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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Fewer EVMs malfunctioned in Sikkim than other states: CEO



...but such hiccups did delay voting

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 16 APR:

Chief Electoral Officer, R Telang, today informed that while malfunction-

ing EVMs caused delays at some polling stations on 11 April, the numbers were still much lower than such hiccups reported from other states where polling was also held the same day.

Mock polls at some polling stations also took longer than expected and that too led to some delays, he explained.

It may be recalled that several complaints

of delays had circulated on social media on the day of elections and many see this as one of the reasons why the voting percentage fell in Sikkim this time. The State registered around 78% voter turnout this year against the 83% turnout recorded in 2014. Many believe that interested voters returned home without casting their votes due to the ex-

tremely slow voting process at their booths.

The District Election Officer, East, it may be recalled, while thanking the personnel and the people for a peaceful election, had also admitted to "some delays and mistakes" on polling day and apologised for the same while pointing out that a 78% turn-out was still a healthy figure.

When asked about details of malfunctioning EVMs, the CEO informed SummitTimes today that during mock poll, 11 balloting units, 22 control units and 28 VVPATs were replaced. During actual poll, a further nine balloting units, nine control units and 48 VVPATs were replaced.

There was only around 4% replacement in total in the State which is very low compared to the national scenario, the CEO pointed out.

He also added that there were delays reported at polling stations which had more than 1,200 voters due to the sheer numbers there.

As for complaints, the CEO informed that the Election Commission has not received any official complaints on the polling process from any political party. He added that some political parties have, however, asked for some data and information which the Commission has already asked the concerned Returning Officers to furnish.

Mangal Jit Rai re-elected as NCDFI Chairperson



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 16 APR:

Sikkim Cooperative Milk Producers' Union Limited [SCMPUL] Vice-Chairperson, Mangal Jit Rai has been re-elected as the Chairperson of National Cooperative Dairy Federation of India [NCDFI] during the recently held election on 08 April at its head quarter at Anand, Gujarat. He is the first Sikkimese to hold this coveted post of the NCDFI Chairperson for two con-

secutive terms.

A SCMPUL press release issued by its Managing Director, Dr AB Karki states that the appointment to such coveted post has brought laurels to the State as well. The release adds that Mr Rai was elected as the Chairperson for the first time during 2016 in the bye-election of 2016 and during his short period as the Chairperson of NCDFI, Mr Rai had increased the business turnover of the fed-

eration from 36% to 62%. After his appointment to the post of Chairperson NCDFI, he has assured to look after the problems of the milk producers' and assured to work in the interest of the farmer producers of the State and entire Country as well, the release informs.

The Organization has around 163 lakh farmer members, 1.66 lakhs milk cooperative society and 26 State Milk Federation under its command.

BBC India launches interactive election chatbot

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, APR 16 (PTI): BBC India on Tuesday launched an experimental interactive election chatbot in Hindi and English on Facebook's Messenger platform as part of a series of Indian General Election related content.

"The chatbot allows users to interact with the BBC, ask questions and get regular updates as the elections unfold," a BBC statement notes.

The latest development follows the British Broadcasting Corporation's first-ever voice activated interactive bulletin in Hindi. The special election coverage will be available on smartphones and allow users across India to instruct their voice device to

navigate through the news according to their interest.

"Elections are the noisiest time in India. It's important to cut through the noise and help voters make informed decisions," said Rupa Jha, Head of BBC Indian Languages.

"We have added modern innovations in storytelling to our trademark journalistic rigour in the BBC's election coverage across India," she said.

To access the new interactive bulletin, people will be able open up Google Assistant on their phone or smart speaker and say "Ok Google, Talk to BBC Elections" or the same phrase in Hindi.

The service will be updated every afternoon and is aimed at giving

users the chance to "connect" with BBC election news coverage.

Besides the innovations, BBC Reality Check will also have a specific election service in English and six Indian language services to debunk fake news stories and unravel issues at the heart of the debate.

"The BBC Reality Check reports will focus on issues that affect lives and livelihoods in contemporary India, analyse claims by political parties covering a wide range of topics from the economy and social policy to national security," the BBC said.

Indians began voting in a seven-phase general election from last Thursday, with results set to be announced on May 23.

GJM-Sikkim calls on Darj voters to support BJP on 18 April

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 16 APR:

Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, Sikkim branch, has announced support for the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate, Raju Bista, for the Darjeeling parliamentary seat which goes to polls on on 18 April.

Addressing a press conference here at Deorali today, GJM-Sikkim president, Ganesh Chettri, announced that GJM-Sikkim will support the BJP candidate.

He appealed to people from Darjeeling hills working in Sikkim and other parts of the country to cast their votes for the BJP candidate.

He called on the people to not think of their votes as being for BJP, Bimal Gurung or Mamata Banerjee but as a vote for the victory of the community.

GJM Sikkim vice-president, Mahendra Tamang, in turn alleged that some leaders in Darjeeling have been trying to suppress the people and asserted that the election was the right time to answer such leaders.

He appealed to the people to ensure the highest margin victory for the BJP candidate to "save the Gorkha community". The press conference was also addressed by GJM state advisor, Rakesh Singh.

Mission to free Dzongu of non-biodegradable waste



WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 16 APR:

If you visit the village of Gor at Lower Dzongu you will not find even a single wrapper as the students here are on a mission to make this area free from non-biodegradable waste materials.

The students and teachers of Gor

Secondary school of Dzongu, North Sikkim who have been collecting sweet wrappers and plastics are recycling it into decorative items. These students have made dolls by stuffing them with the wrappers of sweets and chewing gum and also some hand bags as part of their extra-curricular activities.

Children are very enthusias-

tic in recycling and making new things with waste, said Headmistress, Tseten Lhamu Lepcha.

She further added that the main motive behind recycling is to make children aware that their school premises as well as their villages remain free of non-biodegradable waste.

DGCA asks airlines to reduce airfares on 10 routes to 'reasonable levels'

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): Aviation watchdog DGCA Tuesday asked airlines to reduce fares on ten domestic routes to "reasonable levels" as ticket prices on these high density routes have risen up to 30 per cent in last one month, according to a senior official.

Amid concerns over spike in airfares, mainly after grounding of scores of planes by ailing Jet Airways, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) held a meeting with representatives of various airlines.

Speaking about various steps being taken to address capacity and other issues, Civil Aviation Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola said the DGCA reviewed airfare movement in 40 high density sectors.

A comparison between current ticket prices and those during March 7-14 period, when it was normal sea-

son, was done by the watchdog.

It was found that airfares rose 10-30 per cent on 10 routes and on those routes, airlines have been asked to reduce the ticket prices to "reasonable levels", Kharola told reporters here.

A senior DGCA official said the regulator would continue to monitor airfare movements on a daily basis and also engage with airline for appropriate action.

Airlines were advised to continue to monitor at their level and provide information to the DGCA to keep fares low as far as possible, he noted.

"Airlines representative also intimidated DGCA that they have removed the few higher buckets from sale and offering tickets to passengers in lower fare buckets.

"DGCA will continue to moni-

tor fare movement on daily basis and engage with airline for appropriate action," the official added.

According to him, the regulator monitors domestic airfares on a daily basis, particularly on high density routes and routes where alternate mode of transport is not available or is difficult.

Based on the monitoring process, the DGCA engages with airlines when the spurt in airfares is observed in any sector for appropriate action, he added.

Kharola said that around 21 planes are expected to be added to the fleet of domestic carriers by the end of May. Out of them, eight have been brought in since the beginning of March and another three are expected to be inducted in the coming weeks.

Without naming any airline, he said that

some of them are in discussions with lessors to take deregistered aircraft of Jet Airways.

Together, there would be a "good number" of additional planes to meet the peak season demand, he added.

Earlier in the day, Civil Aviation Minister Suresh Prabhu had called for a review of issues related to struggling Jet Airways, including rising fares and flight cancellations.

"Directed Secretary @MoCA_Gol to review issues related to Jet Airways, especially increasing fares, flight cancellations etc," Prabhu said in a tweet.

Besides asking Civil Aviation Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola to take necessary steps to protect passenger rights and safety, Prabhu also called for working with all stakeholders for their well being.

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Review plea filed in SC for civil rights of homosexuals

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking review of an order by which a plea for various civil rights, such as same-sex marriage, adoption and surrogacy for the LGBTQ community was dismissed.

The apex court, on October 29, 2018, had dismissed a plea filed by Tushar Nanyar which had sought reliefs such as grant of civil rights to the members of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer) community besides seeking decriminalising the consensual gay sex.

"We are not inclined to entertain this petition after the decision of this Court in Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India decided on September 6, 2018," the apex court had said.

Seeking the review of the order, the plea said that the petition, which was dismissed, was not limited to the issue of decriminalising the consensual gay sex only.

The plea had raised the issue of "non-recognition of same-sex mar-



riages" under the Special Marriages Act, 1954) and denial of adoption and surrogacy rights to the members of the LGBTQ community members.

The plea had sought civil rights of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer) community as part of the basic human rights and said that these rights were not addressed in the apex court's judgement on Section 377 of the IPC which had criminalised consensual gay sex.

It had sought recognition of their rights to same-sex marriages, adoption, surrogacy, IVF and directions so that the community can serve openly in the army, navy and air force.

"LGBTQ rights are not recognised as part of human rights. Non Recognition of same-sex marriages (Indian Special Marriages Act, 1954), availability of adoption, surrogacy, IVF (for LGBTQ only) is violative of Article 14, 15, 19, 21, 29. Discrimination sole-

ly on basis of sexual orientation violates Article 14, 15, 21 in relation to Army, Navy, Air force Act.

"Other instances of indirect discrimination are not addressed in the Navtej Singh Johar case. People in the military are not allowed to serve openly. Heterosexual people end up marrying LGBT people, end up consummating marriage with them, which harms heterosexual people most. Gay women have it worst," the plea had said.

The plea had said that

the definition of marriage for LGBTQ had not been addressed in the apex court's judgement of September 6, 2018.

The plea said both heterosexuals in an opposite-sex relationship and homosexuals in a same-sex relationship are similarly circumstanced as the general nature of relationship is romantic and sexual one, either at the time of marriage as in a love marriage or is sought or hoped to be as in the case of arranged marriage.

DGCA asks airlines to reduce airfares on 10 routes to 'reasonable levels'

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): Aviation watchdog DGCA Tuesday asked airlines to reduce fares on ten domestic routes to "reasonable levels" as ticket prices on these high density routes have risen up to 30 per cent in last one month, according to a senior official.

Amid concerns over spike in airfares, mainly after grounding of scores of planes by ailing Jet Airways, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) held a meeting with representatives of various airlines.

Speaking about various steps being taken to address capacity and other issues, Civil Aviation Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola said the DGCA reviewed airfare movement in 40 high density sectors.

A comparison between current ticket prices and those during March 7-14 period, when it was normal season, was done by the watchdog.

It was found that airfares rose 10-30 per cent on 10 routes and on those routes, airlines have been asked to reduce the ticket prices to "reasonable levels", Kharola told reporters here.

A senior DGCA official said the regulator would continue to monitor airfare movements on a daily basis and also engage with airline for appropriate action.

Airlines were advised to continue to monitor at their level and provide information to the DGCA to keep fares low as far as possible, he noted.

"Airlines representative also intimidated DGCA that they have removed the few higher buckets from sale and offering tickets to passengers in lower fare buckets.

"DGCA will continue to monitor fare movement on daily basis and engage with airline for appropriate action," the official added.

