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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## Car with BJP supporters pelted with stones on poll day in Kalimpong

**SUMMIT REPORT  
KALIMPONG, 18 APR:**

In an otherwise peaceful day of polls in Kalimpong, a car with BJP supporters was vandalized today along with a vehicle carrying journalists of 24 Ghanta news channel below Dambar Chowk while they were returning from Champa-maya booth, Bhalukhop at about 2 pm. BJP supporters have blamed the Binoy faction of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha for the incident.

It is learnt that Thopden Bhutia, the election agent of BJP was doing booth visits when the car he was travelling in was pelted with stones. Four people were inside the car, including Pratap Khati, the AIGL leader.

"It was a conspiracy to kill us, especially me," said Mr Bhutia.

He has filed an FIR accusing the Binoy faction of GJM and named 50 Morcha supporters including Santosh Bhujel, Kunal Pradhan, Bidur Rai and Bhuwan Khanal.

Condemning the attack, Pratap Khati, said that such incidents cannot be tolerated in a democracy.



ed in a democracy.

"We are not going to let those in favour of violence rule the place. We will not let that happen," he said.

On the other hand, the leaders of the Binoy faction of GJM have alleged that Bimal Gurung and BJP supporters are using

fake 'police' and 'press' stickers on their vehicles to visit booths and threaten people. It is learnt, that the police have seized a

vehicle with a fake 'police' sticker on it although it is not clear yet if the vehicle belongs to any party. Besides the two inci-

dents of violence, the polls went on peacefully here.

It may be mentioned that Kalimpong saw a voter turn-out of 71.5% today.

## CEO-Sikkim warns against influencing postal ballot

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 APR:**

The Chief Electoral Officer, in an advisory issued today, has warned against attempts to influence the casting of postal ballots and details the provisions of law which attract imprisonment of up to six months for those found guilty of such violations.

The Advisory comes in the wake of allegations by the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and echoed by the BJP and also separate allegations leveled by the SDF that some police officers were trying to influence their subordinates to cast their postal ballots in favour of parties and candidates supported by them.

All heads of offices and officers in-charge have been directed to ensure that no such coercive measures are allowed.

The advisory also advises all political parties and their supporters to desist from indulging in "objectionable activities" in social media or "otherwise" and informs that the State and District MCMCs have been directed to "keep a close watch on posts made in social media which are likely to disturb peace and take action as per law".

Similar directions have also been passed to the DEOs and enforcement teams.

## Six ATTC students placed in Maruti Suzuki India



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 APR:**

Maruti Suzuki India Ltd has selected six students of ATTC, Bardang, as Junior Engineer Trainees.

The company had conducted a written online examination for the final year students of ATTC, Bardang earlier this month and the viva was conducted today, a

press release informs.

The selected candidates are Sanjeev Adhikari, Anil Kumar, Abishes Karki, Manasvi Bharati, Satyam Gupta

and Om Prakash Thakur.

ATTC family congratulates them and wishes them the very best for a bright and successful future, the release adds.

## Army Vice Chief visits forward areas in Sikkim

**KOLKATA, APR 18 (PTI):** Vice Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Devraj Anbu visited Trishakti Corps and forward areas of Sikkim bordering China during a two-day visit that ended Thursday, a Defence official said.

The Vice Chief was briefed by Lt Gen C P Mohanty, GOC Trishakti Corps, at its headquarters at Sukna in North Bengal on the operational preparedness and

prevailing situation on the border.

Lt Gen Anbu thereafter went to East Sikkim to visit key forward posts, where he interacted with the troops.

He complimented the soldiers for their professionalism, commitment and dedication for maintaining round-the-clock vigil in sensitive border areas and upholding the sovereignty of the nation, the official said.

## Postal ballot exchange scheduled for 22 Apr

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 APR:**

Postal ballots cast at the facilitation centres set up in the districts will be exchanged [to have them slotted to their respective constituencies] at 12 PM in Singtam on 22 April.

The District Election Officer, East, in a notice issued today, has informed the candidates for the Lok Sabha, Sangha and constituencies in East Sikkim that postal ballots cast for these elections in East district

for constituencies in the other three districts and vice versa will be exchanged at the said date and venue.

ADC [Dev], Gangtok, Kishore Pradhan, has been appointed the nodal officer and authorized to carry out the exchange.

Contesting candidates or their election agents can witness the exchange and are also allowed to follow the official vehicles going to and from the respective district headquarters, it is informed.

## Used as 'human shield' last time Srinagar voted to elect MP, Dar now on poll duty

**MI JEHangir**

**UTLIGAM (JK), APR 18 (PTI):** Nearly two years ago, when Srinagar voted in a Lok Sabha bypoll, Farooq Ahmed Dar was used as a 'human shield' to ensure safe passage for army jawans as they came under intense stone-pelting, but now he finds himself posted on election duty. "Farooq Ahmad Dar is working on consolidated terms as sweeper in the Health Department. He has been posted on election duty," said Budgam Chief Medical Officer Nazir Ahmad.

In 2017, a picture of Dar tied to the bonnet of an army jeep splashed across the front pages of newspaper, invoking sharp but divided reactions. Investigations later found he was on

his way to his sister's place for a condolence meet after casting his vote in the bypoll on April 9 2017 when the army picked him up and tied him with ropes, parading him through nearly 28 villages.

"What was my mistake? Going to the polling booth and casting my ballot?" Dar had told PTI in a video interview last year.

At this village, nearly 40 kms from the Srinagar city, where Dar was tied to the army jeep, the incident is still fresh in the minds of the locals.

After the polls opened at the Utligam polling station, only two of the registered 1,016 voters had cast the ballots in the first 100 minutes.

The residents allege the stone-pelt-

ing was in response to the "unprovoked harassment" of the locals by the army officer and the "vandalism" by the troops. "It was the army personnel who went berserk and started beating up people and broke window panes of many houses that day. The youngsters were infuriated and retaliated by pelting them with stones," Nazir Ahmad, a local resident, told PTI.

Ahmad admits the stone-pelting was very intense, which probably forced Major Leetul Gogoi to catch hold of Dar and use him as a human shield. "He is not even from our village. He is from Cheill-Brass village, 15 kilometres from here. That incident has brought only unwanted attention

from all sides to our village. If we vote, it is a problem and if we do not vote, it is a problem," he said.

Mohammad Aslam, another villager, said the police picked up 22 youths from the village over the past couple of days without any charge.

"Most of them are labourers and students. We are least bothered about if any one comes to vote or not. We have formed a committee to ensure there is law and order problem in our village this time because we are concerned about our boys," he said.

There is a sense of deja vu among some residents here.

A young woman died Thursday morning due to

turn to pg02

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## BJP Sikkim submits memorandum to CEO on CSDS survey

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 18 APR:**

Bharatiya Janata Party Sikkim Pradesh submitted a memorandum to the Chief Electoral Officer, Sikkim today on the CSDS survey, a press release informs.

In the memorandum, the state president, DB Chauhan has alleged that the survey violated the model code of conduct. The party has also alleged that SHO Soreng tried to influence the postal ballot of personnel under his command. BJP Sikkim has requested the Election Commission to take action to ensure the sanctity of the Commission.

### Used as 'human shield'..

brain hemorrhage. Preparations were underway for her final rites at the graveyard right next to the polling station.

“You would not have been able to come here had it not been for the death of the woman this morning. The scenes here would have been different,” said a youth, who wished not to be named, indicating that disturbance in the area was planned.

As this PTI reporter travelled to Cheill-Brass, a remote village just at the foot of the mighty mountain, Dar was not at his home.

“He has gone for election duty,” his mother Fazi Begum told PTI.

She said Dar was appointed as a daily wage employee in the state Health Department and has been on election duty since Wednesday.

Asked if the eligible members of her family had cast their votes, Fazi Begum said, “I almost lost my son due to voting two years ago. Do you think we will go to vote again?”

The 65-year-old woman said her son had to seek daily wage employment in the government department as he could not work on shawls anymore.

“His thumb has been damaged after he was tied to the jeep by army people. Now he cannot work on shawls,” she said.

The State Human Rights Commission had awarded Rs 10 lakh compensation to Dar but the state government refused to pay up.

“We have not got any help from the Government. (Then chief minister) Mehbooba Mufti did not honour the ruling of the SHRC,” Fazi Begum said.

She has now pinned hopes on the court where the case is under consideration.

# Phase 2 of LS polls: Moderate to high voter turnout

**NEW DELHI, APR 18 (PTI):** Moderate to high voter turnout was recorded in the 95 constituencies in 11 states and Puducherry that went to polls in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections which were marred by sporadic incidents of violence in West Bengal and Manipur and EVM glitches.

There were also reports of EVM malfunctioning in some seats.

Puducherry saw a high voter turnout of 78 per cent while in Manipur, the polling percentage was nearly 75, sources in the election office said.

Srinagar, which in 2014 witnessed the lowest voter turnout in the country at 25.86 per cent, saw 12.43 per cent polling, with highest 17.1 per cent recorded in Shia-dominated Budgam district till 3 pm.

No untoward incident was reported during polling which was being held amid tight security due to militant threats and a boycott call by sep-



arartists in Kashmir. Udhampur Lok Sabha constituency recorded 58.13 per cent polling.

In Tamil Nadu, where polling is being held in the maximum 38 seats, the voter turnout was 52.02 per cent at 3 PM.

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Satyabrata Sahoo said no reports of booth capturing or any other untoward incident regarding law and order has been received so far.

Karur recorded the highest voter turnout at 56.85 per cent while Chennai Central clocked

the lowest at 45.65 per cent, according to the EC data.

Elections for the 18 assembly segments where bypolls are being held saw a turnout of 55.97 per cent at 3 pm.

Besides Tamil Nadu, polling is being held in 14 seats in Karnataka, 10 in Maharashtra, eight in Uttar Pradesh, five each in Assam, Bihar and Odisha, three each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, two in Jammu and Kashmir and one seat each in Manipur and Puducherry besides 35 assembly con-

stituencies in Odisha.

Polling in Tamil Nadu's Vellore LS seat was cancelled Tuesday by the Election Commission following recovery of cash allegedly from an associate of a DMK leader recently.

The EC also announced postponement of polling in Tripura (East) Lok Sabha seat to the third phase on April 23, saying the prevailing law-and-order situation there is not conducive for holding free and fair polls.

Isolated incidents of

violence, road blockades, bombings and police firing marred polling in the three Lok Sabha constituencies in West Bengal with 65.43 per cent of voter turnout recorded till 3 PM.

Police fired in the air and burst tear gas shells to control a mob, who threw stones at them in Raiganj Lok Sabha constituency in West Bengal. Bombs were also hurled by unknown miscreants in Chopra area, a senior EC official said.

A reporter and a camera person of a local news

channel were allegedly manhandled when they went to cover polling at Kataphulbari in Raiganj constituency.

CPI(M) candidate from Raiganj, Md Salim, claimed his car was attacked by unknown persons when he went to a polling booth at Islampur.

Special Police Observer Vivek Dubey, however, described the voting as “more or less peaceful” with a few isolated incidents reported from places in the three seats.

An average 57.22 per cent polling was recorded till 5 pm in 10 constituencies of Maharashtra.

