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SummitTIMES

Vol 03 | Issue 327 | Gangtok | Monday | 24 December 2018

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RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

Governor hails initiative as 'momentous' and 'auspicious'

INTERNATIONAL HINDU BUDDHIST DARSHAN CONFERENCE AT JORETHANG

JORETHANG, 23 DEC [IPR]: Governor Ganga Prasad attended the International Hindu Buddhist Darshan Conference 2018 organised by Hindu Buddhist Organising Committee as chief guest at Jorethang playground today.

The conference is being organized with the objective to facilitate a cross pollination of ideas and foster harmony while also focussing on exploring shared values of dharmic traditions, which, the organizers hope, will provide a guiding light to the troubled world of today.



Accompanying the Governor as special guests were the area MLA, Health Minister AK Ghatani, Goshir Gyaltsab Rinpoche, Swami Ananda Brahmachariji Maharaj, Lama Sonam Gyurmi

Khempola, Chaitanya Krishnaji Maharaj, Indresh Kumarji, Rohit Raj Maharaj, Guinness World Record Holder Arpan Sharma, NASA researcher Chaitanya Maharaj Ji.

Various other eminent religious leaders of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy from Nepal and Bhutan, Advisors, Chairpersons, officials, NJMC members, panchayats and NGO representatives were also present among

a massive gathering of general public.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor expressed his "sincere contentment" on being a "fortunate participant" of the International Hindu Bud-

dhist Darshan Sammelan.

Termining the occasion as both momentous and auspicious for all present, the Governor shared how Buddhism and Hinduism were the most ancient religions of the world which share strong similarities.

Drawing similarities between the two, he spoke about the belief of reincarnation, dharma and karma in both Hinduism and Buddhism.

He also spoke in brief about the pursuit of enlightenment and liberation in both the religions.

The Governor, in his address, also lauded the noble programmes initiated by the State Government which established positive initiatives which are pro-people in nature.

He also urged the people of Sikkim to lead a life that emphasises

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CM attends Denzong Monlam Chenmo at Tathagata Tsal



NAMCHI, 23 DEC [IPR]: Chief Minister Pawan Chamling attended the concluding day of Denzong Monlam Chenmo at the prayer hall of Tathagata Tsal today.

At the outset, the Chief Minister offered prayers at the shrine and sought blessings from Drubwang Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche.

The CM was accompanied by the area MLA, Power Minister DD Bhutia, officials and a large congregation of devotees.

This is the maiden Denzong Monlam Chen-

mo organized by Tathagata Tsal and was undertaken in collaboration with the Karma Rabtenling Monastery.

The three-day event was presided over by Drubwang Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche and included prayers, teachings on 'the words of the perfect teacher' and was completed with Sengdongma empowerment.

This prayer ceremony also aims to attain true enlightenment among sentient beings and spread the message of love, compassion, kindness, peace and harmony.

Janta Melas to begin 16 Jan

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 23 DEC:

The second phase of Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, popularly known as Janta Melas, will be held from 16 January, starting from Gangtok.

As per the schedule provided by the State Government, this time, the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan will start from East and conclude in West district. The first schedule does not include details for South district.

As per the schedule, after Gangtok, the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan will roll down to Rorathang on 17 January, be held at Mangang on 20 January, then on 22 January at Mangley/ Sinchuthang, 24 Jan on Jorethang, 27 January at Soreng and conclude in Gyalshing on 28 January.

Through these seven episodes of Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, the Chief Minister is expected to address the public at the different ven-

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4.7 magnitude earthquake hits Nepal

KATHMANDU, DEC 23 (PTI): An earthquake measuring 4.7 on the Richter Scale jolted Sindhupalchowk district in Nepal early Sunday morning, creating panic among the residents.

The quake was felt at 5.06 am (local time) in Sindhupalchowk district, 80-km east of Kathmandu, according to the National Seismological Department of Nepal.

The tremor was also felt in Kathmandu, the capital city of the country.

However, there were no reports of any loss of lives or properties due to the quake.

Shiva Hang Subba - Always Onwards

ALISHA BHAGAT & LAYMIT LEPCHA

GANGTOK, 23 DEC:

"I believe that nothing is impossible in life when your passion and dedication is strong," shares long-distance runner from Sikkim, Shiva Hang Subba.

He has proved this with his impressive performance in the recent 12 Hour Stadium Run held on 16 December at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi where he secured the second position covering 283 laps of the stadium and a distance of 119.709 KMs in 12 hours.

This achievement is very momentous for him as he was just one lap behind Abhishek Rathor of Delhi, who finished on the first position covering 284 laps and a distance of 120.132 KMs in 12 hours.

After returning from



New Delhi, Shiva Hang shared his journey and achievements and future plans with Summit-

Times. Shiva Hang hails from Timbrong, Yuksom in West Sikkim. He com-

pleted his schooling from Darap Senior Secondary School in the year 2016.

After schooling, he took the decision to support his family rather than to go for the further studies. There are nine members in his family so he took the responsibility of his family at a young age along with his father.

"It was very hard for my father to run the family alone so I started to work part time in a travel agency as a trekking guide for tourists coming to our area. Although many challenges and obstacles have still been coming on my way I have learned to always move forward in life," he says.

Shiva Hang was always passionate about sports, trekking and adventure activities. After being motivated and inspired by initiatives and achievements of the Mara-

thon Man of Sikkim, Amar Subba, his interest in marathon became stronger.

In the meantime, Amar Subba recognized Shiva Hang's passion and potential for marathons at the right time and started to guide and prepare him for long distance running events. He also started to prove his mettle in different marathons held in the State.

In his debut appearance in an ultra marathon, Shiva Hang finished the 12 Hours Stadium Run held in August earlier this year at Bangalore on the fourth position by covering a distance of 101.5 KMs. On the basis of this performance, he was shortlisted by NEB Sports Entertainment for the recent 12 Hours Stadium Run held at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi.

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New award announced for National Unity

NEW DELHI, DEC 23 (PTI): Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced the institution of a new national honour for National Unity on the pattern of Padma Awards, an official statement said Sunday.

The annual award would be given to any Indian who has contributed to national unity in any manner, it said, adding that the prime minister drew inspiration from Sardar Patel's contribution towards unification of the country.

The announcement was made at the just concluded annual conference of Director Generals of Police and Inspector Generals of Police held at Kevadiya in Narmada district of Gujarat, near the statue of Sardar Val-

labh Bhai Patel, country's first home minister.

Modi also released a commemorative postal stamp on the National Police Memorial and a special issue of Indian Police Journal on police martyrdom, published by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), it said.

The prime minister also suggested that a national level parade may be organised by police forces of about three to four states near Patel's statue, called the 'Statue of Unity, every year on Patel's birthday on October 31.

This day is also observed as National Unity Day. The prime minister also launched the website of the Cyber Coordination Centre, which will

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Himalayan glaciers retreating at alarming rate: Parliamentary panel

NEW DELHI, DEC 23 (PTI): A Parliamentary panel has recommended the Centre to make adequate financial allocation and infrastructure available for an extensive study of the Himalayan ecosystem to measure the extent of glacial retreat and the ways to mitigate its effects.

Noting that glaciers in the Himalayan region are retreating at an "alarming rate" and that there is a need to regulate tourism activities, the panel has also suggested the Centre to constitute a committee of experts to formulate the guidelines to be observed while preparing the roadmap for Himalayan Eco-tourism.

The Committee on Estimates (2018-19) in its 30th report on performance of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) said urgent steps are required to create a mechanism involving all stakeholders who are directly or indirectly af-



ected by the changes in Himalayan system so that integrated approach is adopted in the entire region.

Such a platform will need international cooperation from all the countries falling in or connected to the Himalayan range, it pointed out.

The panel chaired by senior BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi noted that "reckless and irresponsible" tourism in the Himalayan ecosystem is one of the major reasons for environmental degradation and asserted that with the construction of roads

and luxurious amenities for tourists, the number of people visiting has vastly increased which is increasing the pressure on the ecosystem.

As a result of large number of visitors, the roads, the houses, the hotels and resorts - all of these have to

be constructed by cutting mountains and many of these constructions are not as per specifications for mountains but are more inspired by plain areas, the panel said.

It recommended public awareness campaigns for sensitising people about vulnerability of Himalayan region and need for sustainable tourism be undertaken by the government.

"The committee, therefore, recommends that adequate financial allocation be made and adequate infrastructure be created for extensive study of the Himalayan ecosystem to measure the retreat of all the glaciers existing in the region and the ways to mitigate its effects.

"Besides there is a need to regulate Himalayan eco-tourism. A committee comprising experts should be constituted to formulate the guidelines to be observed while preparing

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**Gangtok on
Monday,
24 Dec**

Temp: 10°C/06°C
Forecast: Sunny
to partly cloudy
with a little rain in
the evening, then
a shower in spots

Sunrise: 07:01 AM
Sunset: 03:49 PM

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Claims do not translate to victories: DD Bhutia on SKM claims

REBYNA RANA

GANGTOK, 23 DEC:

Senior SDF minister, DDD Bhutia, today made light of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha claims of SDF losing ground in South and West Sikkim, long established as SDF strongholds.

Interacting with media-persons today at Rabongla after completion of Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's visit, Mr Bhutia, who represents Berfung constituency of South Sikkim, said, "You cannot win elections just by making empty claims. Words do not translate to electoral victories."

This was in response to media queries about his response to SKM claims that SDF was trailing in the districts.

"Time will tell who wins the coming elections. In a democracy, people reign supreme and only they decide who will win an election



based on who they trust to give them a Sikkim of their choice," he said, adding that this trust has resided with the SDF for the past two and a half decades.

He said that the party organisation of SDF was strong in the districts.

About his own prospects, should he get the

party ticket again, he said, "We have already done our homework on who is with us and who are with the opposition and who are neutral. Last elections, I got 6,500 votes while my opponent got only 3,400 votes. The votes I got in the last elections are intact and moreover, people from

other opposition parties have come and joined our party. The support base of SDF has increased in Berfung constituency."

Mr Bhutia further said that the SDF government has fulfilled all the basic minimum needs of the people of Sikkim.

He also remarked that people are free to do politics, but Sikkim should not suffer.

"There should be no external interference in Sikkim, peace should remain in Sikkim. However, here someone is going around saying that they will even beat and murder people in order to form the government. Such things should not happen in Sikkim," he said.

Mr Bhutia was referring to an SKM leader whose video allegedly making such claims and threats has been doing the rounds in social media.

JK in 2018: Political tussle, central rule and a horrific rape

MI JEHANGIR

SRINAGAR, DEC 23 (PTI):

Jammu and Kashmir saw political turmoil in 2018 after the PDP-BJP coalition collapsed, necessitating imposition of Governor's rule in the state and subsequently President's rule, and was also rocked by a horrific incident of rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl.

Though militant-related activities in the state resulted in the loss of lives of many, officials claimed there was a marked improvement in the security scenario in the Kashmir Valley ever since the imposition of

Governor's rule.

The political scene in the state remained hot since the beginning of the year with the then chief minister Mehbooba Mufti sacking her finance minister Haseeb Drabu in March for going against the PDP line and asserting that Jammu and Kashmir shouldn't be seen as a conflict state or a political problem, but as a society with social issues.

On April 30, Mehbooba carried out a reshuffle in her council of ministers to fill some of the vacancies as both the PDP and BJP got in

Governor hails initiative...

compassion and non-violence in one form or another.

