saying it has to be satisfied that the agency's request was "bona fide" and not for "political purposes".

A bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi said CBI has to place material which can "even very remotely" show that Kumar, who was earlier heading West Bengal Police SIT probing the chit fund scam, has something to do with either destruction or disappearance of evidence related to the case.

"We have to be satisfied that you (CBI) are seeking this (custodial interrogation of Kumar) in bona fide interest of justice and not for political purposes," said the bench, which also comprised Justices Deepak Gupta and Sanjiv Khanna.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for CBI, said he would file the evidence by tomorrow.

The bench said that it will take up the matter for further hearing on Wednesday.

During the hearing, the bench told Mehta, "All you have to show us is that this man (Kumar) has something to do, even very remotely, with disappearance or destruction of evidence".

Mehta told the court that custodial interrogation of Kumar was necessary as he was not cooperating in the probe and he was "evasive" and "arrogant" in answering the queries put to him during his questioning by the CBI.

He said Kumar was the in-charge of investigation by the SIT and

had allowed the release of mobile phones and laptops, containing crucial records of alleged involvement of political functionaries in the scam, which were seized from the accused.

He said that the seized mobile phones and laptops were not even sent for forensic examination and material evidence were destroyed in the case.

Mehta said that entire call detail records (CDRs) of certain phone numbers, which were provided to SIT by telephone service providers, was not shared with the CBI.

"He (Kumar) is virtually a party to destruction of evidence," he said.

Mehta told the court about some missing evidence, including a diary which allegedly contain records of cash payment to influential persons in the scam, and said that CBI want to interrogate Kumar on these crucial aspects of the case.

"The allegation is that in the name of this ponzi scam, blackmoney of high and might was being moved," he said.

He said that when the CBI team had gone to interrogate Kumar at his residence in Kolkata, the local police had "ambushed" the CBI officers.

"What was there in the residence of Kumar which prompted him to virtually attack the CBI team. What was that? CBI team had gone to his residence for questioning," he said.

To this, the bench asked, "You (CBI) had gone there without any search notice?"

Mehta, who replied in the affirmative to the court's query, said, "What prompted that sudden 'dharna' where police official was sitting with the Chief Minister? That 'dharna' place became a

secretariat".

During the hearing, the bench told Mehta that if the CBI would justify that Kumar has not cooperated in the probe, then it can permit the agency to have his custodial interrogation.

Mehta told the court that after questioning Kumar in the case, the CBI team has reached to a conclusion that he was not cooperating, "he gave clean chit to influential persons" and tried to shift the blame to either his senior or junior officers.

The bench observed that Kumar was not an investigating officer in the case and was only heading the SIT and CBI has to "show on record" that he was a party in either destruction or disappearance of evidence.

"We want to satisfy ourselves that this man, whose custodial interrogation you are seeking, has to role to play either in destruction or disappearance of evidence," the bench told Mehta.

The court was hearing CBI's application in which the agency, which was asked by the apex court to investigate the case, was seeking custodial interrogation of Kumar on grounds that he had given evasive replies during questioning.

Earlier, Kumar had alleged that he was targeted by CBI in the chit fund case due to "mala fide intent" and "conflict of interest" of former interim CBI director M Nageshwar Rao as his family members were under the scanner post-demonetisation. Kumar had alleged that post demonetisation in November 2016, investigation was initiated into some shell companies that prima facie were involved in receiving huge deposits and a FIR was registered.

Rotary Club installs sanitary napkin vending machine at DAC East



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 30 APR:

A sanitary napkin vending machine and incinerator unit was inaugurated today at District Administrative Centre (Office of The District Collector East at Gangtok).

The unit has been sponsored by Rotary

Club of Gangtok and will be maintained by DAC now, a press release informs.

Rs 5 coin will be required to be put in the machine to get a sanitary pad. It will be useful for women employees and public in times of emergency, the release mentions.

Rotary Club of Gang-

tok has earlier installed sanitary napkin vending machine and incinerator at Government College, Rhenock and plans to install a few more sets in other locations in Sikkim. One such unit will be installed for Sikkim Girls Bn NCC at Kamrang, Namchi by next month, the release adds.

Yuksom youth Nawang Gyatso Bhutia is all about butterflies

REBYNA RANA GANGTOK, 30 APR:

Meet young butterfly lover and expert from Sikkim, Nawang Gyatso Bhutia who heads BAMOS NCS (Butterflies And Moths of Sikkim Nature Conversation Society) as its president.

Hailing from Yuksom in West Sikkim, Nawang started getting interested in butterflies in 2010. Since then, he has learnt a lot about butterflies gathering information from here and there due to the lack of proper documentation on butterflies in this area.

Later, Nawang joined Butterfly India to learn more about butterflies wherein he met Peter Smetacek, Isaac David Kehimkar and Monsoon Jyoti Gogoi helping Nawang in his learning process.

Nawang also guides butterfly lovers and tourists coming to Sikkim from different parts of



the country. He conducts similar tours in West Bengal and North East. He also organizes awareness programmes to sensitize people of Sikkim on butterflies and also conducts training camps in North East.

He shares that in the coming days, BAMOS will be holding awareness campaigns in schools and villages of Sikkim on butterflies.

"We will also set up stalls during big tourism events in Gangtok and

Amway India aims to tap 'nascent' kids dietary supplement mkt

KOLKATA, APR 30 (PTI): Direct selling major Amway India on Tuesday launched two new kids dietary supplement products, aiming to boost revenues from the segment and tap this "nascent" market.

According to Euro-monitor estimates of about Rs 401 crore, the kids' vitamin and dietary supplement market is still at a "nascent stage and promises strong growth potential", Amway India Chief Marketing Officer Sundip Shah said. The segment contributes about 10 per cent to the overall nutraceutical sales.

Amway India, part of the USD 8.8 billion global group, launched 'Nutrilite DHA Yummies', developed to support the nutritional gap of ome-

ga-3 fatty acids and vitamin D in children of age five years and above.

"Nutrilite DHA Yummies is an addition to our existing range of supplements for kids," Shah said in a statement.

As of 2018, the overall omega 3 supplement market was growing at a CAGR of 12 per cent, officials said.

The new product will initially be imported from its global sourcing hubs.

Amway Global Chief Operating Officer Michael J Cazer recently told PTI that the company was giving major impetus to building a strong product portfolio going forward.

This would be part of its journey to make India a USD 1 billion market in a decade, he had said.

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Addressing Climate Change

It will take more than renaming departments and steering committees

The State has a State Steering Committee to “Strengthen State Strategies for Climate Action in Sikkim.” As its name suggests, it is tasked to reinforce Sikkim’s preparedness for Climate Change. Sikkim was also among the first states in the country to dedicate a department to Climate Change when it added “Climate Change” to the name of the Department of Science & Technology. The State has also commissioned a study of its glaciers, and initiatives like the Organic Mission and ecotourism attest its acceptance of climate change as a real concern.

That said, while the acceptance and commitment appear to be in place, realization about the possible impact of global warming and climate change is not as clear as it needs to be. And why would it be? Most of Sikkim does not depend on nature or environment anymore, so the direct connection does not exist. Houses are brick and cement constructions, so no one notices if bamboo is no longer as easily available. Ditto for the village and neighbourhood spring water sources. Why would people notice their drying up when water comes piped into home in PHE or RMDD supply lines? Except the few who still live off agriculture, and especially since no one is hunting and gathering any more, the scale of how the land has changed due to climate change is neither missed, nor even noticed by any one. It is in such a scenario that the State Steering Committee needs to work and “Strengthen State Strategies for Climate Action in Sikkim”.

A recent study by a team of geographers and glaciologists had projected that over 70% of the glacier volume in the Everest region could be lost by 2100! And that is the lower end of their estimate!! If greenhouse-gas emissions continue to rise and global warming comes true to predictions, even up to 99% of the glacier volume of the Everest region could be lost by 2100. Just to drive home the point – it is not as if the loss will manifest suddenly in the year 2100, it will play out through the years, obviously accelerating the already noticeable trend in the merely eighty-four years left till it is 2100. The report mentioned here speaks exclusively of glaciers in the Everest region, but that zone is not very far or separated from the Sikkim Himalaya, and if anything, Sikkim’s glacial areas are even closer to the tropics, hence more affected by warming than the ice of Everest. It becomes necessary then that Sikkim works on its preparedness for climate change with more seriousness than just adding “climate change” to the name of one of its departments, or putting out an action plan without any real plan of action. The Everest melt claim is staggering, and while everyone will be surprised, even this statistic is unlikely to draw any public response because most of us will never really see a glacier in real life and most understand the role glacier play in ecology and hydrology only in very general terms.

