



KASHYAP CALLS GOVT 'FASCIST' OVER ITS HANDLING OF STUDENT PROTESTS AGAINST CAA

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IN INDIA'S ASSAM, A SOLIDARITY NETWORK HAS EMERGED TO HELP THOSE AT RISK OF BECOMING STATELESS

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'GULLY BOY' OUT OF OSCAR RACE AS ACADEMY UNVEILS SHORTLIST FOR 9 CATEGORIES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Special summary revision of electoral rolls begins

GANGTOK, 17 DEC [IPR]:

The special summary revision of photo electoral rolls with reference to 01 Jan, 2020 as qualifying date will be held from 17 Dec, 2019 to 15 Jan, 2020, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), R Telang, informed a press conference today.

The conference was chaired by the CEO in presence of Special Secretary, RDD, Anil Raj Rai, who has been appointed by the Election Commission of India as Roll Observer, Additional CEO, Roshni Rai and representatives from recognised political parties along with the officials and staff from the office of CEO.

During this period, inclusion, deletion, correction and transfer of names in the electoral roll can be applied in Form 6, 7, 8 and 8A. Eligible citizens who attain 18 years of age on or before 01 Jan, 2020 can apply for inclusion of their names in the electoral roll during the Special Summary Revision.

Eligible citizens may also apply online on www.nvsp.in and for further details may log in at www.ceosikkim.nic.in.

He further mentioned that between 01 Sept to 30 Nov, the Commission had conducted a special verification drive of electors under the Electors Verification Programme (EVP) during which 100% of the electors were verified through House-to-House verification by Booth Level Officers.

It was observed that a large number of forms were received during EVP for deletion and correction which were disposed before the draft publication.

The Chief Electoral Officer further directed all the officials/ officers concerned to comply with the instructions and directions of the Election Commission of India for Special Summary Revision of Electoral roll with reference to 01 Jan, 2020 as the qualifying date.

He also appealed all the recognised political parties to appoint Booth Level agents (BLA) in all polling booths to address their claims and objections before the Electoral Registration Officer leading to much transparency in the registration process.

A copy of the draft Electoral Roll has also been handed over to representatives of political parties.

The CEO further informed that the draft roll has been uploaded on www.ceosikkim.nic.in and the draft roll can also be inspected at the office of the Electoral Registration Officers of respective Assembly constituencies.

Also, the CEO informed that the Roll Observer, Anil Raj Rai, can also be contacted at 9593782919 for any redressal of grievances in case of any irregularities during inclusion and deletion of names in the electoral roll.

Chasok Tongnam concludes at Saramsa with CM as chief guest

HOLIDAY FOR THIS SPECIAL FEST WILL BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED: GOLAY

REBYNA RANA

GANGTOK, 17 DEC:

The three-day Chasok Tongnam celebrations concluded today here at Saramsa near Ranipool with Chief Minister, PS Tamang [Golay], as chief guest.

The celebration was organised by Sukhim Yakthung Chasok Tongnam Lokchun [SYC-TL]. Chasok Tongnam is a major festival of the Limboo community celebrating a good harvest.

The objective behind the mega event here was also to revive Limboo folk culture and preserve the indigenous knowledge of ritual practises, faith and belief system of the community, the organizers inform.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister informed that the State Government was working on medical insurance cover for all the people.

"We are in the process of delivering 'system change' in Sikkim and I appeal for support from the people of Sikkim; let us create a system which benefits everyone. We are also in the process of digitising all government office work for the convenience of the people. In this government, we want that the official works of the people to be processed and completed in time," he announced.

The CM also stated that the SKM government was in the process of fulfilling all the promises and programmes mentioned in the party's election manifesto.

"We have fulfilled most of the promises made to the government employees like releasing the 5th Pay Commission arrears in one installment," he stated.

The CM further an-



nounced to provide houses under the Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana for which an amount of Rs. 16.85 crore has been set aside. House upgradation scheme [room extension plus furniture and TV] will also be provided, he added and informed

that a Rs 16 crore budget has been set aside for this scheme as well which aims to provide each beneficiary with Rs 50,000 towards home upgradation.

Speaking to the Limboo community, the CM contended that the pre-

vious government had hastily inaugurated the incomplete Sirijunga Statue project in West Sikkim and also short-changed the community by reducing the height from 136 feet to 36 feet.

"We will complete this project of making

the statue 136 feet tall," he said.

The Chief Minister also said that the State government was also working to address the issue of Sanskrit language school teachers. "The previous government had left the issue

unresolved, our government will regularize the services of Sanskrit teachers at the earliest," he announced.

Three eminent personalities – the Late Birkha Man Subba, SP Mangyung and BL Sawaden - were also felicitated for contributions in their respective fields.

The CM also released six books on the occasion. Cultural dances were also presented by different communities on the occasion.

Earlier, SYCTL placed a demand seeking that Chasok Tongam be declared a government holiday so that it becomes a calendar event. This will help encourage the younger generation to participate in their traditional event and thus keep the Chasok Tongam culture alive, they explained.

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SU students reiterate anti-CAA position, appeal against polticing of their position



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 DEC:

Sikkim University Students' Association [SUSA] has urged all not to politicise SUSA's protest against the Citizenship [Amendment] Act. At the same time, the association has also urged organisations and individuals not to do advocacy on behalf of SUSA and Sikkim University students.

The participation of Sikkim University students at the SPYF anti-CAA rally on 14 Dec is being seen as Sikkim Krantikari Morcha as agent provocateurs from outside trying to instigate trouble in Sikkim and SKM's argument has come in for serious flak from several quarters since then.

Addressing a press conference here today, SUSA president, Mahesh Rai, stressed that SUSA was a non-political organisation and even its constitution restricts students from having political affiliations.

He mentioned that SUSA has been protesting CAA and showing solidarity with students who have been facing brutality and attacks in different parts of the country. He added that SUSA had

organized its own protest against CAA on 14 December after which some students of the university had participated in the SPYF rally in the "individual capacities."

"Our students were neither part of the organising committee nor led the SPYF rally. We have just registered our protest against the CAA," Mr Rai clarified.

He stated that there was no planning or funding or any instigation from outside to protest the Act.

He mentioned that SUSA and SU students have not participated in any unlawful activity.

Likewise, SUSA general secretary, Nishant Chettri mentioned that Sikkim University has students from different parts of the country and SUSA has been protesting the CAA right since the start.

He mentioned that not only students from Assam but local students of Sikkim were equally represented in the SPYF rally.

"Students from Assam have not been able to return home and register their protest physically in their own state so they raised their voice against the Act strongly in the Gangtok rally," he pointed out.

Organisers invite Sikkimese to Mechi Paryatan Mahotsav at Pathibhara

SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 17 DEC:

The organizing committee of Pathibhara Marathon and Mechi Paryatan Mahotsav 2020 has invited devotees and lay people from Sikkim attend the Mahotsav to be held from 21 to 25 December at a popular pilgrimage site, Pathibhara in Taplejung district of Nepal.

The five-day festival, the organizers inform, will feature a series of national and international level religious, sporting, cultural and related events.

Addressing a press conference here today, convener of the organizing committee, Tara Nath Ghimire, informed that the committee has been organizing this festival



for the last 18 years.

Pathibhara is a popular pilgrimage site and also known for its natural beauty.

Mr Ghimire added that Pathibhara has been receiving around 3 lakh tourists every year, of whom the fourth highest numbers were from Sikkim who arrive there mainly to offer prayers.

"In this regard, we

have come here to invite pilgrims and people from Sikkim to be part of the Mahotsav. It will be a wonderful experience for them and an privilege for us," he said.

It is informed that the committee has also invited the Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] to the festival.

Mr Ghimire informed that the festival will have a 5KM long Kalash Yatra

at Taplejung Bazaar and an international marathon for men and women.

He shared that the area is also home to many places of tourist interest offering majestic views of Khangchendzonga.

The organizers have also arranged free transportation for pilgrims from outside Nepal from Taplejung Bazaar to Pathibhara during the festival.

Life without internet, social media in Guwahati

KUNAL DUTT

GUWAHATI, DEC 17 (PTI): Guwahati resident Ali Akbar plays cards at home for amusement and does workouts in leisure time these days to beat boredom.

The good old deck of cards is back in vogue in many households in the city whose people have been living without mobile internet since December 11 evening.

"I used to play games online, or surf Facebook or browse YouTube for videos, but since mobile net is suspended, I have no option for online entertainment," Akbar said.

In his late 20s, he works as a desk staffer at an economy hotel in Guwahati, and says, life becomes quite monotonous in this kind of job.

"Since, I cannot chat online with my friends while at home, I play cards with family members or invite friends over to join us," the Guwahati youth said.

This otherwise bustling city had been living under a curfew since December 11, which was lifted on Tuesday morning, as Guwahati appeared to limp back to normal

life. The authorities late Monday had also told that broadband services were to be restored on Tuesday, however; they did not say anything on resumption of mobile internet services.

Thus cab aggregator services remained unavailable for commuters in Guwahati, with buses becoming a major source of transportation.

Internet services have been suspended in Guwahati since Wednesday evening to prevent misuse of social media in disturbing peace and tranquillity as well as to maintain law and order; authorities had earlier said.

A staffer of a hotel in Hatigaon, who did not wish to be identified, said, "We have suffered a huge loss in the last one week, as people could not book hotels online." "We have about 20 rooms but only 4-5 been occupied daily since the curfew was clamped," he said.

Many restaurant owners in the city, who have tied-up with food delivery services, also said, no internet, meant no online order, and so no earning from that platform.

Biswajit Barman, 28, a support engineer

who works at Janata Bhawan here, said, "Life without internet has becoming dull in office and at home".

"My job involves use of computer and access to internet, so, I mostly sit around these days. Also, many government employees yesterday had observed satyagraha at my office, and did not work but spent time idly in office," he said.

In a lighter vein, he also said that many youth in Guwahati are "addicted to PUB-G video game" but now they are off it, because of no internet in mobile phones.

"They see armoured men in virtual life while playing the game, but now, instead they have been seeing armed security forces in the streets for the past one week," he said with a smile.

"Having no internet is a loss, but at least people are talking to each other, at home and in public transport, otherwise they will have their necks buried in their phones," Barman said.

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Nirbhaya case: CJI Bobde recuses from hearing convict's plea seeking review of death penalty

NEW DELHI, DEC 17 (PTI):

Chief Justice S A Bobde recused himself on Tuesday from hearing the plea of convict Akshay Kumar Singh seeking review of the 2017 apex court judgment upholding his death penalty in the Nirbhaya gang rape-and-murder case.

At the outset, a special bench comprising CJI and Justices R Banumathi and Ashok Bhushan made it clear that review pleas has to be heard by another appropriate bench.

The CJI said one of his relatives had earlier appeared on behalf of the victim's mother in the case

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Leadership and personality development workshop begins for NSS volunteers

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 DEC:

A state-level capacity building programme for youth on “Leadership and Personality Development Through Life Skills” was inaugurated by the Sports & Youth Affairs Minister, Kunga Nima Lepcha, here at Paljor Stadium on Tuesday evening.

The programme is being organized by Sikkim State National Service Scheme Cell in collaboration with the NSS Cell of Guwahati.

The five-day residential programme is being attended by 150 NSS volunteers from 75 educational institutions from different parts of the State.

The programme will include motivational talks and activities, life-skill and personality development trainings, group discussions, de-



bates, yoga, zumba, cultural and other activities conducted by experts and resource persons from different government and non-governmental organizations.

The Minister was accompanied to the inauguration by Secretary, SYA Department, Kuber

Bhandari, and other officials of the department.

In his inaugural address, the Minister urged participants to consistently work on the NSS theme, ‘Not Me But You,’ to serve society in better manner.

He observed that NSS volunteers can play a very important role in

leading and educating their families and society and contribute to the state and the nation building process.

“I am seeing future leaders in different fields in every NSS volunteer,” he shared.

The Minister encouraged NSS volunteers to

keep a clear aim in life and follow it with confidence and determination. He invited them to take the full advantage of the camp and become inspiration for others.

Sports & Youth Affairs Department Additional Director [NSS], Doma Tshering Bhutia,

mentioned that such programmes will help youth address the challenges of their daily lives and motivate them.

She mentioned that the programme has experts, motivational speakers and life skill trainers from different areas and expressed hope that the programme will help NSS volunteers lead their respective areas and people in a better way.

The inaugural function was also addressed by Dewakar Basnet and Sapant Pradhan as motivational speakers. The inaugural function also included yoga and Zumba sessions.

The inaugural function, which was conducted by SYA Assistant Director, Pincho Bhutia, was concluded with vote of thanks proposed by State NSS Coordinator, Babita Chettri.