Adopting non-violence in our thinking, planning and actions will bring about positive change at all levels of human existence by leaps and bounds.

He also credited peace and harmony as the two factors of survival and development of mankind.

In addition, he also spoke about the rich history and culture of the country and highlighted the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' which conveys that the whole earth is just one family.

The area MLA also addressed the gathering and highlighted the state government's endeavour to maintain the secular fabric of the Sikkimese society. He underlined the development of various religious establishments of very faith in every district of Sikkim under the leadership of Chief Minister Pawan Chamling and affirmed the concept of religious tolerance and faith reinforced by the State Government.

Other speakers at the event spoke at length about religious beliefs, the road to leading a healthy lifestyle.

Deliberations by noted speaker from and across Sikkim were given on intelligence, strength, courage, fitness, alertness, compassion and eloquence which all contribute to the holistic development of an individual.

The program also saw felicitations being accorded to all the spiritual gurus and scholars by the organising committee of International Hindu Buddhist Sangh.

Shiva Hang Subba...

"I consider 2018 a lucky year for me for securing the fourth position in Bangalore and then the second position in the recent 12 Hours Run in New Delhi. However, these achievements have been possible only due the support to my trainer, Amar Subba and my family, friends and well wishers," he expressed.

It has taken a lot of hard work, dedication, sacrifice and commitment to shine the name of Sikkim and bag these achievements in such a short span of his ultra marathon journey.

Apart from his daily running, Shiva Hang has been practicing with his trainer on hilly terrains and on other routes for competitions.

Sharing his future plans, he says, "I wanted to continue my long distance running to shine Sikkim's name at national and international events. I also wanted to motivate the younger generation towards sports and healthy activities to stay mentally and physically fit and strong."

Likewise, his trainer Amar Subba expressed his immense happiness and satisfaction with the achievements of Shiva Hang.

"I have been trying my best to prepare him for the international events. He has a lot of potential to do even better and his strong commitment and dedication have helped him in the short span that he has been in the sport," he added.

some new faces. The new ministers included Kavinder Gupta, who swapped the post of Assembly speaker with Nirmal Singh for becoming the deputy chief minister.

As the new ministers must have been still settling in their new jobs, the BJP, in a sudden but not unexpected move, decided to pull out of the coalition government with the PDP and also withdraw support from the government.

The then Governor N N Vohra, who was six days away from completing his second term at the Raj Bhawan in Srinagar, decided to impose Governor's rule in the state. He, however, kept the assembly in suspended animation as outgoing chief minister Mehbooba had not made any recommendation for dissolution of the the lower house of the legislature.

The elected government fell on June 19.

After completion of six months of Governor's rule in Jammu and Kashmir on December 19, the state came under President's rule from midnight of December 20.

President Ram Nath Kovind signed the proclamation for imposition of central rule in the state after receiving a report from Governor Malik and after considering it and other information.

In January, the eight-year-old girl belonging to a Muslim nomadic family was found murdered in Kathua district of the state.

The girl was reportedly missing by her family on January 10 but was found dead eight days later. Post-mortem report said she had been repeatedly raped under the influence of sedatives and later killed by her tormentors.

While not much headway was made in the early stages of police investigation, the government ordered a crime branch probe into the murder. Investigations revealed gory details of the crime against the minor girl, shaking the nation and leading to widespread protests demanding stern punishment to those involved in the crime.

222 dead as volcano-triggered tsunami hits Indonesia

CARITA, DEC 23 (AFP):

A volcano-triggered tsunami has left at least 222 people dead and hundreds more injured after slamming without warning into beaches around Indonesia's Sunda Strait, officials said Sunday, voicing fears that the toll would rise further. Hundreds of buildings were destroyed by the wave, which hit the coast of southern Sumatra and the western tip of Java about 9:30 pm (2000 IST) on Saturday after a volcano known as the "child" of Krakatoa erupted, national disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said. Dramatic video posted on social media showed a wall of water suddenly crashing into a concert by pop group "Seventeen" -- hurling band members off the stage and then flooding into the audience.

In a tearful Instagram post, frontman Riefian Fajarsyah said the band's bassist and road manager had been killed and his wife was missing. Search and rescue teams were scouring rubble for survivors, with 222 people confirmed dead, 843 people injured and 28 missing, Nugroho said.

Tsunamis triggered by volcanic eruptions are relatively rare, caused by the sudden displacement of water or "slope failure", according to the International Tsunami Information Centre.

Unlike those caused by earthquakes, which trigger alert systems, they give authorities very little time to warn residents of the impending threat. The destructive wave left a trail of uprooted trees and debris strewn across beaches. A tangled mess of corrugated steel roofing, timber and rubble was dragged inland at Carita beach, a popular spot for day-trippers on the west coast of Java.

Photographer Oystein Andersen described how he was caught up in the disaster while on the beach taking photos of Anak Krakatoa. "I suddenly saw a big wave," he wrote on his Facebook page.

"I had to run, as the

wave passed the beach and landed 15-20m inland. (The) next wave entered the hotel area where I was staying and downed cars on the road behind it." The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said the "powerful waves" reached a height of 30-90 centimetres (1-3 feet). Asep Perangkat said he was with his family when the wave surged through Carita, carving a swathe of destruction, dragging cars and shipping containers. "Buildings on the edge of the beach were destroyed. Trees and electric poles fell to the ground," he told AFP.

In Lampung province, on the other side of the strait, Lutfi Al-Rasyid fled the beach in Kalianda city, fearing for his life. "I could not start my motorbike so I left it and I ran... I just prayed and ran as far as I could," the 23-year-old told AFP. Kathy Mueller from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said the toll was likely to rise as the conditions on the ground became clearer.

"The situation, and the death toll, will remain fluid over the next days and even weeks," she told AFP. Aid workers were helping to evacuate the injured and bring in clean water, tarpaulins and provide shelter, she added, saying the group was preparing for the possibility of diseases breaking out in the tsunami zone. Anak Krakatoa, which forms a small island in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra, emerged around 1928 in the crater left by Krakatoa, which erupted in 1883 killing at least 36,000 people. "The cause of the undersea landslide was due to volcanic activity of Anak Krakatoa, which coincided with a high tide due to the full moon," Nugroho told reporters in Yogyakarta.

Professor David Rothery from The Open University said that the proximity of the volcano to the coast gave authorities very little time to act.

"Tsunami warning buoys are positioned to

warn of tsunamis originated by earthquakes at underwater tectonic plate boundaries. Even if there had been such a buoy right next to Anak Krakatau, this is so close to the affected shorelines that warning time would have been minimal given the high speeds at which tsunami waves travel," he said. Indonesian authorities initially said the wave was not a tsunami, but instead a tidal surge and urged the public not to panic. Nugroho later apologised, saying because there was no earthquake it had been difficult to ascertain the cause of the incident early on. "If there is an initial error we're sorry," he wrote on Twitter.

The wave swamped parts of the coast around the Sunda Strait, leaving at least 164 people dead in worst-affected Pandeglang district on Java's western tip. Large numbers of casualties were recorded at two hotels in the area, Nugroho said, without elaborating.

Eleven people died further north in Serang, while 48 were killed in South Lampung, on Sumatra island. Heavy equipment was being transported to badly hit areas to help search for victims and evacuation posts and public kitchens were being set up for evacuees, he added.

According to Indonesia's geological agency, Anak Krakatoa had been showing signs of heightened activity for days, spewing plumes of ash thousands of metres into the air. Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone nations on Earth due to its position straddling the so-called Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide.

Most recently in the city of Palu on Sulawesi island a quake and tsunami in September killed thousands of people. On December 26, 2004 a tsunami triggered by a magnitude 9.3 undersea earthquake off the coast of Sumatra in western Indonesia killed 220,000 people in countries around the Indian Ocean, including 168,000 in Indonesia.

School Heads meet for AGM



SUMMIT REPORT

SINGTAM, 23 DEC:

The Annual General Meeting of the Association for Heads of Government Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools of Sikkim (AHGSSS) was held on 22 December at River View Resort near Jalipul.

The meeting was presided over by the president of the association, KB Chettri, and had Joint Director, East, Tshering Kee Chingappa, as the guest of honour and was attended by 118 school Heads from across the state.

The AGM started with a welcome address by RP Khanal, Principal, Dikling SSS. The Association felicitated five of its former members for the contributions to the

Association during their tenure as members in the executive body. Those felicitated on the occasion are Tshering Kee Chingappa, Joint Director (East), who was also General Secretary of the Association from 2008 to 2016, PL Subba, Dy. Dir (West), BK Pandey (Retd. Dy. Dir), Kamal Sapkota (Retd. Headmaster and Sunita Upreti (Retd. Headmistress).

Ms Chingappa, in her address, urged members to cooperate with each other to improve and grow together. She urged HOs to improve their knowledge and skills so that society at large is benefitted.

Mr KB Chettri highlighted the contributions of senior members of the association and re-

quested all members to do all possible to bring the state to the top in the field of education.

He also thanked the Chief Minister for accepting the request of the Association regarding time-bound promotion of School Heads which was placed before CM during the Teachers Day Function at Manan Bhawan on 05 September 2018.

He informed the gathering that the file is under process and official notification to this effect will be out very soon.

Treasurer Telbu Gurung, Principal, Sir TNSSS, presented the account details of the Association. The vote of thanks was proposed by Pema Yolmu, Principal, Namchi Girls SSS.

East Bengal wins GTA Chairman's Gold Cup

SUMMIT REPORT
KALIMPONG, 23 DEC:
East Bengal downed M o h a m m e d a n Sporting Club 3-1 in the final match of the GTA Chairman's Gold Cup played here at Mela Ground today.

Neither team, playing in the iconic ground amidst thousands of people, was able to score in the regulation or even the 20 minutes of extra time. The goals came only in the tie-breaker.

GTA Chairman's Gold Cup has brought the glory of football back to the hills, said many people who were walking towards Mela Ground to witness the finals.

The hills, especially Kalimpong, have been fanatic football lovers as is still evident from the Independence Day match every year.

Today, after the match, which ended around 5:30 PM, the GTA Chairman, Binoy Tamang, said that the match will stay in people's memories for more than



30 years to come and more young footballers will now get motivated to take up football as a career.

"Such big matches being held here once in a while will definitely inspire and motivate the youth," he reiterated.

"This tournament has been very successful and everyone had a role to play. I am thankful to all. And the plates in the Gold Cup are installed for

32 years which means that the game will go on," he added.

The Gold Cup, which was displayed yesterday at Mela Ground, is 42 inches tall and has 112 grams of gold inlays and was made at a cost of Rs 6,21,000. The winning team will get to keep the trophy for three months.

The East Bengal coach, Ranjan Chaudhary, later said that to

win in a tie-breaker was always their plan.

"Our strategy was 100 percent successful, we knew that we would lead in the tie-breaker. We blocked the best goal keeper while Vikas Saini of the same team won Man of the Match. Philip Adjah of Md Sporting emerged the highest goal scorer while Darjeeling United FC won the fair-play award.

could even start an East Bengal football school to groom the young players here," he said.

East Bengal goal keeper Mirhsad K was adjudged the best goal keeper while Vikas Saini of the same team won Man of the Match. Philip Adjah of Md Sporting emerged the highest goal scorer while Darjeeling United FC won the fair-play award.

