



**R. KELLY FACES NEW
BRIBERY CHARGE IN
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**GANGTOK MIGHT BE CLEAN BY
NATIONAL STANDARDS, BUT IT
COULD BE SO MUCH BETTER**
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**SALMAN ISN'T AFFECTED BY
HIS STARDOM: SONAKSHI**

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CM salutes forces on Armed Forces Day

SUMMIT REPOR

GANGTOK, 06 DEC:

Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] has extended warm greetings on the occasion of Armed Force Flag Day in honour of the soldiers, airmen, and sailors who keep the nation safe.

In his message, the Chief Minister expressed his gratitude towards the Armed Forces personnel for their sacrifices and remembered those who attained martyrdom in the defense of the country.

He has also acknowledged the sacrifices made by the families of soldiers and the importance of the Day which seeks to encourage people to participate and contribute to the cause.

The Armed Forces Flag Day has been observed every year on 07 December since 1949. The three branches of the Armed Forces organise numerous programs to showcase their efforts towards national security. Funds collected on the Day are used for the welfare of serving personnel, ex-servicemen and to rehabilitate battle casualties. Small flags are distributed on this day in return for donations.

On this occasion, it being civilian responsibility towards the army and their family members, the Chief Minister has appealed to everyone to support and generously donate towards the welfare of our Armed Forces, who serve our Nation day and night with selfless dedication, and official press statement conveys.

NEFT transactions to be available 24x7 from Dec 16

MUMBAI, DEC 6 (PTI):

In a bid to promote digital transactions, the RBI on Friday said round-the-clock transactions will be allowed under the National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) system from December 16.

The 24x7 NEFT system will be available on all days of the year, including holidays, it added.

NEFT transactions are settled in hourly batches. For weekdays, the batches are from 8 am to 7 pm. On first and third Saturdays, the settlement happens from 8 am to 1 pm.

In a notification, the central bank said it has been decided that the facility on NEFT system shall be made available from December 16, 2019 on 24x7 basis. The first settlement will take place after 00:30 hours on December 16, 2019 (night of December 15, 2019).

The RBI has asked the member banks to keep adequate liquidity in their current account with the regulator at all times to facilitate successful posting of NEFT batch settlements.

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Santhali language makes debut in Rajya Sabha

New Delhi, Dec 6 (PTI): Santhali language on Friday made its debut in Rajya Sabha when a lawmaker from Odisha used it to raise a matter of urgent public importance during the Zero Hour.

Sarojini Hembram of the Biju Janata Dal spoke in Santhali, an Austroasiatic-Munda language spoken mostly by tribals in Odisha.

She also demanded Bharat Ratna for Raghunath Murmu, who in 1925 created the Ol Chiki script for the Santhali language. Pt. Murmu is revered by tribals and is recognised as a big cultural icon in the state, she said, adding the state government has already recognised his contribution and now it was the turn of the nation to do so. Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu, who has encouraged MPs to use their local language for raising Zero Hour mentions while ensuring that English and Hindi translations are available to other members on headphones, said this was the first time that Santhali language was used in the Upper House.

Members thumped desks to welcome the move. Naidu said the interpretation in Hindi was done under a new scheme by a non-regular employee engaged for the purpose.

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CM lobbies for Stage-III refinancing, gets Ministry nod

NEW DELHI, 06 DEC [IPR]: Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] met the Union Minister for Power, RK Singh, in New Delhi on Thursday.

He brought out the urgent need of expeditious structured take out/refinancing of the 1,200 MW Teesta Stage III Hydroelectric Project, indicating that this project was not only the second largest hydel project in India but has also become a Government of Sikkim project after the intervention of Union Power Ministry on 06 August, 2015 when it was declared a stressed project.

The project continues to remain under severe stress because of its restructuring not being carried out by the project lenders. The financial stress of this project was so intense that if the restructuring is not carried out, the project could fall into the Non Performing Assets (NPA) category on 27 December 2019.

The Union Minister was also informed that the project's operational efficiency was so good that it generated the designed energy target of 5,217 million units on 10 Nov, 2019 itself and whatever energy is gener-

ated during the remainder of the financial year would be a bonus.

Appreciating the concerns raised by the Chief Minister, the Union Power Minister agreed and assured the restructuring/ structured take out finance by Power Finance Corporation and Rural Electrification Corporation within seven days to avoid its slipping into NPA category.

The Chief Minister brought up some pressing issues of the State Power Sector which included, expeditious clearance of pending schemes; North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme

(NESIDS); Deen Dayal Uapadhaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY); Integrated Power Development Schemes (IPDS); grant of financial assistance for installation of smart meters in pre-paid mode throughout the State; and central assistance for developing small green hydroelectricity projects.

The Union Minister assured the Chief Minister that the Ministry will extend all requisite assistance to address the concerns and grant of financial assistance under the forthcoming central government initiative/programmes very soon.

Need for seed production prog highlighted at World Soil Day event

GANGTOK, 06 DEC (PIB):

ICAR-NOFRI, Sikkim, in collaboration with KVK, East Sikkim Ranipool, conducted a capacity building program on "Quality Organic Seed Production in Pulses" and "World Soil Day" on 05 Dec at ICAR-NOFRI, Tadong.

More than 60 farmers from all four districts participated in the program.

Speaking on the occasion, chief guest, Agriculture Secretary, Rinzing C Bhutia, highlighted the importance of quality organic seed in food grain crops and stressed the need for a seed production program in the state to meet the seed demands of the farmers.

He also mentioned that seed demand has to be met through local seed production without dependency on outside sources and appreciated the technologies developed by ICAR for organic farming and also expressed satisfaction over dissemination of technologies to farmers.

He further mentioned that marketing channels have to be strengthened for making organic farming more remunerative. He congratulated the gathering on World Soil Day



and urged the farmers to adopt productive technologies for maintaining soil fertility. Chief Guest also distributed soil health cards to the farmers.

Guest of Honour, Additional Director, Bina Kumari Rai, Agriculture (East) cum Project Director, ATMA (East) appreciated the support and cooperation provided by ICAR in undertaking various field activities with the State Department of Agriculture. She mentioned that there has been a growing demand for organic seed in recent years and the state needs to expand its seed production program not only for self sufficiency but also for meeting outside demand.

She thanked ICAR for conducting various capacity building programs for the farmers and working in coordination with State Agriculture Department for the betterment of farming community.

Joint Director, Dr RK Avasthe, ICAR-NOFRI mentioned that soil is the basis of agriculture and maintaining soil fertility is the key to successful organic farming. He briefed the gathering about various technologies developed by the institute for maintaining soil fertility and enhancing cropping intensity for organic systems. He raised concern over run-off losses and urged farmers to adopt soil conservation prac-

tices to prevent soil nutrient loss. He also mentioned that maintaining soil health cards is imperative for keeping soil health in good condition. He further spoke about need for quality organic seed in Sikkim and also mentioned that seed production need to be taken up on priority basis at farmers' level.

Coordinating the program Scientist (Plant Breeding), Dr Chandan Kapoor earlier welcomed the guests and highlighted the importance of this program. He mentioned that seed production activities and on-farm demonstrations have been undertaken under NEH component of Seed Project of

ICAR (IISS, Mau) for capacity building of farmers, providing quality seeds to farmers along with inputs for quality seed production.

Earlier, the Chief Guest visited the Research Farm and interacted with the Scientists on the on-going research activities and also discussed about various organic production technologies developed and disseminated at farmers' field. During the field visit various aspects of pulses seed production were demonstrated to farmers viz., Quality organic seed production technology in pulses by Dr Chandan Kapoor and Dr Janak Singh; Demonstration of urdbean var Pant Urd-31 (identified for the state) and Rajmash var SKR 57 (newly developed) by Dr Chandan Kapoor, Dr Raghavendra Singh and Dr Janak Singh; Agronomic practices for pulses seed production by Dr Raghavendra Singh; Disease and Pest management in pulses by Dr Chandramani Raj and Dr Shweta Singh; Soil sampling, testing and nutrient management by Dr RK Aavasthe, Dr Manoj Kumar, Dr Janak Singh and Dr PK Pathak.

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We are not criminals, says Farooq Abdullah

NEW DELHI, DEC 6 (PTI):

"We are not criminals," says Lok Sabha member and National Conference president Farooq Abdullah in a letter to Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on his personal letterhead which mentions his residence as "sub-jail".

Abdullah, under detention since August 5 and subsequently booked under the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA) on September 17, is at present at his residence in Gupkar which has been declared as a sub-jail.

Abdullah is among a host of political leaders who have been detained on August 5 after the Centre withdrew special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and bifurcated the state into union territories.

Tharoor, a Lok Sabha member from Kerala, had written a letter to Abdullah on October 21 which was delivered to him on December 2. The contents of the letter were not available.

In his one paragraph reply, Abdullah, a three-time former chief minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, thanked Tharoor for his letter.

He said the October 21 letter was delivered to him on December 21 by the magistrate who looks after him in the sub-jail.

"It is most unfortunate that they are not able to deliver me my post in time. I am sure this is not the way to treat a senior Member of the Parliament and leader of a political party. We are not criminals," Abdullah wrote in his reply, which has been shared by Tharoor on his Twitter handle.

In his tweet, Tharoor said parliamentarians should be allowed to attend "the session as a matter of parliamentary privilege".

"Otherwise the tool of arrest can be used to muzzle opposition voices. Participation in Parliament is essential 4 (for) democracy and popular sovereignty," he added.

UCWSS to put up pre-Christmas celebrations at MG Marg



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 06 DEC:

Like previous years, Pre-Christmas Celebrations will be held in grand manner on 22 and 23 December here at MG Marg. This was decided at a meeting held here at EPCS Church on Thursday evening. The meeting was attended by the Minister, LN Sharma, Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling, Upper Tadong MLA, GT Dhungel, Rev PS Tingmo, Rev Joseph Tamang and other senior pastors, leaders and representatives from different churches of in

and around Gangtok.

The meeting decided to organize the celebrations under the banner of United Christian Welfare Society of Sikkim [UCWSS].

After thorough discussions and deliberations on various issues, the meeting unanimously constituted a governing committee to organize the celebration. The governing committee has PS Abharam B Tamang, Mahindra Gurung, Jeewan Khar-el, Andrew Chettri, JB Balakoti, Elder Patrus Gurung, Dup Tshering

Sherpa, Suman Rai, Stephen Karki and Esmile Gurung.

The meeting also appointed senior pastors PS Tingboo and Joseph Tamang as advisors and decided that the governing committee will further constitute sub-committees to ensure that the celebration in hosted in a grand manner.

Minister LN Sharma appealed to churches to come together to celebrate Christmas in a grand manner at MG Marg and asserted the need of support and participation of all

churches. He also assured to provide all possible support to the celebration.

Similarly, the Political Secretary to the CM also encouraged pastors and leaders of different churches to work in close coordination for the celebration.

Earlier in the meeting, pastors and leaders placed their suggestions regarding the pre-Christmas celebration. The meeting had started with an opening prayer by Rev PS Tingboo and concluded with vote of thanks proposed by Suman Rai.

MLA inspects new Jorethang SDM Office site

**SUMMIT REPORT
JORETHANG, 06 DEC:**

Zoom-Salghari MLA, Sunita Gajmer, accompanied by SDM RB Bhandari, department officials, Revenue Officer, AE Buildings & Housing, led a site inspection to the proposed site at Jorethang Gairigoan for the construction of a new SDM office. The MLA directed the contractor and Department for take up the sanctioned work at the earliest.



CM returns

SILIGURI, 06 DEC (IPR): Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Golay] arrives at Bagdogra Airport on Friday after a 6-day official tour to New Delhi and Arunachal Pradesh. He was accorded a warm welcome by officials from different departments at the airport.

Another depositor of fraud-hit PMC Bank dies

MUMBAI, DEC 6 (PTI): A 71-year-old depositor of fraud-hit PMC Bank died of a heart attack at his residence here, his relative said on Friday.

Pratap Jiandani suffered a heart attack on Thursday afternoon at his residence in suburban Murlund, he said.