Those working on climate change and hoping to make preparedness more than just a catchy term will have to ensure that Sikkim accepts Climate Change as the challenge that it is and not just make token gestures of concern towards it. Rising temperatures will not only increase the rates of snow and ice melt, but can also result in a change of precipitation from snow to rain at critical elevations where glaciers are concentrated. Reflect these findings and projections against Sikkim and talk to stakeholders here and even they will vouch that parts of North Sikkim which used to receive only snow [and no rain] have been inundated by sleet and rain in the recent years. Global warming is a reality for Sikkim as well and reports of rain in formerly only snowfied regions and the advance of lower hill plants into the higher reaches provide the more obvious evidence.

Meanwhile, the study of Sikkim’s glaciers had reported that the glaciers here were in good health. Welcome as this update is, given the rather short duration of the study and the general lack of adequately reliable base-data, future projections could not have been very detailed. It is learnt that the study of Sikkim’s glaciers, including observations of glacial lakes is being undertaken in earnest. This study has now also been expanded to experts beyond the jurisdiction of government departments. Hopefully, this independent presence will not only ensure that their analysis is based only on hard data and not influenced by other considerations, but now that more minds are being applied to aspects which could have a very telling effect on how the Sikkimese live in the very near future, something substantial will shake out. And the study needs to be expanded to features beyond glaciers and made to include the mountain springs, catchment areas and lakes.

Spanish election: victory for Socialists as VOX surge fragments right-wing vote

CAROLINE GRAY
theconversation.com

Spain’s left-wing parties have beaten the right in the country’s most polarised election in decades. With the Socialist party (PSOE) winning 123 of the national parliament’s 350 seats, and far left Unidas Podemos winning 42, the statewide left combined to take 165 seats.

This trumped the 147 seats secured by the three right-wing parties combined. The Conservative party (PP) took 66 seats, centre right challenger Ciudadanos (Citizens) 57, and the far right Vox 24. The remaining 38 seats went to an array of regionally-based parties across the left-right spectrum.

SÁNCHEZ REMAINS IN CHARGE

The result is a huge victory for Socialist leader Pedro Sánchez and a historic defeat for the Conservatives. The ball is now firmly in Sánchez’s court. With the left still falling short of the absolute majority of 176 seats needed in Spain’s 350-seat parliament, Sánchez will need to secure pacts with smaller parties to secure his investiture and make it possible for the Socialist party to govern.

The big question is whether Sánchez will be able to form a viable, stable government with Unidas Podemos and an array of regionally-based parties without the need for the Catalan separatist parties. It was the Catalan parties who triggered these elections in the first place. When Sánchez would not meet their demands for dialogue on Catalan self-determination, they voted against his 2019 budget in parliament, bringing the government down and forcing a vote.

Assuming the support of Unidas Podemos, the PSOE still needs 11 more seats to reach the minimum of 176 needed for Sánchez to win a first-round investiture vote, unless there are some abstentions. The Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) is likely to play ball with its six seats and so too are a couple of small parties in other regions with one or two seats each. But the numbers still don’t quite add up without at least one of the Catalan pro-inde-

pendence parties, unless Sánchez gets the radical Basque pro-independence party Bildu on side.

A second-round investiture vote only needs a simple majority if it comes to that, but governing effectively thereafter will not be easy without a strong majority. News emerging from Spain in the hours after the vote suggested the PSOE will try to govern alone rather than entering into a formal coalition, which leaves open the door to shifting alliances depending on the legislation once Sánchez’s investiture is secured.

While the maths actually favours a centrist PSOE-Ciudadanos coalition (180 seats), PSOE voters shouting “not with Rivera” outside the party headquarters on election night made it clear they would consider any such pact a betrayal. So would many Ciudadanos voters.

Their leader, Albert Rivera, explicitly vetoed the possibility of any such pact ahead of the election, due to the parties’ contrasting visions on how to deal with the Catalan crisis. Many will have voted for Ciudadanos instead of another right-wing party due to this cordon sanitaire, and Rivera currently looks set to stick to it. His first post-election declarations suggest he intends to continue challenging the PP for the leadership of the right, from the opposition. With 15.9% of the vote, Ciudadanos came very close to the PP’s mere 16.7%.

VOX ENTERS PARLIAMENT

While the right has declined overall compared to the 2016 elections, it has also fragmented. New far right party Vox has entered the national parliament for the first time, stealing seats primarily from the Conservatives.

With the emergence of this far right challenger in recent months, Spanish nationalism has resurfaced to a degree few would ever have anticipated just a year ago. Vox also pulled the Conservatives and Ciudadanos further to the right as each sought to become the lead party in the right-wing space.

What first sparked the resurgence of right-wing Spanish nationalism was the Catalan independence crisis. Vox argued it would clamp down on the

pro-independence movements once and for all, by taking over the regional government and recentralising the Spanish state.

Yet it soon became clear the left-right split was about much more than Catalonia. The revival of Spanish nationalism has gone hand in hand with a resurgence of traditional Spanish right-wing social conservatism. Vox not only targets Catalan separatists and illegal immigrants, but also women’s and LGBT rights.

The extreme right is not, in fact, new to politics in democratic Spain. The traditional conservative PP party has always embraced the full spectrum of right-wing sensibilities, from the moderate right through to the extreme right. Many of those who voted for Vox come from the far right of the PP, having become disillusioned with the latter.

WHAT NEXT?

The left has clearly won this vote, but if Sánchez does not quickly secure the necessary support for his investiture, Spain could be faced with weeks or months of yet more political wrangling and paralysis. With regional elections just around the corner in late May, tactical behaviour is set to continue.

Much will also depend on how the weakened and fragmented right composes itself, and how, in particular, the PP will attempt to reinvent itself after its losses.

Of course, as long as Spain remains mired in these domestic dilemmas, any aspirations it may have to play a greater role on the European or global stage will remain frustrated. Some of Spain’s top political analysts have expressed their exasperation at the almost complete absence of Spain’s role in the EU and beyond from any of the electoral debates and discussions, even with European elections just around the corner and at a time of unprecedented challenges to the EU project.

There is a lot hanging on whether the country can better navigate the new reality of parliamentary fragmentation this time around to make progress, within its own borders and beyond.

[the writer is Lecturer in Politics and Spanish, Aston University]



Eight reasons why comedians make good leaders

KATHLEEN CRONIE
theconversation.com

If you were browsing Netflix’s comedy section recently, you might have noticed the Ukrainian sitcom, *Servant of the People*. In it, an ordinary history teacher is unwittingly elected president of the Ukraine. In an unusual turn of events, the star of that series, comedian Volodymyr Zelensky, was recently actually voted in as the next president of Ukraine. While there’s no doubt Zelensky is a popular comedian – does he really have what it takes to lead the country?

As part of my ongoing doctoral research, I surveyed 230 musical directors to find out what skills they think they need to lead successfully. Many of these leaders reported that telling a joke or a funny anecdote was important. Of course, we all enjoy a good giggle, but is cracking jokes really a useful way for leaders to spend their time? The research I have been exploring on humour and leadership suggests that we might be better off employing Michael McIntyre than Bill Gates. Here, are eight key ways that leaders can usefully use humour in their work:

1. CREATING A ‘TEAM’

Good leaders want a unified team behind them, if for no other reason

than it drastically reduces the chances of a coup occurring (UK prime minister Theresa May can doubtless tell you more about that). Using humour has been shown to strengthen solidarity between colleagues and successful leaders can channel humour into team spirit, uniting their followers behind them.

2. AVOIDING FATIGUE

Laughter might not always be the best medicine, but if leaders want to motivate flagging followers, a well-placed joke might do the trick. Using humour relieves boredom and raises energy levels. This is a handy trick for leaders and not just in formal workplaces. Leaders of exercise groups, for example, might use humour to motivate class members, enabling them to feel the burn for longer.

3. SOFTENING CRITICISM

Often, leaders have to deliver criticism without alienating their followers. An easy and effective way of managing this is to deliver this criticism in a lighthearted way. This is particularly useful if the leader wants to get along well with their followers. Speaking of which...

4. BALANCING POWER AND POLITENESS

Leaders depend on their followers respecting them. They will also, however, have an easier time working with their team if they do so po-

litely as opposed to dictating. Using humour is a great way of positioning yourself as leader of a group without rudely reminding everyone that you’re in charge and they have no choice but to follow you.