NYK youth development programme held in Namchi

SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 23 DEC:
Nehru Yuva Kendra, Namchi, organized a Youth Club Development Programme for Namchi and Jorethang Block at Namchi on 21 December.

The programme, attended by presidents and members of the different youth clubs of Jorethang and Namchi Block along with the National Youth Volunteers of NYK Namchi, saw Dilip Sharma discuss the Youth Club Award 2018-19 and sought submission of applications within December along with the annual reports.

He also called on the youth clubs to submit applications for sports material which will be distributed soon by the office. He also discussed District Level Sports Meet



and other day & week programme of NYK Namchi.

Suyog Pradhan, NYV of Sumbuk Block, also addressed the programme and told clubs to submit the participants list for the Adventure Camp scheduled to begin on 11 January 2019.

He also spoke about other programmes like a workshop on photography, Youth Convention and other training programmes of KVIC and requested clubs to submit the name list of interested members for the said programmes.

Kisan Diwas was organized at CAEPHT



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 DEC:
The College of Agricultural Engineering & Post Harvest Technology (CAEPHT), Ranipool, organized Kisan Diwas today at CAEPHT's ATIC hall with Dr RP Mishra, In-charge Dean of the Col-

lege, as the chief guest. Kisan Diwas is organized every year by Central Agricultural University, Imphal. Today, 44 farmers from North and East Sikkim were present on the occasion.

Dr Mishra, Dr SN Yadav, Dr Deepak Jhajha-

ria and Dr SK Chauhan spoke on the importance of the Kisan Diwas.

A video was also screened by FMPE Department and AICRP on PET for the farmers attending the programme. The programme was sponsored by AICRP on UAE.

Bogibeel: India's longest rail-road bridge has lifespan of around 120 years

NILADRI SEKHAR DUTTA DIBRUGARH (ASSAM), DEC 23 (PTI): Bogibeel, Asia's second longest rail-cum-road bridge that will be opened to traffic by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, has a serviceable period of around 120 years, senior officials said here.

The 4.9 km-long Bogibeel Bridge on the Brahmaputra river is India's only fully welded bridge for which European codes and welding standards were adhered to for the first time in the country, said Chief Engineer Mohinder Singh.

Singh said a fully welded bridge has a low maintenance cost.

The bridge, constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 5,900 crore, has a "serviceable period of around 120 years", he said. The bridge reduces travel time from Assam to Arunachal Pradesh to four hours and will cut out the detour of over 170 km via Tinsukia.

It will also reduce Delhi to Dibrugarh train-travel time by about three hours to 34 hours as against 37 hours presently.

Modi will open the bridge to traffic, 16 years after it was announced by then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The bridge has a two-line railway track on the lower deck and a three-lane road on the

top deck. For the first time in Indian Railways, the girder has steel floor system for railway tracks and concrete for road.

"Early flood in the river Brahmaputra restricted the working season to a very short period of approximately five months (from November to March) and demanded huge mobilization of construction equipment," said Singh. Transportation of concrete across river channels of 600 metre to 900 metre width from both the north and south banks was the biggest challenge, he said.

To overcome this, concrete was pumped through pipeline laid over buoys. "Eighty-thousand tonnes of steel plates was delivered for the project via a combination of rail and road transport, while a 1,000 tonne hydraulic jack and strand jacks linked with the sub-structures were used for moving steel truss over the pillars," he said.

Most 2D' automatic nesting software was used to generate efficient two-dimensional cutting plans for fabricating the steel superstructure for the bridge.

After December 25, people, especially patients from Assam Medical College located here, can travel straight from Dibrugarh from the other side of the river instead of using the ferries.

When Malala was not impressed by Time magazine ranking

NEW DELHI, DEC 23 (PTI): When Malala Yousafzai came to know that she was on the cover of TIME Magazine's 100 Most Influential People list in 2013, it hardly impressed her as she told her father, "I do not believe in such categorisation of human beings".

Her father Ziauddin Yousafzai talks about this interesting fact in his new book "Let Her Fly: A Father's Journey and the Fight for Equality".

Malala was on the cover and inside she was ranked number 15. President Barack Obama was 51st.

A driver named Shahid Hussain in Britain showed a copy of the magazine on his phone to Ziauddin who in turn showed it to his daughter.

While Malala was in the hospital, first full-time, then visiting for ongoing treatment, (wife Toor) Pekai and I needed somebody to drive us to and from the facility. One day, our driver, Shahid Hussain, who had become our friend, arrived with news of TIME magazine's 2013 list of the 100 most influential people in the world, Ziauddin writes.

Please I request you show this report to her. She will be so happy, Hussain told Ziauddin. He gave his mobile phone to show her. Ziauddin took the phone and showed it to Malala.

I was so proud of what was on the screen. She took the phone from me and studied it. And then she put it down. Well, she said, I do not believe in such categorisation of human beings, he writes in the book published by WH Allen.

For over 20 years, Ziauddin has been fighting for equality, first for Malala and then for all girls throughout the world living in patriarchal societies.

Taught as a young boy in Pakistan to believe that he was inherently better than his sisters, Ziauddin rebelled against inequality at a young age. And when he had a daughter himself he vowed that Malala would have an education, something usually only given to boys and he founded a school that she could attend.

Then in 2012, Malala was shot for standing up to the Taliban by continuing to go to her father's school and Ziauddin almost lost the very person for whom his fight for equality began.



Let Her Fly is Ziauddin's journey from a stammering boy growing up in a tiny village high in the mountains of Pakistan, through to being an activist for equality and the father of the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and now one of the most influential and inspiring young women on the planet.

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DGGI busts Rs 220-cr fake tax-invoices scam

CHENNAI, DEC 23 (PTI): The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) has busted a racket of fraudulent companies engaged in raising fake tax invoices worth Rs 220 crore to avail input-tax credit.

According to the DGGI, searches were conducted at several official as well as residential premises last Thursday in Chennai and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu and busted the racket and arrested two persons.

"Several incriminating documents, including copies of fake invoices,

issued on the letterheads of several firms that existed merely on paper, were seized", an official release issued on Sunday by Additional Director General K Balaji Majumdar said.

The modus operandi was that several bogus companies and bank accounts were created using PAN and Aadhaar number of family members and employees, and complex transactions were made without the supply of goods, the release said.

According to the documents seized, fake invoices covering goods

worth more than Rs 220 crore were issued without supply of goods, it said.

The officials seized chequebooks with pre-signed cheque leaves pertaining to 45 bank accounts, rubber stamps in the name of 30 companies and computer hard disks, the release said.

Two persons have been arrested on Saturday and the DGGI provisionally attached bank accounts that were operated by the imposters, it said, adding that the arrested had been remanded to judicial custody.

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SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Newspaper Business

Layoffs and roll-backs, relevance and need

These have not been good times for newspapers. Lay-offs, wind downs and if the recent incident in Manipur where a journalist finds himself behind bars for a year without even a chargesheet or court hearing is added, the trouble is not just with the bottom-lines. There is also the ever present challenge of relevance and speed, something that social media and television beat newsprint to with ease.

And while on the current times, in the region, we have known these immediate months as the news-drought phase as must be apparent to regular buyers of newspapers (thanks for doing so) who could not have missed the dearth of “local” news updates in their local papers. But this is a cyclical phase, what has arrived as a shocker, and also a reminder, on what the media space is going through came in the form of major developments like across the board layoffs. It was not so long ago that a string of rather exceptional newspapers bankrolled by chit-fund finances folded up and left behind a litter of suddenly made jobless journalists. But at that time, the blame rested with the financiers; with what has happened with HT now and with other media houses over the recent years, however, has brought the whole print journalism model into question. One was always aware of these discussions raging the world over, but with these developments, the deliberations have arrived closer. Why, even this newspaper has risen from the ashes of another, and while that might have a ring of positivity to it, it also carries a hint of things not being all honky-dory in the newspaper business.

Point is that while journalism might serve the community, it still requires a business model to remain viable. Fiscal robustness is an important contributor to quality journalism. That said, it cannot be looked at solely as commercial enterprise. Unfortunately, business managers have been gaining more influence in media houses in the recent decades and while they have scaled up profits in the past, they clearly lack the resolve to weather economic crisis. Spending fiscal quarters or even entire financial years deep in the red is not new to newspaper houses, but they never triggered the kind of panic layoffs and roll-backs in the scale that one has been witnessing off late. That is happening because journalists have been edged out or won over by the accounts sections. That said, it is not being implied that newspapers should be not-for-profit (although, good luck with turning profits from good journalism), but just a reminder that business ups and downs had earlier led to re-strategizing and innovations unlike the bloodletting that one sees nowadays.

It is in a setting like this that one should also go over what newspapers are all about. Survival alone does not a good newspaper make. Opinions on this will undoubtedly differ, but here are some points for the readers to mull upon. For starters, good newspapers are unwavering in their commitment to their community and this “community” can be the national audience, a big city or even a small town. They serve as a kind of glue that provides various factions with the same information so that they can unite or divide based on their views formed from access to the same unbiased reportage. Newspapers don’t decide, they provide the people with all the required information from all the varied points of view and let the people decide. Newspapers are lynchpins which keep things civilized even as they facilitate change and moderate the opposing views in the course of this change. They don’t bring about the change. That is for the people to do. Newspapers and journalists who believe themselves to be the activists/ agents of change credit themselves with too much intelligence and importance. As individuals or even institutions, one can only contribute to change, not force it. These qualities are not always overtly expressed in a newspaper’s pages, but flow naturally when newspapers succeed in shining the light on real problems. And good newspapers go a step further.

Apart from reporting on issues they provide insight into the issues that face a community. If, after reading a newspaper, you feel that you have understood an issue better, it is a sign that the papers are succeeding. Similarly, one should see her concerns and experiences reflected in the pages. That’s a must, because that provides the connection between the publication and the readers. Good newspapers also play it straight. And when doubts surface, they explain their actions. But they are neither arrogant nor defensive. Finally, good newspapers are like relatives. They prompt a wide range of emotions that run the gamut from love to hate, depending on the day. But you still want them around, just like the relative. Look where we arrived - a conversation which started with layoffs, ended with finding family :-)

Let go of toxic workplace ‘emotional labour’ in 2019

ASTRID HELENE KENDRICK
theconversation.com

What will you leave behind in 2019? Here’s one suggestion: toxic workplace emotional labour.

If you’re an administrator or manager, you may have influence over that not only for you but for employees in your sphere of influence.

As an education researcher, I have studied the emotional labour of women in schools to learn more about the embodied manifestation of emotional labour and how it shows up in people advocating change.

Talk about emotional labour has come into common societal use particularly as part of a discussion of gender equality. For example, a Harper’s Bazaar article that went viral last year dubbed emotional labour, “the unpaid job men still don’t understand.”

But I want to talk about emotional labour from a sociological perspective, where the construct itself is gender neutral and can provide either protective or destructive outcomes for all employees.

A popular dictionary of business and management defined emotional labour as “the work of managing one’s emotions in the course of dealings with customers or employees.”

Indeed, “emotional labour” was first proposed not as unpaid labour, but particularly as an organizational construct related to paid work. In her 1983 book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, sociologist Arlie Hochschild described insights after spending months interviewing flight attendants (a job she once held).

These employees were expected by both the organization and customers to display the persona of the positive, happy flight attendant. The profession required them to provide emotional labour — the expression of only appropriate and organizationally approved emotions while engaged in job duties. This labour was particularly taxing when faced with disgruntled, rude or angry passengers.