Around 59.72 per cent polling was recorded till 3 pm in Chhattisgarh's three Lok Sabha seats, all having Naxal presence, amid tight security.

According to police, except for an IED blast triggered by Maoists in Mohla-Manpur assembly segment of Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha constituency, no other untoward inci-

dent was reported in the poll-bound areas.

About 53 per cent voters exercised their franchise till 3 pm in five Odisha Lok Sabha and 35 assembly seats, some of them in Naxal-affected areas.

Karnataka saw a turnout of 61.84 per cent till 5 pm.

In Assam, Karimganj recorded the highest polling of 63.66 per cent till 3 pm followed by Mangaldoi and Autonomous district- both at 62.7 per cent, Silchar with 57.06 and Nowgong with the lowest at 56.78 per cent.

The five seats in Bihar saw an estimated 45.77 per cent voting till 3 pm.

The Election Commission put the overall voter turnout in Uttar Pradesh at 50.39 per cent till 3 pm.

Lok Sabha polls are being held in seven-phases for 543 seats on April 11, April 18, April 23, April 29, May 6, May 12 and May 19, and counting will be on May 23.

## Stray violence in phase 2 voting in WB, 66 pc votes cast 3 pm

**DARJEELING, APR 18 (PTI):** Isolated incidents of violence, road blockades, bombings and police firing marred the second phase of polling at a few place in the three Lok Sabha constituencies in West Bengal with 65.43 per cent of voter turnout till 3PM on Thursday, officials said.

Around 63.14 per cent polling was recorded in Darjeeling, 71.32 per cent in Jalpaiguri (SC) and 61.84 per cent in Raiganj seat.

It is Raiganj which reported the maximum incidents of violence from its Chopra and Islampur areas. Special Police Observer Vivek Dubey,

however, described the voting as “more or less peaceful” with a few isolated incidents reported from places in the three seats.

Voters of Chopra put up a road blockade in protest against absence of central forces at the polling stations, an official said.

Police fired in the air and burst tear gas shells to control a mob, who threw stones at them. Bombs were also hurled by unknown miscreants in Chopra, a senior EC official in the district said.

“We are scared for our lives. We have no confidence in the state police and want imme-



diated deployment of central forces here,” a voter of Hemtabad (SC) assembly segment under the Raiganj Lok Sabha constituency, said.

Later, voters in the area were escorted by security personnel to their respective pollings station to cast their voting rights, the EC official said. A reporter and a

camera person of a local news channel were allegedly manhandled when they went to cover polling at Kataphulbari in the Raiganj constituency. Dubey said, “Small incidents will always occur but there is no big incident.”

Special Observer for West Bengal Ajay V Nayak also echoed Dubey's

views. CPI(M) candidate from Raiganj, Md Salim claimed that his car was attacked by unknown persons when he went to a polling booth at Islampur. “I got to know of rigging in that booth. After I reached the polling station, some people attacked my car.

Though I am unhurt, the vehicle has been damaged. I believe the Trinamool Congress is behind the incident,” Salim alleged.

The EC removed presiding officer of a booth at Kalimpong government junior school where Jan Andolan Party (JAP) president Harka Bahadur Chettri was seen casting

his vote while talking in his mobile phone.

According to rules, mobile phones are not allowed within 100 metre of a polling booth.

“I had no knowledge that mobile phones were not allowed inside and nobody even told me about it. That's why I entered the booth while talking over the phone. Had I known I would have deposited the phone to the security officers before entering,” Chettri said.

The EC has deployed 194 companies of central forces to cover 80 per cent of the over 5,000 booths in the three Lok Sabha seats.

## SMALL POTATOES IN A BIG POT Free Hit for the BJP

**JIWAN RAI**

I am aflame but not yet burnt to ashes/You can therefore set my house on fire again/Do not ask me where I belong/The ground on which I stand is caving in/I belong there/Where one's wellbeing is never enquired about!(Salkiera pani ma kharani bhaeena/ajahai aago laganunu mero gharma/mero thaau nasodhnu/ma pahiro ma ubhieko chhu/ ma tyahen chhu/ jahaan sancho-subhida soddhinna!)

These lines from a song beautifully sung by Uday and Manila Sotang more than portray the peculiar distress of Indian Gorkhas living in Darjeeling in particular and elsewhere in general. Ironically, they lived in a blissful bubble, happily oblivious to their deep-seated misery for far too long. Their plight was analogous to victims of CIPA (Congenital Insensitivity to Pain with Anhidrosis) - a rare medical condition in which the individual is incapable of feeling pain and temperature. The fingers can be burnt or cut and yet neither pain nor heat is felt. Then Subash Ghising came along and convinced the Indian Gorkhas that they had been sinned against and were doomed. It was the brilliant use of pathos in his rhetoric that stirred a love for homeland (Maato Ko Maya) and a longing for identity. Remember, this longing for identity was not a beggarly desire. It was founded on the glorious history of the Gorkha's bravery displayed in the founding of the nation and its ongoing defence. The Ghising narratives spun with

nostalgia (historical authenticity), pathos (an expression of the untold pain of the wronged), oratorical brilliance (messianic hope) and unrelenting thrust (persuasive enough to attract response from the central leadership) founded the bedrock of the movement for Gorkhaland. However, he could not withstand the rigour of Indian politics for long. He was entrapped before he knew it - a predicament which was predictable given his style of 'leadership' - a habit of pulling a lone oar. Ghising never built up teamwork. When he was trapped there was no way out. In a sense, he was locked into his own self-centrism. (Bimal's story is the same). His Gorkhaland movement died the death of a thousand qualifications. The rest is history. Every right thinking person knew that post-Ghising Gorkhaland movements were just flickers from the dying fire that Ghising had once set. Originality was striking by its absence.

Anyone who knows this part of history and the Gorkhas' aspirational context would agree that the contemporary political dispensation in Darjeeling has no soul. Therefore, an evaluation of the significance of this election in Darjeeling is of mere academic interest.

In this Lok Sabha election, initially Darjeeling constituency voters had three options - supporting the BJP, backing a consensus Gorkha candidate for which RB Rai even withdrew his candidature, or aligning with the Trinamul Congress. Needless to say, the people knew that

all three options were nothing more than lame. Lifeless rallies, dimming slogans, aimless speeches said it all. This election has vividly displayed how the Gorkhas are experiencing the weakening of their attachment to their goal. However, politics is never insignificant. The outcome of the election on 23 May will convey some message - whether India and West Bengal are really interested to listen to it or not.

The victory of the Trinamul candidate, Amar Singh Rai will mean that political atrocities are forgettable. The sharp rhetoric exchanged between Kolkata and Darjeeling by the then incumbent leaders was just the venting of momentary frustration. And the words, intent and promises were merely captive to the moment with no lasting meaning and purpose. Even worse, his election will forebode more U-turns in the future. Is that defeat in victory for the Gorkhas? Because it will be a direct admission of the fact that the Gorkhaland aspiration is notional, used as a point for political bargain.

On the other hand, the victory of the BJP candidate, Raju Bista will mean that they take BJP lies very lightly. After the historic promise given by Narendra Modi five years ago, the BJP hasn't uttered a single word to soothe the Gorkhas during their five years of governance, let alone initiate a process to fulfil those empty words. Again, the PM Modi had issued a promise of granting constitutional recognition of the 11 left out Gorkha communities as Scheduled

Tribes. Make no mistake about it - his promise was made in an election campaign mood and its significance is nothing more than that of the desperate promises made by an infatuated fellow to his love interest. A last minute attempt triggered by sheer desperation! It is not deep and genuine. For a seasoned BJP strategist, it is just pie in the sky dangled to tantalize the pushover Gorkhas. The BJP party that is grappling with mega-issues, Gorkhon ka Sapana (“Gorkhas' dream” the term Modi had used in the 2014 election campaign) is small potatoes. So far as the Gorkhas are concerned, the BJP's victory will vindicate those who have been nursing deep wounds in their heart from the time when the Bimal Gurung led GJMM's movement was thwarted by the “rough and tough” approach of Trinamul. Those Gorkhas will say a resounding “khuching!” and the story is over for five years. For now, the Trinamul's no-ball has given the BJP a free hit. Whether they will hit a six or not remains to be seen.

However, the BJP has a larger agenda which is to penetrate Gorkha minds with the idea of Hindutva. This is a grand strategy for long term electoral advantage. What the BJP is doing is to unite Indian Gorkhas spread across the country with a commonly binding ethos of Hindutva. That explains why the BJP brought Raju Bista, a Gorkha from Manipur to Darjeeling. Imagine over 10 million Indian Gorkhas sharing a united political affiliation based on religious commonality. The BJP is in need of far more responsible advice here as this strategy will eventually backfire for at least two simple reasons. One - the Gorkha community embraces a wide range of religious belief systems and clubbing them into one religion may prove hegemonic. Two, the Gorkhas inner angst is due to the denial of a national

identity. Nothing will bind them as strongly as this longing for a national identity. Nothing can be a better springboard to launch the process of the inclusive socio-economic and cultural development of the Gorkhas than the constitutional recognition of their home-state which would be solid ground for their national identity in Indian federalism.

The Gorkhas are inherently disadvantaged with an insignificant demographic (read electoral) strength, weak intellectual tradition and marginalized socio-economic condition. With detrimental social preconditions such as these, the birth of a persuasive leader who can make the nation take their issue seriously enough is a miracle which is very unlikely to happen at least in the foreseeable future. Until that miracle happens, the Gorkha proxy leaders will continue to sing the songs whose master lyricists are in Kolkata and Delhi. The politically active Gorkhas in general will continue to fit themselves in sundry roles prescribed by their beleaguered leaders.

Let me sign off with Manila Sotang's line from the above-mentioned song- Mero chinhari nasodhnu/ma aafaidekhi haraundaichhu (Ask nothing about my identity/I am vanishing from myself into nonexistence).

**“The people knew that all three options-the BJP, TMC or Consensus candidate are nothing more than lame. Lifeless rallies, dimming slogans, aimless speeches said it all. This election has vividly displayed how the Gorkhas are experiencing the weakening of their attachment to their goal. However, politics is never insignificant. The outcome of the election on 23 May will convey some message - whether India and West Bengal are really interested to listen to it or not.”**

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## Jet union seeks govt intervention to avoid KFA-like collapse

**MUMBAI, APR 18 (PTI):** The officers and employees union of the grounded Jet Airways Thursday sought government intervention to avert a Kingfisher-like collapse of the carrier, which could not take off after halting operations temporarily in October 2012.

Alleging some "motives" behind the series of developments at the carrier, which eventually forced it to shutter services temporarily from Wednesday night, Jet Airways Officers & Staff Association president Kiran Pawaskar also demanded a probe, preferably by the national investigation agency CBI.

After flying for over 25 years, Jet Airways was grounded last night when its final flight, a Boeing 737, touched down at the Mumbai airport early Thursday after departing from Amritsar.

The country's oldest private airline flew its maiden flight nearly 26 years ago from the city airport to Ahmedabad as an air taxi operator.