5. DIFFUSING TENSION

Even under the best of leaders, mistakes happen and occasionally tensions will run high. In this situation, as a leader you have two choices. Maintain a stiff upper lip and plough on in the face of revolt. Or make a joke, lighten the mood, and diffuse the tension in the room. Using comedy in this way smooths over friction and resets the mood.

6. ELICITING GOODWILL OF FOLLOWERS

(Almost) everyone likes to be liked. Leaders, however, can really benefit from being popular. Research has shown not only that humour can encourage followers to think positively of someone, but that it can also suppress negative feelings towards them. You do, of course, have to be careful, as it’s possible to overcompensate – just think of David Brent’s relentless nonsense in TV series *The Office*.

7. FOSTERING CREATIVITY

Humour comes in many forms but a common type of joke involves unexpected combinations of incongruous ideas: “One morning I shot

an elephant in my pyjamas. How he got in my pajamas, I don’t know” (Groucho Marx). One of the byproducts of combining odd ideas in this way is increasing creativity levels in groups, making teams more productive and innovative.

8. BENEFITING HEALTH

We all feel better after a good laugh, but the benefits of a good giggle go further than just cheering us up. Humour expert John Morreall puts this best:

“Physically and mentally, humour is the opposite of stress. Laughter lowers blood pressure, increases blood circulation, reduces muscle tension and pain, and boosts the immune system.”

So what does this mean for aspiring leaders? Well, comic timing isn’t going to turn a terrible leader into a hotshot CEO, but it turns out that if they use humour carefully, leaders can turn laughs into votes or giggles into team spirit.

Perhaps Volodymyr Zelensky isn’t really unprepared for his new job at all. David Brent probably had the right idea all along: “When people say to me: would you rather be thought of as a funny man or a great boss? My answer’s always the same – to me, they’re not mutually exclusive.”

[the writer is PhD Candidate, University of Aberdeen]

1,409 hectare of maize cultivation affected by insect attack in Mizoram



AIZAWL, APR 30 (PTI): At least 1,409 hectare of maize cultivation in Mizoram have been affected by insect attack, a state Agriculture department official said Tuesday.

The outbreak of Fall Army Worn (FAW) 'Spodoptera frugiperda' an insect has spread to all the eight districts of the state and has caused an estimated loss to the

tune of Rs 18.05 crore of maize cultivation, the official said.

A state level Fall Army Worm Rapid Response Team (RRT) was constituted to combat of the FAW outbreak while district agriculture officials were activated to take measures for mitigating the loss of crops and also to launch operation to contain the outbreak.

Joint director of the

state Agriculture department (crop husbandry) James Lalsiamliana told PTI that chemical pesticides as well as organic ones were used to kill the worms in the maize fields.

"Utmost care was taken to ensure that the pesticides were not harmful to human beings by imparting education to the people and by giving strict instructions to the

usage of the pesticides," Lalsiamliana said.

He said that while 80 affected villages covering all the districts have been surveyed the survey continued to cover all the villages where outbreak was reported.

After receiving warning from the Centre, the state Agriculture department had sent warnings to all the District Agriculture Officers on February

27 last on the possibility of incidence of FAW in the state.

The FAW outbreak was reported in neighbouring Bangladesh and Myanmar by early this year.

Experts said that the FAW is a lepidopteran pest feeding in many foods (polyphagous) and eating leaves and stems of more than 80 plant species.

Agartala-Bangalore Hum Safar Express derails, none hurt

GUWAHATI, APR 30 (PTI): The 12504 Agartala-Bangalore Hum Safar Express derailed between Churaibari and Kalkalighat stations under Lumding division of Northeast Frontier Railway in Assam along Tripura on Tuesday, an NFR press release said here.

There was no causality in the incident, said the release issued by NFR chief public relations officer Pranav Jyoti Sharma.

Two wheels of the front trolley of engine got derailed at a location about 26 kms away from Karimganj station at 7.52 AM, the CPRO said.

The train was pulled back by a relief engine to Churaibari station

in the Assam-Tripura border and passengers were provided with all necessary assistance, Sharma said.

An accident relief train immediately left from Badarpur for the site and thr NFR additional general manager along with high officials rushed to the spot, he said.

The accident relief train began work immediately after reaching the site and the derailed wheels of the engine were put back to normal position, he said.

The track was declared fit for train movement at 12.10 pm, the CPRO said, adding, cause of the accident is being investigated.

Cong delegation meets EC, demands fresh polling in West Tripura seat

AGARTALA, APR 29 (PTI): A Congress delegation met the full bench of the Election Commission in New Delhi and demanded fresh polling in West Tripura seat alleging large scale rigging by the ruling BJP, senior party leader said Tuesday.

Elections in West Tripura seat was held in the first phase on April 11.

We met the EC full bench on Monday and demanded countermanding of the elections in the West Tripura constituency because the polls were heavily rigged by the BJP supporters," Tripura PCC president Pradyot Deb Burman told reporters here.

The Congress leaders who met the EC included Jairam Ramesh, Ran-deep Singh Surjewala,

Abhishek Manu Singhvi, party candidate from the constituency, Subal Bhowmick besides Deb Barman himself.

Bhowmik said that the ECI was informed about booth jamming and violence due to which Congress election agents couldnt enter 900-1,000 polling stations out of 1,679 of the constituency where polling was held in April 11.

A decision on it would be taken shortly, Deb Burman said.

After the election in West Tripura, the EC had postponed polling in East Tripura, the other Lok Sabha seat in the state, from April 18 to April 23 saying "The law and order situation prevailing... is not conducive to the holding of free and fair poll".

Economic growth reducing groundwater faecal pollution in North India: IIT study

KOLKATA, APR 30 (PTI): Economic growth is reducing faecal pollution in groundwater in North India, which is a key factor causing water-borne diseases in the densely populated Indo-Ganges-Brahmaputra river basin, a study by researchers at IIT Kharagpur has found.

About 100,000 children in India die every year from waterborne enteric diseases like diarrhoea, researchers said.

The study, published in the Journal of Earth System Science, made first-time observations on significant reduction of faecal coliform pathogen concentration in the spatially variable groundwater from 2002 to 2017.

"Looking beyond the country globally, more than two billion people, mostly living in economically stressed areas of Africa and South Asia still do not have access to basic sanitation, and more than one billion still opt for open defecation," said Professor Abhijit Mukherjee, from the Department of Geology and Geophysics at IIT Kharagpur in West Bengal.

"The resulting unsafe disposal of faecal waste to nearby drinking water sources poses an extremely serious environmental crisis and public health concern," said Mukherjee, who led the research project.

The researchers studied data for the densely populated Indo-Ganges-Brahmaputra river basin, across 234 districts in Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam and also Delhi and NCR.

The data was collected from National Rural Drinking Water Programme, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, and covered

almost last three decades to delineate the long-term improvement trends of groundwater quality across India, as consequence of development.

The study determined the economic development trends and correlations using night-time light data instead of gross domestic product (GDP) or other economic growth data.

"Night-time light is regarded as a secular proxy for economic growth and in recent times are regularly used as a modern technique for characterising micro-GDP -- GDP for a small area," Mukherjee told PTI.

"We have used satellite based night-time light information based on Defence Meteorological Satellite Program of the US Air Force, archived by NOAA/NASA for the period 1992-2013, said Srimanti Duttagupta, PhD scholar at IIT Kharagpur.

"In most areas economic development, suggested by increasing satellite-based night-light correlated to the reduction in faecal coliform concentration and alleviation of water quality, said Duttagupta, first author of the research paper based on the study.

The other dataset used was high-resolution geographically spatial information of water-borne faecal pathogen concentration in groundwater from the period 2002-2017.

Numerical and statistical analyses were performed on datasets to understand the efficiency of development in alleviating the water quality and public health, and relationship with economic development.

The study showed that the spatially vari-

able groundwater faecal pathogen concentration from 2002-2017 has significantly decreased across the basin.

From 2002-2013, night-time light on the surface area as seen from satellites increased by 3.05 per cent per year and faecal coliform pollution decreased 1.39 per cent per year.

The research group observed significant decrease of groundwater faecal coliform concentration after 2014, in the acquired data.

"Nevertheless, in areas with inferior water quality, improper human practices outweigh economic development in affecting human health," he added.

