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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Stalin slams Centre for “autocratic imposition” of Hindi

CHENNAI, SEP 15 (PTI):

The DMK president M K Stalin on Sunday accused the Centre of “autocratic imposition of Hindi” and underscored the need for unity in opposition ranks to take forward protest against the government on such issues.

Addressing an MDMK party event chaired by its leader Vaiko here, Stalin said Tamil was sidelined in the competitive examination conducted by the railways and postal department.

After Home Minister Amit Shah’s pitch for Hindi as a common link language, the DMK chief had Saturday said that such a view was against national integrity and demanded that it be taken back. “We have been compelled to go the protest mode everyday to get our rights,” he said and sarcastically added “even if we snooze they (the Centre) will thrust Hindi and ease out Tamil if went tired.”

Addressing the MD-MK’s 111st birth anniversary celebrations of Dravidian ideologue C N Annadurai, he said since 1938, Tamil Nadu had been protesting against Hindi imposition and several such agitations continued through the years including those held in 1949 and 1953.

Such protests culminated in a massive agitation in 1965 and “has not the situation come to a pass necessitating protests even now?,” he asked. “They are continuously imposing Hindi and we are opposing it all along,” he said and alleged “thrusting of Hindi is being carried on in an autocratic fashion (by the Centre) despite such opposition.”

Not only on the Hindi issue, but also on matters like National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test, Cauvery issue, projects on Methane, extraction of Hydrocarbon and Neutrino, Tamil Nadu was being betrayed, he claimed.

The Central and State governments were behind the betrayal on such issues, he alleged adding, “we have the democratic duty to stop it.” Protest voices were raised on such issues both inside and outside Parliament and State Assembly and agitations were held by mobilising people.

“We have to join hands and hold protests; and Annan (elder brother) Vaiko is the forerunner of struggle,” he said.

Stalin praised Vaiko as a fearless leader, determined to take forward the struggle on such issues against the government be it inside or outside of Parliament.

CM assures govt employees that govt has their best interest in mind, always

ARPAN PRASHAN

GANGTOK, 15 SEPT:

Contending that the previous government had a very discriminatory attitude towards government employees, especially those of the Group C&D categories, Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] today assured that the SKM Government will look out for their interests in earnest and assured that no government employee will have to any longer knock on the doors of the Court seeking justice with regard to their service, facilities or rights.

The SKM Government, he said, will solve every problem of the government employees.

What he sought in return was an improved work culture.

“We have to change our attitude of ‘Me’ and ‘Mine’, to ‘We’ and ‘Ours’, and this attitude will surely help all of us to work together for the betterment of Sikkim and its people,”



he said while addressing a state-level convention of Government Employees (Group C&D) at Paljor Stadium here today.

He reminded government employees that they were a vital cog of governance and any slackness on their part could derail government projects and schemes.

In this regard, he reiterated that the State Government was ready to help and solve the problems of government employees and urged everyone to work with a positive attitude.

Speaking about promotions, the CM said promotion was the right of each and every gov-

ernment employee and that they don’t need to thank the government of the CM for it.

“We need to end this culture of thanking people for something that is the right of employees,” he said.

“In the present government, no one has to seek favors or consid-

eration if should come to them by way of their right. If it’s their right, it will come to them automatically as per the prescribed processes,” he said.

The CM also urged employees to stay fearless in their work.

He also remarked that it was not possible for any government of

fulfill all the demands and deliver on all the aspirations within 3 or 4 months and stressed that these matters took time and due process. In this regard, he called on the employees to have faith and assured that everything will end positive for them.

He also claimed today that the State was

financially broken due to the fiscally reckless ways of the previous government which was why the SKM Government was not being able to expedite major decisions in the speed that it would have wished.

The political will was however there, he assured and called for patience from the government employees.

Going over commitments made to government employees in the run-up to the elections, the CM informed that the government has already decided to release the pay revision arrears in one installment and that arrangements for the same have already been made.

He also informed that the government was working on a health insurance cover of up to Rs 20 lakh for all government employees and extending the same insurance cover to at least five members of the family.

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Govt reviewing parameters used to measure stunting in children

UZMI ATHAR

NEW DELHI, SEP 15 (PTI):

The government is reviewing parameters used to measure stunted growth in children to see how they can be “Indianised” according to anthropology of Indians, sources said. Stunting is the impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition, repeated infection, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation. It is presently calculated by taking measurements of height.

India tops the list of countries with 46.6 million children who are stunted, followed by Nigeria (13.9 million) and Pakistan (10.7 million), the Global Nutrition Report, 2018 said.

According to the National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4), 38.4 per cent children under five years of age are stunted or low height-for-age and 21 per cent wasted or low weight-for-height in India. As many as 48.3 per cent of children in Bihar under five are stunted, the survey said.

But official sources said the anthropology of Indian children varies in different parts of the country and there cannot be standard parameters to measure stunting in children across all states especially in a diverse country like India.

“The government in collaboration with the Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health and World Health Organisation is looking into how these international parameters can be Indianised,” an official source said. India also accounts for 25.5 million children who are wasted, followed by Nigeria (3.4 million) and Indonesia (3.3 million). Wasting, or low weight-for-height, is a strong predictor of mortality among children under five years of age. It is usually the result of acute significant food shortage or disease.

In a bid to better understand the food needs and requirements of malnourished children from different states, the Centre is also studying locally available nutritious food that would not only be healthy but also cost-effective and conveniently obtainable for the families, officials said.

“The government is also working towards educating children and parents about the access of locally available nutrient-rich food that would help them understand what would benefit them in terms of nutrition,” the official said, adding that special focus is being given in the ‘Poshan Maah’ (nutrition month) during which the government aims to reach out to 10 crore beneficiaries.

‘Poshan Maah’ is celebrated in the month of September every year under the ‘Poshan Abhiyan’ which was launched by the Centre in 2018 to reduce low-birth weight, stunting and undernutrition, and anaemia among children, adolescent girls and women.