"The situation is very bad for employees. As many as 16,000 permanent employees don't have work today. I told the management that efforts should be made to resume operations as early as possible," Pawaskar, who is also an NCP lawmaker, said asking why the airline did not clear employees dues before suspending services.

Airlines' chief executive Vinay Dube had Wednesday said the airline did not have an "answer" at present on the fate of its employees during the on-going stake sale process.

The airline senior management, pilots and engineers have not been paid since January while the other categories of employees have also not received their March salaries.

"Employees are ready to work. They are experts at what they do because they have been working for 25 years. We are not going to run away. We will remain here," Pawaskar said.

He said the SBI-led consortium, which now the controls the management, can resume operations after requesting the Prime Minister's Office or finance ministry for the required funds.

The consortium had rejected the airline's appeal for Rs 983 crore lifeline, of which Rs 240 alone were to be used to disburse the pending salaries, Pawaskar added.

He also asked why banks have not cleared the promised Rs 1,500 crore loan to the airline even two weeks after chairman Naresh Goyal stepped down from the airline two weeks ago—the main condition of the lenders to lend more money.

He also said none of the jobs are lost so far and that the employees will continue to claim salaries as long as they are with Jet Airways.

# Community fire safety awareness program at PNGSS



## SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 18 APR:** On the occasion of Fire Safety Week 2019, Sikkim Fire & Emergency Services headed by ADGP, Akshay Sachdeva, along with two senior officers to the rank of Addl. Chief Fire Officers, Mani Kumar

Pradhan, Vishal Kr Gurung and Sub Officer, Shamsher Subba & Fire personnel of Gangtok Fire Station organized a community fire safety awareness program at Paljor Namgyal Senior Secondary School, Gangtok.

On Thursday, Prin-

cipal, Teachers and the whole school participated in the events. During the program ADGP, Mr Sachdeva, made the event very interactive by involving the students and teachers in the demonstration. Live demonstration was given in the field

of rescue with focus on fire fighting, First Aid and many more safety tips.

Volunteer students participated actively in all the fire safety measures.

ADGP, Mr Sachdeva along with the fire officials and team members were warmly welcomed

by the PNG family. Welcome address was given by teacher, KK Chettri and concluded with the vote of thanks by Pranil Hang Subba.

The theme of the awareness program was "KNOW SAFETY NO PAIN".

## Governor's message on Good Friday

### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 18 APR:** On the solemn occasion of Good Friday and Easter weekend, the Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad joins in prayers alongside the people of Sikkim, as per a Raj Bhavan communiqué.

In his message the Governor has said, "Good Friday, is observed worldwide by our Christian brethren to pay homage and respect to the great sacrifice made by Jesus Christ to sal-

vage the humankind and its virtues from evil forces. The day commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, his death at Calvary and resurrection. Jesus Christ, through his life and teachings of Holy Bible, has spread the message of truth, love, righteousness, non-violence and compassion among mankind.

May this day once again reaffirm our commitment to work in unison for the common good of mankind".

## EC lets off Union minister Naqvi with warning for 'Modiji ki sena' remark

New Delhi, Apr 18 (PTI): The Election Commission Thursday let off Minority Affairs Minister and BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi with a light rap for his 'Modiji ki sena' remark and "warned" him against using the armed forces for political propaganda. It also asked him to be "careful in the future" with his utterances.

Addressing an election rally in Rampur on April 3, Naqvi had used the phrase 'Modiji ki sena' or Modi's army. State election authorities had issued him a

show cause notice. In his response, the minister had agreed that he had used the phrase.

"The Commission ... hereby warns Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi to desist from using the references to defence forces for political propaganda and to be careful in future," the order read. It reminded the BJP leader of its March 19 instruction asking politicians "to desist from using any reference to defence forces in their political campaign/propaganda".

## In a first, over 150 inmates of mental health centre cast votes

**CHENNAI, APR 18 (PTI):** They lined up patiently to cast their votes in the blazing sun, 156 inmates of a mental health centre here, eager to participate in the electoral process as polling was held in 38 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu Thursday.

The inmates, including 56 women, exercised their franchise in a booth exclusively set up for them at the Institute of Mental Hospital (IMH), Kilpauk, probably the first time such patients are voting in the country.

The area comes under Central Chennai constituency where the main fight is between former Union Minister and DMK leader Dayanidhi Maran, Sam Paul of PMK under the AIADMK-BJP-PMK combine, Kameela Nasser from Makkal Needhi Maiam floated by actor Kamal Haasan.

After casting his vote, a 37-year-old man, battling schizophrenia for the last seven years, said when he stood near the electronic voting machine, he reminisced about the 2001 assembly elections, the last time he voted. "I felt special. I

am very happy to vote," he said. He was all praise for students of a local city college (Loyola College) and Election Commission officials for conducting awareness programmes and mock polls on the hospital premises ahead of elections.

IMH Director P Poor-na Chandrika was elated over the exercise being conducted in the hospital.

"This is the first time in the country that such patients are voting and also for the first time an auxiliary polling booth is being set up inside a mental hospital," she told PTI.

The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences in Bengaluru and Calcutta Mental Hospital also have voters list, but it is not known if they have done something like this, she added.

The exercise to add the inmates' names to the electoral roll was initiated in February this year, the director said, adding patients were chosen based on their decision-mak-

ing capacity.

"The components we considered to screen the patients include knowledge of the election process, their thoughts, language and how relevant conversations they can have," Poorna Chandrika said.

The 156 inmates, certified "fit-to-vote" in their case sheet, have been either cured or are undergoing treatment.

Some are employed inside the hospital while others at the Directorate Of Medical and Rural Health Services in the city, according to hospital officials.

After casting his vote, another inmate expressed interest to vote in the 2021 State assembly polls.

He has a diploma in mechanical engineering and wanted government to offer job opportunities to inmates who are skilled and qualified.

"Much of the time we are confined to our wards. I want to get out and do something useful. Government must give opportunities for us too," an inmate, who was admitted to the hospital four months ago, said.

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## KUTSHE SHEGU

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

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

Contact: 90833-85240, 89673-16501.



## ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

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

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

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

Jit Bahadur Subba (Husband).

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



## KUTSHE SHEGU

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

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

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



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## Reputation is Everything

*Handle the budget tourists with more care*

The past few tourist seasons have been “bumper” for Sikkim, and the latest one, despite the ongoing elections, appears to be building up for a superlative run. Everyone associated with the sector is already keeping long hours and looking at handsome earnings. But it has not all been good. It rarely is. Reports abound about tourists not only being charged usurious amounts for their holidays, but also being stood up by cabbies who landed still higher rates or treated to miserly hospitality by overbooked hotels. In the rare case, the reasons why holidays were spoiled were genuine and unavoidable, stemming from infrastructural limitations and impossible to resolve logistics. Unfortunately, in most of the cases, it is sheer greed that short-changes guests. Travellers realise that arriving in a new place jacked up on endorphins from the experience leaves them vulnerable to the occasional cheating. In fact, these even form part of the whole touristry experience, but when this becomes the dominant memory, the negativity becomes palpable and the word of mouth can prove damaging. No one will blame the destination or its people for flights missed due to landslides or even traffic jams, but if a holiday is spoiled by stakeholders looking only at profit margins, the word will spread.

Harrowing tales of tourists ill-treated and unattended are not rare aberrations any more. Tourists, especially those travelling on a tight budget, are snared in cons with embarrassing regularity and this is not something that the State should take lightly. For all its hopes of roping in the dollar tourists, fact remains that tourism in Sikkim is sustained by those who love Sikkim so much that they scrimp and save to get here. They may be loud, they may drive a hard bargain, but they are the ones who come to Sikkim in the largest numbers and who pay higher fares and sit through a bumpy five-hour ride [one way] to get their half an hour with Tsomgo. They are the backbone of the tourism industry here. They are the bird in the hand for Sikkim Tourism while other prospects are still in the bush.

They need to be handled with greater care. It is all too easy to dismiss reports of their harassment as one meted out by agents in their own backyards and hotels being operated on lease by their ‘own’ people. Fact remains that it is Sikkim’s image that takes a beating. Reputation is everything in this business. The best example can be seen in neighbouring Darjeeling. In the wake of its two Aandolans, tourism had reduced to a trickle. It had just about resuscitated, that Aandolan 3.0 arrived at around this time three years back and derailed some future seasons too. Even until then, although Darjeeling still attracted more tourists than Gangtok, the numbers had fallen and peak season days reduced. Even through the lull, tourists avoided the neighbouring hills if they could because of the reputation it had earned. Sikkim, which is just about finding its feet as far as tourism is considered, cannot afford such blacklisting.

The industry has to remember that for every tourist complaint filed, there are many more that go unreported to the authorities. It is another matter that many vent on social media which, let’s accept it, can do as much for promotion as it can do for ruining carefully cultivated images. Every complaint should thus be taken seriously and some examples set to convince tourists and those in the tourism business that Sikkim is serious about proving itself to be a tourist-friendly destination. Tourism is a thrust sector of the Sikkimese economy and yet it is allowed to blunder about unregulated. There appears to be yawning gap between the industry, its players and its policy makers. Policies are framed with a particular audience in mind while the ground realities on tourist arrivals are different. Associations are granted many privileges and yet internal monitoring of services remains muddled. For a State so particular about local protection, it is ironic how a significant portion of the hospitality industry [especially those catering to the budget tourists] operates on lease. This ambiguity has to be done away with so that regulation of the industry becomes more meaningful. Every time a tourist is duped in Sikkim, it is not the establishment that suffers, it is Sikkim’s reputation that takes a beating. And, as mentioned earlier, reputation is everything in this business.

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# Ayodhya: The history of a 500-year-old land dispute between Hindus and Muslims in India

AMALENDU MISRA  
*theconversation.com*

Much of the Indian city of Ayodhya is dotted with small Hindu temples. But there is a particular site with no temple on it, which draws worldwide attention and remains a flashpoint of Hindu-Muslim religious tension.

For centuries, a mosque, known as the Babri Masjid, stood on this site in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The founder and first emperor of Mogul India, Zahir ud-Din Muhammad Babar had ordered it built nearly 500 years ago. It took two years to erect the structure, which was completed in 1529, the year before his death. While a functioning mosque until the early 1990s, its history has been controversial.

Ayodhya was a fabled mythical city-state. Legend has it that it was the kingdom of Hindu god Ram, who is believed to have been born exactly on the spot where the Babri mosque was built. A legend being a legend, there are no verifiable historical records to substantiate this claim. That, however, never prevented the Hindu majority of Mogul India, ruled by an Islamic minority, from holding on to this view. Archaeological evidence suggests the site had a temple structure prior to the building of the mosque.

During the period of Mogul rule, which lasted between 1526 and 1857, there were murmurs about Ram’s birthplace being usurped by the Moguls for their mosque. When the British took charge of India in 1857, some Hindus protested against the illegality of the site. The colonial British administration was well aware of the contested dynamics of the Ayodhya site and kept it divided – much like Temple Mount in Jerusalem. While it permitted the Muslim worshippers to pray inside the mosque, it nonetheless allowed the Hindus to perform puja, a Hindu form of worship, outside the disputed site.

