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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Nirbhaya case: Death row convict Vinay Kumar Sharma moves curative plea in SC

NEW DELHI, JAN 9 (PTI):

In a last ditch effort to escape the noose, Vinay Kumar Sharma, one of the four men sentenced to death in the Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case, filed a curative petition in the Supreme Court on Thursday.

A curative petition is the last legal remedy available to a convict.

On Tuesday, a Delhi court issued death warrants against Mukesh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Sharma (26) and Akshay Kumar Singh (31) and said they will be hanged on January 22 at 7 am in Tihar jail.

In his curative plea, Vinay said his young age has been erroneously rejected as a mitigating circumstance.

“The petitioner’s socio-economic circumstances, number of family dependants including ailing parents, good conduct in jail and probability of reformation have not been adequately considered leading to gross miscarriage of justice,” the plea said.

It said the court’s judgment has relied on factors such as “collective conscience of society” and “public opinion” in deciding the sentence to be imposed on him and others.

“The impugned judgment is bad in law as subsequent judgments of apex court have definitely changed the law on death sentence in India allowing several convicts similarly placed as him to have their death sentence commuted to life imprisonment,” the plea said.

It further said that after pronouncement of the apex court’s judgment in 2017 there have been as many as 17 cases involving rape and murder in which various three-judge benches of the top court have commuted the death sentence.

The 23-year-old paramedic student, referred to as Nirbhaya, was gang raped and brutally assaulted on the intervening night of December 16-17, 2012 in a moving bus in south Delhi by six people before being thrown out on the road.

She died on December 29, 2012 at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore.

On July 9, 2018, the apex court had dismissed the review pleas filed by the other three convicts in the case, saying no grounds have been made out by them for review of the 2017 verdict.

One of the six accused in the case, Ram Singh, allegedly committed suicide in the Tihar Jail here.



Slush jams traffic at Ambithang

**WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 09 JAN:**

Owing to continuous rain, traffic at Ambithang near Mangan, North Sikkim, was jammed today as slush made it difficult for some vehicles to climb up the hill.

The traffic jam was later opened and the vehicles stranded on either

side managed to cross the spot.

It may be mentioned here that maintenance work is underway at this trouble spot and the road condition has improved.

Heavy snowfall was also reported in the North district resulting in disruption of traffic in many areas like Lachen,

Yumthang and Gurudongmar. It was also reported that the roof of Khamsel Lhakang at Tholung Monastery in Upper Dzongu has been damaged by snowfall.

Further, the maintenance work at Tholung Monastery has been stalled as the workers had to leave the area.

West Bengal govt tests viability of white-topped roads

KOLKATA, JAN 9 (PTI): The West Bengal government is testing the viability of white-topped roads, officials said on Thursday.

White-topping is a relatively new technology in which bituminous and asphalt roads are covered with concrete which substantially increases their longevity, a senior state official said.

The state government, in consultation with IIT-Kharagpur, has white-topped one kilometre of the town’s bypass road to test cost-effectiveness and feasibility of the technology, he said.

“Sensors have been embedded on the stretch to study it. Based on the results of the pilot project, several other roads might be taken up after



six months,” Srikumar Bhattacharya, Chairman of Projects Approval Committee of the state Finance Department said.

The cost of white-topping roads is 25 per cent more than laying bituminous ones but they last for 20 to 25 years as against five years of the

latter, he said. Bhattacharya said the technology offers a balance between cost and performance of roads. White-topping has been done on more than 1,000 km of roads in Maharashtra, Karnataka and other states, he said.

Bhattacharya, however, said utility planning

needs to be done and soil conditions tested before applying the technology on city roads.

“White-topping has a potential to provide a sustainable solution to improve the conditions of the roads in our country,” said Prof Swati Maity of IIT-Kharagpur.

10,349 farmers committed suicide in 2018: NCRB

NEW DELHI, JAN 9 (PTI):

At least 10,349 people working in the farm sector ended their lives in 2018, accounting for 7.7 per cent of the total number of suicides in the country which was 1,34,516, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

The 2018 figure is less in comparison to 2016 when 11,379 farmers committed suicide, according to the agency which is responsible for collecting and analysing crime data.

Many states and union territories have reported nil data on suicides by farmers, cultivators and farm labourers. “West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, Goa, Chandigarh, Daman & Diu, Delhi, Lakshadweep and Puducherry reported zero suicides of farmers/cultivators as well as agricultural labourers,” the NCRB report said.

The data of 2017 was not made public by

the NCRB in its report released on Wednesday. According to the report, a vast majority of farmers who committed suicide were men.

“A total of 10,349 persons involved in farming sector (consisting of 5,763 farmers/cultivators and 4,586 agricultural labourers) have committed suicides during 2018, accounting for 7.7 per cent of total suicides in the country,” the report said.

“Out of 5,763 farmer/cultivator suicides, a total of 5,457 were male and 306 were female during 2018. Out of 4,586 suicides committed by agricultural labourers during 2018, 4,071 were male and 515 were female,” it said.

Overall, a total of 1,34,516 suicides were reported in the country in 2018, showing an increase of 3.6 per cent in comparison to 2017 when 1,29,887 people ended their lives, the report said.

Majority of suicides

were reported in Maharashtra (17,972) followed by Tamil Nadu (13,896), West Bengal (13,255), Madhya Pradesh (11,775) and Karnataka (11,561), accounting for 13.4, 10.3, 9.9, 8.8 and 8.6 per cent respectively, it said.

“These five states together accounted for 50.9 per cent of the total suicides reported in the country. The remaining 49.1 per cent suicides were reported in the remaining 24 states and 7 UTs,” the report said.

Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state with 16.9 per cent share of the country’s population, has reported comparatively lower percentage share of suicidal deaths, accounting for only 3.6 per cent of the total suicides in the country in 2018.

Delhi, which is the most-populous UT, has reported the highest number of suicides (2,526) among UTs, followed by Puducherry (500).

Country going through difficult times, says SC as it refuses urgent hearing on CAA

NEW DELHI, JAN 9 (PTI):

Chief Justice of India S A Bobde on Thursday observed that the country is going through difficult times and there is so much violence going on as the Supreme Court refused urgent hearing on a plea seeking to declare the Citizenship Amendment Act as constitutional.

A bench headed by CJI Bobde expressed surprise over the petition and said this is the first time that someone is seeking that an Act be declared as constitutional.

“There is so much of violence going on. The country is going through difficult times and the

endeavour should be for peace... This court’s job is to determine validity of a law and not declare it as constitutional,” the CJI said.

The bench also comprising justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant said it will hear the petitions challenging validity of CAA when the violence stops.

The observation came after advocate Vineet Dhanda sought urgent listing of his plea to declare CAA as constitutional and a direction to all states for implementation of the Act.

The plea has also sought action against activists, students and me-

dia houses for “spreading rumours”. On December 18, the apex court had agreed to examine the constitutional validity of the CAA, but refused to stay its operation.

The newly amended law seeks to grant citizenship to non-Muslim migrants belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, Jain and Parsi communities who came to the country from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan on or before December 31, 2014.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Bobde had fixed a batch of 59 petitions, including those filed

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Social Sciences Winter School Workshop held at Dzongu

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 DEC:**

Five-day Social Sciences Winter School Workshop, a multidisciplinary induction programme for students of Social Sciences addressing issues related to Culture, Heritage, and Sustainability organized by School of Social Sciences, The Assam Kaziranga University and hosted by Lepcha Homestay, Lingthem, Dzongu successfully concluded on 01 Jan, 2020.

A press release informs that the intensive field-based workshop integrated interdisciplinary approaches related to the Heritage, Oral Narratives, and Sustainability. In total, the workshop was designed to provide academic platform to scholar participants in sharing ideas, views and epistemology regarding the community knowledge systems, which is different from the ones that drive the modern nation states.

The inaugural address was held at Gangtok on 28 Dec, 2019. The field-based study commenced from 29 December onwards at Dzongu and was complimented through class-based learning sessions by resource persons with expertise on diverse social sciences.

A total of eighteen participants from Delhi, Bangalore, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Sikkim attended the Winter School Workshop. Fifteen resource persons belonging to academia, social activism, and policy conducted the



Winter School; the aim was to bridge the divide between these schools of thought.

Assistant Director Printing and Stationeries, Tom Tshering Lepcha, and Folk artist, Mickma Tshering Lepcha conducted the inaugural session of the Winter School. This was followed by Assistant Professor, Sikkim University, Dr Uttam Lal, who spoke on ‘Heritage of Sikkim from Geographical Context’.

Programme Manager, The Mountain In-

stitute, Dr Ghanashyam Sharma, conducted a session on ‘Conservation of Traditional Knowledge Systems, Biodiversity, Organic Agriculture and Sustainable Land Use’.

Research Scholar affiliated to Sikkim University, Jigme Dorjee Bhutia spoke on ‘Medical Heritage of Trans-Himalayas Health Practices and Customs’. The inaugural day at Gangtok concluded with an exposure trip to understand the dynamics of urban-ethnography.

The second day of the workshop included an interactive session with the organizers of Namprikdang Namsoong Celebration Committee, Dzongu. For the purpose of exposing the participants to the everydayness of the Lepcha community, they were hosted by Premit Lepcha proprietor of Lepcha Homestay at Lingthem.

The second day concluded with a session on ‘Material culture, graphic designing, preserving of knowledge through digital technology’ headed by Chewang Rinchen Subursuknee, alumnus of National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

Lepcha Homestay, the venue of the third day of the Winter School witnessed brainstorming on ‘Ethnography with Environmental Activism’ conducted by general secretary of Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT), Gyatso Lepcha and Free Flow River Teesta.

The second session on ‘Methods Pertaining to Epistemology and Indigenous Knowledge Systems’ was conducted by Assistant Professor, Nar Bdr Bhandari Degree College, Gangtok, Reep Pandi Lepcha.

The third session concluded with hours long hiking experience to Mantam Lake side and hot spring to locate community resilience in disaster management, health, and healing practices in contextual ecological and environmental setting. The evening concluded with methodology

turn to pg 02

Removal of JNU VC not a solution, says HRD secy

NEW DELHI, JAN 9 (PTI): The HRD Ministry on Thursday said the removal of Jawaharlal Nehru University Vice-Chancellor M Jagadeh Kumar was not a solution.

HRD Secretary Amit Khare said officials of the ministry will talk to Kumar again on Friday over the students' claims of revised fee not being implemented.

"The removal of the vice chancellor is not a solution," he said, adding the ministry officials will also meet JNU Students' Union after meeting Kumar.

Murli Manohar Joshi seeks JNU VC's ouster

NEW DELHI, JAN 9 (PTI): Former HRD minister and senior BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi on Thursday called for the removal of JNU Vice Chancellor M Jagadeh Kumar, saying it is "shocking" that he is adamant on not implementing a government proposal to resolve fee-hike crisis in the university.

"Reports are that the HRD ministry had twice advised the JNU VC to implement certain reasonable and working formula for resolving the issue of enhanced fees in JNU. He was also advised to reach out to teachers and students.

"It is shocking that the VC is adamant on not implementing the government proposal. This attitude is deplorable and in my opinion such a VC should not be allowed to continue on this post," Joshi tweeted.