It was observed that areas with lower literacy rate and very high population density suffer from poor groundwater quality because of faecal coliform pollution, irrespective of economic development.

The issue of overpopulation and slums is an intricate problem which is reflected on all life aspects in countries like India, researchers said.

The study reflects through results that higher faecal coliform concentration in urban and peri-urban areas, suggesting economic progress may not be the only influencing factor on water quality alleviation, they said.

The researchers noted that social behaviour and practices, use and disuse and beliefs are mostly related to lower literacy rate.

In turn, this result in lack of awareness and encourage malpractice on sanitation, eventually leading to increased faecal waste into drinking water sourced to groundwater, according to the study.

2 micro-observers, 3 presiding officers of West Tripura suspended

AGARTALA, APR 30 (PTI): Two micro observers and three presiding officers of the West Tripura Lok Sabha constituency were suspended for "willful insubordination and dereliction of duty" on April 11 when polling was held in that seat.

The Assistant Returning Officer (ARO) of West Tripura, Sudhakar Shinde, issued a notification in this regard on Monday, which was made available to reporters on Tuesday.

Opposition parties like the Congress and the CPI(M) have alleged large scale rigging by the ruling BJP in West Tripura seat and demanded re-poll in many booths. The saffron party, however, denied the charge.

The five suspended officials are micro ob-

servers Prof Sangram Sinha and Bhasan Chandra Das, and presiding officers Promode Chandra Das, Gautam Debnath and Giridhari Das.

Prof Sinha who was appointed as the micro observer for Debipur Gram Panchayat Office did not report incidents of poll interruption or poll violation, which can be termed as "willful negligence of election duty", the ARO said in a letter to Returning Officer Dr Sandeep Mahatme.

Another Micro Observer, Bhasan Chandra Das, who was appointed for Brajapur Higher Secondary School, had neither informed the general observer about booth capturing and violation of poll process, nor he highlighted the matter in the feedback report, the

ARO pointed out.

The three presiding officers were suspended on similar charges, he informed the returning officer.

Though the officials did not report these irregularities, they came to light during the scrutiny of webcam footages and various documents, sources in the election office said.

The ARO has lodged an FIR against the officials on Saturday, police said.

After the election in West Tripura, the EC had postponed polling in East Tripura, the other Lok Sabha seat in the state, from April 18 to April 23 saying "The law and order situation prevailing... is not conducive to the holding of free and fair poll".

Modi "shamelessly" engaging in horse trading, claims Mamata; wants his nomination annulled

KOLKATA, APR 30 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday demanded cancellation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's candidature from Varanasi for "shamelessly indulging in horse trading", a day after he claimed 40 TMC MLAs were in touch with him. Making a sensational claim in the middle of the general election, Modi had said on Monday that 40 TMC MLAs were in touch with him and will desert their party once the BJP wins the polls.

"Modi said yesterday that 40 Trinamool Congress workers (MLAs) are in talks with the BJP. Look how shamelessly he is indulging in horse trading. His candidature should be immediately cancelled. He has no right to continue as the PM," Banerjee said at a rally in Hooghly district.

The firebrand Trinamool Congress chief also said that people usually revere national leaders, but Modi was an exception.

Likening the prime minister with Gabbar



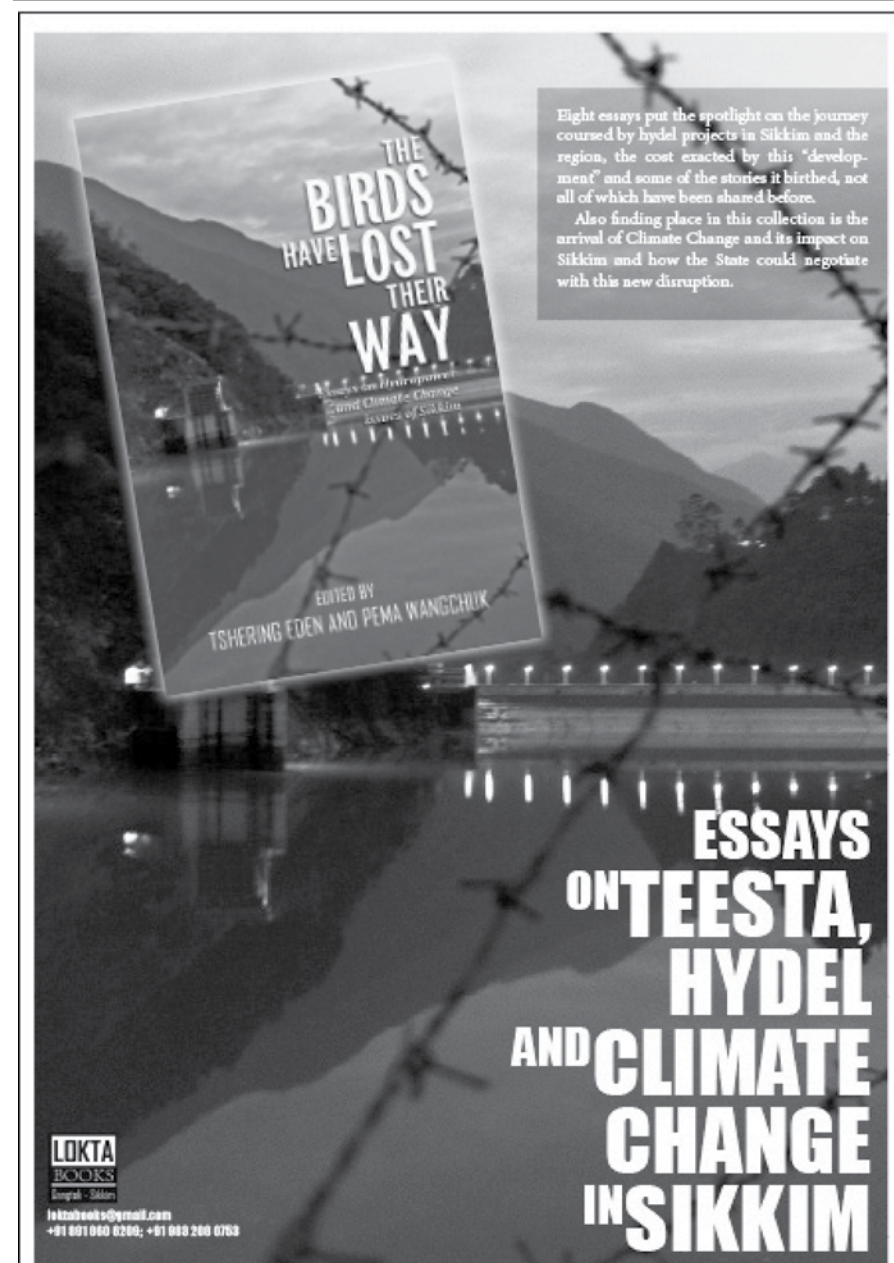
Singh, the antagonist in the 1975 blockbuster 'Sholay', she said, "National leaders like Netaji (Subhas Chandra Bose) are revered and loved by all. It is only people like Modi and Gabbar Singh that people are scared of." "What has he done in the last five years? Farmers are committing suicide, unemployment is on the rise," she said.

The chief minister also said the BJP will not be able to establish a foothold in West Bengal, no matter how much the party "daydreams" about it. "Modi is daydreaming about getting a foothold in West Bengal. His dream will never come true," she added.

In the national capital,

the TMC wrote to the Election Commission, alleging that Modi's speech indicates an "impending horse-trading" and asked the poll panel to cancel his nomination for such "provocative and undemocratic" statements.

In its letter to the EC, the TMC demanded "strong action" for the "unfounded, inappropriate and illegal" campaign and utterances of the prime minister. "You (EC) are thus requested to ask Mr. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister, for evidence in support of his statement, failing which his nomination should be cancelled for violation of the Model Code of Conduct by making such provocative and undemocratic statements," the letter said.



CSK look to be back on top against Delhi Capitals

C SHYAM SUNDAR

CHENNAI, APR 30 (PTI): Their net run-rate slipping into negative after a defeat against Mumbai Indians, defending champions Chennai Super Kings will be keen to get back to No. 1 spot when they take on current table-toppers Delhi Capitals in an IPL match here on Wednesday.

An interesting contest is on the cards between two current top teams and a win for either side will help it consolidate its position and ultimately could have a bearing on where it finishes in the final standings.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni-less CSK went down rather tamely to Mumbai Indians in their last game, which saw their net run-rate falling. Now with just two games left in the league stage, CSK will look to roar back with victories to seal a spot in the top two and get the home comfort in Qualifier 1.