SRP unconvinced by SKM and BJP assurances on Citizenship law

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 DEC:

Sikkim Republican Party president, KB Rai, today claimed that Citizenship (Amendment) Act has already been implemented in Sikkim and that unlike being claimed by SKM, Article 371F cannot stop CAA from the State.

He stressed that the State government should either push strongly to bring Sikkim under the Inner Line Permit regime or secure tribal status for the leftout communities to make Sikkim a Tribal State and get automatic protection from the Act.

Addressing a press conference, Mr Rai stated that the recent press statement of the Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling, was not satisfactory. He pointed out that while Article 371F can protect the old laws of Sikkim, it cannot stop Indian citizens from living in Sikkim.

Mr Rai mentioned

that the CAA has already been implemented in the State since there is no specific mention in the Act saying otherwise hence Article 371F cannot stop Indians from living here and in the long run this will reduce the original inhabitants of Sikkim into minority.

He fears that there is the possibility of increased influx into Sikkim and the political rights of the Sikkimese will eventually drain away.

Sikkim Gorkha Jagaran Sangh president, Balbir Tamang, also raised similar fears questions at the press conference as did Raj Gadaily from Gorkha Apex Committee.

“We cannot trust the verbal assurances of BJP, SKM or any other political party on the CAA so now the people need to come forward to protest peacefully against the act,” he said.

Rajbhasha Workshop organized by ICAR-NOFRI

GANGTOK, 17 DEC [PIB]:

ICAR-National Organic Farming Institute (NOFRI) organized a day long Hindi Workshop under the Chairmanship of Joint Director, Dr RK Avasthe on 16 Dec, 2019 for the staff members of the Institute and Krishi Vigyan Kendra, East Sikkim. Initiating the deliberation, Sr Technical Officer, Surendra Mohan Kandwal highlighted the objectives for organizing such Hindi workshop at this Institute.

Further, he stated that every year we organize 4-5 Hindi Workshops on different topics related to implementation of Rajbhasha Hindi. During September to November 2019, number of programmes/events organized like Hindi Chetana Mas (whole month of September 2019), Celebration of 150th Birth Anniversary Week of Rashtrapita Mahatma Gandhi from 28 Sept to 02 Oct, 2019, Vigilance Awareness Week from 28 Oct to 02 Nov, 2019, wherein the medium adopted was Hindi.

Additionally Scien-



tists of this Institute are writing Popular Articles in Hindi and those have been published in the Journals published by the ICAR. Some of Extension materials have also been published in Nepali for the benefit of the farming community of Sikkim.

Dr Rafiqul Islam, Principal Scientist delivered a talk on “How to overcome from the Podium phobia”. During the talk he cited many examples to overcoming from the phobia in public speaking, as it is very essential to have good oration quality for making any presentation.

The interaction ses-

sion was organized for the participating staff members. He requested all the participants to make regular practice for delivery of a lecture before the audience of different size for perfection.

The Vice Chairman of the Official Language Implementation Committee, Dr Raghavendra Singh emphasized on the keen interest of the staffs in adopting Hindi in their routine work and every efforts are being made by the Hindi Section for promotion of the Hindi at this Institute.

He appealed to staff to get benefit by this Workshop. Sr Scientist,

Dr Ashish Yadav revealed some of historical aspects of Rajbhasha Hindi and its gradual progress in the Society. Head (I/C) of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Dr PK Pathak highlighted the constitutional status of Rajbhasha Hindi and its role for National Integration.

CTO, S Verma has also offered his views. The workshop was co-ordinated by Sr Technical Officer, SM Kandwal, Member Secretary, official Language Implementation Committee. At the end the programme the vote of thanks proposed by Scientist of the Institute, Dr Chandan Kapoor.

DU students hold anti-CAA protest

NEW DELHI, DEC 17 (PTI):

A section of Delhi University (DU) students on Tuesday protested against the amended citizenship law and condemned the police crackdown on Jamia Millia Islamia students. The protest was organised by the Left-backed All India Students’ Association and women’s collective Pinjra Tod, who claimed that Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) activists targeted “women wearing hijab”, a charge denied by the RSS-affiliate.

According to a member of Pinjra Tod, there were around 400 students who participated in the anti-CAA protest and they held a march from the DU arts faculty to the Vishwavidyalaya Metro Station.

Police had placed barricades between the protesters from Pinjra Tod and the ABVP, which was holding a demonstration in favour of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, she said.

“The ABVP was deliberately targeting Muslim students. Women in hijab and men with beards were targeted in the protest against the Citizenship Act. “Two female students and a male student filed complaints at the Maurice Nagar police station,” the Pinjra Tod’s member said.

However, ABVP state media in-charge Ashutosh Singh denied the allegations and said his organisation’s protest had ended even before the anti-CAA protest began.

Chasok Tongnam...

On this, the CM said the demand will be put up and a decision will be taken after consultations.

“I must tell you that there are 365 days in a year and of these, 143 days are government holidays including Saturdays and Sundays in Sikkim. That means 39% of the year is a holiday, however, this festival is also important and if declared as a government holiday, it will be an opportunity for the younger generation to take forward their major cultural event and keep it alive. I cannot say anything at the moment but will try to find a way. There are some days which have been declared as holidays unnecessarily, we can cut down such holidays or maybe we can have one Saturday as working day so that there are only three Saturdays that are holidays in a month to accommodate the demand of Chasok Tongnam as a government holiday. We will come up with a solution and get back to you by March, he said.

Area MLA, Em Prasad Sharma, also addressed the gathering.

Nirbhaya case...

and observed that it would be appropriate that some other bench hear the review plea at 10:30 am.

Advocate A P Singh, appearing for Akshay, started his submission saying that the case in hand has suffered political and media pressure and grave injustice has been done to the convict.

Life without...

A large number of Assamese youth use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp or online entertainment services like Netflix and Amazon Prime.

Akbar said, he has subscribed to Netflix for online shows, but “TV is all I am watching these days, mostly news channels to learn about the protests”.

Guwahati has been the nerve-centre of the protests, and people, both men and women, old and young, have been agitating over the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), now an Act (CAA), alleging that it is “highly polarising and anti-Constitutional” and “goes against the Assam Accord”.

In Goneshguri Market, vegetable vendors and fruit sellers hailed buyers as old Bollywood songs played on their mobile phones in the background.

“I have a smart phone but no use of it much now, as I can only make calls with it. We used to see news on mobile phones or watch something entertaining to while away time in absence of customers. Earlier, time used to fly, but, now time seems to stretch,” said 37-year-old Raj Kumar, a fruit seller.

But, 48-year-old Upendrajit Kalita, who has been participating in the ongoing protests with full vigour, asked “Was there internet during independence movement or social media during Assam movement (1979-85)”.

“All long-drawn struggles should surmount all odds. Every day is a challenge for us, but we will remain unrelenting in pursuit for our rights,” he said.

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Regional Outreach Bureau event in Darj

GANGTOK, 17 DEC [PIB]: Regional Outreach Bureau, Siliguri, organized a two-day Integrated Outreach Programme at Hayden Hall, Darjeeling, on 16 and 17 Dec.

On day-one, the programme was correlated with Swachh Bharat, Plastic Free India, Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat and on Jal Shakti.

The Programme was coordinated with the Nehru Yuva Kendra, Darjeeling, State ICDS Department, Health Department, ASHA, Anganwadi Workers, SHG’s from various sector.

As a package of the programme the Bureau organized a Public Meeting, Photo Exhibition on Swachh Bharat, Plastic Free India, Jal Shakti and on Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat also exhibits the cut out models of Mahatma Gandhi, on Swachh Bharat Mission and on Jal Shakti.

During the IOP as a chief guest, Father Paul Desuza, Director, Hayden Hall Darjeeling, inaugurated the Stalls of various Departments along with the Photo Exhibition and various cut-outs related to Swachh Bharat, Plastic Free India and on Jal Shakti.

Among the Speaker as a resource Person Social Workers, Om Narayan Gupta while delivering his remarkable speech on Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat, he opined that on the occasion of the National Unity day (Rashtriya Ekta Diwas), the Birth Anniversary of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, he said that the main purpose of the scheme is to enrich and enhance the traditional and culture of the country, which launched an initiative to boost the cultural connection between the states and union territories of the country, which help to enhance the interaction between the peoples of different Regions. Further he state that through this scheme one state of the country will connect to the other states on an annual basis to promote the rich tradition of each other by organizing various events.

Health Instructor, Sister Changku, Hayden hall Hospital, while speaking on health and Hygiene she said that Health is the normal and healthy state of the body.

Which are a great source of peace and happiness. Health refers to a healthy state of mind and a body physically fit to have no disorder. Again on Hygiene which she refers as the good practices to survive that prevent disease ultimately lead to good health especially, cleanliness, proper disposal of waste water and drinking water supply. In her speech she said that a healthy human being can enjoy a life in everywhere/way. Where as a unhealthy being lives a miserable life. Again she stressed that we should prepare our food in cast iron frying pan instead of Non-stick frying pan as she said.

From WWF, Ms Meghna, while speaking on Plastic free India she opined that Single use plastic material which is a major causes of the environmental pollution. Since Plastic is a non-biodegradable which can stay in our earth for more than 100 years polluting immensely. So it has become very essential to ban the single use plastic before it ruins our environment completely. So as a part of break free from plastic movement, we believe in world where the land, sky, oceans and water are home to an abundance of life, not the abundance of plastic, and where the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat is free of toxic by-products of plastic pollution. So we could make it possible by taking active part in the awareness campaign against the use of plastics. The mass gathering was curious about the Eco Brick they saw and knew first time with the aegis of this Exhibition on Plastic Free.

While Deepa Sharma, (Swachh Bharat Mission) DRDS, Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, West Bengal, speaking on Jal Shakti-In her speech she said that inspiring by our Prime Minister, which is lead to water conservation campaign and is most important subject for the inhabitants of Darjeeling. The campaign will focus on Integrated demand and a supply –side management of water at the local level including creation of local infrastructure for source sustainability by using Rain

Water Harvesting, ground water recharge and management of house hold waste e water for re-use. It also focus on creating or renovating structures for rain water and waste water harvesting which will ultimately regulated the water use and saving measures.

Further while speaking on Swachh Bharat Mission, she said that A clean India would be the best tribute India could pay to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150 Birth Anniversary in 2019. As she said the Quote of Mahatma Gandhi that “Swachhta is more important than Freedom”. As our place in free from open defecation where the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is the most significant cleanliness campaign by the Govt. of India, leading the mass movement for cleanliness to fulfill Mahatma Gandhi’s dream.

Appreciating the programme father Paul Desuza, Director, in his speech urges to organize more such awareness campaign in his places in near future. During the Programme as a live Performance the Local entertainment groups had performed various dance and play to make entertainment for the gathering, which witnessed a huge enthusiasm among the masses.

The second day commenced with the welcome address by the organisers i.e. ROB, Siliguri. Later, a Sit & Draw competition on Swachh Bharat was held on the dais where as many as fifty competitors including students participated. Local live entertainment programmes folk dance and songs were taken place during the course of programmes. Among the Resource Persons DRDS, Deepa Sharma, Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, West Bengal commenting the quote “health is the ultimate wealth” and spoke about the hygiene and use of napkins and proper toilets. After than a Quiz competition was organized among the gathering and prizes i.e. jute bag and mathematical instruments for the students were awarded to all the participants. The day’s programme was concluded with Vote of Thanks by the ROB.

~ SummitTIMES ~ CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

For details contact: 9083826462

FLAT FOR RENT/LEASE

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

For more details: 9083826462 /9832556698

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College.

Flat Land no cutting required. Price 30 Lakhs (negotiable).

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

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



Bibek Chettri wins Aurora Badminton Tournament

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 DEC:

Bibek Chettri of Central Pendam lifted the Men's Singles trophy beating Aditya Pariyar of Singtam, East Sikkim, in straight sets to win the Aurora Badminton Tournament held at Sikkim Distilleries auditorium in Rangpo, East Sikkim,

today. Principal, Singtam Senior Secondary School, KB Chettri, graced the occasion as chief guest accompanied by executive members of Badminton Association of Rangpo.

Likewise, Aron Pradhan from Bardang won the U-16 Single's beating Pintu Gupta of Singtam, while SM Rai pairing

with Pawan Sharma clinched the Men's Doubles, Suresh Prasad pairing with Anil Sherpa won the Veterans' Doubles and Amartya Gurung from ACF Fitness, Majhitar was conferred the Best Player Trophy.

The tournament was conducted under the technical guidance of Badminton Association of Rangpo.