According to him, the regulator monitors domestic airfares on a daily basis, particularly on high density routes and routes where alternate mode of transport is not available or is difficult.

Based on the monitoring process, the DGCA engages with airlines when the spurt in airfares is observed in any sector for appropriate action, he added.

Kharola said that around 21 planes are

expected to be added to the fleet of domestic carriers by the end of May. Out of them, eight have been brought in since the beginning of March and another three are expected to the inducted in the coming weeks.

Without naming any airline, he said that some of them are in discussions with lessors to take deregistered aircraft of Jet Airways.

Together, there would be a "good number" of additional planes to meet the peak season demand, he added.

Earlier in the day, Civil Aviation Minister Suresh Prabhu had called for a review of issues related to struggling Jet Airways, including rising fares and flight cancellations. "Directed Secretary @MoCA_GoI to review issues related to Jet Airways, especially increasing fares, flight cancellations etc," Prabhu said in a tweet.

Besides asking Civil Aviation Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola to take necessary steps to protect passenger rights and safety, Prabhu also called for working with all stakeholders for their well being.

Rising airfares: DGCA meets airlines; to engage with them for appropriate action



NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): Aviation regulator DGCA will continue to monitor airfare movements on a daily basis and also engage with airline for appropriate action, a senior official said Tuesday amid concerns over rising ticket prices.

With crisis-hit Jet Airways drastically curtailing its operations, there has been an adverse impact on the number of flights being operated on various routes.

As concerns persist on higher air ticket prices, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Tuesday held a meeting with representatives of airlines, the official said.

Airlines were advised to continue to monitor at their level and provide information to the DGCA to keep fares low as far as possible, he noted.

"Airlines representative also intimidated DGCA that they have removed the few higher buckets from sale and offering tickets to passengers in lower fare buckets.

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engage with airline for appropriate action," the official added.

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Govt cancels visa of Bangladeshi actor; issues 'Leave India' notice for 'campaigning' for TMC

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): The Centre Tuesday issued a 'Leave India' notice to Bangladeshi actor Ferdous Ahmed and cancelled the business visa given to him for allegedly campaigning for a Trinamool Congress candidate in West Bengal, officials said.

Ahmed has also been "blacklisted" by the Union Home Ministry, thus jeopardising the chances of his future travel to India.

"After receiving a report from the Bureau of Immigration regarding

visa violations committed by a Bangladesh national, Ferdous Ahmed, the home ministry has cancelled his business visa and issued him a Leave India notice. He has also been blacklisted. The FRRO Kolkata has been directed to ensure compliance of these orders," a home ministry official said.

The move comes hours after the central government sought a report from the Foreigner Regional Registration Officer (FRRO), Kolkata, on the Bangladeshi actor

for allegedly campaigning for a Trinamool Congress candidate for the Lok Sabha polls. Ahmed, along with a few Indian actors, allegedly took part in campaigning for TMC's Raiganj candidate Kanhaiyalal Agarwal.

The Bangladeshi film star was reportedly seen seeking votes for Agarwal at campaign rallies across Hemtabad and Karandighi near the Indo-Bangladesh border.

The FRRO is responsible for providing visa services in the area under its jurisdiction.

EC orders repolling in one Assam polling booth



GUWAHATI, APR 16 (PTI): The Election Commission of India has ordered repolling in one booth in Dhemaji district, where election was held in the first phase, for not erasing the mock poll data.

The repoll will take place along with the second phase of polling on April 18 from 7 am to 5 pm, an official release said.

The polling booth falls in the Lakhimpur Lok Sabha constituen-

cy where election took place on April 11.

According to the election department, the officials of the polling station number 165, Dhemaji Town High School did not erase the test data of the mock poll conducted in the presence of the agents of different parties.

The actual election on April 11 had begun with the mock poll date intact in the EVM, which was pointed out later by

Congress' polling agent, officials said.

Replacement of the EVM was ordered immediately but the replaced voting machine did not reach on time, the officials said.

In the first phase of polling, 78.23 per cent votes were cast.

Karimganj (SC), Silchar, Autonomous District (ST), Nowgong and Mangaldoi seats will go to the polls in the second phase.

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): The BJP Tuesday urged the Election Commission to review its order banning Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath from campaigning for 72 hours, claiming he did not intend to incite communal tension and had only expressed his beliefs.

A BJP delegation including Union ministers J P Nadda, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and V K Singh also asked the EC to take action against cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu alleging that he tried to "spread hatred" with his speech in Bihar's Katihar constituency on Monday.

Defending Adityanath, Nadda said, "We have urged the EC to re-

view its decision banning Yogi Adityanath for 72 hours from participating in poll campaign. Yogi ji only expressed his beliefs and did not intend to seek votes or influence any community."

"We have requested the EC to review the decision to ban him and keep in view our right to retort and response," the Union health minister told reporters.

The poll watchdog served a notice to Adityanath on Monday after he, while addressing a rally in Meerut, compared the Lok Sabha elections to a contest between 'Ali', a revered figure in Islam, and Bajrang Bali, the Hindu god Hanuman.

On the complaint against Sidhu, Nadda

said, "The BJP delegation also met the EC for action against Sidhu. His comments in Purnia, Bihar, communalise and spread hatred among communities on religious lines, thereby committing blatant violations under Indian Penal Code, Representation of the People Act and Model Code of Conduct."

Sidhu stoked controversy on Monday by urging Muslim voters of Bihar's Katihar Lok Sabha constituency, with sizeable population of the minority community, to vote en bloc and defeat Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Sidhu was canvassing in support of Congress leader and former union minister Tariq Anwar.

28 killed as flash floods, thunderstorms lash Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, APR 16 (PTI): Massive thunderstorms lashed several parts of Pakistan, including Punjab and Sindh provinces, killing at least 28 people and injuring several others, according to media reports on Tuesday.

Heavy rain and storm caused by a westerly wave uprooted electricity poles and trees in different parts of the country and also damaged properties on Monday.

Intermittent downpour in western, central and northern parts of the country for the past few days has rendered mud houses susceptible to the collapse, while landslide and flash floods in some areas have already made several roads dangerous for travel, Dawn reported.

Thunderstorm in Punjab province resulted in the collapse of several buildings, killing at least nine persons, including two women.

Four deaths were reported in Khanewal district; three in



Hasilpur area of Bahawalnagar district; and two Dunyapur tehsil of Lodhran district.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province's Chitral valley, a woman and two men died when the roof of their house collapsed and fell on them.

In Balochistan province, authorities declared emergency on Monday after torrential rains and flash flooding wreaked havoc and killed at least nine persons, including a child.

On Tuesday, at least three people, including two children, were killed in flash floods in different areas of Balochistan, Levis sources said.

Heavy rainfall in

Quetta, Gwadar, Chagai, Harnai, Duki, Jewani, Jaffarabad, Kohlu, Sibi, Barkhan, Chaman and other districts of Balochistan caused flooding in nullahs and drains which severed land link in various parts of the province, the Express Tribune reported.

The low-lying areas had been submerged due to continuous rainfall in Kohlu and adjoining areas. In separate incidents related to the dust storm that hit Karachi, four persons, including two young girls died, an equal number of fishermen went missing and dozens of others suffered injuries, according to officials and rescue services.

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FIR against BJP's Satpal Satti for using expletive against Rahul Gandhi

SHIMLA, APRIL 16 (PTI): The Himachal Pradesh election office Tuesday served a notice to state BJP chief Satpal Singh Satti for allegedly using an expletive against Congress president Rahul Gandhi and is also probing a "threat" to cut off the ruling party leader's tongue, officials said.

The police registered an FIR against Satti under section 294 of IPC (obscene acts) under Baddi police limits.

State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Devesh Kumar said Satti has been served a notice for violation of Model Code of Conduct by the district election officer (DEO) of Solan. The BJP leader has been asked to reply within 24 hours from the receipt of the notice, Kumar said.

The CEO said the Election Commission of India (ECI) had taken strict cognisance of the alleged derogatory comments by Satti, which had gone viral on social media.

The ECI has been informed about the action taken in the matter on the basis of the reports by Solan DEO, Kumar said. The Congress burned the effigies of Satti at district headquarters across the state on Tuesday.

The election office and the local police are looking into a BJP complaint that a Congress "supporter" has offered a reward of Rs 10 lakh to anyone who cuts of Satti's tongue.

Meanwhile, a video, which went viral on social media, showed an alleged Congress supporter Vinay Sharma -- claimed by the BJP to be a former deputy advocate general of the state during Congress rule -- announcing a reward of Rs 10 lakh for any person who cuts off Satti's tongue.

The BJP filed a complaint with the state chief electoral officer, demanding registration of FIR against the Congress and Vinay Sharma for threat, criminal intimidation, instigation of physical violence and for other electoral offences.

In his complaint, state BJP general secretary Chander Mohan Thakur alleged, "The Congress leader, who has been identified as Vinay Sharma, a former deputy advocate general during Congress rule, is openly instigating the public to bodily harm Satti."

The Kangra district electoral officer has directed a thorough probe into the BJP's complaint, officials said.

The BJP also lodged a related complaint with Shimla police.

Earlier, the Congress state unit spokesperson Naresh Chauhan had sought Satti's apology in the matter, but the saffron party leader refused to do so, saying he merely read out contents of a message which was already viral on social media.

On Monday, state Congress general secretary Rajneesh Kimta had filed a complaint with the CEO against Satti for allegedly using expletives against the Congress president.

Sikkim Milk to resume proper supply today

REBYNA RANA

GANGTOK, 16 APR:

Sikkim Milk Union will be resuming proper supply of its packaged milk from Wednesday. The Union had been unable to deliver sufficient supply to its consumers for the past few days.

Speaking with SummitTIMES, Sikkim Milk Union, Managing Director, AB Karki said that procurement has been falling because more farmers have been moving away from dairy farming while existing farmers have been demanding hike in prices since prices of animal fodder have gone up.

Shortage of vehicles supplying milk due to the election was another reason cited by Mr Karki.



He informed that Sikkim Milk Union reached out to farmers in most areas and held meetings with them to convince

them by providing extra incentives.

"Sikkim Milk Union is trying its best to fulfil the milk demand by motivating

and providing incentives to the dairy farmers," said the managing director.

Sikkim Milk Union receives about 33,000 li-

tres milk on an average daily basis from 14,000 farmers of East, South and West districts respectively, it is informed.

Over 91pc seized Vellore cash in Rs 200 denomination; all sourced from one branch: IT dept report

NEELABH SRIVASTAVA

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI):

Over 91 per cent of Rs 11.53 crore seized by Income Tax Department in Tamil Nadu's Vellore Lok Sabha constituency was in the denomination of Rs 200 and sourced from one bank branch in the district to allegedly bribe voters, a report prepared by the department's sleuths revealed.

President Ram Nath Kovind Tuesday ordered rescinding the notification to hold election to the seat based on an Election Commission recommendation after the "black money", allegedly linked to DMK candidate Kathir Anand, was seized by the department on the night of March 29-30.

The department's Chennai wing had submitted a report of this incident to the poll panel with a strong recommendation to cancel the election in Vellore as "incriminating" amount of black money was being pumped into the constituency to "lure maximum number of the voters" ahead of the April 18 election.

The damning report accessed by PTI said that out of the total Rs 11.53 crore cash seized by the tax department, "only Rs 99 lakh cash was in the higher denomination of Rs 2000 and Rs 500, while 10.5 crore was in the smaller currency of Rs 200."

