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Summit TIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SKM ANNOUNCES NAMES OF 9 CANDIDATES; BOTH SITTING MLAS MAKE IT TO FIRST LIST

Will seize property of the corrupt and deposit Rs 5 lakh into people's bank accounts: Golay



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 MAR: Sikkim Krantikari Morcha president, PS Tamang [Golay], today announced names of nine candidates in the party's first official list of candidates for the upcoming assembly elections in the State. He announced these names at a public meeting held at Hee Gaon under Maneybong-Dentan constituency in West Sikkim on Sunday.

Both the sitting MLAs of the party, Kunga Nima Lepcha from Syari, and Sonam Lama for the Sangha, feature in the first list and will return to contest from their existing constituencies.

While no candidate was named for the constituency where today's meeting was held, two candidates have been announced for West Sikkim. Sangay Lepcha will get the SKM ticket from Yaksom-Tashiding constituency while MN Sherpa will contest from Daramdin.

In East Sikkim, Dr MK Dhakal has been named the SKM candidate for Khamdong-Singtam with Mr Lepcha returning to Shyari constituency.

In North Sikkim,

Chungkipu Lepcha has been named the SKM candidate for Dzongu while Sandup Lepcha will contest from Lachen-Mangang.

An SKM press release informs that supporters of different political parties and members of different organisations officially joined SKM at the meeting today. Among them were government contractor NB Dahal from Gyalshing, Kaushal Lohagan from Zoom-Salghari, KB Rai from Namchi-Singhiang, Hamro Sikkim Party vice-president and West District president Indra Hang Subba, former bureaucrat DB Rai,

independent panchayat from Rangang Yangang, Sukh Hang Subba, SRM party cheli convener, Dikla Bhutia and women welfare president Sangay Doma Tamang and 94 families led by former panchayat Ram Hang Subba and 747 families from other constituencies.

In his address, the SKM president, PS Tamang, lashed out against the SDF and accused it of many failings.

He asked the people to give five years to SKM to serve them in office and its government will deposit Rs 5 lakh in every Sikkimese's bank account

HSP releases second list of candidates and first segment of manifesto



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 MAR: Hamro Sikkim Party today released its second list of candidates for the upcoming assembly elections.

Featuring in this list are BB Dungal-mali who has received the party ticket for Poklok-Kamrang where he will be going up against SDF president, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling.

Closer to Gangtok, Nima Lepcha of Ray-Mindu has been picked to contest from Martam Rumtek constituency, Palman Kami for Salghari-Zoom and Neeraj Adhikari from Khamdong-Singtam.

While announcing these names at a press conference today, the party also released its 'mini-manifesto' covering its programme for develop-

ment. HSP spokesperson, Biraj Adhikari, informed that that the four candidates were all active in public life and service of people. While Mr Dungal-mali is a pastor, Nima Lepcha and Palman Kami are respected social workers, and Neeraj Adhikari a research scholar.

Speaking to media persons, Mr Dungal-mali stated that HSP was growing in popularity among the people who are attracted to the party due to the clean image of party president Dr Bina Basnett, Bhachung Bhutia and other leaders of the party.

"We have been on a door-to-door campaign for the past three months and people's response has been very encouraging," he said. **turn to pg02**

POLL VAULT

Going over 45 years of Assembly Elections in Sikkim

PEMA WANGCHUK DORJEE

GANGTOK, 17 MAR:

On 11 April, a Thursday, the nearly 4.24 lakh voters registered in Sikkim will get a chance to decide who represents them in the Assembly and in Parliament for the next five years. Political parties received barely a month for a proper campaign between the announcement of the dates and the actual date with the EVMs, and a week into the countdown, none of the parties have released the complete list of candidates and the election manifestos also appear to still be works in progress.

And the clock is ticking.

This will also be a time for great flux in the alignments of leaders and wannabe leaders as loyalties change with the announcement of names. This routine plays out in the run-up to every election, and this cycle should be no different. But then, politicians have traditionally been fickle when it comes to ideology and sulking, switching side and rebelling don't even raise eyebrows anymore.

While the fickleness of "leaders" continues to entertain, it might also be worthwhile to indulge in a recap of how electoral democracy has played out in statistics in Sikkim. After all, in about three weeks time, an important moment will have arrived for the electorate in Sikkim who have always been energetic about exercising their right to vote and the State has rather consistently posted very high voter turnouts. Polling can be expected to be just as involved this time around too.

Although making predictions is very tempting, today we engage in a different approach and go over how Sikkim has voted in the past and what the important poll issues were in the fray. Going over past electoral performances is an interesting exercise in itself and viewing them in retrospect, weighing them against the dominant issues of the time, can also help engage in some projections on what will happen on 11 April, 2019.

1974 was the first time that the Sikkimese voted to elect representatives. The voting process was complex and the deciding of win-

ners even more so, but this was still a major victory achieved by the LD Kazi led Sikkim National Congress.

Sikkim, after all, was not ignorant of the arrival of electoral democracy in India, and the SNC was rewarded for its achievement secured for the people with a near-clean sweep - it bagged 31 of the 32 seats, with the Sikkim National Party winning only one seat.

The 1974 election was held under the Representations of Sikkim Subjects Act, 1974, which gave Sikkim its 31 territorial constituencies and one seat for the Sangha. The 31 territorial constituencies were allocated as 15 for Nepalis, 15 for the Bhutia-Lepcha and one for the scheduled castes in what is commonly known as the parity formula and which was discontinued in 1979.

This election was not held directly under the Election Commission of India since Sikkim was still a kingdom at the time and one unfortunate fallout of this has been that election details like voter turnout, votes polled by the candidates etc are not easily accessible. This could be an interesting exercise for a researcher to dig up.

The pre-merger Council was allowed to continue as the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim after 1975 and the next elections - the first as a part of democratic India were held in 1979.

This was an interesting election. Nar Bahadur Bhandari was fronting the Sikkim Janata Parishad and campaigned on the plank of de-merger. Also, the same year, a Bill seeking amendments to prepare Sikkim for its first elections as a part of India was placed in the Parliament. This Bill, which was to become infamous as the "Black Bill" of 1979 removed the seats reserved for the Nepali community in the Assembly and made them into general seats. The BL seats, for reasons that were never clearly explained, were also reduced to 12, the Sangha seat was retained and the SC seats increased to two.

The fallout of the "Black Bill" was fast and devastating. The LD Kazi Government, already on extension, collapsed over night and the dissolution of the Nepali seats became an emotive political issue. **turn to pg02**

RESERVE BANK OF INDIA www.rbi.org.in

Redressal of complaints against entities regulated by RBI/ any Department of RBI

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set up various fora for grievance redressal at its Offices across the country. Any member of public who has a grievance relating to deficiency in service by the entities regulated by RBI viz: Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks, Co-operative Banks or Non-Banking Financial Companies (registered with RBI under Section 45-IA of the RBI Act, 1934), Digital Transactions conducted through non-bank entities regulated by RBI (under the Payments and Settlements Act 2007), Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) or against any Department of the RBI, may write / send email / call to the following concerned RBI office (Gangtok) and submit his/ her grievance with full details / facts along with supporting documents.

1. Consumer Education and Protection Cells (CEPC)

Name & designation of Officer: Shri I.Y.T. Namchu, Assistant General Manager
Address: Tseyang Dzong Building, Amdo Golai, Tadong, Gangtok - 737102
Telephone No 03592-281118 / 281117
Fax No 03592- 281113
Email ID: cepgangtok@rbi.org.in
Office time: 9:30 am to 5:45 pm (Monday to Friday)

For more information, please visit RBI's website at <https://www.rbi.org.in> >>> Consumer Education and Protection >>> For Common Person >>> Complaints >>> Against RBI.

2. Banking Ombudsman Scheme, 2006 (BO Scheme, 2006)

A complainant may file online complaint through the Complaint Tracking System (CTS) at <https://www.rbi.org.in> >>> Consumer Education and Protection >>> For Common Person >>> Complaints >>> Against Bank >>> Banking Ombudsman Scheme. The complaint can also be submitted by post/ hand delivery/ e-mail with full facts along with supporting documents at the following address/ e-mail ID
Office of the Banking Ombudsman

C/o Reserve Bank of India
Address: 15, Netaji Subhas Road, Kolkata 700001

Telephone No 033- 22304892 Fax No 033- 22305899
E-mail ID bokolkata@rbi.org.in
Office time: 9:45 am to 5:30 pm (Monday to Friday)

3. Ombudsman Scheme Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFC-O Scheme), 2018

(for redressal of complaints (against deposit - taking NBFCs) falling under Clause 8 of NBFC-O Scheme, 2018)
The complaint can be submitted by post/ hand delivery/ e-mail with full facts along with supporting documents at the following address/ e-mail ID:

NBFC Ombudsman (Kolkata Centre/Zone)*

C/o Reserve Bank of India
Address: 15, Netaji Subhas Road, Kolkata- 700 001

Telephone No 033-22304892, Fax No 033-22305899
E-mail ID nbfco@rbi.org.in
Office time: 9:45 am to 5:30 pm (Monday to Friday)

The Jurisdiction of NBFC Ombudsman for Kolkata Centre/ Zone covers West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Bihar and Jharkhand.

For more information, please visit RBI's website at <https://www.rbi.org.in> >>> Consumer Education and Protection >>> For Common Person >>> Complaints >>> Against NBFCs >>> Ombudsman Scheme for NBFCs.

4. Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions (OSDT-2019)

(for redressal of complaints against deficiency of services related to Digital transactions made through the System Participants as defined under the Payments and Settlements Act 2007, excluding System Providers). The complaint can also be submitted by post/ hand delivery/ e-mail with full facts along with supporting documents at the following address/ email ID:
Digital Payments Ombudsman (Kolkata Centre/ Zone)*
C/o Reserve Bank of India - STD Code: 033
Address: 15, Netaji Subhas Road, Kolkata-700 001
Telephone No 033-22304892 Fax No 033-22305899
E-mail id: odtkolkata@rbi.org.in.

(Office time: 9:45 am to 5:30 pm (Monday to Friday))
The Jurisdiction of Ombudsman for Digital Transaction for Kolkata Centre/Zone covers West Bengal and Sikkim.

Note: For filing complaint under the BO Scheme, 2006 or NBFC-O Scheme, 2018, or OSDT 2019, the complainant may please note that, he/ she should first approach the branch of the bank / deposit-taking NBFC registered with RBI/ system participant for redressal of his/ her grievance. If the grievance regarding deficiency in service listed in Clause 8 of the respective Ombudsman Schemes against any bank / NBFC/ System Participant not redressed within 30 days or if complainant is not satisfied with the reply given by the bank / NBFC/ System Participant concerned, he/she can approach the concerned Ombudsman anytime within one year of receipt of reply from the bank / NBFC/ system participant or where no reply is received, anytime within one year and one month from the date of representation to the bank / NBFC/ system participant.

Appeal against decision of Ombudsman

Appeal against decision of Banking / NBFC Ombudsman or OSDT can be sent to the Appellate Authority, Reserve Bank of India, Consumer Education and Protection Department, Central Office, Amar Building, Sir P M Road, Fort, Mumbai 400 001 within 30 days of receipt of the communication of the respective Ombudsman's decision, only if the complaint is closed under the appealable Clause of the respective Scheme.

5. Complaints against Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC)

For complaints against DICGC, members of public can lodge the complaint at following address/e-mail id:

Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC)

The Deputy General Manager, DICGC, Complaint Redressal Cell, RBI Building, 2nd floor, Opp. Mumbai Central Railway Station, Mumbai - 400 008.

Complainant can also approach Shri Deepak Narang, Deputy General Manager on Telephone No. 022-23019633 Ext No. 8201 or through e-mail dicgc@rbi.org.in

NOTE: Complainant is requested to indicate his/her address and phone number/ mobile number in the complaint.

Sport enthusiast Phurba Sherpa to contest as independent from Gangtok

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 17 MAR:

Gangtok-resident, Phurba Sherpa, today announced plans to contest the upcoming Assembly election from Gangtok constituency as an independent candidate.

The 45-year-old hails from Development Area and has been associated with different social and sport organisations. He is the chief coordinator in Sikkim Football Association and was the former president of an I-league football club, Denzong Boys, from Sikkim.

While announcing his decision to contest the election at a press conference here today,



Mr Sherpa said that he was motivated to join electoral politics by his desire to work for the betterment of sports,

health and education sectors in the State.

He stressed that these three sectors are interrelated and di-

rectly connected to the people.

On Gangtok-specific issues, he flagged traffic congestion, parking problems, irregular power supply and other civic problems and assured to address these issues if elected.

