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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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*Child rights
body asks states
to stop sale of
Johnson's baby
shampoo*

NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI): The apex child rights body has asked all states to stop sale of Johnson's baby shampoo after its sample was found to be of substandard quality in a lab test.

In a letter to chief secretaries of all states, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights or NCPCR ordered stoppage of sale of Johnson's baby shampoo and also removing the product from stock of shops after Drug Testing Laboratory, Jaipur declared it of substandard quality as presence of formaldehyde was confirmed in it.

The apex child rights body had sought sample test reports of Johnson's baby shampoo and talcum powder from authorities of five states -- Andhra Pradesh (south), Jharkhand (east), Rajasthan (west), Madhya Pradesh (central) and Assam (northeast) -- after reports of presence of asbestos and carcinogenic substance in them emerged.

The order to stop sale was issued after test reports of the baby shampoo sample from Rajasthan came in. It is yet to receive the test reports from the other four states.

It has asked the Drug Control Officer of Rajasthan to send the test report of the talcum powder at the earliest.

*Air India's
operations hit
globally due
to technical
glitch: official*

NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI): Hundreds of Air India passengers were left stranded at several airports across the world due to a glitch in its check-in software, the airline said Saturday.

The airline's "server is down", an official said. "SITA server is down. Due to which flight operation is affected. Our technical teams are on work and soon system may be recovered," the airline's spokesperson said.

Air India's software solution is managed by SITA, a global airlines IT services major, which provides its check-in, boarding and baggage tracking technology.

According to an Air India official, the server was down since around 3 AM Saturday morning due to which the airline is unable to issue boarding passes to passengers at airports across the world. Many passengers complained on social media about being stranded at airports.

A similar incident took place on June 23 last year when a technical glitch in the airline's check-in software delayed 25 of its flights across India.

SIKKIM UNIV HOSTS FIRST REGIONAL SERIES EASTERN HIMALAYAN NATURENOMICS FORUM 2019

Inter-disciplinary discussions focus on Lepcha lore, strengths and challenges

REBYNA RANA

GANGTOK, 27 APR:

Sikkim University today hosted the first regional series of Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum 2019 at the Barad Sadan conference hall here at 6th Mile. The primary theme of the forum was, "Community, Conservation & Livelihoods: The Lepcha Community."

Many speakers from diverse fields shared their thoughts on the topic at the Forum moderated by HOD, Sociology Department, Sikkim University, Dr Sandhya Thapa. The inaugural session focused on the Lepcha history, tradition, folklore, connection with nature, challenges and threats.

Dawa Lepcha spoke about the roots of the Lepcha community, their indigenous knowledge and practices and their means of livelihoods while Gacho Lepcha pro-

vided an insight on the mountain community's closeness with nature.

The second session of the Forum engaged in a cross-vertical dialogue and explored how experts from different fields can contribute to the cause of the Lepcha community and generate wider awareness.

Speakers in this session included Assistant Professor, Dr Sunayana Sarkar, Structural Geology and Geotectonic, NMIMS University, Mumbai; Filmmaker Minket Lepcha; Mountaineer and Adventurer, Anindya Mukherjee and Tom Tshering Lepcha from the Department of Social Justice & Welfare. The session was moderated by the Head of the Department, Dr Satyadeep S Chhetri, Department of Chemistry, NBBDC, Tadong.

The session flagged important issues and



gaps that need to be addressed in Dzongu and issues facing the with Lepcha community.

The idea is to work together to find solutions to the challenges and implement a sustainable future for the mountain community. The session

ended with Minket Lepcha stating, "If roots had boundaries, would trees ever bear fruit".

Shedding light on the importance of keeping the mountains free from plastic pollution, Neela Mazumdar from Earth Day Network-India

launched the Great Global Cleanup in the mountains campaign to spread awareness on removing billions of pieces of trash from our neighbourhoods.

The launch of the campaign was followed by screening of the acclaimed documentary film, 'Voices

of Teesta', directed by Ms Minket Lepcha.

The idea behind organizing the Regional Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum was to understand the conservation story, provide exposure to the community's heroes and iden-

tify the most pressing needs and solutions for the challenges faced by mountain communities and use the outcomes as a launch-pad to start discussing possible solutions.

The regional forum is part of the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum considered Eastern Himalaya's largest forum for building prosperous communities in Asia and has been organized every year in Guwahati since 2013.

The Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum was launched in 2013 to find solutions leading to important lessons for the communities and others, at all levels, from local to global.

Starting the dialogue with Asian Elephant Conservation to exploring the crucial role of rural communities in the Eastern Himalayas and supporting rural economies and

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Wandering Souls invite book and cash donations for library initiative



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 APR:

Wandering Souls of Sikkim today announced plans to move ahead with its library initiative by installing its second Library Reading Corner at Government Senior Secondary School, Maming, East Sikkim soon.

"This is in line with our objective of laying a foundation for better future. Therefore, we request everyone to support our initiative by contributing either books (old/new), magazines or cash and help us install a resourceful

corner of knowledge for the young minds," WSOS conveys through a press release issued today.

"Old books and magazines lying in your store-rooms, covered with dust can turn out to be a motivation to read books for many students studying in the village school; and the cash that you contribute shall be used for purchasing book shelves and other essential materials for the library. Therefore, we request anyone interested in contributing for the initiative to kindly contact us at 7908696173," it adds.

Stakeholders sensitized on POCSO and Juvenile Justice Acts

MANGAN, 27 APR [IPR]: A

two-day block level sensitization programme on Protection of Child from Sexual Offence (POCSO) Act, 2012 and Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015 for stakeholders comprising of Anganwadi Workers, Accredited Social Health Activist and personnel appointed under the One Family One Job scheme concluded today.

The programme which was held at the Dzongu and Chunthang Block Administrative Centres by the District Child Protection Unit, North, to build cooperation among stakeholders in the field of child protection and to make them aware on the Acts related to children and child protection mechanisms under Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), Social Justice,



Empowerment and Welfare Department.

The District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), North, Wendy M Lepcha, explained the types of sexual offenses punishable under POCSO Act and provisions for child friendly judicial processes.

She also informed that any person who

fears that an offence under POCSO Act is likely to be committed or has knowledge of such an offence having been committed, s/he is required to provide the information to the Special Juvenile Police Unit or the local police.

She also spoke about the toll free 24/7 Child

helpline number 1098 and for any assistance in child protection related issues or inform the office of the District Child Protection Unit, North at Mangan Nagar Panchayat.

She also requested the AWWs to sensitise the children about good touch, bad touch and

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*AAP leader
files complaint
against Modi
for exceeding
Rs 70-lakh limit
on Varanasi
roadshow*

NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI): Senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh has filed a complaint with the Election Commission (EC) against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for allegedly exceeding the expenditure limit of Rs 70 lakh for his roadshow in Varanasi.

Modi is the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) candidate in Varanasi in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

In a letter to the election officer of Varanasi, Singh has claimed that a total expenditure of Rs 1.27 crore was incurred to take out the roadshow on Thursday. He has also given the break-up.

"The expenses incurred on the private jets used by various BJP

turn to pg02

Campaigning ends for fourth phase polling in five Bihar LS seats

PATNA, APRIL 27 (PTI): Campaigning ended on Saturday for the five Bihar Lok Sabha seats of Begusarai, Munger, Ujiyarpur, Samastipur and Darbhanga which go to the polls in the fourth phase on April 29.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a rally at Darbhanga where he defended his use of national security as a poll plank and came down heavily on the reluctance of local RJD candidate Abdul Bari Siddiqui, whom he did not mention by name, to recite the national song Vande Mataram.

Currently held by Kirti Azad, who has now joined Congress and is contesting from Dhanbad in neighboring Jharkhand, Darbhanga is being contested by

former BJP MLA Gopalji Thakur.

Congress president Rahul Gandhi shared the stage with RJD heir apparent Tejashwi Yadav at a rally in Samastipur ending speculations of discord between the two alliance partners. At Samastipur Congress candidate Ashok Kumar is pitted against sitting MP Ram Chandra Paswan, who is the younger brother of Lok Janshakti Party chief Ram Vilas Paswan.

The rally was also attended by RLSP chief Upendra Kushwaha, who is in the fray from adjoining Ujiyarpur currently held by state BJP chief Nityanand Rai. BJP president Amit Shah also held rallies at Ujiyarpur, Begusarai and Munger the last

being the only seat in the fourth phase which is being contested by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar JD(U). The cynosure of all eyes in this phase, however, is the Begusarai seat which will witness an electrifying contest between the political Left and the Right with CPI debutant Kanhaiya Kumar taking on fire-brand BJP leader Giriraj Singh.

Lying vacant since the death of sitting MP Bhola Singh a few months ago, Begusarai also has RJDs Tanveer Hassan, who had finished runner up five years ago in the fray.

While the campaign of Singh, a union minister, who has moved from Nawada, was marked by his own hyper-na-

tionalistic speeches which have drawn the ire of opposition parties, it is the Left underdog whose canvassing brought national spotlight on the mofussil town.

Seeking to erase the stigma of a sedition case through a political mandate, the former JNU students union president has tirelessly carried out a door-to-door campaign besides holding countless small to medium-sized meetings in which he sought to underscore his humble roots by speaking in the local dialect and position himself as one conversant with politics at all levels from local to international.

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Summit Times in Nepali

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Entrepreneurship Awareness Workshop and Business Hackathon begins



SUMMIT REPORT

Gangtok, 27 Apr:

The two-day 'Entrepreneurship Awareness Workshop and Business Hackathon' organized by AIC- SMU Technology Business Incubation Foundation under the aegis of NITI AAYOG, Govt. of India and Atal Innovation Mission kick started today at SMIT, a press release informs. The inaugural ceremony

was attended by Director SMIT, Prof (Dr) Ashis Sharma, CEO AIC- SMUTBIF, Prof (Dr) Tejbanta S Chingtham along with other dignitaries and faculty from different colleges and schools.

With around 60 participants from 3 colleges and 8 schools from around the nation, the event is not only aimed at providing an inspiration to the ambitious participants

to consider entrepreneurship as a future plan, but also providing a stage to the budding entrepreneurs to present their ideas and interact with successful entrepreneurs.

Prof Chingtham, CEO-SMIUTBIF, formally welcomed all the dignitaries, guests and participants. Dr Bikash Sharma explained about the structure of SMUTBI and highlighted the im-

portance of this event. He further added that the support of NITI AAYOG, GoI and AIM has been immense in promoting and encouraging young entrepreneurs for start-ups.