The cash was shifted from Kingston College (Durai Murugan Educational Trust), Vellore, to a cement godown in the night between March 29-30 due to botched up operation by the state police and revenue authorities.

The political functionaries obstructed I-T teams for a long time and meanwhile shifted the cash and other material out of the premises.

"Based on the leads found and meticulous surveillance, the cash was found to have been secreted in a cement godown belonging to a functionary of the same party. All the cash (seized) was found stuffed in cartons and gunny bags, neatly packed for distribution ward-wise with computer-printed labels on the packets," the tax department report said.

The educational group mentioned

in the report is linked to Anand's father Durai Murugan as he is a managing trustee of the institute and is also the sitting MLA of Vellore and the DMK treasurer, it said.

The report has photographs of the seizures made and they were sent to CBDT and EC.

They show that currency wads were neatly packed and bore numerical markings in blue and red ink, indicating that the packages were meant for ward-wise distribution.

The report also said that the taxmen used an "advanced currency-counting machine" and tabulated the entire cash bundles series-wise. They then sent the cash bundles to the RBI to ascertain the source bank branch of the currency notes.

A senior I-T official told the news agency that the "RBI found that the cash was sourced from a local Canara Bank branch cash chest."

The two cashiers who issued the banknotes were grilled by I-T department sleuths for long hours. It then came to light that their senior manager, based in the regional office, had ensured that this huge amount in lower denomination is supplied to the branch and further released to an alleged DMK-linked functionary who was not even an "income tax assessee." "The senior manager exploited the banking system and got the local branch such a big quantity of Rs 200 notes that was further released to the DMK-linked functionary," the I-T department official said.

The IT department has summoned the senior manager and the DMK candidate, Anand, for questioning.

"An I-T probe found that this cash was to be distributed in installments to lure voters in Vellore constituency," the official said. The EC took the decision after the district police filed a complaint against Anand and two of his party's functionaries on the basis of a report from the I-T department on April 10.

Anand was charged under the Representation of the People Act for giving "wrong information" in his election affidavit filed along with his nomination papers, police have said.

Railways remove Phoolan Devi's picture from wall, trigger row

INDORE, APR 16 (PTI):

A controversy erupted here Tuesday after the railway administration removed a picture of bandit-turned-politician Phoolan Devi from a boundary wall.

The local Mallah community took offence, while the Rajput leaders asked why her picture figured on the wall in the first place.

The picture of Phoolan Devi on the boundary wall of the local railway station was painted over on April 13.

It was among the pictures of 35 eminent women including Mother Teresa and the Queen of Jhansi Rani Laxmi Bai painted on the wall.

When contacted, Ratlam Rail Division's Divisional Railway Manager R L Sunkar said that after the administration learned about "the controversial picture" of Phoolan Devi, it was removed.

A private university has painted pictures of

eminent women on the boundary wall in a bid to beautify the railway station under a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative, he said.

"The agency working under CSR has been told strictly not to paint a picture of any personality without approval of the railway administration," Sunkar said.

But the action did not go down well with the local Mallah (boatmen) community, to which Phoolan Devi belonged.

President of the Madhya Pradesh Manjhi Machhua and Adivasi Mahasangh Chandra Shekhar Raikwar said, "It is very unfortunate that the picture was removed. Our community's delegation would soon meet railway officials and demand that it be restored."

Phoolan Devi's life was the story of a woman's struggle, he said.

"She took up arms against atrocities. She reached Parliament after winning an election, leav-

ing the life of a bandit behind. We will not tolerate an insult to her," he said.

On the other hand, members of the local Rajput community questioned why she merited the honour of having her picture painted on a railway wall.

Patron of the Indore Unit of the All India Kshatriya Mahasabha Mohan Sengar said, "Railways should tell us what remarkable work Phoolan Devi had done for society which led it to issue the permission to paint her picture along with that of great women like Rani Laxmi Bai and Mother Teresa."

After leaving behind her life as leader of a gang of dacoits, Phoolan Devi entered politics and was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1999. She was shot dead outside her house in Delhi in July 2001.

Her life story became the subject of an acclaimed film directed by Shekhar Kapur and starring Seema Biswas.

9-yr-old Indian girl wins USD 1 million jackpot in Dubai



DUBAI, APR 16 (PTI): A nine-year-old Indian girl on Tuesday won USD 1 million jackpot in Dubai Duty Free's Millennium Millionaire - six years after winning a luxury car in the same raffle.

Eliza M, a grade school student, won the jackpot with ticket No.0333, the Khaleej Times reported.

Her father, identified as M. from Mumbai and a resident of Dubai for 19 years, said that he was a regular participant in the Dubai Duty Free Millennium Millionaire promotion since 2004.

With 9 as his lucky

number, he decided to buy ticket No. 0333 online under his daughter's name, Eliza, the paper said. The girl is no newcomer to winning Dubai Duty Free promotions as she won a luxury McLaren Coupe in January 2013, the paper said.

She is the 140th Indian national to win a million dollars in the Dubai Duty Free Millennium Millionaire promotion since its inception in 1999.

"I have been buying tickets for the USD 1 million promotion since Series 43, and in fact, I

have kept that ticket all this time. I never missed buying a ticket for every series including the Double and Multi-Millionaire Promotions," the girl's father said.

Following the draw, two more winners were announced in Dubai Duty Free's Finest Surprise Promotion, each winning a luxury motorbike.

Mohammad Haneef Adam, a 23-year-old Dubai-based Indian national, won an Indian Scout Bobber.

A resident of Dubai for 20 years, Adam currently works in Sharjah.

CPI(M) claims rigging in 464 booths of Tripura West LS seat

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): The CPI(M) on Tuesday alleged that polling in 464 booths under Tripura West Lok Sabha seat were rigged and demanded a re-poll.

Out of two Lok Sabha seats in the state, polling was held in Tripura West parliamentary constituency during the first phase on April 11. The other seat, Tripura East, will go to polls in the second phase on April 18.

A CPI(M) delegation met the Election Commission on Monday and demanded repoll in those booths, incumbent MP Tripura West Sankar Prasad Datta said.

"During the first phase of polls, CPI(M) polling agents and voters were driven out of the booths. BJP workers were standing be-

side EVMs inside polling booths," he alleged.

CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury, addressing party workers at Jantar Mantar here, said, "There should be re-polling in 464 booths where the rigging took place during the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections. It is a murder of democracy in Tripura."

He claimed that he could hardly spot security forces in the booths in the hilly areas of the state.

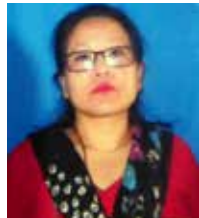
Datta claimed that the BJP has been attacking followers of left parties in the state as it did not fulfil the promises made before the Assembly elections and "they know that people of Tripura will vote in the favour of the CPI(M)".

KUTSHE SHEGU

The 49 day Shegu of Lt. Meena Kumari Rai w/o Phur Shangey Sherpa who left for heavenly abode on 6 Mar, 2019 falls on 22 Apr, 2019.

All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Upper Phalidara. We also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude towards all those who extended their support during the time of bereavement.

Contact: 90833-85240, 89673-16501.



ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

Anthyesthi kriya of our beloved mother, Lt. Hasti Kumari Subba who left for her heavenly abode on 12 Apr, 2019 falls on 20 Apr, 2019.

All relatives, friends, and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers to the departed soul at our residence at Soreng busty.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

Jit Bahadur Subba (Husband).

Deepen Subba, Sachin Subba, Preeten Subba (Sons): 70298 85112, 74309 25608.



KUTSHE SHEGU

The 49th Day Kutshe Shegu of Late Norden Tshering Lepcha of Naga Namgor, North Sikkim who left for his heavenly abode on 04/03/2019 falls on 21/04/2019. All friends, relatives and well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayer of departed soul at our residents at Naga Nomgor, North Sikkim.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us in our time of bereavement and regret our inability to thank them individually.

Lachhi Tamang (wife) and family members. 7384321454/9775819998/8945969929



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Cleaning Up

And no, we don't mean the Swachh Bharat kind

Sikkim often invokes Singapore when it speaks of its aspirations and plans. The country is taken as a role model more for emulating the “litter and spit free” environs or to underline the growth made possible by stable and unchanged government. May be Sikkim should also look towards Singapore to inspire a cleanliness drive against corruption. Of course, the other comparison that Sikkim draws - with Switzerland - would also work, because where Singapore is the only country from Asia in the top-10 least corrupt nations (it ranks 3rd), Switzerland sits pretty on the same spot [3] on the list. Would not be a bad idea for Sikkim to link similarities with these two countries beyond sharing the same first letter. But let's stick to Singapore for today.

Yes, corruption is a shared problem between India and Singapore and was also of the same colonial carryover kind of the privileged few and the omnipresent government. The latter, however, managed to sweep it away after first accepting that wherever there was development underway, the attendant demand of professionals and the importance of projects, fostered corruption. In a recent conversation with some officials from Singapore, some interesting tidbits were collected about how their country combated this dishonest mode of profiteering. This Singaporean lesson is worthy of duplication here.

The Singapore government effectively cleaned up a corrupt developing society in a very short time through three clear strategies, we are told. These, broadly, were a “strong-arm theory”, a “strong-men theory”, and a “strong-wage theory”. The format has obviously worked for Singapore and Sikkim could do well to borrow another of its tried system and replicate it here. The strong-arm theory included strict laws and efficient anticorruption agencies. These are already in place in Sikkim as they are elsewhere in the country, although the actual enforcement is far from satisfactory in many cases. The investigations are tacky, hence convictions are few and the penalties rarely deterrent enough. The strong men theory is interpreted as an unwavering political will from the top leadership. No matter what we might believe about smart bureaucrats corrupting naive politicians, if the public representatives put their foot down and demand transparency and fix accountability, corruption will start faltering. The next step beyond those forced by groundswells of public opinion need to be taken as well. For instance, the requirement to file property returns while filing nomination papers during elections is welcome, but now, there should have been an independent body of auditors to check whether what is disclosed is a true reflection of assets. The strong wage theory is high wages for the top leadership. This, on the understanding that corruption at high levels is far more difficult to deal with than petty corruption because the former is better connected and more deeply entrenched. Paying them well is an incentive to remain clean. For instance, the Singapore Prime Minister, even after a pay-cut taken some years back, earns more than the U.S. President, the Chancellor of Germany, and the British Prime Minister put together! Little reason left for him to be corrupt then.

Sikkim has already tried out this last trick and has among the better paid officials in the country. Sikkim has already tried out one of the other two options as well, but when it find the political will to get serious about containing the problem? Of course, these options don't work in isolation, they have to come together. If they do, they can't possibly fail. Will Sikkim be interested?

Of late, there has been another option that desperate people have resorted to; the options which have given us Kejriwal in Delhi, and also, even though they hail from completely different ideologies, Modi in India to a large extent, Trump in the US and Duterte in the Philippines. It is now universally accepted that the interplay of corruption and inequality feeds populism, a populism of a very dangerous kind. When traditional politicians fail to tackle corruption, people will grow cynical and seek out options from the opposite end of the spectrum. People around the world, especially in ill-informed or desperately unequal societies, have been turning to wildly populist and alt-Right leaders who promise to break the cycle of corruption and privilege, win them pride and secure them their place in world. Unfortunately, they almost never deliver. What they end up doing is exacerbating the already vexed situations.