Earlier, at least eight depositors, who had high quantum of money stuck with the bank, had died in the last couple of months, including one who committed suicide.

The relative said Jiandani had an account in Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative Bank (PMC Bank), which was put under restrictions by the

RBI in September after an alleged Rs 4,355 crore scam came to light.

However, his death was nothing to do with the bank scam, said Jiandani's relative Mukesh Chhandiramani.

Jiandani's son is returning from Spain after which his last rites will be performed, he said.

Some of the PMC depositors who died in the aftermath of the scam were under stress due to the RBI-mandated curbs.

On October 14, PMC Bank depositor Gurudas Kaisare, a resident of Airoli in Navi Mumbai, died due to stress as he was not able to withdraw his money.

He was admitted for treatment, but was not able to access money to pay medical bills, said his relatives.

Another depositor, Kuldeep Kaur Vig, died of a heart attack in neighbouring Navi Mumbai in the first week of November, her family said.

Vig (64), a resident of Kharghar, was worried about her money getting stuck with the bank and feeling stressed after watching news about depositors' protest on TV, her husband Varinder Singh Vig (74) said.

As part of RBI's restrictions, withdrawal from PMC Bank accounts was initially capped at

Rs 1,000 and raised in a staggered manner to Rs 50,000 per customer over six months.

The PMC Bank, which has around 16 lakh depositors, was placed under an RBI administrator on September 23 for six months due to massive under-reporting of dud loans.

The bank, over a long period of time, had given more than Rs 6,700 crore in loans to Housing Development and Infrastructure (HDIL), which is 73 per cent of its total advances, and which turned sour with a shift in the fortunes of the now bankrupt company.

inal justice system."

Hailing the encounter, BJP's Rathore also praised the "leadership" that allowed it.

"I congratulate the Hyderabad police and the leadership that allows the police to act like police. Let all know this is the country where good will always prevail over evil. (Disclaimer for holier-than-thou police acted swiftly in self defence)," he said.

Lekhi also appeared to approve the encounter as she said in the Lok Sabha that arms are not meant to be a showpiece for police. However BJP MP Maneka Gandhi was unambiguous in her condemnation of the encounter killing.

"What happened was horrifying for the country. You cannot kill people because you want to. You cannot take law in your hands. They would have been hanged by court anyway. If you're going to shoot them before due process of law has been followed, then what's the point of having courts, law and police?" the former Union Women and Child Development minister told reporters.

Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan, who had recently called for lynching of those accused of such ghastly crimes, said "better late than never" in her reaction to the encounter.

15.86 lakh cancer patients in 2018: govt tells LS

NEW DELHI, DEC 6 (PTI): There were 15.86 lakh cancer cases in the country in 2018, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said in Lok Sabha on Friday.

The minister said cancer is diagnosed and treated at various levels in the health care system and the treatment of cancer is by surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and palliative care.

"As per the National Cancer Registry Programme of Indian Council of Medical Research, the estimated incidence of cancer cases in 2018 was 15,86,571," he said

during Question Hour.

Vardhan said while doctors with D.M. (Medical Oncology), M.Ch. (Surgical Oncology) and M.D. (Radiation Oncology) treat cancer patients in higher level tertiary care hospitals, other doctors such as general surgeons, gynaecologists, ENT surgeons etc. also provide treatment for cancer in government and private hospitals, depending on the type and site of cancer.

The minister said the information regarding cancer patients in government hospitals is not main-

tained centrally.

"Health being a state subject, the central government supplements the efforts of state governments in providing health care services including cancer care.

"The government of India is implementing the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) under the National Health Mission (NHM)," she said.

Vardhan said the objectives of NPCDCS include awareness generation for cancer

prevention, screening, early detection and referral to an appropriate level institution for treatment.

He said 599 Non Communicable Diseases (NCD) clinics at District level and 3,274 NCD clinics at community health centre level have been set up under the programme.

To enhance the facilities for tertiary care of cancer, the central government is assisting 18 state cancer institutes and 20 tertiary care cancer centres under the strengthening of tertiary care for cancer scheme, he said.

CM meets Andhra counterpart

NEW DELHI, 06 DEC (IPR): Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Golay] and the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, met in the lounge of Indira Gandhi International Airport this afternoon.

During the meeting, Mr Tamang congratulated his Andhra counterpart on his massive victory in the Andhra Pradesh assembly elec-

tions this year.

Similarly, Mr Reddy also congratulated Mr Tamang for forming the government in Sikkim.

During the brief interaction, they talked about various developmental works underway in their respective states and also appreciated the kind of development that both Sikkim and Andhra Pradesh have seen in the recent past.

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Santhali language makes..

The interpreter, he said, was a Ph.D student.

Rajya Sabha has regular employees who translate statements made on the floor of the House in different recognised Indian languages into Hindi and English. To enlarge the basket of languages used, outside language experts have been engaged on need basis to translate.

Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh too mentioned that this was the first time that the language was spoken on the floor of the House and welcomed the move.

NEFT transactions to be..

NEFT transactions after usual banking hours are expected to be automated transactions initiated using 'Straight Through Processing (STP)' modes by the banks.

The existing discipline for crediting beneficiary's account or returning the transaction (within 2 hours of settlement of the respective batch) to originating bank will continue, it added.

Besides, member banks will ensure sending of positive confirmation message for all NEFT credits and all provisions of NEFT procedural guidelines will be applicable for 24x7 transactions as well, it added.

"Member banks are also advised to initiate necessary action and ensure availability of all necessary infrastructural requirements at their end for providing seamless NEFT 24x7 facility to their customers," the regulator said.

Banks may disseminate information on the extended timings for NEFT to all their customers, RBI said.

From July 1 this year, RBI had decided not to levy charges on transactions through NEFT and Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) system in order to promote digital transactions in the country, and asked banks to pass on the benefits to the customers.

Earlier, the RBI used to levy minimum charges on banks for transactions routed through RTGS and NEFT. Banks, in turn, levy charges on their customers.

RTGS is meant for large-value instantaneous fund transfers, while NEFT is used for fund transfers of up to Rs 2 lakh.

Need for seed production..

Dr Chandan Kapoor mentioned that the variety Pant Urd-31 is suitable both for timely sown and late sown conditions for urd bean cultivation areas of Sikkim. The variety resistant to viral disease (MYMV), determinate and synchronous habit, photo and thermo insensitive and has an average yield of 900-1100 kg/ha matures in about 90 days under organic conditions of Sikkim. The Rajmash var. SKR 57A is suitable for cultivation during pre-Rabi season for dry seed purpose, matures in about 100 days and has an average yield of 1000-1200kg/ha.

The program was coordinated by Scientist (Plant Breeding), Dr Chandan Kapoor; and SMS Animal Science cum I/C Head, Dr PK Pathak, KVK East Sikkim. At the end Dr PK Pathak proposed the vote of thank, Sr Technical Officer, SM Kandwal moderated the program and Mr Shantanu Das, Puscak Sharma and Ezekiel Khawas assisted in organizing the program.

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ANTHYESTHI KRIYA (SUDDHI KARYA)

Anthyesthi Kriya (Suddhi Karya) of our beloved sister Late Meena Gajmer who left for Paramdham on 30th November, 2019 falls on Friday, the 6th December, 2019. All relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers to the departed soul at our residence at Lingding Zero below Lingding Junior High School, ICAR - Lingding Road. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us in the hour of bereavement.

Narendra Gajmer, Chetan Gajmer (Younger brothers), Indira Gajmer, Pushpa Gajmer (Younger sisters), DK Gajmer, DB Gajmer (Cousin brothers).

Contact: 8101480557, 8768773529, 9735963493.



ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

13th days Anthyesthi Kriya of our beloved mother Late Mrs. Pushpa Darnal of Gangtok (Deorali) who left for her heavenly soul on 27th November, 2019 falls on 09th December, 2019.

Venue - Lexicon More Pathar Ghatta Road, Ashiyana apartment, Matigara near Royal Academy school.

Contact No -

**Ms. Karuna Rai Daughter
Mr. Lakshan Darnal (Elder Son) 9635831527
Mr. Mahesh Darnal (Younger Son) 9775438955
And all family members**



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Roadside plots for sale at Adampool, Ranipool-Rumtek highway.

For details contact: 9083826462

FLAT FOR RENT/LEASE

Fully furnished 3BHK flat available for rent/lease at Church Road near DPH. Roadside and five minutes walking distance from MG Marg.

For more details: 9083826462 /9832556698

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College.

Flat Land no cutting required. Price 30 Lakhs (negotiable).

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

SHG and Aanganwadi workers promote awareness on PMMVY

NAMCHI, 06 DEC [IPR]: A skit was performed by members of Self Help Groups and Aaganwadi workers as part of Matru Vandana Saptah at Central Park today.

Organised by Social Justice and Welfare Department, South, the skit was mainly aimed to make pregnant women aware about the maternity benefit programmes run by the Government of India under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.

The programme was attended by SDM



Namchi [HQ], Vishu Lama, as chief guest. The event was headed by CDPO [Namchi], Laxman

Tamang and supported by ICDS Supervisors, SHGs, Aganwadi workers and NGOs.

Matru Vandana Saptah is a week-long campaign which got underway on 02 Dec.

Encounter killings: Families of accused in total shock

HYDERABAD, DEC 6 (PTI): The families of the four rape-murder accused were shell shocked as the news about their wards' death in alleged police encounter reached.

Key accused Mohammed Arif's mother was at a loss for words and could only say my son is gone.

Arif's father had earlier said his son deserved the toughest punishment if had committed the crime.

Grieving wife of Chennakeshavulu, Renuka, said police should kill

her also as she doesn't not have anything to do after her husband's death.

I was told nothing will happen to my husband and he would come back soon. No I don't know what to do. Please take me to the place where my husband was killed and kill me also," she told reporters.

Chennakeshavulu got married recently.

Jollu Ramappa father of Shiva said his son might have committed the crime, but didn't deserve such an end.

Many people committed rapes and murders.

But they were not killed like this. Why they were not meted out such treatment," Ramappa asked when mediapersons sought his reaction.

Locals said the four accused belonged to economically weaker families with poor literacy, yet earned well and led a lavish life-style spending on liquor and others.

The 26-year old Arif, from Jakler village in Narayanpet District in Telangana, had worked in a local petrol pump before becoming truck driver.

Another accused Jollu Shiva and Jollu Navin,

both 20, were working as cleaners and belonged to Gudigandla village in the same district. Chintakunta Chennakeshavulu (20) was also a truck driver from the same village.

According to people who know them, Chennakeshavulu was suffering from kidney ailment.

Parents couldn't control them as they were uneducated.

These people were earning handsomely and there was no accountability. They indulged in alcohol consumption from young age, a resident of Makthal said.

Encounter: some ex-cops welcome it, some term it 'short-cut'

MUMBAI, DEC 6 (PTI): Reactions of some former senior police officials from Maharashtra on Hyderabad encounter were mixed on Friday, with some justifying the action citing the circumstances, while others condemning it as undesirable "short-cut".

The four men arrested for the rape and murder of a 25-year-old woman veterinarian in Hyderabad last month were killed in an 'exchange of fire' with a police team on Friday morning.

Former Maharashtra Director General of Police D Sivanandhan said this kind of "short-cut" will not help with prevention of crime in the long run.

The 1976-batch IPS officer, whose tenure in Mumbai in the 1990s saw several encounters of gangsters, said, "After the encounter, the police may get praised for a short period, but it is not good in the long run."

Sivanandhan also said it was better to take measures to prevent crime against women with the help of technology.



"There should be proper patrolling and adequate police presence all over the city," he said.

Another former top official of Mumbai Police said, requesting anonymity, "Whatever happened should not have happened, especially when the accused were in police custody."

Julio Ribeiro, former Mumbai police commissioner and Punjab DGP, condemned the encounter.

"The judicial process system is not working. That is why these short-cuts are adopted under

pressure from the public and politicians," he said.

SS Virk, who served as DGP of Maharashtra and Punjab, said going by the circumstances narrated by Hyderabad Police, the action was justified.