Prof (Dr) Ashis Sharma, Director SMIT, in his address encouraged everyone to learn from the failures and focus on being better by not repeating the mistakes. He further inspired every-

one to participate in the Hackathon and make the event a success.

CEO, Sumit Thakur, Untapped Technologies, one of the start-ups incubated by SMUTBI, discussed the need of the younger generation to come up with solutions to the day-to-day problems.

Later in the day, Founder, Karma Bhutia, iShippo, Demi, MeGoYo, Niko, as the keynote speaker for one of the sessions shared his experiences and encouraged the young minds. In the fun-filled interactive session by the veteran entrepreneur, he started his presentation by answering what it takes to be an entrepreneur. He highlighted on the importance of 'working together' to develop a solution for a problem. Taking real life examples, he then, shifted to talking about 'Empathy in AI'.

The day ended with teams being formed for the Hackathon and discussing solutions.

Workshop on Open Source Technologies at Rhenock College



SUMMIT REPORT

Gangtok, 27 Apr:

Department of Computer Science, Government College Rhenock conducted one day workshop on "Open Source Technologies" on 24 Apr, 2019. The objective of the workshop was to acquaint students about the importance of open source software and technologies, their increasing importance and relevance in the fields of education, learning, business, communication and tele-medication and other areas, a press release informs.

The resource persons for the programme were Assistant Professors, Sunil Dhimal and Bishal Pradhan, Sikkim Manipal Institute of Technology, Majitar.

In her inaugural address, Principal, Dr Iyat-ta M Uprety, welcomed the distinguished guests on behalf of the entire college fraternity and also expressed profound gratitude to Human Resource Development Department, Government of Sikkim, for their continued support in conducting such educational workshops.

She urged the student community to take ad-

vantage of modern day means of technology and advised them to use them judiciously. Talking about technology she further informed the gathering that the college library would soon be connected to INFLIBNET centre, thus modernizing the library like never before.

In his address to the students, Mr Dhimal talked in detail about Open Source Technology and how students as well as teaching community can reap benefits by using such technology. He elaborated on the link between technology and society that the development of technology in each stage of history has shaped our social behavior along with changing our social perspective.

He motivated the students not to be addicted to mobile phones as he explained the psychological, social and medical side effects of technological addiction and over use. Concepts like Digital Inequality, Attention Economics, Coding, Privacy and Computer Programming were the other areas that he covered in his speech.

Similarly the second resource person, Mr

Pradhan talked at length about how Open Source Technology and Software is transforming the modern world. From disaster management software, remote sensing, geographic system, ad-supported businesses everything is now based on Open Source Technology and one cannot move ahead in its venture without welcoming the use and adoption these open source technologies.

He further highlighted the transformative role open source is playing in the field of education, especially higher education. With the availability of cloud based e-learning platform like Coursera, Udemy, Unacademy, etc, students can now enroll themselves in any course online and avail the best opportunity to learn from reputed global universities through online mode, he added.

The programme concluded with vote of thanks by Yogesh Neopaney, Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Computer Science.

Inter-disciplinary...

livelihoods, six years of Eastern Himalayan Nature-nomics Forum has led to participation from over 20+ countries, 2000+ speakers and participants from multi-disciplinary fields and recognized 80+ Balipara Foundation Social Recognition Awardees.

The Sikkim Chapter was organized in association with the Sociology Department of Sikkim University and the regional chapter plans to travel to different parts of the Eastern Himalayas and organize community-specific discussions.

AAP leader files...

leaders to reach Varanasi were Rs 64 lakh. Over 100 BJP leaders took commercial flights to reach Varanasi at a cost of Rs 15 lakh. The hotel expenses were around Rs 8 lakh, while the expenditure on vehicles was Rs 6 lakh," Singh has said in the letter.

Besides, Rs 5 lakh were spent on food, Rs 5 lakh on poll accessories, Rs 2 lakh each on social media campaign, sound system and stage, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader has claimed.

He has also mentioned that Rs 20 lakh were spent to ferry BJP workers by train.

Singh has alleged that the total expenditure crossed the limit of Rs 70 lakh set by the EC for a road-show and sought action against Modi.

Stakeholders sensitized...

alerted the ASHA workers to report on any illegal adoption/ transaction of new born children from the hospitals as adoption has to be as per JJ Act, 2015.

The Chairperson, CWC, Mingma Bhutia, spoke about domestic violence affecting children and the provision of sponsorship, foster care and institutional care that could be availed by such children and other vulnerable children through Child Welfare Committee, North.

The programme was attended by the CDPO, Dzongu, BDO, Dzongu, CDPO, Chungthang and ICDS supervisors. They urged their staff to work towards building a safe environment for the children in the district by being alert citizens.

Campaigning ends...

On the day of filing nominations, supporters from far-off places including Bollywood actress Swara Bhaskar, civil rights activist Teesta Setalwad, dalit MLA from Gujarat Jignesh Mevani and Jammu and Kashmir-based fellow JNU alumnus Shehla Rashid were in Begusarai to canvass in his support.

Others who have toured the riparian district in support of the 32-year-old include Bollywood celebrities Javed Akhtar, Shabana Azmi and Prakash Raj, Swaraj India founder Yogendra Yadav besides top Left leaders like Sitaram Yechury and Sudhakar Reddy.

Yechury also campaigned in Ujiyarpur where his CPI(M) has fielded a candidate.

Renowned motivational speaker and author Shiv Khara campaigned in Beguserai for Giriraj Singh and is expected to do the same for some more NDA candidates in the state.

About 100 writers and poets around Bihar, including Sahitya Akademi winner Arun Kamal and Hindi poets Alok Dhanwa and Khagendra Thakur have issued a joint statement appealing to the people of Beguserai to give the young CPI candidate a chance.

North officials trained on vote counting intricacies



MANGAN, 27 APR (IPR):

Officials tasked with the responsibility of vote counting on 23 May for the three different constituencies of North district - Kabi-Lungchok, Dzongu and Lachen-Mangan - underwent training on the intricacies of vote counting and its processes at the District Administrative Centre conference hall here today.

Kabi SDM, Mahesh Sharma imparted the training.

The officials were trained on how to handle the electronic voting machines, voter verifiable paper audit trail, counting of votes, tabulation and data entry, counting of postal ballots and Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System, declaration of results and

follow up actions, including sealing of EVMs and other after-final results.

The officials were intimated that counting will commence at 8AM and that the counting process will be carried out in the presence of general observers, returning officer and candidates and/or election agents of all political parties contesting in the district.

Rampaging MI eyeing playoff berth against KKR

TAPAN MOHANTA

KOLKATA, APR 27 (PTI): Mumbai Indians will look to seal a playoff berth when they face an out-of-sorts Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League at the Eden Gardens here Sunday.

Skipper Rohit Sharma roared back to form with his first half-century of the IPL as Mumbai Indians crushed MS Dhoni-less Chennai Super Kings by 46 runs, their biggest defeat at home Saturday. One win away from assuring their last-four berth, Mumbai Indians will look forward to take on their 'bunny' Kolkata Knight Riders -- against whom they have an eight-match winning streak in a 18-5 head-to-head record. The last time KKR had won against MI was four years ago.

With three matches left in the league stage, the two teams clash for the first time this season tomorrow, with the return leg slated for May 5.

KKR are in the midst of a six-match losing

streak and seemed to have lost the plot completely. Karthik led from the front with a career-best 97 not out to set a challenging 176 target for Rajasthan Royals here in the last match as they looked to snap their losing streak but their pacers came a cropper and the visitors secured a thrilling three-wicket win.

Starting at elimination, KKR would hope for their batting and bowling to click as a unit with just three matches to go. At the moment nothing is going in favour of the Shah Rukh Khan-owned franchise, something that reminds of their disastrous show in 2009 when the team had lost nine in a row, in a 10-match winless run.

This will be KKR's last home match of the season and the team will look to win it for the fans who have come in huge numbers and packed the stadium in every match.

Mumbai Indians, on

the other hand, will look at captain Rohit to give them a flying start.

Teams (from): Kolkata Knight Riders: Dinesh Karthik (c), Robin Uthappa, Chris Lynn, Shubman Gill, Andre Russell, Carlos Brathwaite, Sunil Narine, Piyush Chawla, Kuldeep Yadav, Nikhil Naik, Joe Denly, Shrikant Mundhe, Nitish Rana, Sandeep Warrier, Prasidh Krishna, Lockie Ferguson, Harry Gurney, Matt Kelly, KC Cariappa and Yarra Prithviraj.

Mumbai Indians: Rohit Sharma (C), Quinton de Kock (WK), Suryakumar Yadav, Yuvraj Singh, Kieron Pollard, Hardik Pandya, Krunal Pandya, Mitchell McClenaghan, Jason Behrendorff, Mayank Markande, Rahul Chahar, Jasprit Bumrah, Anmolpreet Singh, Siddhesh Lad, Ankul Roy, Evin Lewis, Pankaj Jaiswal, Ben Cutting, Ishan Kishan, Aditya Tare, Rasikh Salam, Barinder Sran, Jayant Yadav, Beuran Hendricks.

Match starts 8pm.

TMC denies charges of political match fixing with BJP



KOLKATA, APRIL 27 (PTI): TMC Saturday denied charges of political match fixing with BJP and said that it is the only opposition force which has suffered the most for opposing the saffron party and its policies.

"The allegations are simply baseless. We have been constantly fighting against BJP and RSS in the country and for that we had suffered a lot. But that has not deterred us from fighting against BJP," Trinamool Congress secretary general Partha Chatterjee said.

His comment follows allegations by CPI-M state secretary Surjya Kanta Mishra that TMC and BJP are engaged in political match fixing and word about it has been made public by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself.

Modi during an interview earlier this week had said that TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, who is among his most severe critics, sends him Bengali sweets and kur-

tas, which she chooses personally, every year.

TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee had criticised Modi for going public about the giftS saying he had made a "political issue" of the "courtesy" shown by her.

Mishra had earlier called TMC a "Trojan horse of BJP" in the opposition camp and said both it and BJP are hand in gloves in Bengal and have tried to polarize elections in Bengal.

Banerjee had been trying to bring together the opposition parties to fight the BJP and had organised a united opposition rally in the city in January.

Chatterjee said "The CPI(M) has lost its base in Bengal. The Left leaders and cadres are joining BJP in Bengal on a regular basis. They have sold their flags to BJP, just like they did in Tripura".

BJP along with ally IPFT had ended the 25-year-long rule of the Left Front in Tripura in March 2018.

The senior TMC leader accused Election Commission of not acting impartially and working as per instruction of its "BJP bosses".