"I was an active member of Sikkim Democratic Front but was not able to give time to the party when I got busy with social and sports activities. This is my electoral debut and I have no intentions of backing down," he said.

He plans to submit his nomination papers and begin his election campaign on Monday.

BJP lashes out at "immature" SKM for breaking alliance

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 17 MAR:

The Bharatiya Janata Party's Sikkim unit has lashed against Sikkim Krantikari Morcha for breaking off the alliance at its final stages. The BJP-Sikkim president, DB Chauhan, told a press conference today that SKM's last-minute ditch not only revealed its "political immaturity" but was also a big let-down for the people of Sikkim who were hoping for a strong Opposition alliance this time.

BJP leaders, including its central leadership, it may be recalled were convinced that the BJP-SKM alliance was final and that only the formalities of seat-sharing had

to be worked out. SKM had clearly emerged from its meetings with BJP leaders in Delhi with a different understanding of what was discussed and decided and had announced its decision to contest the elections on its own on 15 March.

Mr Chauhan informed a press conference here today that the alliance had been finalized after a series of meetings between a seven-member SKM delegation led by PS Tamang [Golay] with the BJP national president, Amit Shah, and other senior BJP leaders in Delhi.

He informed that BJP had asked for 10 seats in the initial talks but had later agreed to the SKM proposal of seven seats.

And then SKM broke the alliance in its final stages, he said.

Mr Chauhan added that this was not the first time that SKM has "betrayed" BJP. He also commented that there may have been some pressure which compelled SKM to break the alliance.

"SKM had announced the alliance in a press conference. So SKM has played with the sentiments of the people of Sikkim by suddenly breaking the alliance process," he said.

He informed that the BJP high command had even agreed to the eight-point minimum common programme proposed by SKM so there was no valid reason, except pres-

sure, to explain why SKM broke away.

While reiterating that SKM had let the people down with its decision to opt out of the alliance, the BJP-Sikkim president today announced that BJP was prepared to fight the elections on its own in Sikkim.

He however added that BJP was also in the touch with different regional parties for a strong probable alliance in the State.

Meanwhile, Mr Chauhan also informed that the state-unit has already sent its report for the elections to the high command and after their approval, will announce the numbers of seats that the BJP will contest here.

First randomization of EVMs on 18 March

Candidates informed about nomination filing protocols and rules

MANGAN, 17 MAR

[IPR]: District Magistrate-cum-District Election Officer, Raj K Yadav, called today informed that the first randomization of EVMs will be held on 18 March in the presence of all political parties at the Zilla Bhawan in accordance with directions of the Election Commission of India.

The entire process of randomization will be done through Election Management Software (EMS) and will be video graphed, he informed.

After randomization, all EVMs will be kept at assembly constituency/assembly segment-wise.

Thereafter, the EVMs located at Zilla Bhawan (NDZP) strong room will

be shifted to the newly constructed strong room in the District Administration Centre, Mangan, as per the directions of ECI.

The DEO informed that on 18 March, after publication of notification of election by Election Commission of India the notice of election will be issued by the Office of the District Collector, North. All willing candidates accordingly informed that nomination papers can be collected along with other related documents from the office of the DC, North.

Further, only three-vehicle convoys are allowed to accompany candidates within 100 meters (main gate of dis-

trict administrative centre) office of the Returning Officer, North district.

The maximum number of persons allowed to enter the office of the Returning Officer at the time of filing of nominations has been limited to 05 (including candidate).

Further, Expenditure Observer, Ravi Patel, Indian Railway and Account Service, is also arriving on 18 March to monitor the progress and status of the preparedness for the election and can be contacted at 03592-234003 (landline) or 7586909224 (Mobile Phone) or one met at the North District Zilla Panchayat Guest House for any election-related issues.

Going over 45 years of Assembly...

It thus so transpired that there were two major issues in the air in 1979, each promoted by a different political outfit and the results reflected this. The Bhandari-led SJP struck the halfway mark with its MLAs winning in 16 constituencies. RC Poudyal's Sikkim Congress [Revolutionary], which had taken up the restoration of the Nepali seats as its main agenda, came in second with 11 MLAs.

While SJP received 31.49% of the votes SC[R], received 20.58%. Mr Bhandari went on to form the Government with the support of one Independent MLAs and the 4 MLAs of the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress. This alignment would go on merge into the Congress [I] soon after.

Just as 1974 had won the people of Sikkim the right to vote, in 1979, the people realised that they could also contest, even as Independents. It has to be the excitement of exercising this new right that saw a staggering 108 Independents contest the 1979 elections.

What is more, one of them even won, a feat that has been repeated only twice since then.

In 1979, the Independents accounted for 16.50% of the votes polled, only slightly fewer than Mr Poudyal's party and slightly more than the Janta Party into which LD Kazi had by then merged his party.

In 1984, Mr. Bhandari was dropped by the Congress high-command on corruption charges [he had merged his SJP into the Congress]. The move backfired politically and the Congress was soon reduced to a minority by a near complete defection into the new party launched by Mr Bhandari - the Sikkim Sangram Parishad.

In a way, the 1985 election was about getting Mr Bhandari back into power and the campaign was run on a strong anti-Delhi tone. It was thus a head-on collision between the SSP and the Congress [I] and the strong play on regional pride won the day. 30 SSP candidates emerged victorious and the party polled 62.20% of the votes polled. The Congress could muster only one MLA with 24.15% of the votes and from among the 94 Independents, one won.

The 1989 elections in Sikkim are widely believed to have been less than fair with the rampant electoral mechanisms, dominant elsewhere in India at that time, also alleged in Sikkim. The list of candidates in the fray reflects this to some extent. Till 1985, parties of all colours and a strong number of Independents jumped into the electoral fray, but in 1989, the numbers dwindled drastically.

In 1979, there were 244 candidates in the fray, in 1989, this dropped to 118. Only three regional political parties and Congress [I] fielded candidates. SSP bagged 70.41% of the votes.

When elections came calling again in 1994, the Chamling-led Sikkim Democratic Front wave had swept through Sikkim with its "Bhandari Hatao, Sikkim Bachao" slogan and promise of returning democracy to an oppressively stilted Sikkim.

This wave was peaking at the time when the Income Tax issue ambushed Sikkim and Mr Bhandari was dethroned by his own legislators. The SDF battle-cry against the Bhandari-led SSP lost some sting because he had already been ousted.

There were three issue in the electoral fire - SDF's call to win back democracy by ensuring that SSP did not return to office, Income Tax and a parallel move by Bhandari-adherents to get him back to power.

Those must have been confusing times for voters and also for the politicians on how to rally support. It was also one of the most communally charged campaigns that Sikkim has seen. The confusion reflects in the vote-share because there appeared to be enough voters who wanted Mr Bhandari's second mid-term eviction from power to be avenged. The SDF wave however held strong and it emerged as the party with the largest vote share of 42% and 19 MLAs. SSP was close second with 35.08% of the votes and 10 MLAs and Congress, which was the caretaker government in power at the time, managing 15.02%. The number of candidates was also a more robust 186 in 1994.

The 1999 elections were seen as a vote on SDF's performance in government and whether it had succeeded in institutionalising democracy as it had promised. The election was also promoted as a test on whether Mr Bhandari still commanded a following in the

State. SDF received a thumbs up with a majority share of the votes at 52.32% and five more constituencies. The results also reflected that SSP was also still relevant because even it improved its vote share, although it recorded a drop in the number of MLAs this was good for. The Congress was no longer relevant, managing only 3.67% of the votes. Although one Independent candidate won, the number of Independent candidates had dropped to only 9 in 1999.

The elections in 2004 elections were livelier in comparison. Free expression had gained ground in the 10 years that SDF had been in office and a healthier media had developed to report more extensively on the elections. Sikkim, which till then was serviced only by weekly newspapers and regional and national dailies which arrived here a day late and rarely carried any in-depth reportage on Sikkim, now had a clutch of daily newspapers.

Also, there was a resurgent Congress in Sikkim with Mr Bhandari in its fold. There were also a slew of disgruntled former SDF members and this combo pushed a 'silent wave' murmur. The Opposition, however, remained traditionally disorganized and casual and this led to four constituencies being won by the SDF without a contest even before the State went to polls.

The list of candidates, apart from the heavyweights, was lackluster across the board, but the contest was violent [by Sikkim standards till then] and the rumour mills kept busy. The electorate, however, had made up its mind. 71.09% of the votes - a record endorsement in Sikkim's electoral history - were cast in favour of the SDF. The Congress managed only 26.13% and the others - BJP, CPM, SHRP and SSP did not even break the double-digit mark, in fact, the other parties could not even convince 1% of the voters to vote for them.

While the rout was near complete, a bigger take-away from this election was the confirmation that the sun had set on former Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari's electoral pull. He contested from two constituencies - Central Pandam-East Pandam and Gangtok - and lost from both.

2009 saw a replay of 2004 with SDF improving on its presence in the Assembly from 31 to a complete rout of 32/32. Interestingly, while SDF won all seats, its vote-share climbed down slightly to 67.52%. There were three other national parties and three regional parties in the mix, but save the Congress which pulled in a respectable 28.31% of the votes, the rest stayed below 3.74% of the votes polled - Sikkim Himali Rajya Parishad's vote-share.

Where one would have expected all Opposition to have been decimated with this rout, the curse of 32/32 struck SDF too. Remember, SSP too rode a 32/32 domination in 1989-94 following which it was voted out of office and never allowed back.

The 2014 term began with dissent in the SDF ranks with PS Tamang [Golay] almost missing out on a party ticket and then kept out of the Cabinet. The resentment festered and led to the launch of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha in Feb 2013. The party managed to round up the anti-incumbency sentiments, leverage social-media [a new platform which exploded in 2014] and benefitted from the army of young voters who exploded on the scene with Election 2014. The five years between 2009 and 2014 registered a substantial increase in voter strength at 32.34%. The electorate had increased only by 6.61% in the previous five years, 2004 to 2009.

In retrospect, one can surmise that SDF also miscalculated in bringing back too many old warhorses as candidates. While many of them won, the messaging could have misfired with the extremely young voters, many of them first-timers who had not seen any other government in Sikkim since they were born.

The next installment of this series will delve in Election 2014 in more detail and see if some aspects can be unpacked from that experience.

Meanwhile, people can expect the belligerence of campaigning and the aggression to rise some notches. Media has also changed in the past years and while this has definitely improved on the speed at which information is shared, it remains to be seen whether social media can spin the same influence as it pulled in 2014.

Ex-servicemen rally in Kalimpong

SUMMIT REPORT

KALIMPONG, 17 MAR:

As a mark of respect to the services and sacrifices of army veterans, an ex-servicemen rally was organised at Kalimpong Military Station here under the aegis of the Striking Lion division today.

The rally aimed to strengthen the bond or solidarity between serving and retired soldiers and also to provide them a platform to voice their concerns on various policies affecting veterans, their pension related anomalies and as an expression of genuine concern of the serving personnel towards the



veterans. Around 2,000 ex-servicemen and their families attended the rally.

Veer Naris, WW2 veterans, war-wounded and senior citizens above 80 years of age were felicitated by the chief guest of the day, GOC, 27 Mountain Division, Ajay Kumar Verma, and Deepa Verma, the FWO chairperson.

Soldiers from different units performed Khukuri dance, Highlander dance and Bhanga along with an impressive band display.

Also today, various facilities were extended to ex-servicemen which included a free medical camp, Aadhar registration, Pan Card and Ex-servicemen contributory health scheme and provision of CSD facilities.

HSP releases second list...

Similarly, Mr Lepcha, who is also the founder of Nepali Bhotia Lepcha Sadhbhawana Sangathan, stressed the need for the protection of all communities of Sikkim to save Sikkim. He lashed out against the ruling party for not working earnestly for the protection of the people at the ground level.

He stated that the youthful HSP leadership will work to lead the Sikkimese youths on the right and productive path.

Palman Kami and Neeraj Adhikari also assured to give their best to the party and speak for the people. HSP working president, Bhachung Bhutia, mentioned that the party was releasing its election manifesto in stages covering different categories.

He stated that HSP has detailed programmes and policies to make a 'Happy Sikkim' in the next five years.

"We have programmes for youths to make them self-reliant and to make them free from politics of flags and slogans. We want to help Sikkimese youths live with full prestige and dignity," he said.

Mr Bhutia insisted that only HSP can make Sikkim "new, clean and happy."

He also added that HSP wants to free Sikkim from the politics of the party flags and was hence not asking supporters to put up HSP flags on their houses.

"We are not putting or party flags on any house in the State and as our support base grows, we will remove all SDF and SKM flags from Sikkim before 11 April when Sikkim goes to polls," he said.