BAS readies 20-member State team for NE zone Inter-State Badminton tourney

SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 15 SEPT:

A 20-member team of Badminton Association of Sikkim [BAS] is all set to represent Sikkim at the North East Zone Inter State Badminton Championship 2019 to be held from 19 to 22 September here at Paljor Stadium’s Indoor Badminton Hall complex.

The championship will feature the participation of international and top-rated players of the country from North Eastern States. The last time that Sikkim hosted this prestigious championship was in the year 2011.

The Sikkim squad comprises of: Amon Rai, Uttam Jindal, Rewash Rai, Wangyal Lepcha and Shahil Pradhan in senior men’s category, while Su-



nandita Bista, Selina Rai, Prasanna Pradhan, Tashi Choden Gurung and Indu Rana will represent in senior women’s category.

Likewise, the junior boys’ team members are Pranay Sarkar, Ashim Chettri, Devon Dungma, Siddharth Gupta and Kushal Lama and Stutie

Mandal, Sharika Rai, Surekha Rai, Anisha Rai and Anunaya Rai are in junior girls’ team.

Reserve players for the tournament are Brinda Gadaily, Abhigyal Jeena Lepcha, Aman Rai, Mondeep Subba and Sheeom Limboo.

Team coaches are Sa-

meer Gurung and Ravi Rai and Diwakar Rai is officiating as team manager.

Secretary, Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Kuber Bhandari, has conveyed his best wishes to the State team for the championship. Meeting the team here this

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CBI team visits WB secretariat, told to come on working day

KOLKATA, SEP 15 (PTI):

A CBI team went to West Bengal state secretariat, Nabanna, to hand over some letters to senior government officials on Sunday.

The team was asked to come on a working day as there was nobody in the Chief Ministers’ Office to receive the letters, a CMO official said.

“They (CBI team members) have been told that since Sunday is a holiday, there is none at the CMO to receive any communication. They have been asked to come on a working day,” the official said.

It was not known what the letters were about, as CBI officials were not immediately available for comment.

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Journalists in Kashmir hard-pressed due to restrictions on internet, mobile services

SHEIKH SUHAIL

SRINAGAR, SEP 15 (PTI):

With no internet and mobile services in Kashmir for over 40 days now, journalists in the Valley have been hard-pressed as a makeshift media centre set up here by the government continues to be the only connection for many with the rest of the world.

The restrictions were imposed across Kashmir on the evening of August 4 a day before the Centre announced the abrogation of Article 370 provisions and bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union territories.

Even though landline phones have been restored early this month, mobile services and

internet - on any platform - remain snapped. Harried journalists are now demanding that the government should at least restore broadband connections of media houses.

We have minimal contact with our head office. We are often outside our offices here for assignments or something else and it is difficult for the head office or even our family to reach us in the absence of mobile phone services, Irfan Ahmad, a senior photojournalist, said. Another local journalist, Mudasar, who works for a daily newspaper, said information gathering has suffered due to the communication restrictions.

We often do not know what

is happening in the city and information from other districts is hard to come by. We have to rely on official versions of the events or incidents. Reaching officials or sources especially in the other districts is very difficult, he said.

During the first few days after the restrictions were imposed, the journalists could not file any stories except for the TV reports using the channels’ outdoor broadcast vans here.

In the absence of any medium to send the news-reports across the country or outside, some journalists would send their reports on pen drives through flyers at the airport.

The flyers would then con-

tact the offices of the media houses which would collect the drives from him. Most media organisations, especially TV channels, sent journalists from Delhi to the Valley as their reporters were incommunicado.

Around a week later, the state government’s Department of Information and Public Relations set up a ‘Media Facilitation Centre’ at a conference hall of a local hotel here. Four computers and a lone cell phone were available to cater to hundreds of journalists both local as well as from outside the state.

“One often had to wait for more than half-an-hour to get a

turn to pg02

Kerala CM attacks Shah on Hindi pitch; says it is a “war cry” against non-Hindi speaking people

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, SEPT 15 (PTI): Slamming Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his Hindi language pitch, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday said it was a “planned attempt” to stir up a controversy and divert attention from pressing problems in the country.

He termed it as a ‘war cry’ against the mother tongue of non-Hindi speaking people.

The Chief Minister, in a Facebook post, said that despite protests erupting in many places on the issue, Shah was not prepared to withdraw from the “hindi agenda”, which are signs to show that the sangh parivar was getting ready to open a new “agitational platform”.

However, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan welcomed the move, saying language inspires and unites the people and the country’s unity can be strengthened through Hindi.

“A language inspires and unites people. Let us strengthen our unity through Hindi, our national language.

Along with our mother tongue, let us use Hindi in our work”, he said in a tweet on the occasion of Hindi Divas on Saturday.

Shah had in a series of tweets on Saturday, said “India has many languages and every language has its importance. But it is absolutely necessary that the entire country should have one language that becomes India’s identity globally,” he said. Launching a scathing attack on Shah,

Vijayan said the notion that Hindi can unite the country was “absurd” and the move was a “war cry” against those loving their mother tongue.

“The claim that Hindi unifies our country is absurd. That language is not the mother tongue of a majority of Indians.

The move to impose Hindi on them amounts to enslaving them. The Union Minister’s statement is a war cry against the mother tongues of non-Hindi speaking people”, he said.

The Chief Minister said people in the Southern, Western and Eastern parts of the country do not speak Hindi and to make it the primary language in these areas amounted to rejecting their mother tongues.

No Indian should feel alienated because of language, he said and pointed out that India’s strength lies in its ability to embrace diversity.

Vijayan demanded that the Sangh Parivar relinquish its ‘divisive’ policies and said they should realise that people can see through the ‘ploy’, that this was an attempt to divert attention from the real problems.

