



**3RD WIN FOR SIKKIM
IN WOMEN'S U23 ONE-
DAY CRICKET LEAGUE**

pg03

**WE NEED TO STOP
CONFLATING ISLAM
WITH TERRORISM**

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**I BELIEVE IN CREATING
TRENDS, NOT FOLLOWING
THEM: JOHN ABRAHAM**

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Summit **TIMES**

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Nominations close with 173 candidates for Election 2019

Total nominations filed

- 162 candidates for Assembly Elections
- 11 candidates for Lok Sabha Elections

Candidates contesting 2 constituencies

- SDF - Pawan Chamling and DT Lepcha
- SKM - Kunga Nima Lepcha
- HSP - Bhaichung Bhutia

Last minute surprises

- SKM changes Yangthang candidate
- HSP candidate from Maneybung-Dentam quits party and contest
- Two Cong candidates boycott Assembly elections

Most contested constituency

- West-Pendam with 08 candidates in the fray



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 25 MAR:

As expected the nomination filing process on the last day today went on till late into the night with the process in East and West districts stretching past 11 p.m. North, with only three constituencies and 12 candidates filing nominations today, was

the first to finish the nomination process followed by South district which had 39 candidates filing their nominations today. West District saw 33 candidates filing their nomination papers while 74 candidates filed their nominations in East District.

In total, 162 candidates have filed nominations for

the 32 Assembly constituencies in the State while 11 candidates have filed nominations for the Lok Sabha elections. The final count will be known after the scrutiny and withdrawal process is over on 28 March. Last elections in 2014 had 121 candidates for the Assembly elections and 06 for the Lok

Sabha elections.

CANDIDATES CONTESTING FROM TWO CONSTITUENCIES

This time there are three candidates contesting from two constituencies each. Like in previous elections, the SDF president and Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling will be contesting from two constituencies and this election he

has chosen Poklok-Kamrang and Namchi-Singithang. In 2014 he had contested from Rangang-Yangang and Namchi-Singithang.

From SKM, Kunga Nima Lepcha will be contesting from Shyari and Gangtok while HSP's Bhaichung Bhutia will be contesting from Tumin-Lingi and Gangtok.

DROP-OUTS

Springing some last minute surprises, Congress candidate from Lachen-Mangan, Acharya Karma Tashi Bhutia did not file his nomination along with the State Congress president, Bharat Basnett [from Namcheybung] in support of the PIL in the High Court of Sikkim challenging

the constitutional validity of Assembly elections in Sikkim. Mr Basnett did, however, file his nomination papers for the Lok Sabha seat.

There was a last minute change for SKM as well, where it changed its Yangthang candidate, MP Subba. The party has fielded Bhima Hang Subba

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NORTH DISTRICT

12 candidates file nominations in North

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 25 MAR:

On the final day of filing nominations for General Election 2019, 12 candidates filed their nominations for three constituencies of North district with the Returning Officer (RO), North, Raj K Yadav. Out of the 12 candidates, two were dummy candidates of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha.

Meanwhile, the Congress candidate named for Lachen Mangan, Acharya Karma Tashi Bhutia, did not file his nomination reportedly in support of a PIL in the High Court of Sikkim which contends that assembly elections held in Sikkim thus far are constitutionally invalid.

All the nominations were done in the presence of the General Observer (GO), Dr. Pratibha Singh.

As per an IPR press release, the names of the candidates who have filed their nominations are as under:-

1. Gyurmik Yauseel Bhutia, 29-Kabi-Lunchok Constituency, Indian National Congress (INC).
2. Tshering Wangdi Lepcha, 31-Lachen-Mangan Constituency, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF).
3. Athup Lepcha, 30-Dzongu Constituency, Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP).
4. Pintso Namgyal Lepcha, 30-Dzongu Constituency,

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EAST DISTRICT

East RO receives 74 nomination papers on final day

GANGTOK, 24 MAR [IPR]: The office of the Returning Officer, East Sikkim, which, apart from receiving nomination papers for the assembly constituencies in the district, is also where the Lok Sabha elections and Sangha seat nomination papers are filed, kept the busiest day of all ROs today. The district already has the highest number of assembly constituencies at 12.

Today, 74 candidates trooped to the district administrative centre to file their nominations in a process which stretched late into the night.

The District Election Officer, East, Kapil Meena, informs that a total of 63 nomination papers for the 12 Assembly and one Sangha constituency were received today.

The Lok Sabha election received 11 nomination papers. The oath of affirmation was administered by the RO as per the norms and the names of the candidates who filed their nominations today are as follows:

- KHAMDONG-SINGTAM:**
1. G.M Gurung (Junior) of SDF
 2. Dr. Mani Kumar Sharma of SKM
 3. Gopal Khatiwara of SNPP
 4. Neeraj Adhikari of HSP
 5. Tula Ram Guragai of INC
 6. Sher Bahadur Karki of BJP

WEST PENDAM:

1. Sonam Darjee of SRP

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WEST DISTRICT

33 candidates file nominations in West

GYALSHING, 25 MAR (IPR): On the last day of filing nomination papers, 33 candidates filed their nominations in the office of the Returning Officer here today.

While 10 candidates were from SKM, including one dummy candidate for Soreong-Chakung; seven were from Congress; five from HSP; four from SRP; three from BJP; two candidates from SRM and two remaining candidates from SDF.

The Returning Officer informs that the scrutiny process will start at 11am sharp on Tuesday, 26 March.

The list of candidates is as follows:

- SKM:**
1. Mingma Norbu Sherpa (06-DARAMDIN)
 2. Lok Nath Sharma (04-GYALSHING-BERNYAK)

3. Aditya Golay (Tamang) (07-SORENG CHAKUNG)
4. Diwash Golay (Tamang) (07-SORENG CHAKUNG)
5. Sangay Lepcha (01-YOKSAM TASHIDING)
6. Purna Hang Subba (03-MANEYBONG DENTAM)
7. Bhim Hang Limboo (02-YANGTHANG)
8. Phurba Tsh. Bhutia (05-RINCHENPONG)
9. Sunita Gajmer (08-ZOOM SALGHARI)
10. Chandra Bir Kami. (08-ZOOM SALGHARI)

HSP:

1. Pahal Man Kami (08-ZOOM SALGHARI)
2. Sonam Gyatso Sherpa (06-DARAMDIN)
3. Phurket Lepcha (01-YOKSAM TASHIDING)
4. Dhan Singh Limboo (02-YANGTHANG)

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SOUTH DISTRICT

39 candidates file nominations in South

44 candidates in fray for 8 constituencies

NAMCHI, 25 MAR [IPR]: Returning Officer (South), Ragul K., informs that a total of 41 nominations were received by his office from various candidates today, the last day for filing of nomination papers.

The candidates whose nomination papers were received by the RO were administered an oath of affirmation as per the norms.

The candidates who filed nominations today are:

1. Yadhu Kumar Rai, Poklok-Kamrang, Sikkim Republican Party (SRP)
2. Ratna Singh Rai, Namchi-Singithang, Sikkim Republican Party (SRP)

3. Mohan Gurung, Rangang-Yangang, Sikkim Republican Party (SRP)
4. Kharga Bahadur Rai, Namchi-Singithang, Sikkim Republican Party (SRP)
5. Laxmi Prasad Chettri, Temi-Namphing, Sikkim Republican Party (SRP)
6. Mingma Tshering Sherpa, Barfung, Sikkim Republican Party (SRP)
7. Bal Bir Tamang, Melli, Sikkim Republican Party (SRP)
8. Ganga Ram Sharma, Namthang Rateypani, Sikkim Republican Party (SRP)

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Chamling files nomination papers

BIKASH CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 25 MAR:

Namchi today resounded with lusty slogans as supporters of Sikkim Democratic Front and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha gathered at the South district administrative centre for the final day of nomination filing.

The SDF President, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, filed his nomination papers for Namchi-Singithang and Poklok-Kamrang constituencies at the office of Returning Officer, Ragul K. The Chief Minister was escorted to the venue by a large gathering of supporters.

On the other hand, SKM candidates for constituencies in the South



district, none of whom had filed nominations thus far, also filed their nomination papers accompanied by a matching number of supporters.

Police had to put up barricades in front of District Administrative Center in order to maintain law and order.

During the process of filing of nominations, one side of the DAC was filled

with SDF supporters raising party slogans while on the other side, SKM supporters shouted slogans with similar enthusiasm.

After the nominations were filed, the CM along with other candidates marched towards Central Park and went towards his residence at Ghurpisey followed by supporters, senior leaders and party workers.

SDF accuses SKM of intentionally misleading people by naming Golay CM candidate

SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 25 MAR:

A day after Hamro Sikkim Party condemned SKM's announcement of disqualified MLA PS Tamang [Golay] as its chief ministerial candidate, Sikkim Democratic Front also criticized the move and accused SKM of intentionally misrepresenting rules and laws and misleading the electorate in direct violation of the model code of conduct. The party has demanded that the Chief Electoral Officer of the State take suo-moto cognition of the matter and process SKM in accordance of

the law for cheating and misguiding the electorate of Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference here today, SDF spokesperson, Bhim Dahal, insisted that SKM was "again trying to deceive" the people with its claim despite knowing that a person convicted under the Prevention of Corruption Act remains disqualified from contesting elections for a period of six from his date of release from prison.

"A person convicted under PC Act cannot even be nominated a Chairperson as per law. There is no question of

him then becoming the CM," he claimed.

SDF spokesperson, KT Gyaltsen, in turn pointed out that since the SKM was fielding Mr Tamang even as a candidate, it was clear that the party was aware of his disqualified for six years status and was hence intentionally misleading people.

He added that the law was clear in recording that a person disqualified from filing nomination papers for assembly or parliamentary elections cannot be made a Minister or CM after the election under the Article 164 of the constitution.

He also spelled out

section 171G of the IPC covering offenses relating to election which states, "Whoever with intent to affect the result of an election makes or publishes any statement purporting to be a statement of fact which is false and which he either knows or believes to be false or does not believe to be true, in relation to the personal character or conduct of any candidate shall be punished with fine."

Mr Gyaltsen further claimed that the party has taken the opinion of a senior advocate on whether Mr Tamang was eligible to contest elections or

whether he could be made a Minister in the State government. "The answer received was a clear no," he said, adding that the matter also came up when Jayalalitha was made CM when her party won even though she was disqualified from contesting elections following her conviction. The Supreme Court had eventually ruled she could not be made CM.

SDF spokesperson and Lok Sabha MP PD Rai, while calling on the CEO to take suo-moto cognizance, informed that the party would also file a complaint before the CEO on this matter.

Free cataract operation at Singtam Hospital

YOGEN THATAL SINGTAM, 25 MAR: District Hospital Singtam is going to conduct free cataract operation on 26 and 27 Mar, 2019. Ophthalmologist, Dr Mayel P Lepcha, DHS will be present during the two days informed CMO, Dr Laden Tsh Bhutia, DHS.

Gyaltsen condemns allegations by overlooked ticket aspirant

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 25 MAR: Sikkim Democratic Front party spokesperson, KT Gyaltsen, who is also a former MLA, today dismissed allegations leveled against him of having conspired to deny a ticket aspirant a candidature.