CBI arrests two senior IFS officers for bribing MoEF official

NEW DELHI, MAR 17

(PTI): The CBI has arrested two senior Indian Forest Service officers for allegedly bribing an environment ministry official, officials said Sunday.

Tarun Johri and D Gogoi, both chief conservators of forest, posted in Arunachal Pradesh and Port Blair respectively, were arrested in a case of Rs 20,000 to the environment ministry official for getting a departmental work done.

It is alleged that some departmental service matter of Gogoi was pending in the ministry for which he sought help of his batchmate Johri, who was on a visit to Delhi, they said.

Johri paid Rs 10,000 to the official on behalf of Gogoi to a ministry official who complained to his superior about the bribe, they said.

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Cong says it will solve Naga problem if voted to power

KOHIMA, MAR 17 (PTI):

The Congress will solve the vexed Naga problem if voted to power in the upcoming Lok Sabha election, NPCC president K Therie said Sunday.

"Give us another chance to deliver and if we do not, throw us out," Therie appealed to the voters.

Even after the signing of the framework agreement with the NSCN(IM) in

2015 and six Naga nationalist political groups joining the peace talks separately, there has not been a breakthrough on the decades-old Naga problem.

"The Indian National Congress and the founding fathers of the Nagaland Congress have delivered political solution in the past due to which the Nagas are enjoying the fruits of statehood and are protected under Ar-

ticle 371(A) of the Constitution," the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) chief said in a statement.

Chishi was chosen as the Congress candidate to contest the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland after wide consultations to accommodate the views of like-minded parties, societies and groups, he said.

The party has ap-

pealed to the like-minded parties for their support to their candidate in view of the common belief in secularism, opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Bill and early political solution to the Naga issue.

The Congress will also scrap the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Bill if it comes to power, the NPCC chief said in a statement.

Goa CM Manohar Parrikar passes away

PANAJI, MAR 17 (PTI): Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar died at his private residence near here Sunday. He was 63.

Parrikar is survived by two sons and their families.

"Chief Minister passed away around 6.40 pm Sunday," a senior state government official told PTI.

The BJP stalwart's health, which has been fluctuating for a year, took a turn for the worse in the past two days.

In a tweet, President Ram Nath Kovind said, "Extremely sorry to hear of the passing of Shri Manohar Parrikar, chief minister of Goa, after an illness borne with fortitude and dignity."

"An epitome of integrity and dedication in public life, his service to the people of Goa and India will not be forgotten," the President tweeted from his official handle.

Sources said former defence minister Parrikar had been on life support system since late Saturday night.

Parrikar had been unwell since February 2018 when he was diagnosed with a pancreatic ailment.

SAATHI training on counseling basic skills for govt teachers



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 17 MAR:

A 3-day training program on "basic skill of counseling" for government school teachers was organized by Sikim Against Addiction Towards Healthy India [SAATHI] from 15 to 17 March at SICUN, Assam Lingzey. The training was attended by 104 teachers from 103 government schools, a press release informs.

SAATHI president, Tempo Bhutia, welcomed the teachers to the training and introduced the resource person while Dikila Bhutia briefed them on the objectives of SAATHI.

Dr Bibhushan Dahal from STNM Hospital took a session on "Epidemiology and problem of substance use disorders" and explained to teachers on how to recognize signs of substance abuse.

Udai Rai of Serenity Home explained the importance of counseling, shared his own experience of dealing with addiction and stressed the need to give importance to every child.

"Every child is a masterpiece, they are priceless, wonderfully and beautifully made, one should never discriminate. Since teachers play a major role in a student's life, harsh words will leave a deep impact on them and it will show in the society," he shared, adding, "Teachers should be available for the students in times of need and listen to their problems and then the problem of suicides and substance addiction will come down."

Legal Services Camp held at Rangit Nagar

GANGTOK, 17 MAR [IPR]: District Legal Services Authority (South) and Taluk Legal Services Committee (South), in coordination with the Sikim State Legal Services Authority, organized a Legal Services Camp at NHPC compound in Rangit Nagar, Hingdam, South Sikim on 16 March.

Around 134 people attended the program or whom 120 were beneficiaries. The attendees interacted with the officers and representatives of the Departments present to address their problems and to procure appropriate advice and guidance.

The purpose of the program was to spread awareness about welfare legislations and various schemes and to strengthen the community's access to the schemes being implemented by the Legal Services Authority and other Departments of the Government, a



press release informs.

The program aimed at identifying and connecting people to welfare schemes to ensure that fruits of the welfare schemes are passed to the eligible people and also looked into understanding the legal needs of the people by addressing their legal problems and giving appropriate legal advice.

The program focused mainly on NALSA (Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation) Scheme, 2015, NALSA (Effective Implementation of Poverty Alleviation Scheme)

Scheme, 2015 and NALSA (Legal Services to the Victims of Drug Abuse and Eradication of Drug Menace), Scheme, 2015.

The program was launched by Chairperson, DLSA (South), Jyoti Kharka, accompanied by the Secretary, DLSA (South), Urvashi Pradhan; panel advocates BS Pradhan and MD Tamang; Medical Officers Dr Dipshika Pradhan and Dr Rahul Mukhia, Namchi District Hospital; TM Sharma, DCPU (South); TG Rai, PI/ SHO Hingdam, Police Station (South); Renuka Rai, Panchayat Inspector, BAC Ravangla; Sita Chettri, Welfare Inspector, Social Welfare Department; SK Rai, Panchayat President; Passang Lepcha, Panchayat Member; Laxmi Tamang, Para-Legal Volunteer and the local gentry of Hingdam, South Sikim.

During the program, two video shorts were also screened on the benefits of National Legal Services Authority and Sikim State Legal Services Authority.

Nomination filing process begins Monday

EVMS and VVPATs to be randomized and shifted to strong-rooms on 18 Mar

GANGTOK, 17 MAR [IPR]: The District Election Officer, East, informs that all preparations have been made for nomination filing process scheduled to be held from 18 to 25 March.

On days of filing nominations, only three vehicles of the candidates will be allowed within 100m of the East District Administrative Centre.

There will be strict vigilance by District Police on any unauthorized entry and only one door will be allowed for people to enter, the DEO informs.

Further, only the candidate and a maximum of four persons will be allowed to enter the Returning Officer's Chamber.

The filing of nominations

for Assembly Constituency No 17 to 22 can be done in Chamber of Bharani Kumar, ADC/ East, who is the Returning Officer for these constituencies while nominations for AC No. 23 to 28, 32 Sangha and for Parliament can be done in Chamber of Kapil Meena, District Collector/ East who is the Returning Officer for these constituencies.

It is further informed that the first randomization of EVMS and VVPATs will be carried out with the EVM software in the presence of political party representatives.

The randomization process will begin in the District Collectorate at 9 AM sharp followed by the opening of the warehouse at the CEO Office

Building, Baluwakhani.

The warehouse opening will also be done in the presence of political parties and thereafter EVMS and VVPATs meant for polling will be shifted to Strong Rooms at Brihaspati Parsai Senior Secondary School, Ranipool.

The strong rooms for each Assembly Constituency will be separate and kept under 24x7 CCTV surveillance and under double lock system.

Adequate Police security will be kept at Strong Rooms complex after keeping EVMS and VVPATs which will continue till the Election process is over. Fire Safety and all other ECI directions in this regard will be followed at the Strong Rooms, the DEO informs.

Books & Toys donation drive for govt primary schools

BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 17 MAR:

In a move aimed at sharing the joy of reading with government school students and to inject a core change in the school system prioritizing the intellectual growth of students, the Human Resource Development Department, along with BRCs and CRCs under Namchi BAC, today organized a books and toys donation campaign here at Central Park. BRC member Bhupwan Chettri informs that the initiative was mooted by Deputy Director [South], DB Subba. The donated books will go to primary schools in Namchi BAC. Mr Chettri informed that primary schools have now been upgraded with reading corners but face shortage of books.



"When Deputy Director DB Subba came up with the idea to hold a books and toys donation drive, we supported the concept and joined it," he detailed.

He informed that the drive was successful as many donors from Namchi, including the Southern Enfielders, came forward and donated to the cause.

He further informed that a good number of books have been collected which will be sent to Namchi BAC for onward distribution to primary schools.

PAYING GUEST AVAILABLE

PG available for working women & girls at EPCS Church premises, near Primula Lodge at Churuch Road, Gangtok, Sikim. Contact: Mob: 9064804782/ Whatsapp No: 9641549764.

KUTSE SHEGU

The 21 day Shegu of Lt. Sachin Tamang who left for heavenly abode on 25th February 2019 falls on 17th March 2019 (Sunday).

All relatives, family, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence Barbotey, Tamang Gaon, Soreng, West Sikim. We also express our sincere gratitude to all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.



Mrs. Binu Subba (wife) 9647892791
Ms. Jaikala Tamang, Ms. Sujata Tamang, Ms. Sweta Tamang (sisters)
Mr. Rajen Tamang (brother)
6297875142, 9734142686,
8670576733, 9593388722

Cong releases first list of Assembly election candidates

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 MAR:

Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee today released its first list of 16 candidates for the upcoming assembly elections in the State. It is informed that this was a tentative list as it has been sent to the All India Congress Committee for the approval.

Addressing a press conference here this evening, SPCC working president, Dr Dipendra Gurung, announced the names of 16 candidates - five candidates each from East and West districts, four from South District and 1 for the Sangha.

Pema Rinzing Bhutia will contest from Yaksom-Tashiding constituency on a Congress

ticket; Mangal Subba from Yangthang; Dr Dipendra Gurung from Maneibong-Dentam; Dal Bahadur Karki from Gyalshing-Bermiok; Tej Bahadur Rawat from Soreng-Chakung; Gan-ga Maya Cintury from Salghari-Zoom; Ishwar Prasad Rai from Poklok-Kamrang; San-chaman Chettri from Namthang-Rateypani; Deepak Kumar Bhandari from Temi-Namphing; Tula Ram Guragai from Khamdong-Singtam; Deo Kumar Pradhan from Rhenok; Gopal Chettri from Chujachen; Dorjee Wangdi Bhutia from Gnathang-Machong; Sunmit Targain from Gangtok; Penzong Lepcha from Dzongu and Acharya Karma

Tashi from Sangha.

He informed that the AICC has already approved SPCC president Bharat Basnet as Lok Sabha candidate from Sikim.

Dr Gurung mentioned that while the party was open to alliances, when that did not materialize, it decided to go it alone and contest all the assembly and Lok Sabha seats in the State.

SPCC president, Bharat Basnet, informed that AICC will also include two issues of Sikim in the national manifesto - restoration of Nepali seats in the State Assembly and tribal status for left out communities on the basis of Sikim Subject.

Mangan treated to street-play on election processes

MANGAN, 17 MAR [IPR]: Diksha Audio Vision, Tibet Road, Gangtok, performed a street-play on voter awareness at Mangan Bazaar today. The play was performed to generate awareness on election processes like EVMS and VVPAT machines, vote casting, female voter turn-out,



PwD voters and their facilities etc.

The play featured Timothy Rai supported by other seven artists.

The ADC (Dev), Man-

gan-cum-Nodal Officer, SVEEP, Election Department, North District, KR Limboo, informs that the street-play successfully addressed the message.

MCC IS IN EFFECT

WHAT IS MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT?

Model Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections. The Model Code of Conduct comes into force immediately with the announcement of the election schedule by the Commission for ensuring free and fair elections.

Visit the website: eci.gov.in

FAQ

EVM with VVPAT Unit

The diagram shows the components of an EVM with VVPAT Unit: a Ballot Unit (BU) connected to a Control Unit (CU), which is connected to a VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) unit.

Q6. What is Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)?

Ans: Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is an independent system attached with the Electronic Voting Machines that allows the voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended. When a vote is cast, a slip is printed containing the serial number name and symbol of the candidate and remains exposed through transparent window for 7 seconds. Thereafter, this printed slip automatically gets cut and falls in the sealed drop box of the VVPAT

Q7. Whether VVPAT runs on electricity?

CALL 1950 FOR ANY ELECTION RELATED QUERIES

Contact Hours : 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM

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SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Tongue-Tied

About mother tongues, and still no good news to share

The section spoke about mother tongues and indigenous languages recently, and returns to the theme again. As much as this revisit is caused by a bout of obsessing over the issue, it is also necessitated by the always important theme of regional languages and of how they are losing their, well, voice. Even up to a decade and a half ago, it was not rare to find Sikkimese children conversing in up to three languages on a regular basis and reasonably conversant in a third. Most of them are now reduced to being bilinguals and at best with only a passable spoken proficiency in a third. The missing language from their conversations is invariably their mother tongue. This loss is unfortunate and avoidable and offers us the chance to ponder more seriously on where we are going wrong with our efforts at keeping these languages alive.