"The kind of comment EC special police observer is making is shameful. He is acting as per the orders of his BJP bosses," he said.

Trinamool Congress had last week written to the Chief Election Commissioner urging him to recall or cancel the appointment of Ajay V Nayak as special observer in Bengal in the remaining phases of the Lok Sabha elections for his comments on West Bengal.

Nayak had told newsmen after the second phase of polling that the situation in the state is akin to what it used to be in Bihar 15 years ago and that "everything is not well with democracy in Bengal".

The TMC letter to the EC had alleged that Nayak has political and organisational allegiance to the RSS and BJP leaders.

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Trump tells NRA he's withdrawing from arms trade treaty

INDIANAPOLIS, APR 27 (AP): In a largely symbolic gesture to a group that helped him win the White House, President Donald Trump said Friday he is pulling the US back from an international agreement on the arms trade, telling the National Rifle Association the treaty is "badly misguided."

Trump made the announcement at the NRA's annual convention, where he vowed to fight for gun rights and implored members of the nation's largest pro-gun group struggling to maintain its influence to rally behind his re-election bid.

"It's under assault," he said of the constitutional right to bear arms. "But not while we're here." With pro-gun legislation largely stalled in Congress and few deliverables during Trump's term so far, the president told the group that he would be revoking the United States' status as a signatory of the U.N. Arms Trade Treaty, which regulates the multibillion-dollar global arms trade in conventional weapons, from small arms to battle tanks, combat aircraft

and warships.

President Barack Obama signed the pact, which has long been opposed by the NRA, in 2013. But it has never been ratified by US lawmakers.

"Under my administration, we will never surrender American sovereignty to anyone," Trump said, before signing a document on stage directing the Senate to halt the ratification process.

"We will never allow foreign diplomats to trample on your Second Amendment freedom." "I hope you're happy," he told the group, then appeared surprised by the cheers. "I'm impressed," he said.

"I didn't think too many of you would really know what it is." His move against the treaty came as Trump sought to excite an organization that was pivotal to his victory in 2016 but, three years later, is limping toward the next election divided and diminished.

And it represents just the latest in a series of withdrawals from international pacts and organizations joined by previous administrations, like the Paris climate accord



and the Iran nuclear deal.

Gun activists had denounced the treaty when it was under negotiation as an infringement of civilian firearm ownership, despite the well-enshrined legal principle that says no treaty can override the Constitution or U.S. laws. The treaty is aimed at cracking down on illicit trading in small arms, thereby curbing violence in some of the most troubled corners of the world.

It was the first legally binding treaty to regulate

the international trade in conventional arms and was overwhelmingly approved by the 193-member U.N. General Assembly in April 2013. It has been ratified by 101 countries but key arms exporters including Russia and China and major importers such as India and Egypt have given no indication that they will sign it.

Advocates of tighter gun restrictions and those who had helped negotiate the treaty denounced Trump's deci-

sion Friday.

Kris Brown, president of the Brady organization, said will "only embolden terrorists and other dangerous actors around the world." And Rachel Stohl, managing director of the Stimson Center and a consultant to the treaty negotiations, said: "By turning its back on multilateral diplomacy yet again, the United States is disregarding global norms and allowing nefarious actors to trade weapons with impunity."

Yet Trump's showy rejection of the agreement from the stage has limited effect because it has been unlikely all along that he would send the treaty to the Senate for ratification.

At the United Nations, spokesman Stephane Dujarric called the treaty "a landmark achievement in the efforts to ensure responsibility in international arms transfers" and particularly important at a time of renewed interest in expanding weapons arsenals.

Trump's speech came at a troubled time for the gun rights organization, a one-time Republican kingmaker, which has been grappling with infighting, bleeding money and facing a series of investigations into its operating practices, including allegations that covert Russian agents seeking to influence the 2016 election courted its officials and funneled money through the group.

As Trump landed in Indianapolis, a judge im-

posed an 18-month prison term on gun rights activist Maria Butina, an admitted Russian agent who, according to her plea agreement, worked with a former Russian lawmaker to use their contacts in the NRA to pursue back channels to American conservatives during the 2016 presidential campaign.

While the group had high hopes for easing gun regulations after pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into 2016 campaigns, much of the legislation the group championed has stalled, due, in part, to a series of mass shootings, including the massacre at a Parkland, Florida, high school that left 17 dead.

Adam Winkler, a UCLA law professor and expert on gun policy, allowed that the group had scored some victories under Trump, including the appointment of two Supreme Court justices who may be open to striking down gun laws.

But overall, he said, "On the legislative front, the NRA has been frustrated," with priorities like national reciprocity for conceal carry laws and a repeal of the ban on silencers stalled.

Will expose how Modi govt imposed anti-people decisions on Delhiites: AAP

NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI): The Aam Aadmi Party will start a sector-wise comparison of the central government with that of Arvind Kejriwal-led dispensation on critical issues affecting the everyday life of Delhiites.

Senior AAP leaders and Delhi government ministers on a daily basis will present the factual position of critical sectors before the media, the AAP said.

"AAP will expose how the Modi government imposed anti-people decisions on Delhiites one after the other, which adversely affected the ordinary people," the AAP said in a statement.

"The BJP has already run away from bringing out either its manifesto or vision document for Delhi, since it knows that the residents of Delhi will question it on its past false promises, it said.

AAP leaders will present the factual position on issues like Metro fare hike, MCD's performance, electricity, pollution, GST and demonetisation among others, the party said.

Delhi goes to polls on May 12 in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections and the results would be declared on May 23.

US asks citizens to reconsider travel to Sri Lanka after bombings

By Lalit K Jha
Washington, Apr 27 (PTI): The United States has advised its citizens to reconsider their travel to Sri Lanka in view of the massive Easter Sunday bombings that killed over 250 people including Americans. The State Department raised the travel risk to Level 3 in a travel advisory issued Friday.

The State Department has also ordered the departure of all school-age family members of US government employees in kindergarten through 12th grade. It also authorised the voluntary departure of non-emergency US government employees and family members.

"Terrorist groups continue plotting possible attacks in Sri Lanka. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets, shopping malls, government facilities, hotels, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, parks, major sporting and cultural events, educational institutions, airports, hospitals, and other public areas," the State Department said.

The US government has limited ability to provide emergency services to US citizens in Sri Lanka due to the security environment, it said.

The US has four levels of travel advisories. Level 1 means exercise normal precaution, Level 2 is exercise increased caution, Level 3 is reconsider travel and Level Four advises Americans not to travel at all.

Meanwhile, FBI Director Christopher Wray said that he has sent a team of officials to Sri Lanka to assist in the investigation.

"The FBI has sent personnel over to assist in the investigation, to work with our partners

over there. I do think it's a reminder that the terrorist threat isn't yesterday's news, isn't yesterday's problem, isn't gone," Wray said in response to a question as the Council on Foreign Relations think-tank.

"I sometimes think people in this country and in other parts of the world have started to get maybe a little blas or a little complacent about it. And it's a pretty chilling reminder that the threat is real," he said.

This, Wray said, also shows that folks can radicalise in a virtual way, which is a bigger and bigger problem.

"People talk about ISIS and the fall of the caliphate, absolutely true. On the other hand we, worry very much about what is in effect a virtual caliphate where terrorist organisations can organise in a way that don't require the same kind of physical infrastructure.

"The other thing we see... a problem that people need to be very aware of, is you always hear this phrase about connecting the dots in the terrorist arena, but a lot of the terrorist plots of today are more compact, involving fewer people, less complicated attacks, shorter period of time, which means fewer dots to connect in the first place," the FBI Director said.

"If you add on top of that the different ways in which communication is encrypted and hidden, that makes the dots even fewer. The time in which law enforcement and intelligence community folks can act has compressed. So the professionals sometimes refer to the time from flash to bang. Well, the time from flash to bang has shortened. And that's putting a whole new strain on our collective security," Wray added.

Temple-building spree in Asansol, rivals allege soft Hindutva push by TMC

Pradipta Tapadar
Asansol/Pandaveswar(WB), Apr 27 (PTI): Targeted by the BJP for alleged Muslim appeasement, the Trinamool Congress is on a temple building spree in Asansol and its surrounding areas in what is seen as its soft Hindutva push to counter the saffron party in this communally sensitive belt in south Bengal in Lok Sabha polls. In the sleepy town of Pandaveswar, which was hit by communal riots last year, a Ram temple is being jointly built and maintained by Hindus and Muslims with assistance of local TMC leaders to help "heal the scars" of the communal violence.

Not just Ram temple, seven other Sun temples are being jointly built by people of different communities including Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in various parts of Asansol.

The temple has been built by joint efforts of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs living in the area. This temple reflects the brotherhood in our locality.

"We have been living peacefully for the last several decades except for last year when there was a lot of tension following religious processions, said Abhijit Saha, a resident of the area and community leader.

Senior Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader and Mayor of Asansol Municipal Corporation Jitendra Kumar Tiwari is at the forefront of construction of the temples in his area and has aided in building the Ram temple, which was inaugurated by him on April 23.

Muslims contributed 10,000 bricks, whereas Sikhs and Hindus helped in collecting funds for building the temple. "Our local MLA Jitendra Tiwari has also been active in helping us collecting

funds," Saha said.

In addition to increasing outreach among the majority community members, the TMC's efforts also appear to be guided by its endeavour to endear itself to the migrant Hindi speaking population from Bihar and Jharkhand in the region which has four Lok Sabha constituencies.

Asansol-Durgapur belt has been one of the most politically and communally volatile regions in the state since 2014 Lok Sabha polls, which witnessed a surprise victory of BJP's Babul Supriyo. In March-April last year, Asansol in West Burdwan district witnessed communal riots over Ram Navami celebrations. This Ram temple is a message for the BJP and RSS, which are trying to divide our society in the name of religion. Hindus and Muslims have been living in harmony for decades the BJP has been trying to create a wedge between the two for last few years to serve its own political purpose, Tiwari told PTI.

He, however, dismissed suggestions by rival parties that it was part of the party's soft Hindutva agenda to assuage the perceived anger among the Hindus over the last year's riots.

Hindus account for nearly 70 per cent of the population whereas Muslims are 28 per cent.

But local party leaders, on condition of anonymity, concede the temple building spree is an attempt to reach out to the Hindus.

It is true that a section of Hindus are not very happy with the role of the administration. So we thought of reaching out to them. The BJP has been trying to make an issue out of it to create polarisation in the area, a TMC leader who did not wish to be named said.

The TMC's temple

building exercise is being seen as its bid to check the growth of the BJP, which has made steady inroads in South Bengal region since Supriyo's victory and has consistently accused the Mamata Banerjee Government of trying to appease the Muslims for vote bank politics at the cost of rights of Hindus.