Without his inspiring presence, CSK's batting collapsed against MI and



they lost the game by 46 runs to surrender their position at the top of the points table to Delhi.

With 16 points from 12 games, CSK will be hoping that their talismanic captain recovers from the bout of fever, which forced him to sit out the MI fixture, and be ready to feature in the last home match of the

league phase. Also, the home team will be expecting influential all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja to be back in the mix too.

Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, would be high on confidence having posted four wins in their last five matches.

Young Shreyas Iyer has done a good job of leading the team, which

also has 16 points from 12 games, and has scored important runs.

He will be keen to put on some valuable runs on board against the formidable CSK and would also expect Shikhar Dhawan, Prithvi Shaw and Rishabh Pant to find ways to score on a sluggish Chepauk track.

It will be fascinating

to see how the league's top wicket-taker Kagiso Rabada does on CSK's home turf, traditionally known to offer help to slow bowlers.

The spin-heavy CSK led by Imran Tahir and Harbhajan Singh could prove quite a handful for Dhawan & Co. and how they cope with that would determine

the game's outcome, as would the Delhi tweekers performance.

Teams (from):

Chennai Super Kings: MS Dhoni (captain & WK), Suresh Raina, Ambati Rayudu, Shane Watson, Faf du Plessis, Murali Vijay, Kedar Jadhav, Ravindra Jadeja, Dhruv Shorey, Chaitanya Bishnoi, Rituraj Gaikwad, Dwayne Bravo, Karn Sharma, Imran Tahir, Harbhajan Singh, Mitchell Santner, Shardul Thakur, Mohit Sharma, K M Asif, Deepak Chahar, N Jagadeesan (wk), Scott Kuggeleijn.

Delhi

Capitals: Shreyas Iyer (captain), Prithvi Shaw, Shikhar Dhawan, Rishabh Pant, Colin Ingram, Keemo Paul, Axar Patel, Rahul Tewatia, Amit Mishra, Kagiso Rabada, Ishant Sharma, Hanuma Vihari, Ankush Bains, Chris Morris, Sherfane Rutherford, Lalaj Saxena, Sandeep Lamichhane, Trent Boult, Avesh Khan, Nathu Singh, Bandaru Ayyappa, Colin Munro, Manjot Kalra.

Match starts at 8 pm.

KL Rahul defends playing slow initially



HYDERABAD, APR 30 (PTI): Kings XI Punjab opener KL Rahul defended his strategy of playing slow initially while chasing a mammoth 213 against Sunrisers Hyderabad, saying one between him and Chris Gayle was supposed to go all out upfront while the other tried to take the game deep.

Chasing a huge total, Rahul (79 off 56; 4x4, 5x6) made a valiant effort with the bat but lacked support from the other end as Kings XI were restricted to 167 for eight.

"That's been the team plan. One of me or Chris Gayle look to bat 15-16 overs as deep as possible so the others can play around," said Rahul at the post-match press conference.

"That doesn't mean that you don't play your shots. I tried my shots a few times, it didn't come off, few went for boundaries, few hit the fielders." Rahul though finished with a strike-rate of 141.07 but at one stage he had just made 39 off 36 deliveries when the required rate was well above 15 runs per over.

The 27-year-old explained that he knew he could make up for it in the back end had he stayed at the crease in the middle overs.

"Not always as a batsman you will get off to an amazing start, you don't get a 20-ball 50 each time. Sometimes when you get off to a start like that you have got to make it count but sometimes when you are not finding your touch you have to hang in there. I know that if I am set I can make

up for it," said Rahul. He rued that lack of partnerships hampered his team. "We couldn't get enough batting partnerships. We were batting well, unfortunate that each time we tried to take a chance we found a fielder."

Rahul also backed Mujeeb ur Rahman, who conceded 66 runs in his four overs, highest in this year's IPL.

"Obviously, anybody who goes for that many runs will be disappointed. Sometimes it is not your day. In T20 cricket that happens. Everyday one of the bowlers will get targeted and go for runs.

"He is a young guy, he has a lot of skill. This is the first time he has gone for so many runs. Before this he has done really really well for Kings XI and yeah one-off game this happens to every bowler. The best of bowlers will get hit for 50-60 runs, you just have to look to bounce back," said Rahul.

KXIP used only five bowlers despite going for runs and Rahul said that injuries to a lot of their key players prevented them from going for the sixth bowling option.

"It is not an excuse but there are a few injuries in the team which doesn't allow us to go with a sixth bowling option or play an all-rounder," Rahul clarified.

"When you are going in with five bowlers, all of them have to bowl four overs each. There is not really a choice. When you have gone with five full-time bowlers, you have to trust them. You expect them to deliver most times but some times it does not happen," he added.

BFI nominates Amit Panghal, Gaurav Bidhuri for Arjuna award again



NEW DELHI, APR 30 (PTI): Asian Games and championship gold-medallist Amit Panghal and 2017 world bronze-winner Gaurav Bidhuri were Tuesday nominated for the Arjuna award by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI).

Panghal, who claimed the light flyweight (49kg) category gold after defeating reigning Olympic champion Hasanboy Dusmatov of Uzbekistan in the Asiad final at Jakarta, was nominated last year as well for the second highest sporting honour after the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna.

However, he was not considered due to a failed dope test in 2012, for which he served a one-year ban.

"We are nominating Amit again and we are confident that he will be considered this time," BFI President Ajay Singh told reporters at a felicitation function.

Panghal, who now competes in 52kg category, had said that the anabolic steroid for which he tested positive was a case of accidental intake during treatment for chicken pox.

His name was not

accepted by the awards selection committee due to the positive dope test. It remains to be seen whether there would be a change in the position due to the Armyman's continuous remarkable performances, including a Commonwealth Games silver last year and most recently a gold in the Asian championships in the 52kg division.

"Let's see what happens now. I am hopeful that this time, I would be considered," Panghal told PTI. Similarly, Bidhuri's name has also been sent again. The Delhi-based boxer, who recently won a silver medal at the national championships, was the lone Indian medallist at the 2017 world championships in Hamburg.

Other boxers who will be in contention but have not been recommended by BFI are former world silver-medallist Sonia Lather and former CWG bronze-winner Pinki Rani.

Women's assistant coach Sandhya Gurung and former women's chief coach Shiv Singh's names have been recommended for the Dronacharya Award.

Czech international Sural killed in auto crash in Turkey

ANKARA, APR 30 (AP): Czech Republic international Josef Sural was killed and six other Alanyaspor players were injured on Monday when their van crashed on the way home from a Turkish league soccer match.

The 28-year-old Sural died in the hospital during emergency surgery, Alanyaspor president Hasan Cavusoglu told NTV television by telephone.

The six other players

were reported to be in stable condition.

Cavusoglu said Sural and his six teammates hired a private luxury van to return from a game at Kayserispor in central Turkey.

The crash occurred near the entrance to the town of Alanya, on Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

Cavusoglu said the driver of the van was being questioned by police.

"Our pain is huge," Ca-

vusoglu said.

State-run Anadolu Agency said the van veered off the road and overturned.

It identified the injured players as Wanderson Baiano, Steven Caulker, Isaac Sackey, Papiss Demba Cisse, Welinton Souza and Djalma Campos.

Cavusoglu later told CNN-Turk television that the injured players had "small fractures and cuts."

Dusmatov intimidated by me now: Amit Panghal

New Delhi, Apr 30 (PTI): Beating an Olympic champion for two consecutive times is no mean feat but Indian boxer Amit Panghal says it's no big deal either as Uzbek 'golden boy' Hasanboy Dusmatov is now a "bit scared of him".

Panghal defeated world silver-medallist and Rio Olympic champion Dusmatov for the first time in September last year, the stage being the Asian Games finale in Jakarta.

He repeated the feat at the Asian Championships, ousting him from medal contention altogether with a quarterfinal win in the event which concluded in Bangkok last week. Dusmatov came into this edition as a two-time gold-medallist.

"Kuch nahi hai (It's nothing). I think he was a bit intimidated by me this time, his game wasn't upto it," he told PTI with a grin on his face.

"Thoda down tha mere saamne (He seemed a bit down)," he added.

Panghal is having a stellar run ever since the bronze he won in the 2017 Asian Champion-



ships. He made the quarters of the world championships that year, losing a close one to Dusmatov.