"TV clips show that people are very happy with the police action. I do not disagree with them. (But) While praising the encounter on the whole, we also have to see whether there was any legal lacuna," he said.

"The rape and murder was barbaric. If such

things start happening then no girl or woman will feel safe," Virk said, adding that it was a crime against entire society.

"In Nirbhaya case, strong legal action was taken against the accused. They were all sentenced to death, but have not been hanged so far," he pointed out.

"The legal system loses its impact in such cases. When our criminal justice system becomes weak and ineffective, the public expects strong action. Then even if the action is not strictly legal, people welcome it," he

Khas Chettri-Bahun Kalyan Sangh organizes blood donation camp at Melli



SUMMIT REPORT MELLI, 05 DEC:

Khas Chettri-Bahun Kalyan Sangh of Melli Bazar in South Sikkim organized a Blood Donation Camp in coordination with the "Blood Army of Sikkim" at the Primary Health Center here. The camp was supported by HDFC Bank and was attended by SKM's

Melli constituency in-charge, Tilak Basnet, as chief guest and was also attended by ex-MLA, Mohan Sharma, Panchayats, Ex-Panchayats, BB Chettri, Dil Kumari Chettri, DB Chawan, Nirmal Chettri, HN Sharma, member of organizing committee and the donors.

KCBKS was established in the year

2015 and has engaged in several social programmes. Last year, it organized a free health checkup which benefited 800-900 people and also facilitated eye operations for 8-9 people, a press release informs.

The Camp was addressed by State Programme Coordinator of The Blood Army of

Sikkim, Suyog Pradhan who highlighted the blood requirement of major hospitals of Sikkim.

Dr CM Sharma also highlighted the blood requirement of Sikkim and of how 6,000-7,000 units of blood every year.

Tilak Basnet also delivered a short speech.

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GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM FOREST & ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Ref No. 367/F&ED

Dated: 06.12.2019

Sealed tenders are invited from the reputed registered firms/dealers by 17th December 2019, 2:00 pm for the supply of Compostable Nursery Bags having the following specifications:

Sl.No.	Specification	Quantity
1	Compostable nursery bags:- * Dimension : 5"x8" * Thickness : 50 - 70 micron	2,00,000 nos.

Documents to be enclosed with the tender form:

- Registration certificate of the firm/ Valid Trade license.
 - Certificate issued from Central Pollution Control Board for the authenticity of the material and the related test reports.
- The interested firms may collect the tender form from office of the Joint Director-cum-Nodal Officer, State Medicinal Plants Board, Forest & Environment Department, Block B, Room No. B-305, Forest Secretariat Building, Deorali, Gangtok - 737102 during the office hours from 10th December, 2019 till 17th December 2019, till 12:00 noon on submission of Bank Receipt of Rs.500/- (Rupees five hundred only) deposited in the head **0406-01-800-04-Other Misc Receipt-Forest & Environment Department, which would be non-refundable.**
- The tender documents may also be downloaded from the website, sikkenvis.nic.in, sikkimforest.gov.in. **However, the submission of Bank Receipt of Rs.500/- (Rupees Five hundred only) will have to be done during the submission of tender form.**
- The date for submission of the filled in tender form is 17th December, 2019 at 02:30 pm. The interested tenderers or their authorized representative may be present at the time of the opening of the tender.
- The tender committee reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tender papers without assigning any reasons thereof.

Director-cum CEO
State Medicinal Plants Board,
Forest and Environment Department
Government of Sikkim.

R.O. No. 290/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20 Date: 06.12.2019



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India sensitises missions abroad against Nithyananda

New Delhi, Dec 6 (PTI): The government has cancelled the passport of rape-accused self-styled godman Nithyananda even as the Ecuadorian government denied that it has granted asylum to him.

External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Ravesh Kumar said all Indian missions and posts abroad have been sensitised to inform local governments so that he could be traced.

"We have sensitised all our missions and posts and told them to inform local governments about him," he said at a press conference.



Nithyananda is wanted in India for multiple cases including alleged rape and abduction.

Kumar said Nithyananda's passport was cancelled before its validity was to expire in 2018 and that his application for a new one was also rejected because of cases pending against

him.

Asked about reports that Nithyananda declaring founding his own country called 'Kailassa' in his website, Kumar said, "Setting up a website is different from setting up a nation."

In a related development, the embassy of Ecuador, in a statement, cat-

egorically denied that the Nithyananda was given asylum by it or has been helped by its government in purchasing any land or island in South America near or far from Ecuador.

There were reports that the self-styled godman purchased an island in South America with the help from Ecuador.

It said Ecuador denied the request for grant of refuge by Nithyananda and later on, he left Ecuador presumably on his way to Haiti.

"All the information, whatever, which is published in digital and print media in India, is based on the information which allegedly has been sourced from https://kailaasa.org, a website which is supposedly maintained by Nithyananda or by his people," it said. "Henceforth all digital or print media houses should refrain from citing Ecuador in any form in all pieces of information related to Nithyananda," it added.

Collaborating Towards a Better Town

Gangtok might be clean by national standards, but it could be so much better

When they experimented with MG Marg, the policy-makers had hoped that the litter & spit free zone would eventually encompass all of Gangtok, and if that happened, dream even bigger and extend it to all of Sikkim. The mission has succeeded to the extent that Sikkim went on to become the first Nirmal Rajya (open defecation free state) and has also bagged a Sa-faigiri award for its obviously better garbage management credentials than the other states of the country. But that is hardly a comparison to boast about or be satisfied with since Sikkim has the benefit of its small size and abundant finances to devote to waste management, a luxury, which say a Bihar does not enjoy. So, while the State, its government and its people deserve credit for being better, they should now aim to become really good as well.

What better place to begin than the capital itself. Gangtok remains a town of contradictions where the residents continue to live comfortably in the company of stinking jhoras which they themselves have clogged with all types of household refuse and even the occasional sewage release. Instinctive cleanliness around public spaces is thus perhaps too much to expect. Gangtokians might live in pine-wood paneled houses that they themselves rub with mansion polish every day, but are oblivious to their civic duties as they prove with clockwork regularity as the corners and roadsides continue to mimic public dustbins and the jhoras have become a study of consumption patterns. This, despite a functional garbage collection service being in place. This is unfortunate because with even a few collaborative efforts, this town could be much better. A keener sense of responsibility towards public spaces would help and the right awareness at the school level could easily address the problem of irresponsible littering. It is after all not enough to reach a garbage bag to the UDHD trucks in the morning and then spend the rest of the day littering the town with wrappers and other refuse or surreptitiously empty septic tanks into neighbourhood jhoras.

What is required is an attitudinal shift which displays more collective consideration. Gangtok is not really a city yet, but it is already overflowing with brash disregards; house-owners are lavish with their own accommodations but cramp the floors below with pigeonholes and common toilets and bathrooms; Gangtok drivers are among the most impatient and insensitive, as are their VIP vehicles. Such mindsets, which disregard common intent or pursuits, continue to rear up in all engagements and personal aggrandizement thus becomes a driving force. An immediate fall out of this has been the noticeable rollback in aesthetic nuances. Aesthetic appeal is after all for public consumption and extravagance for personal indulgence. No prizes here for guessing which option Gangtok takes on a daily basis. Bigger cars, higher buildings and increased consumption have left Gangtok an ugly town. Take any back-lane and one will be confronted with innumerable case-studies of how private greed has encroached upon public space and convenience. The capital is exploding with private decisions thumbing their collective noses at public courtesies.

With too much ugliness already permanent in the form of concrete, the least that can be done is to leave the open spaces [which are mostly the roads and shortcuts now in Gangtok] free of litter. Maybe starting with this conscious effort, Gangtok could begin the process of becoming and town more becoming of its hill station status and more true to its cleanliness credentials.

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

Our plan to identify ‘illegal immigrants’ could get some Muslims declared ‘foreign’

HAIMANTI ROY

THECONVERSATION.COM

The Indian government will soon ask its 870 million voting-age citizens for documentation that they are legal citizens with ancestral ties to India. On Nov. 20, Indian Home Minister Amit Shah announced a plan to expand the National Registry of Citizens, a four-year documentation effort that recently concluded in India’s northeastern state of Assam, to the entire country. Shah claims that the effort will help identify illegal immigrants in a “nondiscriminatory” fashion.

The news was met with some dismay. After Assam finished tallying its 30.5 million people in August, about 1.9 million were declared “foreign.” Some were Bangladeshi immigrants living in Assam illegally. Others were refugees who migrated to India after Bangladesh’s independence war in 1971. Most were women, members of oppressed castes, religious minorities or poor.

Even some people with paper ID were rejected from the register because of misspelled names or incorrect formats.

As a historian who studies identity and exclusion in India, I know that when governments try to determine who belongs and who does not, the most marginal are inevitably left out.

INDIA’S MANY IDS

India, which was under British rule from the 18th century until 1947, has seen many different governments try to define citizenship.

The British Indian Passport, implemented in the early 20th century, was the first large-scale attempt. The British used their passport to give “respectable” Indians the right to travel across British colonies and prevent travel by groups deemed “undesirable” by the colonial government – indentured and migrant workers, anti-colonial and communist dissidents, among others.

After the arbitrarily drawn partition of the British-ruled subcontinent into the sovereign nations of India and Pakistan in 1947, new systems of documentary control were invented to control the ensuing refugee flows between two new countries.

Some of these would later come to serve as evidence of nationality in India. The India-Pakistan Passport, which enabled people to cross freely between the two countries, did double duty as a certificate of citizenship. India’s ration cards, which entitled Indians to welfare distribution in the post-colonial era, also served to verify residency and allowing inclusion into electoral rolls.

In 2009, India launched the ambitious Aadhar project. The goal of this project was to provide a biometric identity and unique identification number to all of India’s 1.3 billion people.

Though critics have raised concerns regarding privacy and surveillance, most Indians now have an Aadhar card.

Yet, in Assam, this card was not considered valid for the state’s citizenship registry. Anyone who has been in India for six months can apply, so the state considered the Aadhar card in-



sufficient proof of residency.

‘WEAPONIZATION OF PAPER’

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party have released few details about the planned national extension of the citizen registration process. It is unclear when it would begin, how long it would take and which government agency would lead the process.

But the Indian Ministry of External Affairs stated that it will follow the Assam method of determining citizenship. A spokesman says the state used a “fair,” “nondiscriminatory” and “scientific” way to identify illegal immigrants.

To register officially as an Indian citizen, people across the country will have to submit a combination of documents that confirm residence and establish links to India. These include birth certificates, land deeds, prior inclusion within electoral rolls or evidence of government service.

But documentary proof of identity requires access to state services and financial privilege. In India, as in other emerging economies, many people lack government-issued birth certificates and land deeds.

Traditionally, long-time residence, kinship, language and religion have been sufficient proof of belonging in India.

Critics call Assam’s citizen registry initiative a “weaponization of paper” that targets religious minorities and marginalized communities.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Modi’s commitment to Hindu nationalism – a political stance that promotes India as a Hindu nation – has raised concern that any national citizen ID effort will target Muslims, India’s largest majority.

Since entering office in 2014, Modi has revoked the special status of Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in India. He has overseen legislation that economically and socially excludes Muslims and watched silently as hate crimes against Mus-

lims surge.

A particular reason for concern about religious discrimination in the citizen identification process is a separate citizenship bill likely to be approved by the Indian Parliament.

It promises to grant Indian citizenship to all Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and Christians who have fled religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh or Afghanistan. Their citizenship would be automatic after a short residency in India and would require no documentary proof.

If that bill passes, the results of any future national citizen documentation process would in effect apply solely to Muslims who cannot prove residency.

TRAUMA OF EXCLUSION

Many countries have stumbled during efforts to identify all their citizens.

Periodic U.S. efforts to identify and expel undocumented migrants in the 20th century at times led the government to mistakenly detain and even deport American citizens who lacked the proper ID.

The 1.9 million Assam residents unable to prove their Indian citizenship may now appeal to the Foreigners’ Tribunals, quasi-judicial bodies created by the Assam government for this purpose.

Those confirmed as “foreign” face potentially lengthy confinement in detention centers now under construction to hold newly stateless people.