When India became independent in 1947, many headline Hindus demanded the site be returned to their community. In 1949, two years after the partition of India, Hindu activists entered the mosque building and placed the idols of Ram and his consort Sita in the main prayer hall. The then-prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, demanded that the idols be removed. For a while, the local hardline Hindu priests kept offering daily worship. However, following a lawsuit by Muslim clerics, the courts intervened and the gates to the mosque were locked, leaving the idols inside.

### DESTRUCTION OF THE BABRI MASJID

In the decades that followed, both Hindus and Muslims made several legal and populist attempts to claim ownership of the now out-of-bounds mosque. But it would be another quarter of a century before the issue would once again become the rallying cry for Hindus. In 1984, the Hindu organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad or the World Council of Hindus, initiated a nation-wide campaign to gar-

ner public support for access to the mosque.

This move galvanised Hindu right-wing sentiment in a big way. On December 6 1992, a Hindu mob tore down the mosque with pickaxes and hammers. In the months that followed, a country-wide communal fury led to the killing of more than 2,000 people, most of them Muslim. Some critics argue that the destruction of the Babri mosque by the Hindu radicals was the turning point in Hindu-Muslim relations in contemporary India.

India being a democracy, the matter didn’t end there. The courts intervened and the site was cordoned off. Subsequently, the event provided fuel to the religious nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which made building a new temple dedicat-



ed to Lord Ram an election manifesto issue. Nearly 30 years later, nationalist Hindus continue to push for a new temple to be built on the site. Yet Muslims want to rebuild the mosque in the same spot where it once stood before it was destroyed.

### HEADING TO MEDIATION

There have been several court battles over the site. For the legal bodies involved, it has always been a dispute wrapped in myth and boxed in contentious history. In 2011, appreciating the historical and mythical nature of claims and counter-claims, the top legal adjudicating body in the province, the Allahabad High Court, ruled that the disputed land be divided between Hindus, Muslims and a Hindu religious sect based near the site. The key Hindu and Muslim disputants in the case, however, challenged the verdict and moved their case to India’s Supreme Court, which has been tasked with finding a final resolution to the conflict.

In March 2019, the Supreme Court appointed a three-member panel for mediation – one retired Muslim supreme court judge, a senior advocate and a Hindu spiritual guru with a global following. The method, if somewhat unorthodox, shows awareness of the emotional dynamics surrounding this dispute.

The mediators’ objective is to balance emotions and seek a middle ground solution that can help provide healing. They are expected to suggest who should have ownership over the 2.77 acres of disputed land in Ayodhya before India elects a new federal government in late May 2019.

The militant Hindu hardline party, the Shiv Sena, with a rowdy cadre base, is less convinced about the mediation process. Instead, it proposes that in order to break the impasse, the central government should “start the construction of Ram temple.”

Despite the ongoing mediation, the Ayodhya dispute has not been at the forefront of the campaign for the 2019 elections. Yet, it would be wrong to suggest the nationalist BJP of prime minister

Narendra Modi has abandoned the issue altogether. Ayodhya remains a rallying point for hardline Hindus. In its 2019 “Sankalp Patra”, or election manifesto, the ruling BJP has expressed its resolve to:

“Explore all possibilities surrounding the construction of Ram temple in the disputed site.”

### A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

The destructed Babri mosque site, known as the Ramjahmabhoomi, is a location suffused with emotions. Many Hindus feel they cannot part with

it, as that would imply letting down their god-king Ram. And, being the majority community they feel they have an innate right to have it their way.

To many moderate Muslims, their community’s future security in India is intimately linked to this religiously charged land issue, and there is some sympathy among moderate Muslims in India for an out-of-court settlement in the dispute. But according to Syed Ghayorul Hasan Rizvi, chairman of the National Commission for Minorities: “The Muslim community is ready to give up the Babri mosque claim, but their leaders are not.” To this constituency of hardline Muslim leaders, voluntary withdrawal from a claim of ownership over the disputed site risks being interpreted as the community giving into Hindu majoritarian hegemony.

Expressing frustration about the state of affairs between Hindus and Muslims over the disputed site, the chief justice of the supreme court recently told the petitioners in an associated legal case: “You will not let this country live in peace ... somebody has to always poke.” Come the post-election period, it’s possible there will be more fireworks surrounding this intractable dispute.

[The writer is Senior Lecturer, Department: Politics, Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University]

## Notre-Dame de Paris: From searing emotion to the future rebirth of a World Heritage Site

ANNE GOMBAULT  
*theconversation.com*

On the night of April 15, 2019, in Paris, the emotions were raw.

“Notre Dame is burning, the whole of France is crying, the whole world is crying,” said Archbishop Michel Aupetit of Paris. “It’s terrible, frightening, painful, a tragedy, a nightmare.”

“This place leaves no one untouched. When you enter this cathedral, it inhabits you,” said Anne Hidalgo, the Mayor of Paris, in front of the burning monument.

“We will rebuild,” said the Rector of Notre Dame, “we will rebuild.”

In the light of the day, the extent of the destruction was stunning. The cathedral’s 93-metre spire had collapsed, two-thirds of the roof was destroyed and parts of the interior were grievously damaged. But thanks to the efforts of 500 firefighters, the structure of the cathedral itself was “saved and preserved in its entirety”, according to Jean-Claude Gallet, commander of the Paris Fire Brigade. Two towers with their immense bells still stand and many of the cathedral’s priceless treasures survived.

### IMMENSE EMOTION

Of all the historic monuments on earth, Notre-Dame de Paris is one of the “superstars”: its unique history, exceptional architecture and renowned artefacts attract millions of visitors to Paris. Indeed, the cathedral can be described as an intangible strategic resource with few global equivalents.

Notre-Dame de Paris is first and foremost an exceptional place of Christian and Catholic worship, dating back nearly 1,000 years. It’s a jewel of Gothic art with countless treasures, including radiant stained-glass windows, the crown of thorns and tunic of Saint Louis, and the choir organ. It is collectively classified as a

Unesco World Heritage Site.

As the “eldest daughter of the church” in France, Notre Dame is a national and cultural symbol, and has witnessed a large part of the country’s history: all its kings have stepped inside, and Napoleon crowned himself emperor there. Here the funerals of Charles de Gaulle, Georges Pompidou and François Mitterrand took place...

Millions of people who’ve never been to Paris have breathed the air inside the cathedral by reading Victor Hugo’s famous novel. While commonly known in English as The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, the original title is Notre-Dame de Paris, putting the cathedral front and centre in title and the narrative. Hugo delivered a romantic vision of the cathedral, as well as passage that describes a fire that took place only in readers’ imaginations:

“All eyes were raised to the top of the church. They beheld there an extraordinary sight. On the crest of the highest gallery, higher than the central rose window, there was a great flame rising between the two towers with whirlwinds of sparks, a vast, disordered, and furious flame.”

As a direct consequence of Notre Dame’s history, architecture and art, of its place in culture and literature, the cathedral is the leading monument in Europe, with approximately 14 million visitors in 2018. It is one of France’s “primary assets”, the “cathedral of cathedrals”, a must – the actual word is used in French.

World Heritage Sites arouse emotions and emotions reveal shared values. Such emotions were on the faces of all those gathered in front of Notre Dame, the countless messages from heads of state, the flood of heartfelt sentiments on social networks – Notre Dame’s place in the collective imagination and worldwide influence is undeniable.

Speaking in front of the still-burn-

ing cathedral at 11:30 pm, French president Emmanuel Macron stated:

“Notre-Dame de Paris is our place, it is our history, our literature, our imagination, the place where we have lived all our great moments [...]. It is in so many books and paintings [...] Even for those who have never been there, this is our story.”

Such monuments encourage us to identify with them emotionally. They’re keystones to national identity, and can even further international relations. The agonised reaction to the fire at the cathedral mixes sentimentalism, nostalgia and nationalism in a way that is deeply linked to the past, as related by historian David Lowenthal in his study The Past is a Foreign Country.

### CREATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

Continuing his speech in front of the cathedral, President Macron was unequivocal:

“We have built this cathedral and over the centuries we have made it grow and improved it. So I say to you solemnly this evening: we will rebuild this cathedral, all of us together [...]. We will rebuild Notre Dame.”

Into the evening of April 15 and through the next day, an exceptional effort began to take form: The French president launched a national donation effort, Unesco pledged its support and mayors of towns large and small throughout France stood up as one. The wealthy Arnault and Pinault families have promised to donate a total of 300 million euros to the future restoration, and thousands of individuals have pledged their support.

Before the path to cathedral’s rebirth can be mapped out, we need a serious assessment of how the tragic destruction of such a priceless monument was even possible. It was undergoing renovation at the time of the fire broke out, and this raises

questions about the requirements for work on historic monuments, and also the level of resources allocated. Art historians such as Alexandre Gady and Didier Rykner have stated that the fire could and should have been avoided. They state that even if Notre Dame is “repaired”, we have already in a sense “lost it”.

It is near certain that the cathedral cannot be rebuilt exactly as it was before. The fire started deep within the roof, which was under repair at the time. The oak frame dates from the 13th century, and according to experts, reproducing it would require a forest of 1,300 oak trees. One alternative is to use innovative techniques, as architect Henri Deneux did when he rebuilt the cathedral of Reims after it was nearly destroyed during the First World War.

Monuments in general and religious monuments in particular are fragile. Against all odds, Notre Dame survived periods of immense turbulence in French history, and was touched by neither bombardments nor significant fires, a constant threat prior to the 1752 invention of the lightning rod. Until April 15, it had come to us remarkably preserved, and millions of visitors paid tribute every year. Yet the risk of the unimaginable still remained.

“It’s in our nature to mourn when we see history lost – but it’s also in our nature to rebuild for tomorrow, as strong as we can,” former US president Barack Obama said the night of the fire. Notre-Dame de Paris is the heart of the city and of France, and an inspiration for the world. We are all cathedral builders, in a moment of sacred union in a secular society.

[The writer is Professeur de management, directrice du centre de recherche Industries créatives Culture, Kedge Business School]



# Attack attempt on Cong candidate; ruling IPFT supporter held

**AGARTALA, APR 18 (PTI):** Police arrested a supporter of the ruling IPFT on the charge of trying to attack the convoy of Congress' Lok Sabha candidate Pragya Dev Burman in Khowai district of Tripura on Thursday.

The accused supporter of the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) allegedly tried to throw brickbats at the convoy of the candidate but he was captured by the security guards escorting her car, Deputy Inspector General of Police Arindam Nath said.

The incident took place while Pragya Dev Burman, sister of state Congress president Pradyot Dev Burman, was on her way back from a rally at Tulashikhar, a tribal hamlet in Khowai district, around 65 km from here.

Pragya Dev Burman is the Congress candidate for East Tripura (ST) constituency which will go to polls on April 23.

"We were returning after attending a public meeting at Tulashikhar area. An IPFT supporter tried to hurl a stone at my car. It seems

there were more people with him," Pragya told reporters.

She claimed that the support she is getting from people might have irked the IPFT.

"The IPFT is giving alcohol to its supporters and asking them to attack opposition party workers. I have heard that the accused person also tried to attack other opposition party leaders," the Congress candidate said.