That was followed by a gold at the India Open in 2018 and also the Strandja Memorial in Bulgaria. A silver in the Commonwealth Games came soon after, succeeded by the gold at the Asiad in Indonesia.

The form carried on this year too and he won a gold at the Strandja Memorial again before the top finish at the Asian Championship. In between these two golds, Panghal moved from 49kg to the 52kg category.

He had said that the transition would not be easy but if there were any difficulties, they didn't

show in his performance in Bangkok.

"You can say that things worked out. Plus the fact that most of the guys I fought were also the ones I used to encounter in 49kg. So, luckily all of us made the transition at the same time. There was familiarity," he said.

He has a packed schedule ahead of him as he gears up for the world championships in Russia, scheduled from September 7. The event will be the first Olympic qualifying event.

"I have a packed schedule, which includes training trips to Italy and Ireland. Plus there is the India Open later this month (starting May 20 in Guwahati). So it's a good build-up," he said.

Love match as Altdore and Stephens announce engagement

LOS ANGELES, APR 30 (AFP): American tennis star Sloane Stephens and USA international Jozy Altdore announced a love match with both posting on Twitter that they are getting engaged.

Altdore tweeted the news on Monday with a picture and a message that read, "Forever starts now" while Stephens wrote "Forever yes" next to a red heart. The couple have been dating since 2016.

The 2017 US Open champion Stephens has won six WTA Tour titles and was runner up at the French Open last year.

Stephens grew up in Fresno, California but moved to Florida to attend a tennis academy at a young age. She and Altdore were childhood friends during her time in Florida. In addition to her Grand Slam success, the 26-year-old Stephens was a member of the 2017 US Fed Cup team and reached the championship match of the WTA Tour Finals in 2018.

The 29-year-old Altdore currently plays for Toronto FC in the Major Soccer League and has represented the US at almost every level, including two World Cups.

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China defends Xinjiang crackdown after UN chief raises issue

BEIJING, APR 30 (AFP): China Tuesday rejected “any interference” in its internal affairs after UN chief Antonio Guterres raised the plight of ethnic Uighurs in the restive Xinjiang region during a visit to Beijing.

Guterres had been under pressure from rights groups to publicly confront Beijing over the mass detention of Uighurs and other mostly Muslim Turkic-speaking minorities in Xinjiang during his trip.

The was no public denunciation, but UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Guterres raised the issue during talks with Chinese leaders when he attended a summit

Friday and Saturday on Beijing’s Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

The UN chief delivered a three-point message that stressed human rights must be upheld in the fight against extrem-



ism, while recognising China’s sovereignty and condemning terrorism.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said China was willing to discuss human rights issues with all parties on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

“At the same time, we firmly oppose any

interference in China’s internal affairs under the pretext of human rights issues,” Geng said at a regular press briefing.

“Xinjiang affairs belong to China’s internal affairs. Terrorism and extremism are wanton violations of basic human rights,” he said.

Upwards of one mil-

lion Uighurs and other minorities are being held in internment camps in Xinjiang, according to estimates cited by a UN panel.

China says the camps are “vocational training centres” to steer people away from extremism and reintegrate them, in a region

plagued by violence blamed on Uighur separatists or Islamists.

“The preventive anti-terrorism and anti-extremism measures taken by China in Xinjiang are carried out in accordance with the law, and human rights are also respected and protected,” Geng said.

Trump sues banks in bid to block Congress subpoenas

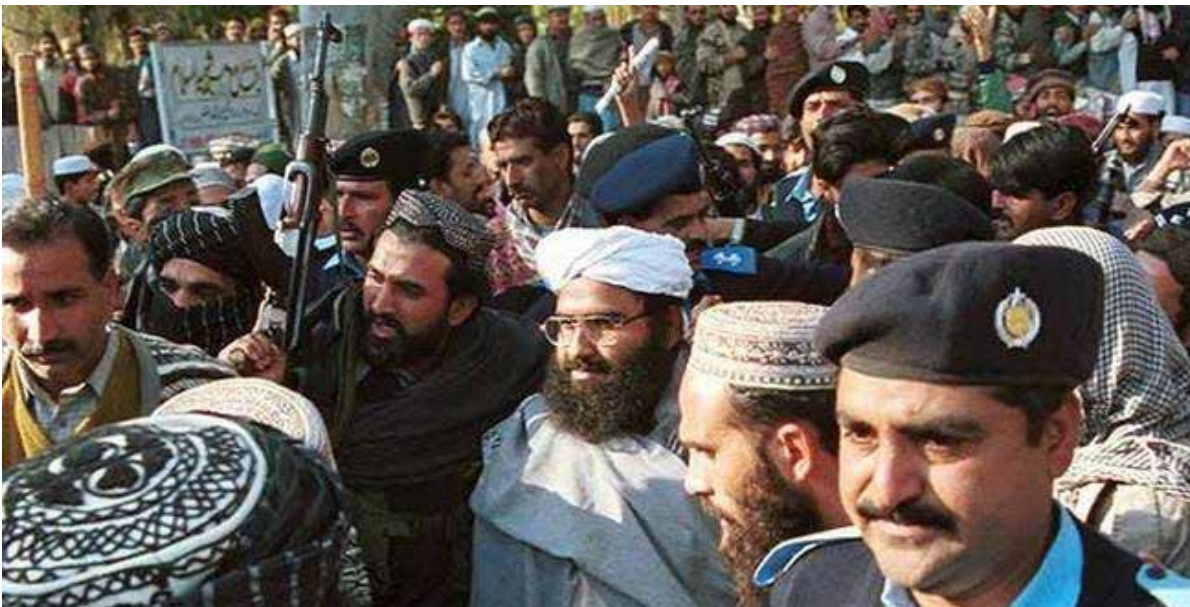
NEW YORK, APR 30 (AFP): US President Donald Trump, along with his family and businesses, on Monday sued Deutsche Bank and Capital One in an attempt to stop them from complying with Congressional subpoenas issued as part of a probe into foreign political influence. The subpoenas -- which the Trumps described in their suit as “intrusive and overbroad” -- were issued to several banks by the Democratic-majority House’s intelligence and financial services committees, which are looking into the president’s finances as part of a larger probe into election meddling by Russia.

The lawsuit is the latest step in Trump’s fight-back against the Democrats, and alleges that the subpoenas have “no legitimate or lawful purpose.” “The subpoenas were issued to harass President Donald J. Trump, to rummage through every aspect of his personal finances, his businesses, and the private information of the President and his family, and to ferret about for any material that might be used to cause him political damage,” said the suit, filed with the US federal court in the Southern District of New York.

“No grounds exist to establish any purpose other than a political one.” The suit accuses Congress of stepping beyond its law-making mandate into law enforcement, and says the subpoenas violate the privacy rights of Trump and his family. Deutsche Bank was one of the few major Western financial institutions to continue to lend to Trump’s real estate empire after several of its casinos went bankrupt in the 1990s, resulting in claims by creditors valued at USD 330 million in present-day dollars.

“We remain committed to providing appropriate information to all authorized investigations and will abide by a court order regarding such investigations,” the German bank said in a statement.

Listing of Azhar as global terrorist by UN will be ‘properly resolved’: China



BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, APR 30 (PTI): China said on Tuesday that the vexed issue of designating Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist by the UN will be “properly resolved” but it did not give any timeline, days after Chinese President Xi Jinping met Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan here.

China put a technical hold in March on a fresh proposal to impose a ban on the head of Pakistan-based JeM which claimed responsibility for the deadly Pulwama terror attack. It was for the fourth time, China blocked Azhar’s listing as a global terrorist by the UN.

“I can only say that I believe that this will be properly resolved,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a media briefing here.

He was responding to questions on the media reports that China has reportedly consented to lift its technical hold on a fresh proposal moved by France, the UK and the US to list Azhar under the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council.

The US, the UK and France this time stepped up pressure on Beijing by taking the issue directly to the powerful UN Security Council (UNSC).

Though China can exercise its veto power as a permanent member of the UNSC, Beijing has staunchly opposed the issue to be taken to the apex UN body as it has to publicly explain its stand on its reservations to list Azhar, whose group JeM has already been designated as terror outfit by UN, before exercising its veto.

China has accused the US of scuttling progress to resolve the issue by taking it to the UNSC and insisted that it should be resolved at the 1267 Committee whose proceedings are not publicised.

“Regarding the listing issue in the 1267 Committee, we have expressed our position many times and I just want to stress two points,” Geng said answering a number of questions on Azhar’s issue.