Deportation is not an option for the majority of people excluded from Assam’s citizenship rolls. They do not have residency elsewhere. Neighboring Bangladesh says it will not accept Assam residents declared to be Bangladeshi immigrants without proof of Bangladeshi citizenship.

For many, the pain of not qualifying as Indian has started taking its toll. At least 30 people excluded from the Assam registry have killed themselves this year.

[the writer is Associate Professor of History, University of Dayton]

Good literature can come in digital forms – just look to the world of video games

JAMES O’SULLIVAN

THECONVERSATION.COM

Some years ago, tired of scrolling through Netflix in search of something we hadn’t seen yet, I suggested to my partner that we play a video game instead. Not the gaming type, she wasn’t too keen on the idea, but I promised something where she didn’t have to “aimlessly collect things”. The game we played was Dear Esther, which is part of the burgeoning trend in “literary video games”.

The suggestion proved successful. She enjoyed the experience and, compelled by immersion and the story, progressed right through the two-hour play-time in one sitting. I knew that Dear Esther would be the perfect game for someone who doesn’t like games. All the hallmarks of gamification are absent: you don’t have clear objectives, you don’t have to overcome obstacles, collect anything, battle anyone, and you can’t really die. In Dear Esther, all you really do is walk.

Developed by British game studio The Chinese Room, Dear Esther belongs to a contemporary genre of games known as “walking simulators”. These titles involve little more than travelling from one point to another, sometimes interacting with the occasional object while leisurely taking in the surrounds.

Many walking simulators have gone on to receive critical acclaim, works like Everybody’s Gone to the Rapture, also by The Chinese Room, The Vanishing of Ethan Carter, All the Delicate Duplicates, and Journey. The degree to which one has stuff “to do” varies between such works, but typically, players have very little to interact with in these worlds. And yet, they are immensely popular.

FINDING THE STORY

The reason is that these games are all about story and about the vital role of place in the act of storytelling. Creators of digital fiction are using rich virtual worlds to make their sto-

ries engaging. We all know when we have come upon a good story, because we want to stay in it, we want to know how it ends. We want to go over it again to be sure that we haven’t missed something the first time around because there is pleasure in knowing and unknowing. A feeling that there might be more story to be revealed, hidden somewhere in the game world. But this is a false sense of liberation – what I refer to in my book Towards a Digital Poetics: Electronic Literature & Literary Games as the “illusion of choice”.

Scholars of digital fiction have long been fascinated by this idea, the reality that interaction makes the player feel like an active participant in the narrative’s progression; when they are in truth still a voyeur, bound by predetermined authorial structures as they might be in print. The difference, of course, is that sense of active participation, of narrative exploration which, however false, is extremely compelling.

What is interesting about the use of video games to tell stories is that we are constantly being told that literature is suffering in this current age of screens. Such arguments tend to construct a tension between print and screen-based storytelling. But language is just one form of expression, and while it is a hugely powerful instrument when yielded on its own, there is also much that can be achieved by combining it with other modes, as we have long seen with film and other multimedia storytelling.

Video games, inherently mixed media, are ideal for such expressive mash-ups. A storyteller can describe a world with words, but they could also show you that world with computer graphics; allow you to build it in your mind’s eye, or traverse it with a mouse and keyboard.

It is easy to argue that compared to mixed media storytelling, the use of language alone can be more liberating to readers: the worlds

we imagine are limited only by ourselves. Whereas video games, despite illusions otherwise, are mathematically confined. The worlds we inhabit in games are, while seemingly vast, surrounded by hard-coded event horizons – points which the player just cannot pass. But good stories are not defined by their capacity to be infinite, but the extent to which they make us feel something, whatever their aesthetic confines.

DIGITAL LITERATURE’S DAY

Of course, not all video games are concerned with story. In fact, Ian Bogost, one of the stars of game studies, thinks they’re better without. Some are still all about play, about doing, about space without narrative. Astrid Ensslin, who wrote the book on this topic, Literary Gaming, talks about a “literary-ludic spectrum”, with games that privilege play being on one end and games that privilege story on the other. Considering that video games are the cultural form of the day, there is plenty of room for both.

Video games have become a new form of literature without much fanfare. People still refer to the 1970s and 80s as the glory days of interactive fiction, a time when computers were giving choose-your-own-adventure stories a new lease of life. But technology has come a long way since then, and so too has our ability to capture the hallmarks of good literature in digital forms.

Literary games are not just those indie works like Dear Esther and Everybody’s Gone to the Rapture that privilege spatial narratives. Even blockbuster, big-budget (what are called “Triple A”) titles like Red Dead Redemption and Horizon: Zero Dawn recognise the importance of characters, dialogue, setting and theme. These are all the elements of literature, and somewhat quietly, they have become central to a large element of the contemporary video game canon.

[the writer is Lecturer in Digital Arts & Humanities, University College Cork]

ACB exonerates Ajit Pawar in Vidarbha irrigation scam

NAGPUR, DEC 6 (PTI): Maharashtra's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has given a clean chit to NCP leader and former deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar in the multi-crore Vidarbha irrigation scam.

The ACB, in its affidavit submitted in the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court, has ruled out Pawar's involvement in cases of alleged irregularities in approval and commissioning of irrigation projects in the state.

The affidavit was submitted on November 27, a day before the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government of the Shiv Sena -NCP-Congress was sworn-in in the state on November 28.

The court had asked the ACB to clarify its stand on the role of Pawar, a former Water Resources Development Minister, in these cases.

Pawar, the NCP MLA from Baramati in Pune district, was Water Resources Development Minister during 1999-2009 when the Congress-NCP combine was in power in Maharashtra.

Pawar had also served as chairman of Vidarbha

Irrigation Development Corporation (VIDC), which had cleared irrigation projects in which irregularities were alleged.

The affidavit said there were lapses on the part of executing agencies of the tender work - that is engineers, divisional accountants and respective contractors of these projects.

"However, the VIDC chairman/Minister of Water Resource Department (WRD) cannot be made responsible for the acts of the executing agencies as there is no legal duty on his part," it stated.

The ACB is inquiring into a total of 2,654 tenders related to 45 projects of VIDC as per two PILs filed in 2012 before the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court.

On November 25, the anti-graft agency had said it has closed probe in nine cases of alleged corruption in irrigation projects, but clarified none of them was linked to Pawar.

"These enquiries were closed as no criminal offence was made out after enquiry against anyone. None of these



nine enquiries was in respect to Ajit Pawar, the then chairman of VIDC," the ACB had said.

About the November 27 affidavit, a senior ACB official said the court had asked the agency to submit a 'status report' on the VIDC scam before November 28.

"We have not closed inquiry into the VIDC cases. In some cases we have filed chargesheets and investigation is also going on. Similarly, investigation into

FIRs related to these cases are also going on.

"We have submitted the status report on investigation going on into tenders that were issued (by VIDC)," he said.

He said the HC had asked the ACB to submit a report on the PIL filed by one Atul Jagtap concerning award of tenders for an irrigation project in Amravati. Pawar was named a respondent in this PIL.

"Concerning this we had, in our previous af-

fidavit, written that we have referred this matter to the government for opinion.

"Now, we have got opinion from the government that Ajit Pawar was not involved in it (the scam) and this we have communicated to the court a few days back.

"Besides, Ajit Pawar was never an accused in any of our cases and investigation into Vidarbha irrigation tender cases are still on," the ACB official said.

The November 27 af-

fidavit said, "There are two allegations against the (then) chairman of VIDC (Pawar) - (A) regarding grant of sanction to the liability of the tender cost including that of updated cost and (B) grant of mobilisation advance to the contractor despite there was no mention of the same in the tender booklet."

"Detailed enquiries/investigations have been conducted in this regard and opinion of the expert committee members appointed by the

government for advise in the course of enquiry on technical issues have been obtained. Similarly, queries were referred to government also," it said.

The ACB said reports of several committees were also also taken into account.

"Opinion given by the above authorities and the clarifications given by the ex-chairman officio of VIDC were taken into consideration along with other evidence collected during the enquiry.

"Also, the reports of the Nandkumar Vadnere committee, the HT Mendhegiri and the Dr Madhavrao Chitale committee are referred for the allegations in the PILs," it said.

The affidavit stated that nothing adverse regarding money trail linkages has been noticed so far. Also, neither documentary nor oral evidence could be gathered during probe till now.

"There are some procedural lapses, departmental irregularities such as sending some files and proposals by the executive director to the chairman without routing those through

the managing director/principal secretary of WRD."

There were also instances of lapses in the payment of EMD (Earnest Money Deposit) amount by successful bidders in some cases, issuing of tender booklets to some non-eligible bidders and JV firms without following preconditions of tenders, the anti-graft agency said.

The affidavit has asked for disposal of PILs.

The scam, pegged at around Rs 70,000 crore, related to alleged corruption, cost escalations and irregularities in approval and execution of various irrigation projects during the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) rule.

The allegations on Pawar included claims that he awarded projects at inflated prices.

Last month, Pawar had rebelled and joined hands with the BJP to form a short-lived government in Maharashtra where he was deputy chief minister for just three days. He later resigned and returned to the NCP fold.

Voda Idea to shut if no relief provided by govt: Kumar Mangalam Birla

NEW DELHI, DEC 6 (PTI): Vodafone Idea Ltd, the India's third largest mobile service provider, will shutdown if the government does not provide relief on the liability it faces in past statutory dues following a Supreme Court order, its billionaire chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said on Friday.

"If we are not getting anything then I think it is end of story for Vodafone Idea," Birla said at the HT Leadership Summit when asked about the future of Vodafone Idea in absence of a government relief on payment of Rs 53,038 crore dues.

Birla's Idea Cellular and British telecom giant Vodafone plc's India unit had merged last year to compete with the onslaught of free voice calling and dirt cheap data unleashed by richest Indian Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio.

In the process, it accumulated Rs 1.17 lakh crore debt and had just weeks back posted corporate India's biggest



loss after it provisioned for the liability arising from the Supreme Court upholding the government's position on what base should statutory liabilities be calculated.

"It does not make sense to put good money after bad. That would be end of story for us. We will shut shop," he said in a response when asked if Vodafone Idea will put in more money.

Market leader Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea and other telecom players have to pay as much as Rs 1.47 lakh crore in payment of telecom license fee and

spectrum usage charge together with interest and penalty for past 14 years.

Both Airtel and Vodafone Idea have petitioned the government for relief in waiver of interest and penalty, which will halve the dues, and also filed a review petition in the Supreme Court.

Birla was however hopeful of a relief from the government not just for the telecom sector but the industry as a whole to pull out the economy from a six-year low GDP growth of 4.5 per cent.

"They (the government) have realised the fact that this (telecom)

is a very critical sector. The whole digital India programme rests on this. This is a strategic sector," he said.

The government, he said, has publicly stated that it wants three players from the private sector and one player from the public sector.

"I think that we can expect much more stimulus from the government because it is required for the sector to survive. If we weren't getting anything then I think it is end of story for Vodafone Idea," he said.

The government had late last month deferred by two years the

payment due to telecom companies for spectrum they bought in past auctions. This relief totalled Rs 44,000 crore for the industry but companies are expected to pay this due together with interest after the two year moratorium.

Asked about the specific relief sought, Birla said, "The big elephant in the room is AGR. Which is actually I think something which lies in the court of judiciary. I believe government can have a dialogue. This was a suit filed by the government against telecom service providers."

AGR refers to adjusted gross revenues, a percentage of which the telecom companies pay as statutory dues. The Supreme Court had upheld the government position that non-telecom revenues have to be included in the AGR for calculating dues.

"Since the government has won, it gives them headroom to talk to judiciary and try to find some of solution. I don't know which form or shape it takes," he added.

CNG buses on Kolkata roads by March: Minister

Kolkata, Dec 6 (PTI): The West Bengal government has decided to roll out CNG buses in the city by March next year, a minister said on Friday.

During a discussion in the assembly, state transport minister Suwendu Adhikari said a fuel station has been set up at one of the bus depots of the department in southern part of the city.