This attempt can only be seen as a ‘war cry’ against the feelings of the people who love their language like their own mother, the Chief Minister said.

“Hindi is being spoken by crores of people and that has been recognised generally. In the name of language, there are no issues in the country now.

CM assures...

Speaking about the special committee formed to look into the various problem and concerns of Group C&D employees by the previous government, the CM directed that the committee be made stronger so that it can address their issues more effectively.

He also shared memories of his days as a government employee starting with the State Bank of Sikkim and several other departments before he became a government teacher, a responsibility he held until he joined politics, the CM said that he can thus understand and empathise with the problems of government employees.

The daylong convention was organized by All Sikkim Government Employees (Group C&D) Association and was also attended by the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Cabinet Ministers, MLAs, Chief Secretary, Departmental Heads, Advisors, Chairpersons, group C&D employees from all four districts and members of 37 different employee associations.

The convention was also addressed by the Sangay Zangpo Bhutia, president of the All Sikkim Government Employees Association (ASGEA), and Rapden Bhutia, general secretary of the association who presented the report on the functioning of the association.

Mr Zangpo thanked the State Government and the Chief Minister on behalf of government employees while the Mr Rapden Bhutia explained the objective behind organizing the state level convention.

On the occasion, ASGEA also felicitated the Chief Minister.

BAS readies...

morning, he also handed over the sports kit to the players.

The state team has been undergoing a coaching camp organised by BAS under coaches Sameer Gurung and Ravi Rai here at the badminton hall. The month-long state camp was taken by 35 state ranking and other promising shuttlers at Namchi and Gangtok. In the final selection held on 02 September, 20 shuttlers were shortlisted to represent the State and five have been kept as reserve.

Speaking to media persons, team coach Sameer Gurung informed that the coaching camp will continue till 17 September after which a two-day rest will be given to the team members.

BAS president, C Zangpo, in turn mentioned that preparations for the championship have been underway on a war-footing and assured a grand event for sports lovers. He has also called upon the people to support the State team with their presence and cheering and thanked every department, organisation and individual who helped BAS host the event.

Sikkim-BJP begins Sewa Saptah with Jal Sanrakshan Abhiyan



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 SEPT:

A Bharatiya Janata Party team led by the BJP-Sikkim president, DB Chauhan, carried out a Jal Sanrakshan Abhiyan on Sunday as part of the party’s nationwide Sewa Saptah programme to mark the birthday of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

As part of the drive today, the team carried

out a cleanliness drive at the water source of Duga-Rankey and Gantey Kolsha under West Pendam constituency in East Sikkim today, informs a BJP press release.

The release informs that the drive was also joined by Saku ward panchayat member, Vasundhara Sharma, and people of the area.

A cleanliness drive was

also carried out at the water source and tank area at 32 No by the same team accompanied by Sewa Saptah convener, Sudeep Pradhan and party youth.

The release adds that BJP workers, under the guidance of Rangrang-Yangang MLA, Rajkumari Thapa, held quiz, debate and painting competitions on water conservation along with

a cleanliness drive at the Helipad and Pokhari at Upper Yangyang.

Another BJP team, led by BJP East District president, YT Lepcha, carried out Jal Sanrakshan Abhiyan at Gangtok.

The release informs that the party will also hold state-wide blood donation camps on the third day of the programme.

Vegetable Producer Groups formed from among SHGs of Khamdong Block under NRLM



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 15 SEPT:

Vegetable Producer Groups from among SHGs of Khamdong block were formed today under the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM) at Aritar, Dochum and Sirwani wards.

The meeting was attended by RDD Commissioner-cum-State Mission Director/SRLM, Dr P Senthil Kumar and the mission team of SRLM including Deputy CEO (SRLM), Project Manager, Livelihood, BPMs, DPMs, APMs and other block staffs, Panchayat president of Simik Lingzey GPU and FPO General Secretary, and both Kishi Sakhis and Vegetable Producer Group SHG members of Aritar WDS of Simik Lingzey GPU, Dochum and Sirwani WDSs of Sirwani GPU, a press release informs.

The first session was held at Simik Lingzey Panchayat Bhawan with the producer group members of Aritar Vegetable Producer Group.

The second session was held at Dochum with the Vegetable Producer Group members of Sirwani and Dochum under Sirwani GPU.

At both meetings, Dr Kumar explained the various schemes and programmes under SRLM and its significance with regard to upliftment of the rural economy through participation of villagers, especially women, through Self Help Groups.

At the outset, he highlighted the significance of the Pancha Sutra of NRLM and the importance of following the “pancha sutra” in their activities and therefore

the need for all members to remember it by heart.

He also explained the different funds available for SHGs including Start Up funds, Revolving Funds and CIF funds and encouraged all members to take full benefit of these provisions.

Then he focused on the formation of Vegetable Producers Groups.

After detailed discussions on the importance of formation of PGs, the process, the membership and the advantages of PGs, the vegetable producing members of Aritar, Dochum and Shirwani agreed to form Vegetable Producer Groups in their respective wards.

Next, these Vegetable Producer Groups will need to prepare a seasonal vegetable calendar.

The Vegetable Producer Groups resolved to try and produce vegetables on a larger scale and grade the vegetables according to quality.

They will receive support from the SRLM team to establish market linkages with SIMFED, Sikkim Supreme and other buyers.

The team insisted that the PG members come together and collectively study the problems of pest damage. SRLM also assured the PGs of providing provide a hut facility for field level processing and grading and a custom hiring center.

These custom hiring centers will be provided with the required equipment for tilling, watering, vegetable collection and grading.

SRLM Kishi Sakhis will be provided training on Business Development Plan preparation.

Taekwondo Poommsae and Kyorugi championships conclude in Namchi



NAMCHI, 15 SEPT [IPR]:

The 11th State Taekwondo Poomsae and 21st Kyorugi Championship 2019 concluded here at the Gymnasium Hall today.