Languages are essentially about communication; then they take on aspects of culture and invariably underline the ethos of a people. That said, a language obviously ceases to be one when there is no one left speaking it. This does not necessarily happen with the complete annihilation of a people and is most times caused by the language becoming redundant as a tool of communication. The best examples of this are Sanskrit and Latin. Both are now pursued for purely academic reasons, but the languages for all practical purposes are dead. But how does a language die? Past experience proves that the moment "outsiders" stop trying to learn a language, it is already on death-row. And outsiders stop learning a language when they feel no need for it as a tool for communication. All old members of the business community speak fluent Tibetan. They had to if they wanted to trade with Tibet. Everyone in Sikkim, including those who have been here barely a year, speaks Nepali. They have to because they need to get their message across. Similarly, any Sikkimese going out for studies comes back equipped with Hindi-speaking skills. The Chinese are introducing English in their schools because they want to now converse with the world. That more or less settles what is actually a redundant argument that language is about communication.

Now, let's look at Sikkim. Take the Bhutia or Lepcha languages as examples. We don't see too many non-Bhutias or non-Lepchas wanting to learn these languages unless they are involved in some research. Very soon, even the families which still use the language will stop doing so because they have to interact with people from outside every day. These languages then lose all utility and within a generation are lost. Also, because there is so little literary work in these languages, even the aesthetic appeal of learning them is lost.

So what is being done about it? The State government has made it mandatory for all government schools to teach the "local" languages to anyone interested. And that is the best it can do. The students have to enroll for the classes from there on. Is that happening? The other problem is that the government diktat runs only over government schools. Private institutions, which are either cramped for funds or driven by profits, don't offer too many language options. Since these are also institutions which produce the better achievers, we are also releasing too many non-regional language speakers into positions of influence and power in the coming years. Check out any school and the number of enrolments for Nepali and Hindi are much higher even among those for whom neither language is their mother-tongue. The situation will only worsen with time unless we make it worth the while of those who take the trouble to learn these languages. For that, those who complain about losing their language need to create more awareness, produce more literature, get a pop-culture going in these languages, make it more vibrant. The recent release of the first Lepcha language movie was an exciting development on this front. The region needs more of this. Even some attempts at dubbing the bigger box office hits might be worth a try and could deliver some interesting results. The present generation, with its millisecond attention-span, needs a lot of colour to keep them interested. Even if this comes at the cost of diluting some aspects, do it. So what if a compromise has been made, at least a language would have been saved.

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

Christchurch mosque shootings must end New Zealand's innocence about right-wing terrorism

PAUL SPOONLEY
theconversation.com

Mosques across New Zealand remain closed and police presence is strong, following a terrorist attack at two mosques in central Christchurch on Friday.

Fifty people have been killed at Masjid Al Noor and a second mosque nearby.

Three people have been taken into custody in connection with the shootings. One man in his late 20s has been charged with murder.

In the hours after the attacks, New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern made it clear this was a terrorist attack of "extraordinary and unprecedented violence" that had no place in New Zealand.

She said extremist views were not welcome and contrary to New Zealand values, and did not reflect New Zealand as a nation.

"It is one of New Zealand's darkest days. Many of the people affected by this act of extreme violence will be from our refugee and migrant communities. New Zealand is their home. They are us."

She is right. Public opinion surveys such as the Asia New Zealand Foundation annual surveys of attitudes tend to show that a majority of New Zealanders are in favour of diversity and see immigration, in this case from Asia, as providing various benefits for the country.

But extremist politics, including the extreme nationalist and white supremacist politics that appear to be at the core of this attack on Muslims, have been part of our community for a long time.

HISTORY OF WHITE SUPREMACY

I completed research in the UK on the National Front and British National Party in the late 1970s. When I returned to New Zealand, I was told explicitly, including by authorities that were charged with monitoring

extremism, that we did not have similar groups here. But it did not take me long to discover quite the opposite.

Through the 1980s, I looked at more than 70 local groups that met the definition of being extreme right wing. The city that hosted many of these groups was Christchurch.

They were a mixture of skinhead, neo-Nazi and extreme nationalist groups. Some were traditional in their ideology, with a strong underpinning of anti-Semitism and a belief in the supremacy of the "British race". Others inverted the arguments of Māori nationalism to argue for separatism to keep the "white race pure".

And yes, there was violence. The 1989 shooting of an innocent bystander, Wayne Motz, in Christchurch by a skinhead who then walked to a local police kiosk and shot himself. The pictures of the internment showed his friends giving Nazi salutes. In separate incidents, a Korean backpacker and a gay man were killed for ideological reasons.

Things have changed. The 1990s provided the internet and then social media. And events such as the September 11 terror attacks shifted the focus - anti-Semitism was now supplemented by Islamophobia.

HATE SPEECH ONLINE

The earthquakes and subsequent rebuild have significantly transformed the ethnic demography of Christchurch and made it much more multicultural - and more positive about that diversity. It is ironic that this terrorism should take place in this city, despite its history of earlier far right extremism.

We tend not to think too much about the presence of racist and white supremacist groups, until there is some public incident like the desecration of Jewish graves or a march of black-shirted men (they are mostly men) asserting their "right to be white". Perhaps, we are comfortable in thinking, as the prime minister has



said, they are not part of our nation.

Last year, as part of a project to look at hate speech, I looked at what some New Zealanders were saying online. It did not take long to discover the presence of hateful and anti-Muslim comments. It would be wrong to characterise these views and comments as widespread, but New Zealand was certainly not exempt from Islamophobia.

Every so often, it surfaced, such as in the attack on a Muslim woman in a Huntly carpark.

AN END TO COLLECTIVE INNOCENCE

It became even more obvious during 2018. The Canadian YouTuber, Stefan Molyneux, sparked a public debate (along with Lauren Southern) about his right to free speech. Much of the public comment seemed to either overlook or condone his extreme views on what he regards as the threat posed by Islam.

And then there was the public protest in favour of free speech that occurred at the same time, and the signs warning us about the arrival of Sharia law or "Free Tommy" signs. The latter refers to Tommy Robinson, a long-time activist (cf English De-

fence League leader) who was sentenced to prison - and then released on appeal - for contempt of court, essentially by targeting Muslims before the courts.

There is plenty of evidence of local Islamophobic views, especially online. There are, and have been for a long time, individuals and groups who hold white supremacist views. They tend to threaten violence; seldom have they acted on those views. There is also a naivety amongst New Zealanders, including the media, about the need to be tolerant towards the intolerant.

There is not necessarily a direct causation between the presence of Islamophobia and what has happened in Christchurch. But this attack must end our collective innocence.

No matter the size of these extremist communities, they always represent a threat to our collective well-being. Social cohesion and mutual respect need to be asserted and continually worked on.

[the writer is Pro Vice-Chancellor, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Massey University]

How the Syrian uprising began and why it matters

WENDY PEARLMAN
theconversation.com

Amid headlines about the Islamic State group and photographs of rubble, it can be easy to forget that the Syrian war began as a nonviolent uprising.

March 15, the uprising's eighth anniversary, serves as a reminder that any enduring end to the Syrian conflict must address the grievances and aspirations that propelled its beginning. Violent repression cannot create a stable solution, no less a just one.

I'm a scholar of Middle East politics. Since 2012 I have interviewed hundreds of displaced Syrians across the Middle East and Europe. Those interviews are collected in my book, "We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria."

Their stories describe suffocating fear and silence under the authoritarian regime that Hafez al-Assad established in 1970 and his son Bashar inherited.

They also describe how people risked their lives and worked together to fight their oppression.

ADAPTING AND SUBMITTING

Before the civil war, a single ruling party, state surveillance and pervasive covert informants led Syria's parents to raise children on the saying "Whisper, the walls have ears."

An "Emergency Law" in place since the 1960s, gave security forces far-reaching powers to arrest anyone at will.

"If they got even a sense that you're not completely submitting to their demands, you'd be put where the sun doesn't shine," a university student told me. "No one would hear from you again."

While security rule created fear, everyday corruption made indignities the norm. People with whom I spoke recounted their exasperation with paying bribes at every turn and watching regime cronies get rich while their livelihoods deteriorated.

Most demeaning was the sense that complicity was the only way to survive. A mother shrugged, "You just adapted to oppression and rotted along with it."

REBIRTH AND TRANSFORMATION

In early 2011, the Arab Spring galvanized millions in protest in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere. Outside analysts and many Syrians themselves judged that a history of state violence left Syrians too afraid to go out. When a new Facebook page called for revolution on March 15, a few individuals broke the barrier of fear.

That Friday, larger protests formed in southern Syria and security forces opened fire, killing two unarmed protesters. A week later, tens of thousands joined demonstrations across the country.

Syrians recall those demonstrations and the



hundreds that followed, as creative celebrations filled with dance, song and a sense of rebirth. After a lifetime of having to chirp praise for "the Leader," this was the point Syrians went out and said "no." Some describe it as the first time they had heard their own voice.

A graphic designer described how her husband was the first of the two of them to attend a demonstration. He returned to say, in tears, "Anyone who doesn't live this moment cannot consider himself alive." After her first demonstration, she told him that he was right.

Many felt that experience of protest was transformative socially, as well as personally. Hundreds of neighborhood committees formed to organize protests, bringing together people of different backgrounds to exchange ideas and work together. This civic engagement defied the collective distrust that the authoritarian state had actively fostered in order to control society.

SOLIDARITY COULD BE HEROIC

"People took huge risks just to spread leaflets or bring someone to the hospital," a young woman recalled. "I also did crazy things to rescue total strangers ... Because we were together, shouting for the same goals."

ASSAD CRUSHES DISSENT

It took 12 days and 61 deaths before Bashar al-Assad delivered his first address about the crisis.

"If Bashar had made reform, we would have cheered him and made him king," an engineer recalled.

Instead, the president vowed to crush unrest, which he denounced as a foreign conspiracy to foment sectarian strife.

People I interviewed regard such rhetoric as itself a strategy to "sectarianize" the conflict to divide citizens who shared a unifying aspiration for accountability and good governance. They insist

that demonstrations often began at mosques not because they were led by Islamic extremists, but because mosques were the only place where people could legally gather. Many knew stories about Christians or atheists who participated in Friday prayers simply to join marches on the start.

Pounded by repression, the uprising swelled during spring 2011. Calls for reform escalated to demands to topple the regime. After months of overwhelmingly peaceful protests, some in the opposition took up arms.

The regime intensified its reprisals from tanks to indiscriminate aerial bombardment. Other states and non-state actors intervened on the side of the regime or an increasingly fragmented array of rebel groups, propelling a multi-sided war that shattered the country.

"We tried our best to build something," an activist told me, a heavy sense of loss in her voice. "We faced a lot and we faced it alone. But we lost control."

TELLING THE STORY

Today, violence has killed more than half a million Syrians and forced some 12 million to flee their homes. Observers increasingly assert that the Assad regime has "won" the Syrian war.

As the saying goes, history is written by the victors. Assad has a tight grip on media and, in the years to come, Syrians expect that he will continue to promote a story about the conflict that ignores or maligns those who found their voices in peaceful protest eight years ago.

This will be a vengeful denial of one of the century's bravest shows of people's power. No less, it will be a denial of the many ways in which Syrians today continue to call for a society with freedom and justice - and without fear.

[the writer is Associate Professor of Political Science, Northwestern University]

Arunachal CM to be BJP nominee from Mukto Assembly seat

ITANAGAR, MAR 17 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu will contest the April 11 assembly elections from Mukto, his home constituency in Tawang district, bordering China.

Since 2004 assembly elections, the Mukto seat has a history of MLAs being elected without a contest.

Khandu, heading a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government since December 2016, was elected unopposed from the constituency in 2014 and had no rival in the 2011 by-election as well.

The death of his father and former chief minister Dorjee Khandu in a helicopter crash in April 2011 had necessitated the by-poll.

The senior Khandu too was elected unopposed from the Mukto seat in 1990, 2004 and 2009 on a Congress ticket.

The constituency is

dominated by the Monpa community, who are followers of Buddhism.

The BJP on Sunday declared the names of candidates for 54 seats in the 60-member state Assembly.

Among the candidates, few are first timers while the names of several ministers, including Arunachal Pradesh Home Minister Kumar Wai and Tourism Minister Jarkar Gamlin, and that of many sitting MLAs were dropped.

Wai and Gamlin represent Bameng and Alo East seats respectively in the outgoing House.