Later, he told PTI that apart from electric buses, 10 CNG buses will be rolled out by March 2020 to start with the project and the government has signed an agreement with state-owned GAIL (India) Ltd to supply the compressed natural gas (CNG).

"GAIL will supply CNG on tankers to feed the Kasba fuel station

and we have already signed a pact in this regard," Adhikari said.

He said the state government will add 150 electric buses across the state from the existing fleet strength of 80 odd.

The central PSU has been building a pipeline to bring the clean fuel in the state while another private sector player was setting up a CNG terminal to import the clean gas in the compressed form.

State-owned gas utility GAIL said it has completed awards for all major contracts for the ambitious Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga natural gas pipeline project that transverse from Jagdishpur to Haldia and Bokaro (Jharkhand) and Dhamra in Odisha.

The company had

Neroca beat Aizawl FC 1-0 to notch up first win

IMPHAL, DEC 6 (PTI): Neroca FC registered their first win of this I-League season by beating former champions Aizawl FC 1-0 at the Khuman Lampak ground here on Friday.

Ousmane Diawara scored the all-important goal in the 28th minute to give the home side all the three points. Neroca had lost 1-2 to Gokulam Kerala in their campaign opener.

Aizawl FC, who dominated the possession, failed to convert any of their 15 shots in the match.

The first big chance of the first half came in the 13th minute for the home team but Chanso Horam, who had a clear

shot on left flank, failed to convert the same.

Neroca FC was slowly growing in confidence and another chance came from the right side but Khaiminthang Lungdim side-netted his shot in the 22nd minute.

The defining moment of the game came in the 27th minute when Neroca got a free-kick from just outside the 18-yard box. Zodingliana's thunderous left-footed kick hit the goal post and Ousmane Diawara capitalised on the rebound, putting the ball in the back of the net.

On the 34th minute, from a free-kick just outside the box, Aizawl FC's Paul Ramfangzaava struck a

powerful shot but the Neroca FC goalkeeper dived to his right and made a tremendous save to keep his team's lead intact.

With just a few seconds remaining in the first half, Neroca got another chance to double their lead but the shot on goal by Chanso Horam was deflected from the body of an Aizawl FC defender for a corner.

After the changeover, Aizawl got a corner but the resulting header was cleared by the Neroca defence from the goal-line. In the 66th minute, Aizawl brought on Lalhman-gaihkhima for William Lalnunfela in order to provide better supply to Abdoulaye Kanoute.

Hernan Crespo named event ambassador of Kolkata 25K run

KOLKATA, DEC 6 (PTI): Former Argentine footballer Hernan Crespo was on Friday named as the international event ambassador for the sixth edition of Tata Steel Kolkata 25K run, scheduled to be held here on December 15. The IAAF silver label race will witness one of the greatest football strikers of all time, coming to a city that is considered home to Indian football.

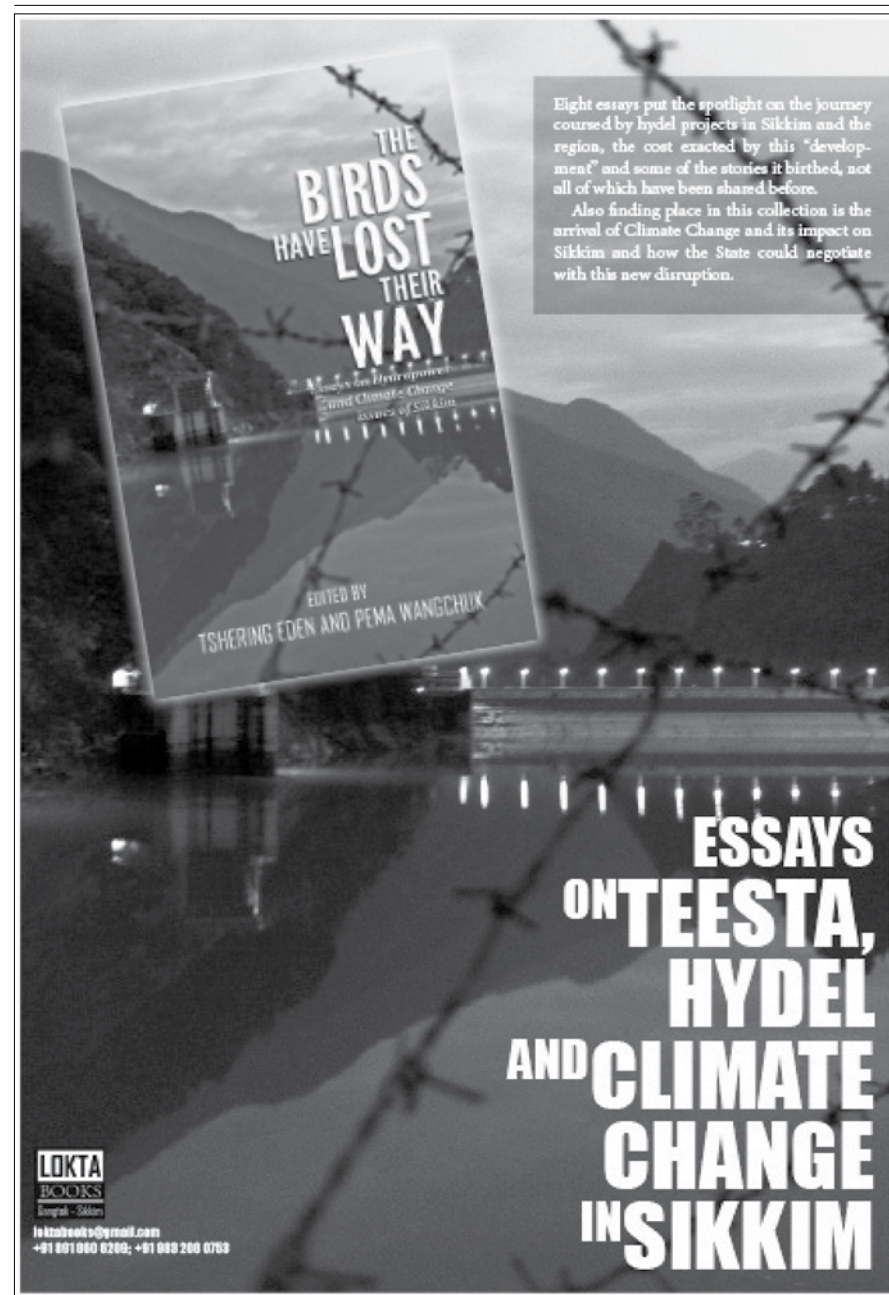
A prolific striker, Crespo has scored over 300 goals in a career spanning 19 years and is Argentina's fourth highest scorer behind only Sergio Aguero, Gabriel Batistuta and Lionel Messi.

The 44-year-old has played in three FIFA World Cups -- 1998, 2002, 2006. At the club level, he fin-

ished as the top scorer in the 2000 01 Serie A with 26 goals, playing for Lazio.

"I am honoured to be a part of the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K. As a footballer running has held a special place in my career. Whether it is sprinting from one end of the football field to another or jogging waiting for the ball, running has been an important part of my life," Crespo said.

"Argentina have played here once and I know that in this city many people follow and support Argentina, so I am already feeling at home. I have always had wonderful experiences in India and I am delighted to be in this beautiful country again and to be the Ambassador of an international sporting event.



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Australia eyes more than one Day/Night Test against India in 2021 series

MELBOURNE, DEC 6 (PTI): Cricket Australia (CA) is set to request the BCCI to agree for more than one Day/Night Test during India's 2021 tour Down Under, when officials of the two boards meet on the sidelines of a three-match ODI series in January next year.

According to a report in 'ESPNcricinfo', CA feels encouraged about the proposal after India won their maiden Day/Night Test against Bangladesh in Kolkata recently.

A CA delegation, led by its Chairman Earl Eddings, will meet BCCI top brass during the three-match ODI series in India starting January 14 next year.

"As you build that trust and build that relationship you have that chat," Eddings told the website.

"Pleasingly they've played their first day-



night Test and won easily. Now they've got through that it might give them the right build-up to it over here. I've got no doubt they'll consider playing one and maybe even more day-night Test matches. But that's down the track to when we catch up with them in January," he added.

CA Chief Executive Kevin Roberts, while talking to ABC Radio recently, also spoke about having more than one Day/Night Tests during what is meant to be a four-match Test series.

"...in my heart I'd say four from four, in my head we'd love to play one of the four as a day-night Test, he said.

Eddings said CA also wants the BCCI to consider adding one more Test to the traditional four-match series that the two countries play.

"Ideally we want to be playing five Tests against India, hopefully in the future we can do that as well," he said.

India's maiden Day/Night Test was a result

of the initiative taken by new President Sourav Ganguly, one of the country's most successful and charismatic former captains. He managed to convince Bangladesh for a Day/Night game within a week of taking over on October 23.

"The fact India are playing day-night Test cricket is a great thing. It shows that he cares about the game. We've exchanged letters, I'm going over there with some of our board members in early January for some of the ODIs where I hope to meet with the new BCCI administration," Eddings said of Ganguly.

"I want to stress we've got a very strong relationship with India, there's a lot of mutual respect there. While we have our differences because we've got different needs, the relationship is very strong," he added.

Everton sack Marco Silva and put Duncan Ferguson in temporary charge

ANDY HUNTER
THEGUARDIAN

Duncan Ferguson has been placed in temporary charge of Everton after Farhad Moshiri, the club's majority shareholder, made Marco Silva his fourth managerial sacking in under four years.

Silva was dismissed midway through a three-year contract with Everton languishing in the relegation zone after eight defeats in their past 11 Premier League matches.

Moshiri had been reluctant to part company with the Portuguese, an appointment he instigated and ultimately had to pay Watford around £4m in compensation for, but the manner of Wednesday's shambolic 5-2 defeat at Liverpool proved the breaking point.

David Moyes is the leading candidate to succeed Silva with Tim Cahill under consideration to become the former Everton manager's assistant. Other possible contenders include Vitor Pereira who was overlooked for the Everton job in 2013. The Portuguese is currently in charge of Shanghai SIPG.

Moyes has been championed for some time by the chairman, Bill Kenwright, despite his poor track record since leaving for Manchester United after his Everton contract expired in 2013. The 56-year-old is available having been out of work since leaving West Ham in May 2018, although he will not be installed before Saturday's home game against Chelsea. His first game could be away at United on Sunday week.

Ferguson, a first-team coach under several Everton managers, was asked to take temporary charge following a chaotic day that had Moshiri visit Silva in person at the club's training complex. Neither Moshiri nor Kenwright attended the derby defeat at Anfield but Moshiri travelled from London to visit Finch Farm with fellow board members and the director of football, Marcel Brands.



Silva took training as usual on Thursday before Brands instructed the first-team squad to remain behind for a meeting with Moshiri. The players were not criticised for their part in Silva's sacking – it is understood the 42-year-old was not mentioned during the meeting – but were asked what the board could do to help improve their performances. The directors reconvened and, six days after Brands gave an in-house interview calling for stability and unity at Goodison Park, Silva was informed his time as the Everton manager was over after 18 months.

He follows Roberto Martínez, Ronald Koeman and Sam Allardyce as managers sacked in Moshiri's reign – the under-23s' manager David Unsworth has also taken temporary charge in that time – and leaves with the lowest points-per-game average (1.28) of any Everton manager since Walter Smith, Moyes's predecessor. Silva won 19 of his 53 league matches at Everton.

In a statement the club said: "Majority shareholder Farhad Moshiri, chairman Bill Kenwright and the board of directors would like to thank Marco for his service over the last 18 months and wish him well for the future. Duncan Ferguson has taken temporary charge of the first team and will manage the side for the game against Chelsea on Saturday. The club aims to confirm a new permanent manager as swiftly as possible."

Silva paid an inevitable price for bad results and was left a lame-duck manager after Everton fans turned on him following the 2-0 home defeat by

Norwich, who were bottom of the table at kick-off, on 23 November. However, there was also recognition within the Everton hierarchy of his misfortune with injuries and VAR decisions, plus a flawed transfer strategy last summer.