Denying the allegation, IPFT spokesperson Mangal Debbarma said the arrested supporter

was there by co-incidence and neither he nor the party was involved in the attack.

"Very sad to see that my sister Pragya was attacked by paid goons in Tulashikhar. One person was arrested. I have no words to condemn it," the state Congress chief said.

BJP spokesperson Nabendu Bhattacharya denounced the incident saying "any attempt of attack is condemnable".

The Election Commission had on Tuesday announced postponement of polling in the East Tripura seat to the

third phase on April 23 from April 18, saying the prevailing law and order situation there is not conducive for holding free and fair polls.

Tripura has two Lok Sabha seats. Elections for the first phase were held in West Tripura seat on April 11, and the Congress and CPI (M) demanded re-poll in 460 polling stations on the ground of alleged rigging by the ruling BJP.

The BJP-IPFT combine ousted the CPI(M)-led Left Front from power after 25 years in early 2018.

## Over 73% votes cast in Assam in phase two

**GUWAHATI, APR 18 (PTI):** Over 73 per cent of the 6910592 voters were cast in five Assam Lok Sabha constituencies Thursday during the second phase of polling, an election department communique said.

The communique said that 73.32 per cent votes were polled across 8,992 booths in Karimganj(SC), Silchar, Autonomous Districts(ST), Nowgong and Mangaldoi constituencies to decide the fate of 50 candidates.

"This is the initial voting percentage at 5 pm. It will increase further as people are still in the queue at the polling booths," state chief electoral officer Mukesh Chandra Sahu told PTI.

All those who had queued at the booths before 5 pm will be allowed to cast their votes, he said.

Nowgong recorded the highest polling of 75.71 per cent at 5 pm, followed by Mangaldoi and Silchar with 75.07 per cent and 71.79 per cent respectively. In Karimganj the figure was 71.41 per cent and Autonomous District witnessed the lowest voting at 69.51 per cent, the election office said.

Repolling was conducted during the day at polling station number 165 at Dhemaji Town High School (EW), where voting took place in the first phase on August 11, due to non-erasing of the mock poll data and 69.

Sahu said there were reports of malfunctioning of EVMs during the poll from some booths and those machines were been replaced.

"As per the initial reports, around 120 VVPATS were replaced, while 20 units of control and ballot units were changed during the main polling. Some more machines were changed at the time of mock polling. These figures may go up slightly as we have not received the final numbers from the centres yet," the CEO said.

Sahu termed reports of votes going to only one particular party despite the voters pressing different buttons as "fake".

Brisk polling was reported since the beginning at 7 am with women and first time voters queueing up at the booths even before the

exercise began. The 84 model polling stations wore a festive look with balloons and flowers used to decorate them and the voters were welcomed by volunteers wearing traditional dresses. Arrangements for drinking water, baby feeding rooms and resting place for the elderly were made in them.

Many volunteers were seen escorting the elderly and people with disabilities in their wheel chairs. The 137 polling stations in the five constituencies which were under women personnel saw voters queueing up since early morning.

Among the prominent voters were AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal, AIUDF sitting MP Radheyshyam Biswas and Congress sitting MP Sushmita Dev. Former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta did not cast his votes in protest against the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill and the alliance of his party AGP with BJP.

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Bhubaneswar Kalita could not vote as his name was figured in the electoral rolls of Mangaldoi and Gauhati.

The prominent candidates in the fray on Thursday included sitting Congress MPs Sushmita Dev from Silchar and Biren Singh Engti from Autonomous District, sitting AIUDF MP Radheshyam Biswas from Karimganj, Congress Rajya Sabha MP Bhubaneswar Kalita, two BJP MLAs - Rupak Sharma from Nowgong and Rajdeep Roy from Silchar, Assembly deputy speaker Kripanath Malah from Karimganj and former Congress minister Prodyut Bordoloi from Nowgong.

Besides Dev, the two other women candidates in the fray are Nazia Yasmin Mazumdar of National Peoples' Party in Silchar and Swarnalata Chaliha of the SUCI(C) in Mangaldoi. A total of 78.27 per cent of the 76,03,458-strong electorate had voted during the first phase in which election Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Kaliabor, Lakhimpur and Tezpur seats on April 11.

The third and last phase of voting in Assam will take place on April 23 for the Gauhati, Barpeta, Kokrajhar (ST) and Dhubri seats.

## BJP resorted to massive poll rigging on April 11: CPI(M)



**AGARTALA, APR 18 (PTI):** The CPI(M) Thursday alleged that the ruling BJP in the state resorted to "massive rigging" in West Tripura Lok Sabha seat during the first phase of elections on April 11 as it was aware that people were unhappy with the pace of development work in the state.

Denying the charge, the saffron party said it was the CPI(M) that had indulged in unfair practices to remain in power in the state for 25 years.

Addressing a press meet here, CPI(M) state secretary Gautam Das said "development work has come to a standstill" since the BJP came to power.

"The massive rigging in the first phase of polls was the manifestation of the BJP's frustration after realizing that its support base has eroded in the state. They (BJP) have cheated the people of Tripura by not fulfilling the promises made be-

fore last year's assembly polls," he said.

Hailing the decision of the Election Commission to defer polls in East Tripura (ST) constituency, Das said law and order has collapsed in the state.

He sought heavy deployment of central forces and intensified patrolling in the sensitive areas of East Tripura constituency, which is set to go to polls on April 23.

"Just after the conclusion of the voting process in West Tripura on April 11, we made an assessment and found out that polls were rigged in 464 of the total 1,679 booths.

Later, reports suggested that rigging was carried out in 774 booths," he said.

The BJP has let loose "a reign of terror" in Tripura, the senior CPI(M) leader alleged.

"The saffron party has carried out a series of fascist attacks in the state. Seven CPI (M)

workers were murdered and around 1600 injured in these attacks. "They destroyed our offices, set fire to many houses," Das stated.

Rebutting the CPI(M) charges, BJP spokesperson Nabendu Bhattacharya said "rigging was a part of CPI(M)'s culture."

"The BJP did not resort to any kind of unfair practices. Rigging is part of CPI(M)'s culture. During the party's 25-year rule in the state, the Left parties have rigged each and every election.

"We are preparing a document with facts and figures to prove that the Left Front had indulged in rigging during its rule in the state," he added.

Voting in East Tripura constituency was deferred from April 18 to April 23, with the Election Commission asserting that the prevailing law-and-order situation in the state was not conducive for holding free and fair polls.

## 10,500 families of 700 Meghalaya villages affected by cyclone

**SHILLONG, APR 18 (PTI):** Over 10,500 families in 700 odd villages of Meghalaya have been affected after a cyclonic storm ravaged the state in the past three days leaving many of them homeless, officials here said Thursday.

Three persons suffered minor injuries during the storm on Wednesday in West Garo Hills district.

About a 100 school buildings and few community halls were destroyed by the storm that lashed the districts

along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Revenue Minister Kyrmen Shylla reviewed the situation at a high level meeting attended by Chief Secretary PS Thangkhiew on Thursday.

"The total number of households affected by the cyclone is 10,554 in 700 villages," a senior revenue department official said after the meeting.

Relief materials have been distributed to the affected families.

Power supply in parts

of West Garo Hills, South West Khasi Hills and Ri-Bhoi districts has been disrupted and efforts are on to restore it, the official said.

West Khasi Hills, East Jaintia and West Jaintia Hills districts were also affected by the storm.

Shylla directed the deputy commissioners to reach out to all the affected families especially those in far flung areas.

The chief secretary also asked them to submit detailed assessment reports at the earliest, the official said.

## Modi govt will be thrown out of power: Mamata



**MALDA (WB), APR 18 (PTI):** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Thursday said the NRC, which the BJP proposes to implement in the country if it comes to power, will boomerang on the saffron party and become the "NBC - National Bidaay (Farewell) Certificate".

Banerjee, who was addressing a poll rally at Maldaha North parliamentary constituency, reiterated that she will not allow NRC in the state and called upon the people to throw out the Modi government for its 'divisive politics'.

She also hit out at the Congress and the CPI-M saying that they had lost their relevance.

"We will not allow NRC in Bengal and the decision for NRC will boomerang on the BJP and become the NBC or 'National Bidaay (Farewell) Certificate'. The Modi government must be thrown out," Banerjee said. Repeating her allegation that the saf-

ron party is trying to divide the nation on religious lines, the Trinamool Congress supremo said people will give it a befitting reply by voting it out of power.

She also claimed that her party would play the key role in forming the new government at the Centre.

Stating that the Modi government is known for bluffing, Banerjee said "People will not pardon the BJP government any more for depriving them. Modi must face the consequences of bluffing and giving false assurances to the people."

Criticising the Congress and the Left parties for their role in the current political situation in the country, she said "Both the parties have lost their relevance."

"While the Congress has been sold out, the Left parties have lost their relevance ... It is the RSS which is now campaigning for the Congress and even distributing money to bribe the

voters." Banerjee assured the people of the area of more development and called upon the people to caste their votes in favour of Mausam Benazir Noor, a Congress MP who had joined the TMC.

Speaking at Pakuahat in the same district later, Banerjee alleged that the Congress was hand-in-glove with the RSS, which was campaigning for it and even distributing money to bribe the voters.

Banerjee alleged that RSS is helping Congress in Jangipur and Baharampur Lok Sabha seats in Murshidabad district. While Abhijit Mukherjee, son of former president Pranab Mukherjee, is contesting in Jangipur, former WBPC president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is in the fray in Baharampur.

"Defeat the BJP, Congress and Left combine and elect our (TMC) candidates, who will help to form the new government at the Centre," Banerjee added.

## Violence disrupts poll process in two Manipur booths

**IMPHAL, APR 18 (PTI):** Voting was stalled in two polling booths of Inner Manipur Lok Sabha constituency on Thursday after violence broke out over alleged proxy voting and dispute among the election agents, an official said.

According to sources in the election office, an estimated 75.69 per cent of over nine lakh electorate exercised their franchise till 4 pm in the second phase of the general election.

In one of the booths at Kiyamgei Muslim Makha locality in Imphal East district, unidentified men stormed into a poll-

ing station around 11.30 am and broke EVMs and VVPATS, claiming that "proxy voting" was being carried out in the station, Chief Electoral Officer PK Singh told PTI.

It was only after the security personnel opened fire in the air, the mob dispersed, Singh said.

In another booth in the same area, a scuffle broke out between the polling agents of opposing political parties around 3pm, derailing the voting process.

The reason behind the skirmish between the agents was not clear as yet, the CEO said. Sources

in the election office said that re-polling was likely in the two booths of East Imphal district.

Altogether 9,28,626 voters were expected to exercise their franchise at 1,300 polling stations of Inner Manipur to decide the fate of 12 candidates. Manipur Governor Najma Heptulla, who cast her vote early in the day at T G Higher Secondary School in Imphal West district, urged voters to exercise their democratic right judiciously.

The state has two parliamentary constituencies, one of which went to polls in the first phase on April 11.



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# Loyalty matters most, says Kohli recalling times when Dhoni backed him

**NEW DELHI, APR 18 (PTI):** Virat Kohli hasn't forgotten the times when Mahendra Singh Dhoni firmly stood by him as a captain and now that the roles have reversed, he is not going to back down from supporting the veteran despite the "unfortunate criticism" that the former skipper is coping.