Workshop held on Livestock and Poultry Management and Production

GANGTOK, 17 DEC [IPR]:

A workshop on "Livestock and Poultry Management and Production" was held at the Animal Husbandry Department Training Centre here at Sokeythang today.

Secretary of AH&VS, SB Subba, was present as the chief guest accompanied by Director [Piggery], Dr Sangay Dorjee Bhutia, Director [Poultry], DK Pradhan, members of self help groups, officials and staff of AH&VS. Dr Anju Nayak, Dr S Nagar, Dr PP Soni were guests from outside the State.

The Secretary informed that this was the first time in the Government of Sikkim that such a galaxy of scholars and scientists were participating in a daylong workshop.

He thanked the resource person and other specialists who had come from afar to share their

knowledge and experience with livestock farmers here and called on the gathering to extract the maximum benefit from various strategies, management tips, dynamics of supply and demand, quality of productivity, stability of rates in the products and byproducts shared by the resource persons.

The resource persons for the day were Registrar & Dean (PGS), Prof Dr PK Shukla, Head, Department of Poultry Science, DUVASU Mathura, UP; Director Extension, Dr Sunil Nayak, NDVSU & Prof & Head Department of Animal Nutrition Co V Sc & AH Jabalpur (MP); Regional Manager South Central Asia (SCA) Dr Jitendra Verma; and Associate Prof & Head Department of veterinary Microbiology, Dr Anju Nayak, College of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry, Jabalpur.

Heaven Dance Institute reopens in Rangpo



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 DEC:

After a four-year gap, the Heaven Dance Institute was re-inaugurated at Rangpo in a new look and with new vision today, a press release informs.

Sikkim Bihari Jagran Manch central committee president, Swaminath Prasad, was present as chief guest and

inaugurated the institute in the presence of SBJM Rangpo Branch President, Sukdev Prasad, JP Singh, LM Khawas, Devanand Agarwal, Santosh Agarwal, Lions Club International 322 F Region Chairman, Namita Chettri, Deepa Khawas, Sital Pradhan, Jony Rai, Deepak Gurung and others.

Choreographer of the institute, Bishnu Suman,

mentioned that classes will run regularly according to the requirements of the students and with a clear aim to provide students national and international platforms.

The chief guest made special mention of Bishnu Suman, congratulating him for resuming classed and assured support from his side as well.

Age-old rainwater harvesting tech improved to make lives better in arid Rajasthan



AMITAVA ROY

JODHPUR (RAJASTHAN),

DEC 17 (PTI): The lives of most of the 1.5 crore population of arid western Rajasthan have changed for the better after an age-old method of rainwater harvesting has been improved and employed there effectively, an official said here on Tuesday.

The 'tanka' storage system - the method of collecting rainwater from a catchment area and storing it in a 'tanka' (underground tanks) - is unique to this part of the country.

The water-scarce desert and arid region, which used to suffer from droughts frequently, has benefited from the system which has been improved by an institute under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

People in the districts

of Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Nagaur, Bikaner and Churu in the Thar desert now have access to stored water throughout the year, Jodhpur District Magistrate Prakash Rajpurohit said.

"Most of the 1.5 crore population in the region have benefited from constructing tankas in their households through the NREGA programme, in which 100 per cent funding is provided by the government," Rajpurohit told a group of visiting journalists.

While the Centre bears 60 per cent of the approximate Rs 1.2 lakh cost for construction of a tanka for a single household, the rest 40 per cent is borne by the state government, he said.

"With an average rainfall of 350 mm annually, the region needs to store rainwater as much as possible and the tanka

system has proved to be a boon for the purpose," the district magistrate said.

In Jodhpur district, a total of 3005 tankas were constructed at a cost of around Rs 75 crores from April 1, 2018 to January 1, 2019, an official said.

In a four-decade-long research, the Jodhpur-based Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI) has perfected the technology of tanka construction for various types of users, a CAZRI spokesman said.

The CAZRI which functions under the aegis of the ICAR has developed an improved design of tanka for capacities varying between 5000 litres for individual capacity and 6 lakh litres for community use, he said.

Improved tankas are built mainly of stones, cement and concrete, the spokesman said.

Crowds back as NEUFC gear up to host Bengaluru FC

GUWAHATI, DEC 17 (PTI):

NorthEast United FC will host Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League (ISL) here on Wednesday, as both sides look to regain their momentum.

The match, at the Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium, was earlier supposed to be held behind closed doors due to unrest in the region following the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill.

However, the ISL later said in a statement that the game will be open to spectators. NorthEast United FC are coming into this game off a 3-0 loss to ATK at home and are now winless in three matches. Not only was it their first defeat of the season, but they also lost their star striker Asamoah Gyan to injury in that game.

"It was very bad for us. That was the worst match we played. We never played so badly before. We have to forget that day and continue working hard," NorthEast coach Robert Jarni said.

The Highlanders will again be without the prolific Ghanaian on Wednesday. Gyan, who has three goals to his name, has been crucial to NorthEast setup so far.

Without the former Premier League star, their attacking threat

goes down a few notches and the other forwards will have their task cut out against a formidable Bengaluru defence which has conceded the least in the league. However, Jarni would have had some time to formulate a plan of attack without Gyan, given that NorthEast have had a 10-day break after their last game, owing to the postponement of their home tie against Chennaiyin FC.

The return of Uruguayan attacking midfielder Federico Gallego in place of Maximiliano Barreiro also helps boost the Highlanders' attack. Gallego, who contributed four goals and as many assists last season, makes his ISL return after suffering a leg break coincidentally against Bengaluru FC last season.

NorthEast's defence has not been in great form of late, conceding six goals in three matches. The defence, led by Kai Heerings, need to step up to the task.

"The game is difficult. We know that Bengaluru is one of the best teams in India but we saw that the game was open in Bengaluru. We had the possibility to win and the same for tomorrow, so who knows what will happen tomorrow (Wednesday)," said Jarni. Bengaluru FC come into this game after see-

ing their unbeaten start to the season come to an end against Mumbai City FC who won 3-2, thanks to an injury-time goal from Rowlin Borges.

However, despite the three goals they shipped on Sunday, Bengaluru have conceded only five goals so far this season and are the best defensive unit in the ISL by far.

It is the attack that should worry Carles Cuadrat though. Apart from Sunil Chhetri, none of the attackers seems to be in form. Ashique Kuruniyan is yet to open his account for the season and has put in some below-par performances so far.

"Last year we were champions but we lost an important player (Miku). We have been unlucky about the situation now. Ashique is with 0 assists and 0 goals and Udanta only one goal.

"So, of course, we have problems that way but at the same time we work in a way where they help us defensively," explained Cuadrat.

In their four away matches so far, Bengaluru have scored just three goals and their shot accuracy and conversion rates have been disappointing. They are also struggling to score from open play. Four of their last five goals have come from set-pieces.

Mammootty, Dulquer raise their voice against CAA



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,

DEC 17 (PTI): As protests continued against the amended Citizenship Act, top Malayalam actor Mammootty on Tuesday said the country can forge ahead as a nation only when one rises above caste, creed and religious considerations.

"We can forge ahead as a nation only when we rise above caste, creed, religion and other considerations.

Anything against such a spirit of togetherness is to be discouraged," Mammootty wrote in his official Facebook Page though he did not explicitly mention the controversial Act.

Kerala had made headlines on Monday when the ruling CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front and the opposition United Democratic

Front, spearheaded by the Congress, came together against the CAA and the Centre.

Echoing similar views, Mammootty's son and actor Dulquer Salmaan in a post said: "Secularism, democracy and equality are our birth-right and we must resist any attempt to destroy it. However, do remember that our tradition is that of Ahimsa and non-violence. Protest peacefully and stand up for a better India. #longlivesecularism #unitedstand," the 'Zoya Factor' actor posted.

Many Malayalam actors, including Prithviraj, Parvathy, Tovino, Kunchacko Boban and Amala Paul have taken to social media to express their views against the CAA and the police action on students of Jamia Millia Islamia university in Delhi.

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CEE 24 NOV 2019

(a) English

The result of Common Entrance Exam (CEE) for recruitment into Indian Army for Soldier General Duty, Soldier Technical, and Soldier Tradesman held at Army Recruiting Office, Siliguri, on 24 November 2019 has been declared and uploaded on Indian Army website www.joinindianarmy.nic.in on 14 December 2019. In case of any query, candidates are advised to contact Army Recruiting Office, Siliguri. The result is also available on IVRS No 03322236897.

(b) Hindi

आर्मी रिक्रूटिंग ऑफिस, सिलीगुड़ी, में दिनांक 24 नवंबर 2019 को सोल्जर (जनरल ड्यूटी), सोल्जर (टेक्निकल), तथा सोल्जर ट्रेड्समैन पदों के लिए आयोजित सामान्य प्रवेश परीक्षा का परिणाम भारतीय सेना की वेबसाइट www.joinindianarmy.nic.in पर दिनांक 14 दिसम्बर 2019 से उपलब्ध है। यदि उम्मीदवार को किसी भी प्रकार की जानकारी प्राप्त करनी हो तो वे आर्मी रिक्रूटिंग ऑफिस, सिलीगुड़ी से संपर्क करें। परीक्षा का परिणाम आ बी आर एस नम्बर 03322236897 पर भी उपलब्ध है।



Say No to DUI

Tearing hurry and powerful vehicles already make a bad enough cocktail

Name change has done nothing to make the highway any safer, not that it was ever intended to have such an effect. Driving along NH-10 continues to be as scary as it was negotiating the stretch when it was NH-31A. The experience gets all that more unnerving early in the morning or towards dusk, especially if one is driving into Gangtok. Even as the engine tries to warm up sufficiently to run smoothly on hill roads, mainline jeeps thunder down the highway in collective tearing hurry. Trucks are still on the roads rushing to make it to Gangtok before their entry time ends and the vehicles that race down from the capital, headed for Siliguri and South and West Sikkim destinations appear to running on aviation fuel. Frozen expressions on the faces of the passengers and the grim determination on the faces of extremely young drivers leaves one cold, wondering whether the easy availability of vehicle loans for such powerful vehicles is really such a good idea for Sikkim. Thankfully, the number of accidents on Sikkim roads has seen a noticeable drop in recent months, but that is still no indication that the roads are any safer. They can't happen until the drivers are better trained and have packed in at least some experience.

Thankfully, the problems of fog and haze have still not set in, but what is still reason for worry is the picnic season that will now set in with the New Year. Picnic revelers for passengers and the boisterousness that a daylong outing can infuse are not the most conducive elements for safe driving. If the driver has been a part of the picnic celebrations, then the worries multiply. In this regard, it is time that the practice of including a sober driver in every carpool becomes a necessity. Any drive around the hills after dark carries a very high probability to getting brushed, or at least nearly run off the road, by vehicles powered by a disdain for safety that only alcohol and/ or drugs can induce. No, let's not have the cops start ambushing drivers with their breath-analyser toys because that is too much of nuisance and invariably ineffective because of the selective nature of policing. Instead, a campaign by the young and supported by the establishments that they frequent should be attempted. Let the process begin from there, and once the model works, it will begin making sense to a wider network of drivers and passengers. Once that happens, at least one aspect of irresponsible driving habits would have been taken care of and then the focus can shift to other challenges.

Remember, hill roads can be cruel, a slight mistake and momentary lapse of concentration and one is not even left with a lifetime to repent. Such loss is pointless and easily avoidable.

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In India's Assam, a solidarity network has emerged to help those at risk of becoming stateless

ANURADHA SEN MOOKERJEE
theconversation.com

The state of Assam in India is currently burning with violent protests against a new citizenship law passed by both houses of the Indian parliament in early December.

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) will ease the Indian citizenship process for undocumented migrants in India who come from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh – but only for those who are not Muslim, undermining the promise of equality by the Indian Constitution. The international community criticised the new law, with the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights calling it “fundamentally discriminatory”.

Since its parliamentary approval on December 12, the law has triggered massive protests across India including in the capital Delhi.

CONCERNS IN ASSAM

Assam is directly affected by the new law. It significantly undermines the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a listing process that has been underway in Assam since 2015 through which residents have to prove their claim to citizenship based on documentary evidence. The NRC is designed to update a first list conducted as an all-India exercise in 1951 to combat illegal immigration flows, primarily from neighbouring Bangladesh.

More than 1.9 million people in Assam – many of whom are Muslim – have failed to make it onto the NRC's final list which was published on August 31. They now face the risk of statelessness. But at the same time, the large numbers of Hindus who were excluded in the NRC system can now become Indian citizens under the CAA. The way the CAA is written makes way for Indian citizenship of all non-Muslims who lived in certain areas of Assam, such as the Brahmaputra Valley, before or on December 31 2014, even if they don't have documentary evidence, and while rendering Muslims stateless. It contradicts the cut-off date for inclusion used by the NRC, which was midnight on March 24 1971.