WRITE US:

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Franco's invisible legacy: books across the hispanic world are still scarred by his censorship

JORDI CORNELLÀ-DETRELL
theconversation.com

It's exactly 80 years since the end of the Spanish Civil War, when General Francisco Franco's populist forces finally overcame the leftist resistance and plunged the country into full-blown dictatorship. Decades after his death, Franco continues to cast a long shadow over Spain, from the rise of the far-right Vox party to the hundreds of mass graves of people who died in the war that are still waiting to be exhumed.

One other hugely important legacy that few people are aware of is the continuing effect on books, both in Spain and throughout the Spanish-speaking world. To this day, translations of many world classics and works of Spanish literature are being reprinted using expurgated texts approved by the dictator's censors – often without publishers even realising it, let alone readers. It has had a chilling effect on freedom of speech over the years, and must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Between 1936 and 1966, every single book published in Spain had to be submitted to a national board of censors for examination. The censors would decide whether the text should be banned altogether or was fit for publication, in which case they would stipulate any necessary changes. After 1966, when a new law that partly liberalised freedom of speech was introduced in the country, publishers could voluntarily decide whether to submit a text for censorship. However, the authorities still retained the ability to withdraw any book from circulation that they deemed unacceptable.

Franco's censorship laws sought to reinforce Catholicism and promote ideological and cultural uniformity. The censors enforced conservative values, inhibited dissent and manipulated history, especially the memory of the civil war. Sexually explicit material was banned, as were alternative political views, improper language and criticisms of the Catholic church.

Spain abandoned these policies after Franco's death in 1975, yet most of the same texts are still widely available today. Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* is available in more than 20 different Spanish-lan-

guage editions, for instance, including an electronic one, all of which lack two extended passages that according to the censors glorified Satan. James Baldwin's *Go and Tell it on the Mountain* is only available in a version with cuts that include references to birth control and details about the sex lives of the main characters. The publication of this expurgated text is sponsored by none other than UNESCO.

Many literary works by some of Spain's most important 20th-century writers have suffered similar fates, including those by Ana María Matute, Camilo José Cela, Juan Marsé and Ignacio Aldecoa. In some cases, such as George Orwell's *Burmese Days* and Ian Fleming's *Thunderball*, censored parts have even survived in retranslated and restored versions.

With no one under the age of 40 even alive during the dictatorship years, few people are even aware of the problem. Public libraries are encouraging people to read thousands of volumes without realising they are censored. Many of these texts have been imported to Latin America, sometimes even being republished in different countries with their censored parts intact. It means that a fairly large proportion of the world's population is being routinely denied access to literature as it was intended to appear.

WHY CENSORSHIP NEVER ENDED

It is a well known fact that Spaniards have found it difficult to confront their traumatic recent history. The so-called “pact of forgetting”, a tacit decision among the Spanish political elites not to question or examine the past, was seen by many as vital to make the transition to democracy possible in the late 1970s and 1980s. For years, this included a general amnesia about Franco's cultural policies: even when books were retranslated to restore censored parts, few people said anything about it.

Spain's 2007 Law for the Recovery of the Historical Memory was a major step away from these years of forgetting. It condemned the dictatorship and established compensations for people who endured political violence during the regime. It also initiated the removal of statues and other public

symbols which glorified Franco's reign. Yet other cultural artefacts, such as books, were overlooked.

The upshot is that Spain's literary censorship problem is alive and well today. Indeed, it is arguably getting worse: it is easy to release digital versions of these classics, so Franco's hand even reaches into Kindles and tablets. We are talking about one of the most long-lasting yet invisible legacies of his regime. The effect on culture in Spain and in other hispanic countries is almost incalculable. Censorship has certainly distorted many people's perception of the civil war and its consequences. Many readers will also be ignorant of writers' real points of view regarding important social issues such as gender roles, birth control and homosexuality.

The question is how to deal with this complex problem – particularly now that the Vox party, which is expected to do well in the upcoming election, has promised to repeal the Law of Historical Memory on the grounds that it manipulates the past.

The most important task is to raise awareness among the reading public. This needs clear support from the Spanish government, plus serious engagement from the whole literary sector, including libraries, publishing houses, translators, archives, cultural publications and writers themselves. The technologies that are giving new life to the problem could be used to help: a public database of restored texts, for instance, could become an important tool.

The point is that while Spain has increasingly been addressing the impact of Franco's regime in the country's social and historical memory since the early 2000s, the process of coming to terms with the past is far from complete. The pact of forgetting has not only marred Spain's democratic progress, it has severely damaged the country's cultural heritage. Spain and the rest of the Spanish-speaking world will not be free from Franco's censorial shadow until this issue is publicly and decisively addressed. With people on the ascendant who would prefer to turn back the clock, there is no time to lose.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Hispanic Studies, University of Glasgow]



Microplastics have even been blown into a remote corner of the Pyrenees

SHARON GEORGE & CAROLYN ROBERTS
theconversation.com

Microplastics have been discovered in a remote area of the French Pyrenees mountains. The particles travelled through the atmosphere and were blown into the once pristine region by the wind, according to a new study published in *Nature Geoscience*.

This is just the latest example of the “hidden risks” posed by plastics that humans cannot see with the naked eye. For now, governments and activists are focused on avoiding plastic litter in the environment, driven mainly by concern for wildlife and worries over unsightly drinks bottles or abandoned fishing nets on beaches. Plastic bag usage has been cut in many parts of the world, and various projects are exploring how to gather up the floating plastic waste in oceans. But little has yet been done to deal with polluting plastic particles that are usually invisible.

There is however growing concern about these micro and nanoplastics, classified as particles smaller than 5mm. These come in part from deliberately manufactured sources, such as scrubbing materials in cleaning and cosmetic products, but also

from secondary sources, such as the inevitable breaking up or wearing down of larger items such as tyres or fibre shed from tumble driers and washing machines. We are becoming increasingly aware of their presence but know surprising little about how much is out there, how it behaves in our environment, and what the implications are for human and animal well-being.

As more studies publish their findings we are learning that microplastics are more widespread than we imagined, and that they are found in every environmental system investigated. Plastic particles have been found in record-breaking quantities in in river sediments in the UK, for instance, while a study in Paris found plastic fibres in wastewater and the air.

This is perhaps to be expected in built up and polluted urban environments, but the new findings from the Bernadouze meteorological station in the Pyrenees are a different matter. This part of the mountain range is normally considered clean and pristine, not somewhere scientists would expect to find contamination. But the researchers looked for airborne plastic by collecting samples of atmospheric “fallout” over a five-month period. And they did indeed find microplastics, lots of them, in the form

of tiny fragments, fibres and films. While their exact source is a mystery they were shown to have potentially travelled up to 95km.

Particles have also been found in deep ocean floor sediments, far from immediate sources of pollution, carried there by ocean currents and settling slowly. Other research has identified some astonishing ways microplastics can move between one environmental sub-system and others. Alongside the obvious route of direct ingestion by animals who become prey for others higher in the food chain, it is now apparent that there are other more innocuous routeways, such as mosquito larvae in water ingesting plastics that are then retained in their bodies as the animals become flying insects. This releases particles into the atmosphere allowing them to float for thousands of miles, or to be inhaled.

SHOULD WE BE WORRIED?

The amount of plastic in the environment has increased and we are still making lots more. It stands to reason that microplastics are going be with us for a while yet, since plastic itself has many beneficial uses. If these fragments were unreactive and harmless they would not pose a threat, but unfortunately the risks are

not yet fully understood.

Alongside the issues associated with inadvertent ingestion of large volumes of material without any nutritional value, there are some hidden risks. Microplastics have a relatively large surface area and so could potentially provide sites for surface reactions and act as rafts for organic pollution. Given that microplastics are turning up in drinking water and food we need to do more work to understand the risks to health and work out ways to manage this risk. A study that found microplastics in a fish liver raised concerns that plastic can cross the gut if it is ingested.

The trouble is, these plastics are so small they are not easy to remove from the environment once they get there. The key is preventing their escape into the environment in the first place. Focusing on the bigger plastics we can see may be a distraction from this potentially larger problem in the air we breathe and the food we eat, but tackling the problem at the source could go a long way to helping with damage limitation.

[Sharon George is Lecturer in Environmental Science, Keele University; Carolyn Roberts is Entrepreneur in Residence, Mercia Centre for Innovation Leadership, Keele University]

It's commoner vs royals in Bolangir LS constituency

BOLANGIR (ODISHA), APR 16 (PTI): The soaring mercury levels in Odisha have failed to take the heat out of last-minute campaigns in Bolangir Lok Sabha constituency, where a greenhorn is locking horns with two princely state candidates in a pitched battle.

Notwithstanding the grueling heat, the candidates, along with their supporters and family members, have hit the road in their last-ditch attempt to woo the voters.

While the ruling BJD in the state has re-nominated sitting MP Kalikesh Singhdeo from the seat, the BJP has fielded three-time MP Sangeeta Singhdeo, wife of veteran saffron leader KV Singhdeo.

The Congress has nominated newbie Samrendra Mishra, son of Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Narasingha Mishra, to take on the heavyweights.

Since 1998, the seat has been retained by the members of the royal family - either by Sangeeta Singhdeo or by her brother-in-law Kalikesh Singhdeo.

Sangeeta, as a BJP candidate, was elected to Lok Sabha from Bolangir in 1998, 1999 and 2004.

Kalikesh, on the other hand, has been holding the seat since 2009. He defeated Sangeeta by 1,04,299 votes in 2014 to bag the seat for the second consecutive term.

Sangeeta, who was the common candidate of the BJD-BJP alliance for three consecutive terms, lost the seat to Kalikesh after the coalition split.

Mishra, however, believes that he will put an end to the "dynastic rule"



in Bolangir this time.

"This is a fight between a raja (king), a rani (queen) and a common man. I, being a common man, will certainly win because people no longer support dynastic politics."

His father and senior Congress leader Narasingha Mishra was defeated by Kalikesh in 2009. The Congress greenhorn, it seems, is out to settle the score over his father's defeat.

"The Naveen Patnaik-led government has failed to improve irrigation facilities in Bolangir even after 19-year-long rule. People have migrated to other states in search of work due to lack of job opportunities. I am the only one who speak for them in Parliament," he added.

The two members of the Singhdeo family also exuded confidence that they would find their way to the Lower House of Parliament again.

"The BJD has taken many initiatives for the seat in the last 10 years. I am sure Bolangir will

bless me again," Kalikesh said. He stressed that people will vote for a regional party as national parties, after forming the government, "do not care about their interests".

The constituency, a part of the poverty-stricken (Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput) belt, is beleaguered by drought and persistent crop failure, Kalikesh said.

"The BJP is an anti-tribal and anti-poor party. It stopped financial assistance for the KBK region and also discontinued the Backward Region Grant Fund, which had aided people here to a large extent in the past," he claimed.

Sangeeta argued that many poor women in the constituency have benefitted from the central schemes.

"People have faith in the BJP. They have seen me as their representative thrice earlier. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's good work and strong leadership have impressed the voters of Bolangir," she claimed.

"Women here have received cooking gas connection and pucca houses. They have also been able to set up toilets with central funds," the former MP added.

Notably, the constituency has not favoured the grand old party in a long time.

The Congress last bagged the seat in 1996 polls, when people elected Sarat Patnaik to power.

Barring a few occasions, Bolangir has always been loyal to the royal family when it came to electoral battles.

KV Singhdeo's father Raj Raj Singhdeo had won the Lok Sabha constituency for two consecutive terms in 1967 and 1971 as Swatantra Party candidate.