Union minister and BJP candidate from the Asansol Lok Sabha seat Babul Supriyo said the TMC is trying to compensate for the "sins" it committed during the 2018 riots. During the riots, TMC was mute spectators and now they are trying to become the messiah of Hindus by building temples. If they are so keen on making temples why don't they clear their stand on Ram Mandir issue at Ayodhya, he said.

Maulana Imdadul Rashidi, the imam of Noorani mosque in Asansol who lost his 16-year-old son during the riots, appealed for peace and said temples and mosques should not be mixed with politics.

Religion has a separate place in society and politics has a separate place. Both should not be mixed and it can cause a lot of problems. I appeal to everybody to maintain peace in the area, said Rasheedi, who had declared last year that he would move out if anyone retaliated against his son's death.

The Asansol-Durgapur belt and parts of Birbhum and Purulia, which share its border with Jharkhand, is known as the Hindi heartland of Bengal as majority of the population in the area are migrant labourers from Bihar and Jharkhand who work in factories there. The opposition Congress and CPI(M) have alleged that the TMC is "peddling soft Hindutva" to nullify Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) "pro-Hindu" agenda.

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Working Together to Prevent Suicides

If only it was so simple. And maybe it is

As per the World Health Organisation, as many As 8 lakh people commit suicide every year [that's one suicide every 40 seconds around the world] and around 25-times more attempt suicide.

The numbers paint a scary picture and make this a challenge requiring the world's attention. Remember, apart from the 8,00,000 lives lost to avoidable reasons, there are 2 crore others who have tied a noose for themselves or attempted some other form of ending their lives! If their triggers are left unattended, they will be among the statistics of those who 'successfully' self-destructed in the coming years. They are also clearly grappling with serious issues and even if those around them do not notice (or choose to ignore) the suicidal tendencies, they cannot be left untouched by the deep trauma of such conditions.

When one takes this aspect also into consideration, then the impact of suicides and suicidal tendencies multiplies many times over because each victim and person at risk is part of a family, belongs to a circle of friends, goes to school, college or office and touches many lives on a daily basis and no matter how consciously one tries to camouflage the condition, it does get out and affect others; and with every death to a suicide, everyone associated with the person is hit by a sense of guilt at not having intervened in time. Hence, as much for the lives that can be saved through some timely intervention as also to save those left behind from wracking guilt, the theme for World Suicide Prevention Day some year back needs to be taken to heart - 'Working together to prevent suicide.'

What was underlined through this theme was our collective responsibility as a community to look out for those struggling with suicidal thoughts, notice their condition and engage with them in a non-judgmental way, hear them out, offer sound counsel if we can and help them access professional assistance. Suicide is a vexed problem facing Sikkim which is why more people here need to spare a minute to muster the resolve to get engaged.

Studies across the world have borne out that most times, all that it takes to pull a person back from the brink is a gentle word of support, even a gesture conveying that they need not suffer in isolation.

This section has spoken often about how Sikkim is seeking to address the challenge of suicides without having figured out why so many here ending their own lives. That is an important data analysis to undertake and should be done soon, but today, let's also focus on the need to remove the stigma still associated with suicides and suicide attempts, not just on the victims but also on their families. This stigma stops many from seeking help and also denies the community the opportunity to learn and prepare for the challenge. It is important that people who have lived through a suicide attempt to be able to share their experience more widely and teach others about the value of human engagement. Societies which have sought the assistance of survivors to inform the suicide prevention programmes have learned that words and actions of others are important mediums of saving lives. Those who have overcome suicidal tendencies have often spoken movingly about reaching the point where they could see no alternative but to take their own life, and about the days, hours and minutes leading up to this. They often describe realising that they did not want to die but instead wanted someone to intervene and stop them. Many say that they actively sought someone who would sense their despair and ask them whether they were okay. That is where the investment of a minute to notice these signals becomes important. The agencies engaged in addressing the problem of suicides can help by informing people at large about how they should respond and act when they notice someone around them struggling with such dark thoughts, because, let's also accept that most of us do not know how to face such situations. And because we do not know, we choose to ignore.

Joining together is critical to preventing suicide. Preventing suicide requires the efforts of many. It takes family, friends, co-workers, community members, educators, religious leaders, healthcare professionals, political officials and governments. Suicide prevention requires integrative strategies that encompass work at the individual, systems and community level.

Data reveals that in the wake of every suicide, 135 people suffer intense grief or are otherwise affected. Given the number of suicides Sikkim has suffered, it would be safe to vouch that just everyone here has been affected by a death due to suicide. That, in itself, should be reason enough for everyone here to work together to prevent suicides. The theme for this day has been carefully chosen. After all, it highlights the most essential ingredient for effective suicide prevention - collaboration. We all have a role to play and together we can collectively address the challenges presented by suicidal behaviour in society today.



Kathmandu locals are fighting 'injustice' to save their city's heritage, years after deadly earthquake

URMI SENGUPTA
theconversation.com

Four years ago, vast swaths of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, turned to rubble in a matter of minutes. The magnitude 7.8 earthquake, which wrought destruction on the city, was followed by hundreds of aftershocks. Just 17 days later, another magnitude 7.3 temblor felled more buildings and structures, which had stood through the first quake.

The human toll was catastrophic: across Nepal, 9,000 people died and hundreds of thousands more were left destitute, facing extreme poverty. The damage to Nepalese culture was also significant: hundreds of historic buildings, shrines and statues across the capital were reduced to dust.

Four years and hundreds of millions of dollars in donations later, Nepal is slowly recovering. Inevitably, though, a catastrophe of this scale has caused issues for the nation's resource-starved government. Researchers have highlighted that political squabbling and a lack of local or regional governance have slowed reconstruction.

RIISING FROM THE RUBBLE

When a city is damaged beyond recognition, the need to rebuild presents an opportunity to reshape and redraw the physical landscape – to make it stronger and grander than it was before. Catastrophic situations can bring about unexpected transformations, not just in a city's design and architecture, but also in society – creating new identities and opportunities.

Kathmandu has long grappled with the conflict between tradition and modernisation. For most of its history, it has retained its medieval urban culture: Hindu and Buddhist religious practices have long influenced the city's layout and design. But there have always been parallel concerns that the city could be on the cusp of losing its historic character.

Even before the earthquake struck, unbridled and unregulated growth had been undermining the city's historic buildings, draining its natural resources and disrupting the skyline, with tall buildings blocking views.

The city's five major rivers have been reduced to

drainage canals due to development pressure and inconsiderate sewage discharge, while hinterland on the outskirts was rapidly cleared to build houses for those displaced by political conflict over the last two decades.

A CITY ON THE LOOSE

As far back as 1934, much of the historic city was flattened by another strong earthquake. That moment is now regarded as the advent of modernisation, which introduced new buildings, roads and technology to the city. The 2015 earthquake brought many urban issues back into focus, and for a moment, it seemed the city could have been a giant workshop to test solutions to problems – in housing, culture, transport and heritage.

But as before, Kathmandu continues to operate as a city on the loose. From my own observation of the city, it seems that new development continues at almost the same rate as the decade before the earthquake struck. The transport network remains asphyxiated by too many vehicles. And both local and federal efforts to fix the city's urban planning problems and accommodate its growing population remain fixated on creating satellite towns, ignoring the potential of retrofitting historic neighbourhoods.

After they were damaged in the 2015 earthquake, city authorities wanted to demolish and redevelop historic buildings such as Singha Durbar and Bagh Durbar (which date back to 1908 and 1805 respectively) – though they were finally prevented by a supreme court mandate. Ranipokhari (Queen's Pond) at the centre of the city – a crucial cog of the old city's innovative drainage system – has been drained and paved over to make space for shops and cafes. And a central open space called Khula Manch has been turned into a parking lot resembling a dystopian scrap yard.

LOCALS RISE UP

Political conflict is rife and agreements hard to come by. For example, in the absence of any agreement between different public sector agencies (including the municipal government, the National Reconstruction Authority and the Department of Archaeology) about how the city's famous Dhara-hara Tower should be rebuilt, there are plans to build two towers and share the profits generated from construction contracts, to appease any dissent.

How artificial intelligence systems could threaten democracy

STEVEN FELDSTEIN
theconversation.com

U.S. technology giant Microsoft has teamed up with a Chinese military university to develop artificial intelligence systems that could potentially enhance government surveillance and censorship capabilities. Two U.S. senators publicly condemned the partnership, but what the National Defense Technology University of China wants from Microsoft isn't the only concern.

As my research shows, the advent of digital repression is profoundly affecting the relationship between citizen and state. New technologies are arming governments with unprecedented capabilities to monitor, track and surveil individual people. Even governments in democracies with strong traditions of rule of law find themselves tempted to abuse these new abilities.

In states with unaccountable institutions and frequent human rights abuses, AI systems will most likely cause greater damage. China is a prominent example. Its leadership has enthusiastically embraced AI technologies, and has set up the world's most sophisticated surveillance state in Xinjiang province, tracking citizens' daily movements and smartphone use.

Its exploitation of these technologies presents a chilling model for fellow autocrats and poses a direct threat to open democratic societies. Although there's no evidence that other governments have replicated this level of AI surveillance, Chinese companies are actively exporting the same underlying technologies across the world.

INCREASING RELIANCE ON AI TOOLS IN THE US

Artificial intelligence systems are everywhere in the modern world, helping run smartphones, internet search engines, digital voice assistants and Netflix movie queues. Many people fail

to realize how quickly AI is expanding, thanks to ever-increasing amounts of data to be analyzed, improving algorithms and advanced computer chips.

Any time more information becomes available and analysis gets easier, governments are interested – and not just authoritarian ones. In the U.S., for instance, the 1970s saw revelations that government agencies – such as the FBI, CIA and NSA – had set up expansive domestic surveillance networks to monitor and harass civil rights protesters, political activists and Native American groups. These issues haven't gone away: Digital technology today has deepened the ability of even more agencies to conduct even more intrusive surveillance.

For example, U.S. police have eagerly embraced AI technologies. They have begun using software that is meant to predict where crimes will happen to decide where to send officers on patrol. They're also using facial recognition and DNA analysis in criminal investigations. But analyses of these systems show the data on which those systems are trained are often biased, leading to unfair outcomes, such as falsely determining that African Americans are more likely to commit crimes than other groups.