For the protesters on Assam's streets, the CAA gives legal rights to the large numbers of undocumented Bengali-speaking Hindus who have migrated from Bangladesh since 1971 and also those currently excluded by the NRC.

Their fear is twofold. First, indigenous Assamese feel that with the inclusion of the Bengali speaking Hindus by the CAA, the composite number of Bengali speaking people (both Hindus and Muslims) will outnumber the Assamese speaking people in the state. Census data shows that the Assamese-speaking people in the state declined from 58% of the population in 1991 to 48% in 2011. Second, the Muslims both excluded by NRC and those who have migrated later, risk becoming stateless.

A JOURNEY TO THE PAMPARA CHAR

I've seen up close the damage the NRC process has had on communities in Assam. In mid-November, I visited the state with the Indian peace activist Harsh Mandar and several others as part of an initiative called Karwan e Mohabbat, a human caravan of peace, justice, solidarity and consciousness as part of my research on citizenship in the Indian borderlands.

We visited the homes of people who have been excluded from the NRC, particularly from the Muslim community in Lower Assam districts. We listened and learned about their experiences of trauma, suffering and hopelessness with the filing of their documents and how they are coping with their exclusion.

Among the people we met in the Barpeta district of Lower Assam were inhabitants of the Chars, low-lying temporary sand islands formed by silt deposition and erosion. These sand bars, which emerge and submerge in the river beds of Assam's Brahmaputra river, are uniquely vulnerable to disasters such as floods and cyclones.

WILD GRASS, THATCHED HUTS AND DISTRESSED RESIDENTS

The Pampara Char is a barren wasteland, with wild grass growing all over the place and houses that looked like temporary huts. The only brick building, which was freshly painted in white and blue, was the primary school. It stood distinct from the other houses and seemed sparingly used. The people, toughened by poverty and harsh ecology, were left distraught by their experience of the NRC and gathered around Harsh Mandar and other social activists to share their suffering and tales of horror about the registration process. Many had to go through repeated verification across different drafts of the list.

I observed deep anxiety among the people we met, such as the aggrieved 54-year-old Khaled Ali. Illiterate and landless, Ali is a river fisherman who sometimes also works as a daily wage labourer. Like many others he received a notice in early August that he and his 18 other family members needed to submit more documents or they would be excluded from the final NRC list. Their names had been included in two previous versions.

A reverification hearing was scheduled for the next day in the distant town of Golaghat, which is 460km away from the Pamapara Char. Overnight, Ali raised a loan of 30,000 Indian rupees (US\$424 or €383) to travel to Golaghat, with all his family members and two witnesses in a hired bus. After an 18-hour trip, they reached Golaghat and were received by local civil society activists who arranged for them to camp at a community centre and also helped them to submit their documents.

After their reverification hearing, Ali and his family members found themselves excluded in the final NRC list. While they have 120 days to appeal against their exclusion, his wife lamented that they

lack the money to produce more documents from paralegals to support their cases before the appeal deadline on December 29. Meanwhile, a distraught Ali told us that he still has a loan of 14,000 rupees (US\$198 or €178) to repay.

COMPLEX DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

For marginal and illiterate residents of the Chars such as Ali, the NRC and the process of proving citizenship has become a very stressful and expensive burden. As we found out during our home visits, a new parallel economy of document production has flourished. Paralegals charged anywhere between 500 to 1,000 Rupees for each document, a very large sum for these poor people.

The highly complex documentation process, which includes requirement for family trees and residency documents dating back to before March 24 1971, is also to blame for the exclusion of large numbers of people from the final NRC register. The process is extremely insensitive to the difficulties of the large mass of illiterate and poverty-stricken populations who are finding it very difficult to make sense of how to navigate registration on their own.

Processes of verification and reverification have been implemented in a way that firmly establish a hierarchical relation between the state and its citizens, with the complete domination by bureaucrats and public office holders over the rights of the citizens and residents.

'CITIZEN-MAKING' HUMANITARIANS OF ASSAM

Many of the marginalised populations in Lower Assam, such as Ali and his family, have needed constant support to be able to file their documents and fight their cases. Local activists are playing a significant role in helping people deal with the burden of proving their citizenship, understanding the terminology and filling in the application forms and claims. They are also offering guidance about attending case hearings, support in procuring documents for submission from paralegals and also offering psycho-social counselling. Volunteers and human rights groups of Lower Assam have also connected with civil society actors in Upper Assam to help residents commute from Lower to Upper Assam for hearings and verification, and on some occasion even raise money, creating a solidarity network.

Such a humanitarian network is crucial at a time when marginalised people feel threatened with the changing legal regime which seeks to redefine the basis of Indian citizenship. These networks of solidarity in India's north-eastern borderlands attempt to draw out the real Indian body politic, reinforcing the plural fabric of the Indian constitution.

* Some names in this article have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

[The writer is Research fellow, Graduate Institute – Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement (IHEID)]

The science of gift wrapping explains why sloppy is better

ERICK M. MAS
theconversation.com

They say appearances can be deceiving. In the case of gift giving, they might be right.

Consumers spend billions of dollars a year on wrapping gifts, in most cases to make their presents look as good as possible. This includes money spent on paper, boxes, ribbon and pretty bows.

While some people are particularly skilled at gift wrapping – with the perfect folds, carefully tied ribbons and bows – others aren't quite cut out for it, and apparently would prefer washing dishes or cleaning the house.

Two colleagues and I wondered whether all that time and effort is actually worth it. Does a beautiful presentation actually lead to a better-liked gift? Or is it the other way around?

SLOPPY VERSUS NEAT

In a paper recently published by the Journal of Consumer Psychology, University of Nevada, Reno professors Jessica Rixom and Brett Rixom and I conducted three experiments to explore the impact of gift wrapping.

In the first experiment, we recruited 180 university students to come to a behavioral lab in Miami to participate in a research study described as an extra credit exercise. Upon arrival, each student was given

an actual gift as a token of appreciation for their participation.

The gift was a coffee mug with the logo of one of two NBA basketball teams, the local Miami Heat or rival Orlando Magic, handed out at random. We knew that every participant was a fan of the Heat based on a prior survey – and that they explicitly didn't support the Magic. The purpose was to ensure that we were giving half of the students a desirable gift, while the other half received something they did not want.

Finally, half of the gifts were wrapped neatly, while the rest looked slapdash.

After unwrapping, participants evaluated how much they liked their gifts. We found that those who received a sloppily wrapped gift liked their present significantly more than those who received a neatly wrapped gift – regardless of which mug they got.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

To understand why, we recruited another set of students and asked them to view an image of either a neatly or sloppily wrapped gift and report their expectations about it prior to seeing what was inside.

Participants were then told to imagine opening the gift – which for everyone was a pair of JVC earbuds – and rate their actual attitudes toward it, allowing us to compare whether it

matched their expectations or not.

Results showed that expectations were significantly higher for the neatly wrapped gifts compared with sloppily wrapped ones. However, after the reveal, participants receiving the neatly wrapped gift reported that it failed to live up to their expectations, while those who got the sloppily wrapped gift said it surpassed their expectations.

This suggests that people use the wrapping as a cue to how good the gift will be. Neat wrapping sets the bar for the gift too high, intimating that it will be a great present. Sloppy wrapping, on the other hand, sets low expectations, suggesting it'll be a bad gift.

So a sloppily wrapped gift leads to pleasant surprise, while one that's neat-looking results in disappointment.

FRIENDS VERSUS ACQUAINTANCES

In our third and final experiment, we wanted to zero in on whether this effect depended on the relationship between the gift-giver and recipient. Does it matter if the giver is a close friend or just an acquaintance?

We surveyed a nationally representative sample of 261 adults and asked them to imagine being at a party with a secret gift exchange. At random, participants viewed images and imagined receiving either a neatly or sloppily wrapped gift. This time, we instructed half of them to imagine the gift was from a close friend, while the

other half believed it came from an acquaintance. Then we revealed the gift and asked them to rate it.

When it came from a close friend, recipients ended up liking the sloppily wrapped gift more, just like in our other experiments. However, when the gift came from an acquaintance, recipients preferred it when it was neatly wrapped. This occurs because these participants used the wrapping as a cue to how much the gift-giver values their relationship – rather than to signal what's inside. Neat wrapping implies the giver values their relationship.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE

So if you're stressing over gift wrapping this holiday season, consider saving yourself time, effort and money by wrapping your friends' and family's gifts haphazardly.

But if you're planning to give a gift to someone you don't know quite as well – a work colleague, for example – it's probably worth it to show you put in some effort to make it look good with all of the neat folds, crisp edges and beautiful bows.

I, for one, am taking these results to heart. From now on, I'll only wrap my wife's gifts sloppily so she'll always be pleasantly surprised no matter how good – or bad – the gift is.

[The writer is Postdoctoral Fellow in Marketing, Vanderbilt University]

Internet-dependent commercial activities hit in Assam

DURBA GHOSH

GUWAHATI, DEC 17 (PTI): Suspension of internet in Assam has affected commercial activities dependent on online transactions and mobile applications, particularly banking, cab services, food delivery and e-commerce sectors.

Internet services have been suspended in Assam since December 11 following protests against the citizenship law.

Broadband services were restored on Tuesday but mobile internet remained suspended causing hardship to people dependent on mobile apps and other online services.

People are facing difficulties in withdrawing or transferring money online and as there is no internet, debit and credit cards also cannot be used for making online transactions, several bank customers told PTI.

“We conducted most of our banking transactions online or through debit and credit cards but over the past six days, we have become dependent on cash,” 26-year old businessman Mohit Jain said.

Bank officials said they have dedicated internet lines which are working but most customers dependent on mobile network are not being able to conduct transactions. With a halt



on online transactions, people have become more dependent on cash leading to its shortage in the ATMs, they said.

The banks are regularly replenishing cash in the ATMs and mobile ATMs have also been put into service in some areas but the measures are still not enough in easing the situation, shopkeeper Hemanta Kalita of Chandmari area of the city said.

Kalita said he had waited for more than an hour outside an ATM to withdraw cash so that he could buy stock for his shop from the Fancy Bazaar wholesale market but cash ran out in the kiosk forcing him to shun his plan. The worst affected, however, are

mobile app-dependent cab and bike services like Ola, Uber and Rapido.

Ola and Uber cab drivers had staged a protest on Tuesday by lining their vehicles on the streets and seeking alms.

The agitating drivers said for the last six days, they have not been able to earn anything due to the suspension of mobile internet services.

Demanding that mobile internet services be restored, president of Guwahati Cab Drivers Association, Ibrahim Ali said, “Several youths from poor financial backgrounds run their families and pay bank instalments with their earnings as cab drivers.”

Bijoy Deka, a cab driver, said, “I pay a

monthly instalment of Rs 10,000 for my vehicle but I fear that I will default this month as I have not earned for nearly a week.”

App-based bike rider Rajib Ali said he is facing difficulties in running his family which is dependent on his earnings.

Food delivery service applications such as Swiggy and Zomato have also been affected.

Several restaurant owners said they have not received any online home delivery orders due to the suspension of internet services.

E-commerce sector, too, has been hit with people not being able to order items or receive products they have already ordered. “I had ordered winter clothes

through Amazon online application but the products have not yet been delivered and I am not able to track them,” homemaker Mayuri Gohain said.

Students are also facing difficulties in submitting applications online.

“I was scheduled to submit my applications for higher studies to foreign universities this week but I am not been able to do that. If internet services remain suspended, I might have to go outside the state to submit them,” undergraduate student Pallavi Sarma said.

Several people, who were planning to travel during the upcoming festive season of Assam, are also unable to book flight or train tickets online.

BrahMos missile successfully test-fired from Odisha’s Chandipur

BALASORE (ODISHA), DEC 17 (PTI): Supersonic cruise missile BrahMos was successfully test-fired from a base in Odisha’s Chandipur on Tuesday, Defence sources said.

The land-attack version of the missile was test-fired from a mobile autonomous launcher at Launch Complex-3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur near here at around 8.30 am, they said.

The trial of the surface-to-surface missile was successful, meeting all the parameters, a De-

fence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) source said.

The BrahMos missile is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile capable of being launched from submarines, warships, fighter jets or land.

The first extended version of the missile with a strike range of 450 km was successfully test-fired on March 11, 2017, Defence sources said.

A shorter range land-attack version of the BrahMos was successfully test-fired from the ITR at Chandipur

on September 30, 2019, they said. BrahMos is a joint venture between India’s DRDO and NPOM of Russia.