SDF ticket hopeful from Shyari, Tenzing Lamtha, it may be recalled had accused Mr Gyaltsen of being the reason he did not receive ticket promised to him.

Without taking any name, Mr Gyaltsen today countered that some individuals and their supporters have made baseless, derogatory and defamatory allegations against him without any substantial evidence and demanded an unconditional apology.

Likewise, SDF spokesperson, Bhim Dahal, also criticised those who he said were trying to defame a senior politician through communal misinformation

33 candidates...

5. Sukhang Subba (04 - GYALSHING BARNYAK)

INC:

1. Tej Bdr. Rawat (07 - SORENG CHAKUNG)

2. Ganga Maya Cintury (08-ZOOM SALGHARI)

3. Pema Rinzing Bhutia (01-YOKSAM TASHIDING)

4. Passang Gyalchen Sherpa (06-DARAMDIN)

5. Dal Bdr. Kariki (04-GYALSHING-BERNYAK)

6. Phurchung Lepcha (05-RINCHENPONG)

7. Mangal Subba (Limboo) (02-YANGTHANG)

SRP:

1. Nakul Pradhan (07 - SORENG CHAKUNG)

2. Binay Limboo (02-YANGTHANG)

3. Phigum Lepcha (01 - YOKSAM TASHIDING)

4. Kiran Gurung (03-MANEYBONG DENTAM)

BJP:

1. Bhanu Bhakta Dahal (04-GYALSHING-BERNYAK)

2. Roger Tsh. Lepcha (06-DARAMDIN)

3. Sancho Lepcha (05-RINCHENPONG)

SRM:

1. Datenpa Sherpa (06-DARAMDIN)

2. Daniel Lepcha (05-RINCHENPONG)

SDF:

1. Sancha Raj Subba (07-SORENGCHAKUNG)

2. Dal Bahadur Subba (02-YANGTHANG)

SDF condemns communal posturing against digital campaign

Rested leaders step up and support party's decision

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 25 MAR: Sikkim Democratic Front spokesperson and Lok Sabha MP, PD Rai, today alleged that some groups were projecting their racist tendencies on SDF's digital campaign, 'Ma Pani Chamling.'

He stressed that 'Ma Pani Chamling' has no other agenda other than presenting Pawan Chamling as the leader of the party and that this was the party's dig-

ital campaign to solicit ideas of the people and will continue beyond the elections.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Rai stated that there were some people who were making racist remarks in this respect and further urged them to stop such communal posturing and see the spirit under which this particular campaign has been launched.

He underlined that SDF was a dedicated and disciplined party with a principled foundations.

He also thanked the young leaders of the party for standing firm and remarked that those who

had left the party were opportunists and clearly not connected with the principles of the party.

Sitting MLA, Dr Mechung Bhutia, in turn stated that he was also an aspiring candidate but accepted the party's decision when he was dropped.

He expressed his happiness that Minister DT Lepcha was picked as the party candidate from Martam-Rumtek constituency and assured to extend full support to ensure a good victory for him.

Likewise, SDF vice-president Bhaskar Basnett expressed his happiness on the deci-

sion of the party high command and thanked the party for giving GT Dhungel as the party candidate from Upper Tadong constituency from where he had contested last time.

Sitting MLA from Chujachen, Bikram Pradhan, who too has been rested, stated that Sikkim has earned recognition under the leadership of Pawan Chamling and that he had full faith in Mr Chamling's decisions.

Sitting Minister, AK Ghatani, also thanked the SDF president for having given him the responsibility of serving the people as an MLA and Minister for five years.

39 candidates file...

9. Pawan Chamling, Poklok-Kamrang, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)

10. Pawan Chamling, Namchi-Singhithang, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)

11. Tashi Thendup Bhutia, Barfung, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)

12. Lobzang Bhutia, Barfung, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM)

13. Raj Kumar Basnett, Rangang Yangang, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM)

14. Samdup Tshering Bhutia, Tumin-Lingi, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM)

15. Sanjit Kharel, Namthang -Rateypani, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM)

16. Ganesh Rai, Namchi-Singhithang, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM)

17. Tilak Basnett, Melli, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM)

18. Bedu Singh Panth, Temi-Namphing, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, (SKM)

19. Kharka Bahadur Rai, Poklok-Kamrang, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM)

20. Hukum Chandra Rai, Namchi-Singhithang, Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP)

21. Kamala Rai, Rangang-Yangang, Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP)

22. Birkha Bahadur Rai, Poklok-Kamrang, Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP)

23. Lall Bahadur Chettri, Melli, Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP)

24. Durga Bahadur Chettri, Temi Namphing, Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP)

25. Madan Tamang, 13 Namthang Rateypani, Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP)

26. Bhaichung Bhutia, Tumin Lingi, Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP)

27. Deepak Kumar Bhandari, Temi-Namphing, Indian National Congress (INC)

28. Tanka Nath Adhikari, Rangang Yangang, Indian National Congress (INC)

29. Ishwar Prasad Rai, Poklok-Kamrang, Indian National Congress (INC)

30. Samdup Lepcha, Barfung, Indian National Congress (INC)

31. Hari Basnett, Melli, Indian National Congress (INC)

32. Kamala Rai, Namchi Singhithang, Indian National Congress (INC)

33. Sancha Man Chettri, Namthang Rateypani, Indian National Congress (INC)

34. Sangkit Lepcha, Tumin Lingi, Indian National Congress (INC)

35. Rup Narayan Chamling, Rangang Yangang, Sikkim Rajya Manch (SRM)

36. Bhola Chauhan, Melli, Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP)

37. Usha Gurung, Namthang Rateypani, Jai Maha Bharat Party (JMBP)

38. Nirmal Kumar Pradhan, Namchi-Singhithang, Independent

39. Bikash Tamang, Namthang Rateypani, Independent

Fresh Nominations were also filed by Farwanti Tamang for Melli and Raj Kumari Thapa for Rangang Yangang from Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) today.

Earlier, on 19 March, a total of nine nominations were received from five candidates by the Returning Officer. The names of the candidates are as follows: Farwanti Tamang, Melli, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF); Birjan Tamang, Namthang-Rateypani, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF); Garja Man Gurung, Temi-Namphing, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF); Raj Kumari Thapa, Rangang Yangang, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF); Ugen T Gyatso Bhutia, Tumin Lingi, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF).

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East RO receives...

2. Bikash Darjee of SNPP

3. Lall Bahadur Das of SKM

4. Gopal Baraily of SDF

5. Indra Kumar Suji of HSP

6. Birendra Pourali of BJP

7. Santosh Bardewa, (Independent Candidate)

8. Binod Darjee of INC

RHENOCK:

1. Bishnu Kumar Khatiwara of SKM

2. Biraj Adhikari of HSP

3. Hemendra Adhikari of SDF

4. Bharat Kumar Sharma of BJP

5. Ramesh Sharma of SUF (Sikkim United Front)

6. Deo Kumar Pradhan of INC

7. Chakra Pani Sharma of SRP

Chujachen:

1. Rudra Khatiwara of HSP

2. Damber Kumar Pradhan of SKM

3. Gopal Chhetri of INC

4. Krishna Bahadur Rai of SDF

5. Mohan Gurung of BJP

6. Anil Kumar Rai of SRP

7. Mr. Rudra Narsing Sakya (Independent Candidate)

GNATHANG-MACHONG:

1. Tshering Bhutia of SKM

2. Sangay Chopel Bhutia of HSP

3. Dorjee Ongden Bhutia of INC

Namcheybong:

1. Denis Rai of SKM

2. Anush Rai of HSP

3. Phip Rahang Subba of SRM

4. Kharka Bahadur Rai of SRP

5. Devi Basnett of BJP

Shyari-Tathangchen:

1. Karma Ongdi Bhutia of SDF

2. Kunga Nima Lepcha of SKM

3. Chewang Dorjee Bhutia of INC

Martam-Rumtek Constituency;

1. DT Lepcha of SDF

2. Sonam Tshering Bhutia of INC

3. Sonam Tshering Venchunga of SKM

4. Gyalsten Bhutia, (Independent Candidate)

5. Jigdel Chewang Bhutia of BJP

UPPER TADONG:

1. Anand Lama of SKM

2. Punam Bhandari of SRP

3. Anita Gurung of INC

Arithang:

1. Ashis Rai (Independent candidate)

2. Sumitra Rai of INC

3. Arun Kumar Upreti of SKM

4. Shyam Pradhan of SDF

5. DB Chettri of BJP

Gangtok:

1. Kunga Nima Lepcha of SKM

2. Snunit Targain (Lepcha) of INC

3. Phurba Sherpa (Independent candidate)

4. Yang Tshering Lepcha of BJP

Upper Burtuk:

1. DR Thapa of SDF

2. NB Gurung of SKM

3. DB Tamang of SRP

4. Aita Tamang of INC

Sangha Constituency;

1. Sonam Lama of SKM

2. Karma Tashi Bhutia of INC

3. Tshering Lama of SDF

Sikkim Parliamentary Constituency;

1. Dhiraj Rai of SRP

2. DB Katwal of SDF

3. Mahendra Thapa (Independent Candidate)

4. Biraj Adhikari of HSP

5. Bharat Basnett of INC

6. Passang Sherpa (Independent Candidate)

7. Sun Maya Gurung, (Independent Candidate)

8. Robin Rai of All Indians Party

9. Laten Sherpa of BJP

10. Indra Hang Subba of SKM

11. Narendra Adhikari of SUF (Sikkim United Front)

Scrutiny of nominations is scheduled for 26 March from 11am till 3pm and last date for withdrawal of candidatures is 28 March 2019.

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General Observer interacts with Nodal Officers in Gyalshing

GYALSHING, 25 MAR (IPR): The General Observer (GO) for the West District, Faisal Aftab, visited the Office of the RO/DEO West where he oversaw the process of nominations happening inside the office of the DEO West.

He later met with the SDPO, Gyalshing, Prakash Subba in regards to the law and order situation of the area. The GO also inspected the Kyongsa Strong room and interacted with the officials of the Control Room and MCMC.

On his way to Gyalshing, the GO also inspected the nakas and interacted with the concerned Sector Magistrates, SST, VST and FST of Akar



Bridge (Zoom Constituency) and Legship Bazaar Area (Gyalshing-Barnyak Constituency) on 24 Mar, 2019.

SDF candidate receives warm welcome at Rongli



SUMMIT REPORT RONGLI, 25 MAR:

SDF candidate from Chujachen constituency, KB Rai, was given a warm welcome by his party supporters at Rongli yesterday.

Present on the occasion were former MLAs Bikram Pradhan and

Puran Gurung, former Zilla Adhyaksha Bimal Dawari, Indra Pradhan, Chairman, Social Welfare Department, Panchayats, Gram Panchayats, and party supporters, all of whom resolved to work towards ensuring a comfortable victory for Mr Rai.

In his first address to supporters, Mr Rai thanked the SDF party president Pawan Chamling for having faith on him and expressed confidence that together with the people of Chujachen constituency, impressive development will be achieved.

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Nominations close...

from the constituency instead.