The Indian captain also expressed his happiness with the composition of the 15-strong Indian squad for the World Cup in an interview to 'India Today'.

"It's unfortunate to see so many people going after him. For me, loyalty matters the most," Kohli's words showed his reverence for his first international captain.

"When I walked into the team he had the option of trying someone else after few games, although I grabbed my chances but for me to get that kind of backing, it was very crucial for me.

"Also, he gave me an opportunity to bat at No 3 because not many youngsters get to play at No 3," the skipper recalled his formative days in international cricket.

When an astute brain meets a superlative performer, there is bound to be lot of mutual admiration and the



Kohli-Dhoni relationship is no different.

"It's just about the field placements and bowling changes and we say you know the angles, you know the pace of the pitch and that's why there is so much of trust and respect between the two of us," he said.

As he has said earlier, Kohli again reiterated that there are no peers to Dhoni when it comes to reading match situations.

"He is one person, who literally knows the game inside out. He understands the game from 'Ball 1 to Ball 300 (50 overs) on the field. I

won't say its a luxury to have him but I am fortunate to have a mind like that from behind the stumps," Kohli said.

It is Dhoni's presence behind stumps that has ensured that Kohli with one of the strongest arms can afford to field in the deep.

"At the end of the day, I want to be involved in strategy with the team management with Mahi bhai and Rohit.

"In the death overs, I know that I have to be on the outfield to try and make something work for the team because that's my nature that I

want to do something for the team rather than just be there. "After 30-35 overs, he knows that I will be in the outfield and its on the auto mode," he explained.

While he didn't elaborate about his take on the debate on the World Cup squad, he didn't forget to give it his stamp of approval.

"We are very happy with 15 that we have. This is the most balanced side we could have thought of because everyone is in a good space," the skipper said without getting into the debate about the much

and players responded in a very positive manner right from the management, myself, Mahi bhai being the senior most guy and everyone. There is one goal and everyone is in sync with that goal."

While the World Cup now occupies his mind space, he said that he doesn't need to switch buttons as the intensity always remains the same.

"In 2011, I was not involved in a lot of things, was not involved in a lot of meetings, the pressures that come along. At this point in time, it's going to be different. Even in 2015, I wasn't involved to an extent where I had to be part of everything that is going on, said Kohli.

"To understand the magnitude of a tournament like this from a captain's point of view is a different ball game. I won't say that I will look to do something different just because its a World Cup. Fortunately, I am in the mindset, I don't have to pick myself up for a series, because I always have the same intensity and drive to take the team over the line.

"Even though players are playing the IPL but the anticipation is for the World Cup and you can see that energy the way everyone is playing."

## Dhoni 'might' play the next game, says Raina



**HYDERABAD, APR 18 (PTI):** Stand-in-skipper Suresh Raina said captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni "might" play the next game after missing Chennai Super Kings's six-wicket defeat by Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL here.

Dhoni was ruled out of the match with back spasm, paving the way for Raina to shoulder captaincy responsibility.

"His back was stiff. He is feeling better and might play the next game," Raina said at the post-match presentation ceremony.

For a team that has won seven of their nine matches this season, the defeat was a wake-up call, Raina said.

"I think it is a very good wake up call."

CSK were restricted at 132 for five after they opted to bat, and then, SRH chased down the target with 19 balls to spare.

"I think we didn't put a decent score on the board and kept losing wickets. We lost too many wickets in between and that's why it cost us the game.

"We should have looked for partnerships and should have rotated our strike better. Hence, we were 30

runs short," Raina said.

Man of the Match David Warner (50) thanked the crowd for support.

"Great support, even though there is plenty of yellow, they are a fantastic crowd. Sometimes we have been a bit hesitant, against Kings (XI Punjab) the wicket was quite tough. Me and Jonny (Bairstow) have been mixing and matching quite well.

"I have two beautiful children, one more on the way, and a beautiful wife and I can't thank them enough. I have fantastic support from over the world and it has been overwhelming here in India," Warner said.

Sunrisers Hyderabad captain Kane Williamson applauded the team for its efforts.

"Very good performance all around. CSK started well with the bat but the way we performed in the back half was outstanding and the chase was superb. I don't think the wicket changed too much," he said.

"Rashid (Khan, who claimed 2/17) has been an outstanding performer for a number of years. He was brilliant today. Warner was brilliant. A match-winning knock with Jonny (61 not out)," Williamson added.

## Tokyo 2020 launches ticketing process



**APR 18 (AFP):** Tokyo 2020 organisers on Thursday launched a portal detailing prices and timings for Olympic events, as they prepare to throw open ticket applications via lottery for Japanese residents.

The new website lists prices for the record 339 events in 33 sports -- ranging from the cheapest general tickets at 2,500 yen (22) to an eye-watering 300,000 yen for the best seats at the opening ceremony.

Those lucky enough to score the best seats for the showcase men's 100-metre final will pay 130,000 yen.

But half of all tickets will be priced at 8,000 yen or less, organisers stressed and special tickets priced at 2,020 yen are available for families resident in Japan with children, senior citizens or people with impairments.

However, the website is currently for planning purposes only as the ticket lottery for Japanese residents runs

from May 9 to 28.

Overseas fans will be able to snap up tickets from June 15 via special "Authorised Ticket Resellers" in each country.

They can however access the website in English from Thursday at <https://ticket.tokyo2020.org/?culture=en-us>.

Organisers were not able to give a precise number of tickets available as various stadium configurations are still being finalised with just less than 500 days to go until the opening ceremony.

But they said it would be roughly the same as the 7.8 million tickets they estimated when bidding for the right to host the Games.

Of these tickets, an estimated 70-80 per cent would be allotted to Japanese residents with the rest going to overseas fans.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics will run from July 24 to August 9. Tickets for the Paralympics will become available this summer.

## Pakistan leave out Aamir from World Cup squad

**KARACHI, APR 18 (PTI):** Pakistan Thursday left out experienced but out-of-form pacer Muhammad Aamir from its 15-member World Cup squad while including batsman Abid Ali in the line-up.

Chief Selector Inzamam-ul-Haq, announcing the World Cup squad and two reserve players, said the 11 from the 2017 Champions Trophy had been retained in the selection process.

"We are hopeful and confident that Pakistan will give a good account of itself in the World Cup," Inzamam said.

The selectors, while not showing faith with left-arm Aamir who has taken just five wickets in his last 14 ODIs



since the Champions Trophy two years back, reposed confidence in seniors Shoaib Malik and Muhammad Hafeez.

Inzamam said that Hafeez's final inclusion in World Cup was subject to him being 100 per cent fit before the tournament as he is still recovering from a thumb injury.

"Doctors have ad-

vised him not to bowl or bat now but when his rehab is over he will be back in action in two weeks time," he added.

Inzamam said hard-hitting batsman Asif Ali and Aamir were in the reserves for the one-day series against England and the side matches before the World Cup.

Pakistan World Cup

squad: Sarfaraz Ahmed (Capt), Fakhar Zaman, Imam-ul-Haq, Abid Ali, Babar Azam, Shoaib Malik, Haris Sohail, Muhammad Hafeez, Shadab Khan, Imad Wasim, Hasan Ali, Faheem Ashraf, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Junaid Khan, Muhammad Hasnain.

Reserves: Asif Ali and Muhammad Aamir.

## RCB will seek to stay afloat when they clash with KKR

**TAPAN MOHANTA**

**KOLKATA, APR 18 (PTI):** Their house in complete disorder after seven defeats from eight outings, the Virat Kohli-led Royal Challengers Bangalore will be desperate for a win to stay afloat in the IPL when they take on Kolkata Knight Riders here on Friday.

It would be a great opportunity for the Bangalore outfit to post a win against an opponent who are low on confidence having slipped from second to sixth position in the points table after suffering three straight defeats.

In fact, to make matters worse, Kolkata's dangerman Andre Russell has suffered an injury scare after being hit on his left shoulder by a bouncer during their practice.

Russell was already suffering from niggles ahead of their last match against Chennai Super Kings and had failed to fire for the first time, exposing KKR's over-reliance on the



West Indies big hitter.

Russell had left the Royal Challengers in shambles in their first leg exchange, smashing seven sixes en route to his 13-ball 48 not out as KKR had chased down a huge 206.

It remains to be seen if the Jamaican recovers in time. His

absence would be a big void for KKR, who are looking to return to winning ways and reignite their campaign.

To make the playoffs, KKR need to win at least four of their remaining six matches, of which three are at home.

However, even KKR will

fancy their chances and seek to get back on track against a lowly RCB facing a do-or-die situation. RCB's star duo of Kohli and AB de Villiers have been in sublime form but the team has not clicked as a whole with their pace bowling being a major letdown. While youngster

Navdeep Saini has been impressive, senior pro Umesh Yadav has turned out to be a big flop, bagging two wickets at an expensive economy of 9.26.

With South African veteran pacer Dale Steyn ready to take charge as an injury replacement for Nathan Coulter-Nile midway into the IPL, the pace department will hope to get their sting back.

Kohli and de Villiers will look to fire in unison against a team whose bowling has failed to click collectively.

The KKR pace department has looked mediocre, while their famed spinners have struggled to get wickets on the batting-friendly Eden conditions here.

Meanwhile, all eyes will also be on KKR skipper Dinesh Karthik who has grabbed a surprise World Cup berth ahead of young wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant. Karthik has only one half-century and an average of 18.50 so far this season.

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# 29 German tourists killed in Portuguese bus crash



**LISBON, APR 18 (AFP):** Twenty-nine German tourists were killed on Wednesday when a bus crashed on the Portuguese island of Madeira.

Televised images showed the bus had spun off the road, apparently having flipped several times, before crashing into a house at the bottom of a slope.

"Horrible news comes to us from Madeira," a German government spokesman tweeted after the deadly crash.

"Our deep sorrow goes to all those who lost

their lives in the bus accident, our thoughts are with the injured," he added.

Filipe Sousa, mayor of Santa Cruz where the accident happened, said 17 women and 11 men were killed in the crash, with another 21 injured.

A doctor told reporters another woman died of her injuries in hospital.

"I express the sorrow and solidarity of all the Portuguese people in this tragic moment, and especially for the families of the victims who I have been told were all Ger-

man," President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa told Portuguese television.

He said he would travel to Madeira overnight. Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa added on Twitter that he had contacted German Chancellor Angela Merkel to convey his condolences.

"It is with profound sadness that I heard of the accident on Madeira," he wrote on the government's Twitter page.

"I took the occasion to convey my sadness to Chancellor Angela

Merkel at this difficult time," he added.

The regional protection service in Madeira confirmed 28 deaths in the accident that happened at 6:30 pm (1730 GMT), while hospital authorities said another woman later died of her injuries. The bus had been carrying around 50 passengers.

Regional government Vice President Pedro Calado said it was "premature" to speculate on the cause of the crash, adding that the vehicle was five years old and that

"everything had apparently been going well".

Judicial authorities had opened an investigation into the circumstances of the accident, the Madeira public prosecutor's office told the Lusa news agency.