Sitting MLAs who were denied party tickets this time include Tappuk Taku (Seppa East), Pani Taram (Koloriang), Punji Mara (Taliha), Karo Yekar (Daporijo), Dikdo Nyigyor (Likabali), Lombo Tayang (Mebro), C T Mein (Chowkham), Wanglin Lowangdong

(Borduria-Bogapani) and Thangwang Wanhmag from Longding-Pumao assembly constituency.

Deputy chief minister Chowna Mein has been fielded from Chowkham constituency instead of Lekang which, he has been representing for the five consecutive terms since 1995, due to the recent state-wide protest over the permanent residence certificate (PRC) issue in the state.

The Lekang constituency has over 70 per cent non-tribal voters who are demanding grant of PRCs.

The BJP came to power in the Himalayan state after a majority of Congress MLAs deserted the party to ally with it and later joined it.

The simultaneous polls to two Lok Sabha seats and 60 assembly constituencies in the state will be held on April 11.

Aya Ram Gaya Ram culture gains pace in Odisha

Bhubaneswar, Mar 17 (PTI): With a few weeks left for Lok Sabha and assembly polls and major parties busy in finalising candidates, 'Aya Ram Gaya Ram' culture seems to be gaining momentum in Odisha.

Many leaders, including sitting MPs and MLAs, are now changing party loyalty fearing denial of tickets or defeat in the upcoming polls. Those who had soured their relations with the state leadership are also crossing over from one party to another.

BJDs sitting MP from Nabarangpur Balabhadra Majhi left the ruling party alleging 'neglect' and joined the BJP within 36 hours of resigning from the BJD.

Balabhadra quit the BJD in the backdrop of speculation about the party fielding Odishas SC & ST Development Minister Ramesh Chandra Majhi as its candidate from Nabarangpur Lok Sabha seat.

Two ex-BJD leaders - former Kendrapara MP Baijayant Panda and former minister Damodar Rout - have also joined the BJP, vowing to oust Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Panda had resigned from the ruling BJD while Rout was expelled from the ruling party long ago. They were inducted into the BJP ahead

of the elections.

"I have severed 45 years of relationship with the Janata Parivar as I was expelled from the BJD for no reason. I feel the BJP has the determination to dislodge 19-year-old Naveen Patnaik government," Rout said.

Salipur MLA of Congress Prakash Behera resigned on Saturday alleging 'negligence by the state party leadership'.

Though Behera's name was cleared by the Pradesh Election Committee for becoming a candidate in 2019 polls, he quit the party ahead of elections. Behera joined the BJP in Delhi on Sunday.

Three other sitting Congress MLAs have also quit the grand old party in the run up to elections in Odisha. They are Nabakishore Das (Jharsuguda), Jogesh Singh (Sundergarh) and Krushna Chandra Sagaria (Koraput). Das and Singh joined the BJD, while Sagaria went to the Bahujan Samaj Party.

BJD MLA from Nilagiri in Balasore district Sukant Kumar Nayak also left the party alleging neglect. Sources close to him said he may join the saffron party. Nayaks resignation came after the BJD inducted Nilagiris BJP leader Sushma Biswal into

the party fold.

Earlier last week, former Congress chief minister Hemananda Biswas daughter Sunita Biswal quit the party and joined the BJD after AICC general secretary Jitendra Singh announced that the party would not give more than one ticket to one family.

In an embarrassment for state BJP chief Basant Panda, his nephew joined the ruling BJD and termed his uncle as an 'autocrat'. Former BJP leader and senior MLA Jitendranath Mitra has meanwhile quit the saffron party and joined the BJD.

"Leaders changing party affiliation during election time is natural. This has happened in the past also. There is nothing new in it. Individuals quitting the party will have no impact on BJDs poll prospect," senior BJD leader and Finance Minister SB Behera said.

Meanwhile, BJDs Odisha Pravar Arun Singh claimed many BJD leaders were in touch with the BJP leadership for joining the saffron party.

According to political observers, party hopping will be witnessed in a big way after declaration of candidates list by the BJD, the BJP and the Congress.

Odisha will go to polls in four phases from April 11 to April 29.

To stop BJP, minorities likely to go with TMC in Bengal

PRADIPTA TAPADAR KOLKATA, MAR 17 (PTI): Despite nursing a grudge against the state government for its alleged failure to curb communal riots, the minorities in Bengal are likely to vote for the TMC to stop BJP's march, leaders said.

A deciding factor in several Lok Sabha seats in the state, the minorities especially Muslims are likely to vote for the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) which they perceive as a "credible force" unlike the Congress-Communist Party of India (Marxist) alliance, they claimed.

"Despite having anger against the state government over various issues including several riots that took place in the state, the minorities will vote for TMC in the state to ensure their safety and security," Mo-

ammed Kamruzzaman, General Secretary of All Bengal Minority Youth Federation told PTI.

"In Bengal, TMC is the most credible force as it is in power, when it comes to fight against BJP," he added.

Kamruzzaman, whose organization has the biggest following among Muslim youths in the state, said that the Congress-CPI(M) seat sharing talks have evoked little hopes as credible alternative among the masses.

The Imams of the city, who hold a sway over the large Muslim population here, felt that the minorities should vote for the strongest secular candidate.

"We would appeal to the minorities to vote in favour of the strongest secular forces in their respective areas. Efforts

should be made to ensure that only secular and democratic candidates win," Qazi Fazlur Rahman, the Imam, who conducts prayers on Eid at Red Road every year, told PTI.

The Red Road Eid prayers witnesses the biggest congregation of Muslims in the state.

Rahman's view was echoed by Shafique Qasmi, Imam of Nakoda Masjid, the biggest mosque in the city, who stressed that the minorities must ensure that there was no division of their votes and only a secular and democratic force comes to power.

The minorities, which comprise nearly 30 per cent of the electorate, are a deciding factor in nearly 16-18 Lok Sabha seats of the state. They are a vote bank that every political party has tried to woo.

The Sport of Politics: Where Rathore hit bull's eye and Bhutia missed a sitter

POONAM MEHRA

NEW DELHI, MAR 17 (PTI): One is usually front page, the other mostly at the back. But in election season, politics and sports converge, defying the old adage that the two do not and should not mix.

Sports stars have long dotted the political firmament and will do so again this election with seasoned names like Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, Kirti Azad and Navjot Singh Sidhu in the reckoning and maybe some newbies like cricketer Gautam Gambhir joining their fray.

"I feel sportspersons have a drive to do something for the nation, and whether they are on the playing field or in the field of politics, they always have that in them," Olympics silver medalist and Union minister Rathore told PTI.

The 16th Lok Sabha featured accomplished sportspersons like Rathore, a BJP leader who is minister of state for Information and Broadcasting, as well as former cricketer Kirti Azad (in the BJP to start with and now with the Congress), former football captain Prasanna Banerjee (Tirunamool Congress) and national-level shooter Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo (BJD).

Deo won a trap gold at the national junior shooting championships in 1991.

Rathore, a double trap shooter, became a path-breaker when he was appointed the first sportsperson to helm the sports ministry in



September 2017. He now holds independent charge of the I&B ministry.

"I think it is encouraging that sportspersons are deciding to play an active role in politics and therefore, in nation building. Their career in sports makes athletes disciplined and focussed," Rathore said when asked about his thoughts on sportspersons taking the political plunge.

"They also have a target-oriented approach and are go-getters. These are qualities that are essential in a good leader," said the first-time MP from Jaipur (Rural).

Rathore, Azad, who is in his third term in the lower house, and Banerjee are, however, not the first and neither will they be the last.

The 15th Lok Sabha had, apart from Azad and Deo, former cricket captain Mohammed Azharuddin (Congress) and his ex-teammate Navjot Singh Sidhu (BJP).

Azharuddin was in the fray from the Moradabad constituency in 2014 as well but ended up on the losing side. Sidhu, on the other

hand, made his way to the Rajya Sabha after being denied a ticket in 2014 and eventually quit the BJP to join the Congress.

In 2004, celebrated middle distance runner Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, who won two gold medals in her only Asian Games appearance, represented West Bengal's Krishnanagar constituency for the CPI(M).

Among the earliest to make the seamless transition from sports to politics was hockey star Aslam Sher Khan -- a World Cup gold-medallist and an Olympic bronze-medallist.

Khan was first elected to Lok Sabha in 1984. He won again in 1991 before losing four elections after that. Chetan Chauhan, the man who partnered Sunil Gavaskar in many a memorable stands, was a two-time MP, winning the Amroha constituency for the BJP in 1991 and 1998.

No active sportsperson has entered politics for now.

In the upcoming polls, the buzz doing the rounds is that cricketer Gautam Gambhir will enter the electoral battlefield.

The outspoken former opener, who played a defining role in India's 2011 World Cup-winning campaign, is speculated to compete for the ruling BJP.

There are tangential connections too. Cricketer Ravindra Jadeja's wife Riva Solanki has joined the BJP. She also headed the women's wing of the controversial Karni Sena -- the self-proclaimed representative of the Rajput community which grabbed headlines for violent protests against period Bollywood films deemed offensive by it.

So what pulls athletes to politics? According to Rathore, it's primarily the drive to do something for the nation.

"When I joined politics I was often asked how it is to be a politician after being an army man and a sportsperson. I feel the commonality is that in all my roles, I have the privilege of serving the country," said Rathore.

Not all have been successful though. Former cricketer Mohammed Kaif, who contested once in 2009 for Congress, lost from Uttar Pradesh's Pulpur, the constituency best known for being represented by first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Iconic footballer Bhaichung Bhutia contested for the TMC in 2014, in what was termed a wave election for the party, but lost. He is, however, unfazed and has floated his own party in native state Sikkim for the upcoming polls.

Former national swimming champion-turned-actor Nafisa Ali tried her luck twice, with Congress in 2004 and SP in 2009, but didn't win even once.

Competitive role aside, sportspersons will play an active role in encouraging a higher voter turnout this election.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called on cricket icons Sachin Tendulkar, a former Rajya Sabha member, Virat Kohli, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Rohit Sharma, Virender Sehwag, and champion wrestlers Bajrang Punia and Vinesh Phogat to spread the word on the importance of voting.

Rising cricket star Rishabh Pant and Commonwealth Games gold-winning table tennis sensation Manika Batra have been roped in for a similar campaign by the poll panel.

Sportspersons are also common sight in the Rajya Sabha where honorary memberships is quite regular.

The most high profile among the sitting Rajya Sabha MPs is boxing stalwart MC Mary Kom, who claimed her sixth world title while being an active member last year.

Before her, Tendulkar had added a bit of political history to his cricketing accomplishments by becoming the first active sportsperson to be nominated to the House of Elders.

In India, most complaints by flyers are about harassment by airline staff

DEEPAK PATEL

NEW DELHI, MAR 17 (PTI): Most complaints filed by air passengers in the Civil Aviation Ministry's grievance redressal system relates to behaviour of airline staff and harassment of flyers, according to an official document.

'Loss of baggage' category in Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring system (CPGRAM) has received second highest number of complaints from air passengers, showed a Ministry document accessed by PTI.

The document shows that while 3,524 complaints were received in CPGRAM in the category of 'harassment of passengers/ staff crew behaviour', the number of complaints that were received in the category of 'loss of baggage' was 1,822.

The category of 'ticketing/fare/refund' received third highest number of complaints. It recorded 1,011 grievances as yet.

The CPGRAM is an online system with an objective of "speedy redress and effective monitoring of grievances" by ministries or departments or organisations of central government.

The CPGRAM was established by the Centre in 2007-08.

When asked for data

regarding the number of complaints received against each airline, a senior ministry official said, "There is no option in CPGRAM to segregate the grievances airline-wise."

Last year, the civil aviation ministry had told the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture that "systematic grievance redressal mechanism has been already put in place through which passenger grievances received by this office are forwarded to the concerned airline for redressal directly with the complainant as the travel by air is a contractual matter between the airline and the passenger".

In its report dated December 21, 2018, the Standing Committee said that it "feels that the role of the Ministry should be more than being a transmitter of passenger grievances to the respective airlines".

"The Ministry should ensure that the respective airline has taken necessary action to redress the grievance within a stipulated timeframe. The Ministry should also penalize the airlines in case of not solving the grievances to the satisfaction of passengers," the committee had said.

Nepal's Buddha Air to operate flights to Kolkata from May-end

KATHMANDU, MAR 17 (PTI): Buddha Air, which is Nepal's leading private air service provider, is all set to operate flights to Kolkata from May-end this year, according to a media report.

The airlines had planned to start flights to the eastern Indian city from mid-April. However, it changed its flight dates considering upcoming Indian parliamentary elec-



tions, the Himalayan Times reported. "Although the date of the flights has been changed due to the elections, the flight schedule remains unchanged," a media statement issued by the

Buddha Air was quoted as saying by the paper.

Buddha Air will operate its flights to Kolkata with the ATR 72-500 aircraft on Monday, Wednesday and Friday every week.