Also, HSP's candidate, Prakash Sharma from Maneybung-Dentam late this evening issued a press release announcing his resignation from the party and the contest. He has said that he is not convinced if electoral politics can change the society. Therefore, he is withdrawing electoral politics.

"First of all, we need to educate the masses about their rights. So I have decided not to take part in this fraudulent electoral system where votes can be

purchased..." he states in his press release.

MOST CONTESTED CONSTITUENCY
With 08 candidates in the fray, West Pendam in East District could be the most contested constituency if there are no withdrawals or failures in scrutiny. The least contested constituency is Lachen-Mangan with only two candidates.

DUMMY CANDIDATES

There are 05 dummy candidates with 02 in North, 01 in South and 02 in West.

12 candidates file...

Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF).

5. Penzong Lepcha, 30-Dzongu Constituency, Indian National Congress (INC).

6. Ugen Nidup Bhutia, 29-Kabi-Lungchok Constituency, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF).

7. Samdup Lepcha, 31-Lachen-Mangan Constituency, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM).

8. Chung Kipu Lepcha, 30-Dzongu Constituency, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM).

9. Karma Loday Bhutia, 29-Kabi-Lungchok Constituency, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM).

10. Phurden Tshering Lepcha, 29-Kabi-Lungchok Constituency, Independent.

11. Gyanden T Lachungpa, 31-Lachen-Mangan Constituency, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM).

12. Jamyang Palmu Bhutia, 29-Kabi-Lungchok Constituency, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM).

Further, DEO/RO informed that the general public can meet the General Observer on any days from 10 a.m to 11 a.m regarding any issue or query related to General Election 2019 at North Zilla Guest House (Room No. 01). She may be contacted on the following numbers: Landline 03592-234400, Mobile number: 7076989068/7586909224.

SDF candidate for Kabi-Lungchuk,

Ugen Nedup Bhutia said that he has started his campaigning from booth level wherein he is focusing more on general development keeping in mind the need of the youth. He added that he is not taking his campaigning to social media just for publicity but will be working on the field.

SDF candidate for Dzongu, Pintso Namgyal Lepcha said, "I am getting full support from my area. The SDF party already has good programs for the people but I will talk to the public and listen to their grievances and work towards further developing my area. I will focus more on the educated youth. Being a social worker they know and have faith that I will resolve their issues. I am confident of winning looking at the response of the public. I will take the road connectivity issues to the government which is a major problem here."

SKM candidate for Dzongu, Chungkipu Lepcha said that her door-to-door campaign is going really well and she is getting good response from the people.

"I am optimistic. I feel that people in my area face problems related to basic needs like electricity, road connectivity, equal and fair distribution of government schemes. If SKM forms the government then I assure my people that we will provide free electricity in our area. I have full hope that my people will help me reach the right place from where I can be their voice and resolve issues," said Ms Lepcha.

3rd win for Sikkim in Women's U23 One-Day Cricket League

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 25 MAR:

Sikkim defeated Mizoram today in the ongoing Women's U23 One-Day League (2018-19) at KIIT Cricket Stadium, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Sikkim has won two matches so far in the tournament and has secured 8 Point(s) in the Plate Division. They will be playing eight matches in this tournament.

Mizoram won the toss and chose to field first. Sikkim scored 209 runs with the loss of 3 wickets in 50 overs. Nandita scored 65 of 145 balls, Samayita 64 not-out of 70 balls, Tshering Yangden (10), Pretika Chettri (7) and Tabita Subba (4). Not only the batsman but even the bowlers took the crucial role, they restricted the opponent for just 88 runs in 34 overs, in which Neema Yanki Lep-



cha took 3 wickets, Tabita Subba 2 wickets and Pranita Chettri, Nur Pandi Lepcha and Samayita took 1 wicket each.

"Girls are getting con-

fidant with every match played and I believe with more time they will perform even better. We are looking forward to the remaining matches of

the tournament and will be giving our best," said Coach Kikam Bhutia.

Sikkim will be playing against Bihar, Puducherry, Meghalaya,

and Uttarakhand in this tournament and currently is in the 5th position of the points table ahead of Manipur, Puducherry, Meghalaya, and Mizoram.

Training on maize cultivation at Barasamdong



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 25 MAR:

Mevedir in collaboration with ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency) organized a ward level training cum demonstration program on 25 Mar, 2019, a press release informs.

The program was conducted at Boom ward under Barasamdong GPU, West Sikkim in the presence of MB Gurung, Shekhar Gurung (Field Assistant) and resource person Phurcho Lepcha (from ATMA) along with Mevedir Master Trainer, Shanti Gurung, Ran Maya

Rai and Kinzang Bhutia.

Phurcho Lepcha highlighted the package of practices for maize of CP333 variety. To demonstrate the package of practice of maize, farmers were taken to the field and with the help of farmers and Master Traine, a bed was prepared for sowing the seed.

Once the bed is ready, the seeds are carefully dropped and placed in equal intervals to ensure proper distribution of seeds and maintain seed spacing. While demonstration the farmers were informed that the

empty gap spaces in the maize field could be intercropped with vegetables and crops.

Ran Maya Rai highlighted about the various ICS documentation processes. She also informed the farmers about the newly opened organic Input stores at Jorethang and Gyalshing where variety of seeds of Kharif vegetables are available. Other useful inputs and seeds of flowers are also available in these stores.

The training program was attended by more than twenty-three farmers, the release adds.

Trump campaign did not coordinate with Russia in 2016: Justice Department

WASHINGTON, MAR 25 (AP): The Justice Department said Sunday that special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation did not find evidence that President Donald Trump's campaign "conspired or coordinated" with Russia to influence the 2016 presidential election.

Mueller also investigated whether Trump obstructed justice but did not come to a definitive answer, Attorney General William Barr said in a letter to Congress summarising Mueller's report.

The special counsel "does not exonerate" Trump of obstructing justice, Barr said, and his report "sets out evidence on both sides of the question."

After consulting with other Justice Department officials, Barr said he and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein determined the evidence "is not sufficient to establish that the president committed an obstruction of justice offense."

Barr released a

four-page summary of Mueller's report Sunday afternoon.

Mueller wrapped up his investigation on Friday with no new indictments, bringing to a close a probe that has shadowed Trump for nearly two years.

Barr's chief of staff called White House counsel Emmet Flood to brief him on the report to Congress. Trump was at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, about to return to Washington after spending the weekend there.

Mueller's investigation ensnared nearly three dozen people, senior Trump campaign operatives among them.

The probe illuminated Russia's assault on the American political system, painted the Trump campaign as eager to exploit the release of hacked Democratic emails to hurt Democrat Hillary Clinton and exposed lies by Trump aides aimed at covering up their Russia-related contacts.

ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

The Anthyesthi Kriya of our beloved mother, Late SITA MAYA TRIKHATRI (80 yrs) who left for her heavenly abode on the 23rd of March, 2019 falls on 4th April 2019.

All relatives, family, friends and well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at Hotel Chowtaro, Deorali Bazaar, Gangtok, East Sikkim.

We also express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

Daughters: Champa Bardewa-9434203706, Manju Trikhatri -7407181907
Sons: Pratap Trikhatri -9064836436; Lalit Trikhatri (Son)-9775956554
Daughters-in-Law: Man Maya Trikhatri -9775405439; Ashu Trikhatri -9647686222; Mamta Trikhatri -9609115039



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Summit Times office
Church Road, Gangtok
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I will be first one to hang my boots when time comes: Yuvraj on retirement



MUMBAI, MAR 25 (PTI): Yuvraj Singh's cricketering future has been a topic of discussion for some years now but the player said that he would be the first one to bid adieu when he feels that his time is up.

Out of national team's scheme of things for good, Yuvraj has had poor track record in IPL but started on a bright note with a half-century for his latest franchise Mumbai Indians.

"When the time comes, I will be the first one to hang my boots," Yuvraj told the media persons after MI's 37-run defeat against Delhi Capitals in the IPL opener.

However India's

2007 World T20 and 2011 World Cup hero did admit that at times he felt indecisive about carrying on.

"The last two years, have been up and down (for me). And I could not decide on what to do," said the 37-year-old.

Yuvraj said that when he did a self-introspection, he found that he is still enjoying the game just as he did as an U-16 cricketer not thinking about national team selection.

"The main thing for me was why I played the game when I started off. I played the game because I enjoyed playing cricket. When I enjoyed playing cricket, I was not playing for India. I

was playing for U-14s and U-16s. So till the time, I enjoy playing cricket, I am going to play."

The veteran left-hander spoke to Sachin Tendulkar, who could relate with his situation as to how he felt when he was at the business end of his career.

"I have been speaking to Sachin (Tendulkar) as well and he has gone through that time when he was 37-38-39 (and how he felt).

Talking to him makes things easier for me. And I am just playing because I enjoy playing cricket pretty much," he signed off.

FAQ

EVM with VVPAT Unit

Q12. Is it possible to vote more than once by pressing the button again and again?

Ans. No. As soon as a particular button on the Balloting Unit is pressed the vote is recorded for that particular candidate and the machine gets locked. Even if one presses that button further or any other button, no further vote will be recorded. This way the EVMs ensure the principle of "one man, one vote". The next vote is enabled only when the Presiding Officer/Polling Officer in-charge of the Control Unit releases the Ballot by pressing the Ballot Button. This is a distinct advantage over the ballot paper system.

Q13. How can a voter be sure that the EVM is working and his vote has been recorded?

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Trump signs proclamation recognising Israeli control of Golan Heights

LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, MAR 25 (PTI): US President Donald Trump on Monday signed a proclamation recognising Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights and told the visiting Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, that his country has "absolute right" to self defence.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war but its sovereignty over the territory is not recognized by the international community. Trump's move reversed more than a half-century of the US policy over the issue.

"The United States recognizes Israel's absolute right to defend itself. The despicable attack this morning demonstrates a significant security challenges that Israel faces every single day. And today I am taking historic action to promote Israel's ability to defend itself and really to have a very powerful, very strong national security which they're entitled to add," Trump said at a White House signing ceremony.

Trump was referring to the rocket attack



by Hamas, the Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip, on Tel Aviv in the 1967 Mideast war, including two children, were injured.

In the presence of Netanyahu, Trump signed the presidential proclamation recognising Israel's sovereign right over the Golan Heights.

"Today, aggressive action by Iran, and terrorist groups in southern Syria, including Hezbollah, continued to make the Golan Heights a potential launching ground for attacks against Israel. Any possible future peace agreement must account for Israel's need to defend itself from Syria, Iran and other regional threats. We do not want to see another attack like the one suffered this morning, North of Tel Aviv, Trump said.

In view of the attack,

Netanyahu cut short his visit to the US.

Terming the Golan declaration "a long time in the making", Trump said, "It should have taken place many decades ago."

Meanwhile, Netanyahu praised Trump saying he has shown consistently incredible support for Israel's right to self-defence. "When we exercise that self defense, you never flinched. You have always been there, including today" he said.

"Your decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty on the Golan Heights is so historic," Netanyahu told Trump.

"Your recognition is a twofold act of historic justice. Israel won the Golan Heights in a just war of self-defense, and the Jewish people's roots in the Golan go back thousands of years," he added.