The missile is operational with the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force. The BrahMos is regarded as the fastest supersonic cruise missile in the world, the sources said.

It has established itself as a major force multiplier in modern warfare with its land-attack and anti-ship capabilities with multi-role and multi-platform abilities, they added.

Protests against citizenship law in some parts of Bengal

KOLKATA, DEC 17 (PTI): Protests were reported from some parts of West Bengal for the fifth day on Tuesday against the amended Citizenship Act.

Agitators raised slogans against the new Citizenship Act at Basirhat in North 24 Parganas district.

The police has stepped up vigil across the state and as many as 354 protesters were arrested for violence.

Several trains to north Bengal were either cancelled or delayed, officials said.

West Bengal Chief

Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee is scheduled to lead a rally from Jadavpur 8B bus stand to Bhawanipore in south Kolkata area against the citizenship law.

Banerjee, who led a mega rally from Red Road to Jorasanko Thakur Bari, the ancestral house of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in north Kolkata on Monday, had urged the agitators to not indulge in vandalism and arson.

The chief minister had declared on Monday that the Amended Citizenship Act and the

National Register of Citizensh could be enforced in the state only over her “dead body”.

Road and rail blockades were witnessed in the state on Monday as violent protests over the contentious Citizenship Act refused to die down, amid warning by state authorities and appeal from the chief minister.

Anti-citizenship law protests snowballed into a major flashpoint in West Bengal on Monday with highways and railway lines blocked and incidents of arson and loot reported from many places.

Tension prevails in Jamia area, normal life affected

NEW DELHI, DEC 17 (PTI): It’s noon and 31-year-old Haris Rao is still waiting for the first customer at his stationery shop in the Batla House market adjoining Jamia Millia University.

Business has taken a hit due to the tension that gripped the areas adjoining Jamia Millia University following violence during a protest over the amended Citizenship Act on Sunday.

The markets in the Batla House, New Gole, Abu Fazl, Zakir Nagar and Gaffar Manzil areas wore a deserted look on Tuesday morning as well.

“I sell pens, notepads and books. I remain connected to students and I feel their pain. They all are our brothers and sisters,” he said, talking about the “police brutality” that sent shockwaves in the area on Sunday.

Rao’s shop remained

close for the last two days. “Who would feel like studying in such a situation,” he asked.

Mohammad Ali Javed, 22, who runs a cubicle-sized mobile recharge shop, said it remained shut for the last two-three days due to the “hungama” (commotion) in the area.

“A few people who know me personally asked me to get the recharges done from home. That’s the only business I conducted in the last two days,” he said, adding there’s hope that the situation will normalize soon.

Aftab Rao, who owns a merchandise store in the Kotla market, said his shop remained shut as he joined the protest against the police atrocities on Jamia students and the amended Citizenship Act along with his eight-year-old daughter.

“When I watched the news of police beating up our girls in bathrooms, libraries and mosques (on the campus), my eyes welled up with tears and I decided to join the protesters,” he said.

“It’s not about religion, any father would do the same. We are fighting for the right cause,” Rao, 36, added.

Shopkeepers and daily wagers huddled into small groups around bonfires and condemned the police action. “Only God knows what they (government) want,” one of the persons said. “To throw us out of the country,” another replied.

A shoe store owner who did not wish to be identified said most of the shopkeepers took part in the protest on Sunday and Monday.

“Police made a big mistake by attacking our sisters,” he said.

Flight ops, railway services resume in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, DEC 17 (PTI): Flight operations and railway services resumed in Guwahati on Tuesday, in a major relief to hundreds of stranded passengers, as the city limps back to normalcy after days of violent protests over the citizenship law.

Flights to and from the Dibrugarh airport is also operating as per schedule, officials said.

“Trains, including some intercity services, resumed services as law and order situation has gradually improved in the state,” Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) spokesperson Subhanan Chanda told PTI.

Services of other trains are being gradually resumed, he added.

“The resumed trains include Manas Rhino passenger, which connects New Bongaigaon to Guwahati, and will benefit the office-goers,” the spokesperson said.

Local passenger and intercity trains running today are the Down Dimapur-Guwahati Nagaland Express, Alipurduar Jn- Siliguri Intercity Express, Guwahati-New Bongaigaon passenger, Guwahati-Goalpara-New Bongaigaon.

UP Guwahati Jorhat Town Jansatabdi Express, Dekargaon-Kamakhya Express, Alipurduar Jn-Lumding Intercity Express, Guwahati-Ledo Intercity Express, Guwahati-Dibrugarh Intercity Express, Rangiya-Murkongselek passenger, New Bongaigaon-Goalpara-Guwahati are also operating.



Curfew lifted in Guwahati, relaxed in Dibrugarh

GUWAHATI, DEC 17 (PTI): The curfew imposed in Guwahati on December 11 in the wake of protests against the citizenship law was lifted on Tuesday, officials said. Shops and business establishments were open in the city, and buses, cars and two-wheelers were plying.

The decision to lift the curfew in Guwahati was taken at a

law and order review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday.

“It has been decided to lift the curfew completely in Guwahati from 6 am tomorrow,” an official statement had said.

However, the statement did not mention anything about resumption of mobile internet services. In Dibrugarh, the curfew

has been relaxed for 14 hours from 6 am on Tuesday, they said.

Assam witnessed violent protests with three rail stations, a post office, a bank, a bus terminus, shops, dozens of vehicles and many other public properties being set ablaze or damaged by the protesters.

Five persons had lost their lives since Wednesday.

Curfew relaxed in Shillong from 6 am to 7 pm

SHILLONG, DEC 17 (PTI): Curfew was relaxed for 13 hours in Shillong on Tuesday even as the ban on mobile internet services will remain in force, officials said.

The curfew was relaxed from 6 am from areas under Lumdingjri police station and Sadar police station limits, a statement from the East Khasi Hills district administration said.

Banks, main markets were open and vehicles were plying on the streets. Schools have announced their annual results following which

winter vacations have begun in most of the educational institutions.

Mobile internet remained shut for another 48 hours beginning from 5 pm on Monday even as mobile messaging services were relaxed to 5 messages per number that includes OTP services, a senior Home department official said.

No report of violence was reported since Monday, the official said.

The Confederation of Meghalaya Social Organisation (COMSO), an umbrella organization of all social organisations and

pressure groups, lauded the state governments decision to pass a resolution to demand implementation of the Inner Line Permit in the state.

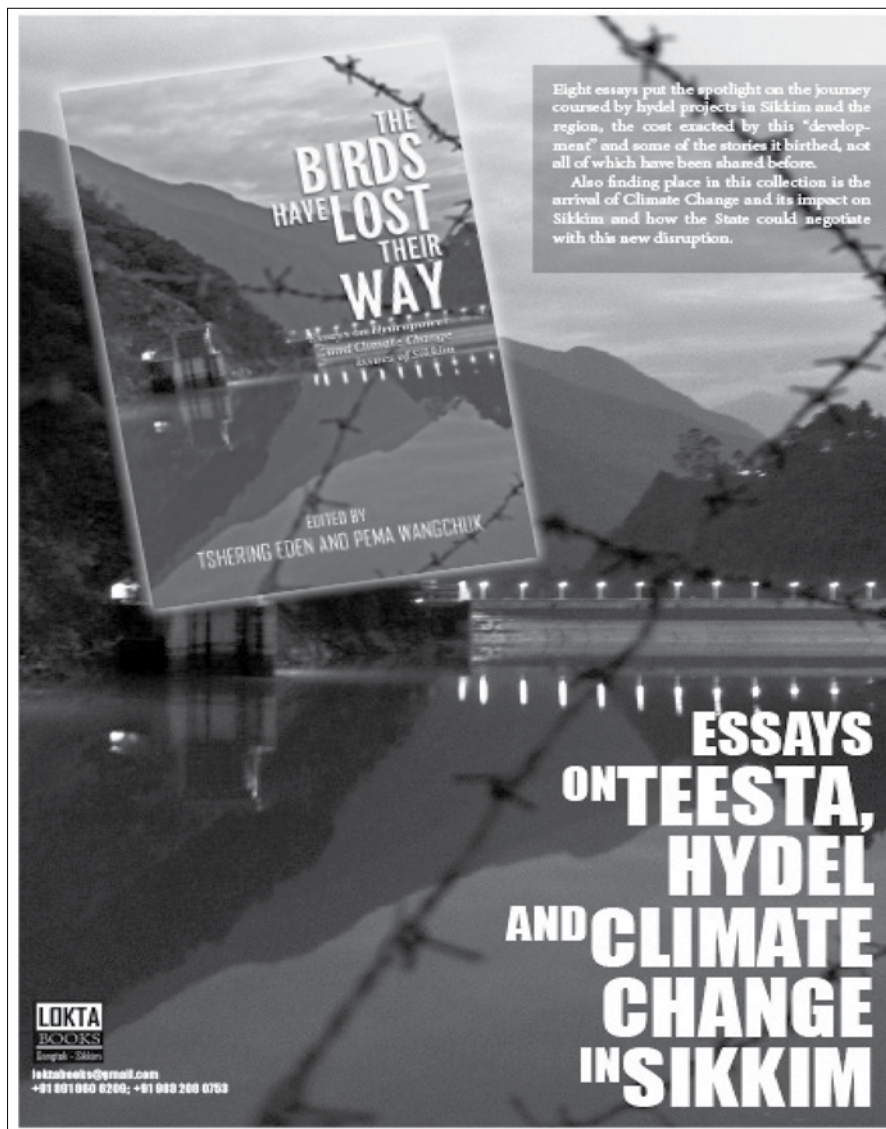
However, COMSO members are holding peaceful protests by organizing sit-in demonstration against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. “We will continue to protest against the CAA, and we want 100 per cent exemption of Meghalaya from the purview of this Act,” COMSO chairman R Kharjahn said.

Meanwhile, newly appointed Meghalaya Gov-

ernor R N Ravi will take oath on Tuesday at the Raj Bhavan.

Ravi, the Governor of Nagaland was on Monday given additional charge of Meghalaya, a statement issued by the Rastrapati Bhavan said.

“The President of India is pleased to appoint R N Ravi, Governor of Nagaland to discharge the functions of the Governor of Meghalaya, in addition to his own duties, during the absence on leave of Tathagata Roy, Governor of Meghalaya,” it said, without citing further details.



Mandhana in ICC women’s ODI and T20 teams of the year

DUBAI, DEC 17 (PTI): India opener Smriti Mandhana was on Tuesday named in both the International Cricket Council’s ODI and T20 teams of the year, capping off a memorable season.

Mandhana has Jhulan Goswami, Poonam Yadav and Shikha Pandey for company in the ODI team of the year and all-rounder Deepti Sharma in the T20 side.

The 23-year-old Mandhana has played 51 ODIs and 66 T20Is for India, besides a couple of Test matches. She has a combined tally of 3476 runs in T20Is and ODIs. Australia’s Alyssa Healy was chosen as the T20 cricketer of the year following her record-breaking 148 against Sri Lanka earlier this year.

The ODI cricketer of the year honour went to Australia’s Ellyse Perry, who scored 441 runs at an average of 73.50 and took 21 wickets at 13.52.

Perry also pocketed the Rachael Heyhoe-Flint award for being



the cricketer of the year across formats.

Perry has had a stellar year across formats, with three hundreds including one in the women’s Ashes Test. She also became the first player to complete 1,000 runs and 100 wickets in T20I cricket.

“It’s an amazing honour and I’m a little bit shocked, given how many amazing performances

there have been across the year,” said Perry, who has won the Rachael Heyhoe-Flint Award for the second time in three years.

“It’s amazing to be acknowledged and I do truly appreciate it. It’s a really nice way to finish the year on a personal note.”

The emerging cricketer of the year award went to Thailand’s Chanida Sutthiruang. The

26-year-old seamer took 12 wickets at this year’s ICC Women’s T20 World Cup qualifier. Australian Meg Lanning was chosen as captain of both the ODI and T20 side.

“It’s a huge honour to be named captain of the ICC ODI and T20 Teams of the Year alongside some incredible players. It’s been an amazing year for the Australian team and we’re looking forward

to the challenges that lie ahead in 2020,” said Lanning.

“A home T20 World Cup is an opportunity that doesn’t come along often, but we are looking forward to and embracing the challenge of performing well in front of our home crowd,” she said referring to the showpiece event at home in February-March next year.

Tennis in 2019: Nadal on top as new faces make mark in women’s game

LONDON, DEC 17 (AFP): Rafael Nadal finished the season on top of the world to give the men’s rankings a familiar look but a new crop of women is showing the old guard can be overthrown.