Wolves shock Man United to reach FA Cup semis

WOLVERHAMPTON, MARCH 17 (AFP): Wolves inflicted a second straight defeat on Manchester United on Saturday, out-playing Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side to secure a 2-1 win and reach the FA Cup semi-finals.

United lacked spark throughout and were overcome by an eager Wolves side with two goals in the space of six minutes in the second half from Raul Jimenez and Diogo Jota.

Marcus Rashford's injury-time effort was a mere consolation. Solskjaer had presided over a run of just two defeats in 18 games since replacing Jose Mourinho in December, progressing to the quarter-finals of the Champions League and the last eight of the FA Cup.

But now they have suffered two losses in a row after their Champions League exertions at Paris Saint-Germain.

United were favourites but the Midlanders' form against the top six that has carried them to seventh position in the Premier League gave home fans hope.

The early signs were



that United, not Wolves, were going to live up to the hype of the warm-up, dominating early possession.

The visitors created the first opening when Paul Pogba gained a yard of space in the box and curled wide.

Goalkeeper John Ruddy was happy to let the ball drift away but was forced to make a falling save to his left soon afterwards when Rashford let fly from 30 yards.

Wolves' first threat came in the 28th minute when Ruben Neves's low drive was well held by the United goalkeeper Sergio Romero and it was swiftly followed by a better one, Jota fail-

ing to connect properly with a volley from Matt Doherty's centre.

United players surrounded referee Martin Atkinson screaming for a penalty in the 37th minute after Diogo Dalot's hooked shot hit the elbow of Jonny as he turned his back on the ball. But Atkinson was unmoved.

The best chance of the half fell to Wolves, two minutes before the break. Neves sent Jota galloping clear for a one-on-one with Romero, but the United goalkeeper beat his curling shot away.

United had the first opening of the second half when Rashford got

away from Conor Coady on the right side of the box but could only whistle a fierce angled drive a few feet wide.

Wolves replied with a rising, diagonal effort from Jimenez that looped comfortably over the bar. - ROMERO SAVES -

Nuno Espirito Santo's side were gaining in confidence however and created two chances that required some superb goalkeeping from Romero.

First he reacted sharply to tip over a bullet header from Jimenez from Joao Moutinho's corner. The Argentine keeper then palmed over a rising chip from Moutinho from 25 yards as Wolves got on top.

Wolves scored the goal they had been threatening in the 70th minute. The chance seemed to be lost when Jimenez was forced backwards with his back to goal after being crowded out following a superb run by Moutinho, who breezed through three challenges cutting in from the left.

But the Mexican swivelled 180 degrees, after getting a lucky bounce off Pogba and drilled a low shot past Romero. Six minutes later Wolves doubled their lead.

Neves sent Jota racing clear on the counter as Wolves broke and the Portuguese left Luke Shaw in a heap before firing an unstoppable left-foot drive inside Romero's near post.

High drama followed when Atkinson showed Victor Lindelof a red card for lunging in on Jota in front of the Wolves dug-out. VAR was called and deemed it a booking, allowing the Swedish defender a reprieve.

Rashford pulled one back with a shot on the turn in the fifth minute of the five added on, but it was too little, too late.

Happy that Chess is back in Asian Games: Anand

C SHYAM SUNDAR

CHENNAI, MAR 14 (PTI): The legendary Vishwanathan Anand along with other top players welcomed the return of chess to the Asian Games fold for the 2022 edition in Hangzhou, stating that it will be an incentive for players to take up the sport.

Five-time World Champion and the country's first Grand Master Vishwanathan Anand said he was happy with the development adding that looked forward to a medal from the team.

"I am happy about the development. I look forward to a medal from our team," Anand told PTI.

Chess was a part of Asian Games programme at the 2006 edition in Doha and 2010 in Guangzhou. India won two gold medals at Doha, with Koneru Humpy capturing the top prize in the women's rapid individual event and the mixed team winning the standard event gold.

In the 2010 edition, the Indian men won a bronze in the standard team event while D Harika took the bronze in the women's individual (rapid) event. Grand Master Baskaran Adhiban, who is playing

in the World Team Championship in Astana (Kazakhstan), said having chess back in the Asian Games is wonderful news and added it would bring incentives to the players.

"This (having chess back in the Asian Games) is wonderful news. I am very happy to hear that. It is good for the sport and the players, who will stand to receive lot of incentives, which is nice," he added.

Adhiban, who had been part of the Indian team that took part in the Asian Games in Guangzhou in 2010, said there was also a good opportunity for the country to win medals at the games.

The All-India Chess Federation (AICF) Vice-President DV Sundar said it was very good news for the game and the players too and gave India chance to annex medals.

"It is a very good news. Chess was part of the Asian Games programme in 2006 and 2010 and it is great that it is back. India has a very good chance of winning medals," he told PTI.

Sundar said the players also will be happy that chess has made a comeback and expected a team event and individual event

to be part of the games.

Chess will be back at the next edition of Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, after the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) decided to reinstate the sport in its games programme scheduled in September, 2022.

The OCA General Assembly met in Bangkok on March 3 and its president Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad Al-Sabah officially confirmed the development to World Chess Federation (WCF) president Arkady Dvorkovich.

GM RB Ramesh, now a noted coach, whose trainees include R Praggnanandhaa, the world's third youngest GM behind Sergey Karjakin and Chennai lad D Gukesh, said the move to re-induce chess in the Asian Games was fantastic for the game and would provide an incentive to the players to turn out for the country and possibly win medals.

"The players can participate and possibly win medals and get cash awards for winning medals from the government. Also, they will be eligible for Dronacharya and Arjuna awards on par with Asian Games sports," he added.

KT Irfan becomes first Indian from athletics to qualify for Tokyo Olympics



NEW DELHI, MAR 17 (PTI): National record holder KT Irfan Sunday became the first Indian from athletics to qualify for the next year's Olympics while finishing fourth in the 20 km event of the Asian Race Walking Championships in Nomi, Japan.

The 29-year-old Irfan clocked 1 hour 20 minutes and 57 seconds to better the Tokyo Olympics qualification standard of 1 hour 21 minutes.

The Olympics qualification period for race walk events and marathon race has begun from January 1 this year and will run till May 31, 2020. The Olympics qualification period for all other athletics events will start from May 1 this year and will run till June 29, 2020.

No other Indian from athletics has so far qualified for Tokyo Olympics.

Irfan, who has a personal best as well as na-

tional record of 1:20:21 which he did during his 10th place finish in 2012 Olympics, also qualified for this year's World Championships (September 27-October 6) in Doha, Qatar as he bettered the qualifying mark of 1:22:30.

The Kerala race walker had won the 20 km event in the National Open Race Walk Championships in Chennai last month with time of 1:26:18.

He was one of the two Indian athletes who were expelled from the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games for not adhering to the 'no needle policy' of the Games. He was disqualified in the 20 km race walk event of the 2018 Asian Games after receiving his third warning for 'loss of contact'.

Japan's Toshikazu Yamanishi won the 20 km race walk event with an impressive time of 1:17:15 while Kazakh-

stan's Georgiy Sheiko and Korea's Byeong-wang Choe were second and third in 1:20:21 and 1:20:40 respectively.

The Asian and World record in men's 20 km race walk stands in the name of Japanese Yusukey Suzuki who clocked 1:16:36 in the 2015 edition of the same championships in Nomi.

Two other Indians, Devinder Singh and Ganapathi Krishnan also qualified for the World Championships as they clocked 1:21:22 and 1:22:12 respectively. They had finished second and fifth in the Chennai National Race Walk Championships with timings of 1:26:19 and 1:26:43.

In the women's 20 km race walk event, Soumya Baby finished fourth with a timing of 1:36:08, well outside Olympics qualifying standard of 1:31:00 and World Championships qualifying standard of 1:33:30.

"Nobody can erase what these players have done," Zidane about those players he recalled. "I will count on everyone." The victory ends a run of four consecutive home defeats for Madrid and means they are now two points behind Atletico, nine back on Barca.

That deficit will surely prove too big to close but Zidane's job was to restore morale in the 11 league games that are left and to find out what, and who, needs changing in the summer.

Special Olympics: When two Indian athletes discovered the joy of sound

APARAJITA UPADHYAY
ABU DHABI, MAR 17 (PTI): Sport has the power to change lives and it quite literally came true for two hearing-impaired Indian basketball players, who experienced the "joy of sound" thanks to the ongoing Special Olympics (SO) here.

Rincy Biju and Jyothi A are participating for the first time in the world's largest sports event for athletes with intellectual and physical disabilities -- an event which took shape 50 years ago.

The two teenagers were in for a life-changing experience when they joined the SO Healthy Athletes program.

The health screening covers seven aspects -- podiatry (treatment of

feet ailments), physical therapy, better health and well-being, audiology, sports physical exam, vision and dentistry.

And the two girls walked out of the 'Healthy Hearing' hall at the Abu Dhabi Exhibition Centre (ADNEC) with their lives changed forever.

"Both the girls haven't stopped smiling since the time they have got the aids. They are very happy," Sneha Shetye, the women's basketball coach, told PTI.

Born in the fishing community of Kerala, the 18-year-old Rincy and her twin sister had a congenital defect in their ears. Both of Rincy's ears are disfigured and her family had given up hope of ever finding a treatment.

The 17-year-old Jyothi, also from Kerala, was abandoned at birth and was brought up by Nirmal Sadan School for children with special needs.

After a screening here, Rincy was fitted with a hearing aid that resembles a hairband, while Jyothi received a more conventional one placed on the ear.

Overcome with emotion, the two girls couldn't hold back tears once they realised their lives had changed forever.

"Rincy was so happy to receive the aid. She just wants to call her mother and tell her," Shetye said.

"Jyothi never got a hearing screening done. So, none of us knew she had a problem," she added.

India now has 2,293 political parties, 149 registered between Jan & March

NEW DELHI, MAR 17 (PTI): "Bharosa Party", "Sabai Badi Party", and "Rashtriya Saaf Niti Party" are some of the 2,300-odd political parties that India has on the eve of the 2019 general elections.

The Election Commission of India's latest data on political parties, registered till March 9, a day before the Lok Sabha elections were announced, reveal that the country is having a total of 2,293 political parties.

They include seven "recognised national" and 59 "recognised state" parties.

In fact, 149 political parties were registered with the poll panel between February and March on the eve of the announcement of the poll schedule.

Till February this year, the country had 2,143 political parties registered with the Commission, with 58



of them getting registered ahead of the assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Mizoram and Chhattisgarh during November-December last year.

Some of the recently registered 149 parties include Bahujan Azad Party from Sitamarhi in Bihar, Samoochik Ekta Party from Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, Rashtriya Saaf Niti Party from Jaipur, Rajasthan, Sabai Badi Party, Delhi, Bharo-

sa Party from Telangana and New Generation People's Party from Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.

These registered but unrecognised political parties do not have the privilege of contesting elections on a fixed symbol of their own.

They have to choose from a list of 'free symbols' issued by the poll panel. According to the latest EC circular, there are 84 such free symbols

Wayne Rooney has hat trick, DC United routs Real Salt Lake



WASHINGTON, MAR 17 (AP): Wayne Rooney had a hat-trick and added an assist to help D.C. United beat nine-man Real Salt Lake 5-0 on Saturday night.

Rooney converted a penalty to open the scoring in the 34th minute. Marcelo Silva brought down Paul Arriola in the 18-yard box and the penalty was confirmed after video review. Rooney chipped a shot into the right corner in the 35th

minute, and made it 3-0 in the 65th.

Lucas Rodriguez scored in the 76th and Ulises Segura capped the scoring in the 80th. Bill Hamid had his third shutout in three games for D.C. United (2-0-1).

Real Salt Lake dropped to 1-1-1. Jefferson Savarino was shown red in first-half stoppage time for a high kick, and received a second yellow card and was sent off in the 67th minute.

Zidane enjoys winning start but Atletico beaten in Bilbao

MADRID, MAR 17 (AFP): Zinedine Zidane brought Real Madrid's outcasts in from the cold and they repaid him with a win over Celta Vigo on Saturday but La Liga's title race could well be over after Atletico Madrid were beaten by Athletic Bilbao.

Isco and Gareth Bale each scored in Madrid's 2-0 victory over Celta before Atletico lost 2-0 at San Mames, giving Barcelona the chance to go 10 points clear if they overcome Real Betis on Sunday.

Barca's superiority has

been clear for some time but Zidane's new era is up and running. Isco, who had not started a single league game under Santiago Solari, gave Real the lead shortly after the hour and Bale got the goal his own committed display deserved to put sorry Celta out of sight.