The Swantrata Party was founded by Raj Raj Singhdeo's father Maharaja Rajendra Narayan Singhdeo, who also happens to be the first chief minister of Odisha.

Of the seven assembly segments in Bolangir - five are represented by BJD MLAs, and one each

are held by the BJP and the Congress. While KV Singhdeo represents the Patnagarh assembly seat, Narasingha Mishra was elected from the Bolangir segment in 2014.

However, if the 2017 panchayat polls were to be taken into consideration, a change in the direction of the wind seems likely with the saffron party bagging the lion's share of zilla parishads. The BJP had secured 24 of the 33 zilla parishads in Bolangir district, causing a major setback to the ruling BJD.

As a remedial measure, the ruling party has fielded fresh candidates from Loisingha and Patnagarh assembly seats this time, replacing the sitting MPs.

According to a poll analyst, the saffron party and the BJD are the key contenders in Bolangir Lok Sabha seat, where the voters haven't sprung too many surprises in the past.

Bolangir, with its more than 14 lakh electorate, is set to go to polls on April 18.

Row over Bangladeshi actor campaigning for TMC in West Bengal

KOLKATA, APR 16 (PTI): A controversy has erupted in West Bengal after popular Bangladeshi actor Ferdous Ahmed campaigned for the state's ruling TMC, prompting the BJP to lodge a complaint with the Election Commission claiming it violated the model code of conduct.

State BJP leaders Jay Prakash Majumdar and Sisir Bajoria met the state's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Ariz Aftab and urged him to take appropriation action over the alleged violation of the model code.

A video showing Ferdous and Bengali actors Ankush and Payal participating in a roadshow to seek votes for Trinamool Congress candidate for Raiganj Lok Sabha seat Kanhaiyalal Agarwal on Sunday has gone viral on social media.

The BJP leaders met Aftab on Monday to register their complaint.

"We believe that it is a completely illegal move executed intentionally. This is a proof of the TMC's bankrupt politics," the Majumdar, the state BJP vice president, said.

He wanted to know how a Bangladeshi national visiting the country on a tourist visa could campaign for a candidate, and alleged that the actor was brought it to polarise minority voters in the constituency.

"All should vote for the Trinamool Congress. All should vote for didi (TMC chief Mamata Banerjee)," Ferdous was claimed to have told voters while sharing the dais with Agarwal.

When reached by PTI for comments, Agarwal said he had no knowledge of the actor canvassing for him.

"I have no knowledge about this (Ferdous campaigning for him). I have only two star campaigners Mamata Banerjee

and Suwendu Adhikary. I have participated in Mamata's two rallies and today I took part in a roadshow in Islampur where Suwendu Adhikary was present," Agarwal said.

Senior TMC leader and former state minister Madan Mitra was dismissive about the violation of the model code because of a Bangladeshi national campaigning in an election in India.

"I don't know whether the actor participated in the rally or was invited by the candidate. But I don't think there is any violation of the model code. The code says a foreigner cannot be a candidate but I think there is no harm if anybody participates in campaigning. I don't see any violation of the MCC," Mitra said.

When approached for comments, a senior official at the CEO's office tersely said the matter is being looked into.

3,500 supporters of BJP-IPFT, CPI(M) join Congress in Tripura



AGARTALA, APR 16 (PTI): More than 3,500 supporters of the ruling BJP-IPFT and the opposition CPI(M) joined the Congress on Tuesday, two days ahead of the second and last phase of Lok Sabha polls in Tripura.

Addressing a press conference, the president of the Tripura Pradesh Congress (TPCC), Pradyot Kishore Dev Burman said, many have joined the Congress today, including Ashok Kumar Baidya, a former Congress MLA from Teliamura constituency in Khowai district.

He had earlier joined the BJP, Burman said, adding, Baidya had resigned from the BJP a month ago.

"Today's incident proved that the people are fed up with the BJ-IPFT government in one year, he said. "The BJP-IP-

FT government is losing its support and that was the reason behind the massive violence and rigging by the BJP during the first phase of elections on April 11," he said.

Polling was held in West Tripura constituency in the first phase.

The TPCC president also said that he would meet the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Sriram Taranikanti and ask him to ensure free and fair elections during the second phase of elections on Thursday.

The Congress had accused the CEO and the Director General of Tripura Police, Akhil Kumar Shukla, of favouring the ruling party during the first phase of the elections in the state.

It had also demanded their resignations.

Former MLA Ashok Baidya, who was also present at the press

conference, alleged that he was forced to resign from the BJP because there was no inner party democracy.

"Ashoke Baidya left the BJP earlier. He was not a significant leader. Everybody has the right to go anywhere," BJP Spokesperson Nabendu Bhattacharya said.

"We only know that the Congress or the CPI(M) cannot field polling agents in the elections because their mass base have eroded," Bhattacharya said.

No one has joined the Congress from the CPI(M), the Convener of the Left Front, Bijan Dhar, said.

"Rather, many have joined our party from the Congress," he added.

Altogether 12,61,861 lakh voters will exercise their franchise in 1,645 polling stations on Thursday.

Digital spend by pol parties may double this election season



KOLKATA, APR 16 (PTI): Online advertising expenditure by political parties is likely to double to Rs 400-500 crore this Lok Sabha election compared to 2014, riding on the growing smartphone penetration and cheaper Internet packs, experts said.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leads the pack in advertising spend in the digital space, they said.

"The total advertising expenditure on election campaigns could be between Rs 2,500-3,000 crore in the 2019 general elections," said Ashish Bhasin, CEO- Greater South, Dentsu Aegis Network.

Of this, ad spends on the social media and other digital platforms could be around Rs 500 crore, Bhasin, who is also the company's chairman and CEO-India, told PTI.

Bhasin said the overall expenditure also includes the manpower cost for campaigning, but not the spends on advertising gov-

ernment schemes and programmes.

Another advertising professional said the budget of political parties for online promotion is growing exponentially with a surge in smartphone sales in the last five years, and a cut-throat competition among telecom operators to offer cheap data packs.

He added that there are separate estimates for constituency-specific advertising in some of the regions.

According to Google's Political Advertising Transparency Report, the total spend on its various digital segments surpassed Rs 86,311,600 since February 19 this year.

A similar report by Facebook showed such expenditure at Rs 121,845,456 for 61,248 ads.

The 2019 general election is being held in seven phases across the country, from April 11 to May 19. The results will be announced on May 23.

Moderate earthquake hits Nepal's Gorkha district

KATHMANDU, APRIL 16 (PTI): A moderate intensity earthquake hit Nepal's Gorkha district, about 160 km west from here, on Tuesday, the tremors of which were also felt in the Himalayan nation's capital, officials said.

They also said that there were no reports of damage to the property.

According to the Ne-

pal's National Seismological Centre (NSC), a 4.5-magnitude quake was felt in the Gorkha district and surrounding areas at around 12:35 pm (local time).

"The earthquake was also felt in Kathmandu.

However, so far there is no report of any damage. This is the third earthquake above 4.5-magnitude that hit Nepal in the

past five days," the NSC officials said.

On Saturday, a 4.6-magnitude earthquake hit the country's Rasuwa district while a 4.8-magnitude tremor hit the far-west Bajhang district on Sunday.

Nepal's Gorkha district was hit by a great earthquake in April 2015 in which around 9,000 people were killed.

Patnaik richest among 244 candidates in phase 2 assembly polls

BHUBANESWAR, APR 15 (PTI): Ruling BJD president and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is the richest among the 244 candidates contesting the assembly elections, in the 2nd phase, scheduled on April 18, a report released by Odisha Election Watch said Monday.

The Odisha Election Watch is a part of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

"Of the 244 candidates in the fray for the 35 assembly segments, 70 are corepatis," said Odisha Election Watch Convenor Ranjan Mohanty, adding that 13 candidates have assets worth Rs 5 crore and above, and 24 others have assets between Rs

2 crore and Rs 5 crore.

While Patnaik, who is contesting from two assembly segments, Hinjili and Bijepur, tops the list of rich candidates with total assets worth Rs 63 crore, BJP candidate KV Singhdeo contesting from Patnagarh segment in Bolangir district stands second with total assets worth Rs 37 crore, the report said.

BJD's Jharsuguda candidate, Naba Kishore Das, is in the third place with total assets worth Rs 33 crore, it said.

Das is followed by BJD candidate Saroj Kumar Meher of Patnagarh seat with total assets worth Rs 31 crore.

Other rich candidates are BJP's Bijay Kumar

Swain (Rs 15 cr), BJD's Arkesh Narayan Singhdeo (Rs 15 crore), BJD's Nandini Devi (Rs 11 crore), BJP's Dinesh Jain (Rs 8 cr), BJP's Pitamber Acharya (Rs 7 crore) and BJD's Kishore Kumar Mohanty (Rs 7 crore), the report added.

BSP candidate Narayan Versa contesting from Bhatli assembly segment only has Rs 8,044.

Incidentally, K V Singhdeo's wife Sangeeta Singhdeo was also on the top of the list of candidates for the Lok Sabha with assets worth Rs 37 crore.

Of the 35 candidates contesting for five Lok Sabha seats in the second phase of the elections, 11 are corepatis, he said.



La Liga conducts training for Indian coaches

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): Spain's premier football league, LaLiga, conducted a three-day training workshop "Train the Trainer" for Indian coaches from April 13 to 15th here.

In association with India On Track (IOT), 48 LaLiga Football Schools' India coaches from across the nation were brought here with an objective of increasing their knowledge and showing them the LaLiga systems and methodology.

The workshops were conducted by LaLiga Football Schools Technical Director, Javier Cabrera, Spanish coordinator Saul Vazquez with the support of LaLiga Sports Coordinator, Juan Florit.

The training was delivered to provide Indian coaches with theoretical and practical understanding of maximising the potential of aspiring footballers in the country. The coaches also got an opportunity to interact one-on-one with the LaLiga trainers and gain a valuable experience which will be translated to the grounds and increase the level of training of students.

"Through the LaLiga Football Schools initiative, we want to see tangible and long-term impact on football in India. By imparting the knowledge of Spanish techniques and methods, we want to enable these coaches to train the next big global football star from India," said Jose Antonio Cachaza, Managing Director, LaLiga India.

"A talented sports person owes their success to a great teacher. This thought is the basis of the Train the Trainer Programme. For longevity and sustained growth of football in India, it is imperative to bring the best global coaching practices to our coaches here, and to empower them with the right tools to guide the next many generation of footballers to come," said Rohan Chopra, Chief Operating Officer, IOT.

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Arsenal edge past 10-man Watford, move into top four

LONDON, APR 16 (AFP): Arsenal moved into the Premier League top four, but made hard work of seeing off 10-man Watford 1-0 thanks to Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's fortunate early opener on Monday.

Aubameyang profited from an error by Watford goalkeeper Ben Foster as he blasted an attempted clearance in off the Gabon international.

Watford captain Troy Deeney was then shown a straight red card after just 11 minutes, but the Gunners failed to make the most of their man advantage and were fortunate as the hosts twice hit the woodwork.

However, Unai Emery's men held out for a first clean sheet away from home in the Premier League this season to move ahead of Chelsea on goal difference into fourth.

"We didn't control the match like I wanted," admitted Emery. "The team was anxious because they could (have) taken some moment. The most important for us is to score the second goal,



which we didn't do."