Joshi's comments add to the growing clamour for Kumar's removal.

Hundreds of demonstrators, including students and members of civil society organisations, hit the streets on Thursday protesting the recent violence at JNU and demanding resignation of the varsity vice-chancellor.

The HRD Ministry, however, ruled out his removal saying sacking him is not the solution but addressing the core issues on campus.

HRD Ministry officials on Wednesday "advised" JNU Vice-Chancellor to increase communication with students, take the faculty into confidence and facilitate the semester registration process, days after violence ran amok on the university campus.

Kumar, who has been severely criticised by students and faculty members for not taking immediate measures when they were brutally attacked on campus by a masked mob, told the officials that efforts were being made to facilitate semester registration for "willing" students.

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Odisha beats Gorkha Boys in CM's Gold Cup

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 JAN:

Sports Hostel, Odisha, defeated Gorkha Boys, Nepal XI, in a tie-breaker in the ongoing 9th All India Chief Minister's Gold Cup International Football Tournament 2020 at Jorethang, South Sikkim.

Earlier, the match had ended in a 2-2 draw wherein Risen Tudu, jersey no.11

and Bikash Pradhiary, jersey no.19 had scored a goal each for Sports Hostel, Odisha, while Bishal Rai, jersey no. 8 and William Wdeojibo, jersey no.14 scored a goal each for Gorkha Boys, Nepal XI. In the tie-breaker Sports Hostel, Odisha defeated Gorkha Boys, Nepal XI by 4-3 goals.

Jajati Keshari (GK) of Sports Hostel, Odisha got "Hero Of the Match" title with

cash prize of Rs 10,000.

Chief guest of today's programme was Soreng-Chakung MLA, Aditya Golay accompanied by Zoom-Salghari MLA, Sunita Gajmer who is also Chief Patron of SDFA. Guest of honour was KB Rai (SKM Poklok-Kamrang In-charge).

On the day, SDFA felicitated the chief guest and guest of honour.

Final review meeting for Maghey Mela 2020

NAMCHI, 09 JAN (IPR): the final review meeting concerning the upcoming Maghey Mela Celebration, 2020, was held at DC office today.

Present amongst others were MLA Salghari Zoom, Sunita Gazmer, DC (South), Ragul K, ADC (South), Satyan Kr Pradhan, SDM (Jorethang), RB Bhandari, SDPO (Jorethang), Santosh Shrestha, Dy SP (Traffic), Jyoti Chettri.

During the meeting, the DC along with the committee members discussed the various programs and plans which will be organized during the Maghey Mela Celebrations. This mela will commence from 15 to 19 January and will include various cultural, traditional and other miscellaneous attractions.



This time the masses can also take part in a walkathon aimed in bringing about awareness and sensitization regarding Child Sexual Abuse and POCSO Amendment 2019. This open for all walk for a cause is being organized for the first time in Jorethang and will commence from Green Park, covering the entire town and will culminate at Green Park.

The meeting also saw deliberation on the various roles and responsibilities given to the departments and it was appraised by the mela committee members that preparations for the mela are in full swing.

It may be mentioned here that a total number of 40 Departmental stalls apart from SARAS Fair will be put up during the mela at Jorethang Playground.

SC notice to Centre, ECI on plea against use of plastic during polls

NEW DELHI, JAN 9 (PTI): The Supreme Court on Thursday sought response from the Centre and the Election Commission of India on a plea against use of plastic, especially banners and hoardings, during elections.

A bench headed by Justice L Nageswara Rao issued notices to the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the poll panel while seeking their response within four weeks.

The apex court was hearing an appeal filed by one W Edwin Wilson against the National

Green Tribunal's order asking the Election Commission of India and the Chief Electoral Officers of all states and Union Territories to monitor the compliance of advisories against the use of plastic.

The plea in apex court said that NGT did not pass effective order on the main issue of ban on PVC banners use in elections which are a huge menace.

Wilson had claimed that campaigning material made of plastic is used during elections and later discarded as waste, which was detrimental to the environment.

PM meets economists, experts ahead of Budget

NEW DELHI, JAN 9 (PTI): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held discussion on the state of economy with economists, sector experts and successful young entrepreneurs at the Niti Aayog, and promised to take both short-term and long-term measures to revive growth.

During a two-and-half hour meeting held ahead of the Budget 2020-21, the experts made hosts of suggestions for reviving economic growth, which is estimated to slip to 11-year low of 5 per cent in 2019-20.

According to sources, the speakers urge the government to focus on credit expansion, exports growth, governance of Public Sector Banks (PSBs), increasing consumption and job creation. As many as 40 experts and economists attended the meeting.

Modi assured them that he would act on suggestions which can be implemented in short-term and also consider long-term suggestions in due course as these require structural reforms.

"Honourable PM @narendramodi had an interactive session with economists & industry experts at @NITI_Aayog today. Discussed a wide range of issues relating to economic growth, startups & innovation," Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar tweeted.

The high-profile meeting was attended by Home Minister Amit

Shah, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal besides Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar, CEO Amitabh Kant and other senior officials of the think-tank.

Bibek Debroy, chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, too was present at the meeting.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was not present, as she was holding pre-Budget meetings with party workers at BJP headquarters.

The Niti Aayog meeting assumes significance as the government is in the process of formulating Budget proposals for 2020-21. The government's focus will be on accelerating economic growth, which is estimated to slip to an 11-year low of 5 per cent during 2019-20. The Prime Minister on Monday interacted with top business tycoons to discuss the issues facing the economy and measures needed to boost growth and create jobs.

Among others, meeting was attended NIPFP economist Ila Patnaik, former chief economic advisor Shankar Acharya, IIGDR Professor R Nagraj, KKR India CEO Sanjay Nayar, Ather Energy Co-founder and CEO Tarun Mehta, MakeMyTrip Deep Kalra, Dabur India Mohit Malhotra, Bandhan Bank MD and CEO Chandra Shekhar Ghosh and CRISIL MD and CEO Ashu Suyash among others.

Country going...

by the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, for hearing on January 22.

Several petitions have been filed challenging the constitutional validity of the Act including by RJD leader Manoj Jha, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra and AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi.

Several other petitioners include Muslim body Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, All Assam Students Union (AASU), Peace Party, CPI, NGOs 'Rihai Manch' and Citizens Against Hate, advocate M L Sharma, and law students have also approached the apex court challenging the Act.

Social Sciences...

session by Reep Pandi Lepcha, where the students were briefed regarding the manners in which documenting, archiving, and sensitization pertaining to research ethics was imparted.

The fourth day began with talk on 'Sikkim Subject as hyphenated Subject Citizen in India' by Assistant Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhim Sunil Pradhan. He covered Article 371 F of the Indian Constitution and Sikkim's distinct social history as a precursor for Sikkim's special constitutional status.

Sonam Wangchuk Lepcha, renowned freelancer and wildlife photographer conducted a session on storytelling and documentation of oral narratives at Lingthem Monastic compound, this was complimented by academic intervention on methodology by Reep Pandi Lepcha.

Headmistress of Lingthem Junior-High School, Jayjay Lepcha interacted with the participants through experience-sharing session, which she hosted at her residence. The concluding session was conducted by Sikkim's renowned filmmaker Dawa Lepcha, where the docu-feature film Dokbu was screened. The session generated discussions on matters pertaining to the theme of the Winter School.

The valedictory address was delivered by chief guest, Dawa Lepcha who encouraged the participants and commended them for their interest in documenting the nuances located in oral narratives, this was followed by distribution of certificates to the participants, resource persons, and the host on 01 Jan, 2020.

The participants shared their feedback and their learning process regarding the Winter School. Further, the mentors Sunil Pradhan, Reep Pandi Lepcha and Dr Saya Okram, Consultant for UNICEF delivered their concluding remarks.

The welcome address was then conducted by Associate Dean, Dr Golak B Patra, the Assam Kaziranga University, Co-convenor, Kachyo Lepcha along with Assistant Professor Kaziranga University, Tshering Lepcha also the Convener for the event concluded the five-day Winter School Workshop at Lepcha Homestay, Lingthem with their vote of thanks.

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Zoom-Salghari in semi-finals of Inter-Constituency Football



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 JAN:

The quarter-final round of the ongoing Inter-Constituency Football

Tournament 2019-20 has started at Jorethang ground in South Sikkim on Thursday. In the first quarter-final match played

today, Zoom-Salghari edged past Khamdong-Singtam by a lone goal and secured its berth in the semi-final round of the tournament.

Students booked on sedition charges over "Free Kashmir" placard at protest in Karnataka

BENGALURU, JAN 9 (PTI):

A sedition case has been registered against a group of students in connection with alleged display of a Free Kashmir placard during a protest in a campus of the Mysuru university against the attack on JNU students, police said on Thursday.

The case has been registered against Maridevaiah and others under Indian Penal Code sections 124-A (sedition) and 34 (acts done by several persons).

Mysuru Police Commissioner K T Balakrishna said the case had been registered suo motu (on their own) based on video and photo-

graphs showing one of the protestors 'holding' the placard which read Free Kashmir at the demonstration staged by some 100 students on Wednesday. "Investigations are on to find out those who were involved in it," he said.

The students were protesting against the violence in Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi on Sunday.

The protest was held by a Dalit students forum, Mysuru Researchers Association, Bahujan Vidyarthi Sangh, Students Federation of India and other left-Leaning student bodies under the leadership of Maride-

vaiah at the Manasa Gangotri campus of the university in Mysuru, police said.

The FIR said the organisers had not obtained permission for the protest. The case had been registered against Maridevaiah, who was leading it, and others.

Registrar of the university R Shivappa said the administration has issued notices to the organisations concerned seeking an explanation.

"We have also complained to the police against the organisations. They (protesters) had not taken permission from the university," he said.

Sikkim Strength Lifting Association felicitates National C'ship team



SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 09 JAN:
 Sikkim Strength Lifting Association [SSLA] felicitated its team members on Thursday for their outstanding performance in the 29th Senior and Master National Strength Lifting Championship 2019 for Men and Women held from 25 to 28 December at Udaipur in Rajasthan.

A 32-member SSLA team had represented Sikkim in the championship and bagged a total of 28 medals for the State. Sikkim clinched 10 gold medals, 12 silver medals and 06 bronze medals. Likewise, Sikkim women's team lifted the overall champion's trophy, while Sikkim Master's men team lifted the runners-up trophy of the championship. Sikkim also won the champion's trophy in the Inclined Bench Press.