Everton spent approximately £117m on players in that time but also recouped £84m from clearing out dead wood inherited from previous managers, plus the reluctant sale of Idrissa Gueye to Paris Saint-Germain. Gueye's replacement, Jean-Philippe Gbamin, made only two appearances before rupturing a thigh muscle and has yet to resume full training. Another central midfielder, André Gomes, suffered a fracture dislocation to an ankle last month, while Fabian Delph, the summer signing from Manchester City, has been hindered by several injuries.

The failure to replace the on-loan Kurt Zouma in central defence also hindered Silva, who had wanted the Chelsea player's signing to be a priority, while Brands led the £29m signing of 19-year-old striker Moise Kean from Juventus when the manager wanted a more experienced forward. Kean has started only twice in the league and has not scored in 13 appearances in total for the club.

Everton's board, of which Brands is a part, has been divided on sacking Silva, and his potential replacements, for several weeks. The club has spent around £450m on players since Moshiri's arrival in February 2016, recouping just under half of that, but a string of poor purchases and bad appointments have resulted in another fight for survival.

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ALISON FLOOD
THEGUARDIAN

Sixty years after the French Nobel laureate Albert Camus died in a car crash at the age of 46, a new book is arguing that he was assassinated by KGB spies in retaliation for his anti-Soviet rhetoric.

Italian author Giovanni Catelli first aired his theory in 2011, writing in the newspaper Corriere della Sera that he had discovered remarks in the diary of the celebrated Czech poet and translator Jan Zábřana that suggested Camus's death had not been an accident. Now Catelli has expanded on his research in a book titled *The Death of Camus*.

Camus died on 4 January 1960 when his publisher Michel Gallimard lost control of his car and it crashed into a tree. The author was killed instantly, with Gallimard dying a few days later. Three years earlier, the author of *L'Étranger* (The Outsider) and *La Peste* (The Plague) had won the Nobel prize for "illuminat[ing] the problems of the human conscience in our times".

"The accident seemed to have been caused by a blowout or a broken axle; experts were puzzled by its happening on a long stretch of straight road,

a road 30 feet wide, and with little traffic at the time," Herbert Lottman wrote in his 1978 biography of the author.

Catelli believes a passage in Zábřana's diaries explains why: the poet wrote in the late summer of 1980 that "a knowledgeable and well-connected man" had told him the KGB was to blame. "They rigged the tyre with a tool that eventually pierced it when the car was travelling at high speed."

The order, he said, had been issued by Dmitri Shepilov, the Soviet Union's minister of internal affairs, in retaliation for an article by Camus in the French newspaper *Franc-Tireur* published in March 1957.

"It seems it took the intelligence three years to carry out the order," Zábřana's diary reports. "They managed eventually and in such a way that, until today, everyone thought Camus had died because of an ordinary car crash. The man refused to tell me his source but he claimed it was completely reliable."

Camus had sided publicly with the Hungarian uprising since autumn 1956, and was highly critical of Soviet actions. He also publicly praised and supported the Russian

Arsenal no show ends in defeat to Brighton

LONDON, DEC 6 (AFP): Caretaker manager Freddie Ljungberg said Arsenal "did not show up" for the first 45 minutes as the Gunners' winless streak reached nine games in a 2-1 home defeat to Brighton on Thursday.

Neal Maupay headed in a deserved winner for the Seagulls 10 minutes from time after Alexandre Lacazette had cancelled out Adam Webster's opener for Brighton.

Defeat leaves Arsenal in 10th place and 10 points adrift of fourth-placed Chelsea in the hunt for Champions League qualification next season.

On this evidence there is little chance of Ljungberg landing the job on a permanent basis as another sparse crowd at the Emirates greeted the final whistle with a chorus of boos.

After a 2-2 draw at Norwich on Sunday in the first match since Unai Emery was sacked, there was again no sign of a new manager bounce for Ljungberg's home bow as Brighton dominated the first 45 minutes and could have gone in at the break more than one goal to the good.

"You cannot give away a whole half against any team in the Premier League," said Ljungberg.

"We did not show up in the first half, we were very passive, we didn't move. We had chat at half-time, made a tactical change and all of a sudden we looked like the team we wanted to for 20 minutes."

Aaron Connolly missed a glorious chance and Bernd Leno

denied Maupay and Davy Propper before Brighton deservedly took the lead when Arsenal failed to clear a corner and Webster fired home the loose ball from close range.

Joe Willock was sacrificed at the interval as Ljungberg introduced club record signing Nicolas Pepe, who had started on the bench for the fifth straight league game under two different managers.

Ljungberg's half-time tinkering did the trick as the hosts came out a different side in the second half.

Lacazette's looping header brought Arsenal level just five minutes into the second period before Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang was inches away from connecting with crosses from Hector Bellerin and Sead Kolasinac.

'VAR DIFFICULT FOR EVERYONE'

David Luiz thought he had put Arsenal in front as he turned home from Mesut Ozil's free-kick only for the Brazilian to rightly be ruled offside after a VAR review.

Brighton made the most of that reprieve to win on the road in the Premier League for the first time since the opening weekend of the season as Aaron Mooy's cross picked out Maupay to head into the far corner.

Ljungberg believes Arsenal need a win by any means to regain some confidence before they can start to look at gaining ground on the top four.

"They look very short on confidence. In the first half they seemed a bit

scared to get on the ball," added the Swede.

"They have to get a win, get some confidence. They showed at the beginning of the second half for 20 minutes what they are capable of."

Victory for Brighton takes them to within a point of Arsenal and four clear of the relegation zone.

"We had lots of quality and courage," said Brighton boss Graham Potter, whose side enjoyed more possession and more shots on goal than the hosts.

"The main stat is the scoreline. At the end it's nice for the players and supporters that you get a reward for the way we are trying to play."

Elsewhere, Newcastle taught Sheffield United a lesson in taking their chances as the Magpies won 2-0 at Bramall Lane despite enjoying just 27 per cent possession.

Allan Saint-Maximin headed the visitors in front with his first goal for the club and Jonjo Shelvey secured the three points when he played on as the Blades defence stopped at the sight of the offside flag going up against Andy Carroll.

A VAR review showed Carroll was onside as he flicked the ball into Shelvey's path.

"VAR is becoming too difficult for everyone. I don't think anyone knows where they are with it," said Sheffield United boss Chris Wilder.

"The game has changed, it's a new game. What we are having to deal with, we're having to learn on the job.

New book claims Albert Camus was murdered by the KGB

author Boris Pasternak, who was seen as anti-Soviet.

Catelli has spent years researching the validity of Zábřana's account. In his book, he interviews Zábřana's widow Marie, investigates the KGB's infiltration of France, and includes secondhand testimony from the controversial French lawyer Jacques Vergès.

Catelli was contacted by Giuliano Spazzali, an Italian barrister, after the book's publication in Italy. Spazzali recounted a conversation he'd had with the late Vergès about Camus' death.

"Vergès said the accident had been staged. It is my opinion that Vergès had more evidence than he cared to share with me. I refrained from asking," Spazzali told Catelli. "Discretion is the best attitude when a hot topic rises unexpectedly. I didn't investigate any further, and yet I remember how Vergès was certain that the staged accident was schemed by a KGB section with the endorsement of the French intelligence."

Catelli argues that Camus' outspokenness was interfering with French-Soviet relations, and "Camus' prominent character ... stood out in the eyes of the French

people as a reminder of the USSR's cruel imperialism. Both the French and the Soviet governments would have benefited greatly from silencing this unpleasant reminder ... No proper investigation was carried out."

Catelli's said his theory had not been endorsed by Camus' daughter Catherine, who prohibited publisher Gallimard from quoting her father's work. The book has nonetheless been published in France, Argentina and Italy, and received the backing of Paul Auster, who called Catelli's argument compelling.

"A horrible conclusion, but after digesting the evidence Catelli has given us, it becomes difficult not to agree with him. Thus 'car accident' should now be filed in another drawer as 'political assassination' – and thus Albert Camus was silenced when he was 46 years old," writes Auster in a foreword.

"I hope that the academics will not follow the old opinion that it was a simple accident," said Catelli, who is talking to British publishers about an English translation. "I think we owe it to the memory of Albert Camus."

Cambridge French

literature professor Alison Finch was not persuaded. "Supporters of the assassination theory include a creative writer and film director (Paul Auster); a Czech writer and translator whose family were persecuted by the communist regime and who had good reason to hate communism (Jan Zábřana); the highly controversial lawyer Jacques Vergès, who, to be sure, defended Algerian independence fighters tortured by the French but who became infamous for defending the indefensible. Of course, this is what the law must do, but in general he'd be regarded as a maverick rather than a reliable commentator."

Finch also questioned suggestions of French connivance. "This would mean that the assassination was approved at the highest level and presumably by De Gaulle. This, to me, is implausible. De Gaulle, an accomplished writer himself, had great respect for French intellectuals, including those whose views he disagreed with," she said.

The *Death of Camus* draws to a close with Catelli expressing the hope that it will bring forth more evidence, "before the waves of time come to lay waste to the sandy, frail traces of what happened".

Trump urges UNSC to address shared security threat, promote religious liberty

WASHINGTON, DEC 6 (PTI): US President Donald Trump on Thursday urged United Nations Security Council members to address shared security threats and promote religious liberty across the globe.

"Our nations face a range of shared security threats, including terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration, cyber-attack, and the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons," Trump said in his luncheon meeting with the Permanent Representatives of the UN Security Council.

The US holds the monthly rotating presidency of the UN Security Council for December.

"We are working very hard on those problems, especially the last three. There can be nothing more important. The Council must take action to confront these and other dangers facing the world," Trump said at the top of the luncheon at the White House.

"That also includes the behaviour of the Iranian regime, which has killed hundreds and hundreds of people in a very short period of time. They're killing protestors. They turned down their Internet system. People aren't hearing what's going on," he said.

Trump also called on Security Council members to join the United States in "our vital efforts to promote religious liberty" around the globe.

"The world is more secure when people have the right to follow their convictions and to worship in peace. We have been very strong on that."

Trump said it is a horrible situation in Iran and urged the media to get involved by going there and seeing what's happening.

"It's something that is going to be a big scandal throughout the world very soon. They're killing a lot of people. And they're arresting thousands of their own citizens in a brutal crackdown in recent weeks because they're protesting. I think the media should get involved in that. I don't know that they will because they have their own reasons, but the media should absolutely get involved in that," he said.

America will always stand with the Iranian people in their righteous struggle for freedom, Trump said, and added that the Iranian situation could be fixed "very quickly and very easily".

Trump urged the UNSC Permanent Representatives to work together to address global challenges from denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and peace talks in Afghanistan, the White House said in a readout from the meeting.

Trump also encouraged the Permanent Representatives to take action to confront malign actors threatening global security and prosperity.

France hit by second day of massive strike over pension reform

Travellers across France endured a second day of chaos on Friday as unions vowed to keep up their strike until President Emmanuel Macron backs down on controversial pension overhauls.

Rail operator SNCF said 90 percent of high-speed TGV trains were again cancelled, and several airlines dropped flights including Air France, EasyJet and Ryanair.

Nine of the capital's 16 metro lines were shut and most others severely disrupted, sparking some 350 kilometres (220 miles) of traffic jams in the Paris region, well above the usual 200 km, the traffic website Sytadin reported.

Many employees were unable to get to work and several schools again provided only daycare, though fewer teachers were on strike compared with Thursday when some 800,000 people demonstrated across the country according to the interior ministry.

Bike paths were crowded with bikes and electric scooters, with metro operator RATP sponsoring special deals for commuters with a



range of ride-hailing companies and other transportation alternatives.

The walkout is the latest test for Macron after months of protests from teachers, hospital workers, police and firefighters as well as the "yellow vest" movement demanding improved living standards.

Unions say his "universal" pension system, which would eliminate dozens of separate plans for public workers, forces millions of people in both public and private sectors to work well beyond the legal retirement age of 62.

Health Minister Agnes Buzyn said Friday that the government had "heard" the protesters'

anger and would meet with union leaders to discuss the reform on Monday.