Medical teams were being sent from Lisbon to help local staff carry out post-mortems on the dead. Often called the Pearl of the Atlantic, Madeira hosts thousands of tourists each year, attracted to its subtropical climate and rugged volcanic terrain.

## India drops down on World Press Freedom Index

**BY ADITI KHANNA**

**LONDON, APR 18 (PTI):** India has dropped two places on a global press freedom index to be ranked 140th out of 180 countries in the annual Reporters Without Borders analysis released on Thursday, with the lead up to the ongoing Indian general elections flagged as a particularly dangerous time for journalists.

The World Press Freedom Index 2019, topped by Norway, finds an increased sense of hostility towards journalists across the world, with violent attacks in India leading to at least six Indian journalists being killed in the line of their work last year.

"Violence against journalists including police violence, attacks by Maoist fighters and reprisals by criminal groups or corrupt politicians is one of the most striking characteristics of the current state of press freedom in India. At least six Indian journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2018. A number of doubts surround a seventh case, the index noted.

These murders highlighted the many dangers that Indian journalists face, especially those working for non-En-

glish-language media outlets in rural areas, it said.

Attacks against journalists by supporters of ruling BJP increased in the run-up to general elections in the spring of 2019, the analysis alleged.

Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), or Reporters Without Borders, is a non-profit organisation that works to document and combat attacks on journalists around the world. In its 2019 index, RSF finds that hatred of journalists has degenerated into violence, contributing to an increase in fear around the world.

In reference to India, it found an alarming rate of coordinated hate campaigns waged on social networks against journalists who dare to speak or write about subjects that annoy Hindutva.

"The campaigns are particularly virulent when the targets are women. The emergence of a #MeToo movement in the media in 2018 has lifted the veil on many cases of harassment and sexual assault to which women reporters have been subjected, it noted.

"Finally, coverage of regions that the authorities regard as sensitive,

such as Kashmir, continues to be very difficult. Foreign reporters are barred from Kashmir and the Internet is often disconnected there," it added.

South Asia in general features poorly on the index, with Pakistan dropping three places to 142, and Bangladesh dropping four places to 150.

The number of countries regarded as safe, where journalists can work in complete security, continues to decline, while authoritarian regimes continue to tighten their grip on the media, RSF concludes.

Norway is ranked first in the 2019 Index for the third year running while Finland (up two places) has taken second place from the Netherlands (down one at 4th). An increase in cyber-harassment caused Sweden (third) to lose one place. In Africa, the rankings of Ethiopia (up 40 at 110th) and Gambia (up 30 at 92nd) have significantly improved from last year's Index.

At the bottom of the Index, both Vietnam (176th) and China (177th) have fallen one place and Turkmenistan (down two at 180th) is now last, replacing North Korea (up one at 179th).

## Ivanka Trump says she passed on World Bank job

**ABIDJIAN (IVORY COAST), APR 18 (AP):** White House senior adviser Ivanka Trump says her father asked her if she was interested in the job of World Bank chief but she passed on it.

In an Associated Press interview, President Donald Trump's daughter said Wednesday she was happy with her current role in the administration. She was

travelling in Africa to promote a global women's initiative.

Ivanka Trump said her father raised the job as "a question" and she told him she was "happy with the work" she's doing. The president recently told The Atlantic: "I even thought of Ivanka for the World Bank. She would've been great at that because she's very good with numbers."

Ivanka Trump worked on the selection process for the new head of the 189-nation World Bank, David Malpass.

She said he'll do an "incredible job."

Asked if her father had approached her about other top jobs, Ivanka Trump said she'd "keep that between" them. She said she doesn't see a run for office in her future.

## Nepal launches its first satellite from US

**BY SHIRISH B PRADHAN KATHMANDU, APR 18 (PTI):** Nepal Thursday successfully launched its first satellite into space from the US to gather detailed geographical information of the Himalayan nation, evoking unbridled excitement among the people and scientists.

Developed by the Nepalese scientists, NepaliSat-1 satellite was launched at 2:31 am (Nepal time) from Virginia in United States, according to Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST). Two Nepali scientists, Aabhas Maskey and Hariram Shrestha who are currently studying at Japanese Kyushu Institute of Technology, developed the satellite under the BIRDS project of their institute.

Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli congratulated all the scientists and institutions involved in the development of the satellite. He said it was a matter of prestige for the country to have its own satellite. "Though a humble beginning, with the launching of NepaliSat-1 Nepal has entered the Space-Era. I wish to congratulate all those scientists and institutions that were involved right from the development to its launching thereby enhancing the prestige of our country," he said in a tweet.

Spokesperson for NAST Suresh Kumar Dhungel said they invested in the satellite in a bid to open new paths for space engineering in the country.

## Americans await bombshell Mueller report

**WASHINGTON, APR 18 (AFP):** Nearly four weeks after President Donald Trump declared himself completely exonerated, Americans will on Thursday get a chance to see the evidence themselves with the release of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's final report on Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

Widespread doubt and suspicion has remained in the air despite Attorney General Bill Barr's March 24 statement that the Mueller investigation found no criminal collusion by Trump's 2016 campaign with Russia, and insufficient evidence of obstruction of justice.

The details of the 400-page report - which could come out with heavy redactions - could determine whether Democrats in Congress pursue impeachment of the president.

They could also have an impact on Trump's chances for re-election in 2020.

Barr and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who oversaw the 22-month Mueller investigation, plan a press conference at 9:30 AM (local time) Thursday morning to discuss the report.

But the report will not be given to Congress until between 11:00 AM and 12:00 PM (local time), House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler told a news conference, saying Barr "appears to be waging a media campaign on behalf of President Trump."

Since Barr's brief summary of the findings on March 24, Trump has alternately heralded a victory over his opponents and blasted the investigation as illegitimate and an "attempted coup" against his government.

The report was a "complete and total exoneration," Trump declared after Barr gave his summary.

Then on Monday, he lashed out at the investigation, which since the beginning he has labelled an illegal "witch hunt." "The Mueller Report, which was written by 18 Angry Democrats who also happen to be Trump Haters (and Clinton Supporters), should have focused on the people who SPIED on my



2016 Campaign, and others who fabricated the whole Russia Hoax."

"Since there was no Collusion, why was there an Investigation in the first place! Answer - Dirty Cops, Dems and Crooked Hillary!"

The White House appeared poised Thursday to fight back.

According to news reports, Trump's team has spoken with Justice Department officials in recent days on what the report says in order to prepare their response.

Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani told reporters that he is preparing a detailed "counter report" focusing on the obstruction allegations.

And Trump told local Washington radio station WMAL that he might hold a press conference as well.

"This should never happen to a president or to this country again, what took place," he said of the investigation.

"You'll see a lot of very strong things come out tomorrow. Attorney General Barr is going to be giving a press conference. Maybe I'll do one after that; we'll see," he said.

The report will focus on the primary target of the investigation: the extent of Russia's efforts to meddle in the 2016 presidential election and tilt it in Trump's favour.

Much of that story has already been told by Mueller in court filings, in which he charged 26 Russians and three Russian companies with conspiracy. The report should

also summarise the already-known charges brought against six former Trump aides, and explain why none of them, or anyone else, was charged in the conspiracy that involved Russians.

And it will likely have information on the most potent allegations against Trump on obstruction of justice.

Despite Trump's claim that he was exonerated by Mueller, Barr's summary revealed that, on the obstruction of justice allegation, Mueller in fact declined to reach a conclusion on the evidence.

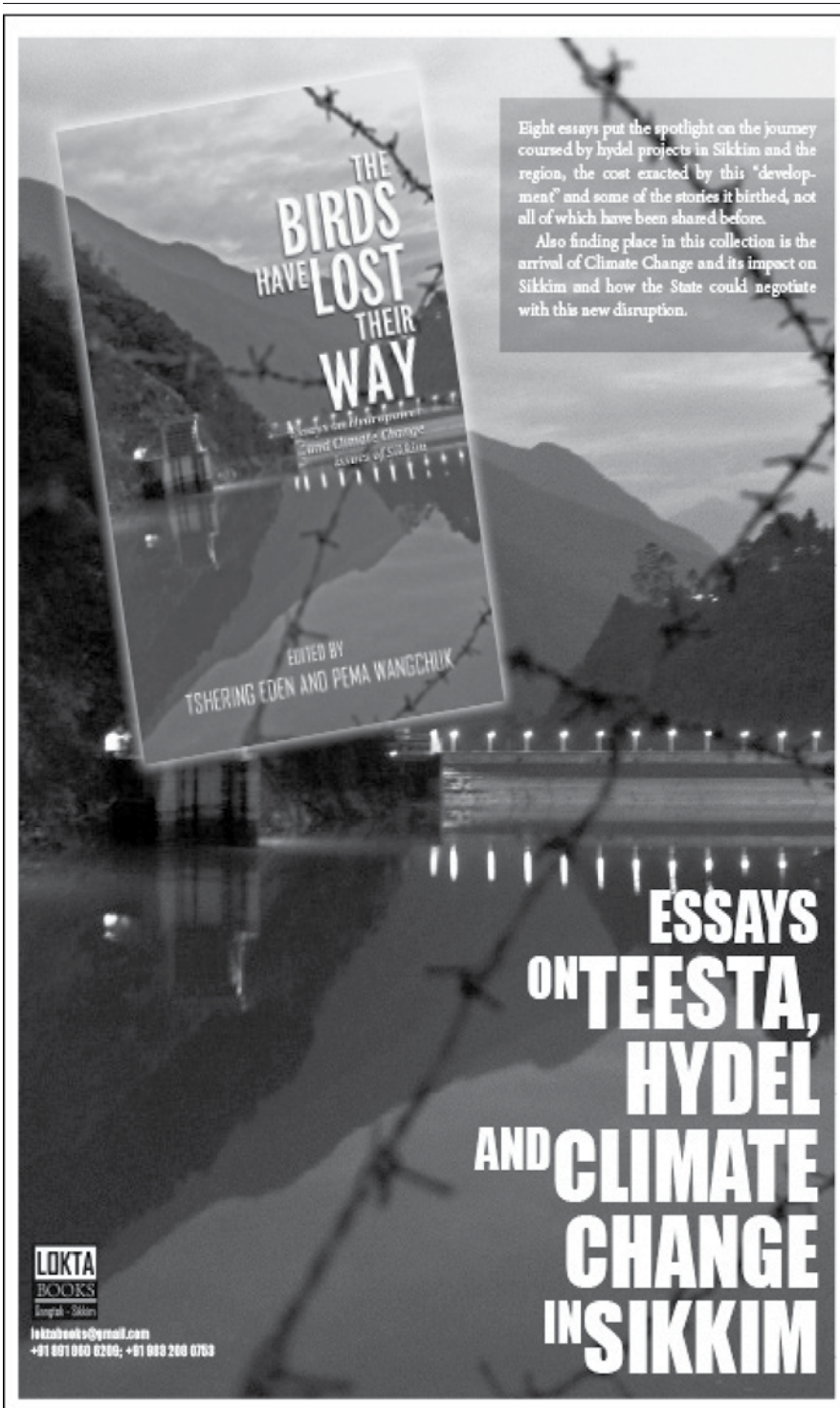
And newspaper reports cited an unnamed member of Mueller's team as saying Barr, in saying the obstruction evidence was "not sufficient" to charge a crime, downplayed the evidence.