Pema Dorjee Bhutia, Ranju Sundas and Swaraswati Rasaily won 2 gold medals each for the State, while Ram Dhoj Rai and Edu Tshering Bhutia bagged a gold medal and a silver medal each, Madhu M Majai won a gold medal and a bronze medal and Bijay Tiwari, Pahalman Limboo, Bhim Subba and Leomit Lepcha bagged a silver medal and a bronze medal each for the State. Similarly, silver medalists are Homnath Siwa-

koti, KR Bhupen, Kalpana Chettri and Chandrakala Subba and bronze medals were bagged by Kishore Dungmali, Pempa Tamang and Wangdup Tamang. The felicitation function, which was here held at Paljor Stadium conference hall, had Chairperson for Sikkim Commission for Backward Classes, Pabitra Bhandari as the chief guest. The function was also attended by president, BK Roka and general secretary, Jasral Pradhan from Sikkim Olympic Association and executive members of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's sports wing among other dignitaries. In her address, the

chief guest congratulated the SSLA team for making the State proud with their outstanding performance in the national championship. She expressed that Sikkimese sportspersons have been making the State proud with their performance in their respective disciplines. She mentioned that the development of sports would ultimately contribute in the overall development of the society and the State. Ms Bhandari stated that games and sports are a priority sector for SKM government and the Chief Minister, PS Tamang has been working for the development of sports and its infrastructure in the State and for the betterment of sportspersons. On the same, she urged young and upcoming sportspersons of the State to take full advantage of this favorable environment for sports in the State to excel in their respective disciplines. Earlier, SSLA president, TD Denzongpa mentioned that SSLA has been successful in producing national and international lifters from different corners of the State in a short span of time. He also appreciated the performance of the women's team in the championship where they lifted the champion's trophy. Likewise, SSLA general secretary, Sonam Tshering Bhutia expressed that SSLA has been working to promote strength lifting in all parts of the State to bring out more talented lifters especially from rural parts. He stressed upon the need of support to the association from all sides in guiding the young generation on a productive path. The function was also addressed by chief coach, Pema Dorjee Bhutia and legal advisor, Prashant P Waiwa of the association among other dignitaries.

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The function was also addressed by chief coach, Pema Dorjee Bhutia and legal advisor, Prashant P Waiwa of the association among other dignitaries.

Aafno Sahar Aafai Banaw cleanliness drive at Jorethang



SUMMIT REPORT

JORETHANG, 09 JAN:
 On the theme of "Aafno Sahar Aafai Banaw", a few people from Budang GPU (West Sikkim) conducted a cleanliness drive at Charcharey Dara, a few km away from Jorethang Bazaar under Zoom-Salghari constituency in South Sikkim.

The team cleaned all the jhoras and collected garbage under the banner of "A Chain of Cleanliness from Me to You".

The drive was conducted under the guidance of Dew Raj Rai along with concerned Panchayat member, Dinesh Kr Rai, Anosh Subba among others.

During the cleanliness drive, Dew Raj Rai appealed to the people of Naya Bazaar, Jorethang to not dump waste at Charcharey Dara which is near a picnic spot. He also appealed to the concerned department to prevent people from dumping waste at Charcharey Dara.

UN chief "deeply saddened" at loss of lives in Ukrainian airliner crash



BY YOSHITA SINGH
UNITED NATIONS, JAN 9 (PTI): UN chief Antonio Guterres has condoled the death of 176 passengers, including nine crew members, on board a Ukrainian airliner which crashed minutes after takeoff from Tehran. The Ukraine International Airlines took off from Imam Khomeini International Airport at 6:10 am on Wednesday and disappeared from radars just a few minutes later, crashing in Tehran province, killing all nine crew members and 167 passengers from different nations.

killing of top Iranian General Qassem Soleimani last Friday. No evidence has emerged of any link between the two events. Iranian officials have initially blamed the crash on engine issues. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky has warned against "unchecked theories" or speculation over the crash, but has ordered a criminal investigation into what happened. The black box containing the cockpit voice and flight data recorders has reportedly been recovered. Meanwhile, all direct flights between Ukraine and Iran have been suspended and a number of commercial airlines are rerouting flights crossing the Middle East to avoid danger amidst the escalating tensions between the United States and Iran.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson Stephane Dujarric on Wednesday, Guterres expressed his deepest condolences to the families of the victims and to the Governments of all the countries whose nationals lost their lives in this tragedy. "The Secretary-General is deeply saddened by the crash of the Ukrainian airliner near Tehran," the statement said. The Boeing 737-800 single-aisle jet was heading to Kiev. The incident took place several hours after Iran launched a ballistic missile strike from home soil on the US forces stationed in Iraq, in response to the US drone

Airline officials said most of the passengers were en route to the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, transiting through there to other destinations. Ukraine Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko said that on board were 82 Iranians, 63 Canadians and 11 Ukrainians, which included two passengers and the nine crew. There were also 10 Swedish, four Afghan, three German and three British nationals, he said.

Open mic event Nepanglish at MG Marg

ARPAN PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 09 JAN:
 The first edition of Nepanglish, an open mic event, is being held on 11 Jan at MG Marg, Gangtok. The event is being organized by two youngsters, 17-year-old Prajal Regmi and 22-year-old Ayush Rai, to provide a platform to the youth to showcase any form of talent.



Organized with the theme - the journey from hidden diary to an open mic - the event will include poem recitation, standup comedy, mimicry and various other forms of talent. Prajal and Ayush hail from West Sikkim and are students of CCCT, Chisopani, Jorethang, South Sikkim. No fee is required to participate in the event and those interested may register their names on the website nepanglish.org. Prajal and Ayush informed that the event also aims to keep youth away from negativity and guide them towards the right path. He has appealed to

all the youngsters to come forward to join hands in making the event successful. It may be mentioned here that after the inaugural event in Gangtok, the organizers plan to hold the event on a monthly basis at different locations across the State.

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CORRIGENDUM

Ref to tender no: - 09/NSCL/WORKS/2018, Dated 05/12/2018, the following tenders have been cancelled-

1. Construction of pedestrian walkway from Namchi Bazar to Entry Gate (Job-A1, Job A2, Job B, Job C) vide file no- 03/NSCL/WORKS/2019/60/1,03/NSCL/WORKS/2019/60/03/NSCL/WORKS/2019/60,03/NSCL/WORKS/2019/62

The respective contractors are hereby directed to be present in the office of undersigned within 1(one) month from the publication of this corrigendum.

Sd/-
 CEO,NSCL

Divisional Engineer
 cum
 GM (Tech),NSCL

Inter-Constituency Football Tournament 2019-20			
Results of matches held on 07 Jan 2020			
Venues	Matches between	Score	Result
Paljor Stadium	1 st Match- Upper Barak Vrs. Upper Tadong	3-2	Match won by Upper Tadong
	2 nd Match- Namcheybong Vrs. Arinbang	1-0	Match won by Namcheybong
	3 rd Match- Syani Vrs. Kabi Lunchuk	3-1	Match won by Kabi Lunchuk
	4 th Match- Rhenock Vrs. Martan Rumtek	4-3	Match won by Rhenock
Dentam	1 st Match- Maneybong Dentam Vrs. Soreng Chakung	2-0	Match won by Soreng Chakung
	2 nd Match- Yulsam Tashiding Vrs. Yangthang	4-2	Match won by Yulsam Tashiding
Namchi Singithang	1 st Match- Namchi Singithang Vrs. Rangang Yangang	2-1	Match won by Rangang Yangang
	2 nd Match- Namthang Rateypami Vrs. Poklok Kamrang	2-1	Match won by Namthang Rateypami

DATE: 03-01-2020

FIRST ROUND OF THE TOURNAMENT (SOUTH- WEST)
VENUES: NAMCHI SINGITHANG PLAYGROUND AND DENTAM PUBLIC PLAYGROUND

FIXTURE-II
Venue: Namchi Singithang Playground (South District Constituencies)

Tumin Lingee	6/1/2020; 1:30 PM	Burfung	6/1/2020; 11:30 AM
Melli	8/1/2020; 11:30 AM	Temi Namping	8/1/2020; 1:30 PM
Namchi Singithang	7/1/2020; 11:30 AM	Namthang Rateypami	7/1/2020; 1:30 PM
Rangang Yangang		Poklok Kamrang	

Venue: Dentam Public Playground (West District Constituencies)

Rinchenpong	6/1/2020; 11:30 AM	Gyalshing Bernyak	6/1/2020; 1:30 PM
Salghari Zoom	8/1/2020; 1:30 PM	Daramdin	8/1/2020 11:30 AM
Yoksam Tashiding	7/1/2020; 1:30 PM	Maneybong Dentam	7/1/2020; 11:30 AM
Yangthang		Soreng Chakung	

Note:

- The first round matches will be played at Namchi Singithang and Dentam Public ground for South & West constituencies respectively.
- The duration of the matches will be 35-10-35 minutes
- Matches will be played as per FIFA Rules
- Organizing committee reserve the right to reschedule the fixture (if required)
- Every player should show their Voter ID Card at the time of Technical check up (if player is under 18 years than Aadhar Card)
- Each Team should submit one constituency flag (6x4 feet) during registration.

Organic Planning

To take things forward, address what is distressing farms

Sikkim is now into Phase-2 of its ambitious Organic Farming plans, even the baton having passed to a new government. The present dispensation had harboured several reservations about the Organic Mission but thankfully appears to have come around since then. Given the havoc that chemical fertilisers and pesticides wreck on the environment and health, this was always a very laudable mission. It was clearly also a difficult task, given that nearly fifteen years since it was first mooted and three since Sikkim became officially “organic”, one still hears of resistance to the idea and cannot help but notice the lack of excitement that such a major paradigm shift is expected to make palpable.

To get a grip on what Sikkim decided to go up against when it began the Organic Sikkim experiment in the year 2005, some perspective is required. As per the annual report of the Department of Food Security and Agriculture, Sikkim had consumed 3,429.6 metric tonnes of fertilisers in 2003-2004! That is a huge amount for tiny Sikkim and to really understand the shock this was delivering to the State, one has to see the 3,429.6 metric tonnes not just as consumption but also as procurement. This quantity of chemical fertilisers was sourced by the concerned departments and supplied onwards to the farmers. One is looking at massive handling of funds and issuing of work orders and all its attendant “arrangements”, and expectedly, the first resistance to the proposal clearly came from within the departments themselves even if these were never overtly expressed. Apart from the dependence of the local farmers and local officers on non-organic fertilizers and pesticides, the policy makers in Sikkim also had to contend with a national policy which is structured to benefit the fertilizer-pesticide manufacturing cartel. Soil-poisoning, cancer-causing chemical fertilizers were given Rs. 12,000 crores in subsidy each year (as of 2005) by the Centre which makes them the cheaper option as against the more eco-friendly, but labour intensive hence also more expensive organic options. Much of the central subsidy makes its way to the fields in Sikkim by way of distribution schemes and subsidised supplies and this process leaked and wasted. But this was the convenient system in place and we should know by now how resistant we are to change. The job, hence, was easier said than done.

But Sikkim has pulled it off at least at the policy commitment level even if the practise has still not become as instinctive as would help the sector. Here, one needs to also recognise that the lethargy one sees in the farming sector is neither unique to Sikkim nor something caused by its shift away from chemical fertilisers and pesticides. This is a condition across the country caused as much by skewed economic-planning priorities and climate change. It would serve the Sikkim Government well to also look deeper into the high attrition rates from the farms of the State. Agriculture has been plagued by diminishing returns for decades now, and that is perhaps when it lost its sheen. Also, Sikkim was never known as a surplus agriculture society, and when farming is sustenance level for generations, every aspiration for a better life would have meant a move away from the fields. Agricultural plots in the hands of the actual farmers (as different from the landlords who are not active agriculturists) have traditionally been very small in Sikkim and this must have contributed towards the farms not becoming as bountiful as they might have potential for is the belonged to the hands that tilled them. Because of how the social hierarchies worked, farmers never ranked very high in the pecking order which is also probably why naukari was aspired for more than farming. Remember, the State Government had also banned import of vegetables into Sikkim at one time, a staggeringly distasteful imposition. The intention was clearly to support local growers and encourage them to grow more. It is unlikely that it had any such impact beyond hurting kitchens here. If the Organic Mission is to become truly sustainable, the thrust should start from understanding what ails the farms and fields from a social, logistical and practical point of view. That way a more holistic approach could be fashioned and less disruptive, but more sustainable, course of action could be initiated.