AI SURVEILLANCE AROUND THE WORLD

In authoritarian countries, AI systems can directly abet domestic control and surveillance, helping internal security forces process massive amounts of information – including social media posts, text messages, emails and phone calls – more quickly and efficiently. The police can identify social trends and specific people who might threaten the regime based on the information uncovered by these systems.

For instance, the Chinese government has used AI in wide-scale crackdowns in regions that are home to ethnic minorities within China. Surveillance systems in Xinjiang and Tibet

have been described as "Orwellian." These efforts have included mandatory DNA samples, Wi-Fi network monitoring and widespread facial recognition cameras, all connected to integrated data analysis platforms. With the aid of these systems, Chinese authorities have, according to the U.S. State Department, "arbitrarily detained" between 1 and 2 million people.

My research looks at 90 countries around the world with government types ranging from closed authoritarian to flawed democracies, including Thailand, Turkey, Bangladesh and Kenya. I have found that Chinese companies are exporting AI surveillance technology to at least 54 of these countries. Frequently, this technology is packaged as part of China's flagship Belt and Road Initiative, which is funding an extensive network of roads, railways, energy pipelines and telecommunications networks serving 60% of the world's population and economies that generate 40% of global GDP.

For instance, Chinese companies like Huawei and ZTE are constructing "smart cities" in Pakistan, the Philippines and Kenya, featuring extensive built-in surveillance technology. For example, Huawei has outfitted Bonifacio Global City in the Philippines with high-definition internet-connected cameras that provide "24/7 intelligent security surveillance with data analytics to detect crime and help manage traffic."

Hikvision, Yitu and SenseTime are supplying state-of-the-art facial recognition cameras for use in places like Singapore – which announced the establishment of a surveillance program with 110,000 cameras mounted on lamp posts around the city-state. Zimbabwe is creating a national image database that can be used for facial recognition.

However, selling advanced equipment for profit is different than sharing technology with an express geopolitical purpose. These new capabilities may

The reconstruction continues with little input from local communities, while international powers make their presence felt. Kathmandu's Durbar Square has become a geopolitical playground, with an influx of donor agencies and countries rushing to prove their solidarity.

The renovation of Gaddi Baithak (or "royal seat") has been completed with US support, despite controversy over its slightly altered facade. Likewise, Nau Tale Durbar ("nine-storey palace"), is currently being rebuilt with the help of Chinese investment, and has attracted local ire for lack of transparency.

Many citizens in Kathmandu are more impatient than ever to fix these problems. Yet the reconstruction is often an assault on their personal and collective identities, given that these sites carry significant religious, emotional and cultural value. A great sense of injustice has arisen over the way building contractors have ignored local techniques and values.

For example, the redevelopment of Kasthamandapa – the temple from which the city takes its name – has stalled due to disagreement over construction materials and methods. Kasthamandapa was built with wood from a single tree some 1,000 years ago. A new tree needs to be found and there needs to be a whole new system of extracting timber. It requires the best craftsmen in the country and significant skilled labour.

The lack of assessment of what has been lost has also been a sore point for heritage campaigners. The absence of detailed historical plans for many important structures means reconstruction efforts are based on limited photographic evidence. Campaigners claim that without local input into the rebuilding, the authenticity of the new structures will be undermined.

The government's reconstruction plans are now being challenged by numerous grassroots organisations fighting to save the city's heritage. Post-disaster reconstruction will continue in Kathmandu, even amid social and political upheaval. But while authorities appear insensitive to citizens' concerns, a greater grassroots awareness of local heritage has clearly emerged – and that, at least, should be welcomed.

[the writer is Lecturer in Spatial Planning, Queen's University Belfast]

plant the seeds for global surveillance: As governments become increasingly dependent upon Chinese technology to manage their populations and maintain power, they will face greater pressure to align with China's agenda. But for now it appears that China's primary motive is to dominate the market for new technologies and make lots of money in the process.

AI AND DISINFORMATION

In addition to providing surveillance capabilities that are both sweeping and fine-grained, AI can help repressive governments manipulate available information and spread disinformation. These campaigns can be automated or automation-assisted, and deploy hyper-personalized messages directed at – or against – specific people or groups.

AI also underpins the technology commonly called "deepfake," in which algorithms create realistic video and audio forgeries. Muddying the waters between truth and fiction may become useful in a tight election, when one candidate could create fake videos showing an opponent doing and saying things that never actually happened.

In my view, policymakers in democracies should think carefully about the risks of AI systems to their own societies and to people living under authoritarian regimes around the world. A critical question is how many countries will adopt China's model of digital surveillance. But it's not just authoritarian countries feeling the pull. And it's also not just Chinese companies spreading the technology: Many U.S. companies, Microsoft included, but IBM, Cisco and Thermo Fisher too, have provided sophisticated capabilities to nasty governments. The misuse of AI is not limited to autocratic states.

[the writer is Frank and Bethine Church Chair of Public Affairs & Associate Professor, School of Public Service, Boise State University]

BJP greatest danger for India, like 440 volt: Mamata

PANDUA (WB), APR 27 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee Saturday came down heavily on BJP saying the party was the greatest danger for the country akin to 440 volt.

People should reject BJP and should refrain from casting any vote in favour of the party. "I assure that if Trinamool Congress is voted to power, then there will be no damage to the country," she told a poll rally at Pandua in Hoogly district held in support of Hooghly Lok Sabha Trinamool Congress candidate Ratna De Nag.

"Both BJP and Narendra Modi will destroy the country if voted to power for the second time BJP is the greatest danger for the country, like 440 volt," she said adding that the ongoing election is to remove the BJP government. Many farmers have committed suicide and thousands are left unemployed. Prices of gas, diesel and petrol are rising and people are not getting money from the



banks during the BJP regime, she said and blamed the CPI(M) for helping it.

"Now CPI(M)'s 'harmad' (goons) have become ustadhs (strongmen) of the BJP," Banerjee said and questioned how a party (BJP) which is inclined towards dividing the country in the name of religion can aspire to return to power.

"How can BJP claim that the party belongs to the Hindus? BJP does not

have any respect for Hindu religion. The party under Modi is for creating disturbances like riots in the country," she said.

Banerjee claimed that her TMC has done a lot of developmental work in places of religious worship like Tarakeswar, Gangasagar, Dakshineswar, Tarapith and Kankalitola.

Continuing her attack, the TMC supremo said "BJP will destroy the country. The prime min-

ister has a penchant for lying all the time. Now he is saying people in West Bengal are not sure of returning home and seek assurance from their mothers before leaving. "Is it true?" she asked the gathering who replied with a resounding "No". It is a common practice among Bengalis to seek their elders' permission before leaving home.

Alleging that the saffron party is distributing money among the people

for garnering votes, she said "BJP is a party of illiterates. What can you expect from it?"

Banerjee claimed that the saffron party will not be able to garner even 80 seats in the Lok Sabha polls and in states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Kerala, West Bengal and Odisha it will not get even a single one.

"In some states like Gujarat, Rajasthan votes will be split," she said.

Depression over Bay of Bengal intensifies into cyclonic storm

CHENNAI, APR 27 (PTI): The deep depression over southeast Bay of Bengal has intensified into a cyclonic storm, named 'Fani', the Regional Meteorological Centre said Saturday.

"Deep depression over southeast Bay of Bengal intensified into a cyclonic storm Fani over southeast Bay of Bengal and lay centred at 1130 hrs IST of April 27 about 1190 km southeast of Chennai," a brief message from RMC said.

S Balachandran, Director, Area Cyclone Warning Centre, said 'Fani' was likely to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm in the next 24 hours. The storm has been named 'Fani,'

as suggested by Bangladesh, he said.

It will move north-westwards and reach near north Tamil Nadu and south Andhra Pradesh coasts on April 30.

However, there was "little chance" of the storm crossing the Tamil Nadu coast as of now but the system was being monitored, he said.

Meanwhile, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast light to moderate rainfall at many places with heavy falls at isolated places as very likely over Kerala on April 29 and 30.

It forecast light to moderate rainfall at few places over north coastal

Tamil Nadu and coastal Andhra Pradesh on April 30 and May 1.

Besides squally winds that were very likely to become gale gusting up to a maximum of 145 kmph in the next two days in the Equatorial Indian Ocean and adjoining southwest Bay of Bengal, the sea condition was also rough to very rough in these areas, it said.

IMD advised fishermen not to venture into deep sea areas of Sri Lanka, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and south Andhra Pradesh coasts between April 27 and May 1.

Those who are out in deep sea areas were advised to return to the coast by April 28, it added.

Inside Krishnanagar, the land of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu that resonates with chants of 'Jai Shri Ram'

SOUMYAJIT MAJUMDER KRISHNANAGAR, APR 27 (PTI): The ruling Trinamool Congress is up for a stringent fight in Nadia's Krishnanagar amid a Hindutva upsurge and with national issues taking centre-stage over the local woes.

The BJP is targeting Krishnanagar, the land of 15th century Bengali saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and home to the globally-known ISCKON, banking on its vote share of last Lok Sabha polls and the inroads it made during the rural polls of 2018. It is also one of the few seats in the state that the party has ever won.

During the national elections of 1999, BJP's Satyabrata Mookherjee had bagged the seat in alliance with then newly-born Trinamool Congress. He had then become a minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and also headed the party in the state.

This time the party has fielded former Indian football team captain Kalyan Chaubey, who is looking to wrest the seat from Trinamool Congress, which has held this constituency for the last decade in a region -- south Bengal -- considered a stronghold of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The constituency is witnessing a four-cornered contest this time.

"The BJP's candidate is an outsider. Had they fielded Jalu babu (as Satyabrata Mookherjee is locally known), the seat would have been a cakewalk for them" said a man in his 50s, unwilling to give his name, sipping tea at a roadside stall outside the district collectorate.

Hearing that, another man going through the day's newspaper raised his head and said, "The BJP has given ticket to someone like Pragya Thakur. People now know everything and see

everything. You can't fool them." The Krishnanagar town and surrounding areas have a significant chunk of Christian population with colonial-era churches dotting the roads. However, the district is Hindu dominated with a small portion of Muslim population.

"It's not about Hindus and Muslims, it's about getting rid of the violence that we have witnessed in the last few years. We have voted for the CPI(M) in the past but now feel that only the BJP can stop the Trinamool," said a shopkeeper at the Dhubulia bus stand.

The CPI(M), however, maintains that the BJP is nowhere in competition as all of it is a "creation of the media" and it is only those who can take on the Trinamool Congress.

"It is a myth that the fight is between the Trinamool and the BJP. People have to understand the mock fight between them. You can see the role Mukul Roy is playing, he was number two in Trinamool and now doing the top job in BJP, does this happen in anywhere?" said CPI(M) candidate Shantanu Jha, a professor of agri-sciences, who is fighting the national polls from the seat for the second time.