The Spanish world number one and Novak Djokovic won two Grand Slams each in 2019, holding Father Time and their young rivals at bay for another year.

But Ashleigh Barty and teenager Bianca Andreescu were two new faces on the list of women’s Major winners as familiar names slipped from view.

AFP Sport looks at some of the big talking points of the season.

CAN NADAL STAY ON TOP IN 2020?

-- Rafael Nadal arrived at the Italian Open in May without a title in 2019.

He beat Novak Djokovic in the final and lost just three matches in the rest of the season, winning the French Open and the US Open before inspiring Spain to Davis Cup glory on home soil, finishing as world number one for a fifth time.

With a combined age of 103, Nadal, Djokovic and Roger Federer continue to dominate men’s tennis and it takes a brave punter to predict their imminent demise.

But there is at last the sense of a credible challenge from an exciting crop of youngsters including Daniil Medvedev, who pushed Nadal all the way in the US Open final, and ATP Finals winner Stefanos Tsitsipas.

“I believe I’m really close to being crowned a Grand Slam champion,” said

Tsitsipas after beating Dominic Thiem in the final in London.

WOMEN’S NEXTGEN SHOW THE WAY

Australia’s Ashleigh Barty, 23, rose from the relative anonymity of 15th in the world at the end of 2018 to top the rankings a year later,

winning the French Open and the WTA Finals along the way.

Teenager Bianca Andreescu of Canada soared even more dramatically, from 178th to fifth in the world, beating Serena Williams in the final of the US Open to become the first Canadian to win a Grand Slam singles title.

“NextGen is here,” Andreescu announced during her winning run at Flushing Meadows.

“You see many fresh faces and I think we’re only going to get better from here.” Federer’s Wimbledon pain

-- Roger Federer had two Wimbledon championship points on his own serve to beat Novak Djokovic and win his 21st Grand Slam title. That would have taken him six clear of the Serbian on the all-time list and three clear of Rafael Nadal at the time.

Instead, he faltered. Djokovic, in a match lasting a shade under five hours, won his 16th Grand Slam and two months later Nadal won his 19th.

“It’s such an incredible opportunity missed,” said the Swiss veteran, now 38 and who must fear his days as the all-time leader on the list are numbered.

SERENA’S COURT PROBLEM

Serena Williams is running out of opportunities to win the 24th Grand Slam singles title that would pull her level with Margaret Court’s record.

The 38-year-old American reached the final at both Wimbledon and the US Open but she won just four games against Simona Halep in London and lost in straight sets to Bianca Andreescu in New York.

It followed defeats in the finals of both events the previous year, suggesting Williams is feeling the pressure.

Speaking after her US Open defeat, she down-

played the pursuit of Court’s record.

“I’m not necessarily chasing a record. I’m just trying to win Grand Slams,” she said.

“It’s definitely frustrating, but for the most part I just am still here. I’m still doing what I can do.”

Comeback of the year

-- In January, British former world number one Andy Murray admitted the 2019 Australian Open could be his last tournament during a tearful press conference.

But the Scot, 32, returned to the court after hip resurfacing surgery and beat fellow veteran Stan Wawrinka in the final of the European Open in October.

“It means a lot,” Murray said after his triumph.

“The past few years have been extremely difficult.... I didn’t expect to be in this position at all, so I’m very happy.” A star is born

-- Having been the youngest player to come through Wimbledon qualifying, 15-year-old Coco Gauff stunned five-time champion Venus Williams in the first round in straight sets, belying her ranking of 313.

“My dream was to win. That’s what happened,” said the American whose run at the All England Club was eventually ended by champion Simona Halep in the fourth round.

Gauff went on to make the US Open third round before winning a maiden title in Linz in the autumn having lost in qualifying. At the end of 2018, she was ranked 875 but she will head into 2020 at 68.

AIFF disciplinary committee to investigate Saudi referee’s allegedly racist remark

New Delhi, Dec 17 (PTI): The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Tuesday tasked its disciplinary committee to investigate the allegedly racist remarks made against Mumbai City FC’s Serge Kevyn Angoue by Saudi Arabian referee Turki Mohammed Al Khudayr in an Indian Super League match.

Mumbai City FC head coach Jorge Costa had alleged that the referee, who officiated his side’s match against Bengaluru FC on Sunday, called Kevyn a monkey.

“AIFF has received a complaint from Mumbai City FC against Saudi Arabian referee Turki Mohammed Al Khudayr for making racist remarks to Mumbai City FC player Serge Kevyn Angou in their Hero Indian Super

League match against Bengaluru FC held on December 15, 2019,” said the AIFF in a statement.

“The AIFF follows a zero toleration policy against racism and the complaint has been forwarded to the Disciplinary Committee to investigate into the matter and take appropriate action if found guilty,” it added.

Before starting his media conference after Mumbai City FC’s 3-2 win over Bengaluru FC at the Kanteerava Stadium on Sunday, Costa read out a statement, saying that Alkhudhayr called Gabonese player Kevyn a monkey and “made some gestures” which were disrespectful.

Kevyn hails from Gabon, which is an African country. He plays as a mid-fielder for the ISL club.

Wilfried Zaha thunderbolt rescues Crystal Palace against Brighton

ED AARONS

LONDON, 17 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: In many ways this result was a microcosm of Roy Hodgson’s career. In his 100th match as the Crystal Palace manager, the 72-year-old had seen his side run ragged by Graham Potter’s impressive team and was staring down the barrel of a third successive defeat to their bitter rivals after Neal Maupay’s seventh Premier League goal of the season.

Yet Hodgson has not been in this game for more than 40 years without learning a thing or two and it was the visitors who were left hanging on for the draw after Wilfried Zaha’s brilliant equaliser – his sixth goal in 11 matches against Brighton – ensured Palace remain three points clear of their not-so-near neighbours in mid-table. “It was a wonderful gutsy, resilient, determined performance full of absolute character,” the Palace manager said. “The way the game panned out, I think I’ve got to be very satisfied – to be honest it feels even like half a victory.”

In the buildup Potter had described Hodgson as a “legend” in Sweden after cutting his managerial teeth in Scandinavia in the late 1970s and the similarities between the two men in the dugout provided a fascinating subplot to this always spicy encounter.

The managers had shared a handshake and a joke as they emerged from the tunnel, with Potter, who spent eight years in charge of Östersund before returning home last year with Swansea, experiencing his first taste of an unusual enmity that dates back



to the personal rivalry between former Tottenham teammates Alan Mullery and Terry Venables in the late 1970s.

Hodgson handed a first league start since August to Christian Benteke, while Jairo Riedewald was recalled to play at left-back in the absence of both Patrick van Aanholt and Jeffrey Schlupp – the first time the Dutchman has started a league match since February 2018. Brighton took the spoils in this fixture last season thanks to Anthony Knockaert’s late goal but with him and the former manager Chris Hughton now a distant memory on the south coast, this is a different side under Potter.

The visitors dominated possession from kick-off, with Palace content to sit back and attempt to hit them on the break. Aaron Mooy was the closest to breaking the deadlock when his shot went just wide, before Riedewald was lucky to escape when he appeared to bring down Martín Montoya inside the area.

Somewhat mysteriously, the VAR official, Martin Atkinson, decided the Palace de-

fender had not made contact. Guaita did well to stop Lewis Dunk’s header from the resulting corner. “It looked like there was something there – sometimes you get them but sometimes you don’t,” Potter said, philosophically.

Benteke’s only real contribution of the half was to pick up a booking after catching Dunk with his arm as they went up for a header. Riedewald, who Hodgson revealed had picked up an injury in training before the match, was put out of his misery at the break and James McArthur shifted to a makeshift left-back. Out of nowhere, Benteke almost shocked Mat Ryan into conceding when his cross sailed over the head of the Brighton goalkeeper and cannoned back off the woodwork.

That would have been cruel to Potter’s side but his decision to swap Leandro Trossard to the right flank so he was up against McArthur paid dividends shortly afterwards. The Belgian’s cross picked out Maupay on the penalty spot and he made no mistake via a deflection to give Brighton a deserved lead.

It could have been even worse for Palace had Guaita not recovered after fumbling the ball at Maupay’s feet following a deep cross but the Spaniard somehow scrambled to deny him a second.

Palace finally registered an effort on target in the 70th minute via a Benteke header easily gathered by Ryan, before the goalkeeper had to keep out the same player’s powerful effort at the near post.

Labuschagne picked in Australia ODI squad for India tour

MELBOURNE, DEC 17 (PTI): In-form batsman Marnus Labuschagne on Tuesday earned a maiden call-up to the Australian ODI squad for the three-match series against India next month following a prolific year in Test cricket.

Labuschagne has averaged 58.05 since making his Test debut last year, scoring hundreds in his last three games.

All-rounder Sean Abbott has been recalled after five years while also making a comeback are pacer Josh Hazlewood and spinner Ashton Agar.

The big names missing from the squad are Glenn Maxwell, Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh and Nathan Lyon.

Chief selector Trevor Hohns said Maxwell, who took a break to address his mental health issues

but is back now in domestic cricket, is being watched closely.

“It’s great to see Maxwell returning to the game with the Big Bash League. We will closely monitor his form after what would have been a disappointing 12 months in the one-day game by his standards,” Hohns said.

The Indian fans will also get to see Australia’s star players -- David Warner and Steve Smith -- in action.

The first ODI will be played in Mumbai on January 14, followed by Rajkot (January 17) and Bengaluru (January 19).

Hohns is confident that Labuschagne will come good in challenging Indian conditions.

“Marnus Labuschagne is ready for his international white ball debut

after his strong form for Queensland in this form of the game,” said Hohns.

“The performance of our white-ball squads has been strong and we are hoping to build the momentum towards the T20 World Cup at home at the end of the year and ultimately build towards the 2023 World Cup in India,” he added.

Head coach Justin Langer will not be travelling to India for the short tour with assistant coach Andrew McDonald taking charge.

Australia squad: Aaron Finch (captain), Sean Abbott, Ashton Agar, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Peter Handscomb, Josh Hazlewood, Marnus Labuschagne, Kane Richardson, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Ashton Turner, David Warner, Adam Zampa.

Manchester City unhappy with Arsenal tactics but won’t stop Mikel Arteta move

NICK AMES & JAMIE JACKSON
THEGUARDIAN

Manchester City will not stand in Mikel Arteta’s way if, as expected, he becomes the Arsenal manager this week and they would leave the door open for a return to the Etihad Stadium.

Arteta met with the Arsenal executives Vinai Venkatesham and Huss Fahmy in the early hours of Monday, with the pair photographed departing his Manchester home at 1.20am. A final meeting with Josh Kroenke, the Arsenal director, is believed to be imminent and Arteta’s appointment could be confirmed in the coming days.

The episode threatens to create bad blood between the clubs, with City unimpressed at Arsenal’s conduct in courting their assistant coach. While there is an acknowledgement on both sides of the process that Arteta has conducted himself openly and honestly, City are distinctly surprised no mention was made before his meeting with Venkatesham, the chief executive, and the director of football operations, Fahmy. They believe there would have been ample opportunity to raise the topic earlier on Sunday, when senior officials from both clubs were at the Emirates Stadium to watch City win 3-0 but the subject was not broached and no official approach was lodged.

Nonetheless City will release Arteta with their blessing, although Arsenal will be required to pay at least £1m in

compensation. Arteta has been mooted as a successor to Pep Guardiola and City have made it clear that they will monitor his progress if he takes the Arsenal job with a view to offering him a return if a vacancy arises.

The situation has been expedited by Arsenal’s haste to replace Unai Emery, where previously they had entertained the possibility of allowing Freddie Ljungberg to continue as the interim head coach. Ljungberg has won only one of his five games in charge and has made it clear to the club that the status quo is untenable. He is working with a skeleton coaching staff and, after the defeat to City on Sunday, said “a decision has to be made so we can have the same resources as other clubs”.

Arsenal’s pursuit of a manager has been racked with uncertainty. One leading target, Brendan Rodgers, signed a new contract at Leicester when their interest became clear and another, Mauricio Pochettino, is unlikely to consider offers until the summer. Carlo Ancelotti and Nuno Espírito Santo were briefly considered.

Arteta joined Arsenal from Everton as a player in 2011. He captained the club before he retired at the end of the 2015-16 season and joined Guardiola at City. Speaking in 2014, he outlined his vision for managing a team and playing “expressive, entertaining” football. “I’m 100% convinced of those things and think I could do it,” he said.

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US, UK approve Roche's \$4.3 bn purchase of gene therapy group Spark

Swiss pharmaceuticals giant Roche said it had received the necessary approval from competition authorities to acquire US gene-therapy group Spark, after the two companies reached a multibillion-dollar deal earlier this year.