Arsenal also edge to within a point of north London rivals Tottenham and two clear of Manchester United in the four-way battle for the two remaining Champions League places behind Liverpool and Manchester City.

FA Cup finalists Wat-

ford were already shorn of the man who helped book their place at Wembley against Manchester City next month as Gerard Deulofeu missed out through injury and Javi Gracia's side did themselves little favours early on.

Firstly, Foster dallied as Aubameyang closed

in to concede a comical opener. "I've said sorry to the lads," said Foster. "I have tried to drag it on to my left and pass it out but before I knew it he (Aubameyang) was bloody on me.

"In hindsight, you have to get rid as quick as you can, even if it goes into row Z. "I am

definitely not a modern goalie. They can't score from row Z." And within seconds, Deeney was punished for what the referee saw as an elbow into the face of Lucas Torreira.

"If it is a foul I have a doubt, maybe a yellow card but (a) red card, I don't understand why

the referee did it," argued Watford boss Javi Gracia.

However, the 10 men were still causing problems to a defensively vulnerable Arsenal at the other end.

Craig Cathcart's shot was turned onto the post by Bernd Leno and the German goalkeeper was also a full stretch to

turn an Etienne Capoue free-kick behind. Emery introduced Mesut Ozil at half-time in an attempt to improve Arsenal's final ball with so much space to counter-attack into, but to little avail.

Alex Iwobi looked to have provided the perfect cross to pick out Henrikh Mkhitaryan, but Foster made amends for his earlier error by spreading himself to make a brilliant save from the Armenian. Arsenal's terrible away record is why they face such a tight battle to secure Champions League football next season.

And they could have thrown just a second away league win since November away as Adam Masina crashed a 25-yard strike off the crossbar before Andre Gray miscontrolled Daryl Janmaat's pass when clean through on Leno.

Gray was then denied by a last-ditch challenge from Ainsley Maitland-Niles after rounding Leno, but without the firepower of Deulofeu and Deeney, Watford's brave effort fell just short.

Chahal excited to play in World Cup, but says focus is still on IPL



MUMBAI, APR 16 (PTI): Yuzvendra Chahal is excited to play his maiden World Cup, but insisted that the focus is very much on bringing the Royal Challengers Bangalore's dismal Indian Premier League campaign back on track.

Chahal was expectedly named in the 15-member squad that will board the England-bound flight to take part in the marquee event which begins from May 30.

"World Cup is after one month and still I'm playing for the RCB, so I'm just looking towards the next seven matches," the Haryana leg-spinner said at the post-match press conference.

"It is my first World

Cup, I'm very excited for that. Everyone wants to represent the country in the World Cup, so I'm excited," the 28-year-old said. Chahal, who returned with figures of 2-27 last night, has so far grabbed 72 wickets from 41 ODI games for India.

He credited his India teammate and MI all-rounder Hardik Pandya for taking the game away from his side.

Pandya's blazing, unbeaten 37 (in 16 balls) helped Mumbai Indians complete a five-wicket win over RCB at the Wankhede Stadium.

"The pitch was offering turn and it wasn't easy to score against the spinners. We bowled well till the 18th over

(barring a) couple of bad overs in the Powerplay and still there were two overs and 24 runs (actually 22) left (for Mumbai to chase). We had a chance on this track but Hardik did well," said Chahal.

He was responding to a specific query whether Mumbai were successful in their plan of attacking pacers.

He however refused to blame any particular individual for the loss saying it's a team game.

"You can't blame a particular bowler. A medium pacer or a spinner not bowling good, it is (still) a team game. If we lose the game, I accept that (as a bowler)," he signed off.

Hardik wants to prove a point with bat and ball: Rohit

MUMBAI, APR 16 (PTI): Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma says Hardik Pandya has been driven by a desire "prove a point to himself", more than anyone else, in what is turning out to be a good IPL season for the flamboyant all-rounder.

Pandya's 16-ball unbeaten 37 guided Mumbai Indians to a five-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bangalore Monday night. The all-rounder is averaging a healthy 46.50 and has a strike rate of over 190 in the eight matches he has played this season.

"His (Hardik's) hitting has been helping the team and him as well to move forward. This is something he wanted to do because he didn't have a lot of time before coming to the IPL," Rohit said after Monday's match.

"So he wanted to prove a point with bat and ball, to himself more than anyone else. The way he is hitting it gives us confidence as a team that there is someone who can hit that well at the end and win crucial games." Talking about



veteran Sri Lankan fast bowler Lasith Malinga, who took four wickets to restrict RCB to 171 for 7, Rohit said, "Lasith's performance matters a lot to us. We missed him for a few games. Trust me, with all that he has done over the years, bowling at the death at the Wankhede is very difficult.

"Credit goes to the bowlers in general for restricting a good RCB batting line-up to 170 odd."

Rohit, however, admitted that he is yet to figure out the Wankhede pitch.

"To be honest, I still haven't figured out the pitch here this season.

Normally it's safe to chase here, but today no one expected it to play this way. If the pitch plays like that I don't want to chase," he said with a smile. Pandya, on his part, praised openers Rohit (28) and Quinton de Kock (40) for the the start the team got in the run chase.

"Hats off to both the openers. It was not easy to bat on this wicket but they made it easy for us in the end. I felt RCB didn't bowl well in the Powerplay and that's where I thought they lost the game," he said.

"We began well and had the bowlers who

hit the deck hard and got some purchase off the wicket. The way the wicket started playing, even AB found it difficult but they both (AB and Moeen) played well.

A disappointed RCB and India captain Virat Kohli defended the move to use left-arm spinner Pawan Negi in the 19th over of which Pandya smashed 22 runs to end the match.

"At the end, we had to take the risk with the left-arm spinner, with two right-handed batsmen. Giving pace was risky, especially with a bit of dew. Unfortunately, it didn't come off," said Kohli.

I love the way Dhoni can slow down and control games: Ish Sodhi

SANJAY GANJOO

CHANDIGARH, APR 15 (PTI): Mahendra Singh Dhoni's ability to control match situations by slowing down the pace of T20 games is something that everyone should learn, feels Rajasthan Royals' New Zealand leg-spinner Ish Sodhi.

Twenty20 cricket has its own speed and Dhoni blessed with a superb cricket brain has shown how trying tweak the pace of the proceedings helps.

"I think mental clarity on one's role is very important. The ability to slow the game right down and that's something that I am starting to really respect and understand watching MS Dhoni when he plays, looks like he really slows the game

down, understands exactly what he needs to do and then goes out and tries to achieve that," Sodhi told PTI during an interview.

He said that it may not be possible to win every game in that fashion but it does help in at least setting it up for the rest.

"Players may not win you every single game like that but they will come quite close and put up consistent performances."

Consistency separates good from the best and it comes with a clear mindset, feels Sodhi, who has played 17 Tests, 30 ODIs and 33 T20 Internationals for New Zealand "I suppose consistency comes from a really clear mindset. That's what we are striving for as crick-



eters, it's nice to contribute once in a while, that's amazing to contribute to wins. But contributing over a long period of time, I think is what separates the class players from the world class players."

Despite a combined 123 international wickets across three formats, Sodhi feels that he is inexperienced.

"I being 26 years old, I have played a lot of cricket, but I am still a reasonably inexperienced person and so I am looking to keep growing my game. I want to put up good per-

formances for Rajasthan Royals, put performances for New Zealand over long periods of time. I just don't want to do it tomorrow or the day after, but I want to do it for a long period," said Sodhi. PTI SUN KHS With World Cup coming ahead, Sodhi when asked how challenging it is for players to manage and remain match-fit, Sodhi said training hard is the key.

I have been working with some very good coaches who help me tremendously over the past couple of years as well. I am just making most of my time, I am trying to keep improving and get better in these conditions, see what I can use in these conditions here that will be helpful for me in UK as well.

India-US ties promoted in sustained manner by Trump: Report

BY LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, APR 16 (PTI): The Trump administration has worked to make India a more prominent part of its regional strategy, a top American think-tank has said in a report, lauding President Donald Trump for promoting strategic ties with India in a “sustained manner”.

Asserting that the Trump administration has maintained the success story of US-India relations initiated by George W Bush, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in its report gives the US President a high B+ grade when it comes to America's ties with India.

The CFR in its special report Trump's Foreign Policy are Better Than They Seem said President Trump “deserves credit for promoting strategic ties with India in a sustained manner”.

The Trump administration has worked to make India a more prominent part of its regional strategy. After changing the name of US Pacific Command to US Indo-Pa-



cific Command in May 2018, the United States is now planning its first tri-service exercise with the Indian military, said the report authored by former US Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill.

President Trump's inclinations, as conveyed through his South Asia strategy, which accords primacy to India; his release of advanced weapons systems, such as unmanned aerial vehicles,

for sale to New Delhi; and his decision to treat India on par with NATO allies where strategic technology release is concerned are all viewed as favourable toward India, it said.

The report said that New Delhi has accordingly responded with bold initiatives of its own.

“Although it has not entirely endorsed the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy, it has applauded the strat-

egy's declared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region a concept first articulated by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, with whom Prime Minister Narendra Modi enjoys an exceptionally close relationship,” the CFR said.

In addition, India has quietly and sometimes not so quietly begun to cooperate militarily with the US in significant ways even in peace-

time, said the report, in which Blackwill argues that even though many of Trump's actions have been impetuous and the president oversees a chaotic and often dysfunctional policymaking process, some of his individual foreign policies are better than his critics give him credit for.

Blackwill points to what he sees as a much-needed toughening of US policy toward China, a justified US withdrawal from Syria and disengagement from Afghanistan, and closer relations with India, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, said CFR President Richard N Hass in the forward to the report.

Observing that it is no wonder that Trump is not given sufficient credit for his foreign policies, the report said that after more than two tumultuous years in office, the president has disrupted a whole series of conventions in the international system, some of them undoubtedly needed, but adopted few follow-on strategies and little or no implementation.

Notre-Dame of Paris ‘saved’ after fire destroys steeple

PARIS, APR 16 (AFP): French firefighters Monday won an hours-long battle to save the main structure of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, after a colossal fire caused the spire of the historic edifice to crash to the ground and wiped out centuries of heritage. French President Emmanuel Macron vowed that “we will rebuild” Notre-Dame and expressed relief that “the worst had been avoided” in a fire that risked bringing the entire edifice down.

The fire destroyed the roof of the 850-year-old UNESCO world heritage landmark, whose spectacular Gothic spire collapsed before the eyes of horrified onlookers on a previously pristine early spring evening. The fire, which came as Catholics prepare to celebrate Easter, sent orange flames and clouds of grey smoke billowing into the sky as stunned Parisians and tourists watched on in horror. As darkness fell, some 400 firefighters then battled to control the fire and save at least its iconic front towers. They finally gained the upper hand as midnight approached.

Paris fire brigade chief Jean-Claude Gallet said “we can consider that the main structure of Notre-Dame has been saved and preserved” as well as the two towers.

Deputy Interior Minister Laurent Nunez, also present at the scene, said that for the first time “the fire had decreased in intensity” while still urging “extreme caution.” “This is really sad -- the saddest thing I've ever stood and watched in my life,” said British tourist Sam Ogden, a 50-year-old onlooker, who had come to visit the cathedral with her family.

Gasps and cries of “Oh my god” erupted around an hour after the fire first broke out when the top portion of the church's spire came crashing down.

The cause of the blaze was not immediately

confirmed. The cathedral had been undergoing intense restoration work which the fire service said could be linked to the blaze. French prosecutors said the blaze was being treated as an “involuntary” fire, indicating that foul play was ruled out for now.