“First, we support the listing issue being settled within the 1267 committee through dialogue and consultation and I believe this is the consensus of most members. Second, the relevant consultations are going on within the committee and have achieved some progress. Third, I believe, with the joint efforts of all parties, this issue can be properly resolved,” he said.

On reports that China would lift its technical hold on May 1, he said, “on the listing issue, China is still working with the relevant parties and we are in contact with all relevant parties within the 1267 Committee and I believe with the joint efforts of all parties, this will be properly resolved.”

Asked about the recent visit of Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale to Beijing during which he held talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi as well as New Delhi shared the technical evidence of JeM’s involvement in the Pulwama terror attack, Geng reiterated that China is still working with the relevant parties.

“I believe with the joint efforts of all parties, this will be properly resolved,” he said.

The efforts to resolve Azhar’s listing issue gathered momentum last week with the visit of Imran Khan to Beijing to attend China’s 2nd Belt and Road Forum (BRF) which was held here from April 25-27.

During the visit, Khan held talks with Xi, besides meeting Premier Li Keqiang and Vice President Wang Qishan during which India-Pakistan tension following the Pulwama terror attack as well as

listing of Azhar reportedly figured.

An official statement of China issued after Xi-Khan meeting on Sunday said the Chinese President had expressed hope that Pakistan and India can meet each other halfway and improve their relations.

Both leaders also exchanged views on the situation in South Asia.

Asked about the outcome of Khan’s visit and his talks with the Chinese leaders, Geng said, “I would like to stress that Pakistan is China’s ‘All Weather Strategic Cooperative Partner.’”

Both the countries are “Iron Brothers,” he said, adding that “we firmly support each other on the issues concerning our core interests. Pakistan is always one of China’s diplomatic priorities.”

“No matter how the international and regional situation may evolve, we firmly support Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and dignity, independently choosing its development path based on its own conditions, securing a sound external environment and playing a constructive role in international and regional affairs,” he said.

“We commend the Pakistani government’s and people’s efforts in fighting terrorism and extremism and their great endeavours and sacrifices to this end,” he said, lauding Pakistan’s counter terrorism efforts.

“We call on the international community to fairly and justly see Pakistan’s endeavours and contributions in counter terrorism and step up dialogue and cooperation with the country,” he said.

China and Pakistan will continue to deepen their high level exchanges and support each other and step up strategic coordination, “make more coordinated efforts in international and regional affairs and deepen our all weather strategic cooperation,” he added.

Iran’s Rouhani says workers ‘on front line’ against US

TEHRAN, APR 30 (AFP): President Hassan Rouhani called on Iranian workers Tuesday to boost non-oil exports and import substitution, telling them they were “on the front line” against America and its tightening sanctions.

Last year, President Donald Trump reimposed crippling US sanctions after abandoning a landmark nuclear agreement between major powers and Iran.

Last week, his administration announced that from Thursday it would end oil purchase waivers granted to Iran’s main customers including China, India and Turkey.

The move has piled new pressure on Iran’s reeling economy that the

International Monetary Fund was already projecting would shrink by 6.0 percent this year.

Addressing workers in a south Tehran sports complex on the eve of May Day, Rouhani said that boosting Iran’s manufacturing output was vital to shore up the value of the rial.

“Whenever you go for self-sufficiency, you have increased the national currency’s value and the more you can increase production for exports, you have increased our foreign currency revenue,” Rouhani said in the speech broadcast live on state television.

“America’s purpose in cutting oil exports is to reduce our foreign currency revenue and

the way to counter it is through the production and export of non-oil goods,” he added. According to Iran’s economy minister Farhad Dezhpasand, non-oil exports reached USD 40 billion for 2018-19.

That tops Iran’s oil revenues projection for 2019-2020 of USD 30 billion. But despite regulations in place requiring exporters to repatriate profits, only a quarter of non-oil earnings were returned to Iran.

Rouhani vowed that despite the unilateral measures adopted by the United States, Iran would continue to supply oil to its major customers, all three of whom have expressed anger at Washington’s attempt to impose its will.

Making of a monarch: King’s image peppers Thailand ahead of coronation

Bangkok, Apr 30 (AFP): It took USD 6,400 and a 12-hour drive for the local mayor to pick up the shrine and towering portrait of Thailand’s king which will stand in the centre of town -- a small part of a massive palace publicity campaign for this weekend’s coronation. “Every government office across the country will do the same,” said Aunchalee Chamchang, the mayor of Thungkhayan, a clutch of villages east of the capital.

Portraits of King Maha Vajiralongkorn often dressed in a golden robe and staring inscrutably forward have been in place at many state offices since he ascended the throne in 2016.

But imposing new images, some several-metres high, and decorations are mandatory at every state office ahead of his three-day coronation, which begins Saturday. The most elaborate set-ups include the gilded-framed portrait, a large pedestal, flags, cone-shaped “pan phum” floral tributes and bunting in various shades of yellow -- the colour of Thailand’s monarchy.

They can cost thousands of dollars, paid for through local budgets and subsidies, and will remain in place for at least the rest of the year.

Roads in Bangkok and across the kingdom are now flanked by the

projection of royal power, intended to reflect the country’s devotion, loyalty and respect to the monarch. But with Thais never far from the gaze of the king’s portraits, it also serves as a reminder of the apex position enjoyed by the royal institution. Critics of the monarchy are rarely heard inside the country where the immediate royal family is protected by harsh lese majeste laws, which carry up to 15 years in jail. The law is often broadly interpreted and includes the misuse of royal images.

Media based inside Thailand must self-censor. For the majority of Thais Maha Vajiralongkorn’s elaborate three-day coronation will be the first they have witnessed and curiosity is mounting. His father Bhumibol Adulyadej died in 2016 after a reign spanning seven tumultuous decades. Bhumibol was revered as a unity figure in a politically divided nation and his image remains omnipresent in many Thai homes and shops. Thais wore black or subdued colours for a year of official mourning after his death.

But Bhumibol’s 66-year-old heir is not as well-known by his subjects and spends much of his time abroad. To address that gap, the new king’s image has slowly seeped into every-

day life -- on buildings, banknotes and stamps - since his father’s death.

A short film accompanying the royal anthem that runs before movies shown in Thai cinemas now tells the story of Vajiralongkorn, a prince turned monk, air force pilot, father and then king. Royal successions everywhere are challenged by shifting iconography, according to Edoardo Siani, a Southeast Asian studies researcher at Kyoto University. “The Thai state has dealt with this issue by introducing images of the new king gradually over an extended period of time,” he said.

The junta that took over in 2014 has driven the image campaign, while the powerful army chief has in recent weeks made several public oaths of loyalty.

Civil servants have been ordered to wear yellow in the run-up to the coronation, but the colour is yet to swamp the city. Peddling around the Bangkok’s historic heart on a tricycle which doubles as a portable shrine to the Thai monarchy, replete with portraits of kings past and present, Komchit Kraithong said he was excited for the big royal event.

“I decorated it with portraits to show my loyalty,” he told AFP. “It’s also as if I am serving their majesties by taking them around Bangkok.





SWEATER WEATHER! The actress, Dakota Johnson was spotted leaving a business meeting in Studio City wearing an oversized sweater in gloomy LA weather.

Charlize Theron used to feel like 'loser' after watching rom-coms

LONDON, APR 30 (PTI): Actor Charlize Theron says she used to feel like a "loser" after watching romantic comedies as she never witnessed a happy ending in real life.

According to The Independent, the 43-year-old actor, who stars alongside Seth Rogen in Jonathan Levine-directed "Long Shot", told Press Association that she wanted to feature in romantic comedy which has a realistic and modern take on relationships. "I just wanted to make sure that we all agreed that we wanted to make a film that would have two characters that felt modern and felt at times conflicted and that we would focus on a relationship that felt real.

"I struggle with that sometimes in romantic comedies, I feel like I'm the only loser who has never experienced the third act of most romantic comedies and it just makes me feel very bitter, and so I just wanted to feel like I could bring something to the table," Theron said.

The actor also said that she used to often take issues with the fantastical element of romantic comedies. "I think it's hard for me to do that kind of fantasy love stuff. But they seemed really up for it so we developed it that way from the beginning and I felt very protected, not only by Seth and Jonathan, our

director and everybody," she added. Theron said the film draws attention towards the fact that at workplaces things are much tougher for women than for their male counterparts.

"That is just a fact that is a cold hard fact that women, not just in politics, but in a lot of



work places, they have to endure way more scrutiny than their male counterparts. So it would have been impossible to tell this story and not address that and it was nice to be able to touch upon things that I think people are really responding to.