He said that his party is reaching out to each and every voter with issues like farm woes, unemployment and industrial slowdown due to demonetisation. "We believe in 'think nationally and act locally'. The issues that the rest of the country is facing is also affecting Krishnanagar."

However, BJP's Chaubey is confident that he will be winning the polls as it is only "the BJP who have the ability to stop the Trinamool Congress".

"People want to get rid of the violence perpetrated by the ruling party and only the BJP can do that. It is not a fight between two parties but for

upholding our democratic rights," he said amid chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' as he toured the city on a hoodless car.

As his carcade entered a Muslim-dominated area, men and women came out of their houses to see the BJP candidate and clicked photos with party workers distributing leaflets.

"You can see the enthusiasm about our party here," he said.

The Congress, a marginal player in the district, has fielded Intaj Ali Shah as its candidate here. Shah believes in his chances if free and fair elections are held.

"I will accept whatever the people's mandate is but I want the elections to be free and fair. We have already raised the issue of sensitivity of several booths in Chapra with the Election Commission. I hope they will take care of it," he said.

On the other side, exuding confidence about her victory, Trinamool Congress candidate Mahua Moitra said, "The BJP has never won this seat on their own. They won this seat once with support from Mamata Banerjee. Even their greatest candidate (Satyabrata Mookherjee) was beaten twice by Tapas Paul and CPI(M)'s Jyotirmoyee Sikdar. At the height of Modi wave in 2014, they came third."

She said her taking part in the polls is not about winning but about ensuring greater margin of victory for her party.

In the last Lok Sabha polls, Trinamool Congress's Tapas Paul held on to the seat for second time with about 35 per cent votes, defeating CPI(M)'s Shantanu Jha who got about 29 per cent votes. The BJP got around 26 per cent votes, while the Congress could only manage 6 per cent.

Krishnanagar will be voting in the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections on April 29.

Absolute peace in Nagaland in past one year: CFMG chief

KOHIMA, APR 26 (PTI): Nagaland has been witnessing "absolute peace" for nearly a year now with no exchange of fire between the armed forces and different Naga groups, a top official of the Ceasefire Monitoring Group (CFMG) claimed on Friday.

Interacting with media persons at the state guest house here, CFMG Chairman Lt Gen (retd) Shokin Chauhan said in the last eight-ten months after he took over as the monitoring group's chief, there has been complete peace in the state.

Chauhan said there was no untoward incident even during the April 11 Lok Sabha polls in Nagaland, as the groups "accepted our request not to involve in intimidation and violation of ceasefire ground rules during the election period".

The CFMG has been successful in "tremendously reducing" the violation of ceasefire rules, and "there is no exchange between the security forces and the Naga groups or within the NSCN factions", he claimed.

Depression over Indian Ocean intensifies, likely to become cyclone



CHENNAI, APR 27 (PTI): A depression over the Indian Ocean and south-east Bay of Bengal has intensified and moved further north-westwards, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Saturday.

It is very likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm during next 12 hours and further into a severe cyclonic storm, the IMD said and warned fishermen against venturing into the sea on Sunday. "The depression over east Equatorial Indian Ocean and adjoining southeast Bay of Bengal moved further north-westwards, intensified into a deep depression and lay centered about 870 km east-southeast of Trincomalee (Sri Lanka), 1210 km south-east of Chennai and 1500 km south-southeast of Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh," it said. "It is very likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm during next

12 hours and further into a severe cyclonic storm during subsequent 24 hours," the IMD said.

Further, the system is very likely to move north-westwards off Sri Lanka coast during the next 72 hours and reach near north Tamil Nadu and south Andhra Pradesh coasts on April 30. On Sunday, gale wind speed reaching 80-90 kmph gusting to 100 kmph and very rough to high seas are very likely over southwest Bay of Bengal adjoining east Equatorial Indian Ocean along and off Sri Lanka coast, the weather office said.

There would be strong wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph gusting to 50 kmph along and off Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coasts, Comorin area, Gulf of Mannar and over Kerala, it said. "Fishermen are advised not to venture into these areas," it said in its "Weather Warning".

Campaigning ends for fourth phase of LS polls in Bengal



KOLKATA, APR 27 (PTI): The high-voltage campaigning by different political parties for the fourth phase of Lok Sabha election in eight constituencies of West Bengal slated for April 29 came to an end Saturday evening.

The constituencies which go to polls on Monday are Baharampur, Krishnanagar, Ranaghat(SC), Burdwan East(SC), Burdwan-Durgapur, Asansol, Bolpur(SC) and Birbhum.

An electorate of 1,34,56,491 will decide the fate of 68 candidates in these eight constituencies, the EC said.

All the eight seats, which are spread across four districts, will see a four-cornered contest between Trinamool Congress, BJP, Congress and the Left Front. The Election Commission will deploy a total of 580 companies of central forces, which will cover all the polling booths in the eight Lok Sabha constituencies to ensure free and fair polling, officials said.

The campaign for eight parliamentary seats where polling will be held Monday saw roadshows and poll meetings by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief

Amit Shah, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

TMC has fielded Apurba Sarkar (David) against the sitting Congress MP, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in Baharampur seat. The Left Front constituent RSP has nominated Id Mohammad, while the BJP has nominated Krishna Joyardar.

In Krishnanagar, the TMC has fielded Mahua Moitra against BJP's Kalyan Chaubey, a footballer. The Congress has nominated Intaj Ali Shah and the CPI(M) Shantanu Jha.

Ranaghat (SC) will see TMC's Rupali Biswas locking horns with BJP's Jagannath Sarkar. Congress has nominated Minati Biswas and the CPI(M) Rama Biswas.

In Burdwan East (SC), TMC's Sunil Kumar Mondal will contest against Paresh Chandra Das of BJP. The Congress has fielded Siddhartha Majumdar and the CPI(M) Iswar Chandra Das.

Mamtaz Sanghamita is the TMC candidate from Burdwan-Durgapur seat against BJP's S S Ahluwalia. The Congress has nominated Ranajit Mukherjee and the

CPI(M) named Abhas Ray Chaudhuri for the seat.

In Asansol union minister and BJP sitting MP Babul Supriyo will contest against TMC's celebrity candidate Moon Sen. The CPI(M) has nominated Gouranga Chatterjee and the Congress Biswarup Mondal for the seat.

In Bolpur(SC) seat, TMC's Asit Kumar Mal will contest against Ramprasad Das of BJP. The CPI(M) has fielded Ramchandra Dome and Congress Abhijit Saha.

Celebrity candidate Satabdi Roy is the TMC candidate from Birbhum seat against BJP's Dudh Kumar Mondal. The Congress has nominated Imam Hossain and the CPI(M) named Rezaul Karim for the seat.

The polling personnel have already left for the 15,277 booths in the eight parliamentary constituencies.

Besides general election observers and expenditure observers, the poll panel has for the first time deployed a special police observer and a special observer.

In another first, VVPAT will be used in all polling booths along with the EVMs, EC sources said.

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‘Not harsh enough’: England star Rose shocked by Montenegro racism rap

LAUSANNE, APR 27 (AFP): England defender Danny Rose said he was “shocked” that Montenegro were only told to play just one game behind closed doors as punishment for racist chants, insisting the sanction “was not harsh enough”.

UEFA ordered Montenegro to play their next home Euro 2020 qualifier in an empty stadium after Raheem Sterling, Rose and Callum Hudson-Odoi were targeted by racist abuse by home supporters during England’s 5-1 win in Podgorica in March.

Sterling celebrated the visitors’ fifth goal by cupping his ears towards the crowd after a section of supporters were heard directing monkey chants towards England’s black players.

“I don’t think it is a harsh enough punishment for someone to learn from in the future,

just a one-game ban and 20,000 euros -- it’s a bit shocking but there is not much I can do now,” Rose told Sky Sports on Friday.

“I just have to hope that I never have to play there again, it’s a shame that this where we are now and I just have to get on with it.

“I wouldn’t want to go back there, but obviously if I have to play there I will play. It’s not on my list of destinations to visit.”

The UEFA ruling means Montenegro will play their match against Kosovo on June 7 in an empty stadium.

England’s Football Association welcomed UEFA’s decision to sanction Montenegro and said it hopes the punishment “sends out a message that racism has no place in football or in wider society”.

European football’s governing body also



fined the Montenegrin FA 20,000 euros (USD 22,300) for other charges including crowd distur-

bances, setting off fireworks, throwing objects and blocked stairways.

After the Montene-

gro incident Sterling, a victim of several instances of racist abuse this season, urged

UEFA to impose stadium bans to crack down on the problem.

“It’s now time for the

people in charge to put a real stamp on it because you can fine someone, but what is that going to do?” he said.

“You’ve got to make it a bit harder, punish fans that can’t come to games. Do something that’s going to make them think twice. If their team can’t play with fans, it’s going to be difficult.”

Tottenham left-back Rose said earlier this month that he “can’t wait to see the back of football” because of the lack of decisive action to tackle racism.

England manager Gareth Southgate was left visibly upset about the treatment of his players and called for education to help eradicate racism in the sport.

“Sanctions are worthless if there is nothing alongside that to help educate people,” said Southgate.

The Montenegrin

FA promised to ban any supporters found to have racially abused England’s players, and said it would “undertake all necessary measures to identify the irresponsible individuals”.

“In a multicultural and multi ethnical society as Montenegro is, there is not any space for such conduct,” read a statement from the Balkan country’s football association.

UEFA regulations state that if supporters engage in racist behaviour then “the member association or club responsible is punished with a minimum of a partial stadium closure”.

Article 14 also states that additional sanctions can be imposed depending on the situation, while “disciplinary measures may be combined with specific directives aimed at tackling such conduct”.

Abhishek Verma secures Olympic quota place with gold in maiden WC final

BEIJING, APR 27 (PTI): Abhishek Verma secured India’s fifth Olympic quota place in shooting by winning the 10m air pistol gold medal at the ISSF World Cup here Saturday.

Shooting in his maiden International Shooting Sport Federation World Cup final, the Indian led the field throughout the men’s 10m air pistol final to clinch the top spot with a total score of 242.7.

Russia’s Artem Chernousov took silver with a total of 240.4 points in the eight-man final. Korea’s Seungwoo Han finished with a bronze after shooting 220.0 in the final.

Verma showcased his class in what was only his first ISSF World Cup final. Indians have sealed five quota places for the Tokyo Olympics so far with young Saurabh Chaudhary clinching one



in 10m air pistol event at the ISSF World Cup in New Delhi earlier this year. With this India have clinched both their quotas in this event.