Sikkim Amateur Taekwondo Association general secretary, Trilok Subba, informs that more than 300 martial artists from all over the State took part in the championships which were played in four categories - Sub Junior, Cadet, Junior and Senior level (boys & girls).

He also informed that the SATA has produced more than 200 medalists from Sikkim since its establishment in the year 1989 and that 100 of these medalists have secured Gold Medals at the national level.

He also highlighted achievements of the players for the State and placed a demand with the State Government for space for regular practice of Taekwondo, Boxing and Karate.

Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma attended the final day as the chief guest.

The tournament was organised by SATA under World Taekwondo (Korea). The three-day tournament had begun on 13 September.

Winners at the tournament will be shortlisted for national Taekwon-

do championship.

Minister Sharma, in his address, congratulated players on their participation and applauded SATA for organising the event and also for consistently promoting sports in the state.

The Minister, while outlining the importance of sporting activities, said that the State has achieved global recognition through sports and also acknowledged the contribution of sportspersons from Sikkim in the international level. He also recalled the remarkable contributions of Tarundeep Rai, Trilok Subba, Bhaichung Bhutia and other sports persons from the state.

The Minister also assured to provide required space for regular practice of Taekwondo, Boxing and Karate in Namchi.

He also highlighted contributions made by Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] during his time as the Sports Minister and conveyed his dedication and commitment to work further for the development of games and sports in the State.

The Minister also shared his experience in Taekwondo and added that a person with self-confidence will definitely achieve all her/his goals in life.

Journalists in...

(computer) system. Then the speed was so irritating that the email would take ages to open, Firdous Ahmad, a local journalist, told PTI.

Journalists have to register themselves before making a call from the cell phone and more often than not, the waiting period would stretch for hours because of the rush.

We have to write down our names on a register before making a call and then wait for our turn, Ahmad said.

However, after frequent complaints by journalists, few more computers were added to the centre and the network speed was also upgraded, bringing some relief.

Irfan Ahmad said while the addition of more computers and speed upgrade was a welcome step, media persons are still grappling with a number of problems.

“After completing our assignments and capturing pictures, we have to first go to our respective offices to select and re-size the pictures. Then copy them in a flash drive and head to the media centre to send them. This is so hectic,” he said.

Mudasir said it has been the “longest-ever blockade” of services faced by journalists in the Valley and the government should at least restore broadband or leased-line internet connections of media houses.

We have seen mobile and internet suspensions, but never before has it been this long for journalists. It has been over 40 days now that we have been deprived of the facilities. In an era when government agencies can monitor anything, why is it so difficult to restore internet lines of media houses? the journalist said.

While the television channels have outdoor broadcast vans for their reportage, the work of their stringers from other districts across the Valley has been hit.

We cannot send reports to our offices or to Srinagar as we do not have any media centre in the districts other than Srinagar. We have to travel to the city to hand over reports which are then sent to our channels via the OB vans, Junaid Ahmad, a stringer with a television news channel said.

Many English and Urdu newspapers have not been published since the restrictions were imposed. Others, who are printing their dailies though with reduced number of pages are not updating their websites because of the absence of internet facilities.

Few dailies like the Kashmir Monitor are updating their websites from Delhi or other places outside the Valley.

Kashmir Press Club (KPC) has expressed serious concern over the continuous communication blockade and demanded lifting of restrictions and restoration of press freedom.

In a statement, the KPC has said that due to unprecedented communication blockade affecting mobile telephony and internet, journalists have been crippled, overwhelmingly disabling them from reporting the ground situation.

Since the communication blockade, the Club has taken up the issue with the government authorities on several occasions, urging them to restore mobile phones and internet to journalists and media outlets including newspapers and also the Club itself, the KPC said.

But all these efforts have proved to be futile as these services have not been restored to journalists till date, it said.

The body has demanded restoration of internet and mobile facilities to journalists and media outlets in the Valley.

CBI team...

After the Calcutta High Court withdrew his protection from arrest, the CBI had served fresh notice to former Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar on Friday asking him to appear before it on Saturday in connection with its probe into the Saradha scam.

However, Kumar is understood to have sought more time to appear before the investigating officer of the case, but that request is yet to be accepted by the probe agency.

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ANTHYESTI KRIYA

The anthyesthi Kriya of Nar Bdr Gurung, rtd, Record Officer Health deptt and also Vice President in Paramedical who left for his heavenly abode on 5th of September 2019. All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering of prayers for the departed soul on 18.09.2019 at Ahley, Namthang south Sikkim



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Naseeb Tamang is Mr Ultimate 2019

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 15 SEPT:

Naseeb Tamang from Nimtar in East Sikkim is Mr Ultimate 2019, crowned at the bodybuilding championship organised by Gangtok-based Ultimate Fitness Gym here at Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College auditorium on Saturday.

Janak Sharma stood on the second position and Birendra Subba on third position.

In men's physique competition, Puskar Gurung from Darjeeling became the champion followed by Bishal Shahani and Bikki Barfora on second and third positions respectively.

Likewise, Mamphy



Roy from Namchi stood as the champion in women's physique competition and Tshering Doma stood on second

and Ranju Sundas on third position.

Ultimate Fitness Gym has been organising this event annually to pro-

mote body building and creating a platform for aspiring body builders.

The competition had Anil Raj Rai, Nayan Barai-

ly, Khagen Gurung, Chandra Das, Ganesh Karki and Tulsi Pradhan as judges. The event had chief coordinator of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, Lakpa Tamang as chief guest.

On the occasion, the organisers also felicitated six personalities for their contributions towards the development of sports in the State. Bodybuilder and social worker, Sanjay Chettri, Bodybuilder & Traffic Police personnel Suraj Subba, Boxing coach and police personnel, Tenzing Sherpa, International Karatekas and kickboxers, Bijoy Gurung and Bhim Subba and bodybuilder Navin Pradhan were felicitated by Ultimate Fitness Gym.