Recently, these ideas have been applied to other domestic and service-oriented fields. In my education research, I have examined how emotions are expected to be managed as a part of employment, and what situations generate emotional labour.

Emotional labour at work is not simply the act of suppressing or expressing emotions while working. Rather, emotional labour involves regulating appropriate or inappropriate emotional expression in response to what sociologists call “organizational feeling rules.” the range of feelings and feeling expression deemed acceptable in a variety of work situations.

Hochschild suggested that a key element of emotional labour was the presence of deep or superficial acting.

In my research, I have examined how deep acting at work could be a protective factor for school employees in challenging situations — but also, what the costs are. Left unnoticed or untreated, these costs can become toxic, leading to deep burnout.

PROFESSIONALISM OR EMOTIONAL LABOUR?

Every work milieu has unspoken organizational

expectations of “professionalism.” In many educational organizations, professionalism is defined as being calm and in control in the face of complexity and instability. What this means in a practical setting is that an individual’s inner turmoil is masked and managed to present the expected emotions, potentially to the detriment of the employee’s well-being.

In the educational profession, a teacher who identifies as a “good” teacher can draw strength and

assistant principal, she kept calm during a difficult meeting with an upset parent by tightly gripping the edge of her school desk.

Inwardly, she was screaming, “How dare you speak to me like that!” But outwardly, maintained a poised and attentive facade until the meeting was complete.

After the parent left, the school leader described feeling dejected, frustrated and empty, yet she still had to continue with her daily responsibilities. She used superficial acting to present the image of the “good” administrator, burying her anger until leaving the school that evening when she finally felt safe to express it.

Another participant in my research study equated the experience of emotional labour with responding to a first aid emergency. While dealing with difficult situations, she buried her own emotions of fear and anxiety to present a compassionate face. But immediately after the situation had passed, she longed for time and quiet space to release her repressed feelings.

Unfortunately, her school did not have the physical space for staff members to privately release their emotions. Instead, she only had time to take a deep breath, smile and teach her next physical education class.

VALIDATE HEART WORK

Possible solutions to problematic emotional labour are two-fold. First, organizational members should recognize which emotions are expected to be managed as a part of employment, and be aware of situations that generate intensified emotional labour.

Second, people in leadership roles should provide appropriate avenues for the safe expression of organizationally inappropriate emotions after difficult situations.

Simply asking the question: “Are you OK? Do you need time, a space or a person to talk to right now?” can go a long way to minimizing the effect of highly charged emotional labour.

Validating the heart work of educators can reconnect them to their passions to persevere with superficial acting during emotionally difficult times. The protective factor of deep acting can re-charge people after difficult workplace incidents if they are processing their feelings and tapping into their creative energy.

Recognizing educators for their positive influence on students and colleagues can help them manage experiences with emotional labour. To care for their emotional well-being, providing them with some time, private space or access to a trusted colleague will help them to “let it go.”

[the writer is Contract Instructor/Literacy Teacher, University of Calgary]



resolve from that belief if faced with struggling students displaying disruptive behaviour.

Thinking, “I am a good teacher – I am positive, kind and calm with all students,” reflects deep acting in which the individual’s personal identity aligns with professional feeling rules.

Extended, ongoing superficial acting, on the other hand, could be problematic.

When individual employees’ actual emotional responses do not align with the organization’s feeling rules, employees have to work to manage their emotions. The psychological effort generated by superficial acting could result in emotional burnout or explosive emotional outbursts.

Elsa, in the children’s movie *Frozen*, revealed the toxicity of extended superficial acting in the well-known lyrics to the song *Let it Go*:

“Conceal, don’t feel, don’t let them know

Well, now they know!

Let it go...”

EMOTIONAL LABOUR IN SCHOOLS

I sought to discover the immediate emotional and embodied experiences of five women who were involved in implementing a new school framework. Their work involved reforming school culture to put students’ well-being at the centre of all curricular decisions, assessment practices and environmental or building changes. The women occupied different roles (student teacher, educational assistant, teacher, school leader and system leaders such as consultants, trustees or subject-area specialists).

One of my participants described an experience she had with emotional labour. In her role as an as-

If someone hurt you this year, forgiving them may improve your health (as long as you’re safe, too)

ALFRED ALLAN & MARIA ALLAN
theconversation.com

During the end-of-year holidays families often come together to exchange gifts and, sometimes, to confront long-held grudges. What better gift than a peace offering?

Conflict is rarely pleasant and arguments in families can be particularly upsetting. We all know that knot in the pit of the stomach, the flushed face and sweaty hands we experience when we feel we have been dealt with unjustly.

This is a primal stress response to when we feel personally or socially threatened. Our natural reaction is to fight or avoid the person. Revenge might feel instinctive, but that can lead to a cycle of unpleasantness that rolls on and on.

Trying to forget or rationalise a hurtful incident, usually to avoid further confrontation, seldom works. Even if the unpleasant feelings might start to fade, they generally linger in our subconscious and any reminder can reignite them. A constructive way of getting rid of them is to forgive.

But how do we do this and what helps us in the process? We’ve been asking these questions since we started doing research with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (set up by the South African government to help deal with the trauma of apartheid) witnesses more than 20 years ago.

Victims who had indicated they had forgiven perpetrators were less angry and distressed than those who did not. We also found victims were more notably forgiving if they received an apology.

WHAT ACTUALLY IS FORGIVENESS?

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or minimising the pain we feel; nor is it about excusing others. Forgiveness means making a conscious and deliberate decision to let go of our feelings of resentment or revenge, regardless of whether the person who has upset us deserves it.

Forgiveness is, in the first place,

not about others. It is about stopping us from allowing resentment towards others to make life miserable for us.

People want to return to how they felt before the offending incident occurred. And they want to think of the event without bitterness and anger, a tightness in the chest, and endless rumination.

Forgiveness takes time. It sometimes helps to think of occasions when we have offended people in the past or

While we may dread apologising, we usually think back positively about the times we’ve offered apologies.

A good apology ideally has three parts: an admission of responsibility, a demonstration of sorrow, and doing something to remedy the offence, or prevent a repetition of it. This could even just involve promising not to do it again.

When we asked people who had been offended by an intimate partner



to try to look genuinely at the situation through the offender’s eyes.

We must start by forgiving ourselves for any contribution we think we might have made to the incident. People often blame themselves partly for what may have happened.

Survivors of sexual abuse or harassment say the most difficult part of the forgiveness process is accepting they were not to blame and to stop being angry with themselves.

After forgiving yourself, it’s easier to then privately forgive other people involved. Research shows forgiveness helps us feel better and may help us live longer.

We can also tell or show someone we have forgiven them, such as by helping them out in some way without them asking.

A SUCCESSFUL APOLOGY

One thing that often helps people to forgive is receiving an apology.

what convinced them their partner was truly sorry, they said actions spoke louder than words. One said it would help if their partner went out of their way to do something that would be an inconvenience for them.

An apology is not telling others we feel sorry they are angry; it is telling them we understand why they are angry with us, regret making them feel that way, and want to take their anger away. An effective apology is showing the person we understand why they are hurting.

A study that explored medical errors and the responses of those affected showed an apology was most effective where it focused on the needs of the patient. We might not always know how we can take away the anger, so it is usually good to ask the person we are apologising to what their needs are.

If the apology wasn’t good enough the first time, you can try again, but

first listen carefully to what the person you are apologising to is saying, and address those concerns.

Misdirected apologies can make a situation worse, they can make people more angry and make it more difficult for them to forgive. So, don’t apologise unless it’s sincere.

PRIORITISE YOUR SAFETY

Forgiving ourselves is always good. But forgiving others is only beneficial if the advantages exceed the potential costs. We should therefore not forgive others if that might expose us to further abuse or exploitation.

The stress response we experience to being hurt is protective because it motivates us to stop people from abusing or taking advantage of us. Anger is sometimes functional.

We should also not feel guilty if we do not forgive be-

cause some behaviour is simply unforgivable and carrying our anger might be less harmful than the potential harm of forgiving.

There are also times when everyone may feel they are the victim or some people may not realise they have hurt others even if they can sense someone is unhappy with them.

A good way forward is to ask people what the issue is and then listen to understand, rather than listening to be able to respond. When we listen without instinctively thinking of a way to defend ourselves, we may realise there has been a misunderstanding or we’ve behaved inappropriately.

And if you feel offended by something that’s said or done, you could avoid unpleasant feelings by telling the other person how you feel.

[Alfred Allan is Professor, Edith Cowan University; Maria Allan is Lecturer in Psychology, Edith Cowan University]

Man held in Meghalaya mine mishap admits he's the owner: Police

SHILLONG, DEC 23 (PTI): The man, who was arrested in connection with the mine mishap in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district a fortnight ago, has admitted that he was the owner of the 370-foot-deep illegal quarry, police said Sunday.

Fifteen miners were trapped in the "rat-hole" mine on December 13 after water from nearby Lytein river gushed into it. All efforts to trace the labourers have turned futile as the water level in the mine showed no signs of receding in the past 11 days.

Krip Chullet, who was arrested on December 14, admitted during interrogation that the mine in Lumthari village of Khliehriat area -- around 80 km from Shillong -- belonged to him, Superin-

tendent of Police Sylvester Nongtynger told PTI.

Two mine managers, Mohesh and James Sukhlain, are still on the run, he said.

Sukhlain facilitates mine operations, while Mohesh is the person responsible for bringing labourers from West Garo Hills district and Assam, the SP said.

Earlier, the police had said Chullet was involved in hiring labourers and sending them down the shaft. Around 20 miners had entered the 370-foot mine on December 13. After reaching the bottom of the pit, they entered the horizontal tunnels, often termed "rat-holes", as each just about fits one person.

According to local people, one of the diggers could have acciden-

tally punctured the walls of the cave, following which the river water gushed into it.

Five people were able to climb out of the flooded mine, leaving the others behind.

Seven of the 15 trapped labourers hail from West Garo Hills district, five from Assam and three from the remote Lumthari village, where the accident took place, the SP said.

The state government had on Saturday announced an interim relief of Rs 1 lakh each to the families of the 15 miners and sought high-power submersible pumps from Coal India Ltd to flush out the water and rescue them.

Over 100 personnel of the national and state disaster response forces, along with the police,

have been waiting for the water level to subside to begin the rescue work.

Mining expert Jaswant Singh Gill, who arrived at the site two days ago, has made recommendations to the state to hasten the operation, NDRF Assistant commandant S K Singh said.

The family members have now given up hope that the miners would be rescued alive.

Shohor Ali, who hails from Magurmari village in West Garo Hills district, has his son, brother and son-in-law trapped in the mine. "We have all lost hope to see them alive. I just wanted the authorities to help us retrieve the dead bodies for their last rites," he told PTI.

Ali also said that all three of his family were

lured to Lumthari with a promise of Rs 2,000 as wage per day.

"I was the first person to get in touch with MLA (Rajabala constituency) Azad Aman to find out about the accident," he added.

The MLA, on his part, said he had contacted the police as soon as he received the information. "It took the police several hours to locate the mine," the Congress MLA told PTI. The Rajabala MLA, however, said the relief offered to the labourers were insufficient.

"I have met the chief minister (Conrad Sangma). I have also written to the chief secretary and sought help from Meghalaya Human Rights Commission demanding relief payment to the affected families," he added.