Incidentally, Verma made his World Cup debut in New Delhi, but failed to qualify for the final at home.

In the Chinese capital on Saturday, Verma shot a total of 585 points to

qualify for the final at the fourth spot.

He was the only Indian who progressed to the final with Shahzar Rizvi and Arjun Singh Cheema finishing 32nd and 54th respectively.

Verma, who had won a bronze medal in the 10m air pistol event during his India debut at the Asian Games, does not have much in-

ternational exposure, making the feat even more creditable.

On Friday, Rajasthan’s 17-year-old teenager Divyansh Singh Panwar on Friday secured India’s fourth Olympic quota place by winning silver in 10m air rifle event.

This is India’s fifth 2020 Tokyo Olympic quota after Anjum Moudgil and Apurvi Chandel

(10m air rifle women), Saurabh Choudhary (10m Air Pistol men) and Divyansh had secured berths in the earlier World Cups and last year’s World Championship.

Saurabh Chaudhary was fielded in the MQS category earlier in the day to boost the chances of another Olympic quota place for India.

Guardiola says City, Liverpool have set new Premier League standards

MANCHESTER, APR 26 (AFP): Pep Guardiola says Manchester City and Liverpool have raised the bar in what is required to win a Premier League title after a blockbuster campaign by both teams.

If both sides win their remaining three games, Liverpool would finish the campaign on 97 points -- the third-highest tally in the Premier League era -- and still fail to end their 29-year wait for an English top-flight title because City would have 98. It is a far cry from the 1996-97 campaign when Manchester United won the championship with just 75 points. That means, according to Guardiola, that future champions will need to be aiming towards the magical century, which City achieved last season, to be assured of lifting the trophy.

“The standards we created last year at Manchester City, people know that you have to be close to 100,” he told reporters on

Friday. “Before it was 90. “This standard was last season, we helped Liverpool to achieve it this year and Liverpool helped us to keep going, so thanks to Liverpool we are competing.

“Liverpool know that to win you have to make a lot of points. That’s what we communicate to anyone. “Next season, Chelsea are getting better, Man United, Tottenham. At the end when you are 25 points above United, 22 points ahead of other ones, if they want to stay there you have to improve the standard. It was easier before, everyone can lose to anyone.”

- TREBLE CHANCE -

The demanding City manager, still in the hunt to win a first-ever domestic treble in English football, is already challenging his players to maintain their standards next season. And he invoked the names of some legendary stars from other sports to try and give them an ex-

ample of how they must maintain their status at the top of the Premier League. “You know when Usain Bolt makes 100m race -- that’s the standard and the others have to achieve it,” he said. “Like, Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, that’s the same. One hundred points in a season -- if you want to compete you have to do that. “I’d sign to maintain that level, I’d sign to do what we have done again in the Premier League, I don’t expect more.

“To push each other, knowing the others are at the same level. Find out what we can do to win the game, after work harder, respect the opponents, improve on what we’ve done this season. That’s the only way I know.” Guardiola, whose side travel to Burnley on Sunday, also explained his decision to leave England defender John Stones out of his squad entirely for the recent 2-0 victory at Manchester United.

Argentine women’s football turns professional, but only just

Buenos Aires, Apr 27 (AFP): The women’s game is turning professional in football-mad Argentina, but there’s very little in that status to compare to the world in which the country’s male superstar Lionel Messi operates and excels.

The Argentine Football Association (AFA) announced in March that the 16-team women’s top division would become professional from June -- a welcome boon ahead of the World Cup that will kick off that same month in France.

Argentina have qualified for only the third time in their history.

But scratching below the surface, women’s professionalism is a far cry from that enjoyed by Messi, the highest paid player in the world on USD 84 million a year added to USD 27 million in endorsements, according to the 2018 Forbes list of top-earning athletes.

AFA has created a fund worth USD 2,600 a month for each team to pay the salaries of eight players -- those players, not enough to make up a full team, will earn 15,000 pesos each, or USD 330.

“People see that the national team isn’t doing so well but no-one sees that we can’t live on this,” said Camila Gomez Ares, 24, who plays for Boca Juniors.



Those eight salaries amount to the typical single wage of a men’s fourth-division player.

“Clubs invest in the men but it’s only the biggest clubs that do so with us, and even then it’s a little,” added Gomez Ares, whose team bans the women’s players from using the men’s pitch to keep it pristine for the likes of former Manchester United, Manchester City and Juventus forward Carlos Tevez. **- SELLING RAFFLE TICKETS -**

One women’s team, San Lorenzo, has decided to pay all 16 of its female players, but is the exception.

Even at Boca and River Plate -- the two biggest and best supported

men’s teams in the country -- women are only paid expenses.

Top-flight women players have to pay for their own transport, boots, clothing and even medical insurance.

“Some pay membership fees (to their club) and if there’s a shortage to pay the doctor, police or ambulance (who attend games), they have to sell raffle tickets or pay money to play,” Florencia Quinones, a 32-year-old Boca midfielder who once played for Barcelona, told AFP.

“It’s about economics,” says Victoria Bedini, a 28-year-old cleaner who trains in the evenings with the modest Excursionistas

club from the Belgrano neighbourhood in Buenos Aires.

There, “boots, clothing, everything is paid for by the players.” The club doesn’t even pay expenses meaning players often fail to turn up for training.

“They don’t have enough to pay for the transport,” said Bedini.

One issue is that South American football’s governing body, CONMEBOL, has launched a push to encourage teams to show more interest in the women’s game.

“The problem is they look for 20 girls and keep them in horrible conditions, because they’re obliged to,” said Macarena Gomez, whose judicial claim against her club, UAI Urquiza, over the lack of a contract was the catalyst that led to professionalism.

She sees the major problem as one of culture. “The spanner in the works is a backward and macho thinking that permeates football,” added the 27-year-old. **- SLOW PROGRESS -**

Given their struggles, just qualifying for the World Cup was an achievement for Argentina, who overcame Panama in a play-off to reach the showcase in France.

They will be hoping to perform far better there than in

their last World Cup appearance, in China 12 years ago.

Amongst chastening defeats to Germany (11-0) and England (6-1) they exited the competition with three defeats from three, a single goal scored and 18 conceded.

They will face 2011 champions Japan, 2015 semi-finalists England and debutants Scotland in a daunting group stage.

This team has come a long way since going without a head coach for two years until they went on strike in 2017 demanding “basic resources” such as travel expenses, a training pitch and accommodation when abroad.

They once had to sleep in their bus when playing a friendly in Uruguay because they didn’t have any hotel reservations.

Things are improving though, as for the first time the team will play a succession of friendlies in the United States to prepare for the World Cup.

But given women’s football began in Argentina in 1930 -- around the time the men’s game was turning professional -- progress has been excruciatingly slow.

“To put it simply, we’ve been made invisible all this time -- we’re 100 years behind,” said Gomez.

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Pakistan suspends polio drive after security threats to workers

BY SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, APR 27 (PTI): The Pakistan government has suspended the anti-polio drive and post-campaign evaluation following the increasing number of attacks on polio workers in different parts of the country.

The countrywide campaign to administer anti-polio drops to 39 million children under five years of age was launched on Monday and Friday was the last day following which the evaluation of the drive was to take place.

However, the campaign, involving 260,000 polio workers, ran into trouble after reports that several children were taken to hospital as they fell sick after being administered the anti-polio vaccine in some areas of Peshawar.

Following the reports, unidentified gunmen shot dead security personnel escorting a team of polio workers in different incidents in northwest Pakistan.

In another incident, a female polio worker was killed and another injured in Chaman area in Balochistan.

Baber bin Atta, focal



person to PM Imran Khan on polio eradication, clarified that the vaccine was safe and anti-polio elements were spreading rumours on social media to scare parents. The National Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) for polio issued a letter asking all the provinces to stop the campaign and prevent further damage.

The uncertain and threatening situation for the front line polio workers has emerged and we need to save the programme from a further major damage, said the letter issued by the EOC.

Pakistan is one of the

three countries where polio is still endemic. The campaign aimed to provide anti-polio medicine to children in all four provinces as well as Pakistan occupied Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

For the first time in the history of Pakistan, the government has suspended the post-campaign evaluation, called Lot Quality Assurance Sampling (LQAS).

The LQAS is used by the World Health Organisation as new sampling methodology to document status of anti-polio coverage and areas of weak coverage with sta-

tistical reliability.

The EOC in a separate letter addressed to all the provinces conveyed apprehension about increasing attacks on polio workers, directing them to suspend LQAS activities, the Dawn reported.

"It has been decided by the National EOC that no post campaign evaluation (LQAS) will be conducted anywhere in the country, the letter said.

It further stated that it has been unanimously decided by the national technical team and Global Polio Eradication Initiative (SPEI) partners to call off the catch-up ac-

tivities of April National Immunisation Day campaign across the country with immediate effect, the report said.

Hence, no further vaccination or catch-up activity will be conducted in any area for this campaign, it said.

Despite efforts, the country has not been able to completely eliminate the disease.

Six cases of polio have been reported so far in 2019. 12 cases were reported in 2018 and 8 in 2017. Attempts to eradicate the crippling disease have been seriously hampered by deadly targeting of vaccination teams in recent years by militants, who oppose the drives, claiming the polio drops cause infertility.

Attacks on immunisation teams have claimed 68 lives since December 2012. Earlier this month, member of a polio monitoring team was gunned down on Monday by a man after a verbal brawl during a campaign at a village near Pak-Afghan border.

In January 2014, three workers were killed while in late 2012, five workers including four female workers were killed in Qayyumabad area.

Heavy rains lash Mozambique after Cyclone Kenneth; 4 dead



PEMBA(MOZAMBIQUE), APR 27 (AP): Heavy rains lashed northern Mozambique on Saturday in the wake of Cyclone Kenneth as aid groups warned of possible flooding and mudslides in the days ahead. At least four deaths had been reported.

Mozambique's disaster authorities said one person was killed in Pemba city and another in hard-hit Macomia district, while residents on Ibo island said two people died there. A large number of homes in parts of northernmost Cabo Delgado province were destroyed, with electricity cut and at least one key bridge collapsed.

Cyclone Kenneth arrived late Thursday, just six weeks after Cyclone Idai ripped into central Mozambique and killed more than 600 people.

This was the first time in recorded history that the southern African na-

tion has been hit by two cyclones in one season, again raising concerns about climate change.

Kenneth, packing the power of a Category 4 hurricane, tore into a region that had never seen such a fierce storm during the age of satellite observation.