Gangtok pretties up for Vishwakarma Puja



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 15 SEPT:

Gangtok is all set to celebrate Vishwakarma Puja on Tuesday, 17 September.

Various driver associations in and around Gangtok are in deep

preparations for this celebration which has now become synonymous with them. Puja Pandals are being installed across the capital, each trying to be more attractive than the other.

Vishwakarma Puja

is a day of worshipping Lord Vishwakarma, the Hindu god considered the divine architect.

Also expected as features of the celebration will be cultural programmes at different puja pandals.

Chinese manjha hits overhead power line of Delhi Metro; services hit

NEW DELHI, SEP 15 (PTI): Services were briefly delayed on a section of the Delhi Metro's Red Line on Sunday after an overhead power line was hit by Chinese manjha at the Seelampur station, officials said. The incident took place in the evening, following which the train was halted for a precautionary check.

"At 4.35 pm, there was minor flashing observed in a pantograph of a train approaching platform of Seelampur station (Red Line) due to some external object ('manjha' kite thread) hitting the OHE/pantograph," a senior DMRC official said. The

passengers were told to vacate the train for precautionary check, he said.

"The passengers were asked to board the train again after the necessary check and there was a brief delay in services due to the incident," the official said.

The Red Line connects Rithala in Delhi to Shahid Stal (New Bus Adda) in Ghaziabad.

"Such flashing is not unusual when some external object comes in between and train continued its normal services after a precautionary check without any evacuation," the DMRC said in a statement later.

For speedy trial of 1.66 L rape, POCSO cases, govt to set up 1023 spl fast-track courts



NEW DELHI, SEP 15 (PTI): The Union government has proposed to set up a total of 1,023 fast-track special courts for expeditious trial of over 1.66 lakh pending cases of crime against women and children across the country. Each of these special courts are expected to dispose of at least 165 such case per year, said a proposal by the Department of Justice under Union Law Ministry.

A total of 1,023 FTSCs will be set up, out of which 389 courts, as per a Supreme Court direction, will exclusively handle cases registered under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, it said. The remaining 634 FTSCs will deal with either rape cases or both rape and POCSO Act cases depending upon the pendency and requirement.

"Each FTSC is expected to dispose of 41-42 cases each quarter and at least 165 cases in a year," the proposal added. According to the Department's proposal note, a total of 1,66,882 cases of rape and those under POCSO Act are pending trial in various courts across the country.

There are 389 districts in the country where the number of pending cases under

POCSO Act exceeds 100. Therefore, as per the apex court directives, each of such districts will have one exclusive POCSO court, which will try no other cases, the note said. The process of setting up of these FTSCs is likely to begin on October 2, the Law Ministry had earlier said.

The Department of Justice had proposed to set up 1,023 fast-track courts at a total budget of Rs 767.25 crore. The Central support of Rs 474 crore for one year will be funded from the Nirbhaya Fund. The fund was created by the Centre in 2013 after the December 16, 2012 gang-rape and murder of a student in Delhi. It was created to support the initiatives of governments and NGOs working towards safety of women.

In a letter to the Cabinet Secretariat on August 8, the Department of Justice had said after recommendation of expenditure finance committee on July 11 and approval of the law minister, the proposal has been forwarded to the finance minister for approval.

"Simultaneously, other connected actions are being taken as setting up of FTSCs is planned to start from 02nd October, 2019," the department wrote.

Dearth of quality people in north India: Labour minister on unemployment



LUCKNOW, SEP 15 (PTI): Union labour minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar has said there was no dearth of employment opportunities in the country, but recruiters visiting north India complain of lack of "quality people" to fill vacancies, drawing flak from opposition leaders who accused him of insulting people of the region.

The comments came amid criticism of the government over India's unemployment rate rising to a 45-year high of 6.1 per cent in 2017-18, data of which was released in May.

"The issue of employment keep figuring in newspapers these days. I am handling the same ministry for labour and employment and examine the issue daily.

I have understood the problem," Gangwar told reporters on Saturday in Bareilly, his Lok Sabha constituency.

"Recruiters who visit north India complain of facing dearth of quality people for the posts they need to fill," he added.

The minister's comments drew sharp reactions from opposition with Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra saying the government was trying to escape blame for the job losses due to economic slowdown by such "insulting" comments.

"Mr Minister, it has been more than five years for your government. There is no job creation. Whatever jobs were there, they have been snatched due to the economic slowdown

brought by the government. You want to escape by insulting North Indians," she said.

"Youths are looking towards the government hoping that it will do something good for them," the Congress general secretary said.

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati said such comments are laughable.

"After the different laughable statements by different Union ministers on the serious issue of economic slowdown, instead of removing unemployment in the country now it is being said that there is no shortage of jobs, but of competence, especially amongst north Indians.

"This is extremely shameful and an apology should be tendered to the nation," she tweeted.

Air India posts Rs 4,600 cr operating loss in 2018-19; aims operating profit this fiscal

NEW DELHI, SEP 15 (PTI): Air India posted an operating loss of around Rs 4,600 crore in the last financial year mainly due to higher oil prices and foreign exchange losses but the debt-laden carrier expects to turn operationally profitable in 2019-20, according to senior officials. Reflecting tough business conditions, the airline's net loss stood at about Rs 8,400 crore while total revenues touched around Rs 26,400 crore in 2018-19, one of the senior officials told PTI.

Another senior official said the airline is projected to post an operating profit of Rs 700 to 800 crore in 2019-20, provided oil prices do not shoot up significantly and there is no steep fluctuation in foreign exchange rates.

However, the airline incurred an operating loss of Rs 175 to 200 crore in the three months ended June as closure of Pakistan airspace for Indian carriers resulted in higher costs and caused a daily loss of Rs 3 to 4 crore when the restrictions were in place, the official said.