MCC IS IN EFFECT

WHAT IS MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT?

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

Visit the website: eci.gov.in

SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Civil Works vs Civic Aspirations

Time to move beyond just packed with construction-related demands

The government and its departments are invariably inundated with memorandums seeking facilities which require contracts and construction works. In most cases, these demands, even when placed by the people, are “contractor-driven” and not necessarily “needs-driven.” Go over any list of demands from anywhere in the State and they are always packed with construction-related, contractor-requiring “urgent requests”; a footpath here, a road there, a building, retaining walls, parking lots, even places of worship etc. While one accepts that infrastructure is something, which, given its scale, requires state-funding, Sikkim should take a pause and wonder sometimes why its aspirations are almost always civil-engineering related.

A part of the answer might be in the staggering number of contractors that Sikkim has. There is a standing quip in Sikkim that if one were to pick up a pebble and throw it, it will hit a contractor. For those who need specific data, try this – a few years ago, the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India worked out that the Roads & Bridges Department alone had 18,591 contractors registered with it! That worked out to one contractor for every 26 citizens in Sikkim!! This is not to demean the profession, but to highlight how big this industry is. Unfortunately, most of them are not industrious enough which explains the litter of incomplete projects and the black hole of cost overruns.

This number more than explains why demand lists are so “contractor-driven” in Sikkim, and the more worrying evidence it brings forth is about the suspected “cartelization” (CAG’s inference which rings uncomfortably true) that has cemented in this sector. It transpires that even though there are such a huge number of people qualified to respond to Notices Inviting Tenders, in 90% of the cases, only the bare minimum number of bids, enough to meet the required by law specifications, are received. When this is viewed against the established trend of how the lowest bids are also almost always higher than the projected cost, speculations arise about connivance.

While it might be okay for those in the business to work through the loopholes and play the system so long as no specific laws are being broken, it is not okay for the people to allow themselves to be so consistently played. They have to be able to see through this misdirection and occasionally also aspire for things less material like quality education through proper faculty in their schools, more meaningful CSR by investors placed around them, better delivery by public servants, more engagements in the social sector and its challenges...

WRITE US:

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

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com



We need to stop conflating Islam with terrorism

NICOLAS PIRSOU
theconversation.com

The Christchurch terrorist attack has shown us that we need to address the threat posed by far-right extremism to our ideals of peaceful social co-operation in a multicultural society. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the shooting, some of the worst far-right commentary has blamed the Christchurch shooting on immigration laws, and Muslim communities themselves.

But these views are based on inaccurate information about Islam and history.

As a New Zealander academic, my work deals with questions related to Islam and multiculturalism. In the past, I have argued both that Wahhabism – the Sunni fundamentalist form of Islam practised in Saudi Arabia – is not compatible with liberal democratic values, unlike some other Islamic schools of thought.

As Muslims in the West come under attack, it is essential to understand and distinguish between these different kinds of Islamic thought and how the West responds to them. While there is a problem at the global level with extreme Sunning militancy, the is this is a minority phenomenon within Islam – and one that is more a threat to Muslims in the Middle East than it is to Western nations.

ISLAM CANNOT BE REDUCED TO A SINGLE IDEA
Right-wing commentators often make statements about Islam and Muslims that are factually incorrect. They demonise Muslims and proclaim that Islam is incompatible with Western democratic values.

But Islam cannot be reduced to a single theological framework or simplistic worldview. Complex theological debates have taken place over the centuries about the relationship between faith and reason, and the political role of Islam. This has led to a religion that contains multiple branches and schools of thought.

Critics of Islam often mistakenly conflate Islam with Wahhabism. Wahhabism is an Islamic school of thought that promotes violence towards both non-Wahhabi Muslims and non-Muslims by taking an uncritical, literalist, approach

to Islamic scriptures.

While its intellectual roots can be traced back to 13th-14th century theologian Ibn Taymiyyah, it only became a genuine political movement in the mid-18th century. This is when the House of Saud entered a religio-political alliance with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. This alliance is still the foundation of the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to this day.

If it was not for the West’s continuous support for the contemporary Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for almost a century, Wahhabism might have remained a marginal historical phenomenon within Islam.

MUSLIMS ARE OFTEN VICTIMS OF WAHHABI EXTREMISM

The next move from these right-wing figures is usually to argue that Wahhabism is the essence of Islam, and that “moderate Muslims” are just not following their own sacred text. They usually proceed by cherry-picking verses from the Koran and historical narrations to prove that Muhammad was a warlord, a paedophile and a terrorist.

This completely ignores the fact that there have been debates for centuries within Islam over the historical context, interpretation, and even accuracy of these cherry-picked parts of the vast corpus of Islamic scriptures.

The rest of the scriptures and Islamic history that promotes compassion, justice, and pluralism are never mentioned. Indeed, the broader Muslim community, in many cases, not only theologically disagree with the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, but have sometimes been victims of Wahhabi extremism themselves.

Besides being intellectually dishonest, this hostile attitude contributes greatly to anti-Muslim sentiment in the West.

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM REINFORCES ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

By conflating Wahhabism and mainstream Islam, the far-right is creating and reinforcing the strength of its own enemy. Alienating and harassing Muslims in the West runs the risk of radicalising some of them. And making the argument that Islam is incompatible with democracy and human

rights suggest that the Wahhabi reading of Islam is in fact the correct one.

This reinforces the clash of civilisation thesis that argues that Western and Islamic worldviews are so fundamentally incompatible that they are destined to perpetual conflict.

Historically, right-wing policy makers in some Western nations have reinforced the economic and military power of Wahhabi ideologues by creating alliances with proponents of the doctrine in places such as Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. Even Israel (usually considered as a bastion of democratic values in the Middle East) is now cosying up to the Wahhabi kingdom because of their mutual fear of Iran.

Let me also highlight that most of the victims of the Wahhabi ideology were and still are Muslims themselves. From the Wahhabi sacking of Karbala in 1802, to the rise of the Taliban, al Qaeda, and Islamic State, countless innocent, mainly Muslim, lives have been lost to Wahhabism in the Middle East.

THE WEST MUST REASSESS ITS NARRATIVE ABOUT ISLAM

It’s natural to want to understand the deeper, root causes, of the Christchurch massacre, and the potential role played by Islamic extremism. But the culprit remains the same: those in the West who promote the idea that Islam and liberal democratic values are incompatible.

They demonise Muslim communities by conflating Islam and the Wahhabi ideology that the West has empowered for many years. Yes, there is a problematic extremist element within the Islamic world, but Western actors, mainly on the right, have aided the Wahhabi ideology in becoming a global phenomenon to the detriment of Muslims themselves.

Instead of blaming Muslim migration and Islamic extremists for the Christchurch massacre, it is time for the West to look into the mirror and reassess their own narratives and actions regarding Islam and the Islamic world.

[the writer is Sessional lecturer in Middle Eastern Politics, Australian Catholic University]

Finding dignity and grace in the aftermath of the Christchurch attack

MOHAMAD ABDALLA
theconversation.com

Following the tragic attack in Christchurch that killed 50 people as they prayed, I felt compelled to visit the injured in hospital, and meet their family and friends.

I also visited others in their homes, alongside an elder and pioneer of the New Zealand Islamic community, the man who helped establish Al Noor Mosque where most of the victims were killed.

Their stories of survival are moving, sometimes remarkable and often deeply sad.

But the common thread in their response to the horrific events of March 15 is profound bravery, deep consideration and thoughtfulness, and a complete lack of desire for vengeance.

At the hospital, I met Ahmad, a middle-aged man from an Afghani background. He said he survived because he was buried under the dead bodies that piled up in the mosque. Although he was shot twice in the back and was lucky to survive, he was not angry or resentful.

When asked about his abiding thoughts now he said: “terrorism must not scare us. Racism must not divide us.”

I then visited Fuad, another middle-aged man originally from Afghan-

istan who also escaped death. He had been struck by a bullet in the back and another just missing the back of his head.

His wounds were visible. He told me, with four children, he was just grateful to be alive. Not resentful or vengeful, he was full of praise for Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and her deep expression of humanity.

Mustafa, a young university student of Turkish heritage, was shot in the legs. One of the bullets exploded in his leg and it is difficult to know the long-term impacts – but he smiles and is cheerful, kind and respectful to the nurses who care for him.

Like the other two, he was not hateful. He said: “We trust in God. Don’t be scared to go to Mosques and schools.”

He was quick to point out terrorism would serve its purpose if it made people afraid – our fear is their victory.

Still in shock from seeing the events at Al Noor mosque unfold, Burhan, a Sudanese man in his 60s, stood in the hospital corridor. That Friday at the mosque, he heard the shooting but was not sure if it was real.

He then saw two men shot dead, one on his right and the other behind him.

He ran outside and hid behind a car but could see the shoes of the terrorist as he continued to fire. He watched as a father ran out with his

three-year-old daughter in his arms calling out “my daughter!”.

Both had been shot multiple times and both remain in critical care.

A young man in his 20s whom I had met when we completed the hajj pilgrimage last year, witnessed the gunman as he shot that young father and child.

Not unscathed, he too was shot in the hip and shoulder and his father only survived by pretending to be dead.

Without anger and strong in his faith he said: “the Prophets of God were tested more severely.”

Down every corridor the message was the same – the survivors urged unity and the strength to resist hatred, racism and vengeance.

At the community centre later that day I met Adnan Ibrahim the father of the youngest of the 50 victims killed at the two mosques. His son, Mucad Ibrahim, was only three years old.

Before he was killed, he had run toward the gunman thinking it was a game.

As Adnan retold the events, everyone became very silent. In deep pain and sorrow, he showed grace and dignity.

“Verily we belong to God and to Him we shall return.”

His most present thoughts were about the sad condition of humanity, that such things could happen.

On my way to the carpark, I met Matiullah, a young man under 20 years old. I greeted him and asked if he lost anyone. He told me his father was killed while standing in prayer at the mosque. I embraced him and was struck by his gentleness and calmness.

The community elder Dr Hanif Quazi took me to see Ambreen Nadeem, who lost both her husband and her 21-year-old son, Talha.

Talha was completing an engineering degree. The entire family were planning to visit Pakistan in June and the tickets were booked.

As I met her with her two remaining sons, 17 and seven years old, I was filled with sadness.

Grief lined her dignified face.

And she said: “I pity the killer because his heart was filled with hate, not love.”

“Pray for us,” she added quietly. I did.

At a time when we could expect that anger, vengeance and resentment could take hold in a community so demolished by violence, I found the exact opposite.

They were compassionate. They were forgiving. They were humane. And this is what we need right now.

[the writer is Founding Director of the Centre for Islamic Thought and Education, University of South Australia]

China pumps-in USD 2.2 billion in Pakistan's dwindling forex reserves

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD/KARACHI, MAR 25 (PTI): China on Monday pumped-in USD 2.2 billion to cash-strapped Pakistan to shore up its close ally's foreign currency reserves and help avert a possible default on external debt payments.

With the generous Chinese assistance, Pakistan has so far received a total of USD 9.1 billion in financial assistance packages from friendly countries during the current fiscal year, The Express Tribune reported.