'Interesting turn' will take place in 1984 riots case against Tytler: Victims' lawyers

SHIKHA VERMA AND RANJIT KUMAR SINHA NEW DELHI, DEC 23 (PTI): The conviction of former Congress leader Sajjan Kumar in a 1984 anti-Sikh riots case has raised hopes of an "interesting turn" in the case against Jagdish Tytler who has been given a clean chit by the CBI, lawyers representing the victims said.

They said the wheels of justice have started moving in the case against Tytler and they are awaiting the report of a lie detector test on controversial businessman Abhishek Verma, who volunteered to support the case against Tytler by deposing as witness.

Senior advocate H S Phoolka and lawyer Kamna Vohra, who are representing the riots victims in case against Tytler, said they are quite hopeful that they will get the same result which the Delhi High Court gave in the case of Kumar, who has been sentenced to life term.

Phoolka said after the high court verdict convicting Kumar in the other riots case, their hope has risen. "It is a great achievement for us. That verdict has made our case stronger against other persons also," he said.

On her part, Vohra told PTI that "now quite an interesting turn will take place in the (Tytler's) case." Her view was shared by Phoolka.

The Congress leader has always denied his role and involvement in the riots and has been given clean chit by the CBI thrice. But the court has refused to accept the closure report and directed the agency to probe the case further

and file status report.

However, Verma, who has claimed that Tytler had narrated him the sequence of events relating to the Pulbangash case, has already undergone a lie detector test which was declined by the Congress leader.

Vohra also shared the views of the senior advocate and said in the Tytler case, Verma has "spilled the beans" relating to the Congress leader's alleged role in the riots incident that took place at Gurudwara Pulbangash in north Delhi where three Sikhs were killed by a mob after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

She said the lie detector test was conducted sometime in the beginning of December and the report will be made available within a month.

"We will wait for the report of the forensic science laboratory on the lie detector test. We have been told (by the court) that the report will be made available after 30 days.

"Once the report is made available, we will be able to know how we have to move further," she told PTI.

However, Vohra said they would not be totally relying on Verma's version as there are sterling witnesses in the case and the evidence likely to come from the businessman's lie detector test will be "one piece of evidence".

Phoolka said witnesses were influenced and they have evidence that one of the key witnesses was sent to Canada, allegedly at the behest of Tytler and they would try to bring him back.

He had earlier also

told the court that Tytler had sent Narinder Singh, son of witness Surinder Singh, to Canada and through him the Congress leader was putting pressure on his father to change the statement and depose in his favour.

Phoolka said the CBI has called for some information from Canada.

However, advocate Arunabh chowdhury, representing Tytler, said right now there is no case against the Congress leader and the CBI has filed three closure reports after thoroughly investigating the case.

"The Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) had directed further investigation in the case. We don't know what is going to happen. There is no case against him. The CBI has said there was no reliable evidence against Tytler. The CBI has done a thorough probe into the matter," he said.

In June 2015, Verma had deposed before the CBI that Tytler had told him in 2008 he had met the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after which he got a clean chit over his alleged role in the case.

In his statement as a witness recorded by the CBI during a probe, Verma, an accused in the naval war room leak and other cases including cheating and forgery, had said Tytler had also told him that a deal was struck and a hefty amount was paid to a riots case witness, who had deposed against him.

The matter is being heard by ACMM Amit Aroora who has asked the CBI to file a status report on further investigation in the case and listed it for hearing on January 15.

Easy to fire blanks when you are million miles away: Shastri on critics



CHETAN NARULA

MELBOURNE, DEC 23 (PTI): Ravi Shastri was dismissive of all the flak the Indian team has copped and took a dig at critics for "firing blanks while sitting million miles away".

India were humbled by Australia in the second Test in Perth by 146 runs, prompting the likes of legendary Sunil Gavaskar to question the team management's selection policies and demanding more accountability from captain Virat Kohli and the head coach.

Shastri didn't take any names but in his inimitable style rubbished all criticism, making it evident that he has not taken it too well.

"When you are millions of miles away, it is very easy to fire blanks. Their comments are too far away and we are in the Southern hemisphere. We have to do what's best for the team, as simple as that," the India head coach fired a counter salvo at all the ex-cricketers, who haven't had exactly charitable comments about the team.

When asked about selection conundrum, Shastri said the only dilemma is whether to play Ravindra Jadeja or not unlike what some experts made it out to be.

"Apart from Jadeja, I don't think there was any other selection dilemma and if there was, it is not my problem," Shastri replied with his usual swagger.

When asked about Jadeja's on-field spat with Ishant Sharma that was caught on camera during the second Test, the coach replied, "I am never surprised (by such coverage). I love coverage, bring it on, as simple as that. In many ways, it can inspire a team to come together

and let us hope it does," the coach said.

There was no surprises when Shastri backed skipper Virat Kohli, whose on-field behaviour has been questioned by the Australian experts.

"He was fantastic. What is wrong with his behaviour? Of course, you can question but as far as we are concerned, he is an absolute gentleman," said Shastri.

Shastri however admitted that top-order has been an issue for the team with both KL Rahul and Murali Vijay failing in four successive innings in the two Tests.

"Top-order problems are a big concern, that's obvious. Responsibility and accountability has to be taken by the top order. I am sure they have got the experience and exposure over the last few years to get out there and deliver," said Shastri, backing Rahul-Vijay to come good.

He did gave indication that team management is seriously looking at Mayank Agarwal as an option.

"Mayank is a good young player. He has got loads of runs for India A. He is someone who has come through the ranks and when you look at his domestic record, his performances are as good as anyone. So that's a call we will have to take," he added.

When asked if India have lost any momentum in Perth, Shastri said that the team are in a unique position at 1-1 in the series, one they didn't experience in South Africa or England.

"We have not lost any morale in Perth. We knew we had our chances there in Perth as well, so we are ready. We are at 1-1 in a Test series in Australia."

Very rarely have we been in a position (this year) where we are 1-1, and it is not often for a team, when they travel overseas, that they are placed 1-1 with two Tests to go. So the boys know what they can do and what they are capable of. The potential lies ahead. We will be third time lucky (after South Africa and England)," Shastri signed off.

3 charred to death in car-autorickshaw collision in Tripura



AGARTALA, DEC 23 (PTI): Three persons were charred to death and five others injured when a CNG-run autorickshaw collided with a car on National Highway-8 at Amtali, near here, police said on Sunday.

Around 8pm on Saturday, the speeding autorickshaw rammed into the Agartala-bound four-wheeler, following which its CNG cylinder

exploded, West Tripura Superintendent Ajit Pratap Singh told reporters.

"Three passengers in the auto rickshaw were burned to death on spot, while the driver managed to jump out with heavy burn injuries. One bike rider, behind the autorickshaw, also suffered injuries. Three other passengers in the four-wheeler sustained cuts and bruises," he said.

Two deceased have been identified as Pradip Biswas (18) and Litan Shukla Das (32). The police are yet to ascertain the identity of third passenger who died in the autorickshaw, the SP said.

All five injured have been admitted to Gobinda Ballav Panth hospital here, Singh said, adding that the condition of two were stated to be critical.

Three-day 'rosogolla' fest to pamper Kolkata's sweet tooth



KOLKATA, DEC 23 (PTI): The year is going to end on a sweet note for the people of Kolkata as a three-day 'rosogolla' festival is being organized in the city to pay tribute to its inventor Nobin Chandra Das.

Bengal had last year received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag for the round-shaped syrupy sweet.

The three-day gala, beginning December 28, will celebrate 150 years of 'rosogolla' invention, said West Bengal minister Sashi Panja.

"The first-ever 'Baghbazar-O-Rosogolla Utsab', supported by the state government, is aimed at paying tribute to Das and his invention of the syrupy cheeseball,

which went on to conquer taste buds across the world," Panja, who is also the chief convener of the fest, told reporters here recently.

The sweetmeat festival will also highlight the history, heritage and culture of Baghbazar - the hub of the Bengal renaissance, she said.

Singer Hariharan is set to grace the occasion and enthrall visitors with his performance.

The fest committee, with painter Suprasanna as chief adviser and the rosogolla inventor's heir Dhiman Das as member, has also arranged for cooking competitions and quiz contests.

Sweetmeat traders from across the state will

get an opportunity to dish out their signature items during the three-day fiesta, Panja, the state minister for women and child development and social welfare, said.

"I fell very proud that Rosogolla has been invented in this city, in Baghbazar. We will also observe 100 years of Bagbazar Sarbojanin Durgotsav (annual Durga puja) at the fest," she added.

Nobin Chandra Das had opened a sweet shop at Jorasanko in north Kolkata in 1864, but he tasted success after moving his business to Baghbazar in 1866. It was sometime in 1868, when he created 'rosogolla' out of fragmented clumps of cottage cheese and sugar syrup.



'Passionate Giants' India take pride in upstaging Argentina in rare good year



ABHISHEK HORE

NEW DELHI, DEC 23 (PTI):

Indian football was a picture of good health with a 10-man under-20 outfit's triumph over a country that gave the world Lionel Messi towering above the heights its senior team and teens reached in 2018.

Messi's World Cup dream with Argentina though lay shattered when they crashed out in the quarterfinals to eventual winners France, who trumped underdogs Croatia in the title clash.

They may have stumbled in the last hurdle, but the Croatians won many hearts across the world with fans interpreting Luca Modric's Ballon d'Or as a vindication of sorts for his tireless work over the years for his country and club, European champions Real Madrid.

Back to Indian football, the unimaginable happened when the country's

U-20 squad, managed by one Floyd Pinto, stunned traditional giants Argentina 2-1 at the Torneo Internacional de F tbol Sub-20 de LAlc dia (LAlc dia International Under-20 Football Tournament), better known as COTIF, in Valencia, Spain in August.

This result against a two-time World Cup-winning nation earned India genuine respect in the world of football while opening up a window of opportunity to test the home-bred players against the global best on a regular basis. What made the achievement more praiseworthy was that it was achieved despite the Indian team being reduced to 10 men. The side played for 40 minutes with the numerical disadvantage, against an outfit coached by World Cupper Pablo Aimar.

"Argentina are miles ahead of us," Pinto would

remark after his wards scripted one of Indian football's most memorable triumphs, and he was not off the mark at all.

Not far behind in magnitude was the under-16 boys' win over Asian heavyweights Iran in another invitational tournament in Amman, achieved four hours after the Argentina heist in Spain.

They have been virtually on the road since January, playing in Europe and Asia, and missed by a whisker what would have been a historic qualification to the 2019 U-17 World Cup.

The team went down fighting 0-1 to the Korea Republic after making it to the quarterfinals for the first time in 16 years, progressing out of the group stages as runners-up.

These victories showed Indian football is on the right track, having made the transition from

'Sleeping Giants' to 'Passionate Giants' with the successful hosting of the U-17 World Cup the previous year.

There was no dearth of activity in the senior team with Stephen Constantine's wards ramping up their preparations for the AFC 2019 Asian Cup, which will be a fair reflection of where the team stands at the moment and what the future holds. They have been clubbed with hosts UAE, Thailand and Bahrain and should they clear the group stage, India will get an opportunity to take on the continent's big guns such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Constantine has made it clear that his players will need to play the best football of their lives if they are to make an impression in the continental showpiece, scheduled

to be held from January 5 to February 1.

India will take confidence from some impressive results in the recent past, the most prominent being the goal-less stalemate with China, coached by World Cup-winning Italian manager Marcello Lippi.