Air India had a loss of Rs 430 crore in the four-month period when Pakistan closed its airspace after the Balakot air strikes. The official noted that



load factor and yields are improving for Air India, which currently flies to 41 international and 72 domestic destinations. Load factor is a measure of seat occupancy and yield refers to average fare paid per passenger.

The situation is anticipated to improve further as more wide-body planes would be available for operations in the coming months, the official added. Air India had grounded several

of its wide-body aircraft for maintenance and most of them are in the process of being re-inducted into the fleet.

Air India is to start flying to Toronto from September 27 and to Nairobi in November.

The airline has a debt burden of more than Rs 58,000 crore and servicing the loans is a major challenge as the annual outgo is more than Rs 4,000 crore. The official who was quoted first

said the carrier is facing a financial crisis and disinvestment is the option.

Aviation consultancy CAPA South Asia CEO and Director Kapil Kaul said Air India's financial position is likely to "significantly improve" in the current financial year.

"CAPA expects a closer to breakeven in FY 20 excluding increased costs incurred due to closure of Pakistan airspace. With oil prices expected to stay below USD 60, expect a closer to breakeven for Air India in FY 20, he told PTI.

Noting that improved financial performance would be a positive for divestment, Kaul said a fully divested Air India that is well capitalised and with improved governance and management would ensure that the airline has a relevant future.

India needs a stronger Air India which is viable without taxpayers' support, he added.

The government has decided on disinvestment of Air India as part of efforts to revive its fortunes. Air India, which has been in the red for long, was sanctioned a nearly Rs 30,000 crore bailout package for a 10-year period by the UPA regime in 2012.

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Recognise the Contribution of Counsellors

Intent is never enough, rehabilitation requires commitment

Rehabilitation of any kind is difficult. It is an ongoing task even when it is material tasks that one speaks of. The process continues, for example at Dikchu where the dam that had forced a sweep of rehabilitation when it was being constructed continues to create new needs and reasons for relief and rehabilitation even though the project itself was completed and commissioned several years back. Ditto for the airport project at Pakyong. These are the material challenges of rehabilitation. It is, however, also obvious that when one speaks of rehabilitation in terms of reconstructing lives shredded by substance abuse and alcoholism and not just homes rendered unsafe by blasting of sinking, the challenge multiplies many times over. It is already difficult of make people change, but when the change being demanded is to give up not only psychological cravings but also surmount the body's physical dependence on chemicals, the challenge acquires epic proportions.

Very few measure up to this daunting task; families often take the convenient exit route of ignoring the problem or shaming the victim (yes, it happens to addicts as well) and even doctors have been known to, on occasion, prefer prescribing the prescription med of abuse as medication instead of making time for counselling sessions which could all eventually go to waste. The society still washes its hands off addicts by branding them as misfit delinquent no-gooders and many schools would rather expel the "bad apples" rather than heal them. Even the Government prefers to engage with the problem as a law & order/ crime & punishment issue rather than understand the many layers and nuances with which a solution can be fashioned.

It is against this backdrop that the support provided by counsellors who continue to work among the addicts despite the general thanklessness of the society makes them heroes in these present times of easy distancing and convenient othering. Unfortunately, heroes are always in short supply and although there are many in Sikkim who are actively involved in counselling addicts and working patiently to get them walking the path of recovery, there is a felt need for more if Sikkim is to even make a dent in the citadel that addiction has constructed in the State. For this to happen, Sikkim will have to also recognise the contributions of these volunteers at the right platform as much to thank them for persevering with a responsibility that the society has danced away from as to inspire more to deploy their persuasive skills towards saving more lives. After all, where others would turn a blind eye or spare only disdain, they counsel, coax, care and tend to victims of substance abuse and try to rehabilitate them. What they do is not easy, and the least they deserve in return is recognition for their service.

After this, even the "sober" should seek out their counsel to inform their anti-drug laws better and construct the social networks required to catch and steady those who fall under the spell of "drugs".

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Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

How big data can affect your bank account – and life

AISLING MCMAHON, ALENA BUYX & BARBARA PRAINSACK
theconversation.com

Mustafa loves good coffee. In his free time, he often browses high-end coffee machines that he cannot currently afford but is saving for. One day, travelling to a friend's wedding abroad, he gets to sit next to another friend on the plane. When Mustafa complains about how much he paid for his ticket, it turns out that his friend paid less than half of what he paid, even though they booked around the same time.

He looks into possible reasons for this and concludes that it must be related to his browsing of expensive coffee machines and equipment. He is very angry about this and complains to the airline, who send him a lukewarm apology that refers to personalised pricing models. Mustafa feels that this is unfair but does not challenge it. Pursuing it any further would cost him time and money.

This story – which is hypothetical, but can and does occur – demonstrates the potential for people to be harmed by data use in the current "big data" era. Big data analytics involves using large amounts of data from many sources which are linked and analysed to find patterns that help to predict human behaviour. Such analysis, even when perfectly legal, can harm people.

Mustafa, for example, has likely been affected by personalised pricing practices whereby his search for high-end coffee machines has been used to make certain assumptions about his willingness to pay or buying power. This in turn may have led to his higher priced airfare. While this has not resulted in serious harm in Mustafa's case, instances of serious emotional and financial harm are, unfortunately, not rare, including the denial of mortgages for individuals and risks to a person's general credit worthiness based on associations with other individuals. This might happen if an individual shares some similar characteristics to other individuals who have poor repayment histories.

Instances of emotional harm can also occur. Imagine a couple who find out they are expecting a much wanted child, but suffer a miscarriage at five months. The couple may find they continue to receive advertisements from shops specialising in infant products months later, celebrating which should have been key "milestones", causing distress. This is another hypothetical but entirely possible scenario.

THE LAW – OR LACK OF IT

In many of these cases, because the harmful practice may not have broken any laws, those who were harmed by data use have limited or no legal options open to them. What happened to Mustafa,

for example, was perfectly legal, as there are no current laws forbidding personalised pricing as such. Our current legal systems do not adequately protect people from the harms emerging from big data.