The report's release nevertheless will not clear the air of doubts.

Barr warned ahead of time that he will have to sanitize it of major parts - testimony given to grand juries that Mueller convened for the investigation, information from intelligence sources, and information related to ongoing investigations, information on people not charged.

Because of that, Congress has demanded Barr hand over the unredacted version to make sure his edits aren't protecting Trump.

Nadler is poised to subpoena the entire Mueller report and various congressional bodies are angling to have Barr testify, and possibly Mueller after that.







**ROLLING AROUND!** The actor, Justin Theroux bikes his way through the streets of NYC.

## Fox cancels Marvel drama 'The Gifted'



**LOS ANGELES, APR 18 (PTI):** Fox Studios has decided to not renew its sophomore drama series "The Gifted" for a third season.

According to Variety, the family adventure series, set in Marvel's X-Men universe, was produced by 20th Century Fox TV, which now is part of Disney, in association with Marvel Television.

The show revolved around a suburban couple whose ordinary lives are rocked by the sudden discovery that their teenage children possess mutant powers. Forced to go on the run from a hostile government, the family seeks help from an underground network of mutants and must fight to survive.

The show starred Stephen Moyer, Amy

Acker, Natalie Alyn Lind, Percy Hynes White, Sean Teale, Jamie Chung, Emma Dumont, Blair Redford and Coby Bell.

Apart from "Gifted", Fox has also cancelled Lil Rel Howery comedy "Rel" after one season.

Inspired by Howery's real life, the series featured the comedian as a self-made success who lives by the code to "always believe in yourself and great things will come," but finds that attitude gets put to the test when he learns his wife is having an affair with his barber.

The character tries to rebuild his life post-divorce as a long-distance single father on the South Side of Chicago who's on a quest for love, respect, and a new barber.

## Prateik Babbar to play antagonist in Rajinikanth's 'Darbar'

**MUMBAI, APR 17 (PTI):** Actor Prateik Babbar will be essaying the role of villain in south superstar Rajinikanth's next "Darbar". The project, to be directed by AR Murugadoss, will feature Rajinikanth as a cop after 25 years. It will be the first time Prateik is working with the superstar and the filmmaker.

"It is such a dream come true to have bagged this project in such little time. This year is looking very positive for me and Sanya (Sagar) has been such a great influence on my life professionally and personally," the actor said in a statement. "I can't wait to commence shooting with Rajinikanth sir and AR Murugadoss sir this week and create some magic," he added.

The project, which was tentatively titled "Thalaivar 167", also features Nayanthara as the female lead. The actor has previously worked with Rajinikanth in "Kuselan", "Chandramukhi" and "Sivaji". Murugadoss had last week shared the first look of "Darbar" which marks his maiden collaboration with Rajinikanth. The poster was decked up with police instruments and equipments, with the punchline, "You decide whether you want to be good, bad or worse."

The film is backed by Lyca Productions, the banner which was also behind Rajinikanth's science-fiction and action flick "2.0".

## There is commercial pressure with 'Kalank': Varun Dhawan



**BY SHUBHA DUBEY**

**NEW DELHI, APR 17 (PTI):**

Varun Dhawan has deftly balanced his career between commercial and small scale projects, but the actor says a mega-budget multi-starrer like "Kalank" comes with a lot of pressure.

His last two releases -- "October" and "Sui Dhaaga" -- had small budgets but a lot is on stake with "Kalank", which he says is his most expensive film till date.

"My last two films had really small budgets and the reach was bigger... There was no pressure of them doing well that much in monetary term. In this film there is commercial pressure. This is a film for which I had prepared a lot... So I am more on the edge," Varun told PTI in an interview.

"A lot of eyeballs are there on this film because it is an

ensemble and all this attention is making me anxious. Everyone is going to watch and all I wanted to do is be good in it. Fear of failure makes me anxious."

Besides Varun, the Abhishek Varman-directed movie features Alia Bhatt, Aditya Roy Kapoor, Sonakshi Sinha, Sanjay Dutt, Madhuri Dixit Nene and Kunal Kemmu.

The actor said he believes in preparing a lot before taking on a role but this time Varman guided his performance.

"For me, preparation is very important. But with this, Abhishek didn't let me prepare too much. He doesn't like that. I am playing a blacksmith in the film... So I knew I had to work on my body... But when I came on the set, he asked me to get the look in my eyes which shows I am in

1940s. He is a very fine director," Varun said.

Every film, Varun said, is like a baby and as an actor one feels responsible for its well-being but there is life beyond the box office.

The actor said he feels secure because he has people to fall back upon.

"Me being secure comes from my personal life. They give me the security and the confidence. I know if someday things do not work the way I want them to, they are going to have my back.

"Initially, in my career, my priorities were my films but as you grow old, things change. But then, sometimes when my film is coming it becomes my priority. I take it as my responsibility to take my film to the finishing line. It is like a child, whom you are teaching to walk. You can't leave it midway. It will fall.

## John Cena in talks for 'Suicide Squad' sequel



**LOS ANGELES, APR 18 (PTI):** WWE wrestler-turned-actor John Cena is in early negotiations to board filmmaker James Gunn's upcoming "Suicide Squad" sequel.

If things work out, Cena will be joining Idris Elba and Margot Robbie in Warner Bros' follow-up to 2016's "Suicide Squad".

According to Variety, it's currently unknown who Cena and Elba will be playing.

Robbie will be reprising her role of Harley Quinn and Jai Courtney is back as Captain Boomerang.

Gunn is also writing the movie, which is expected to go into production later this year. The tentpole is scheduled to release on August 6, 2021.

The film will mark Cena's first comic-book role.

## Mike Myers to headline Netflix comedy series

**LOS ANGELES, APR 18 (PTI):** Veteran actor-comedian Mike Myers is set to star in and executive producer a new comedy series for Netflix.

According to Variety, the streaming giant has ordered six episodes of the half-hour limited series, in which Myers will play multiple characters.

"I love creating characters, and Netflix has given me a fantastic playground to play in," Myers said in a statement.

The "Austin Powers" star will executive produce with John Lyons and Jason Weinberg. Mackenzie Cyr and Justin Capraro-Gentuso are associate producers.

## Pablo Schreiber to star in 'Halo' series

**LOS ANGELES, APR 18 (PTI):** Actor Pablo Schreiber has been cast in the lead role of the Master Chief in the Showtime series "Halo".

The show is based on the hit video game franchise of the same name.

According to Variety, Master Chief is described as Earth's most advanced warrior in the 26th century and the only hope of salvation for a civilization pushed to the brink of destruction by the Covenant, an unstoppable alliance of alien worlds committed to the destruction of humanity.

"Halo" will begin production in Budapest later this year.

The series is produced by Showtime in partnership with 343 Industries and Amblin Television.



**ARIES:** Your indie spirit is evident in all that you do, Aries, but today's stars prod you to open yourself up to the power of two. If you're struggling to keep your head above water, set aside your pride and ask for assistance. Never mind seeking out the answers online—reach out to someone whose skill set complements your own.

**TAURUS:** Tackle tasks that can be easily accomplished today, Taurus. Steer clear of those drawn-out conference calls and meetings that never seem to end. With the Libra moon in your sixth house of productivity, the day is about efficiency with a capital E. Make sure you fuel yourself with plenty of protein and keep the caffeine consumption to a minimum—it will keep you grounded and make it easier to deflect distractions. Keep conversations short and sweet, and start checking off those to-dos.

**GEMINI:** Under today's stars, you're more naughty than nice, so unleash your mischievous side. Let your hair down and allow your inner bad girl/guy to come out to play. Get yourself glammed up for a night on the town,

or inject some spice into your day by sending the object of your affections a suggestive message or photo.

**CANCER:** While you may be up to your ears in work today, Cancer, be sure to carve out quality time with a good friend. Putting your to-dos on hold for this person sends a strong message about how important he or she is to you. Doing so isn't completely selfless, either. Bonding will reduce your own stress levels and remind you where your priorities lie.

**LEO:** The world's your oyster as quicksilver Mercury makes a global entry into your ninth house of travel and adventure until May 6, sparking your wanderlust. Grab your car keys—or passport—and enjoy a spur-of-the-moment getaway. If you can't get out of Dodge on such short notice, consider this your long-lead nudge to start planning your late-spring or summer vacay NOW.

**LIBRA:** Body language isn't just a dialect spoken by a few—it's the universal language of love! And today, your cosmic ruler, silver-tongued Mercury, flits into your sultry,

seductive erotic eighth house until May 6, inviting you to flirt with abandon. It's a time to let your desires be known, directly or with more secretive subtlety.

**VIRGO:** Even someone with superhuman powers couldn't keep up with everything you've got piled on your plate, Virgo. Compromise is mandatory if you hope to maintain some semblance of sanity, so find ways to scale back and streamline. In order to accomplish your most important work mission today, you'll need to back-burner each and every nonessential to-do on your list. Tune out those around you, and you'll cross the finish line before the end of the day. Phew.

**SCORPIO:** Today's emo moon brings out your empathetic side. Don't fight those feelings, Scorpio! If you feel a surge of sadness or anger in response to a friend's plight, express it! Let the tears flow and open your heart to those who mean the most to you. Go out of your way to let them know how important they are in your world. When you need a steady shoulder and a compassionate ear, they'll be there for you with bells on.

**SAGITTARIUS:** Pull off that oversized cashmere sweater and slip into something more glamorous—or better yet, sexier. Today, messenger Mercury wings into your amorous, glamorous fifth house until May 6, turning you into an unabashed flirtaholic. Harboring a secret crush? It's time to act on it, Archer. Plan more playful dates over the next few weeks, whether you're single or spoken for. Think: private whisky tasting or an adventurous road trip to see Hamilton on tour. You'll be a magnet for magnates, so don't be shy about approaching the power players in any room!

**CAPRICORN:** Trying to make everyone happy, Capricorn? Today's stars turn that into an exercise in futility. If you've piled one too many obligations on your plate, your stress levels are liable to peak. Your best bet is to graciously bow out of a few responsibilities in the name of preserving your peace of mind. Don't worry—the people who really count will understand. And if anyone tries to send you on a guilt trip, remember that their emotions are not

your responsibility!

**AQUARIUS:** You've been moving at the speed of light lately, and you're looking forward to life calming down a bit. News-flash, Aquarius: Things will slow down when YOU decide it's time. All this action is actually generated by your love of excitement, so it's up to you to give yourself a much-needed breather. Today's stars encourage you to create a space in your schedule for a bit of solitude. Unroll your yoga mat, turn to your trusty journal or simply take yourself to lunch!

**PISCES:** Ah, the irony. Today, YOU have your nose to the grindstone, but people are throwing you off your game with their texts, questions and tagged posts. While you might be tempted to shut your door, log off and silence your smartphone, the cosmos call for multitasking. The truth is, you won't be able to get 'er done today without getting input from others. You can only do so much, Pisces, so don't drive yourself crazy. Take a deep breath, and let the juggling commence.