Last week, dramatic footage had shown workers removing 16 copper statues from the spire which was undergoing a revamp financed by the state and private donors.

Historians expressed incredulity at the collapse of a building that has been a symbol of France for almost a millennium and withstood war and revolution. “If Paris is the Eiffel Tower then France is Notre Dame. It's the entire culture, entire history of France incarnated in this monument,” Bernard Leconte, a writer and specialist in religious history told BFM TV.

Deputy Paris mayor Emmanuel Gregoire told the channel that workers were scrambling “to save all the artworks that can be saved.” Macron had earlier cancelled a major televised policy speech he was due to give on Monday evening to respond to months of protests, and instead headed to the scene in person.

Visibly emotional, he said while the “worst had been avoided” and the facade and two towers saved “the next hours will be difficult”. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said he felt a “sadness beyond words” but added the fire services “were still fighting... heroically, to save what can be saved”.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called Notre-Dame cathedral a “symbol of European culture” as the blaze raged.

The Vatican on Monday expressed its “incredulity” and “sadness”, expressing “our closeness with French Catholics and with the Parisian population.” There was no immediate indication of any casualties in the blaze.

US President Donald

Trump in a tweet said it was “horrible” to watch the fire but caused controversy by offering advice on how to put it out.

“Perhaps flying water tankers could be used to put it out. Must act quickly!” he said.

But France's civil security service, which oversees crisis management in the country, tweeted back at Trump that the use of water-bombing aircraft was not being considered.

“If used, (this) could lead to the collapse of the entire structure of the cathedral,” it said.

Hundreds of people gathered on the bridges of Paris to witness the scene, many filming the images with their smartphones.

The cathedral was located at the centre of the French capital in the Middle Ages and its construction was completed in the mid-12th century after some 200 years of work.

During the French Revolution in the 18th century, the cathedral was vandalised in widespread anti-Catholic violence: its spire was dismantled, its treasures plundered and its large statues at the grand entrance doors destroyed.

It would go on to feature as a central character in a Victor Hugo novel published in 1831, “The Hunchback of Notre-Dame” and shortly afterwards a restoration project lasting two decades got underway, led by architect Eugene Viollet-le-Duc.

It would survive the devastation of two world conflicts in the 20th century and famously rang its bells on August 24, 1944, the day of the Liberation of Paris from German occupation at the end of the World War II.

“Paris is disfigured. The city will never be like it was before,” said Philippe, a communications worker in his mid-30s, who had biked over to the scene after being alerted of the fire by a friend.

More than 60,000 people flee Nicaragua crisis: UN

GENEVA, APR 16 (AFP): More than 60,000 people have fled the crisis in Nicaragua over the past year, the UN said Tuesday, with neighbouring Costa Rica bearing the brunt of the refugee flow.

The central American country has been gripped by a year of political unrest since months of street protests erupted last April against President Daniel Ortega's government, leaving more than 325 people dead.

The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) said that an estimated 62,000 people had fled to neighbouring countries -- 55,000 of them to Costa Rica.

People “have resorted to irregular crossings to avoid detection, often walking for hours through difficult terrain, exposed to heat, humidity and the risk of malaria,” UNHCR said in a statement.

Those seeking asylum in Costa Rica include “students, former public officials, opposition figures, journalists, doctors, human rights defenders and farmers,” the agency added.

Government talks with the opposition aimed at easing the crisis broke up last week without agreement on political reform in the crisis-torn country.

Ortega's leftist government has said it remains committed to breaking the impasse through dialogue.

The United States and European Union have threatened Ortega with sanctions, while the opposition has demanded the release of all those detained during protests.

Notre Dame hailed as monument to the ‘best of civilization’

New York, Apr 16 (AP): Notre Dame, a survivor of wars and revolutions, has stood for centuries as not merely the greatest of the Gothic cathedrals and a towering jewel of Western architecture.

It has stood, in the words of one shell-shocked art expert, as “one of the great monuments to the best of civilization.” And so it was that across the globe Monday, a stunned and helpless art world wept alongside the people of France as a massive fire ravaged the beloved cathedral.

“Civilization is just so fragile,” said Barbara Drake Boehm, senior curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's medieval Cloisters branch in New York, her voice shaking as she tried to put into words what the cathedral meant.

“This great hulking monument of stone has been there since 1163. It's come through so many trials.” “It's not one relic, not one piece of glass it's the totality,” she said, struggling to find words expansive enough to describe the cathedral's significance.

“It's the very soul of Paris, but it's not just for French people. For all humanity, it's one of the great monuments to the best of civilization.”

Boehm spoke shortly



before the Paris fire chief announced that firefighters had been able to finally save the structure, including its two main towers. Much of the roof was destroyed.

The exact cause of the blaze wasn't known, but French media quoted the fire brigade as saying it was “potentially linked” to a 6 million euro (6.8 million) renovation project on the church's spire and its 250 tons of lead.

The Paris Prosecutor's office, which was investigating, said it was treating it as an accident.

Construction on Notre Dame French for “Our Lady” began in the 12th century and continued for nearly 200 years. It sustained damage and fell into neglect during the French Revolution, but received renewed attention following the 1831 publication of Victor Hugo's novel “The Hunchback of Notre-Dame.”

This led to two decades of restorations, including the cathe-

dral's famous flying buttresses and a reconstructed spire.

While most kings were crowned elsewhere, Napoleon Bonaparte made sure he was crowned there in 1804, and married there in 1810.

Experts note that Notre Dame is an aesthetically smooth synthesis of different centuries. “It all blends together so harmoniously,” said Nancy Wu, a medieval architecture expert and educator at the Met Cloisters.

She said she was struck by delicacy of the structure, as well as that in the three stunning stained-glass rose windows, and the elegant exterior carvings.

“There are a lot of details that remind one of intricate lace,” she said, “even though it's a building of cold hard stone.” Aside from the structure, art experts were concerned about the fate of countless priceless artworks and artifacts inside, including relics

like the crown of thorns, which is only occasionally displayed.

“This cathedral has a number of elements that are not just famous but religiously significant,” said Julio Bermudez, professor at the school of architecture and planning at Catholic University in Washington “One of course is the crown of thorns ... the faithful believe this is the crown that the Savior put on his head. It's kept in a very safe place. But you know the fire is tremendously damaging.”

He also expressed concern about the beautiful stained-glass windows, which he called “really irreplaceable.” Those worried about the cathedral's durability could, perhaps, take solace in one of Notre Dame's more fascinating survival stories. In 1977, workers demolishing a wall in another part of Paris discovered 21 heads belonging to 13th-century statues from the cathedral.

Malaysia arrests Vietnam poachers, seizes tiger, bear parts

KUALA LUMPUR, APR 16 (AFP): Malaysian authorities have arrested two suspected poachers from Vietnam and seized body parts from tigers and bears, a minister said Tuesday, as the country clamps down on rampant wildlife trafficking. The Southeast Asian nation is home to swathes of jungle and a kaleidoscope of rare creatures from elephants to orang-utans and tigers, but they are frequently targeted by poachers.

Two Vietnamese men, aged

25 and 29, were arrested Monday by a wildlife enforcement team in a national park in eastern Terengganu state, said Xavier Jayakumar, water, land and natural resources minister.

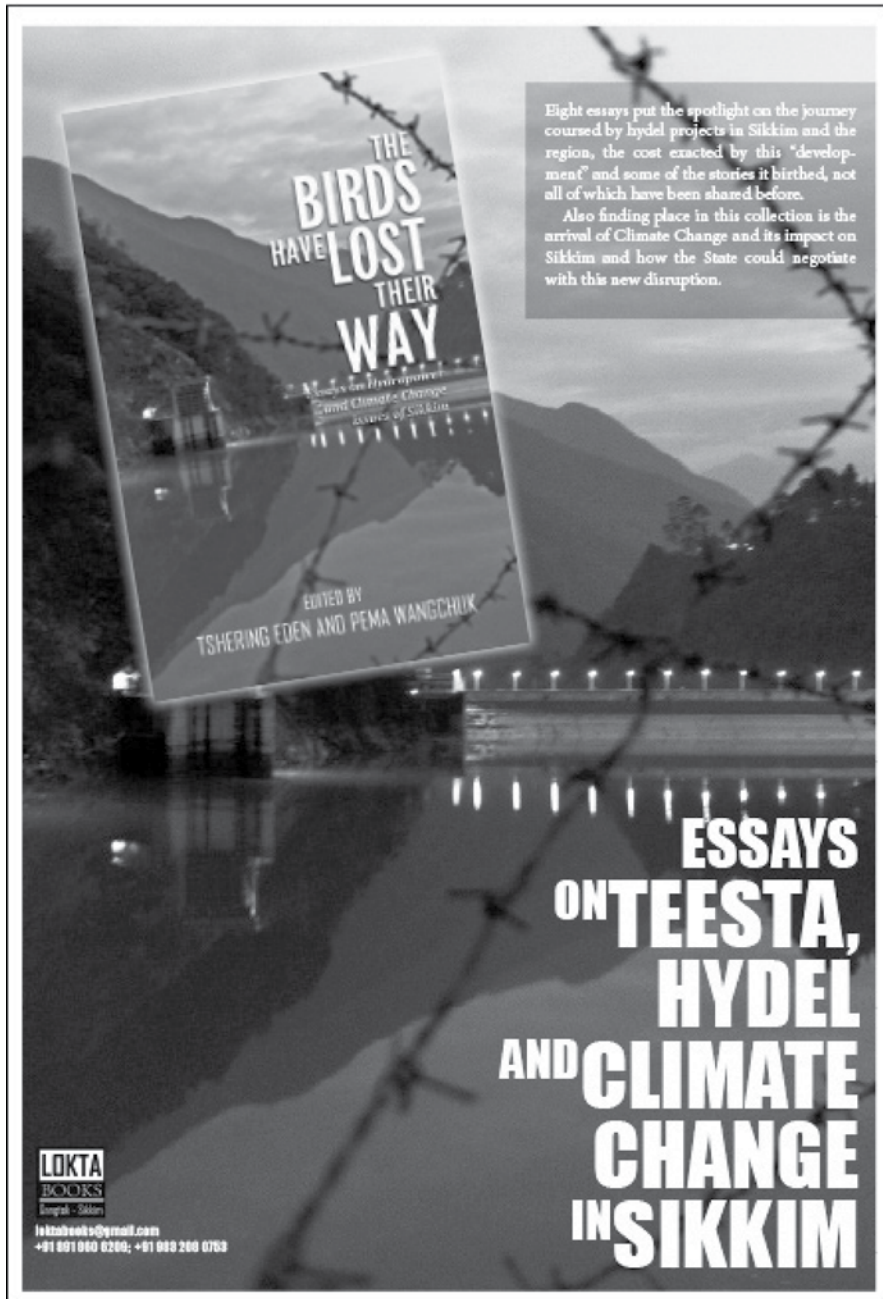
The men were in possession of claws and teeth from the Malaysian tiger, he said. The species once roamed the jungles of Malaysia in the thousands but is now critically endangered, with just a small number believed left in the wild.

They also had teeth and claws

from bears, teeth from wild boars, as well as hunting equipment including machetes, axes and wire for setting traps, the minister said.

“The two suspects have been arrested and will be remanded for three days to assist in the investigation,” he said.

Tiger pelts are prized collectors' items and fetch a high price on the black market, while many animals' body parts are used in traditional medicines in parts of Asia, including Vietnam and China.