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Why people leave Facebook – and what it tells us about the future of social media

MARK WHITEHEAD
theconversation.com

The number of active users of Facebook (those people who have logged onto the site in the previous month) has reached a historic high of 2.45 billion. To put this in some context, approximately 32% of the global population now use the social media platform, and the trend line of participation is still going up.

With the exception of Google, there has never been a company that has had this many people using its services. In this context, it may seem strange to talk about those who are choosing to leave Facebook. But those who are leaving the platform represent a small, but by no means insignificant, counter current. And many people, perhaps looking to eke back some time from busy lives, are choosing to quit social media as a new year's resolution.

In 2018, a US survey revealed that 9% of those surveyed had recently deleted their Facebook account, while a further 35% reported that they were using the social media platform less. Despite its economic success and popularity, there seems to be something going on in the original heartlands of Facebook.

Building on my previous work on behavioural influence, I have been trying to find out more about these so called “Facebook deleters”, to better understand their motivations and the implications of choosing to leave the world's most powerful social network.

THE MOTIVATION

In conversations I've had with those who have deleted Facebook, it has become evident that people's motivations for leaving the platform are varied and complex.

My assumption had been that major events, such as the Snowden leaks, the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and revelations about Mark Zuckerberg's secret meeting with the US president, Donald Trump, were the key motivations for deleting Facebook accounts. But the Facebook deleters I speak to rarely raise political scandals or concerns over data privacy as their primary motivations for leaving the network.

Indeed, when our conversation turns to the

Cambridge Analytica scandal, many suggest that this had only confirmed what they had always assumed about how their personal data was being exploited (at least one person had never even heard of Cambridge Analytica).

Many of those who delete Facebook speak of widely recognised reasons for leaving the platform: concerns with its echo chamber effects, avoiding time wasting and procrastination, and the negative psychological effects of perpetual social comparison. But other explanations seem to relate more to what Facebook is becoming and how this evolving technology intersects with personal experiences.

While many people find it difficult to articulate precisely why they joined Facebook (being intrigued or attracted by the site's novelty, it seems), it is clear that for many the platform has started to play a very different role in their lives. The notion of “oversharing” is discussed as an aspect of what Facebook has turned into, as users find their feeds clogged with information they find gratuitously personal and irrelevant.

DIGITAL NATIVES

Those who joined Facebook at a young age tend to describe their social networks getting too large. The size of a social media network appears to be a significant factor in how useful and trustworthy people find it. We know that social groups in excess of 150 tend to be too large to effectively know and maintain – this is the so-called Dunbar number, named after the anthropologist Robin Dunbar. It appears that in the context of Facebook, those with networks consisting of several thousand people find them increasingly difficult to trust (even when applying rigorous privacy settings).

A further problem for digital natives is the length of time they have been archiving their lives on Facebook. Their Facebook archive often goes back to a time when they were less selective in the curation of their online selves. Such careless sharing is now seen as a threat to the social image they are keen to establish in adulthood.

A recurring theme is the social commitment of being on Facebook. While Facebook enables people to stay connected with their friends, family and communities, it is also seen as generating a new

form of digital domestic labour.

One of the reasons for the success of social media, of course, is its ability to tap into our social instinct for knowledge sharing and exchange. But as social networks grow on Facebook, it appears that the costs of mutual obligation (they liked my post, so I had better like theirs) start to outweigh the benefits to being connected.

This is where digital forms of mutual obligation are different to real ones – in the real world we shake hands and say nice things to each other in the moment of encounter. But in the digital world social obligations can quickly accumulate to unsustainable levels.

IMPLICATIONS

Although Facebook may still continue to grow, those who leave the platform reveal interesting trends which hint at how future relationships with smart technology and social media will play out.

We are in an era of historically unprecedented opportunities for social connection and engagement. Those who leave Facebook are at one end of a spectrum we all inhabit as we try and work through questions of digital identity, responsibility and collective customs.

Leaving social networks is one of several options we can choose as we attempt to navigate this new world. But Facebook deletion is not just a process of people redefining their digital self. Deletion is also a response to a set of emerging tensions between an evolving technology and social life.

As the economic model of Facebook changes (in both scale, intensity and profit-making) it appears likely that it will encounter clear barriers to its social usefulness and desirability. This is, of course, where we begin to see a clash in values within Facebook itself, as it seeks to reconcile its stated desire to connect the world, with its highly monetised mode of operation.

The small numbers of people who delete Facebook are not going to change Facebook's economic model anytime soon. But the future may see the company testing the limits of engagement with social media platforms.

[the writer is Professor of Human Geography, Aberystwyth University]

For linguists, it was the decade of the pronoun

REED BLAYLOCK
theconversation.com

On Jan. 3, the American Dialect Society held its 30th annual “Word of the Year” vote, which this year also included a vote for “Word of the Decade.”

It was the year – and the decade – of the pronoun.

In a nod to shifting attitudes about gender identities that are nonbinary – meaning they don't neatly fit in the category of man or woman – over 200 voters, including me, selected “(my) pronouns” as the word of the year and “they” as word of the decade.

Pronouns, along with conjunctions and prepositions, are generally considered a “closed class” – a group of words whose number rarely grows and whose meanings rarely change.

So when pronouns take center stage, especially a new use of “they” that expands the closed class, linguists can't help but get excited. **PRONOMINAL IMPORTANCE**

Word of the year votes are light-hearted ways to highlight the natural evolution of language. Candidates must be demonstrably new or newly popular during the year in question. Previous American Dialect Society winners have included “dumpster fire” in 2016, “fake news” in 2017 and “tender-age shelter” in 2018.

Because so many words enter our

collective vocabulary each year, the American Dialect Society also votes on subcategories, from “Euphemism of the Year” to “Political Word of the Year.” “People of means” – used by Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz in February 2019 to refer to billionaires – won the former, and “quid pro quo” won the latter.

While the American Dialect Society's annual vote is the longest-running vote, other language publications, from Merriam-Webster to Oxford English Dictionary, also announce words of the year. In December, Merriam-Webster announced that its word of the year was “they.”

It's rare for words as simple as pronouns – “I,” “he,” “they” – to get so much media and cultural attention. But that's exactly what's been happening over the past few years, which made them a tempting choice for voters.

This year's American Dialect Society Word of the Year, “(my) pronouns,” highlights the trend of people presenting their preferred pronouns in email signatures and on social media accounts – for example “pronouns: she, her, hers, herself.” People started doing this to help destigmatize a nonbinary person's declaration of their pronouns.

The Word of the Decade, “they,” honors the way the pronoun has become a singular pronoun for many

people who identify as nonbinary.

“They” has actually been used as a singular pronoun in English for centuries if the gender of someone being spoken about isn't known, or if that person's gender is unimportant to the conversation. For example, if I started telling you something funny my kid said, you might ask, “What's their name?” or “How old are they?”

Only in recent years has “they” become widely accepted as a pronoun for nonbinary individuals for whom the pronouns “he” and “she” would be both inaccurate and inappropriate. It's not the only option – some nonbinary people prefer “xe” or “ze.” **A SHIFT THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN NATURALLY**

Though it can drive some pedants mad, language changes as culture changes. In English, these changes usually involve new or repurposed nouns and adjectives, like what happened with “app.” Originally shorthand for a downloaded computer or smartphone application, it became a word in and of itself.

But in this case, the social push to respect nonbinary gender identity has extended so far into English that it's altering pronouns – again, a class of words that rarely changes – with a new, third-person singular gendered pronoun to accompany the long-standing pair of “he” and “she.” It helps to fill in a linguistic gen-

der gap, just like how, in some dialects, “y'all” or “yinz” fill in the lack of a distinct, plural “you.” But whereas “y'all” appeared slowly after years of unconsciously contracting “you all,” the nonbinary “they” arose quickly after a conscious social movement.

This might explain why some people have adapted to the nonbinary “they” more easily than others. You probably know someone – or are someone – who has struggled with referring to an individual of nonbinary gender as “they.” But what makes it so difficult? Is it discomfort with what can sound like bad grammar? Or does it have to do with our gender biases?

In a recent study, linguist Evan Bradley asked people to judge the grammar of sentences with a singular “they” as “correct English” or not. They found that singular “they” – in its centuries-old use for a person of unknown gender – was easier for people to accept. But the acceptability of nonbinary “they” depended on a person's attitudes toward gender roles.

This suggests that the difficulty with nonbinary “they” has more to do with our culture's perspective on gender than on the language itself.

[the writer is PhD candidate in Linguistics, University of Southern California – Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences]

Maha: Human trafficking victim rescued after 10 years

CHANDRAPUR, JAN 9 (PTI): The Chandrapur police in Maharashtra have rescued a woman 10 years after she was abducted and 'sold' to a man in Haryana, an official said on Thursday.

The police arrested two women on December 4 for abducting the victim in 2010 when she was just 11 years old and selling her to a man in Haryana, sub-inspector Chanda Dandwate of Ramnagar police station said.

The woman, who had been sold at least seven times in the last 10 years, was sexually exploited during this period resulting in the birth of two children, she added.

The victim, who was 11 at the time, was playing near a temple in the Bengali Camp area of Maharashtra's Chandrapur city, when she was drugged and kidnapped



by Janhvi Roy and Savitri Majumdar, the official said. She was first taken to Panipat in Haryana, where she was sold to a man, who confined her at

a farm house and sexually exploited her, the official added.

The victim was also raped by other men in the man's family, as a

result of which she gave birth to two children, Dandwate said.

The woman was last sold to one Dharmavir at Fatehabad in Hary-

ana, who kept her in a rented room, she said. It was here that the owner of the accommodation found something suspicious about her and informed the police, following which she was rescued.

A team from Ramnagar police reached Fatehabad and brought the woman back to Chandrapur, the official said, adding that the Haryana police have also arrested 10 persons in this regard.

The police have started investigating cases of girls who have been reported missing in the last few years, Dandwate said.

The accused women have been charged under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, she said.

The case is in initial stages of investigation, the official added.

Armed robbers loot gold from IIFL branch in Gujarat town

VAPI (GUJ), JAN 9 (PTI): A gang of armed robbers descended on a financial services company and decamped with gold and other valuables worth crores of rupees here in Gujarat's Valsad district on Thursday morning, said police.

The robbery took place at a gold loan branch of IIFL, in the industrial town of Vapi. The firm is engaged in providing loans for homes, against gold, personal and vehicle finance among other services.

While the IIFL staff along with company auditors are calculating the actual loss, police sources said the robbers fled with around 1,000

packets, containing gold jewellery worth approximately Rs 7 crore.

The masked robbers, numbering around half a dozen, stormed into the IIFL's gold loan branch, situated on the busy Vapi-Silvassa road, and threatened the staff with guns and other weapons, the police said.