"It feels reflective, it feels modern and of this time and I think women look at it and it's refreshing to hear a character acknowledge that and not feel sorry for herself but just acknowledge it and be aware of it," the actor said.

'Fantastic Beasts 3' to release in 2021



LOS ANGELES, APR 30 (PTI): The third installment of the JK Rowling's "Fantastic Beasts" series is set to open in theatres on November 12, 2021, Warner Bros Pictures has announced.

Ron Sanders, President, Worldwide Theatrical Distribution and Home Entertainment, shared the news Monday, Deadline reported.

"JK Rowling created an awe-inspiring universe that has captivated people of all ages, taking us on an extraordinary magical journey. Warner Bros is so proud to be the cinematic home of the Wizarding World and is excited about the future of the Fantastic Beasts franchise. We look forward to bringing the third chapter of the five-film series to audiences around the globe in November 2021," Sanders said.

Toby Emmerich, Chairman, Warner Bros Pictures Group, said the team is looking forward to the new film and has confidence in

the "Fantastic Beasts" series.

"We all believe this release date will give the filmmakers time and space to allow their artistry to truly flourish and deliver the best possible film to our fans," Emmerich said.

The series is inspired by the textbook by Newt Scamander, played by Eddie Redmayne in the films that Harry Potter carries at Hogwarts.

The films follow Newt during the early 20th century in New York and London as he navigates the world's secret community of witches and wizards.

The second film in the franchise, "Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald", featured Jude Law as younger Albus Dumbledore and Johnny Depp as younger version of dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald. The film released last year.

Production on "Fantastic Beasts 3" is expected to begin in early 2020.

Ayushmann and Bhumi apt for 'Bala': Amar Kaushik



MUMBAI, APR 30 (PTI): After "Stree", director Amar Kaushik's next film "Bala" is also set in a small town and revolves around a prematurely balding man and a woman facing prejudice because of her skin colour.

"Bala", features Ayushmann Khurrana and Bhumi Pednekar. "Our film is set in Kanpur. I come from small town and I develop characters from reality, the situations are from real life," Kaushik told PTI.

"Bala" marks the third outing for Ayushmann and Bhumi, who have previously worked in "Dum Laga Ke Haisha" and "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan".

"We felt Ayushmann and Bhumi were apt for this film. They have worked together on two films that highlighted social issues, taboo. Having

them with us we are hopeful there will be a connect People love to see such stories," Kaushik said.

"Dinesh Vijan (producer) had the idea and I was working on the film as a creative-director but later I got attached to it and felt I should direct it." The film will go on floors in the next 10-15 days.

Besides this film, Kaushik says there are plan to make the sequel of "Stree".

"It will happen next year. We have some ideas for 'Stree 2'. However, we are not in a hurry to make it. The expectations are high on 'Stree 2' so we want to give our best shot," he says.

"Stree 2" will have the same cast and crew including Raj and DK (writer and producer of the film Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK) Shraddha Kapoor and Pankaj Tripathi.

Jude Law says nanny affair jokes used to make him feel 'absolutely crippled'

London, Apr 30 (PTI): Actor Jude Law says jokes making fun of his affair with his children's nanny used to make his "blood freeze" and leave him feeling "absolutely crippled". In 2005, reports emerged that the actor had cheated on Sienna Miller with the nanny of his three children. Law later issued a public apology.

After the scandal, Law was the subject of numerous jokes, including one that featured in 2010 film "Sex and the City 2". In the movie, Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall) jokes: "There ought to be a law against hiring a nanny who looks like that."

To this, Sarah Jessica Parker's Carrie Bradshaw said back: "Yeah, the Jude Law." During an interview with The Telegraph, Law, 46, was asked about the jokes and he said they no longer bother him.

"Little things like that used to freeze my blood. I would be left absolutely crippled. But nowadays it just bounces off. I'm like, 'Is that all you've got?' I mean, I'm doing the thing I love, I have a happy home life, I'm very proud of my children, and I'm healthy, thank goodness.

"So if people are still throwing paper darts at me... I mean, Christ! If that's what rocks their boat, let 'em do it," the "Vox Lux" actor said. Law said people still do not know him and he is cool with that.

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Our Star Recruiters

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ARIES: Disrupt the status quo on Saturday, Aries, but aim for mild tremors instead of extreme shockwaves. With the Sun and moon trading friendly fire, it's obvious to everyone that change is necessary. But leadership is sorely needed to reveal the next stage of the game. That's where you come in: Make proactive suggestions or simply lead by example!

TAURUS: ETrue success doesn't simply hinge on climbing tirelessly to the top. Saturday's evocative angle between the Sun and moon points you down a more soulful path. Pause from "doing, doing, doing" and think big picture. Beyond putting food on the table, how is your work helping other people and the world at large?

GEMINI: Start your weekend on an inspired note! Pull a motivational or spiritual book off the shelf for some morning reading. Try a little "bibliomancy": opening to a random page and letting the words be your divine directive for the day. Avoid complainers like the plague and seek "high-vibrational" groups of people to spend time with,

especially if you could use an infusion of positive energy.

CANCER: Trying to get a straight answer over the last three weeks has been nearly impossible, thanks to communicator Mercury's backspin through your truth-telling ninth house. You can now breathe easy as the messenger planet turns direct and forges ahead. No more dancing around an issue—insist on the complete story. Steer clear of even slight exaggerations and aim to be fully authentic. Since the ninth house also rules travel, you've got a cosmic thumbs-up for a winter getaway.

LEO: Today's cosmos shine a light on hidden realities as expressive Mercury turns direct in your covert eighth house. Over the past three weeks, while the messenger planet was retrograde, you've held your cards close to your vest, but guarding one secret could be taking a toll on your psyche. Mercury's forward motion could attract a worthy confidante—which is a good start to releasing your burden.

VIRGO: Your routine-driven sign isn't

generally considered erratic, but Mercury's retrograde through your relationship house over the past three weeks might have made you flip-flop. Perhaps a BFF hasn't had much time for you since finding "The One" or an ex resurfaced without an offer of commitment. Enough already!

LIBRA: Channel-surfing or downward-dogging? If you've been doing more of the former over the past three weeks, you can thank Mercury, which has been retrograde (backward) in your self-care sector. But don't throw in the towel! Today, the quicksilver planet turns direct, helping you find sustainable routines.

SCORPIO: You're back! On March 5, expressive Mercury turned retrograde in your passionate fifth house. You may have felt like you were missing the love boat. Or perhaps you couldn't get a clear read on a romantic interest. Get ready to shake off the confusion and insecurity today, as the communication planet powers forward and calls forth your most radiant self!

SAGITTARIUS: Baby, it might (still) be

cold outside, but it wouldn't hurt to open a few windows and air out Chateau Sagittarius. With Mercury retrograde in your domestic fourth house since March 5, home and family matters might have felt a bit dazed and confused. Your survival instincts kicked in, causing you to retreat from the insanity. You can breathe a sigh of relief and re-engage today, as Mercury turns direct. Call a truce with your roomies, make up with your S.O., seek out a solution with your mother!

CAPRICORN: Banish that either-or thinking, Capricorn. After a confusing three-week Mercury retrograde in your communication house, the messenger planet powers forward today. While you prefer to pour your (prodigious) energy into one thing at a time, this approach may not be serving you. Don't be afraid to dip your toe into multiple ponds, like those librarian-slash-actors or entrepreneur-slash-activists. Commuting or living in two cities is even a possibility for some earthbound Goats.

AQUARIUS: Loosen those purse strings, Aquarius. Since Mercury went retrograde

on March 5, you may have had a few budgetary breakdowns. But the messenger planet resumes forward motion today, making it safe to once again enjoy your hard-earned cash. This is a perfect time to revisit (and if necessary, revamp) your plans to strike a healthy balance between saving and spending. Invest in your greatest resource: yourself! A personal growth workshop, meditation retreat or life-coaching sessions can awaken your creativity and usher in a tsunami of entrepreneurial ideas.

PISCES: Vote with your dollar on Saturday, Pisces. An auspicious Sun-moon angle sends a reminder of how loudly money talks. Perhaps you'll choose socially responsible companies over those with murky or questionable practices. Supporting a small business owner can keep the unique character of your neighborhood thriving. This cosmic confab could inspire you to do business in different ways yourself or even earmark some of your earnings for a very specific cause you want to support.