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SWEET COLLAB! The pop artists, Ariana Grande & NSYNC poses together to close out with an outstanding performance at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.

Was told I was too old, fat and ethnic for Hollywood: Jameela Jamil



LOS ANGELES, APR 15 (PTI): Actor Jameela Jamil has revealed she was told that she was too “fat, old and ethnic” for Hollywood, during the beginning of her career.

The “Good Place” star opened up about the setbacks she has faced in her career at the Create & Cultivate Desert Pop Up at the 2019 Coachella Music Festival, reported Harper’s Bazaar.

“I was told I was too old, too fat, and too ethnic for Hollywood, but I’m here today. Don’t listen to people who project their fears on you. If you’re going to be an activist or feminist, you have to be willing to take it and know that we don’t know everything. We have to be willing to shut up, listen, and learn, and not be too proud about it,” Jamil said.

She added that she is ready to see the world change.

“The next generation is f*****g done being excluded and looking up to a white straight thin version of what we are supposed to be. We’re done with the dinosaurs and I’m here to kill the last of them.”

Jamil also discussed the unfair pressure put on women to look a certain way.

She said, “If a man is attractive, it’s considered a bonus. For us, it’s the basic foundation of our worth,” she said.

Relationships, loved ones my priority: Alia Bhatt

By Shubha Dubey
New Delhi, Apr 16 (PTI): Seven hits in 10 years is a testimony of her passion towards acting, but Alia Bhatt says her life does not revolve around the fate of a film.

The 26-year-old star says with age she has realised it is important to be detached from both success and failure and give priority to relationships in her life.

“I’m very passionate about acting, filmmaking and this whole world. But it is still a part of my life, it is not my life. I have realised this now that at the end of the day my family, my relationships and my loved ones are my priority.”

“You realise all this with age. I still give my 100 per cent to each and every film I do, but I think it is not wrong to say that the people in my life, the memories and the moments I have with them are my priority,” Alia told PTI in an interview.

The “Raazi” star adds she enjoys working in movies, but she does not let it overshadow her personal life.

“I don’t like being too attached to my journey. Be it success or failure... I don’t let it overpower me. I shuffle between detaching and attaching. I’m just happy as long as I am working and I want to continue working. But still



it is necessary to not take things too much on heart.”

Alia says performing in front of the camera satisfies her creative appetite and box office numbers do not bother her.

“Nobody wants to fail. But what is important for me is to feel satisfied with the process of filmmaking and then leaving the decision to the world. Then you just have to live with it, deal with it and learn from it.”

From playing a child sexual abuse victim in “Highway” to essaying the role of a spy in “Raazi”, Alia’s choices have surprised both audiences and critics. She, however, says her aim is to not “shock” the viewers but challenge herself instead.

“Surprising people with my choices is being manipulative. I just believe in challenging myself. The reasoning will be wrong if I am trying to bring a shock value with my choices. The reason for me to choose a film is the story,” she says.

Alia will next be seen in “Kalank”, which releases Wednesday.

The actor features opposite Varun Dhawan, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditya Roy Kapoor, Sanjay Dutt and Madhuri Dixit Nene in the film produced by Dharma Productions.

She says the film is important for her because it is her most high budget project till date.

“It is a very important film for me and Varun. It is our biggest film in terms of budget till date. Honestly, we have a stress of our own release, but director Abhishek (Varman) is a close friend so the stress doubles. The journey on this film was not fun and games. It was very emotional and intense,” she adds.

Praising Varman, with whom she also worked in “2 States”, Alia says he is a “complete director”.

“He will get the beauty, drama, scale and naturalness so organically. He is the first person I call for any advice.

Emotions run high at ‘Avengers: Endgame’ fan event in Seoul



BY BEDIKA

SEOUL, APR 16 (PTI): The excitement around “Avengers: Endgame” evaporated into the thin air as a sense of an ending dawned upon the Marvel fans after the franchise veterans, Robert Downey Jr and Jeremy Renner, greeted them at an event here and reminisced about their decade spent making superhero films.

Actor Brie Larson, the newest addition to the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), also soaked in the fan mania, striking the famous Korean heart sign with her fingers and shouting “I love you” to the crowd.

The upcoming film, directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, completes the storyline of 22 films as Avengers, an ensemble of MCU superheroes, unite to fight supervillain Thanos who has wiped out half of the universe’s population, including some of their own, with the snap of his fingers.

Though there is a strict veil of secrecy around the film, “Endgame” might mark the departure of a host of superheroes, including Downey Jr’s Iron Man and actor Chris Evans’ Captain America, from the MCU fold. The film’s cast and the studio have both time and again declined to confirm or deny the same.

Loudest of the cheers were reserved for Downey Jr as he made a grand entry to the stage, striking his trademark Iron Man pose at the Jangchung Arena on Monday night.

The actor, known for his humorous one-liners, seemed emotional with the outpouring of love from the admirers, who chanted his name at every opportunity. Some had even donned the heavy metallic Iron Man suit while others were spotted with messages of love, posters and photographs.

Downey Jr was all hearts as he recalled his first trip to the city and how being a superhero on screen changed his life.

Asked about his plans on the day of “Endgame” release, he promised Korean fans to visit theatres in disguise and steal their popcorns.

In a press conference earlier in the day, Downey Jr walked down the memory lane to recall his first trip to the city and his decades-long association with the MCU.

“It’s about relationships. Jeremy and I have become fathers since we started doing this together. We had all these life-changing experiences, so I want to thank Korea and fans for the opportunities for us to continue our friendship and careers with these characters for so long,” he said at the press event.

Though Downey Jr promised to “stick around anyway” as a superhero at the press event, fans are worried that he may retire or not come back as Iron Man after “Endgame”. Renner, whose Hawkeye has a major role after missing from the action in “Infinity War”, dived straight into the crowd to wish a fan happy birthday.

He made the fan’s day special as the rest of the Avengers team, Marvel Studios chief Kevin Feige, the directors, Downey Jr and the crowd joined Renner to chant ‘Happy Birthday’ to the fan.

Larson said she had been eating non-stop since she landed in Korea, which was beautiful in the spring season with cherry blossoms everywhere.

“Avengers: Endgame” releases on April 26 in India but fans in Korea will get to see it on April 24.

It’s all just noise: Richard Madden on James Bond rumours



NEW YORK, APR 16 (PTI): Rich-

ard Madden is being billed as the next actor to play James Bond after Daniel Craig’s exit, but the “Bodyguard” star says the rumours are “just noise”.

“It’s all just noise,” Madden, who shot to fame with HBO’s epic fantasy series “Game of Thrones” as Rob Stark, said of the reports.

“Bodyguard” is BBC’s most-watched drama since

the season finales of “Downton Abbey”. The actor, who plays the title role in the BBC series of David Budd, termed the reports as a pleasant aftereffect of the show’s success.

“By March, there will be another British TV show with another young male actor, and then he’ll be the next James Bond for the following two months,” Madden

told Elle magazine. He also recently won a Golden Globe for Best Actor in a Drama TV series for “Bodyguard”.

Madden is currently looking forward to release of Elton John biopic, “Rocketman”, in which he portrays the music icon’s former manager, John Reid, who oversaw the singer’s career for over three decades starting in the 1970s.

ARIES: You are wisely embracing new ideas right now, but it looks as though you might be the only one. Everyone around you is behaving with extra caution. What they fear might not be clear to you—and it doesn’t have to be. You do not have to take on the burden of changing everyone’s minds, though putting some effort in that direction will make you feel good. Pushing your agenda too hard will turn people off, but it will also show them that you are a person of substance and convictions.

TAURUS: Jealousy alert! A tangled angle between expansive Jupiter and ardent Venus could provoke an attack from the green-eyed monster. Get the facts before you react—what’s actually happening may differ from the story in your head. It may be someone else seeing emerald, so take extra measures to avoid provoking envy.

GEMINI: “No” is a complete sentence. Today’s terse Venus-Jupiter square could find you in the crosshairs of an emotionally demanding person—someone who regularly insists on getting their way. Gently but firmly assert your

boundaries. Setting limits helps people know where you (and they) stand. With honest-to-a-fault Jupiter involved, you may need to be more upfront.

CANCER: If you want something done, give it to a busy person. Today, you may need to delegate some duties to manage all you’ve got going on in your life. Although it may seem illogical, someone whose plate is almost full would be more reliable than the person who perpetually has “nothing to do.” Just remember, everything comes at a price.

LEO: This Saturday, a refreshingly honest conversation can move the needle on a stuck relationship. Don’t get hung up with saying the “right” thing, Leo; just speak your piece in a non-blaming way. And make sure you extend that open-minded courtesy to the other party as well. Of course, sometimes these sentiments are best expressed in a letter—one that you don’t send, but rather write, then rip up and burn as a ceremonial release.

LIBRA: Who says February 14th gets to

have all the fun? Saturday’s playful pairing of Mercury and Uranus could bring an early visit from St. Valentine. A scintillating conversation could lead to a dinner date that lingers on for hours. If you’re already spoken for, Saturday could be like a V-Day prequel. Reserve a table for two or pick up a pair of tickets for a raved-about show.

VIRGO: Thoughts are swirling through your head this Saturday, but don’t let them evolve into an epic work of fiction. With analytical Mercury getting a boost from innovative Uranus, talk to people who can help you see the situation from an enlightened perspective. Everything happens for a reason, Virgo, even if it makes zero sense in the moment.

SCORPIO: Is it a fact or just a feeling? Saturday’s Mercury-Uranus mashup brings some much-needed objectivity to a situation that’s been hitting all your emotional buttons. While you don’t want to ignore your intuition, what’s bothering you might be a result of a past trigger rather than something that’s actually occurring in the here and now. The surest way to find

out? Investigate, as only a Scorpio can! Your inner bon vivant takes the wheel this Sunday as social Mercury high-kicks into Pisces and your flamboyant, fun-loving fifth house!

SAGITTARIUS: If other people are slowing you down this Saturday, no need to drag those stragglers along for the ride. Enjoy a day of independence, allowing yourself to come and go as you please without checking for approval. The dedicated alone time will refresh your feed and you’ll be ready to reign as life of the party come sundown. Avoid any venues that feel stuffy or elitist!

CAPRICORN: Anyone can dazzle you with a first impression—but can they actually walk their talk? Under Saturday’s convivial alignment of Mercury and Uranus, you might not be the best at separating the wheat from the chaff. Enjoy the magic moments you share with people socially, remembering that only time can tell the true story about their integrity and character. Reserve judgement, one way or the other, because it’s equally possible that

someone you wrote off as annoying could start to grow on you!

AQUARIUS: Chat up strangers this Saturday, because at any moment, random banter could reveal a serendipitous spark. The fateful encounter could happen during an espresso run or while you’re rolling up your yoga mat after class. One thoughtful comment on an Instagram-friend’s feed could lead to a DM exchange—and one bold right swipe could swiftly evolve into a Saturday night date!

PISCES: Thanks to a befuddling workplace situation, you may be craving career guidance or advice on a move you’re pondering. But careful: A harsh Venus-Jupiter square could make you come across as self-absorbed or even a tad unprofessional. If there’s no clear opening for shoptalk, don’t force it. And even if there is, make sure you treat for lunch or coffee to express gratitude for people’s time. Similarly, if you’re not in the mood to hear about a friend’s workplace woes, don’t feel obligated. Redirect the focus to fun plans that will take everyone’s minds off their issues.