Before that, the talismanic Sunil Chhetri's emotional plea to fill the stadium for the Intercontinental Cup matches in Mumbai, found resonance as fans thronged to watch India lift the trophy, beating sides like New Zealand, South Africa and Kenya.

Chhetri, having urged the fans to "come to the stadium and abuse us on our faces", produced a magnificent show on the field and powered the hosts to the trophy with a brace in the final.

At 60,000 times, the plea by the 34-year-old striker emerged as the most 'retweeted tweet' in the year.

In the final, Chhetri also became the joint second highest international goal scorer among active players along with Messi with his 64th strike for the country.

As far as the domestic circuit is concerned, Real Kashmir became the first club from the valley to qualify for the top-flight and remains the flavour of the season owing to their impressive show in the I-League, where they are currently placed second.

25 'call centres' busted since July in Noida, 300 cyber thugs held



KISHOR DWIVEDI

NOIDA (UP), DEC 23

(PTI): A group of officials from FBI of the US

and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police flew down to India in July and called on the chief of the police in Noida, adjoining the national capital, in a meeting coordinated by the Interpol.

The details of the closed-door meeting held at the police headquarters in Gautam Buddha Nagar never emerged in public domain until a spate of raids were reported in the months that followed, as a massive crackdown began on fake call centres, duping foreigners.

On December 21, the police arrested 126 people in its biggest action so far against a fake call centre operating from a quaint office in the city's Sector 63, a commercial hub, which has also seen similar illegal, fake call centres thriving.

The call centre solicited money up to USD 3,500 from US citizens by intimidating them with arrest by the FBI over "stolen" social security numbers, a unique nine-digit pin number given to American residents, the officials said.

Over a dozen actions were witnessed in October and November too, when fake call centres targeting foreigners, mostly American and Canadian citizens, solicited money to fix computers attacked by virus sent by them or by offering "tax benefits".

"Between July 20 and December 21 this year, 25 fake call centres have been busted after they were found running dubious operations," Senior Superintendent of Police

(SSP), Gautam Buddh Bagar, Ajay Pal Sharma told PTI.

"Close to 300 people have been arrested in the raids, over 400 computer systems seized while frauds worth crores, including those targeting foreigners, were unearthed during the process," Sharma said.

The actions drew praise from the US, with its embassy in India recently hailing them as a "great example" of US-India law enforcement collaboration, noting that the FBI's assistance to local police with investigation on numerous fraudulent call centres "affecting thousands of victims worldwide".

Noida, adjoining Delhi, in western Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar district, was one of the biggest beneficiaries in the early 2000s, when it found a place on global map as a new "call centre hub", while India replaced China with lower manpower costs for the booming industry.

There have been fake call centres, which offered "cheap holiday packages" to exotic locations like Goa and Himachal Pradesh, and in the process duped several Indians of lakhs of rupees, officials privy to the probes in cyber fraud cases told PTI.

But a newer trend revealed how foreigners were becoming more vulnerable to such fake call centres.

"It is easier to target someone sitting in the US or Canada because chances are less of them approaching the police for an amount of money they would consider 'less'," the official said.

The easy availability

of data and details of individuals has also added to the vulnerability of people being targeted for cyber frauds. With more personal information, picked up from employment websites, mobile apps, the callers have in cases even claimed to be representatives of tech giants.

For instance, on the intervening night of November 22 and 23, eight fake call centres were busted in simultaneous raids in Noida and Greater Noida and 23 people arrested for duping foreign nationals.

"These fake call centres were not linked to each other but had a similar modus operandi of sending malware to computers in the US, Canada, and other foreign countries and then approach them as being representatives of companies such as Microsoft, Apple and solicit money to solve their problems," SSP Sharma had.

Several of the accused arrested in cases where foreigners are duped hail from the Northeastern states, such as Nagaland, with officials saying their recruiters preferred them "for their English accent, which made them very authentic sounding on tele-calls".

Now, the police have gathered clues and are trying to nab the masterminds behind several of these call centres with global links including those in the US, China, and Dubai.

"We are now following the trail on how the money from abroad was being moved to India. We have got details and are acting on the inputs while coordinating with our counterparts abroad," Sharma said.

Indian woman becomes the fastest Asian to cycle the globe

MUMBAI, DEC 23 (PTI): In an incredible feat for any Indian, 20-year-old Pune woman Vedangi Kulkarni has become the fastest Asian to cycle the globe.

Vedangi, who hails from a suburb of Pune, cycled into Kolkata in the wee hours of Sunday, completing the 29,000 km distance required to qualify as bicycling across the globe.

She started off from Perth in July and will now be flying back to the Australian city to complete the record.

Talking to PTI over the phone, Vedangi said the 159 days spent peddling up to 300 km a day in 14 countries has shown her the "best and worst" of both herself and also the world.

Her father Vivek Kulkarni said very few people undertake this gruelling campaign and his daughter has become the fastest Asian to cycle the globe.

British adventurer Jenny Graham (38) is the fastest woman to have cycled the globe in 124 days in 2018, which was three weeks faster than the previous record.

Elements, both human and natural, tested the Indian cyclist. This included being chased by a Grizzly bear in Canada or camping alone for multiple nights in the snow in Russia or being robbed at a knife-point in Spain. There were troubles on securing the necessary visas as well, which cost her time. The visa process led to a delayed departure and consequently facing weather hostilities in Europe where winter had start-

ed setting in. Vedangi, a student of the University of Bournemouth in the UK pursuing a degree in sports management, said preparations for the ride began about two years ago with long cycle rises, getting the equipment including a specially crafted cycle and planning the route and time window.

She did not have anyone accompanying her for over 80 per cent of the route, and lugged the cycle with the heavy luggage that includes cycle tools, camping equipment and clothing in desolate stretches all alone.

The ride was funded majorly by her parents.

Starting off from Perth, she cycled across Australia, through the outback, to reach Brisbane from where she flew over to Wellington, New Zealand, for doing the entire country north to south.

A short flight took her across the international dateline to Western Canada's Vancouver, from where she continued her eastward journey till Halifax, a port city.

Europe beckoned next and she chose the chilly Iceland to start it all up and later cycled through Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Finland to enter Russia. From Russia, she flew to India for doing the last 4,000 km.

She encountered temperatures ranging from -20 degree Celsius to 37 degrees Celsius during the ride.

Vedangi credited her parents as pillars of strength who ensured she pulls off this ride and enters record books.

Bombay HC convicts man let off in rape case 21 years ago

MUMBAI, DEC 23 (PTI):

The Bombay High Court has overturned a 1997 trial court order acquitting a 41-year-old man in a rape case of a minor girl in 1996. A division bench of Justices Indrajit Mahanty and V K Jadhav Saturday convicted Macchindra Sonawane (who was 19 years old at the time of the incident) and sentenced him to seven years in jail for raping the 11-year-old girl.

The bench, in its judgment, said the trial court had erred and acted in a "casual or cavalier" manner, in determining the victim's

age as that of being a major. The prosecution case is that on December 1, 1996, Sonwane allegedly raped the victim who had gone to his shop to buy medicines. A sessions court in Nashik had in July 1997 acquitted Sonwane after determining the victim's age as 16 and not 11.

The court had taken into consideration the victim's X-ray ossification test that estimated her age as 14. The trial court applied the plus two minus two margin of error and determined that victim was 16, which was the age of consent at that time. The trial

court had also disbelieved the victim's statement that she had resisted the rape after observing that there were no injuries on her body to show resistance.

Thereafter, the Maharashtra government approached the HC in appeal against the acquittal and said the trial court had erred in determining the victim's age and claimed that she had not even hit puberty at the time of the crime.

The HC, in its judgment, noted that the trial court had mechanically determined the age of the victim.

Transgender bill highlight of social justice ministry in 2018

PAYAL BANERJEE

NEW DELHI, DEC 23 (PTI):

The passage of a long-pending bill on transgender rights in the Lok Sabha towards the fag end of the year was the main highlight of 2018 for the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, which otherwise strove for implementation of its schemes.

However, several representatives of the transgender community and activists dubbed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill as "regressive" and said it disregarded most recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee.

They said the bill was in stark "violation" of the fundamental rights of transgender persons enshrined in the Constitution as equal citizens.

On the flip side, the ministry grappled with the implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act with only a third of the states having enacted the rules under the legislation, which was notified for enforcement in April 2016.

The crucial issue of sub-categorisation of the OBCs which had generated a lot of hope within the community with the government forming a panel for the purpose last year has not made much headway.

The National Drug Demand Reduction Policy to address the problem of drug and substance abuse in the country, and the review of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, to toughen provisions dealing with the abuse of old people and lay emphasis on good and affordable healthcare for them also didn't make much progress.

Some of the initiatives which stood out for the ministry in 2018 include launch of the country's first-of-its-kind dictionary aimed at bringing uniformity in sign languages used by hearing and speech impaired people across the nation. The dictionary comprise 3,000 Hindi and English words and their corresponding graphic representation of the signs which are used in daily life.

The ministry in 2018 also decided to continue its post-matric scholarship scheme for SC students for three years and an amount of Rs 3,000 crore was earmarked for the 2018-19 fiscal, approved the proposal for revision and continuation of National Fellowship Scheme for SC students and revised the central sector scholarship scheme of top class education for SC students to cover more institutions with increased number of slots (scholarships).

The Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana, which was launched during 2009-10 (pilot phase) and expanded during 2014-15 (Phase-I), has been further expanded and will cover 4484 SC majority villages (Phase-II).

Among the activities that kept the ministry busy in 2018, 1456 camps across the country under the Scheme of Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP) were organised and more than 2.40 lakh people with disabilities were provided aids and assis-

tive devices in 2018.

Also, 3430 motorised tricycles were distributed and 287 cochlear implant surgeries were conducted in the year.

Under the Accessible India Campaign (AIC), the disability division of the ministry made major strides in creating universal accessibility for disabled in built environment, transport, and Information & Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystem.

So far, access audit of 1,662 buildings in 50 cities has been completed by the auditors.

All 34 international airports and 48 domestic airports in the country have been provided with accessible features such as ramps, accessible toilets, lifts with Braille symbols and auditory signals. Out of 709 'A-1', 'A' and 'B' category railway stations, 670 railway stations have been provided with all short-term facilities and 639 railway stations have been provided with all long-term facilities.

Also, 8.4 per cent public transport buses of 58 SRTUs

(State/UT wise total bus fleet and buses in public sector) have been provided overall accessibility. Out of 100 central government ministries/departments, websites of 94 ministries/departments have been made accessible so far.

The department has already initiated Unique Disability Identification project with a view to create national database for PwDs, to issue unique disability ID (UDID) card along with disability certificate to everyone.

In this regard, a web-based software was developed and was being shared with all the state government and UTs, through training of their personnel. Once the project covers all persons with disabilities, UDID Card will be made mandatory for availing various government benefits.

So far, 463 districts of 27 states/UTs have generated 11.20 lakh e-UDID Cards. An MoU was signed between Australia and India for cooperation in disability sector on November 22 during the visit of President to Australia.

US denounces wealthy-nation discounts for UN peacekeeping

UNITED NATIONS, DEC 23 (AFP): The United States on Saturday denounced at the United Nations a system of discounts for the peacekeeping assessments of wealthy nations, and confirmed Washington will pay no more than 25 percent.