To eliminate any chance of resistance, the looters tied the hands of eight staff members using duct tapes and also stuck tapes on their mouth, they said.

The robbers opened the lockers using keys taken from the staff and decamped with the booty, the police said.

"Robbers targeted

an IIFL gold loan branch today morning. They decamped with gold and other valuables by threatening the staff.

"We are yet to ascertain the value of the looted gold.

Further investigation is on," said district SP Sunil Joshi.

In the CCTV footage, the robbers can be seen coming out of the office carrying bags and rushing towards the road where they get into a waiting car and escape.

A police officer said the robbery appears to be the handy work of a professional gang from adjoining Maharashtra.

Vapi is located close to the Maharashtra border.

Serena drops set before reaching Auckland quarters



AUCKLAND, JAN 9 (AFP):

Serena Williams rallied from a set down to beat journeywoman Christina McHale at the WTA Auckland Classic on Thursday, but said it was just the workout she needed.

With her focus on winning a 24th Grand Slam at the Australian Open, Williams said she needs all the court time she can get after a long off-season since losing September's US Open final.

It took the top seed two hours to put away the 27-year-old McHale and advance to a quarter-final with Germany's Laura Siegemund, who ousted teen prodigy Coco Gauff in the second round.

Williams was broken three times before losing the first set 3-6 but recovered to take the next two sets 6-2, 6-3 in the all-American affair.

"I really need to play matches like that to get to my goals," said the 23-times Grand Slam winner, who is determined to equal the record of 24 held by

Australian great Margaret Court.

"Tournament time is super-important, match time is good. After losing that first set I'm just glad to be still in the event." McHale used her speed around the court in extended rallies which often produced unforced errors from the 38-year-old Williams in the early stages.

But just as it looked as if Williams was in a slump at 1-4 down after five games, the world number 10 got to grips with the blustery conditions and McHale's agility and began to take control.

- 'I'M STILL LEARNING' -

It was the reverse from Gauff, seen as one of the rising stars of tennis, who started strongly against Siegemund but faded as the match wore on.

The 31-year-old Siegemund, who played her first WTA qualifier in 2003 before Gauff was born, was up 5-4 and serving when the American teen broke twice to take the first set. But

from there, she used her considerable experience to ruffle the 15-year-old, forcing her behind the baseline and then drawing her forward with deft drop shots.

"In the first set I had my chances but let it go. So I just tried to keep my level and she started to miss a little bit more, and I guess I just got better and better," Siegemund said.

As Gauff showed signs of being rattled, she lost the steeliness she showed when she burst into the limelight last year with a win over Venus Williams on her way to Wimbledon's fourth round as a qualifier.

Against Siegemund, she finished with seven double faults and 49 unforced errors, which she put down to youth and inexperience.

"I'm still learning and that's the problem that I have," Gauff said.

"I didn't play the right way and if I lost playing the right way it would have been fine, but I don't think I was playing the right way.

WB CID takes over investigation into Sujapur violence

KOLKATA, JAN 9 (PTI): West Bengal CID on Thursday took over the investigation into incidents of violence at Sujapur in Malda district during the nationwide strike by central trade unions.

Hundreds of people, believed to be supporters of Wednesday's 24-hour nationwide strike, had allegedly attacked police with bricks, ransacked buses and police vehicles, a senior CID official said.

"We will be investigating into the violence in Malda's Sujapur yesterday. Our officers will start the probe immediately. The concerned police stations and the district police are being contacted. We have sought details from them," the official said.

On Wednesday, over



hundreds of people had gathered on national highway 34 in Kaliachak's Sujapur in Malda district disrupting the traffic there.

Bandh enforcers had also ransacked a bus and attacked police with bricks when they tried to stop them from damaging property virtually turning the area into a battlefield.

Two police officers were injured in the alleged attack by the supporters of the bandh who also set two police vehicles on fire.

A Malda report quoting district superintendent of police Alok Rajoria said seven persons have been arrested so far in connection with violence and clashes in Sujapur.

Do not support violence during anti-CAA protests: Mamata

MADHYAMGRAM (WB), JAN 9 (PTI): Asserting that violence in any form was not acceptable during protests and demonstrations, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said political parties and leaders should behave in a more responsible way.

Dubbing the National Population Register (NPR) updation process as "a prelude to pan-India NRC" implementation, Banerjee asked people not to share personal details with anyone.

"We were the first ones to raise voice against the citizenship act, NRC and the NPR. This time, the NPR form has sought six new personal details. I will request all of you not to share your details

with anyone. "If someone comes to your place and seeks details, just decline their request," Banerjee said, while addressing an anti-CAA protest march at Madhyamgram in North 24 Parganas.

She, however, stressed that she did not support the violence or clash that had been reported from various parts of the state during anti-citizenship bill protests. "We don't support violence during anti-CAA protests.

Political parties and leaders should behave in a more responsible way. Violence is not the right form of protest," she said, referring to the reports of arson and vandalism in the state during Wednesday's trade union strike.

Indian Women's League to kick off from January 24

NEW DELHI, JAN 9 (PTI): The final round of Hero Women's League 2019-20 will kick off in Bengaluru on January 24, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said on Thursday.

The fourth edition of the tournament will see 12 teams from across the country fight it out for top honours in Indian women's club football.

The teams that are set to participate in the final round has made it to Bengaluru after a rigorous set of zonal qualifiers which were held on a pan India basis.

Teams from Manipur,

Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, West Bengal, Punjab, Karnataka, and the Rest of India zones have earned a ticket to the final round. The 12 teams have been divided into two groups of six teams with each playing the other once in the group. The top two teams from each group will proceed to the semi-final.

The tournament will start with Krypta FC of Manipur taking on Kickstart FC of Karnataka.

The final of the tournament is slated to be held on February 13.

Fake holiday order: DC files complaint

MANGALURU, JAN 9 (PTI): Dakshina Kannada (DK) deputy commissioner Sindhu B Rupesh has filed a complaint with the city police here against those who forged a fake order purportedly issued by her and circulated on Wednesday.

The fake order was that the DC had issued a circular, declaring a holiday for schools and colleges on Wednesday, the day of the country-wide bandh by trade unions. The miscreants had al-

tered a previous order issued by the DC to play the mischief, the deputy commissioner said.

She urged the police to consider the complaint very seriously and take legal steps as per the IT Act and IPC.

The accused are liable for action for forging the letter head and signatures used by the office of the deputy commissioner by copying an earlier order issued on websites, she said in the complaint.

Deepika-starrer 'Chhapaak' made tax free in Chhattisgarh



RAIPUR, JAN 9 (PTI): The Chhattisgarh government on Thursday declared Deepika Padukone-starrer film "Chhapaak" tax free in the state.

The movie has also been made tax free in the Congress-ruled Madhya Pradesh.

"Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has declared Bollywood movie 'Chhapaak' tax free in the state," a statement by the public relations department said here.

The film, based on the story of acid attack survivor Laxmi Agarwal, is scheduled to be released

on Friday. Baghel in a tweet appealed to people to watch the movie along with their families.

"The state government has decided to make Hindi film 'Chhapaak' tax free in Chhattisgarh. The film spreads awareness among people against heinous crime like acid attack on women in society. You all should go to watch the movie along with your families and become aware, as well as spread the awareness," the Congress leader tweeted.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath also declared the film tax free in his state,

saying it gives a "positive message to the society about acid attack survivors."

Padukone visited the JNU campus in Delhi on Tuesday to express solidarity with students who were attacked by a mob, but did not address the gathering.

After her JNU visit, many appreciated her "silent solidarity", but some others criticised her for "supporting Leftists", saying it was a promotional stunt ahead of her film's release.

"#Boycott Chhapaak" was also trending on Twitter, as was "#ISupportDeepika".

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An Olympic First: Cardboard beds for Tokyo Athletes Village

TOKYO, JAN 9 (AP): Tokyo Olympic athletes beware particularly larger ones.

The bed frames in the Athletes Village at this year's Olympics will be made of cardboard. Sturdy cardboard.

"Those beds can stand up to 200 kilograms," explained Takashi Kitajima, the general manager of the Athletes Village, speaking through an interpreter.

That's about 440 pounds, and surely no Olympic athlete weighs that much.

"They are stronger than wooden beds," Kitajima added.

He also took into account the possibility of a wild room celebration after, say, a gold-medal victory.

"Of course, wood and cardboard would each break if you jumped on them," he said.

The single bed frames will be recycled into paper products after the games. The mattress components the mattresses are not made of cardboard will be recycled into plastic products.

The mattress is broken up into three distinct sections, and the firmness of each can be adjusted.

The idea was to use materials that could be remade after the Olympics and Paralympics. But the cardboard frames and supports should give the rooms a spartan look.

Organizers showed off the beds and a few other furnishings on Thursday at their headquarters. The entire Athletes Village complex will be completed in June. The

Olympics open on July 24 followed by the Paralympics on Aug. 25.

"The organizing committee was thinking about recyclable items, and the bed was one of the ideas," Kitajima explained, crediting local Olympic sponsor Airweave Inc. for the execution.

Organizers say this is the first time that the beds and bedding in the Athletes Village have been made of renewable materials.

The Athletes Village being built alongside Tokyo Bay will comprise 18,000 beds for the Olympics and be composed to 21 apartment towers. Even more building construction is being planned in the next several years.

Real estate ads say the units will be sold off afterward, or rented, with sale prices starting from about 54 million yen or about 500,000 and soaring to three or four times that much. Some fear the apartments will flood the market, possibly impacting property values.

The units will be sold off by various real estate companies. Ads suggest many of the units will be slightly larger than a typical apartment in Tokyo, which is about 60-70 square meters or 650-750 square feet.

Ridhima moves into two-shot lead in Leg 1 of Hero WPGT



PUNE, JAN 9 (PTI): Ridhima Dilawari continued from where she left off last season as she moved into sole lead after second round of the first Leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour 2020 at the Poona Club Golf Course here on Thursday.

Ridhima, who shared the first round lead with amateur Pranavi Urs (70-73), shot 71 to go with her first round card of 70 to aggregate one-under 141 at the Par-71 layout.

Ridhima, who won five times in 12 starts in 2019, is now two shots clear of Pranavi and Amandeep Drall, whose second round 70 was the only sub-par round of the day.

Vani Kapoor moved up with one-over 72 and at 147 for two rounds, is now tied-fourth alongside Afshan Fatima (73-74).

Ridhima, who played solid and steady golf through 2019, may well have been more than two shots clear of the field, but for the closing bogey on Par-5 18th.

She also dropped a shot on another Par-5,

the seventh besides Par-4 eighth and 11th. Her birdies came on Par-3 fourth, Par-4 ninth, Par-4 10th and Par-5 12th.

Amandeep was doing very well with three birdies against just one bogey on the front nine. She added another on 11th to go to three-under for the day, but dropped shots on 15th and 17th to fall to 70.

Pranavi started the day with a triple bogey on Par-4 first hole but creditably managed to hold her round together with three birdies and two other bogeys for a card of 73.

Vani Kapoor had one birdie against two bogeys in her 72.

Fancied Diksha Dagar (72-77) and Saaniya Sharma (73-76) are tied-sixth, while Jyotsana Singh (77-74), Sonam Chugh (76-75), Mehar Atwal (76-75) and Neha Tripathi (74-77) are tied-eighth at 151 each.