While China has pumped-in USD 4.1 billion from China, Pakistan has got USD 3 billion from Saudi Arabia and USD 2 billion from United Arab Emirates (UAE), it said. "The State Bank of Pakistan has received RMB 15 billion value equivalent to USD 2.2 billion as proceeds of the loan obtained by the government of Pakistan from China," the central bank tweeted.

Finance Ministry Spokesperson Khaqan Hassan Najeeb said the



funds deposited in the State Bank of Pakistan would strengthen the stability of the country.

The SBP's reserves stood at USD 8.84 billion as on March 15, 2019, according to the central bank's latest weekly report. The latest deposits came from Beijing are expected to boost the SBP's reserves into double digit after a gap of almost one year, the report said.

The comparatively higher imports than exports and debt repay-

ments did not allow the reserves to stay stable, as the government was partially financing such international payments using the reserves.

Apart from the financial help, Riyadh has also enabled a USD 3 billion petroleum oil supply line on deferred payment for Pakistan as well.

Finance Minister Asad Umar has estimated a financing gap of around USD 12 billion for the ongoing fiscal year 2019 and another USD 7-8

billion for the fiscal year 2020, the report said.

The friendly countries have extended the soft loan at an interest rate ranging 2.5-5 per cent to shore up SBP's foreign currency reserves and averting payment default.

Pakistan is also negotiating with the International Monetary Fund for an aid package but talks have been inconclusive, media reports said. Earlier, the UAE had announced a USD 6

billion package for Pakistan in December 2018 including USD 3 billion in cash deposit and a credit line of another USD 3 billion for the supply of petroleum on deferred payment.

However, Pakistan has not been able to secure the USD 3.2 billion oil on deferred payments facility from the UAE.

"The deposits are coming at a very critical time as Islamabad is set to make a large external debt payment next month April, while its reserves remain under pressure,

Arif Habib Limited Head of Research Samiullah Tariq said recently. "Pakistan is scheduled to pay off USD 1 billion for a maturing Eurobond in April. this will be in addition to other external debt payments during the month," he said.

The increased international payment pressure led to depletion of Pakistan's foreign currency reserves to almost five-year low at USD 6.63 billion as on January 18, 2019.

BJP replaces 4 sitting MPs with fresh faces in Assam

GUWAHATI, MAR 25 (PTI): The BJP has dropped four sitting MPs of Assam and replaced them with fresh faces, including two ministers, to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Sitting MPs Bijoya Chakravarty, Ramen Deka and Kamakhya Prasad Tasa were not named in the party's first list of candidates, while Ram Prasad Sarmah's name did not figure in the second list.

The party selected former city mayor Queen Ojha for Guwahati seat in place of former union minister and three-time MP Bijoya Chakravarty, while BJP state general secretary Dilip Saikia was nominated in place of two-time MP and the party's former state president Ramen Deka for Mangaldai constituency.

Power Minister Tapon Kumar Gogoi is contesting in Jorhat in place of sitting MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, while La-

bour, Employment and Tea Tribes Welfare Minister Pallab Lochan Das has been named as the candidate for Tezpur instead of Ram Prasad Sarmah.

Sharma in a Facebook post on March 16 had said, "I have left BJP today. I really feel pained in my heart for those old BJP workers of Assam who are most neglected in the Party by the new intruders in the Party".

Sharma's candidature was at stake since his daughter's arrest in connection with the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) scam where she had earlier been selected as an Assam Police Service officer.

Nineteen Assam government officers, including Sharma's daughter, were arrested in July last year in Guwahati as their handwriting did not match with that in their answer sheets in the APSC examination held in 2016.

Meanwhile, state Congress spokesperson

Apurba Bhattacharya claimed that the BJP dropped its sitting MPs as their performance in the Lok Sabha during the past five years was not up to the mark.

"Many of the BJP parliamentarians failed to utilise their share of funds sanctioned under the Member of Parliament Local Area Development (MP-LAD) Scheme", Bhattacharya alleged.

"We are confident that the Congress will perform well under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi. We will win more seats than the BJP in Assam," he added.

Of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam, seven are held by the BJP, three each by the Congress and the AIUDF, while one by an Independent.

The three-phase Lok Sabha polls in Assam will be held on April 11, 18 and 23, while the results will be announced on May 23 along with the rest of the country.

Two candidates file papers for lone LS seat in Nagaland

KOHIMA, MAR 25 (PTI): Two candidates filed their papers for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland on Monday, the last date for filing of nomination, officials said.

The election to the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland and the byelection to the Aonglenden Assembly constituency will be held on April 11.

Two candidates - Hayithung Tungoe of National People's Party (NPP) and Dr M M Thromwa Konyak of Indian Christian Secular Party (ICSP) submitted their documents on the last day of filing nominations for the Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland, the officials said.

The ruling Peoples Democratic Alliance (PDA) consensus candidate and Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) party nominee Tokheho Yephthomi and Congress candidate K L Chishi had already submitted their documents on March 22.

Chishi is also a former chief minister of the state. Four candidates - Yephthomi, Chishi, Tungoe and Konyak - have filed their nomination papers for the Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland, the officials said. Five candidates have filed their nomination for the bypoll to the Aonglenden Assembly seat, officials said.

The bypoll was necessitated following the demise of sitting NDPP MLA Imtikumzuk in September last year.

Alemjoshi Longkumer (Congress), Toshipokba Longkumer (NPP) and O Tinujungshi Longkumer (NPP), who is also the younger brother of Late Imtikumzuk filed the nominations for the bypoll on Monday, said Deputy Commissioner and District Election officer Rajesh Soundararajan. PDA consensus candidate and NDPP nominee Shringain Longkumer had filed his nomination for the bypoll on March 22.

Congress open to support from all anti-Citizenship Bill groups: Gogoi



GUWAHATI, MAR 25 (PTI): Senior Congress leader Tarun Gogoi Monday said the party will seek support from all organisations and social groups who are opposed to the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

The former Assam chief minister said Meghalaya-based National People's Party was contesting most of the seats in Assam and North East and alleged that it is aimed at helping the BJP.

"We will seek support from all those opposing the Citizenship Bill. We

will welcome the support from AASU, AJYCP, KMSS and others for the interest of Assam and its people," Gogoi said at a press conference here.

The Congress wants that all anti-BJP and anti-Bill forces unite to defeat the present regime at the Centre, he said.

"Because of the Congress party, the Central government could not introduce the bill in Rajya Sabha. We stood by the people of Assam. We will never introduce this bill once we come to government," Gogoi said.

He said BJP president Amit Shah in a rally in

Assam had announced to bring the Citizenship Bill again if it is voted to power after the elections.

Questioning Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma-led NPP's role, Gogoi said: "Conrad's stand is not clear. He was against the bill, but he is still in NEDA despite the BJP saying that the bill will be brought again. That means, Conrad has made a U-turn."

Contesting in almost all the 25 seats in North East even though there is "no base" for NPP will eventually help the BJP by dividing the anti-bill votes, the Con-

gress leader said.

"He (Sangma) could have said that I will support BJP if there is no bill. But he is silent now. It shows that NPP and BJP have a secret unholy alliance," Gogoi said.

On AGP's return to NDA after a hiatus of two months over the bill, the three-time former chief minister claimed that the popularity of the regional party is "decreasing", while all such regional forces across the country are becoming stronger.

"The AGP is an anti-Assam, power hungry and corrupt.

The AGP-BJP alliance means that none of them are confident of winning alone in the state," he added.

Gogoi claimed that the Congress will win at least 10 out of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam.

In 2014, the BJP won seven out of 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam, the Congress and the AIUDF had three MPs each and one member was an Independent. The two BJP allies, BPF and the AGP, had no representation in the Lower House of Parliament.

Mamata trying to provoke constitutional crisis: BJP

NEW DELHI, MAR 25 (PTI): THE BJP Monday alleged Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was trying to provoke a constitutional crisis and accused the West Bengal Police of threatening customs officials who tried to check luggage of two women, including a relative of the TMC chief, at the Kolkata airport.

BJP spokesperson Shahnawaz Hussain told reporters the state government seems to be working to protect a family -- a reference to Mamata Banerjee's MP nephew Abhishek, whose wife's luggage the officials tried to check.

The chief minister should tell the people what was being brought in those suitcases that the Kolkata police had to "terrorise" customs officials to prevent them from checking them, he said.

He also alleged the police threatened the customs officials.

Abhishek, who is a Lok Sabha member, has suggested that his



wife was chosen by customs officials because of her profile and rejected claims of BJP leaders that she was carrying anything in violation of laws.

The BJP has used the issue to corner the state's ruling Trinamool Congress in the run up to the Lok Sabha elections.

Rajya Sabha member Swapan Dasgupta, who is affiliated to the BJP, asked why the Kolkata Police entered an area which falls under the jurisdiction of the customs department.

Mamata Banerjee is deliberately trying to provoke a constitutional crisis, he said.

If Abhishek Banerjee's wife had nothing to hide, then why she and the woman accompanying her resisted their luggage being checked by the customs department, he asked.

The TMC should answer these questions, he said.



AIZAWL, MAR 25 (PTI): The Mizoram BJP unit president John V Hluna Monday said the party would contest the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state but would support the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) nominee in the Aizawl West I Assembly constituency.

Hluna, however, said that there was no electoral alliance or talks with the Mizo National

Front but the BJP decided to support the MNF nominee in the Assembly byelection as the MNF is a constituent of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

BJP nominee Nirupam Chakma and People's Representation for Identity and Status of Mizoram (PRISM) candidate TBC Lalvenchhunga filed nominations for the Lok Sabha seat on Monday.

Ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) nominee C Lalrosanga, Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) and Congress party combine sponsored Independent nominee Lalnghinglova Hmar and two other Independent candidates - Lalhriatrenga Chhange and Lalthlamuani had filed nominations for the Lok Sabha seat last week.

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Damani sets new record at PYC-ATC Snooker Challenge

PUNE, MAR 25 (PTI): National Snooker player Brijesh Damani came up with an astounding break of 77 in the first frame to beat Aakash Padelikar and give his team, Pande Designs winning lead in the 13th edition of PYC-ATC Snooker Challenge. In the Six Red Snooker Event, 75 is the highest break possible and Damani's 77 left everyone spell bound. He won 85(77)-00, 76-17, 52-11. Damani could better 75 because he received free ball during his break. He took the opportunity to successfully set a new record with a 77.

Sri Lanka's tour ends in second whitewash in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, MAR 24 (AFP): A tour that started with an unexpected Test series triumph ended with a second successive limited overs series humiliation for Sri Lanka when South Africa won the third and final Twenty20 international on Sunday.

South Africa made a daunting 198 for two and Sri Lanka were beaten by 45 runs according to the Duckworth/Lewis/Stern method when they were bowled out for 137 as they chased a reduced target of 183 in 17 overs following a rain delay at the Wanderers Stadium. It completed a 3-0 series sweep for South Africa, who also won a one-day series 5-0.

"In home conditions, South Africa are very tough," said Sri Lankan white-ball captain Lasith Malinga, who only joined the tour after Dimuth Karunaratne led the Test side to a 2-0 series win.