The government has yet to lay out the details of its plan, and Buzyn told Europe 1 radio that "there is indeed a discussion going on about who will be affected, what age it kicks in, which generations will be concerned -- all that is still on the table".

- Macron 'determined' -

Yves Veyrier, head of the hardline FO union, warned Thursday the strike could last at least until Monday if the government did not take the right action.

But it remains to be seen if the protests will match the magnitude of

the 1995 strikes against pension overhauls, when France was paralysed for three weeks from November to December in an action that forced the government to back down.

Macron, a former investment banker, has largely succeeded in pushing through a series of controversial reforms, including loosening labour laws and tightening access to unemployment benefits.

But this is the first time the various disgruntled groups have come together in protest.

So far Macron has not spoken publicly on the stoppages though a presidential official, who asked not to be named, said

Thursday that the president was "calm" and "determined to carry out this reform" in a mood of "listening and consultation".

While most of Thursday's rallies were peaceful, police fired tear gas to disperse dozens of black-clad protesters smashing windows and throwing stones during the Paris march, with one construction trailer set on fire. Sporadic clashes were also reported in some other cities.

Many people were bracing for further disruptions over the weekend, including the prospect of fuel shortages as unions blocked most of the country's eight oil refineries.

The minimum pension age in France is 62, one of the lowest among developed countries, but there are 42 "special regimes" for railway workers, lawyers, opera employees and others offering earlier retirements and other benefits.

The government says a single system will be fairer for everyone while ensuring its financial viability while acknowledging that people will gradually have to work longer.

Governor: All 3 crew killed in Black Hawk helicopter crash

ST. CLOUD, MINN, DEC 6 (AP): All three Minnesota National Guard soldiers were killed when the Black Hawk helicopter they were in crashed Thursday, Gov. Tim Walz said.

The identities of the soldiers were not released, pending notification of family.

The crash was being investigated and preliminary information on the crash was not released.

The Black Hawk helicopter with the three crew members aboard crashed Thursday in central Minnesota, the Minnesota National Guard said.

Earlier, the Guard tweeted that the UH-60 crashed south of St. Cloud and that authorities were on the scene. The Guard lost contact with the helicopter shortly after taking off on a maintenance test flight from St. Cloud on Thursday afternoon, Guard Master Sgt. Blair Heusdens said.

The helicopter called mayday about nine minutes after takeoff. Our first priority is the safety and well-being of our Guardsmen and our thoughts are with our soldiers and their families at this time," Heusdens said in a statement before the crash was confirmed.

The Black Hawk sent

a mayday signal at 2:15 p.m., Stearns County Chief Sheriff's Deputy Dan Miller told reporters. Crews from multiple departments spent several hours searching before finding the crash, Miller said.

Television aerial footage showed the wreck of the helicopter along a tree line near open fields near St. Cloud, a city about 59 miles (95 kilometers) northwest of Minneapolis.

Apparent scorch marks encircled the flattened wreckage in the snow. The Guard's base near St. Cloud Regional Airport has been in operation since 2009, with Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters maintained there.

Gov. Tim Walz canceled a tree-lighting ceremony, and a spokesman said he was headed to the St. Cloud area near the crash site.

Walz served for 24 years in the Army National Guard, while he was a schoolteacher and coach, but retired in 2005 to run for Congress.

The Minnesota State Patrol was called to bring in a helicopter to help with the search. A State Patrol Cirrus aircraft, equipped with thermal imaging cameras, also helped in the search.

Uber reveals thousands of reported sexual assaults in US

Ridesharing leader Uber, under fire around the world for its safety record, said it had tallied nearly 6,000 sexual assaults in the United States over the past couple of years.

That included more than 450 cases of rape, according to Uber's first public report into the issue Thursday, which counts attacks by both passengers and drivers over 2017-18.

It also revealed 19 fatal assaults related to the company over the two-year period, when it averaged more than 3.1 million trips each day in the United States.

Sexual assaults were reported on 0.00002 percent of trips, Uber calculated.

"While these reports are rare, every report represents an individual who came forward to share an intensely painful experience," it said.

"Even one report is

one too many."

Uber stressed that the figures also showed its drivers were attacked at about the same rate as passengers reporting sexual assault.

"Drivers are victims, too," it said.

While the report is confined to Uber's biggest market, the company faces complaints worldwide that it is doing too little to protect passengers.

In London, Uber has lost its license after transport authorities said the company had failed to fix a litany of safety issues -- including at least 14,000 cases of drivers handing their permits to unlicensed friends or relatives.

Uber continues to operate in the British capital pending an appeal.

In France, the firm is under pressure from a viral campaign detailing sexual assault involving its drivers, under the hashtag #UberCestOver (Uber it's over).

'Mega fire' forms north of Sydney

SYDNEY, DEC 6 (AFP): Several Australian bushfires have combined to form a "mega fire" that is burning out of control across a swathe of land north of Sydney, authorities said Friday, warning they cannot contain the blaze.

New South Wales Rural Fire Service deputy commissioner, Rob Rogers said "there are probably more than eight fires in all" that have merged to form what has been dubbed a "mega fire" in an area of national park forest.

The blaze was burning across 300,000 hectares -- an area roughly 60 kilometres (37 miles) across -- within an hour's drive of Australia's largest city, which was again subsumed in a soup of toxic smoke.

"There is just fire that whole way" said Rogers, who added that firefighters could do little more than get any residents out, protect property and hope for an end to fire-friendly dry and windy conditions.

We "cannot stop these fires, they will just keep burning until conditions ease, and then we'll try to do what we can to contain them," he told public broadcaster ABC.

"The best thing we can do is try to protect property and people as much as we can." Prolonged drought has left much of eastern Australia



lia tinder-dry and spot fires have raged every day for the past three months.

Bushfires are common in Australia but scientists say this year's season has come earlier and with more intensity due to a prolonged drought and climatic conditions fuelled by global warming.

Dramatic footage of firefighters running from a wall of fire ripping through the tree canopy above them was captured overnight in Orangeville, less than 100 kilometres west of Sydney.

The local fire and rescue team that shot the images said no one was injured and the vehicles surrounded by the swirling embers also survived the blaze.

"The video was put up to demonstrate why you need to listen to the fire advisory system," the

team from Ingleburn fire station said on Facebook.

"If your property is not prepared for the bushfire season and your (sic) not sure you are able or capable of defending your property if a fire approaches you need to leave straight away," they warned.

At a wildlife park in the area, 300 animals were evacuated.

Walkabout Wildlife Park said it had shipped out lizards, dingoes, peacocks and marsupials, as firefighters battled more than 100 fires up and down the eastern seaboard.

"This fire has been doing some crazy things, so we have to be prepared," general manager Tassin Barnard told AFP.

New South Wales rural fire chief Shane Fitzsimmons said some US and Canadian fire-

fighters had arrived to help out.

The specialists are expected to supervise waterbombing planes and heavy equipment used in creating fire containment lines.

"We are not only appreciative of their presence here today, but of their sacrifice," said Fitzsimmons -- who has become a fixture on Australian television screens for weeks, updating the public on blazes in towns, national parks and backwaters.

"They are volunteering to sacrifice time from loved ones, from families, to give up that special time of the year around Christmas and New Year to come down here and lend us a hand," he said.

More than 600 homes have been destroyed and six people have died since the crisis began in September.

Indian-origin man charged for soliciting clients for pimp

GURDIP SINGH SINGAPORE, 6 DEC (PTI): A 22-year-old Indian-origin man has been jailed for one year and a week and fined 30,000 Singapore dollars for soliciting more than 3,000 clients for a pimp in Singapore, according to a media report on Friday.

Ashok Kumar Manogaran, 22, who is accused of soliciting 3,360 clients,

was jailed on Wednesday.

If Manogaran does not pay the fine, he will have to serve an additional three months of jail time, according to The New Paper.

Manogaran was convicted of three charges, including living on the earnings of prostitution earning more than SGD 83,850 between December

2017 and December 2018.

He was also convicted of one charge each for using criminal force and voluntarily causing hurt, while five similar charges were taken into consideration.

The court heard that Manogaran was one of four men engaged by one Chua Chung Siang to solicit clients for prosti-

tutes in Geylang's red-light area in eastern Singapore.

Manogaran would collect the money from the clients and take them to Chua and get his cut.

He also admitted to attacking two Bangladeshi nationals with a friend at a back lane in Geylang on February 15 last year for calling the police.

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R. Kelly faces new bribery charge in Brooklyn criminal case

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Federal prosecutors in Brooklyn on Thursday unveiled a new criminal charge against singer R. Kelly, accusing him of arranging to bribe an official as part of a scheme to recruit underage girls for sex.

The 52-year-old R&B singer, known for such hits as "I Believe I Can Fly" and "Bump N' Grind," was arrested in Chicago in July on separate sets of charges brought by federal prosecutors in Brooklyn and Chicago. He has pleaded not guilty.

The new charge came in an indictment unsealed in the Brooklyn case. Prosecutors said that in 1994, Kelly caused another person to offer a bribe to an official to create a fake identification document for a person identified by the pseudonym "Jane Doe #1."

The indictment did not say whether the bribe was actually paid or the document created. It also did not accuse Kelly of sexually abusing Jane Doe #1.

A lawyer for Kelly could not immediately be reached for comment.

The singer, whose full name is Robert Kelly, is scheduled to go to trial in Brooklyn in May 2020. He has been jailed in Illinois since his arrest.

Kelly had denied abuse allegations for decades before the latest charges. In 2008, he was tried on child pornography charges and found not guilty.

The Brooklyn prosecutors have charged Kelly with racketeering, accusing him and his entourage of inviting women



and girls backstage after concerts, keeping them from friends and family and making them dependent on him financially.

The Chicago prosecutors said Kelly had sexual contact with five minors and recorded sexually explicit videos of some of them. They also accused Kelly of obstructing justice by using threats and bribes, including payments of hundreds of thousands of dollars, to keep his victims quiet.

A trial in Chicago has been scheduled for April 27.

In addition to the two federal cases, Kelly is facing charges from state prosecutors in Illinois and Minnesota. He has pleaded not guilty to those charges as well.

PlayStation 5 Pro Seemingly Teased by Sony

Not long after their launch in 2013, the PS4 and Xbox One were outdated gaming machines. And this is partially why each were rejuvenated with mid-cycle iterations, the PS4 Pro and Xbox One X. A

half-step upgrade

you may say,

and it looks like

Sony Interactive

Entertainment

is planning on doing

this again with the PlayStation 5. In

other words, it looks like a few years after the PS5 release, we'll get a PS5 Pro. Sony hasn't confirmed this is its intention, but it heavily suggested that's what's in the chamber

for next-gen during a recent interview with Game Informer.

More specifically, according to Masayasu Ito -- the Executive Vice President of Hardware Engineering and Operation at Sony Interactive Entertainment -- console cycles are getting shorter, and this simply because technology is advancing at an increasing rate. So, consoles become obsolete quicker, technology wise at least. For Sony, the PS4 Pro was a way to extend the life of the PS4, and apparently the PS4 Pro was the "test case" for what would come next, the PS5.



"In the past, the cycle for a new platform was 7 to 10 years, but in view of the very rapid development and evolution of technology, it's really a six to seven year platform cycle," said Ito. "Then we cannot

fully catch up with the rapid development of the technology, therefore our thinking is that as far as a platform is concerned for the PS5, it's a cycle of maybe six to seven years. But doing that, a platform

clear, we should be able to change life-cycle the hardware itself and try to incorporate

advancements in technology. That was the thinking behind it, and the test case of that thinking was the PS4 Pro that launched in the midway of the PS4 launch cycle."

As you may know, there was a report from earlier this year that claimed the PS5 was launching alongside the PS5 Pro. The report seemed pretty dubious at the time -- and still does -- but the idea that we will see a PS5 Pro -- or something like it -- at some point, seems increasingly likely.

Anyway, for more news, rumors, leaks, media, and information on the PS5, be sure to peep all of our past and recent coverage of the next-gen PlayStation console by clicking right here.