Founded in 2013, Spark Therapeutics specialises in a new and growing segment of medicine for genetic diseases such as blindness, haemophilia, and neurodegenerative conditions.

The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) "unconditionally cleared Roche's pending acquisition of Spark", the Swiss company said in a statement on Monday.

"All antitrust approvals required to complete the offer have now been received," it said, after confirming earlier Monday that Britain's Competition and Markets Authority had also cleared the pending acquisition.

Roche and Spark sealed the deal worth \$4.3 billion (3.7 billion euros) in February.

In a separate statement, the FTC said it had made its decision "following an exhaustive, 10-month investigation" into potential competitive harm that could result from the move.

Spark's biggest treatment under study is a therapy for haemophilia, a disorder where blood does not clot properly to stop bleeding.

"A key question in the investigation was whether the Roche would have the incentive to delay or discontinue Spark's developmental gene therapy for hemophilia A," the FTC said.

"The evidence... did not indicate that Roche would have the incentive to delay or terminate" Spark's therapy development, or affect Roche's haemophilia drug Hemlibra, it concluded.

US wants explanation for Turkey threat to close two bases

WASHINGTON, DEC 17 (AFP): US Defence Secretary Mark Esper said on Monday he wants an explanation from Ankara over threats to close two strategic military bases used by the United States in Turkey. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday threatened to close the Incirlik and Kurecik bases while speaking to a pro-government television channel. The two bases sit on Turkey's southwest coast, near the border with Syria.

The US air force uses the air base at Incirlik for raids on positions held by the Islamic State (IS) group in Syria. The Kurecik base houses a major NATO radar station. Esper told reporters he would need to speak to his counterpart, defence minister Hulusi Akar, "to understand what they really mean and how serious they are."

"If the Turks are serious about this, I mean, they are a sovereign nation to begin with...they have the inherent right to house or not to house NATO bases or foreign troops.

China, Russia press UN to ease N.Korea sanctions

BEIJING, DEC 17 (AFP): China on Tuesday urged the UN Security Council to unanimously back its joint proposal with Russia to ease sanctions on North Korea, warning that dialogue to resolve nuclear tensions must not regress.

The nuclear-armed North has issued increasingly strident declarations in recent weeks, even promising an ominous "Christmas gift" if Washington does not come up with some concessions.

For his part, US President Donald Trump said Monday that he would be "disappointed" if North Korea had "something in the works," warning that if it did, "we'll take care of it." "We're watching it very closely," Trump said at the White House.

Negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang have been largely stalled since the collapse of a February summit in Hanoi between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The North is under heavy US and United Nations sanctions over its nuclear program, but it has been frustrated at



the lack of relief after it declared a moratorium on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests.

"It is an important and sensitive period for the peninsula, and the urgency of a political solution has further increased," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a regular press briefing in Beijing.

The international community should "prevent the peninsula from falling back into tense confrontation, and avoid a serious reversal of the

situation," Geng added.

Russia and China introduced a draft joint resolution at the United Nations on Monday seeking to lift some of the punitive measures that have been enforced on Pyongyang over its nuclear activities.

"We hope that the Security Council will unanimously support the political settlement of the Peninsula issue" and encourage Washington and Pyongyang to "respect each other's concerns," Geng said.

He said "contact should be restored as

soon as possible to break the deadlock and to prevent the dialogue process from derailing or even regressing." While Beijing is Pyongyang's most important diplomatic ally and key economic lifeline, it has backed sanctions against its neighbour in the wake of its nuclear activities.

The draft text, obtained by AFP, said the Council "shall adjust the sanction measures towards the DPRK as may be needed in light of the DPRK's compliance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions."

It also underlined the necessity of having "the most favorable approach towards requests for exemptions from existing UN sanctions against the DPRK for humanitarian and livelihood purposes."

The Russian and Chinese proposal did not detail exactly what North Korea will have to do in exchange for an easing of sanctions.

But in order to improve the lives of people in the impoverished North, the text called for an end to several significant measures which date from 2016 and

2017. Russia and China want the UN to end the ban on its members importing coal, iron, iron ore and textiles from North Korea.

They also call for an end to sanctions, imposed in 2017, that require UN members to send back by December 22 North Korean workers employed abroad.

Those workers are an important source of revenue for the regime.

The Russia-China text also calls for inter-Korean rail and road cooperation projects to be exempt from existing UN

sanctions. Three pages of annexes to the draft resolution list products to be removed from sanctions lists. Among them are bulldozers, small tractors, small metal items including scissors, bicycles, as well as washing machines for clothes and dishes.

China and Russia, which had cautiously backed pressure against North Korea after its past nuclear tests, had indicated last week they would reject further sanctions.

The text "welcomes the continuation of the dialogue between the United States and the DPRK at all levels." The draft text calls for "prompt resumption of the six-party talks" which involved China, the two Koreas, the US, Russia and Japan. Those talks lasted from 2003-2009.

Diplomats said no deadline was put forward for putting to a vote the text, which faces an uncertain future.

Texts related to North Korea are traditionally the purview of the United States, which wants Pyongyang to give up its atomic arsenal right away.

Stuck in Greek snow, refugees already miss dismal camps



Sitting in the lobby of a disused ski lodge on a northern Greek mountain, Congolese asylum-seeker Sylva Caumba blankly stares at the unfamiliar snow outside.

"I would have preferred staying in Moria," the 30-year-old says with a touch of desperation, referring to the dismal camp on the Greek island of Lesbos which is packed six times beyond its official capacity.

"At least there, we had contact with the outside world. Here it feels like an open prison," he adds.

Caumba was transported to the ski lodge at Vasilitsa -- at an altitude of 1,000 metres, and 45 kilometres (28 miles) from the nearest town of Grevena -- around two months ago with his wife and two children.

Bears and wolves are more common than humans in this area.

The facility, which has seen better days and was about to shut down during Greece's economic crisis, currently hosts 116 asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Syria.

- 'No way to live' -
"We wake up, we watch TV and we go back to sleep. This is no way to live," says 20-year-old former footballer Mabika Zordel, also from DR Congo.

Nuredin Intze, a 38-year-old from Somalia, agrees that "things were better" in a similarly overcrowded camp on the Greek Aegean island of Leros.

"The hours do not pass. How can you live with nothing to do? All that is left is to hope that something will change," says the former professional driver.

The Africans' plight is part of a broader conundrum facing Greece's beleaguered migration authorities.

In summer and autumn, the number of asylum-seekers arriving from Turkey on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros steadily increased, cramming people into overcrowded facilities at record levels.

According to government figures, there are now over 40,000 people on these islands, with more than 37,000 of them in camps built to handle just over 6,000.

Amid rising anger on the islands, the conservative government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis recently promised to relocate 20,000 asylum-seekers to other facilities on the mainland by the end of the year.

But the plan has run into objections and protests in several towns in other parts of Greece earmarked to house additional asylum-seekers.

In October, a hotel owner in the town of Vrasna near Thessaloniki said she had received arson threats after agreeing to temporarily host a group of asylum-seekers.

Running out of options, authorities have occasionally been forced to resort to out-of-the-box thinking.

In November, another group of asylum-seekers were taken to an abandoned Orthodox monastery in the southern Peloponnese peninsula.

Within moments, most of them had asked to be relocated elsewhere.

- Mixed reception -
At the Vasilitsa ski lodge, Zor-

del says he had asked to train with the local football club but his request was turned down.

"Maybe it was because of my skin colour," he says.

Aside from being bussed by police to Grevena for supplies twice a week, and preparing their food, Zordel and his close friend Daniel Elipio, 17, have little to do.

So they wait for days when it's not snowing outside to play football in the ski lodge yard.

Both say they fled DR Congo when relatives were murdered.

As in most parts of the country, the response here to the presence of asylum-seeker families and unaccompanied minors is mixed.

Operators in isolated areas are frequently grateful for any business in the dead of winter, but many elderly locals in sparsely populated villages are fearful.

"They keep having children," says a local tavern owner. "We have a falling birth rate. At this rate, they will eventually take over."

Even as he admits that many hostels in the area were "a step away from being auctioned off", Grevena mayor Yiorgos Dastamanis claims that the arrival of refugees and migrants "will undermine the profile of tourism businesses in the area".

In the meantime Caumba sits with his wife and children, wondering how he can build a life for them halfway up a Greek mountain.

"I want to learn Greek, get a job and live a normal life with my family," he says.

"One of my children is 10 and is not in school. I'm not asking for anything outrageous."

49 journalists murdered in 2019



PARIS, DEC 17 (AFP): Forty-nine journalists were killed across the world in 2019, Reporters Without Borders said Tuesday, the lowest death toll in 16 years.

The "historically low" number mostly died covering conflicts in Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan, the Paris-based watchdog said, which warned that "journalism remains a dangerous profession".

Some 80 journalists a year have lost their lives on average over the last two decades, said the organisation, which is known by its French initials RSF.

But its head Christophe Deloire warned that the number of journalists murdered in countries supposedly at peace was

still alarmingly high, with 10 dying in Mexico alone.

"Latin America, with a total of 14 reporters killed across the continent, has become as deadly as the Middle East," he added.

While he said that the fall in the number of fatalities in conflict zones was something to celebrate, "more and more journalists are being assassinated for their work in democratic countries, which is a real challenge to democracy."

While fewer journalists are dying, more are ending up behind bars, according to RSF.

Some 389 were locked up in 2019, up 12 per cent on last year.

Nearly half were imprisoned in three coun-

tries -- China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which was blamed for the gruesome murder of columnist Jamal Khashoggi at its embassy in Istanbul last year.

"China, which has intensified its repression of the (mostly Muslim) Uighur minority, alone holds a third of the journalists locked up in the world," RSF said.

Meanwhile, 57 journalists are being held hostage across the globe, mostly in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Ukraine.

"There has been no notable freeing of hostages this year despite major developments in Syria," the RSF said, which has led it to fear for the worst for many of those abducted.

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Mr. Mani Rai, M/s. Space Ads, B.R. Ambedkar Building, Room No.7, 1st floor, Opp. Ganga Hotel, Hill Cart Road, Siliguri - 735007, Ph. 033-22124348 / fax 033-22124337 / mob. +91-9830547774 / +91-983180397, E-mail: contact@synapse@gmail.com / rahad.rai1023@gmail.com

KOLKATA OFFICE:
Irshad Ali / Intextext, Synapse, 6, Madan Street, Mezzine - 2, 2nd floor, Kolkata - 700072, Ph. 033-22124348 / fax 033-22124337 / mob. +91-9830547774 / +91-983180397, E-mail: contact@synapse@gmail.com / rahad.rai1023@gmail.com

Phone
03592-208498
+91-9832556698
+91-9832080753

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Santa Bhawan Complex, Church Road
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ON HER CELL PHONE! The Marvel actress, Elizabeth Olsen who plays, Wanda Maximoff for upcoming Disney+ miniseries, Wandavision is dressed up as her character Scarlett Witch and on set in Atlanta.

Kashyap calls govt 'fascist' over its handling of student protests against CAA

MUMBAI, DEC 16 (PTI): Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap on Monday called the Narendra Modi's government "fascist" over the police crackdown on the students of Jamia Millia and Aligarh Muslim University following their protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

The police entered Jamia Millia Islamia University after a protest against the amended Citizenship Act spiralled out of control on Sunday evening.

Forty people, including students, policemen and firemen, were injured as violence erupted during the protest.

Kashyap, who had quit the micro-blogging site in August, returned on the microblogging site, saying he cannot stay "silent any longer".

"This has gone too far... (I) can't stay silent any longer. This government is clearly fascist... and it makes me angry to see voices that can actually make a difference stay quiet.." he tweeted.

In August, Kashyap had deleted his Twitter account, saying that his parents and daughter were receiving threats due to his political

views. "When your parents start to get calls and your daughter gets online threats you know that no one wants to talk. There isn't going to be reason or rationale. Thugs will rule



and thuggery will be the new way of life. Congratulations everyone on this new India and hope you all thrive.

"Wish you all the happiness and success. This would be my last tweet as I leave twitter. When I won't be allowed to speak my mind without fear then I would rather not speak at all. Goodbye," Kashyap had written in his last Twitter post.

'Gully Boy' out of Oscar race as Academy unveils shortlist for 9 categories

LOS ANGELES, DEC 17 (PTI): Zoya Akhtar's "Gully Boy", starring Ranveer Singh in the role of a budding street rapper, has crashed out of the Best International Feature Film race at the Oscars after the Academy unveiled shortlists for nine categories.