Malinga said his side's inability to make early bowling breakthroughs, together with their own poor top-order batting, had been the main reason for their defeats.

"Going forward we realise what we need to do," he said. South Africa's match-winner on Sunday was all-rounder Dwaine Pretorius, who took advantage of a promotion in the batting order with a power-packed innings of 77 not out off 42 balls. He followed up by breaking a rapid Sri Lankan first-wicket partnership of 42 when he trapped Dhananjaya de Silva with his first ball.

Opening batsman Niroshan Dickwella raced to 38 off 22 balls and Isuru Udana played another hard-hitting lower-order innings, hitting four sixes and making 36 before Sri Lanka lost their last four wickets for no runs.

South African captain JP Duminy said Pretorius and opening batsman Reeza Hendricks made possible an all-out assault in the closing overs with their batting in the first ten overs.

Pretorius and Hendricks (66) put on 90 for the second wicket before Duminy joined Pretorius in an unbeaten third-wicket stand of 71 off the last five overs. Duminy made 34 not out off 14 balls.

Vijender injured in training, US pro debut delayed

NEW DELHI, MAR 25 (PTI): Indian boxing star Vijender Singh's much-awaited professional debut in the USA, scheduled for April 12, was Monday postponed after he injured himself during a sparring session in Los Angeles.

The 33-year-old, India's first Olympic and world championships medallist in boxing, was to make his US debut at the Staples Center on the Vasily Lomachenko-Anthony Crolla undercard. It was to be an eight-round contest and his opponent was yet to be decided.

"I got hurt during a sparring session on Friday. My left eye has received two kinds of stitches and doctors have told me they would remove the just the external stitches on coming Friday," Vijender told PTI from his training base.

Vijender is so far unbeaten in his 10-bout pro career and claimed the WBO Asia Pacific super welterweight title during his stint with England. The celebrated Indian turned professional in 2015. "I can't recall the



name of the guy I was sparring with but I got hit by his elbow. It is disappointing to be held back by something like this but I believe rab jo karda ae changa hi karda hai (Whatever God does is always for the best). So, I am sure he has a better plan for me," he added. Asked if the new schedule for his debut US fight has been decided, the Haryana pugilist said, "It

will only be known once my injury heals. It is going to take some time. My trainer (Freddie Roach) was furious with the boy who accidentally hit me. But it's all part of life and I am never the one to sulk." "Because apart from this, I am really enjoying training here. I am really looking forward to make a name for myself here." Vijender, represented in India by IOS Boxing

Promotions, relocated his training base to Los Angeles earlier this month after signing up with the legenday Bob Arum's 'Top Rank Promotions'. He is training at the 'The Wild Card Boxing Club' under Roach, a 2012 International Boxing Hall of Fame (IB-HOF) inductee. In his 32 years as a trainer, Roach is widely regarded as one of the best box-

ing coaches of all time. Roach has been mentor to 36 world champions including the likes of Mike Tyson, eight-division world champion Manny Pacquiao, five-time and four-division world champion Miguel Cotto and multiple world champion Oscar de La Hoya. Roach has also trained former junior welterweight champion Amir Khan.

Sindhu, Srikanth seek to reclaim India Open crowns

AMIT KUMAR DAS NEW DELHI, MAR 25 (PTI): Former champions P V Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth will look to shrug off their erratic form and ensure an Indian sweep at the USD 350,000 India Open, which is shorn of star power this time.

With Saina Nehwal pulling out of the country's blue-riband tournament after failing to recover from acute gastroenteritis, the onus will be on Sindhu and Srikanth to keep the tricolour flying at the business end of the tournament starting Tuesday.

Olympic silver-medallist Sindhu, who claimed the World Tour Finals in December last year, will be the firm favourite to secure the women's title after receiving the top billing following the pullout of Chinese top seed and reigning All England champion Chen Yufei due to medical reasons.

The absence of Japanese players will also help Sindhu's case.

Sindhu had a decent start to the new season with a quarterfinal finish at the Indonesia Masters but a first-round exit at the prestigious All England Championship came as a major jolt.

The Indian ace, who won silver medals at the Commonwealth Games, Asian Games and the World Championship in 2018, will draw inspiration from her performance in the last two editions where she had reached the finals and claimed the title in 2017.

Sindhu will open against compatriot Mugdha Agrey and is expected to face fast-rising Danish Mia Blichfeldt, seeded eighth, in the quarterfinals. A win is likely to pit her against Chinese third seed He Bingjiao.

Youngsters Vrushali Gummadi and Sai Uttejitha Rao Chukka will also be in the fray in women's singles at the World Tour Super 500 event.

The tournament will hold a lot of promise for third seed Srikanth, who has endured a title draught for the last 17 months.

With defending champion and top seed Shi Yuqi pulling out, Srikanth will be at the forefront along with former world champion Viktor Axelsen, who had claimed the title in 2017 after three back-to-back finals.

Srikanth, who clinched as many as four titles in 2017, consistent-

ly reached the quarterfinals in 2018 but couldn't come close to claiming a title with the 2017 French Open triumph being his last win.

The 26-year-old from Guntur, who clinched the title in 2015, will begin his campaign against familiar foe, Hong Kong's Wong Wing Ki Vincent, and might come across fellow Indians Sameer Verma or B Sai Praneeth later as both are in the same half of the draw.

Fifth seed Sameer, after reaching the semifinals at the World Tour Finals, will open against Denmark's Rasmus Gemke, while Praneeth faces a qualifier.

RMV Gurusaidutt too is in the same half and will start against Thailand's Sitthikom Thammasin.

Praneeth, who had clinched the 2017 Singapore Open for his first maiden Super Series title, is coming into the tournament after securing a final spot at the Swiss Open and he will look to extend his good run.

The other half of the men's singles draw will have HS Prannoy, Subhankar Dey, Ajay Jayaram and Parupalli Kashyap.

Prannoy, troubled by a gastro-esophageal reflux disease last season, is coming to the event after competing at the Asia Mixed Team championship and will take on Thailand's eighth seed Kantaphon Wangcharoen.

SaarLorLux Open champion Subhankar, who had stunned Asian Games champion Jonatan Christie of Indonesia on way to a quarterfinal finish at the Swiss Open, will open against fourth seed Indonesian Tommy Sugiarto.

Ajay and Kashyap, two careers marred by injuries, will look to continue their comeback with first-round matches against Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu Wei and Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu respectively.

In doubles, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty withdrew with the former still recovering from a shoulder injury. Sixth seeds Manu Attri and B Sumeeth Reddy will lead the challenge in men's doubles, which also features Arjun MR and Ramchandran Shlok.

Arun George and Sanyam Shukla will also be a pair to look out for after they stunned World No. 14 pair of Liao Min Chun and Ching Heng last week at Hong Kong.

Pro Kabaddi League: 29 players retained



MUMBAI, MAR 25 (PTI): A total of 29 players have been retained by their respective franchisees of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) under the 'Elite Retained Players' category, the organisers announced on Monday.

The number of retained players for the upcoming season, starting July 19, has increased from the previous season's 21.

The non-retained players will go under the hammer at the auctions, to be held on April 8-9.

"The League is cognizant of the significance of squad continuity and long-term association of players with their respective teams towards creating strong hooks and bonds for fans as well as sponsors.

"With this realisation, PKL has consistently strengthened its Player Retention Policy to facilitate and augment squad continuity, to benefit players as well as their teams," said League Commissioner Anupam Goswami.

The Elite Player Retention cap has been increased from a maximum of four to six.

"Franchisees can retain up to six elite players from either category A, B or C, with a maximum of two each from Category A and B," a release said.

The League has also introduced a new category where a franchise can retain a New Young Player, once his two-year contract is completed under the Retained Young Players category.

These retained young players are over and above the existing cap of six "New Young players" that a franchise can have.

"This works in favour of young kabaddi players who have proved their mettle and can continue playing with their respective teams and allows the franchises to build continuity of young talent," added the release. Team Tamil Thalaivas has retained seasoned Ajay Thakur for the second time in a row, along with Manjeet Chhillar.

Experienced players such as Rohit Kumar (Bengaluru Bulls), Fazel Atrachali (U Mumbai), Pardeep Narwal (Patna Pirates), Deepak Hooda (Jaipur Pink Panthers), Joginder Narwal (Dabang Delhi K.C) and Maninder Singh (Bengal Warriors) have also been retained by their respective teams.

Pawan Sehrawat (Bengaluru Bulls), Vikash Khandola (Haryana Steelers), Sachin (Gujarat Fortunegiants), Sandeep Dhull (Jaipur Pink Panthers) have also been retained by their respective teams.

Dhoni's acumen versus Pant's power as CSK face Capital test



NEW DELHI, MAR 25 (PTI): The shrewd tactician in Mahendra Singh Dhoni will be plotting a rampaging Rishabh Pant's downfall when Chennai Super Kings face Delhi Capitals in an Indian Premier League encounter on Tuesday.

It will be a battle where experience will be pitted against youth and astuteness will square off against flamboyance when the King faces his heir apparent on what is expected to be another sluggish Feroz Shah Kotla track.

Pant has once again set the tone with a magnificent 78 off 27 balls in Delhi Capitals' 37-run away win against Mumbai Indians.

CSK, with their experience of winning

important moments, will certainly make Capitals wary.

However, Chennai Super Kings will be a different challenge for the Capitals, who don't have an enviable record against Dhoni's men at their home ground.

The nature of the Kotla track makes CSK favourites with their spin troika of Harbhajan Singh, Ravindra Jadeja and Imran Tahir having already hit the straps in the low-scoring opener against the Royal Challengers Bangalore.

A look at Pant's track record indicates that he has had problems against slow bowlers and Dhoni, who has seen enough of the youngster, will love to exploit the chinks in his armoury. The Kotla pitch,

which gets slower with passage of play, might force Dhoni to start with his pacers and keep Harbhajan and Tahir for the overs when Pant is expected to be in action.

Harbhajan, after his man of the match performance against RCB, will be relishing the challenge of bowling to a left-handed batsman, who loves to play his shots.

Having disposed off Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers in the first match, 'The Turbanator' won't mind showing Pant the dug-out way.

While CSK will expect their batsmen to score more freely at the Kotla, Capitals would want their opening bowlers Trent Boult and Ishant Sharma to be a bit more economical.

England's Denly eyeing WC spot through IPL

KOLKATA, MAR 25 (PTI): England all-rounder Joe Denly is looking at the ongoing Indian Premier League to impress upon the national selectors and guarantee his place in this year's World Cup squad. Denly's form in white ball cricket for Kent in 2018 has brought him on the selectors' radar for a spot in England's World Cup squad. He recorded an average of 70.28 in the Royal London One-Day Cup for Kent, besides scoring 409 runs in 12 innings -- including two fifties and a hundred -- in the Vitality Blast.

With his part-time leg-spin, Denly also scalped 20 wickets at an average of 16.75 and an economy rate of 7.76. Having also played in



the recent T20I series against the West Indies, Denly hopes to get selectors' attention by doing well for Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL.