This is because it is very difficult to trace how our data is linked and used. Even if the airline company had done something unlawful, such as broken data protection laws, it would be near impossible for Mustafa to find out. People who feel they have been harmed by data use may struggle to show how their data has been used to cause this harm, which data was involved or which data controller used it. And so they may lack the proof they'd need to get a legal remedy.

Furthermore, even if they show how something someone did with their data harmed them, that particular use of customer information, to adjust pricing for example, may not be unlawful.

Equally, the harm may be caused not by one's own data but by the use of other people's data



(third party data). For example, in Mustafa's case it might be that other individuals who were also interested in expensive coffee machines had very high incomes, or bought expensive items. This may have been used to suggest that Mustafa also fell into this category, which may have resulted in higher prices for him for other products. An individual harmed through the use of third party data will often not have remedies under current data protection laws.

A NEW SYSTEM

To help address such issues, we argue that we need to accept that some risks from data usage are not preventable. Instead of focusing solely on trying to minimise or avoid such risks, we also need to find ways to better support people who suffer

harms from data use, for example by actively monitoring and responding to harms caused by data use, including legal uses of data.

We think that as part of this system, a new type of institution should be set up. We call them harm mitigation bodies. These would be set up at a national level, and people who felt they were harmed by data use, but did not qualify for legal remedies, could go to them to report the harm they think arose from data use. Unlike traditional remedies, harm mitigation bodies could provide support even in cases where no laws were broken. They would be easy for people to use, and flexible, so that they could support people where and how they most need it, giving individuals more power and strengthening collective responsibility for data use.

These proposed bodies would collect information on what types of harm occur: currently there are no national or international bodies that collect information on data harms systematically. They

would also feedback information to policy makers and data users to help improve how things are done. And in cases where people suffer financial harms but do not have access to legal help, they might provide financial support as well.

Big data analytics is rightly lauded for the many new opportunities that it offers. But it will be inevitable that some people will be harmed. As a society, we need to face this truth, and provide better assistance to those who suffer harms, so that nobody who bears the costs for these new practices is left alone.

[Aisling McMahon is Assistant Professor in Law, National University of Ireland Maynooth; Alena Buyx is Professor in Ethics, Technical University of Munich; Barbara Prainsack is Professor of Comparative Policy Analysis, Universität Wien]

How disinformation could sway the 2020 election

PAUL M. BARRETT
theconversation.com

In 2016, Russian operatives used Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to sow division among American voters and boost Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

What the Russians used to accomplish this is called "disinformation," which is false or misleading content intended to deceive or promote discord. Now, with the first presidential primary vote only five months away, the public should be aware of the sources and types of online disinformation likely to surface during the 2020 election.

First, the Russians will be back. Don't be reassured by the notorious Russian Internet Research Agency's relatively negligible presence during last year's midterm elections. The agency might have been keeping its powder dry in anticipation of the 2020 presidential race. And it helped that U.S. Cyber Command, an arm of the military, reportedly blocked the agency's internet access for a few days right before the election in November 2018.

Temporarily shutting down the Internet Research Agency won't be enough to stop the flow of harmful content. Lee Foster, who leads the disinformation team at the cybersecurity firm FireEye, told me in an interview that the agency is "a small component of the overall Russian operation," which also includes Moscow's military intelligence service and possibly other organizations. Over time, Foster said, "All of these actors rework their approaches and tactics."

And there's more to fear than just the Russians. I'm the author of a new report on disinformation and the 2020 election published by the New York University Stern Center for Busi-

ness and Human Rights. In the report, I predict that the Russians won't be alone in spreading disinformation in 2020. Their most likely imitator will be Iran, especially if hostility between Tehran and Washington continues to mount.

DISINFORMATION ISN'T JUST RUSSIAN

In May, acting on a tip from FireEye, Facebook took down nearly 100 Iranian-related accounts, pages and groups. The Iranian network had used fake American identities to espouse both conservative and liberal political views, while also promoting extremely divisive anti-Saudi, anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian themes.

As Senate Intelligence Committee co-chair Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat, has said, "The Iranians are now following the Kremlin's playbook."

While foreign election interference has dominated discussion of disinformation, most intentionally false content targeting U.S. social media is generated by domestic sources.

I believe that will continue to be the case in 2020. President Trump often uses Twitter to circulate conspiracy theories and cast his foes as corrupt. One story line he pushes is that Facebook, Twitter and Google are colluding with Democrats to undermine him. Introducing a right-wing "social media summit" at the White House in July, he tweeted about the "tremendous dishonesty, bias, discrimination, and suppression practiced by certain companies."

Supporters of Democrats also have trafficked in disinformation. In December 2017, a group of liberal activists created fake Facebook pages designed to mislead conservative voters in a special U.S. Senate race in Alabama. Matt Osborne, who has acknowledged being involved in the Alabama scheme, told me that in 2020, "you're going to see a movement to-

ward [political spending from undisclosed sources] on digital campaigns in the closing days of the race." He suggests there could be an effort to discourage Republicans from voting with "an image of a red wave with a triumphal statement that imbues them with a sense of inevitable victory: 'No need to bother voting. Trump has got it in the bag.'"

SPREADING FAKE VIDEOS

Also likely to surface next year: "deepfake" videos. This technique produces highly convincing – but false – images and audio. In a recent letter to the CEOs of Facebook, Google and Twitter, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, a California Democrat, wrote: "A timely, convincing deepfake video of a candidate" that goes viral on a platform "could hijack a race – and even alter the course of history. ... The consequences for our democracy could be devastating."

Instagram could be a vehicle for deepfakes. Owned by Facebook, the photo and video platform played a much bigger role in Russia's manipulation of the 2016 U.S. election than most people realize, and it could be exploited again in 2020. The Russian Internet Research Agency enjoyed more user engagement on Instagram than it did on any other platform, according to a December 2018 report commissioned by the Senate Intelligence Committee. "Instagram is likely to be a key battleground on an ongoing basis," the report added.