The comments came a day after UN member states failed to reach a deal to make up for a USD 220 million budget black hole left by Washington's downsizing of its peacekeeping contributions.

The discounts demonstrate an "urgent need to reform," said Cherith Norman Chalet, the US Ambassador for UN Management and Reform, referring to countries whose "per capita income is more than twice the average of the organization's membership." She did not identify those countries.

Her comments came during the adoption of a resolution renewing until 2021 contributions to the UN operating budget, which is USD 5.4 billion for 2018-19, and to the peacekeeping budget of USD 6.6 billion annually.

The United States is



the largest contributor, whose share is 22 percent of the operating budget and 28 percent for peacekeeping.

President Donald Trump announced in September, however, that Washington would pay no more than 25 percent for Blue Helmet operations.

Washington has been trying to convince sev-

eral countries to reduce their discounts in order to cover the 220 million annually which Washington no longer wants to pay.

Peacekeeping financing is determined by a complicated formula that takes into account a country's wealth, its standing as a permanent Security Council member and other factors.

"These discounts are without justification and have no basis in any methodology and should be eliminated," Chalet said. "Nearly half of member states receive an 80 percent discount to their assessments on the peacekeeping scale." Diplomats said that, in their quest for a better sharing of the financial burden, the US had ap-

proached Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Singapore, Brunei, Brazil, Mexico and India.

Ambassador Nikki Haley, who leaves her post on December 31, could have been involved in the battle but surprisingly abandoned it, a diplomat said.

Overnight Thursday Washington

finally joined a consensus to maintain the status quo on key budget issues for another three years, diplomats said, meaning the UN's financial shortfall will continue to grow.

On Saturday the 193 member states formally confirmed the consensus. But the financial dispute is not going away.

"The United States is going to attack mission after mission" to eliminate them or reduce the costs, the diplomat predicted.

A second diplomat said that even "without legal basis" Washington "will pay only 25 percent and accumulate the arrears." Chalet assured that "the United States takes its obligations to the United Nations seriously and its partnership with the organization and with other member states."

However, she added that "lack of agreement on a 25 percent ceiling will cause the organization to continue to face a three percent shortfall in its peacekeeping budget as the United States will pay no more than 25 percent of peacekeeping expenses."

Pak Army chief backs Imran Khan's peace initiatives



KARACHI, DEC 23 (PTI): Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa has backed Prime Minister Imran Khan's peace initiatives, saying the new government has extended a hand of peace and friendship towards India with utmost sincerity but it should not be taken as Islamabad's weakness.

Addressing the passing out parade of Midshipmen and Short Service Course at the Naval Academy in Karachi on Saturday, Bajwa said that Pakistan was "a peace loving country and believes in peace".

Lauding the efforts of Prime Minister Khan's government to achieve peace between Pakistan and India, the army chief said peace benefits everyone and it is time to fight disease, poverty and illiteracy instead of fighting against each other. "Our new government has extended a hand of peace and friendship towards India with utmost sincerity but it should not be taken as our weakness," Bajwa said.

The powerful army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 71 years, has always wielded considerable power in the matters of foreign policy. The Indo-Pak ties strained after the terror attacks by Pakistan-based terrorists in 2016 and India's surgical strikes inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The ties further nosedived in 2017 with no bilateral talks taking place between them.

Amidst deadly skirmishes along the Line of Control and diplomatic bickering for better part of 2018, the consensus on both sides to open the Kartarpur corridor for Indian Sikh pilgrims has

created a ray of hope for improvement in Indo-Pak ties. "Wars bring death, destruction and misery for the people. Ultimately all issues are resolved on the table through negotiations that is why we are trying very hard to help bring a lasting peace in Afghanistan by supporting Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace plan," Bajwa said.

He also warned that Pakistan is yet to get out from terrorism or sabotage phase of an unannounced war against it.

"Like the terrorists before; the protagonists of the new threats are at times, our own people. Mostly misguided by ambitions, blinded by hate, ethnicity or religion or simply overawed by social media onslaught, some of our own boys and girls readily fall victim to such dangerous or hostile narratives," Bajwa said. Referring to hybrid warfare, the army chief said information and modern technology has changed the nature of warfare now being waged and has tilted the balance in favour of those nations that have embraced the change readily.

"But frankly speaking, even that will not be sufficient as the ever-increasing threat of hybrid war, to which we are subjected to, will need a totally new approach and change of traditional mindset," he said.

Advising future military leaders to prepare themselves for the threats they will face, Bajwa said that they should be able to "gauge the enemies latest moves and be ready to respond, even when a surgical strike exists only in cognitive domain or media or even when the attack comes, not in the battlefield but in cyber space, or against country's ideological frontiers."

Ghosn detention extended over Christmas and New Year



TOKYO, DEC 23 (AFP): Former Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn will be spending Christmas and the beginning of 2019 behind bars after a Tokyo court on Sunday extended his detention through to January 1.

The court's decision is the latest twist in a rollercoaster saga that has gripped Japan and the business world since the auto sector titan was arrested out of the blue in Tokyo on November 19.

"Today, a decision was made to detain (Ghosn). The full term of the detention will expire on January 1," the Tokyo District Court said in a statement to media.

This does not however mean that Ghosn can expect to taste freedom on New Year's Day, as prosecutors can apply for a further 10-day extension as they quiz him on allegations of financial misconduct.

Authorities are pursuing three separate lines of enquiry against the 64-year-old Franco-Lebanese-Brazilian executive.

They suspect he conspired with his right-hand man, US executive Greg Kelly, to hide away around half of his income (some five billion yen or 44 million) over five fiscal years from 2010.

They also allege he

under-reported his salary to the tune of four billion yen over the next three fiscal years -- apparently to avoid criticism that his pay was too high.

The third allegation is that he shifted a personal investment loss made at the height of the financial crisis worth more than 16 million to the Japanese automaker with help from a Saudi acquaintance.

Prosecutors have pressed formal charges over the first allegation but not yet over the other accusations.

Ghosn reportedly denies all the allegations, saying the transactions were done legally.

In connection with the third suspicion, local media say Ghosn is not contesting that payments from Nissan totalling 14.7 million went to the Saudi person, whom he has known for some three decades.

But Ghosn has maintained that the money was for the person's work to help Nissan in the region.

Ghosn's case has seen several twists and turns since his stunning arrest on the night of November 19 as his private jet touched down at Tokyo's Haneda Airport.

On Thursday, observers were caught wrong-footed as the

court threw out a request from prosecutors to extend his detention over the second set of allegations (under-reporting his salary between 2015 and 2018) in an almost unheard-of move.

This raised his hopes of a release in time for Christmas and he was reportedly gearing up to hold a news conference to put his side of the story for the first time.

But those hopes were then dashed on Friday when prosecutors sought and obtained his re-arrest over the new accusations of breach of trust.

"The accused was responsible for managing Nissan's overall operations and for dutifully fulfilling his role as CEO not to cause damage to Nissan and its subsidiaries... but he took action that betrayed his role and caused financial damage to Nissan," prosecutors alleged in a statement on Friday.

Since his arrest, the once jet-setting executive has languished in a tiny cell in a detention centre in northern Tokyo, where he has complained about the cold and the rice-based menu.

Ghosn has told embassy visitors he is being well treated and sources at French car giant Renault have described his frame of mind as "combative" as he fights the

charges against him.

His lengthy detention -- in Japan, suspects can be "re-arrested" several times over different allegations -- has sparked criticism, especially from abroad.

After his arrest last month, Nissan and Mitsubishi Motors promptly sacked Ghosn as chairman but Renault kept him on and appointed an interim boss as it waited to assess the legal procedures against him.

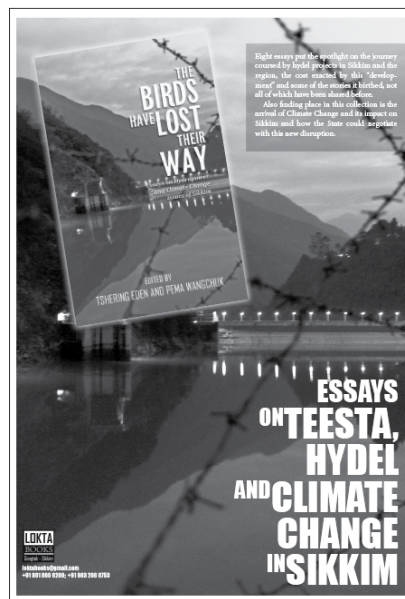
In addition to charges against Ghosn and Kelly, prosecutors had also indicted Nissan itself, as the company submitted the official documents that allegedly under-reported the income.

Kelly, who was also arrested last month, could be released as early as next week.

Ghosn's fall from power at Nissan has exposed a deep rift in the three-way alliance -- which outsold all of its rival groups last year.

The tycoon was once revered for his role in turning around Nissan and forging the fractious alliance, in which Renault remains the dominant shareholder.

Some executives at Nissan -- which now contributes more profits than Renault to the group pot -- were said to bristle at the French company's leadership position.



US government shutdown enters 2nd day, set to last through Christmas

WASHINGTON, DEC 23 (AFP): A partial US government shutdown that entered its second day on Sunday was set to stretch through Christmas, after Congress adjourned for the weekend with no deal in sight to end an impasse over funding for President Donald Trump's wall on the US-Mexico border.

Due to the shutdown -- in which several key US agencies ceased operations at 12:01 am (0501 GMT) Saturday -- Trump said he would remain in Washington over Christmas instead of going to Florida.

"I am in the White House, working hard," the Republican president tweeted. "We are negotiating with the Democrats on desperately needed Border Security (Gangs, Drugs, Human Trafficking & more) but it could be a long stay."

Trump has dug in on his demand for USD5 billion for construction of the border wall, a signature campaign promise and part of his effort to reduce illegal immigration. Democrats are staunchly opposed, and the absence of a deal meant federal funds for dozens of agencies lapsed at midnight Friday.

The House of Representatives and the Senate held sessions on Saturday, but both chambers adjourned without agreement, and no votes were

expected until Thursday.

Visitors to the capital's park-like National Mall, home to attractions including war memorials and the towering Washington Monument, criticized the shutdown which added to an air of chaos in a capital still reeling from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis's resignation last week over Trump policies.

The uncertainty also helped pushed Wall Street into another rout on Friday, ending its worst week in a decade.

"Oh I think it's ridiculous. It's unnecessary," Philip Gibbs, a retired business professor from South Virginia, said of the shutdown. Jeffrey Grignon, a Wisconsin healthcare worker, said the politicians "need to stop acting like children" and do the work they were elected to do.

"It isn't just one or two people. It's all them," he said.

Another visitor, Howard Vander Griend, 57, predicted Trump will come out a winner from the budget impasse. "I don't think the shutdown will pressure president Trump at all," said Vander Griend, of Tennessee. "So I think he will get what he wants and I think that's a good thing." Although tourists could still stroll along the Mall and visit its open-air sites, they found public restrooms closed. Some

other Washington tourist sites including the White House Visitor Center, National Christmas Tree, and National Archives -- home to the US Constitution and other historic documents -- were closed.

Some national parks have shuttered completely, but New York's governor provided funding to the Statue of Liberty monument and Ellis Island so those attractions could remain open.

This is the third partial government shutdown of the year, even though Trump's own Republican party still controls both the House and Senate. That will change in January when the House comes under Democratic control.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer blamed the president for provoking the latest furlough.