"I want to play as many games as I can. It's important leading up to the World Cup. Hopefully I get some game time here and

can contribute to some good performances. And then hopefully the England selectors will be watching them," said Denly, who recently made his Test debut for England in the lost series against the West Indies. KKR boast of a star-studded foreign players line-

up and Denly is still waiting in the pipeline for a dream IPL debut. "We have some good players in the franchise and I think it's a great position to be in. Hopefully, I can put my hands up and be in games," he said.

"I am coming here on the back of a busy winter. I have been to the West Indies and Sri Lanka. I am used to these hot conditions. So I feel like I am well acclimatised and ready to go." Hosts England are considered as strong favourites to lift their maiden World Cup title this year, but Denly thinks otherwise and said their sole aim would be to play their best cricket in every game of the mega-event.

Syria force calls for international court to try IS jihadists

AIN ISSA (SYRIA), MAR 25 (AFP): US-backed forces in Syria Monday called for the establishment of an international court in the country to try suspected Islamic State group jihadists.

The announcement came two days after the jihadist group's "caliphate" was declared defeated. "We call on the international community to establish a special international tribunal in northeast Syria to prosecute terrorists," the Syrian Democratic Forces said in a statement.

In this way, "trials can be conducted fairly and in accordance with international law and human rights covenants and charters", it said.

Syria's Kurds have previously warned that



despite the demise of the IS proto-state, the thousands of foreign jihadists they have detained are a time-bomb the world urgently needs to defuse.

According to the SDF, more than 5,000 jihadists -- Syrian and foreign -- have been captured since

January. The Kurdish administration in northeastern Syria has warned it does not have capacity to detain so many people.

But the home countries of suspected IS members are reluctant to take them back, due to potential security risks and the

likely public backlash.

"The Kurdish administration in northeast Syria has appealed to the international community to shoulder its responsibilities towards members of the terrorist organisation detained by Kurdish security forces," read Mon-

day's statement. "But unfortunately there was no response," it said. It called on the international community, particularly countries that have nationals detained, to support the establishment of an international tribunal, calling for legal and logistical cooperation and coordination.

In the past, two international tribunals were created by the international community: the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which tried genocide perpetrators in the African country, and the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which tried those accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in wars that tore apart the Balkans in the 1990s.

Thai junta poised to retain power as nation awaits vote results

BANGKOK, MAR 25 (AFP): Thailand's election results were due Monday, with the junta appearing poised to hold on to power in a vote that saw its main rival diminished but vaulted a new pro-democracy force into the kingdom's politics.

Sunday's poll -- seen as a referendum on the military -- was the first since a 2014 coup, and was held under new rules written by the junta to ease its transformation into a civilian government. Despite that, analysts had not expected the army-linked Phalang Pracharat party to win the popular vote, given mounting anger at junta rule and the enduring popularity of Pheu Thai -- the party of ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

But Thai politics is unpredictable, and as preliminary results trickled in Sunday, Phalang Pracharat -- with coup leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha as its candidate for prime minister -- clung to the lead, racking up more than 7.6 million votes with 93 percent of ballots tallied.

"This will give them... popular legitimacy and more credibility," Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political scientist at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, told AFP.

Phalang Pracharat had nearly half a million more votes than Pheu Thai, despite the track record of Thaksin whose parties have won every vote since 2001, drawing on loyalty from the rural and urban poor.

Prayut's party is on track to cobble together the 126 votes in the lower house it needs for a parliamentary majority, in combination with a 250-seat upper house Senate that is appointed by the junta.

The Bangkok Post, Thailand's main English-language newspaper, splashed "Prayut return 'likely'" across its front page on Monday.

The poll pitted a royalist junta and its allies against the election-winning machine of billionaire-turned-politician Thaksin and featured an unpredictable wave of millions of first-time vot-

ers. As the results came in, dismay rippled out across the pro-democracy camp, with prospects diminishing of an anti-junta coalition squeezing into power.

The Election Commission unexpectedly postponed the release of fuller results until Monday afternoon, including the number of lower house seats won by each party. The Election Commission has said it will finalise the results by May 9.

But questions quickly began to percolate on social media over an election that saw a massive 1.9 million ballots invalidated, setting the stage for disputes.

Turnout was a tepid 64 percent, much lower than forecasts.

Election night was full of surprises, with the new, youth-focused Future Forward party led by telegenic billionaire Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit taking more than five million votes, which could make it Thailand's third-biggest party. And on the eve of the poll, Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn issued a cryptic statement urging people to support "good" leaders against those who create "chaos."

Another royal command in February torpedoed the candidacy of the king's elder sister Princess Ubolratana for prime minister via a party linked to Thaksin.

Thaksin was ousted in a 2006 coup, and has lived in self-exile since 2008. The administration of his sister Yingluck was also the victim of a 2014 power grab by the military. The Shinawatra-aligned Pheu Thai party has vowed to accept the results but said it needed more "clarity" on the outcome before it took a stance.

The army and its allies in the Bangkok elite loathe the Shinawatras, accusing the clan of toxifying Thai politics and society with money, nepotism and graft.

The Shinawatras say they have simply recognised the economic and democratic aspirations of Thailand's majority.

New Zealand PM to make curtailed China trip

WELLINGTON, MAR 25 (AFP): New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced Monday that a long-awaited trip to China will take place next week, but had been shortened in the wake of the Christchurch mosque killings.

Ardern said she would travel to Beijing on Sunday then hold a full day of meetings Monday with the leaders of New Zealand's largest trading partner, including President Xi Jinping, before returning home the next day.

She said she did not want to spend too long away from New Zealand as it continues to mourn

the March 15 shootings at two Christchurch mosques that claimed 50 lives.

"It was originally intended to be a longer visit, including a business delegation, but under the circumstances that did not seem appropriate to be away for longer," she told reporters.

It will be Ardern's first visit to China since she was elected in late 2017 -- an unusually long wait for the leader of a nation that signed a pioneering free-trade deal with Beijing in 2008.

There were fears that Beijing had postponed the trip amid strained relations after New Zea-

land's intelligence agency last November halted plans for Chinese-owned Huawei to participate in a proposed 5G network, citing "significant security risks".

Ardern has repeatedly played down the Huawei spat and did not directly address it on Monday.

"This is an important visit, New Zealand places a high priority on our relationship with China," she said.

"I look forward to our ongoing engagement." She said discussion items would include upgrading the bilateral free trade deal and combatting climate change.

Pak military says no F16 used to shoot down Indian aircraft

BY SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, MAR 25 (PTI): Pakistan's military has rejected India's claim that it used US-made F-16 fighters jets against India in retaliation to its pre-emptive strikes on a JeM terror camp in Balakot, saying that JF-17 Thunder combat aircraft developed jointly with China were used in the operation.

Referring to the aerial dogfight with the Indian Air Force after the February 14 Pulwama terror attack claimed by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Pakistan Army spokesman Major General Asif Ghafoor said the Indian jets violated the Pakistani airspace on February 26, dropping payloads without inflicting any casualties or damage to infrastructure.

A day after Pakistan's attempt to retaliate the Indian Air Force's air strikes at a Jaish-e-Mohammed terror camp in Balakot, the Indian armed forces displayed parts of an AIM-120 AMRAAM (Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile) fired by an F-16, which fell in Indian territory. New Delhi had also underlined that electronic signatures captured by Indian radars had established the use of F-16 for the offensive.

The US State Department announced that it was seeking more infor-



mation from Pakistan on the potential use of American-made F-16 jets against India in violation of the end-user agreement. "The aircraft which engaged those targets and fought them were JF-17. As regard to how to use F-16, in what context [they] were used or not because at that point of time our entire Air Force was airborne now it remains between Pakistan and the US to see how the MoUs regarding the use of F-16 have been adhered to or otherwise," Ghafoor told Russian news agency Sputnik International.

He noted that Islamabad was discussing the use of its JF-17 with the United States citing "friendly relations" with Washington, stressing, however, that the country would use whatever it deemed necessary if it came to "legitimate self-defence."

He said Pakistan only wanted to tell India that it has the capability to hit back. He said Pakistan has the footage of the operation. Ghafoor said that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is a deterrence

tool to prevent wars in the region. "Pakistan holds the position that this capability eliminates the possibility of conventional war. No sane country having this capability would talk about using it," Radio Pakistan quoted Ghafoor as saying in an interview with the Russian News agency.

He said the Pakistan would take steps towards non-proliferation of nuclear arms but only if India does the same.

Ghafoor said Pakistan would welcome every effort, including that of Russia, which can bring peace in the region.

On military cooperation with Russia, Ghafoor said Pakistan is negotiating defence industry cooperation with Moscow in the areas of aviation, air defence systems and anti-tank missiles.

Pakistan's defence ties with Russia have moved past the bitter Cold War hostilities in recent years and the chill in the relations between Pakistan and the US has further pushed the country towards Russia and China.

British PM isolated as Brexit strategy hangs in the balance



LONDON, MAR 25 (AFP): Accused of presiding over an unprecedented national humiliation in her chaotic handling of Brexit, British Prime Minister Theresa May has all but lost control of her party and her government.

The Conservative leader has in the past won praise for her determination and ability to survive what has often felt like one long political crisis since the 2016 referendum vote to leave the European Union.

But her approach to the endgame, refusing to accept MPs' opposition to her divorce deal and agreeing to delay Brexit to try for a third time to get it through, has prompted frustration and anger on all sides.

Ministers from both the pro- and anti-Brexit camps in her cabinet have in recent weeks joined scores of Conservative MPs in defying the government in parliamentary votes.

And this weekend, after yet another bruising Brussels summit for the prime minister, British newspapers were full of moves by her colleagues to oust her.

In an editorial, Conservative-supporting Spectator magazine suggested May was the "worst prime minister in our history".

It condemned her "lack of imagination, inability to lead a team or solve complex problems" -- although it also accused the ruling party itself for failing to find a better leader.

May's former director of communications, Ka-

tie Perrior, wrote in The Times newspaper that the prime minister was "a passenger at the time when the country needed a rally driver".

She backed a suggestion made by some MPs that May offer to quit if parliament backs her divorce deal, allowing someone else to lead the next stage of the EU negotiations.

The top selling The Sun tabloid also embraced this plan, praising May's "remarkable resilience in the face of repeated humiliations, but saying it was 'time to move on'".

"She has lost the backing of much of the country and now her party," the paper said.

May took office after the 2016 referendum, and despite having campaigned to stay in the EU, embraced the cause with the mantra "Brexit means Brexit".

Her promise to leave the EU's institutions and end free movement of workers delighted euro-sceptic MPs, but caused dismay among many pro-Europeans.

The splits in her Conservative party became a serious problem after a disastrous snap election in June 2017, when May lost her parliamentary majority.

She was forced to strike a deal with Northern Ireland's pro-Brexit Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and since then has struggled to keep her party and its allies together.

Naturally reserved and reliant on her husband Philip and a few close aides, May often

says she is just quietly "getting on with the job".

But in the last election, she struggled to engage with voters and was dubbed the "Maybot" after churning out the same answers and speeches over and over again.

May's legacy from her previous role as interior minister has also been called into question in recent months, with growing criticism of her crackdown on irregular migration.

However, May has been written off before.