Bale was teed up by Marcelo, who was also dropped by Solari but recalled, while Keylor Navas pulled off a superb save in the first half, having been brought back in ahead of Thibaut Courtois.

"Nobody can erase what these players have done," Zidane about those players he recalled. "I will count on everyone." The victory ends a run of four consecutive home defeats for Madrid and means they are now two points behind Atletico, nine back on Barca.

That deficit will surely prove too big to close but Zidane's job was to restore morale in the 11 league games that are left and to find out what, and who, needs changing in the summer.

available currently.

To become a recognised political party either at the state or national level, a party has to secure certain minimum percentage of polled valid votes or certain number of seats in the state legislative assembly or the Lok Sabha during the last election.

Fearing misuse of the provisions for financial contributions to political parties, the Election Commission had in 2016 asked the Central

Board of Direct Taxes to look into the finances of 255 registered but unrecognised political parties it had "unlisted" that year for not contesting polls in the last one decade between 2005 and 2015.

There have been fears that most of such parties are used to 'round trip' the black money into white.

The EC had found that some of the parties were "no longer in existence or functioning".

While the poll watchdog has the mandate to register a political party, the electoral laws denies it the power to deregister any party.

With its demand to get power to deregister a party being pending with the Law Ministry, the Commission had used its powers under Article 324 of the Constitution to "unlist" parties for being dormant and not contesting elections for a long time.

Cyclone Idai hits Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, killing nearly 150

HARARE, MAR 16 (AP): Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi have been hit by a vicious cyclone that has killed nearly 150 people, left hundreds more missing and stranded tens of thousands who are cut off from roads and telephones in mainly poor, rural areas.

Cyclone Idai has affected more than 1.5 million people in the three southern African countries, according to the UN and government officials.

Hardest hit is Mozambique's central port city of Beira where the airport is closed, electricity is out and many homes have been destroyed.

The storm hit Beira late Thursday and moved westward into Zimbabwe and Malawi, affecting thousands more, particularly in eastern areas bordering Mozambique.

Homes, schools, businesses, hospitals and police stations have been destroyed by the cyclone. Thousands were marooned by the heavy flooding and, only caring for their lives, abandoned their possessions to seek safety on higher ground.

UN agencies and the Red Cross are helping

with rescue efforts that include delivering food supplies and medicines by helicopter in the impoverished southern African countries.

Mozambique's President Filipe Nyusi said the damage is "very worrisome" and said that the flooding made it difficult for aircraft to land and carry out rescue operations, according to Mozambique's state radio.

In Zimbabwe, 31 people have died from the floods so far, according to the government. The deaths are mainly in Zimbabwe's Chimanimani, a mountainous area along the eastern border with Mozambique that is popular with tourists. No tourist deaths were recorded, said government spokesman Nick Mangwana.

Roads and bridges were swept away, slowing rescue efforts by the military, government agencies and non-governmental organizations, he said.

The dead included two school students who were among dozens of children trapped in a dormitory after rocks fell from a nearby

mountain, said Mangwana.

Zimbabwe's military is trying to rescue the 197 students at the school, although unsafe conditions are forcing the soldiers to use ground efforts rather than attempt an air rescue, the government's ministry of information said later.

Zimbabwe state television station, ZBC, reported that 150 people are missing.

"We are receiving tragic reports of some people being swept away. We urge patience as rescue is on its way," Zimbabwe's information ministry said in a tweet, although power cuts and communications breakdown in affected areas means the warning might reach just a few.

In Malawi, people "are now facing a second threat of flash floods" following the cyclone, said the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on Twitter.

South Africa's military has sent in aircraft and 10 medical personnel to help in Mozambique and Malawi, it said in a statement Saturday.

Afghan troops go missing after fleeing battle with Taliban

KABUL, MAR 17 (AP): Around 100 Afghan soldiers fled their posts and tried to cross into neighbouring Turkmenistan during a weeklong battle with the Taliban, officials said Sunday.

Mohammad Naser Nazari, a provincial council member in the western Badghis province, said the soldiers were not allowed to cross the border and their fate remains unknown.

The Taliban have posted pictures of captured soldiers on social media.

Jamshid Shahabi, the provincial governor's spokesman, said 16 soldiers have been killed and 20 wounded during the ongoing battle in the Bala Murghab district, in



which the military carried out airstrikes and dispatched reinforcements.

He said a number of soldiers tried to flee, without providing an exact figure.

Shahabi said more

than 40 insurgents were killed in the fighting.

He said the provincial police chief and army commander are in the district and instructing the forces to root out insurgents and res-

cue soldiers.

Officials said the fighting had largely subsided by Sunday, with sporadic clashes breaking out in remote areas.

Nazari provided a higher toll, saying 50

soldiers were killed and around 100 others were missing.

He said hundreds of local residents have gathered in front of the governor's office to express their concerns about security in the province.

He said Bala Murghab is almost completely controlled by the Taliban, with Afghan forces confined to the district headquarters.

The Taliban have been carrying out near-daily attacks across Afghanistan, mainly targeting the government and causing staggering casualties.

The attacks have continued despite stepped-up US efforts to negotiate an end to the 17-year war, America's longest.

Theresa May hopes to be third time lucky with Brexit vote

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, MAR 17 (PTI):

British Prime Minister Theresa May on Sunday called on her rebellious MPs to do the patriotic thing to strike an honourable compromise over Brexit as she prepares to table her twice-defeated withdrawal agreement to another Parliament vote next week, hoping it would prove third time lucky for her.

Her latest plea came at the end of a frenetic week in Westminster as MPs voted on a flurry of motions, not just ruling out leaving the European Union (EU) with May's deal but also without any deal in place at all, calling for a delay to the March 29 Brexit Day deadline.

May warned deeply divided Brexiters within her own party and across the House of Commons that failure to once again support her deal,

which was defeated by a resounding 230-vote margin in January and a smaller 149-vote margin last week, would mean the UK may not leave the EU for many months and may even rule out Brexit altogether.

She urged MPs to get behind her improved deal before a European Council summit in Brussels next week, with legally binding changes to the controversial Irish backstop clause addressing concerns that the UK could be tied to EU rules indefinitely.

If Parliament can find a way to back the Brexit deal before European Council, the UK will leave the EU this spring without having to take part in the European elections. If it cannot, we will not leave the EU for many months, if ever, she writes in The Sunday Telegraph.

As things stand, May is hoping to return to

Brussels with a Parliament-backed deal to seek a short delay until June 30 to complete procedures.

It is for the EU to decide the terms and conditions of any extension because legally the UK is still due to leave the economic bloc on March 29.

With European Parliament elections scheduled to take place towards the end of May, if the UK Parliament remains deadlocked over an exit strategy, the EU is expected to agree to only a lengthy delay to the Article 50 Brexit mechanism.

Such a move would necessitate Britain's participation in the European Parliament polls.

The idea of the British people going to the polls to elect MEPs [Members of European Parliament] three years after voting to leave the EU hardly bears thinking about. There could be no more potent

symbol of Parliament's collective political failure, Theresa May warned.

Against this backdrop, she is set for a last-ditch attempt at getting her deal through the Commons as she seeks to change the mind of 75 MPs to vote differently from last week and win the required majority.

For those who backed remain, I am asking them to remove any chance of the UK staying in the EU. For those who backed leave, I am asking them to vote for a form of Brexit that may not be everything they hoped for, she urged.

There are some signs that hard-Brexiters might be ready to change their minds over fears of a lengthy delay or no Brexit at all, with a letter signed by Tory MPs from Leave-backing constituencies, including former Brexit Secretary David Davis, urging colleagues to back the deal.

At least 50 killed by flash floods in Indonesia's Papua

JAYAPURA (INDONESIA), MAR 17 (AFP): At least 50 people have been killed by flash floods in Indonesia's eastern Papua province, an official said Sunday, as rescuers raced to find more victims of the disaster.

The floods in Sentani, near the provincial capital of Jayapura, were triggered by torrential rain and subsequent landslides on Saturday, and also left 59 people injured.

Dozens of homes were damaged by floodwaters, national disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said.

"The number of casualties and impact of the disaster will likely increase as search and rescue teams are still trying to reach other affected areas," he added.

"The floods were likely caused by a landslide." The waters had receded but officials were still trying to evacuate people.

"The joint search and rescue teams are still do-



ing evacuations and not all affected areas have been reached because of fallen trees, rocks, mud and other material," Nugroho said.

Video footage from the scene showed rescuers administering oxygen to a victim who appeared trapped beneath a fallen tree.

Uprooted trees and other debris were strewn across muddy roads, while at Jayapura's small airport a propeller plane lay partly crushed on a runway.

Papua shares a border with independent Papua New Guinea on

an island just north of Australia.

Flooding is not uncommon in Indonesia, especially during the rainy season which runs from October to April.

In January, floods and landslides killed at least 70 people on Sulawesi island, while earlier this month hundreds in West Java province were forced to evacuate when torrential rains triggered severe flooding.

The Southeast Asian archipelago of some 17,000 islands is one of the most disaster-prone nations on Earth, strad-

dling the Pacific Ring of Fire, where tectonic plates collide.

Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are common.

In December, the western part of Java island was slammed by a deadly volcano-triggered tsunami that killed about 400 people.

Also last year, the city of Palu in Sulawesi was rocked by a quake-tsunami disaster that killed thousands, while hundreds of others died in a series of quakes that hit the holiday island of Lombok, next to Bali.

Thailand's early voting kicks off with crowds, long lines

BANGKOK, MAR 17 (AFP): Hundreds of thousands of voters crowded into schools, parking lots and temples across Thailand on Sunday, eager to cast an early ballot a week before the country's first election in eight years.

Advanced voting is usually a tepid affair, but on Sunday excitement was high as voters turned up in droves to polling stations.

More than 2.3 million Thais are expected to vote before the official March 24 poll date.

Since a 2014 coup ousted then-premier Yingluck Shinawatra, the junta has repeatedly postponed democratic elections -- much to the chagrin of the Thai public.

"I finally have a chance to cast my vote as I've waited for so long," said 48-year-old Paka Kaengkhiw as she stood

in line in front of Bangkok's Phra Khanong district office.

In Dusit district -- home to military offices and government buildings -- voters crowded in a school yard before a polling station there opened.

People dressed in their work clothes -- military uniforms, hospital scrubs and more casual attire -- waited patiently to cast their ballot, aided by student helpers.

At 9 am Prem Tinsulanonda, the powerful head of the Privy Council -- the advisory board to Thai King Maha Vajiralongkorn -- arrived at the school.

Watched by Thai and international media, the 98-year-old was pushed in a wheelchair into a classroom boasting a portrait of the late King Bhumibol, who he advised, before walking the final steps to a polling booth.



More than 51 million Thais are eligible to vote in the official March 24 election, which will be held under a new military-scripted constitution.

Analysts say the new electoral system favours the army-aligned party fronted by junta leader

Prayut Chan-O-Cha, who is running to be civilian prime minister after a government is formed.

But voters on Sunday still held on to hopes for change.

"I vote today in the hope for better change," said Mart Bupa, 53.





BRRRRR! The Doctor Strange star, Benedict Cumberbatch, supports Red Nose Day in the UK by taking a dip in cold water.

No one seems to be reacting to #MeToo stories, says Lily Allen

NEW YORK, MAR 17 (PTI): Singer Lily Allen says #MeToo movement does not appear to be moving forward as nobody seems to be "reacting" to the stories of sexual harassment once they surface.

The 33-year-old musician says the experiences account to breaking news when revealed but people move on soon.

"Everyone is sort of a bit like, 'Yeah, yeah, that happened, but what do you expect?' I think that's the danger with the #MeToo movement. So many people are coming forward and sharing their experiences, and no one seems to be reacting. It's news, and then people move on. It's an interesting time," Allen told *Civilian* magazine.

The "Smile" hitmaker believes people tend to talk about stories of sexual violence as if they are "sensational" and "exceptional".

"That's the issue, people want to talk about



these things as if they are sensational and exceptional. They're not! They're happening to everyone all the f***ing time... Men especially just don't want to believe it, you know whether it has something to do with themselves or accountability, or I don't know what it is - oh, to be a rich white man," she said.

Our industry has balanced content, commercial cinema well: Anil Kapoor

MUMBAI, MAR 17 (PTI): Anil Kapoor says Indian film industry has successfully struck a balance between content-driven and commercial cinema.

The 62-year-old actor said if the story is good, it receives love from the audience.

"There is a place and audience for all types of cinema - content and commercial and our industry has balanced it well. Films with good content are making good money at the box office. This is all because audience is more evolved than ever before."