Its remnants could dump twice as much rain as Idai did last month, the U.N. World Program has said. Aid groups warned that flooding remained a danger after Kenneth, just as flooding caused most of the deaths after Idai. Some forecasts warned of as much as 250 millimetres of torrential rain, or about a quarter of the average annual rainfall for the region.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on Saturday reported heavy damage to Cabo Delgado province, with the communities of Macomia, Quissanga and

Mocimboa da Praia of highest concern.

Communications remained challenging in some areas as authorities and aid groups scrambled to assess the damage, especially in more far-flung communities in the largely rural region.

Mozambique's disaster management agency has said nearly 700,000 people could be at risk, many left exposed and hungry as flood waters rise. "The situation wasn't worse thanks to awareness-raising work by local authorities," the agency said on Saturday while posting photos of buildings where metal roofs had been crumpled or ripped away.

Other photos from Macomia showed a mud-walled home that had disintegrated, a bus that appeared to have slid off the road and a toppled electrical pole, its wires straining.

Protesters ransack govt building, set ablaze gov's effigy in J-K's Kishtwar

JAMMU, APR 27 (PTI): A mob ransacked a government building, damaged several official vehicles and set ablaze an effigy of Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik in Kishtwar district Saturday after hundreds of people took to streets to protest against the recent killings of four people, officials said.

Sanatan Dharam Sabha (SDS), a local religious group, had called for a peaceful march from its headquarters at Char Chinari to the deputy commissioner's office in the communally sensitive town to lodge their protest against the killings and alleged failure of police to nab the culprits. RSS leader Chandarkant Sharma and his security guard were killed by a militant inside the district hospital on April 9, while state secretary of BJP Anil Parihar and his brother Ajeet Parihar were killed in the town on November 1 last year.

Raising slogans against the killings, hundreds of people, including women, marched in a procession in the town under police protection, the officials said.

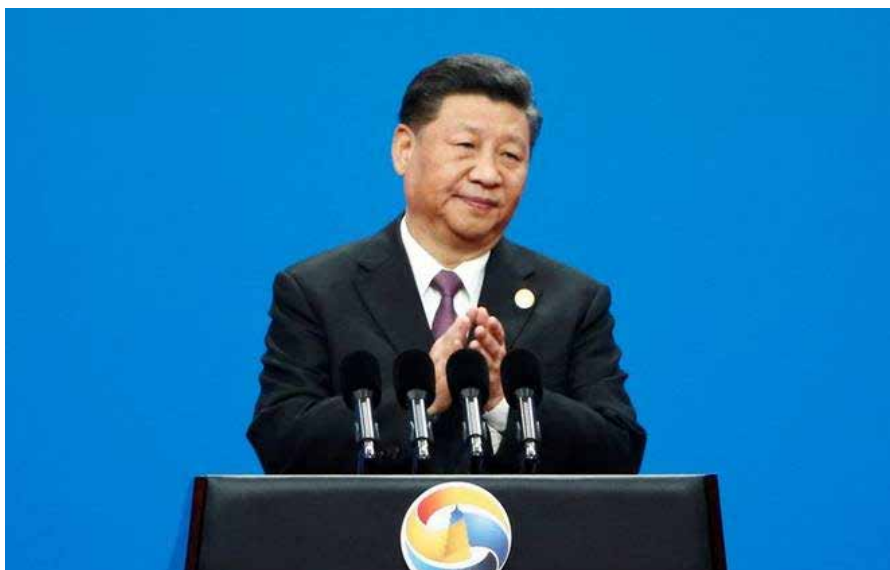
On reaching the DC office complex, however, some of the protesters turned violent and set ablaze the effigy of the governor and damaged several official vehicles, they said. They said the mob also broke open the main gate of the multi-storied building and ransacked several rooms, damaging some records. The protesters also tried to force their way into the office of Deputy Commissioner Angrez Singh Rana but were chased out of the building by policemen without using any force, the officials said.

BRI should follow global norms and benefit all, says Chinese President Xi

BY K J M VARMA
BEIJING, APR 27 (PTI): Chinese President Xi Jinping on Saturday said that the Belt and Road Initiative should benefit all around the world and deliver common development by following the established international norms. Addressing a roundtable meeting of the 37 heads of states and governments who attended the 2nd Belt and Road Forum (BRF), which would close on Saturday, Xi again stressed that the trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would focus on common development of all the participating countries and their people. "We must implement the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits to see that all voices are heard, all reached their full potential and all stand to benefit," the Chinese President said.

The BRI must be open, clean and green and follow high standards, people centred sustainable approach, he said, adding that it should be aligned to the United Nations' sustainable development agenda. "Align our cooperation with universally accepted rules, standards and best practices and pursue social and economic progress and environmental protection in a balanced way. The BRI should be beneficial to all and deliver common development," Xi said.

Those attended the BRF meeting included Russian President Vladimir Putin, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and heads of several Asian, African and Latin American countries besides heads of the UN and the IMF. India and the US skipped the meeting. India, which boycot-



ted the first BRF meeting held in 2017 over its objections to the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), skipped its second edition for the same reasons. India has also been airing its concerns over the BRI financing, saying that connectivity initiatives must follow principles of financial responsibility to avoid projects that would create unsustainable debt burden for communities.

This time the US has emerged as a fierce critic of the BRI, saying that its predatory financing is leaving the smaller countries in heavy debt.

The concerns grew louder after China acquired Sri Lanka's Hambantota port for a 99-year lease as a debt swap.

The heavy Chinese financing of the USD 60 billion CPEC also raised concerns over Pakistan's ability to pay back.

China has clarified that less than 20 per cent of the CPEC projects are based on loans provided by it and rest of the 80 per cent ventures are either directly invested by Beijing or, used Chinese grants. The BRI was launched by President Xi when he came to power in 2013. It aims to

link southeast Asia, central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes. China is doling out huge sums of money for infrastructure projects in countries from Asia to Africa and Europe, enhancing its global influence.

In his speech at the opening ceremony of the 2nd BRF on Friday, Xi allayed fears that China is using the BRI as a geopolitical tool to attain superpower status.

He said the BRI is "not an exclusive club".

"Everything should be done in a transparent way and we should have zero tolerance for corruption," he said.

Xi said that China will not engage in beggar-thy-neighbour currency devaluation.

China will continue to improve the exchange rate formation mechanism of its currency and keep the exchange rate generally stable on a reasonable and balanced level, he said.

Xi said the joint building of the Belt and Road has opened up new space for the world's economic growth and it has also created a new platform to boost international trade and investment,

expanded new practices to optimise global economic governance, and made new contributions to improving people's well-being in all countries. Besides Putin and Khan, Nepal President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, Myanmar state councilor Aung San Suu Kyi are among the top leaders taking part in the event. France, Germany, the UK, Spain, Japan, South Korea and the EU sent high-level representatives.

China said representatives from 150 countries and international organisations are taking part in it. Commenting on the BRF meeting, Li Xiangyang - director of China's National Institute of International Strategy - said that "the BRI has helped China expand its global friendship network which shows that China is playing an increasingly pivotal role in promoting regional development and safeguarding multilateralism".

The initiative, which focuses on utilising market and economic resources to explore new diplomatic relations with other countries, also drives the country's transition to economic diplomacy, Li told Global Times on Saturday.

Ties with India "only problem" for peace in region: Pak PM Imran Khan

BY K J M VARMA
BEIJING, APR 27 (PTI): Pakistan's relationship with India remains the "only problem" for peace and stability in the region, Prime Minister Imran Khan has said and expressed hope of establishing a "civilised relationship" with New Delhi after the Lok Sabha elections are over.

Unless there is peace and stability in region, economic prosperity is difficult for Pakistan, and that is what right now the Pakistan government is working on, Khan who is in China to take part in the 2nd Belt and Road Forum, (BRF) said while addressing China International Cultural Communication Centre here on Friday.

Khan said Pakistan hopes that the political solution in Afghanistan will succeed and the war-ravaged country attains stability.

"Whatever happens in Afghanistan affects the Pakistan's bordering areas. So we are working for a peaceful region. We have decent relationship with Iran and we are trying to strengthen them," he was quoted as saying by state-run APP news agency.

"The only problem right now is our relationship with India. But we are hoping that after the Indian elections, we will again hope to have a civilised relationship with India too," he said.

Since his arrival here on April 25 to take part in the BRF meeting which concluded on Saturday, the Cricketer-turned-politician refrained from speaking on India-Pakistan ties which in the last two months have experienced severe strains following the February 14 Pulwama terror attack carried out

by the Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed which killed 40 CRPF personnel.

His emphasis during the visit appears to be firming up more projects for the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project of China's ambitious trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The BRI is Chinese President Xi Jinping's signature global infrastructure policy. First announced in 2013, the project promises to build ports, roads and railways to revive the ancient Silk Road and create new trade corridors linking China to Asia, Africa and Europe.

The BRF forum aims to showcase the progress of the BRI since it began in 2013. The CPEC is opposed by India as it is being laid through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

In his address at the roundtable meeting of the BRF forum presided by Chinese President Xi Jinping, Khan termed the CPEC as a transformational project which would play an important role in boosting connectivity between the Gwadar Port in Pakistan and Xinjiang region of China.

He also underscored the importance of greater connectivity among the BRI participating countries and proposed four specific areas for particular focus, including digital connectivity, mobility of labour, cultural connectivity and sharing best practices in knowledge and innovation.

To advance these proposals, among other things, Khan also suggested setting up of BRI Tourism Corridor to improve labour

skills and mobility and creating multi-lingual digital platforms.

He also mooted cooperation among the BRI countries for poverty alleviation and campaign against corruption. In his speech at the cultural centre, Khan said the BRI had come as a blessing for Pakistan.

"Belt and Road Initiative has given us an opportunity to catch up with other nations. CPEC has provided an opportunity for Pakistan to attract investment not just from China, which is the fastest growing economy in the world now. So obviously, China is a main home from where we hope to invite investors," he said.

Khan also met Managing Director of International Monetary Fund Christine Lagarde on the sidelines of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing and reportedly discussed the bailout package.

Pakistan is currently undergoing a severe balance of payment crisis, despite large infusion of investments from China, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

The meeting reviewed the relationship between Pakistan and the IMF.

Khan identified the areas of reform and initiatives being undertaken by his government to stabilise the economy, control inflation and achieve fiscal balance, the APP report said.

The two leaders agreed on the importance of the IMF programme and to work towards an agreement for which a fund's delegation is coming to Islamabad.

The two sides agreed on the need for a social safety net for the vulnerable groups of the society.