She has survived the resignations of a string of high-profile Brexit supporters, notably former foreign secretary Boris Johnson, and has endured constant sniping from MPs on the sidelines. She won a leadership challenge within her own party in December, a victory that made her immune from a similar challenge for a year, even if she had to promise to quit before the next scheduled election in 2022. As a result, it is not clear how MPs might depose her now if she refuses to quit.

May's critics are deeply divided, and their inability to unite behind a rival candidate has foiled previous attempted coups.

Her finance minister, Philip Hammond, condemned any talk of replacing May as "self-indulgent", warning that the problem remained what to do about Brexit.

"This is not about the prime minister or any other individual, this is about the future of our country," he said.

Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey couched by hydel projects in Sikkim and the region, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before.

Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

ESSAYS ON TEESTA, HYDEL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SIKKIM

EDITED BY TSHERING EDEN AND PEMA WANGCHUK

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SLIME ATTACK! The Guardians of the Galaxy actor, Chris Pratt reacts as he gets hit with green goop at the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards.

Horror maestro Larry Cohen dies at 77



LOS ANGELES, MAR 25 (PTI): Larry Cohen, best known for directing cult horror films --- "It's Alive", "Gold Told Me To" and "The Stuff"--- has died at the age of 77.

The news of his demise was shared on his official Facebook page.

"The entire #KingCohen team mourns the loss of its star, hero and King, #LarryCohen. His unparalleled talents were surpassed only by his giant heart. The impact he made on television and cinema will be felt forever, and our deepest condolences go out to his family, friends and fans," the post read.

Born on July 15, 1941 in Manhattan's Washington Heights section, Cohen majored in film studies at the City College of New York. He began his career in entertainment industry in the 1950s, working for NBC-TV.

He created the TV series "The Invaders" and "Branded" and also wrote episodes of "The Defenders" and "The Fugitive". He switched to filmmaking in the 1970s, writing and directing "It's Alive" in 1974, which earned seven million and also had two sequels.

Cohen continued to work in films during the 1980s, but focused on screenwriting in the 2000s, writing Colin Farrell's "Phone Booth" in 2002.

"Gremlins" director Joe Dante remembered Cohen on Twitter, calling him a "true original". "Baby Driver" director Edgar Wright paid tribute to the filmmaker and wrote, "Cohen truly was an independent freewheeling movie legend. For so many fun high concept genre romps with ideas bigger than the budgets, for so many truly inspiring cult movies, I thank you Larry.

With each payment you send off, give thanks for the funds that put a roof over your head and give you light throughout the house.

CANCER: Expand your reach, Cancer. The borders are open on Saturday, thanks to a cooperative angle between the moon and no-limits Neptune. Instead of targeting the same crowd, mingle in different circles both online and in real time. If you're on a dating app, try searching a few miles further from base. Seeking work or a new home?

LEO: Does something just feel "off"—or so very "on"? This Saturday, your intuition gets a razor-sharp reboot from the moon and Neptune. Don't ignore that little voice in your head, whether it's talking to you in a whisper or a scream. You owe it to yourself to investigate further. Hey Leo, you might just waltz into the opportunity of a lifetime. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but the Lion can handle the truth.

LIBRA: Having trouble sticking to your routines, Libra? Perhaps they've become too punishing or impractical for your current lifestyle. You don't have to give up on your fitness goals just because you no longer have time for your favorite 90-minute class. Download an app with guided at-home yoga classes or effective 15-minute HIIT workouts. Pin some healthy recipe inspo while you're at it.

VIRGO: Saturday's alignment of the moon and enchanting Neptune blesses you with the gift of gab. Time to seal those deals, Virgo! You'll have people eating out of the palm of your hand. While you want to present everything in the most favorable light, don't get carried away with poetic license. Eventually people will find out if you've embellished the truth, and that can weaken their faith in you.

SCORPIO: Saturday's moon-Neptune formation punches your glamour card. Have fun being fashion-forward, even if you're just adding a dramatic accessory. If you're ready to freshen things up for spring, book the salon appointments and go comb the racks. You'll probably want to wait until Mercury turns direct on March 28 to make any lasting changes, but in the meanwhile, here's an idea: Begin by shopping in your own closet with the aid of a professional stylist!

SAGITTARIUS: Ruby slippers? Check. Saturday could find even the most peripatetic Archer longing for a sense of home. Putting down roots doesn't mean giving up your beloved nomadic ways. As Sagittarius Joan Didion wrote, "You have to pick the places you don't walk away from." A stable base can be a powerful launching pad for your worldly explorations. This weekend, bring a little magic back to your nest, whether you're sprucing up the space with sacred touches or saving potential homes on Zillow!

CAPRICORN: Saturday's planets put a little pep into your step—and your sales pitch. Pause from productivity mode to drum up enthusiasm for your cause. People's motivation may be flagging, but that's nothing one of your spirited talks can't change. Presenting a new idea? Play up the positives FIRST, then you can bullet-point the potential pitfalls!

AQUARIUS: You're cleared for takeoff, Aquarius! Saturday's cosmic concord between the moon and no-limits Neptune will remove a major obstacle from your path. Act swiftly but subtly. It's too soon to draw attention to your agenda; in fact, doing so today could rile up a competitor you didn't even know you had. Careful with your spending as you move toward this goal. It's inevitable that you'll have to shell out some cash, but comparison shopping will help you snag the best possible price. Stop and smell the roses on Sunday—and maybe write a blog post or poem about your experience!

PISCES: You're a powerful presence this Saturday, Pisces—just watch the heads swivel when you walk into the room! Use this influential energy to drum up support for one of your expansion plans. Money could flow in for a pet project, or you could convince your boss to let you work from home a couple days a week. Maybe you're hoping to sway your partner into an adventurous 2019 vacation like trekking the Camino de Santiago or exploring Mayan ruins. Instead of downplaying your desires, shoot for the moon! With expressive Mercury and your celestial guardian Neptune synced up in Pisces Sunday, you'll get some help with verbalizing your desires.

I believe in creating trends, not following them: John Abraham

BY SHUBHA DUBEY

NEW DELHI, MAR 25 (PTI): Films focusing on the golden moments of India's defence history are currently in vogue but John Abraham, whose "RAW" (Romeo Akbar Walter) is set against the backdrop of 1971 war with Pakistan, says following a certain trend to make money is a big no-no for him.

The 46-year-old model-turned-actor has been a part of true-life-inspired defence stories like "Madras Cafe", "Parmanu..." and now "RAW". John says he has always found facts to be more interesting than fiction.

"I feel even if you don't dramatise things at times, facts make the story very entertaining. They are more interesting than fiction," he told PTI in an interview over phone from London. Citing the example of "Vicky Donor" and "Madras Cafe", John said these films set the path for stories such as "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan", "Badhaai Ho" and "Uri: The Surgical Strike".

"I never look at a trend because the minute one looks at the trend and starts following it and it goes out of fashion, they are in trouble. So, I make what I believe in. Everything is cyclical. There is a phase when South Indian remakes are in trend, and sometimes comedies, realistic films or films on the country work well. "As far as I am concerned, the idea is not to be opportunistic with a certain trend, but to do what you believe in. I believe in the country, I believe in the way

the country functions," he added.

"RAW", directed by Robbie Grewal, is based on true incidents and show how India's intelligence agencies, especially RAW, played a crucial part in the conflict.

John, who plays a RAW agent in the film, said it is important to be responsi-

one can turn around in our film and say, 'this didn't happen'. We are confident about our research and the information we are giving in our film."

The actor, however, said the aim is always to move people emotionally with the story, even if it is rooted in reality.



ble when dealing with stories revolving around the armed forces.

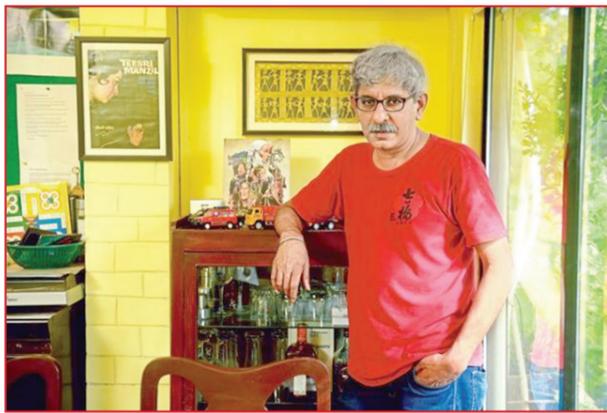
"One needs to be very responsible when you are making a film which is predominantly factual, is on the country and involves the armed forces. And one has to research well.

"In the case of 'RAW', my director's father worked in the military intelligence for four years. So the research and sources we got to go to, to back our information up, is validated. I am sure no

"It is important to make films entertaining and commercially viable. I am not making a film to educate people on 1971 War. I am making a film that speaks about human relationships. I want to move people emotionally in some way or the other and I want to make an edge-of-the-seat thriller," he added.

Produced by Viacom18 Motion Pictures, Dheeraj Wadhawan, Ajay Kapoor, Vanessa Walia, and Gary Grewal, the film releases on April 5.

Will work with Shah Rukh, but haven't pitch him a script: Sriram Raghavan



MUMBAI, MAR 25 (PTI): Filmmaker Sriram Raghavan has quashed reports that he has narrated a script to Shah Rukh Khan but says he told the superstar he will definitely work with him when he has the right script.

There were reports that post "Zero", Shah Rukh was considering doing a film with the "Andhadhun" director. "I have not pitched a script. I just met him (SRK). He had liked 'Andhadhun' and invited me over. We had a chat. I told him if I have something I'll definitely come to him.

"I've got his number now and I can always approach him. I would love to see him in my world of cinema but I need to get the right script," Raghavan told PTI.

The director is currently gearing up to helm a biopic on the life

of Arun Khetarpal, second lieutenant of the Indian army and a posthumous recipient of the Param Vir Chakra.

Tentatively titled "Arun", the biopic will be produced under Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films. Arun attained martyrdom at 21 during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971.

With Ritesh Shah attached as a writer, Raghavan said the project is currently in the scripting stage.

"We will finish it soon. The casting is left, but I prefer to start it once my script is done. The work is going on, and we aim to go on floors in the later part of the year."

Raghavan's "Andhadhun" was touted as the film of the year. The thriller, featuring Ayushmann Khurrana, Tabu, Radhika Apte, chronicled the story of a blind pianist who witnesses a murder.

Malti will stay with me forever: Deepika shares her first look from 'Chhapaak'



MUMBAI, MAR 25 (PTI): Deepika Padukone on Monday unveiled her look from upcoming film "Chhapaak", in which she plays the role of an acid attack survivor, and the actor said the character will remain special for her forever. The 33-year-old actor also announced that the Meghna Gulzar-directed film will release on January 10 next year.

"A character that will stay with me forever...#Malti Shoot begins today! Releasing-10th January, 2020," Deepika posted on her social media accounts alongside the picture of her look from the film.

The movie, which is based on the life of acid attack survivor and activist Laxmi Agarwal, is also Deepika's debut production venture. In 2005, while Laxmi was waiting at a bus stop in Delhi, she was attacked by an assailant, a man twice her age, known to her family and an unlikely suitor whose advances she had declined. The movie also features actor Vikrant Massey.