Salman isn't affected by his stardom: Sonakshi

MUMBAI, DEC 6 (PTI): Sonakshi Sinha says while working on the third installment of "Dabangg" franchise, she observed and learned how superstar Salman Khan never let his stardom go to his head.

Reflecting on her journey in Bollywood which started with "Dabangg" in 2010, Sonakshi said one key takeaway for her after working with Salman was how to treat success with humility.

"I learnt a lot of things by just observing him which I eventually followed even in my journey. The very fact that he doesn't take his super stardom so seriously. He takes it in his stride, he isn't affected by it.

"He's the kind of a guy who'd be living in the biggest of the hotels, fanciest of the rooms but would sleep on the couch," Sonakshi told PTI.

The actor said Salman is incredibly grounded, something everyone wanting to have a long career should learn from.

"If he had let it go to his head, he wouldn't have made a career like the one he has. He works with the same gusto he did twenty five years back. These are the things you've to learn and follow if you want to have a career as long as him.

"He never fails to surprise you. He only competes with himself. He wants to do better than what he did yesterday. What he manages to do all the time, so amazingly, it's something to be inspired by."

After "Dabangg", Sonakshi went on to work in films like "Lootera", "Rowdy Rathore" and most recently, "Mission Mangal".

The 32-year-old actor feels the time just flew by.

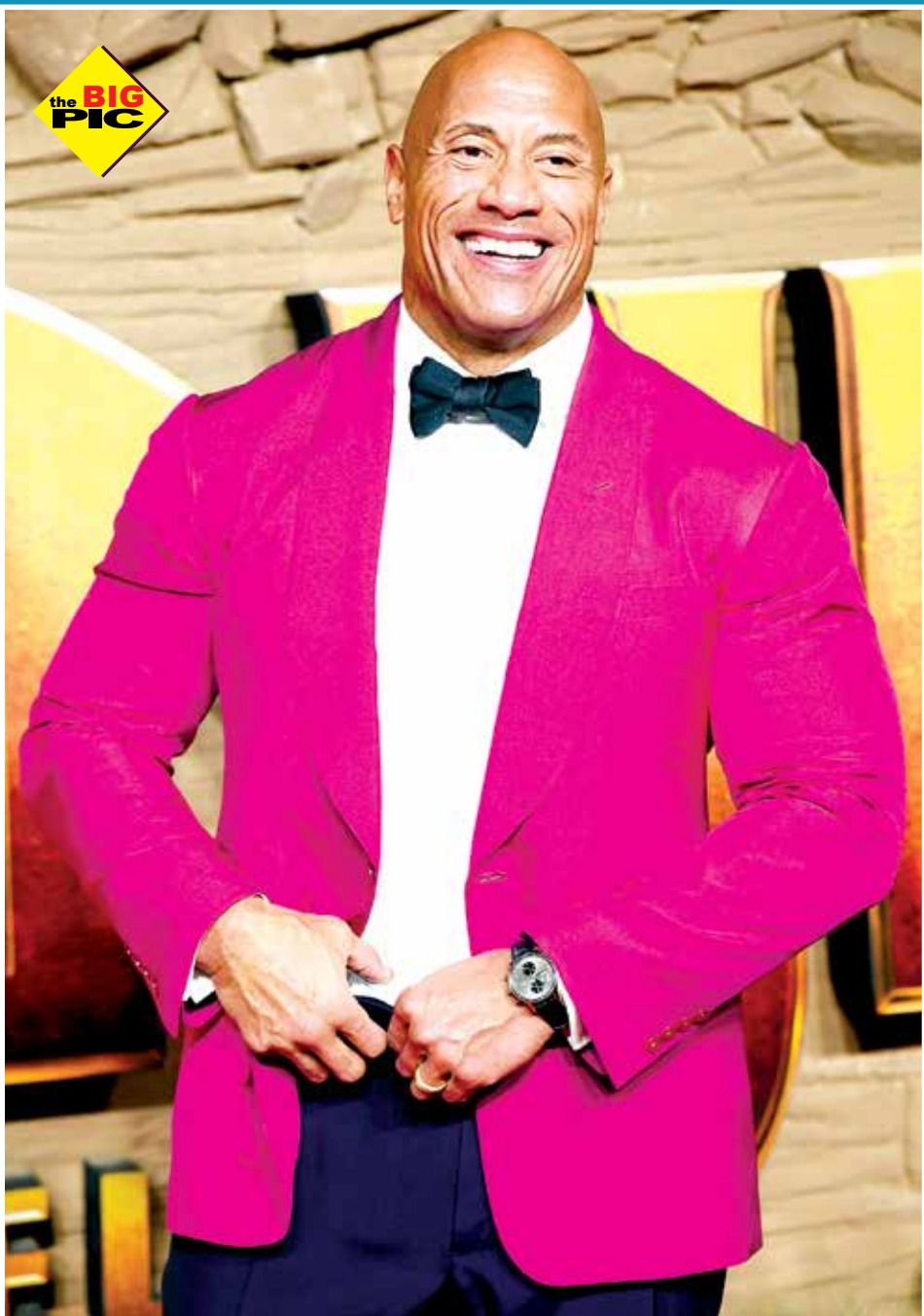
"I can't believe that it has already been 9 years and I'm



here with another 'Dabangg', which would be my 25th film! It's crazy the kind of work I've done and have learnt so much over the years.

"The learning process hasn't stopped. It has been a fantastic journey. I wouldn't change a thing about it," she added.

Directed by Prabhudeva, "Dabangg 3" also features Saiee Manjrekar and is scheduled to be released on December 20..



SMOLDERING! Actor, Dwayne Johnson sported a pink blazer at the premiere of Jumanji: The Next Level in London.

I've come out of all kinds of tags, don't want them anymore: Akshay Kumar



MUMBAI, DEC 6 (PTI): In his career of more than 25 years, Akshay Kumar has been called an action star, comic actor and a patriotic hero but the superstar believes he has slowly come out of all kinds of tags and would never want to be associated with one ever again.

In the 90s, the actor was called "Khiladi Kumar" for featuring in action films, before he changed gears to comedy in the 2000s. Akshay then shifted to romantic-drama and currently he is known for starring in social dramas with patriotic undertones.

When asked which genre does he find himself most comfortable in, Akshay, in a group interview, said, "If I say I feel comfortable in one genre, you will put a tag on me. I don't want any kind of tag. I've come out of that game of tags when I used to do only action, I was bored. I never wanted the tag of an action hero.

"Even now I don't want any tags. I'm very comfortable playing all kinds of genres. If anything new comes in, if it's risky and fun, then I'd just go for it."

The actor will be next seen in "Good Newwz". The Raj Mehta-directed comedy also fea-

tures Kareena Kapoor Khan, Kiara Advani and Diljit Dosanjh.

Akshay feels fortunate to have done two different branches of comedy within the same year -- "Housefull 4" and "Good Newwz".

"I am happy that I get to visit different branches of comedy. 'Housefull' was a slapstick comedy, no matter what people say, that it's senseless, but there is an audience for that also. Slapstick comedy is the most difficult kind of comedy.

"To make people laugh at your own expense is one the hardest kind of comedies. Unfortunately, people here don't give credit to this kind of comedy, even in awards night."

Backed by Karan Johar, "Good Newwz" follows two couples with the same surnames whose decision to opt for in-vitro fertilisation goes awry.

"This is a serious subject but with comedy. We have taken a lot of care in presenting it. At the same time, no one can say this hasn't happened because it has. It's an important subject to talk about," he added.

"Good Newwz" is scheduled to be released on December 27.

Aries:

Things are about to get challenging from here. But that shouldn't be a reason for you to quit or doubt your abilities. This chapter of your life requires you to bring your A-game to the table. You have the ability to throw any curveball right out of the park. Remember, the Universe will never give you more than what you are capable of handling.

Tip: Trust your ability to overcome the obstacles.

Taurus:

It's not this or that, Taurus. Your personal life does not have to suffer because you are ambitious and dream about making your mark in the world. Have the courage to pursue your larger-than-life goals and explore unexplored territories with balance as your operative word. As for your partner, give them a low-down on what you're working on, and see how you can be co-conspirators in this journey to greatness. Chances are, they'll be happy to support you in every way they can.

Tip: Let your partner be your co-conspirator in this journey to greatness.

Gemini:

"Often you begin your day much as you ended the day before. But if we were standing in your physical shoes, we would acknowledge the fresh

new day! I can push the reset button. I have complete control over my point of attraction today! I will look for things that feel good day!" Now isn't that a liberating thought, Gemini. Let this Abraham Hicks' quote inspire you to embrace the optimism that comes with new beginnings. Continue to focus on what you are manifesting. Continue to focus on what makes you feel like the best version of yourself. Let go of the need to control the situation with the inner knowing that what you desire will flow into your existence.

Tip: Focus on what makes you feel good.

Cancer:

There is only one you in the entire Universe. Now isn't that amazing, Cancer. Bring your most authentic self to the table, no matter how daunting this may seem in the beginning. Not listening to the voice of fear is the answer to 99 per cent of your problems. This day also brings with itself the reminder that an idea is just an idea until it is put into action. Get ready to hit the accelerator button, knowing that you will make it to the finish line looking like the most radiant version of yourself.

Leo:

Starting projects is the fun part. Winding them up, however, is a whole other story. This chapter of your life requires you to put in twice the ef-

fort. Continue to work towards your goals with the knowledge that you will manifest what you desire. The truth is, you may or may not get the support you require from the people around you. Find a way to prioritise so you can reach your deadlines in the most efficient manner.

Virgo:

Just when you think you have everything under control, life decides to throw a curveball. Spirit works in mysterious ways, Virgo. Many times, what we perceive as upheaval is in fact a blessing in disguise. Trust the signs. Trust the doors that are opening for you as you express gratitude for the ones that have closed. Once the dust has settled, you will be left with a beautiful piece of land to start building the tower of your dreams.

Libra:

Alastair Reynolds once said, "Ideas have a certain gestation period which cannot be forced." Just the inspiration you need to nurture the spark into a flame, Libra. Take your time, and visualise the endgame. Then, think backwards to the point where you are now. This will help you plan your next moves (with some room for improvisation, of course). Trust that everything is taking place in divine time. Let your experience and wisdom teach you what needs to be done.

Tip: Take time to nurture the idea at hand.

Scorpio:

The Universe is offering you the chance to partner up on the professional front. Explore the creative chemistry you are experiencing at this moment. Schedule a brainstorming session to see if your connection really is va-va-voom. Those who are already working in pairs will come to realise that what they have is special—a relationship that challenges them to look at the world differently and grow.

Sagittarius:

Why are you so afraid of going home to yourself? Sometimes you just have to ease into the silence, Sagittarius. Face the inner demons who have been trying to have a conversation with you for a while now. This is the only way to break free from their clutches and make your way towards the light. Some of you may find solace in spirituality. Visit a sacred place close to your heart, or simply exercise silence within the confines of your own home. With practice, you will be able to find that reservoir of peace everybody talks about.

Tip: Come home to yourself.

Capricorn:

You are where you need to be, Capricorn. Trust the divine plan. Trust the timing of everything. You are in the process of clearing karmic debts

and integrating soul lessons. Be grateful for what the Universe is teaching you via your experiences. Given the magnitude of things, you may not be able to move forward immediately. So be gentle with yourself. It's a good idea to spend some time introspecting.

Tip: Be gentle.

Aquarius:

You are on the road to recovery, Aquarius. Be easy with yourself. Remember to tune into your energy field as you do. Your body may seem fit at the moment, but that doesn't mean your soul need to rest and refuel. Perks of taking time off for yourself? Being unfettered by the things that previously brought you down. Remember, happiness is a fleeting emotion. Inner peace, on the hand? She's in it for the long haul.

Tip: Better days are coming!

Pisces:

What is your divine purpose, Pisces? What are the things that make you feel fulfilled on a soul level? And now for some real talk: is the job at hand in alignment with your higher self? If you answered the aforementioned question in the negative, know that there is an avenue that will allow you to express your most authentic self. It's time to make that bold move. You won't regret it.