The winner of the Hero Order of Merit in 2019, Gaurika Bishnoi struggled for the second day running as she carded 79 after 76 in the first round.

Jack Grealish's poise and panache leave Villa dreaming of Wembley

SACHIN NAKRANI
LEICESTER, 09 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]:

So then, just who exactly will face Manchester City in the Carabao Cup final this year? On a chilly, wet and fervent east Midlands night came a semi-final first leg that proved much more even and intriguingly poised than the one that came before it. If what took place at Old Trafford was a procession bordering on a humiliation, this encounter at the King Power was a genuine contest, and while Leicester remain favourites to reach Wembley, Aston Villa can take great heart from how they performed and will believe they can make the return fixture on their own patch one to remember.

Dean Smith certainly believes Villa remain alive in this tie, speaking afterwards of how his players can "take a lot of confidence and belief" from their display against a side that, it should be remembered, beat them 4-1 a month ago. Villa were ripped apart that day and while there were moments here when they looked incredibly vulnerable, especially during the second half as Leicester performed with renewed pace and intent in pursuit of a goal to cancel out Frédéric Guilbert's first-half strike, the men in claret and blue stood firm. Their back three of Ezri Konsa, Tyrone Mings and Kortney Hause were especially good while in goal Orjan Nyland made a number of crucial saves before



finding himself helpless to keep out Kelechi Iheanacho's powerfully-hit equaliser on 74 minutes.

Nyland was making his second appearance in succession and more will follow for the Norwegian given he now finds himself as Villa's first-choice goalkeeper following the anterior cruciate ligament injury sustained by Tom Heaton in the New Year's Day victory over Burnley and which has ruled out the 33-year-old for the rest of the season. Wesley, the club's £22m record signing, is out for the same amount of time having sustained the same injury in the same game, and that, com-

bined with the pre-match illness picked up by Jonathan Kodjia here led to Villa lining up without a recognised striker.

Anwar El Ghazi was forced into operating as a false No 9 and in doing the job diligently, which included delivering the cross that led to Guilbert's goal, he symbolised the noble effort to the cause delivered by a weakened, patched-up side. Little wonder Smith was so proud of his team, with the manager's only complaint being the "farcical" nature with which they conceded given it resulted from Konsa and Douglas Luiz making a

mess between them of what should have been a straightforward free-kick for Villa.

For all those concerned with Smith's side, the hope will be that this performance had not only presented them with a decent chance of reaching a first major final in five years but also fuelled the players with the belief that they can escape relegation trouble. They currently sit 17th, a point clear of danger, and with a game against City next up. The outlook is not great and has come about from what has been a chastening return to the top flight for a grand old

name of English football. Way too many goals conceded, not enough scored – a toxic combination that appeared to be overwhelming Villa as they went on a run of four successive league defeats prior to Christmas. But since then there have been wins against Norwich and Burnley, and now this; a draw away to the second best team in the country. Villa may be lacking players but they are not lacking in an upturn.

Absolutely crucial to Villa's survival hopes is Jack Grealish. The 24-year-old has been the team's outstanding performer this season

and yet again he delivered a display here full of poise and panache. There were no particularly eye-catching moments, and he may ultimately have come second to James Maddison in the battle of the best young English creative talent on display in front of the watching Gareth Southgate, but there was still much to enjoy and, from a Villa point of view, appreciate.

Stationed in his usual advanced left position, Grealish did his bit defensively and helped relieve the pressure on the visitors by carrying the ball in his trademark manner; loose and easy yet full of purpose. Indeed it was from one such run that Villa took the lead, as Grealish manoeuvred down the right, switched play and watched on as El Ghazi and Guilbert combined to devastating effect.

"It was a great, mature performance," said Smith of his No 10. "He carried the ball so well and when we were rushed he was the one that showed composure. That is what Jack brings to us – he's a top player."

Of that there is no doubt and it could well be Grealish who ultimately makes the difference when these sides meet again in three weeks' time. As Brendan Rodgers said, this tie is "perfectly set-up", and for Villa during a season of great strain and difficulty there remains the very real prospect of a ninth League Cup final appearance. Game on.

Leicester's Kelechi Iheanacho rescues draw in face of defiant Aston Villa

PAUL DOYLE

LEICESTER, 09 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Brendan Rodgers warned that his evolving side would not get anywhere without learning how to suffer. Aston Villa sure put them to the test here, as they defied the form book and a spate of injuries to inflict serious hardship on Leicester. Frédéric Guilbert's goal even looked like giving Villa a lead to take into the second leg in three weeks but Kelechi Iheanacho came off the bench for an equaliser that leaves this Carabao Cup semi-final intriguingly poised.

This was a far tighter contest than expected and nothing like the Premier League encounter a month ago at Villa Park, where Leicester sashayed to a 4-1 victory. A repeat of that would have been no surprise given the wretched luck that has beset Villa during a spell when they have lost most of their spine to injury, including Tom Heaton, John McGinn and Wesley. Their lineup on Wednesday included no specialist striker, as Jonathan Kodjia was omitted from the squad after falling ill, according to Dean Smith.

Smith improvised a solution – Anwar El Ghazi and Jack Grealish alternating as centre-forwards while the defence continued with the back three that has served them well in recent weeks – and his team applied it with enough determination and quality to make life difficult for their high-flying hosts.

Leicester appeared to have got to grips with the visitors by the 24th minute but then, suddenly, Guilbert scored with Villa's first real attack, beating Ben



Chilwell to a cross by El Ghazi at the back post to poke home from close range.

That shocked Leicester and for a while they lapsed into uncharacteristic raggedness. They were fortunate not to fall further behind before half-time, Ezri Konsa heading against the crossbar after beating Kasper Schmeichel to a free-kick by Grealish.

Rodgers used the break to correct a mistake he said he had made with his initial lineup. He introduced Hamza Choudhury in place of Dennis Praet, who had been chosen to start after Wilfred Ndidi suffered a meniscus injury in training. The Nigerian has been outstanding in midfield for Leicester this season and was sorely missed, which makes it bad news for them that he is expected to be out of action for up to four weeks.

But Choudhury did well after coming on and was integral to securing almost total territorial dominance for Leicester.

"We weren't fast enough with the ball [in the first half],

the biggest problem was our pressing. We were not aggressive enough and that was down to me," said Rodgers. "Wilf got taken out of the game at the last minute and I opted to put in another ball-player. [Choudhury] should have started."

The newcomer added more steel but Leicester still had to summon more fluency and ingenuity to unlock the increasingly resolute Villa. When they did create openings, they would have to show more composure than Youri Tielemans did in the 53rd minute when he wafted a shot high and wide after a slick exchange with James Maddison.

Konsa, Tyrone Mings and Kortney Hause excelled in the heart of Villa's defence, ensuring that Orjan Nyland was not as busy as Leicester's possession suggested he should have been.

But the keeper, who had stood strong to deny Jamie Vardy before Villa took the lead, made a couple of fine saves to foil Maddison. He did a fine job deputising for Heaton, though Villa are still keen to strengthen

their goalkeeping options before the close of the January transfer window, with Milan's Pepe Reina, formerly of Liverpool, close to joining.

Nyland could not be blamed for Iheanacho's equaliser after 74 minutes, which is it not to say Villa were faultless. "It was a farcical goal to give away," said Smith, aghast at a sloppily taken free kick and the ease with which Choudhury nudged Douglas Luiz off the ball near halfway. Choudhury rapidly fed Vardy, who helped it on to Iheanacho, who rammed in a superb shot from just inside the area.

Leicester did their utmost to take a lead to Villa Park. Ricardo Pereira slipped Vardy through on a late counterattack but the striker fired just wide and Nyland saved a header by Caglar Soyuncu at the death.

Though outplayed for the second half, Villa deserved the draw for their resilience and organisation. Smith suggested it gave him optimism for the second leg, not to mention Villa's fight for survival in the Premier League. "We can take an awful lot of confidence and belief away from this game," he said. "To leave here unbeaten when everyone knows how well they have been playing is good for our confidence."

Rodgers, too, saw much that pleased him. "It's a semi-final and you're not going to have everything your own way. We had to be patient and stay calm and keep playing. I thought the players dealt with that really well. They showed a great mentality. It's well balanced. We look forward to the challenge at Villa Park."

Real Kashmir look to get back to winnings ways

SRINAGAR, JAN 9 (PTI): Real Kashmir will look to get back to winning ways when they host Punjab FC in the I-League here on Friday, in front of a partisan crowd that will again brave extremely cold conditions to back their team. Former champions Punjab FC have been practising in the sub-zero temperature for the much-awaited encounter, which will take place at the TRC Turf Ground.

Last season, the team from Punjab refused to travel to Srinagar for their match against Real Kashmir, following the Pulwama terror attack. Speaking before the match, Real Kashmir FC head coach David Robertson said, "Punjab is always a tough team to play against. We know it will be a tough encounter but we are looking forward to it. If we play and work as hard as we have, we can win the game."

"I-League is very competitive and there is no easy game and every team is capable of beating each other so there will be a lot of twists and turns as we move on." Punjab FC are yet to hit top form and coach Yan Law would hope his team begins its quest from the TRC Ground. Yan Law said, "Kashmir is one of the strongest teams at home. The weather, the artificial turf, the size of the pitch, and the fans are all in favour of Real Kashmir."

China believes new virus behind mystery pneumonia outbreak

China believes a mysterious pneumonia outbreak that struck 59 people is caused by a new strain of virus from the same family as SARS, which killed hundreds of people more than a decade ago.

Lead scientist Xu Janguo told the official Xinhua news agency that experts had “preliminarily determined” a new type of coronavirus was behind the outbreak, first confirmed on December 31 in Wuhan, a central Chinese city with a population of over 11 million.

It initially sparked fears of a resurgence of highly contagious Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome, and prompted authorities in Hong Kong -- badly hit by SARS in 2002-2003 -- to take precautions, including stepping up the disinfection of trains and airplanes, and checks of passengers.

China has since ruled out a fresh outbreak of SARS, which killed 349 people in mainland China and another 299 in Hong Kong. “A total of 15 positive results of the new type of coronavirus had been detected” in the lab, through tests on infected blood samples and throat swabs, Xu said.

The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed the preliminary discovery of a new coronavirus in a statement. “Further investigations are also required to determine the source, modes of transmission, extent of infection and countermeasures implemented,” said Gauden Galea, the WHO Representative to China. Wuhan’s health commis-



sion said on Sunday seven of the 59 patients were seriously ill, but none had died. All received treatment in quarantine.

Eight patients have recovered and were discharged from hospital on Wednesday, according to Xinhua. The commission said the infection broke out between December 12 and 29, with some of the patients employed at a city seafood market since closed for disinfection.

No obvious evidence of human-to-human transmission has been reported so far.

Footage from January 1 by state broadcaster CCTV showed an official notice at the market saying it had been closed in light of the “current pneumonia situation in our city”, without providing a date for reopening.

The outbreak comes just a few weeks before China’s busiest annual

travel period, when millions of people take buses, trains and planes for Lunar New Year.