"The Trump shutdown isn't over border security; it's because President Trump is demanding billions of dollars for an expensive, ineffective wall that the majority of Americans don't support," Schumer said. Most critical US security functions remain operational, but 800,000 federal workers are affected, with many furloughed before Christmas. Others deemed essential, including Transportation Security Administration officers screening passengers during the holiday crush, are working unpaid.

Assamese film wins award at US fest

NEW DELHI, DEC 23 (PTI): Assamese film "Xhoixobote Dhemalite" (Rainbow Fields), which deals with the sensitive issue of children growing up in violent times, has bagged an award at a US festival for best narrative feature.

The Bidyut Kotoky-directed film won the award at the recently-concluded Erie International Film Festival (EIFF) in Pennsylvania.

An elated Kotoky, who is based in Mumbai, said, "We always believe that Xhoixobote Dhemalite' is a film for the world in Assamese language. This recognition from half way across the globe re-affirms our faith. This continues to reinforce what I always believe - the colour of emotions is same everywhere."

Legendary actor Victor Banerjee, who plays a pivotal role in the film, said the "subtle message of the futility of mindless violence that has crept into our mischievous political psyches is the understated theme of the film."

"The film's story is based in Assam but people from halfway across the globe are relating to it. This goes to show that emotions across the globe are same. In 'Xhoihobote Dhemlile', we always believed that we are making a film in Assamese language for the global audience," said Mumbai-based Kotoky.

The film has won a number of awards at international festivals. In August, it bagged the best screenplay award at Treasure Coast International Film Festival in Florida. It had received nominations in five categories.

A month before that, "Xhoixobote Dhemalite" became the first Assamese film to be commercially released in the US. Be-

sides, it had won three awards, including that of best film, in the Love International Film Festival, Los Angeles.

Based on true events, the film also features seasoned actors like Banerjee, Nakul Vaid, Naved Aslam, Nipon Goswami and Nikumoni Barua.

The film is produced by 'India Stories', a Mumbai-based production house and co-produced by Kotoky's Dhruv Creative Productions and US-based Kurmasana Kreates.

Since its inception, Erie International Film Festival has set



out on a course of establishing a home for independent filmmakers and exhibiting their works. Celebrating narratives, documentaries, experimental, horror and animation films, EIFF offers the vast diversity of Indie films as true art form.

The festival's mission is to help filmmakers reach broadest possible audience while allowing the general public to experience the power of cinema in the digital age.

Films might take a while but I won't go slow: Neha Dhupia



MUMBAI, DEC 23 (PTI): Neha Dhupia says doing films would take a while as she does not know what her character would require her to do in terms of the look.

The actor welcomed baby girl, Mehr last month with husband An-gad Bedi.

"If I have to mould myself into a certain character, it could be a little while before I could commit myself to it. I don't know physically what the character will expect out of me. I have worked through all shapes and sizes."

"I was pregnant when I did 'Roadies' and am coming back for a new season after becoming a mother. But for me to play a part, something like a 'Tumhari Sulu', I need to be there physically 100 per cent. But I won't go slow. I want to be a mom, be on stage, do everything," Neha told PTI.

The actor recently began shooting for the 16th season of the MTV adventure reality show "Roadies".

Neha, 38, says though it is good to get back to work, she had to

overcome the guilt of leaving her daughter at home.

"It feels great but initially you are struck only with guilt, the kind you have never known before. You constantly feel 'Oh my God what is my child doing?'"

"When you are with your child you are like I must cope up with work, because I am a workoholic. The balance is extremely important."

The actor says it is important to move past the guilt.

"There are constant reminders you give yourself that just because you are going to work doesn't mean you love your child less. A mother who decides to be at home after giving birth is as beautiful a mother as the one who decides to work. I have had the luxury to take her with me wherever I go. I will work around it," she said.

The theme for the latest edition of "Roadies" is about hailing real-life heroes by giving them a chance to be a part of the series, "Roadies Real Heroes".

Auditions start from January.

Hope 'Gully Boy' takes hip hop to every corner of the country: Rapper Divine



MUMBAI, DEC 23 (PTI): Rapper Divine, who is one of the inspirations for Zoya Akhtar's "Gully Boy", hopes the film brings more recognition to the hip hop culture.

The city-based rapper, whose real name is Vivian Fernandes, said he is excited to watch the Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt-starrer.

"I'm really looking forward that the film will take hip hop to each and every corner, street and village in this country. I want to see more of our youth take up the mic or learn to play an instrument or produce beats and do something different in their careers," Divine told PTI.

"The film is inspired by the Mumbai hip hop community and it's amazing how far we have come in the last few years. With this film, it seems the journey has only begun," he added. Divine began his career as an underground rapper in 2011 and gained popularity after his single "Yeh mera Bombay". He achieved mainstream success following his song "Mere gully mein" featuring fellow Mumbai rapper Naezy.

He revealed Zoya had attended one of his shows some years ago as she is a big fan of the genre and was writing the movie that time.

"She did her research and saw the scene and I was amazed by how in depth she had gone," he added. The film which is set to release in February next year will have its world premiere at the 2019 Berlinale. Meanwhile, Divine recently performed at RED FM's Riders Music Festival in Delhi.

Beautiful time to tell stories beyond set formulas: Writer Kanika Dhillon

MUMBAI, DEC 23 (PTI): Screenwriter Kanika Dhillon believes it is a great time to be a storyteller today as film industry has become welcoming towards good and unique content.

The "Manmarziyaan" writer believes filmmakers and audiences have become open-minded which makes the job of a creative person more interesting.

"It's a beautiful time to tell stories and I am loving it for now. You can be imaginative, you have the technology to convert your vision, you have the freedom to write the kind of stories you want to tell beyond the set formulas. Also, you have varied platforms to tell different kinds of stories," Kanika told PTI.

Kanika, whose latest release is "Kedarnath", believes writers should "demand a fair price" for the content

they provide.

"If by now the writers in the industry have not realised that they can ask and claim a good amount to write or create content then you are living in a cave. Everyone is hungry for content and you are content creators and if you are not negotiating a good price no Robinhood is coming to save you."

As a screenwriter, Kanika's method of penning a story is more emotional, instinctive and volatile and she does not adhere to a specific process.

"I don't think in genres. Once I get a germ of an idea I wait for it to die! And if it refuses to die and keeps coming back, I start thinking more about it. Then comes the world and the characters. I wait to get bored and if I don't get bored then I start building on them."

This year the writer's

both the releases were caught in controversy- Anurag Kashyap's "Manmarziyaan" for hurting Sikh sentiments and Sara Ali Khan's debut film "Kedarnath" for promoting love jihad.

Kanika says if her stories are making people uncomfortable her purpose as writer is solved.

"If my stories make people uncomfortable, because it questions your set ideas and value systems that are convenient for a group of people or ideas that promote patriarchy and religious fanaticism, then my job as an artiste and a writer is done. The more you will cry foul, the louder my characters will speak."

Kanika is now looking forward to her next release Kangana Ranaut-Rajkummar Rao-starrer "Mental Hai Kya". The film is scheduled to hit the theatres early next year.

ARIES: Toss another Yule log on the fire. Cozytime starts NOW as the moon nestles into Cancer and warms your domestic zone all weekend. On Saturday, la luna will be full, which could highlight issues that need to be sorted out with your family, biological or chosen. Don't wait to deal until you're gathered for the holidays next week. But avoid having conversations when you're feeling prickly or sensitive.

TAURUS: It's "friend appreciation" weekend as the Cancer moon beams into your social sector, Bull. Saturday's full moon could illuminate one member of the Taurus tribe who has gone above and beyond in 2018. How can you thank this special soul: a curated gift, an invite to join your family under the tree next week, a special brunch, your treat? Since this lunar lift highlights neighborhood activities, consider shopping local for any last-minute items on your list. If you have your hands full with holiday prep, there's no need to spiral into a stress meltdown.

GEMINI: Visions of cashmere throws and over-the-knee boots may be danc-

ing through your head this weekend as the Cancer moon lounges in your decadent second house. But this lunar lift is as sensual as it is sensible, so when la luna is full-on Saturday, give your books a thorough look. Before you race off on that eleventh-hour gift-shopping spree—or blow a paycheck on an outfit for NYE—get clear about what and who you owe.

CANCER: This weekend, you get to play Santa...to yourself! With the moon in Cancer jingling in your house of self-love, extend the giving spirit to your own life. As the zodiac's nurturer, you'd hand someone the reindeer sweater off your back. But you don't have to shiver in the cold to be generous. Saturday's full moon helps you gracefully bow out of obligations that don't feed your soul.

LEO: What do you want to send UP the chimney and out of your life, Leo? Saturday's full moon in Cancer illuminates your twelfth house, emphasizing closure and healing. Saying goodbye to something you've outgrown could be the gift that keeps on giving—especially if you've

been pouring energy into someone who has proven to be a bottomless pit of need. 'Tis the season to give to the needy, not the greedy! La lune lingers on in Cancer through Sunday, and thanks to a boost from visual Venus and soulful Neptune, you could literally clean house. Burn the sage wand and remove any objects that have a negative charge. While you're at it, how about creating an area for journaling and meditation?

VIRGO: Even as you're hanging the last ornaments on the Christmas tree, you may be struck by flashes of genius throughout the weekend as the moon sets off sparks in Cancer and your innovative eleventh house. On Saturday, la luna will be full, which could inspire you to play social director for the upcoming festivities. While the holiday menu may be locked and loaded, how about the accompanying entertainment?

LIBRA: You don't have to wait until Monday to revel in the joy of seasonal customs. With the Cancer moon working its magic in your traditional tenth house all

weekend, you're all about bonding with your brood—and providing a warm and comfortable atmosphere for your inner circle. But wait, Libra, are you behind schedule on things like cooking, gift-wrapping and setting up your place for guests?

SCORPIO: Forget cuddling on the couch or staring at snowdrifts all weekend. Beeline to your laptop and scour for supersaver fares and standby flights! On Saturday, the year's only full moon in Cancer cranks up your wanderlust. Who knows? You could be ringing in 2019 from a tropical resort—or flying there tomorrow. Let spontaneity be your guide, even while close to home.

SAGITTARIUS: On, Vixen! With the Cancer moon in your erotic eighth house all weekend—and blossoming into a full moon on Saturday—you're the sultriest reindeer of all. Spend some one-on-one time with the person who makes your heart beat at a supersonic rate. Don't know anyone who fits that category? You could meet them in the two weeks to follow, so start right-swiping...selectively.

CAPRICORN: How about a little unstructured playtime, Capricorn? You probably can't scrap your ENTIRE itinerary to be spontaneous, but note: The moon will be hovering in Cancer and your decadent and romantic seventh house all weekend. Some good old-fashioned fun with your favorite plus-one will keep you in bright spirits as you power through the last bits of present-shopping, cooking, decorating or whatever else is on your to-do list!

AQUARIUS: Step away from the gingerbread house and bundle up for a stroll through the snowdrifts. Saturday's full moon in Cancer activates your sixth house of healthy living. Denying yourself decadence simply won't work at this time of year.

PISCES: Cupid's riding shotgun to Santa all weekend long, so open up the chimney AND your heart. The loving feelings start flowing in on Saturday as the full moon in Cancer electrifies your festive, flamboyant fifth house. Don a piece from the "glam apparel" category and sneak away for a pre-holiday soiree or fancy cocktails with friends (or a date)!!