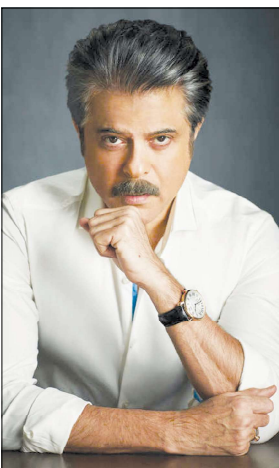
"Audiences have evolved and so films have evolved to better resonate with that change. I don't think it's a matter of films being better or worse. It's a matter of being the reflection of the times," Kapoor told PTI.

This year the actor has had two releases -- "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" and "Total Dhamaal". The films minted Rs 43 crore and Rs 145 crore, respectively.

Kapoor said he has been experimenting with every film and is happy about it.

"There is a sense of self-growth and fulfilment and the feeling of a job well done. I take pride in that."

His next releases include Anees Bazmee's "Pagalpanti", "Takht" with Karan Johar, and a biopic on Olympic gold medalist Abhinav Bindra with son Harshvardhan Kapoor.



Kapoor and daughter Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, who recently shared screen space for the first time in "Ek Ladki Ko...", have been roped in as the brand ambassadors by Scott Eyewear.

Aamir Khan has been my guiding force: Darsheel Safary

MUMBAI, MAR 17 (PTI): Darsheel Safary, the breakout star of "Taare Zameen Par", says director of the film and superstar Aamir Khan has been his guiding force.

Darsheel was applauded by both the audience and critics for his moving portrayal of a child with dyslexia Ishaan Awashti in the film.

"He has been by a guiding force. My dad often speaks to him. It has been a long time since I spoke to him. We keep consulting about should we do this, what is happening, he replies, he responds till date. And it is very nice of him."

"I would love to talk about cinema, industry (with him). He will be quite shocked as the last time he left me I was this 10-year-old naughty, mischievous kid, who did not know what he is supposed to do. Now I am getting my way right, I have developed a passion for films. I would love to have a conversation with him about that someday," Darsheel told PTI.

After "Taare Zameen Par" he did act in a few films like Priyadarshan's "Bumm Bumm Bole", Disney's "Zokkomon" and Deepa Mehta's "Midnight's Children".

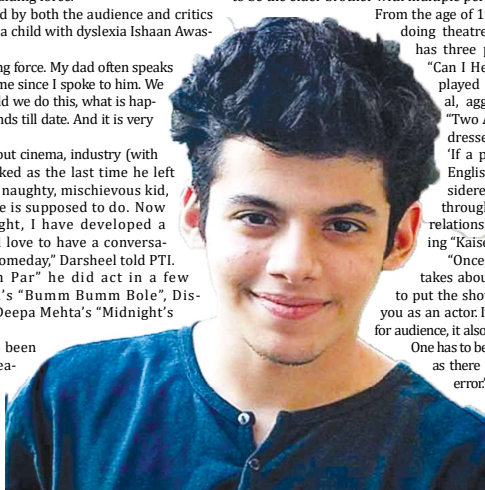
The 22-year-old has been auditioning for ad films, features and for the digital platform.

"People call me because I have acted in 'Taare...' they ask me what are your plans. I do go for auditions. I am being choosy, I don't want to do random stuff, want to do something that appeals to me."

He said whatever interesting work comes his way he tries to make the most of it.

"For me the key lies in working towards my passion. I am sure it will work out one day."

He is busy with his latest play "Kaise Kareng?" which pre-



miered Saturday. It is a story of two brothers, played by Darsheel and Abhishek Pattnaik, and how the latter, who happens to be the elder brother with multiple personality disorder.

From the age of 19, Darsheel has been doing theatre and since then he has three plays to his credit -

"Can I Help You", in which he played the role of a suicidal, aggressive fast bowler, "Two Adorable Losers" addressed the question about "If a person speaks fluent English, why is he considered knowledgeable?" through student-teacher relationship and the third being "Kaise Kareng?".

"Once the script is ready it takes about three-four months to put the show. Theatre enhances you as an actor. It is fun to perform live for audience, it also helps you as an actor."

One has to be more observant, alert as there is very little room for error."

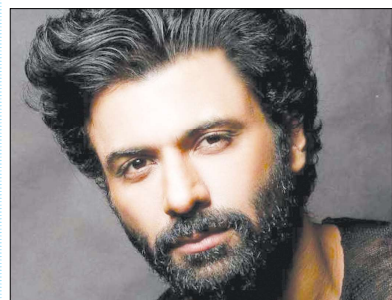
Citing example of his play, "Two Adorable Losers", which has had 90 plus shows, Darsheel said theatre is

all about good content.

"Today the generation says that theatre is a dying form, I strongly disagree. It all depends on the content you get more people to watch it if the story is good."

He said even when he starts doing films he will continue to do theatre just like veteran actors like Paresh Rawal and Naseeruddin Shah.

No north-south divide in content anymore: 'Badla' actor Tony Luke



MUMBAI, MAR 17 (PTI): Malayalam actor Tony Luke says the fact that his performance in his Hindi debut "Badla" was well-received reflects there is no divide between talent from north and south.

Tony made his acting debut in 2016 with the Malayalam movie "Oozham" and has since featured in three more films in south film industry.

"Today an actor has a future in the film industry because content rules. The North and South have come together. Now it's about Indian content versus the global, not North and South," Tony told PTI.

"There are people like Karan Johar and Rajamouli coming together, to make truly Indian cinema and the times are only going to change for the better," he added.

Tony said when the project came his way, he was initially reluctant to audition as

he felt there was "no chance" he would make it.

"I thought my Hindi is bad, because I'm from the South so I didn't even believe I could be a part of it, until Sujoy met me and said 'you're the boy'. Sujoy decided to place me as an actor and I'm grateful for that. There's no heavy pressure on me to be a star," he said.

The actor said he feels "blessed" that he bagged the thriller, where his biggest takeaway was learning from megastar Amitabh Bachchan.

"If someone told me last year that I would be a part of a big film such as this, I would've laughed it off. To be on the set and watch Mr Bachchan perform is surreal. As an actor, you take away so much just by observing him and imbibing his energy."

Going forward, Tony said, if everything falls in place, he will be soon seen in an international web series.

Script is the real hero of any film: Saswata

KOLKATA, MAR 17 (PTI): 'Kahaani' actor Saswata Chatterjee, who will step into the shoes of a writer suffering from identity crisis in upcoming Bengali flick 'Dwikhandito', says for him script is the hero of any film.

"In a film, the script becomes the real hero. If the script cannot narrate a story in a film, it will fall flat."

No amount of acting, camera and other technical flourish can pull it up," said Chatterjee, who has essayed several critically acclaimed roles in Bengali films like 'Ebar Shabor', 'Laptop', 'Goynar Baksho', 'Rajkahini', 'Bhootor Bhoishoy' and 'Proloy'.

"I always take up a film if that has something unique to offer, something different to offer," he told PTI Friday.

The 48-year-old actor, whose 'Dwikhandito' and 'Tarikh' are awaiting release, said, "In my acting career I consider myself lucky to have been offered so many varied roles which had layers."

Chatterjee, who had turned up in a comic character in 'Hoichoi Unlimited', regretted that true comic roles are becoming fewer in Bengali film industry.

"We don't have true comic characters and true comedies in Bengali film industry any more, like the ones in past. We have forgotten to laugh at ourselves. True comedy is not mimicry," he said.

About 'Dwikhandito', he said, "My role in the film is one of the most complex ones. I have portrayed multiple characters in the film - sometimes the character of father and at other times his daughter. There are also some other characters which I portrayed by changing my voice and body language."

The film revolves around the life of a writer Kaushik Roy who suffers from dissociative identity crisis and begins to enact in his real life the characters created by him in his writings and is eventually admitted to a hospital.

Chatterjee plays the role of the writer, while that of the writer's wife is essayed by Anjana Basu in 'Dwikhandito' which will be released on March 29.

He said debutant director Nabarun Sen, an NRI in Singapore, has brought up an interesting issue. "We will be able to identify people with such traits, around us."

The film's story has been written by Sen and it has no relation with Taslima Nasrin's controversial novel 'Dwikhandito'.

To a question if the financial viability of cinema will be at stake if people stop going to theatres, Chatterjee said, "Cinema will survive as people will continue to watch it on mobiles and laptops. But these are not the ideal mediums."

"For really enjoying a film, to see the full effect of watching a film the audiences should go to theatres. Laptop or mobiles cannot replace the experience of watching a film in theatres," he said.

ARIES: Daydream interruption alert! New information or opportunities may unfold that require 100 percent of your focus. Of course, with distractible Jupiter in your worldly and visionary ninth house smashed up with mental Mercury retrograde in your dreamy twelfth, it could easily to confuse so-called reality with fantasy.

TAURUS: In your quest for balance between being transparent and protecting secrets, you might veer too far to one side or the other today. A challenging clash between loose-lipped Mercury retrograde and #NoFilters Jupiter could make it hard to keep things under wraps. You know that confidences need to be carefully guarded, yet you may have a burning desire to share an irresistible piece of gossip or a questionable photo.

GEMINI: A percolating partnership could merit a closer look today. Even if things have been humming along beautifully, it's always smart to think ahead. How's your prognosis as a team? Supersizer Jupiter has been spurring things, but a square

to analytical Mercury retrograde in your future-oriented tenth house raises some legit concerns.

CANCER: There are only so many hours in the day. Cancer. And today's clash between boundary-challenged Jupiter and methodical Mercury (who's currently retrograde) is a reminder that even YOU can't magically change that. This might not be a matter of time management; it may be more about managing your FOMO. Of course you want to do, see and experience it all! That's the beautiful thing about you—but by trying to be everywhere, you can't enjoy the present moment.

LEO: You may not be getting a clear read on someone under today's confusing star-map, so take that as a sign to proceed with extreme caution. Zealous Jupiter in your romance zone is squaring off against analytical Mercury (retrograde) in your intensely emotional eighth house. Are you letting your rational left brain override your more feelings-oriented right brain? Drop it down into your heart and react from there. That's your

superpower, Leo! That said, you COULD always come out and ask someone how they feel. Better than agonizing over an assumption that may be wildly off-base.

VIRGO: You hate to disappoint a friend in need—or to miss a happening after-work event. But some days, you just have to resist the pressure to come out and play. You may be feeling depleted, and if you don't get some "me time," like, now, you could totally crash (not to mention make yourself susceptible for those nasty winter bugs going around).

LIBRA: No need to lower the blinds if you want a little shade. Thanks to today's agitating Sun-Jupiter square, you'll be throwing some of it yourself. Under this magnifying transit, people's annoying "quirks" will really get under your skin. Breathe, Libra, breathe. Let this be your signal to deploy some immediate self-care. Book the 90-minute massage or spend the whole day at the spa.

SCORPIO: All the glitter may not be gold—but that won't stop you from pulling out your wallet. With a decadent Sun-Jupiter mashup overhead, you'd be wise to carry

a set amount of cash and leave your debit cards locked up at home. If you're trying to save up, don't meet friends for "window shopping." The odds of you heading home empty-handed are basically zero.

SAGITTARIUS: Familiarity can breed contempt today, as your ruler, Jupiter, in Sagittarius catches some shade from the moody Pisces Sun. Yesterday, it was all love with your soul squad and favorite relatives. Today, even their most endearing traits will grate on your nerves. At moments like this, your best course of action is to just take some space. Better that than to lash out at them for an innocent "mistake" or, worse, for simply being in your space!

CAPRICORN: Peel off that power suit and kick off those pinchy stilettos. Your heart—and the rest of you—wants to hunker down in your home sweet home. Can you swing a remote workday or head home early? Grab that sheepskin throw and make yourself a pillow fort as your "office." No can do? Do everything in your power to make your cubicle feel cozier. Maybe it's time to invest in a French press for brewing up loose-leaf

tea or a pair of noise-canceling headphones for playing meditative music...and drowning out your coworker's ultra-annoying voice.

AQUARIUS: Tighten your grasp on your wallet, Aquarius, especially if you're part of any decadent Friday night celebrations. Things could spin out of control without much warning, as rounds of drinks escalate into the double digits or someone wants to dine at that \$\$\$\$ resto. Definitely don't be the one to reach for the (paycheck-sized) bill. You may wind up spending a bit more than you planned to, but you don't HAVE to break the bank. And if there's a part deux to the partying and you're already exhausted, don't be shy about calling it a night.

PISCES: Overwhelmed by work? If you can filter out the disruptions and concentrate on each task, you CAN pull this off, Pisces. Today, visionary Jupiter in your career corner is squaring off with distracted Mercury retrograde in your sign. The temptation to multitask is strong, but you are stronger! Focus on your goals and the reasons you set them in the first place. Keep your phone on silent and close all social media sites.