A Chinese transport ministry official said at a briefing that arrangements were made for “disinfection, monitoring and prevention” focusing on areas with large numbers of passengers, including stations and cargo hubs.

Civil aviation and national railway authorities said they had not received any reports of affected patients taking flights or trains, and that they were closely watching the situation.

Wan Xiangdong, chief flight officer of China’s Civil Aviation Administration, said all planes were equipped with emergency medical kits. WHO representative Galea said “people with symptoms of pneumonia and reported travel history to Wu-

han have been identified at international airports”. The organisation has not recommended any travel restrictions on China.

- Hong Kong, Taiwan fears -

In Hong Kong, hospitals have raised their alert level to “serious” and stepped up detection measures -- including temperature checkpoints for inbound travellers.

Authorities in the financial hub say 38 people have been hospitalised in recent days after returning from Wuhan and displaying flu-like illnesses, but none were confirmed to have contracted the mystery virus.

Some 21 of the 38 patients had been discharged by Wednesday.

City residents worried about the outbreak have rushed to buy face masks from local pharmacies, with many selling out earlier this week.

Inbound trains and flights from the mainland are undergoing extra cleaning and disinfection, authorities said.

Additional thermal imaging systems have been set up at the city’s airport, while inbound high-speed rail passengers from the mainland face checks by hand-held infrared thermometers.

The coming holiday has prompted concerns in Taiwan, where top officials urged the island’s health and welfare ministry to strengthen quarantine controls at airports.

On Monday, the country’s centre for disease control also advised residents planning to travel to or near Wuhan to wear masks and avoid contact with wild animals. The US embassy in China warned on Tuesday that Americans travelling in the country should avoid animals and contact with sick people.

From exoskeletons to education at CES

Exoskeletons to give wearers super-human strength and games to playfully teach children software skills for coding -- such innovations were on display at the Consumer Electronics Show this week.

Mechanical muscle

A Guardian XO exoskeleton made in a collaboration between Sarcos Robotics and Delta Air Lines let CES goers easily lift a 50-pound (22.7 kilo) suitcase with one hand with “technology fit for a superhero.”

The battery-powered body suit carries its own weight and “handles the heavy lifting” for wearers, according to Delta. Workers wearing the suit may be able to lift up to 200 pounds (90.7 kilos) for as long as eight hours straight without strain or effort, according to Delta, which planned to have baggage handlers test the exoskeleton. Meanwhile, Panasonic touted its own “support robot” exoskeletons that will be used by support crews to tote weights and other heavy equipment for competitors at the coming Paralympics in Tokyo.

Playing at code

My Creativity Box showed off a “Mochi” game that playfully takes children’s eyes off screens while teaching them software coding skills.

Mochi kits let children create a robotic ride for a plush toy bear and command it according to stories in a book.

Subject themes include shapes, colors, animals and numbers.

“My three-year-old daughter and I came up with the idea,” said Creativity Box technology chief Mihran Vardanyan. “It’s a screenless experience, so

kids are not getting addicted to screens, plus they learn about coding and other useful subjects.”

‘Frozen’ software smarts

Aspiring software savants of any age were invited to “enter the magic coding kingdom” with an online learning scheme created in partnership with Disney.

The Disney Codeillusion program freshly launched in the US uses an array of popular Disney film characters to make learning how to write computer code more entertaining.

“For example, with ‘Frozen’ you can learn how to create Elsa’s snow magic,” Life is Tech USA chief executive Satoshi Miyagawa said while demonstrating the teaching tool.

“For ‘Zootopia,’ you create a website to recruit new police officers.”

The online courses were created with school age children in mind, but partner Life is Tech caught on that lots of adults are interested in code and want a fun way to learn the skills.

“We wanted to build a bridge from kids coding to adult coding, and keep learners motivated,” Miyagawa said of the program, which is priced at \$1,900.

- ‘Sound of the future’ -

Oscar winning composer Giorgio Moroder debuted a piece created in a collaboration with FPT Industrial to serve as a sound for silent vehicles, such as electric cars, that are replacing noisy combustion engines.

“And now you know the engine is working,” Moroder exclaimed after a crowd heard his auto-engine composition for the first time.

Grief and mourning after Iran plane crash kills 176

TEHRAN, JAN 9 (AFP)

Be-reaved friends and families joined in mourning after a Ukrainian airliner crashed near Tehran killing all 176 on board, as heartbreaking details started emerging about the victims, most of them from Iran and Canada.

Both Canada and the United States called for a full investigation to determine the cause of Wednesday’s crash, which came shortly after Tehran launched missiles at American troops in Iraq in response to the killing of a top Iranian general.

There was no immediate indication that foul play may have caused the Ukraine International Airlines (UIA) plane to go down soon after take-off, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned against speculating on the crash causes.

Search-and-rescue teams combed through the smoking wreckage of the Boeing 737 flight to Kiev, but officials said there was no hope of finding survivors.

Body bags were lined up on the ground, and the passengers’ personal items -- including luggage, clothes, a Santa Claus doll and a boxing glove -- were scattered in the debris. At least 25 of the passengers were under the age of 18, the UIA said.

According to Ukraine, 82 Iranians, 63 Canadians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans and three Britons were on board, as well as 11 Ukrainians -- including nine crew. About 30 came from the Iranian community around Edmonton, capital of Alberta province in western Canada, where resident Payman Parseyan described the tragedy as “devastating.”

“Every one of our community members was touched in one way or another,” Parseyan told Canada’s national broadcaster CBC.

Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khome-

nei offered his “sincere condolences” to the bereaved families.

The head of Iran’s civil aviation organisation, Ali Abedzadeh, said Iran would cooperate with Ukraine, but not send the black boxes to the US, with which it has no diplomatic relations.

Without naming Iran directly, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement calling for “complete cooperation with any investigation into the cause of the crash.” According to aviation experts, only a handful of countries are capable of analysing black boxes -- notably Britain, France, Germany and the United States.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his government would ensure a “thorough investigation” and that “Canadians’ questions are answered”.

The country is home to a large Iranian diaspora, and UIA offers relatively inexpensive flights between Toronto and Tehran, with a layover in Kiev.

“About an hour ago, a Ukrainian Airlines plane just landed in Toronto from Kiev,” Trudeau said at a press conference. “According to the airline, there were 138 passengers who weren’t on that flight because they died in the crash on the earlier leg of their travel.” The Edmonton victims included a couple of university professors and their two young girls, aged 9 and 14.

“Many of these people were international students,” said Parseyan. “They worked tirelessly to get to where they were, all to lose it like this.” Siavash Ghafouri-Azar, 35, and Sara Mamani, 36, were coming home from their wedding in Iran, according to The Globe and Mail newspaper.

Hamed Esmaeilion, an Iranian-born dentist, told the paper he had been due to pick up his wife and nine-year-old

daughter from the Toronto airport.

Instead he was heading to Tehran in search of answers after both perished in the crash.

“I have to go. I’m alone here,” he said.

UIA, the ex-Soviet country’s privately owned main carrier, said flight PS752 took off from Tehran airport at 6:10 am (0240 GMT) and disappeared from radars minutes later.

It slammed into farmland at Khalaj Abad, in Shahrriar county, about 45 kilometres (just under 30 miles) northwest of the airport, Iranian state media said. A video aired by Iran’s state broadcaster appeared to show the plane already on fire as it fell.

The airline said the Boeing 737 had been built in 2016 and checked only two days before the accident. It was UIA’s first fatal crash.

“The plane was in working order,” company president Yevgeniy Dykhne told a briefing in Kiev where he choked back tears. “It was one of our best planes with a wonderful crew.” UIA vice president Igor Sosnovskiy likewise said chances of a crew error were “minimal”. Dozens of people gathered in the departure hall at Boryspil airport outside Kiev to pay their respects to the crew, five men and four women.

“There is a lot of speculation at the moment it has been shot down -- I think that is not going to be the case at all,” said Stephen Wright, a professor of aircraft systems at Tampere University in Finland.

“It could be a bomb or it could be some sort of catastrophic breakup of the aircraft.” Trudeau said he was unable to rule out foul play, but added: “It’s dangerous to speculate on possible causes.” Canadian Transport Minister Marc Garneau said the flight’s takeoff was normal.

Climate change threatens Afghanistan’s crumbling heritage

BAMIYAN (AFGHANISTAN), JAN 9 (AFP): After bearing the brunt of jihadist dynamite and looting by thieves, the archaeological treasures of Afghanistan’s Bamiyan province are facing a new and possibly more daunting threat: climate change.

Nestled in the heart of the Hindu Kush mountains, the Bamiyan valley’s picturesque cliffs -- where centuries-old Buddha statues were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 -- still contain a network of caves housing temples, monasteries, and Buddhist paintings.

The valley is also home to the silk-road era Shahr-e Gholghola fortress and the Shar-e Zohak citadel to the east.

Experts say that a pattern of dry spells followed by heavy rain, and larger than usual spring snowmelts is putting this historic art and architecture at risk of destruction.

Afghan officials warned in a 2016 United Nations report that the structures “may collapse and suffer from severe erosion” due to conditions directly linked to climate change.

“The erosion processes are much faster, the rains more devastating and the wind erosion stronger, which has an extremely harsh impact on the sites,” Philippe Marquis, the director of the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan, told AFP.

Marquis -- who has explored and worked in the region for decades -- explains that Afghanistan “is very fragile geologically, especially as vegetation cover has greatly diminished” due to deforestation.

French imaging company Iconem concurred, saying Shar-e Zohak is “very fragile” due to erosion that has increased considerably over the last 30 years.

For Baqe Ghulami, 21, who hails from Saikhand district in northern Bamiyan, climate change has long been a reality residents have had to confront. “The weather is changing, now summers are warmer and winters colder,” he says, while overlooking the empty spaces where the two towering Buddha statues once stood.

Many of the artefacts pre-date the arrival of Islam to the region but despite the fact they come from another religion, the residents who spoke with AFP proudly defended the area’s history as their own.



From the empty caves, visitors can see the Cultural Center, which began construction in 2015 but has yet to be completed.

It aims to educate visitors about the urgent need to preserve the area’s heritage.

“There is no benefit if people just see (the sites) without information,” says Ali Reza Mushfiq, 26, director of the Department of Archeology at Bamiyan University, complaining that a dearth of funding has left many in the dark -- including his own students who lack access to books.

The archaeologist readily admits that “erosion is increasing”, but believes the real danger comes from “human influence at the site”, including looters, who are rampant in Afghanistan.

The Shar-e Gholghola Fortress and other key sites are now guarded to protect against such issues.

The removal of landmines from the area has seen thousands visit in recent years, but the influx of recent visitors has done little to change the reality on the ground.

“We must start training... (the) local people to teach them how not to destroy the site,” says Mushfiq, adding that some residents continue to store feed and house live-

stock in the historic sites. A stone’s throw from the cave of the great Buddha, Ammanullah, 37, says he and his family have moved into one of the caves, building a home inside made of odds and ends with plastic sheets for windows. He is not alone, many other poor families have sought shelter next to ancient artefacts and structures.

“There are 18 families here... we didn’t have other options,” says Ammanullah.

“We would go if we were given a house.” For Marquis, however, the greatest threat does not come from local residents encroaching on the site or from theft.