The movie failed to make the cut in the top-10 movies that will advance to the next round of voting at the 92nd Academy Awards. With "Gully Boy" out of the race, India's dry run at the Academy Awards continues as the country has never made it to the top five, except three occasions. The last Indian film that made it to the final five was Ashutosh Gowariker's "Lagaan" in 2001.

"Mother India" (1958) and "Salaam Bombay" (1989) are the other two Indian movies to have made it to the top five.

Ninety-one films were eligible in the category.

The films that have made the cut are: South Korean director Bong Joon-ho's much touted class satire "Parasite", Pedro Almodovar's Spanish feature "Pain and Glory", "The Painted Bird" from Czech Republic, Estonia's "Truth and Justice", "Les Miserables" from France, "Those Who Remained" from Hungary, North Macedonia's "Honeyland", "Corpus Christi" from Poland, "Beanpole" from Russia and "Atlantica" from Senegal.

In the nominations round, Academy members from all branches are invited to opt-in to participate and must view all 10 shortlisted films in order to cast a ballot.

Besides international feature film, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) also announced its shortlist for music (original score), music (original song), visual effects, documentary feature,

documentary short subject, makeup and hairstyling, animated short film and live action short film categories. In the music (original score), 15 films have advanced to the

culled from 75 eligible songs.

The list includes "Speechless" from "Aladdin", "Letter To My Godfather" from "The Black Godfather", "I'm Standing With You" from

as Martin Scorsese's crime epic "The Irishman". James Cameron-produced "Alita: Battle Angel" and "Terminator: Dark Fate" have also made it to the list.

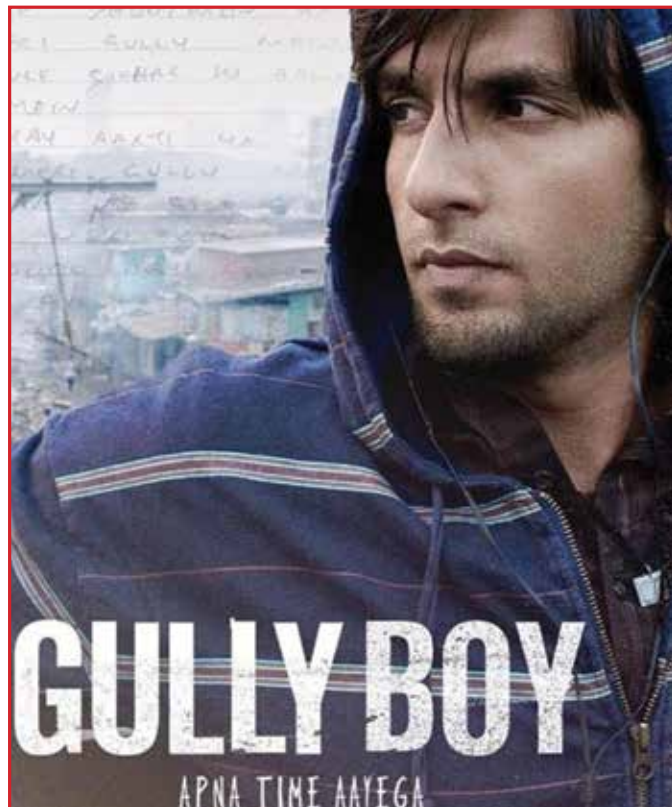
They are joined by "Tom Hooper's "Cats", Will Smith-starrer "Gemini Man" and Sam Mendes' war drama "1917". "Bombshell", "Joker", "Little Women", "Rocketman" and "1917" have also made it to the top ten of makeup and hairstyling category.

The films are joined by "Dolemite Is My Name", "Downton Abbey", "Judy", "Maleficent: Mistress of Evil", and "Once upon a Time in Hollywood".

15 films are currently in contention for the best documentary trophy and the list includes -- Advocate", "American Factory", "The Apollo", "Apollo 11", "Aquarela", "The Biggest Little Farm", "The Cave", "The Edge of Democracy", "For Sama", "The Great Hack", "Honeyland", "Knock Down the House", "Maiden", "Midnight Family" and "One Child Nation".

While in documentary short subject, ten films have made it into final list. The films are "After Maria", "Fire in Paradise", "Ghosts of Sugar Land", "In the Absence", "Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone (If You're a Girl)", "Life Overtakes Me", "The Nightcrawlers", "St. Louis Superman", "Stay Close" and "Walk Run Cha-Cha".

In the animated short film, ten films will be competing for the final five slots. They include "Dcera (Daughter)", "Hair Love", "He Can't Live without Cosmos", "Hors Piste", "Kitbull", "Memorable", "Mind My Mind", "The Physics of Sorrow", "Sister" and "Uncle Thomas: Accounting for the Days". Nominations for the 92nd Academy Awards will be announced on January 13, 2020.



next round. The final five will be determined by members of the music branch of the Academy.

Icelandic composer Hildur Guðnadóttir, whose score for Joaquin Phoenix's "Joker" has been received well by the critics, is joined by veterans Alan Silvestri (Avengers: Endgame), Alexandre Desplat ("Little Women"), Michael Giacchino ("Jojo Rabbit"), Randy Newman ("Marriage Story") and Thomas Newman ("1917") in the category.

Other films that made it into last 15 are "Bombshell", "The Farewell", "Ford v Ferrari", "Frozen II", "Jojo Rabbit", "The King", "Pain and Glory", "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" and "Us".

The Academy's shortlist for music (original song) was

"Breakthrough", "Da Bronx" from "The Bronx USA", "Into The Unknown" from "Frozen II", "Stand Up" from "Harriet", "Catchy Song" from "The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part", "Never Too Late" and "Spirit" from "The Lion King", "Daily Battles" from "Motherless Brooklyn", "A Glass of Soju" from "Parasite", "(I'm Gonna) Love Me Again" from "Rocketman", "High Above The Water" from "Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am", "I Can't Let You Throw Yourself Away" from "Toy Story 4" and "Glasgow" from "Wild Rose".

Summer blockbuster "Avengers: Endgame" is leading the race in the visual effects category. It is joined by fellow Disney features -- "Captain Marvel", "The Lion King" and "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" -- as well

Leak reveals how Marvel might fix one of the biggest problems coming in MCU Phase 4

Disney and Marvel have had a huge year, registering three major successes at the box office including Captain Marvel, Avengers: Endgame, and Spider-Man: Far From Home, although it's Avengers 4 that's obviously the biggest win for the companies. Marvel's huge gamble paid off in the best possible way, turning the MCU into a property with no equal. Marvel's Cinematic Universe is only going to get better now that Disney owns all of Fox's properties, as Marvel can add several key characters to the MCU including the Fantastic Four, X-Men, and Deadpool. Marvel will reboot two of those three franchises, with Deadpool staying exactly as is.

Of all three, it's Deadpool who is likely to be the first Fox hero to hit the MCU. A report last week said that Marvel may use a Phase 4 film to introduce the character, and a second story reinforces that idea, providing an additional clue about Marvel's rumored plans. But, more importantly, this leak might reveal the key plot detail that will help Marvel fix Deadpool's huge problem that makes the character incompatible with the MCU.

If you've seen all MCU films to date and the first two Deadpool films made by Fox, you know there's a massive problem that prevents Marvel from bringing Deadpool over as is — and that problem only became apparent once Endgame was released. That's time travel, of course.

In Endgame, altering the past doesn't change the future. All it does is to spawn a new timeline of events where the future might unravel differently. But in Deadpool 2, changing the past changed the future. Obviously, we can't have both these rules in the MCU going forward, especially since the former is a key element for the entire Endgame plot. So Marvel has to keep all that Deadpool magic in place while somewhat retconning the sequel.

That brand new leak that I mentioned explains how it might all go down. The same source that said last week that Deadpool will appear in Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness in the film and post-credits scene is back with new details. According to We Got This Covered, Marvel may be considering having two

Deadpools, one for the Fox-verse and one for the MCU. The Fox-verse version would cameo in the film and then never appear again, while the MCU version would show up later on and be the one that ultimately joins the cinematic universe. The implication would then be that Wade has always existed in the MCU, which is a fascinating endeavor in its own right.

While the report doesn't touch on the time travel discrepancies between Deadpool and Endgame, this is the sort of trick that would deal with the issue resulting from incorporating Deadpool as-is in the MCU, complete with the Deadpool 1 and Deadpool 2 baggage. By introducing the MCU's own Deadpool, one who is played by the same Ryan Reynolds and does pretty much what the other version does without any time travel, Marvel would avoid having to deal with all those issues. They would still exist, however, as the Fox-verse would have different time travel rules if this leak pans out. But Marvel wouldn't have to worry about it going forward.

ARIES: If Emma Watson's life is anything to go by, then self-partnered is a perfectly good place to be. Revel in your newfound single-status. Replace loneliness with 'aloneness' as you actively engage in activities that bring you joy and discover yourself. Coupled rams, there's no reason for you to miss out on all the fun.

Tip: Self-partnered is a perfectly good place to be.

TAURUS: "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment," said Ralph Waldo Emerson. Your thoughts exactly, Taurus. You've started to wear your authenticity like a pearl necklace - with pride - and it's making you so goddamn attractive to the world around.

Tip: Wear your authenticity like a pearl necklace.

GEMINI: Being an empath is seldom easy. Even the most mundane experiences can make you feel raw and vulnerable. And let's not get started on the energy of the room. So what do you do when you have a knack of sensing everything around to a point that it starts affecting you on a personal level? This

is where the need for boundaries becomes imperative. Start by practicing compassion, first for yourself then others.

Tip: Be compassionate with yourself and others.

CANCER: Pablo Picasso, the famous painter of all times, said, "Every act of creation is first an act of destruction." If things are falling apart, let them. Grab a front row seat and enjoy the show. As you learn to detach, you will gain clarity on what you should and shouldn't do.

Tip: Trust the voice of your inner wisdom.

LEO: Welcome to (almost) 2020! A time when you don't have to play by the rules if you don't want to. A time when pleasing yourself is a prerogative and self-partnered is a perfectly good place to be. Take time to discover yourself irrespective of your relationship status. Commit to dedicating more time to your hobbies.

Tip: Love the (wo)man in the mirror first.

Virgo:

Oh, sensitivity! Your biggest boon and your bane. Understand what is triggering you at this moment. Could you be confusing your

emotions with the feelings of those around you? Something to think about when you find yourself in the midst of a harsh environment. What you're being asked to focus on today: consciously clearing your space and saying goodbye to anything that's toxic.

Tip: Clear your space.

LIBRA: Some fairytale wisdom from Pinocchio to brighten up your day: "The most fantastic magical things can happen, and it all starts with a wish." What are you waiting for, Libra? Let your dreams and desires be known. The Universe is in the mood to give and give some more. Remember to stay open to receiving. If what you have asked for is in alignment with your highest good, there's no reason you won't experience it in your reality.

Tip: Expect nothing less than a miracle.

SCORPIO: Stop living a mundane life. Scorpio. Stop hiding your inherent magic. Today brings with itself the reminder that you are a sorceress who has been blessed with the ability to speak things into existence. Some of you may be going through a

period of separation. Others may be recovering from a heartbreak. Remember the saying 'if it flows, it flows'. For now, focus on the healing and recovery process.

Tip: Awaken to your inner sorceress.

SAGITTARIUS: This is the love you have been hoping and praying for, Sagittarius. Then what's keeping you from making that big move? Could your inability to move forward be a product of your own fears? Keep this in mind when you find yourself 'stuck'. For some of you, the lack of financial stability could be posing as a problem. Trust that your material needs will be taken care of today and tomorrow.

Tip: Beware of the lies your fear is telling you.

CAPRICORN: While one of you is a dreamer with an uncanny ability to make the world a beautiful place, the other is a doer who believes in grounding themselves in the material reality before anything else. Does the stark difference have to pose itself as a problem? Not if you don't want it to. What you want to keep in mind when you visualise a life with them: they say opposites attract for a reason.

Tip: Let your wildly different world views be the reason you explore this connection.

AQUARIUS: The process of transformation may have been gradual, but you're now at a point where you feel self-actualised. Drawing and respecting your own boundaries has become second nature. It's helping you give others the space they need to do their own thing so that when you come together the connection blows your mind. The only thing you want to be mindful of is trying to do everything on your own. There's no harm in asking for help once in a while. Tip: The caterpillar has become a butterfly. **PISCES:** Close your eyes and realign. Connect with the power of your subconscious mind. Now, from this space of clarity, visualise a life with the one who has been on your mind. What kind of feelings does this meditation invoke? Do you feel joyful at the idea of growing older and wiser with them by your side? PS: Looks like you've answered your own question, Pisces. Tip: Put your heart on the line.