“Even if it is dramatic, it is much less damaging than the destruction caused by erosion,” he said.

Mitigating the impacts of erosion and the effects of climate change would cost billions of dollars in Afghanistan, but the war-torn country has little ability to shoulder such a burden.

The Global Adaptation Initiative, run by the University of Notre Dame in the US, currently ranks Afghanistan 173 out of the 181 countries it scored in terms of a nation’s vulnerability to climate change and its ability to adapt.



SHINE BRIGHT! The Marvelous Mrs Maisel star, Rachel Brosnahan glows in a lime green dress at Jimmy Kimmel Live! in Los Angeles.

‘Modern Family’ sets April date for series finale

LOS ANGELES, JAN 9 (PTI): The series finale of ABC Network’s long-running show “Modern Family” will air on April 8. The popular family comedy, created by Christopher Lloyd and Steven Levitan, is currently in its 11th and final season, reported Entertainment Weekly. The network will also allow fans to program an entire night of the show’s episodes on March 11.

After the pilot debuts, ABC will broadcast five additional episodes chosen by fans. Voting for the episodes begins from February 3 via a daily Twitter poll from the show’s Twitter handle and end on February 7. “Modern Family”, which first air in September 2009, revolves around an extended family of the Pritchetts, Dunphys and Tuckers.

The ensemble cast includes Ed O’Neill, Sofia Vergara, Julie Bowen, Ty Burrell, Jesse Ty-

ler Ferguson, Eric Stonestreet, Sarah Hyland, Ariel Winter, Nolan Gould, Rico Rodriguez, Aubrey Anderson-Emmons and Jeremy Maguire. Jordan Peele, Elizabeth Banks, Ed Norton, Courteney Cox, and David Beckham



will guest star in the final season. “Modern Family” has won a total of 22 Emmy awards, including five for best comedy series in row from 2010-2014.

‘Panipat’ tax free in Maharashtra

Mumbai, Jan 9 (PTI): Period drama “Panipat, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, will be tax free in Maharashtra, the makers of the film announced on Thursday.

Featuring Arjun Kapoor, Sanjay Dutt and Kriti Sanon, the film which is based on the third battle of Panipat that took place in 1761, released on December 6, 2019.

According to a statement from Reliance Entertainment, “‘Panipat’ is now tax free in Maharashtra.”

Gowariker took to Twitter to thank the state government for its decision.

“Heartfelt Gratitude! Thank you Hon’ble CM @OfficeofUT ji for imparting TAX FREE status in our attempt of bringing the Maratha Glory to the screen through #Panipat!” the filmmaker wrote.

“Panipat” was produced by Sunita Gowariker and Rohit Shelatkar’s company Vision World.

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Chhapaak Makers Asked By Delhi Court To Name Lawyer In Credits



The makers of Deepika Padukone-starrer Chhapaak were today asked by a Delhi court to name lawyer Aparna Bhat in the film credits. “Her name should be recognised,” the court said on a petition by Ms Bhat who had represented acid attack survivor Laxmi Agarwal on whose life the film is based. The court, though, refused her request to put on hold the film’s release, scheduled for tomorrow.

In her petition to the court today, Aparna Bhat had said that despite representing Laxmi Agarwal in court for several years and helping in the making of Chhapaak, she had not been not given due credit in the film. She said the makers took her help in writing and shooting of the film, but did not give her credit.

“...it is necessary that her contribution be acknowledged by providing on the slide on the actual footage and the images, the line “Aparna Bhat continues to fight the cases of sexual and physical violence against women” during the screening of the film.

“The said line on screen may be with a rider that the same is with the court order,” Additional Civil Judge Pankaj Sharma said.

On Wednesday, Aparna Bhat wrote in a Facebook post: “Have never been the one

to demand attention to my work. Deeply disturbed by the turn of events post watching Chhapaak. Compelled to take legal action to protect my identity and preserve my integrity. I represented Laxmi in her criminal trial in Patiala House Courts... tomorrow someone will represent me in my cause... Ironies of life.”

After many posted comments supporting her, the lawyer, in a separate post, wrote: “I thank all my friends who endorsed my contribution and challenged team Chhapaak in failing to say even ‘Thank you!’ I cannot match the powers of these mighty producers of Bollywood but keeping quiet will further endorse injustice. I have decided to take my cause to the next level. Ready to face the consequences.”

Deepika Padukone, who is also the co-producer of Chhapaak, has called the film a “story of the human spirit and hope”. “Beyond the gruesomeness, the violence and all of that, there is a story of the human spirit and hope. That’s why we’re telling the story,” the 34-year-old actor had told news agency PTI. The film, directed by Meghna Gulzar, also stars Vikrant Massey.

Justin Bieber diagnosed with Lyme disease

LOS ANGELES, JAN 9 (PTI): Singer Justin Bieber has revealed he was recently diagnosed with Lyme disease and a “serious case” of chronic mono, something he said, will be explored further in his upcoming docuseries.

The singer, who was on a hiatus for five years, confirmed the news on Wednesday on Instagram, where he shared a photo of an article about his health.

Justin, 25, called out trolls for jumping the gun about how he “looks” these days.

“While a lot of people kept saying Justin Bieber looks like sh**, on meth etc. they failed to realise I’ve been recently diagnosed with Lyme disease, not only that but had a serious case of chronic mono which affected my, skin, brain function, energy, and overall health,” he wrote in the picture’s caption.

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection, which leads to redness on the skin in addition to fever, headache and tiredness.

“These things will be explained further in a docu series I’m putting on YouTube shortly... you can learn all that I’ve been battling and OVERCOMING!”

the singer added.

The Grammy winner said though it has been a “rough couple years” but he was getting the right treatment that will help treat “this so far incurable disease”.

“... And I will be back and better than ever NO CAP,” he added.

Justin’s wife, model Hailey Bieber called out trolls downplaying the “severity” of the disease without researching the subject.

“Making fun of and belittling a disease you don’t understand is never the way, all it takes is educating yourself,” Hailey wrote on Twitter.

She also thanked models Yolanda Hadid, Bella Hadid and Gigi Hadid for “bringing me so much clarity and information on Lyme disease and for helping answer my questions about course of action, symptoms etc.”

Hailey also thanked singer Avril Lavigne for educating people about the disease.

Yolanda, Bella and Avril have Lyme disease.

Other Hollywood names who have gone public about battling the disease include singer Shania Twain, and actors Alec Baldwin and Ben Stiller.

Oscars to go hostless again for 2020 ceremony



LOS ANGELES, JAN 9 (PTI): It’s official. The 92nd Academy Awards ceremony will go without a host once again.

The Oscars will broadcast on ABC as part of its long-term deal with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science (AMPAS).

According to The Hollywood Reporter, ABC entertainment president Karey Burke made the announcement on Wednesday.

“Let me confirm it now, together with the Academy, that there will be no traditional host this year,” Burke said, emphasising the ceremony would repeat what

worked last year.

The development comes three weeks after reports that the AMPAS was contemplating about whether or not to go hostless for a second consecutive year.

In 2019, the Academy went without a host after controversy around actor-comic Kevin Hart’s past homophobic remarks resulted in him stepping down.

Different set of Hollywood names presented different categories, resulting telecast received strong reviews and solid ratings. The award ceremony will air exactly in a month on February 9.

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ARIES: You are not defined by where you come from, where you grew up or where you choose to live now. What a wonderful feeling to be able to step out of the matrix and see yourself in a brand new light! This is a period of metamorphosis for you, Aries, and it is redefining your relationship with the world. For some, this may be a time of entering into a new relationship or having a conversation about commitment.

Tip: Step into your light.

TAURUS: Don’t take things personally, Taurus. It is about them and not you. However, if the silence is deafening, speak up. Hold space for an open and honest conversation. This is the only way to look at the situation in an objective manner. A good way to centre your energy before you approach them is by going into your sacred space.

Tip: Make decisions in alignment with your higher self.

GEMINI: What if the love you seek has been in front you all along? We’re talking about the ‘beloved within’ this time around. We are, however, propagating that Cupid’s

arrow rarely misses its mark. You don’t have to go on a date if you are not ready yet. But who says you can’t flirt with them in the meantime?

Tip: Cupid’s got his eyes on you.

CANCER: If you grew up in a society that shamed you for your feelings and validated you on the basis of ‘acceptable’ behaviour, chances are you learned to suppress your most authentic self. But there is no reason for you to play out the old narrative or operate from a space of fear, guilt or shame. This chapter of your life requires you to confront the dark parts in order to liberate yourself from them.

Tip: Clean slate.

LEO: This right here, right now is your best life, Leo. A reminder that you are a master manifestor who has consciously created their reality. Knowing that you possess the gift should make you strive for a better life. So get witchy with your hopes and dreams. Aligning your intentions with supporting beliefs and inspired actions will help you move to the next step.

Tip: It’s time to take inspired action.

VIRGO: You may find yourself spending more time in your sacred space this week surrounded by the people who remind you of the true meaning of unconditional love. Home is where the heart is, Virgo! For some of you, this may be a time of relationship milestones. Ready to put a ring on it? Both your families and the Universe support this venture.

Tip: Ready to move in together?

LIBRA: It’s easy to connect on a physical level. A relationship that satisfies you emotionally and spiritually as well? Now that’s rare. Go after your heart’s desires, Libra. Express your love and tell them how much you want to be together. The Universe is in the mood to help you manifest miracles. Remember, the idea of two halves completing each other is a myth.

Tip: Manifest miracles.

SCORPIO: If there’s one thing your experiences have taught you, it’s that we live in a benevolent Universe. Open yourself to help and support, Scorpio. Trust that it will come to you in the most unexpected ways. You are moving to a better place, and so are your re-

lationships. For some of you, this may be a time of celebrating a relationship milestone. Sit back, relax and let your soul crew take care of things from hereon.

Tip: A celebration may be on the cards.

SAGITTARIUS: The Universe is giving you a gold star for confronting your darkest fears and opening yourself to love again. The process has been anything but easy. You pushed through and got to the other side anyway. Know that you are allowed to be both strong and vulnerable at the same time. For some of you, this may be a time of admitting your feelings to the one or going down the commitment route.

Tip: The cards speak of inner transformation.

CAPRICORN: Who says being different is a bad thing? They say opposites attract for a reason. It is your willingness to make things work that will help you build a solid foundation. Keep in mind that the initial stages are the most important, and will set the stage for what is yet to come. Some of you may be thinking about investing in property together or building the home of your dreams. Consider this as

your green flag from the Universe.

Tip: Build a strong foundation.

AQUARIUS: Sometimes everything is perfect on paper, but your heart is just not in it. Their traditional views could be adding to the dilemma you are facing at this moment. Don’t second guess yourself, Aquarius. You always know what’s good for you and what isn’t. Some of you may be at odds with your partner or a loved one. You don’t have to agree with what they say, but you can be tolerant of their views.

Tip: You may find that you view the world around you differently.

PISCES: They’re not psychic, even though you’d really like them to be. Don’t let your expectations become the cause of unrest. This chapter of your life calls for conscious communication. Those experiencing pain and heartbreak are being asked to listen to their heads rather than their hearts. Draw boundaries wherever necessary. While you’re at it, be sure to take the trash out.

Tip: The need for setting boundaries is stronger than ever before.