COMPANIES COULD STEP UP

The social media companies are responding to the problem of disinformation by improving their artificial intelligence filters and hiring thousands of additional employees devoted to safety and security. "The companies are getting much better at detection and removal of fake accounts," Dipayan Ghosh, co-director

of the Harvard Kennedy School's Platform Accountability Project, told me.

But the companies do not completely remove much of the content they pinpoint as false; they merely reduce how often it appears for users, and sometimes post a message noting that it's false.

In my view, provably false material should be eliminated from feeds and recommendations, with a copy retained in a cordoned-off archive available for research purposes to scholars, journalists and others.

Another problem is that responsibility for content decisions now tends to be scattered among different teams within each of the social media companies. Our report recommends that to streamline and centralize, each company should hire a senior official who reports to the CEO and is responsible for overseeing the fight against disinformation. Such executives could marshal resources more easily within each company and more effectively coordinate efforts across social media companies.

Finally, the platforms could also cooperate more than they currently do to stamp out disinformation. They've collaborated effectively to root out child pornography and terrorist incitement. I believe they now have a collective responsibility to rid the coming election of as much disinformation as possible. An electorate that has been fed lies about candidates and issues can't make informed decisions. Votes will be based on falsehoods. And that means the future of American democracy – in 2020 and beyond – depends on dealing effectively with disinformation.

[the writer is Deputy Director, Center for Business and Human Rights, Stern School of Business; Adjunct Professor of Law, New York University]

Nepal should expedite projects under BRI, says Dahal

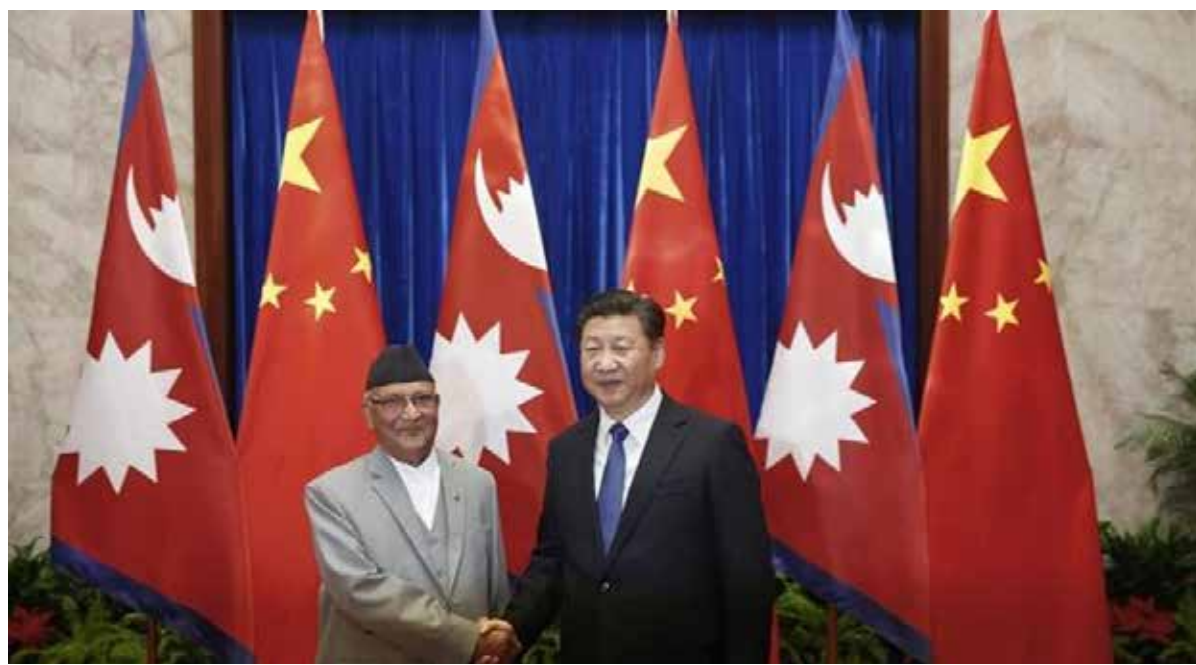
SHIRISH B PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, SEP 15 (PTI): Nepal should finalise all the projects under China's ambitious BRI since the multi-billion project was purely an economic cooperation and not a military alliance, former prime minister and Co-chairman of the ruling Nepal Communist Party Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" said on Sunday.

Speaking at a symposium titled "BRI Dialogue" in Kathmandu, Dahal said Nepal's projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) should not be delayed since it would contribute to the country's socio-economic development.

"BRI is not a military alliance. Rather, it seeks to promote mutual cooperation between various countries that are part of it. We should not delay in finalising the projects under the BRI. I think the time has to come to speed up the projects in accordance with our priority and needs," he said.

The BRI is a multi-billion-dollar initiative



launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. India has been severely critical of BRI as the USD 50 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is part of the BRI, passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

India says it cannot accept a project that ignores its core concern on sovereignty and territorial integrity

Nepal decided to join the BRI when Da-

hal became the prime minister of the country for the second time in 2017 "with the hope that it would contribute to the economic development.

Various projects, including a multi-dimensional connectivity network and other rail projects, are due in Nepal under the BRI, the Himalayan Times reported.

Stating that BRI is primarily about collective efforts of the various countries to achieve

economic development by enhancing rail-road and maritime connectivity, Dahal said that many countries have already started getting benefits from the BRI by executing projects under the initiative.

"Some countries have also expressed some reservations in the biggest ever project of the 21st century. But least developed countries like Nepal have fully supported the BRI," he said. Dahal said

that countries part of the BRI can identify projects based on their national priorities and interests.

He said that Nepal wants to have good ties with both of its neighbours--India and China.

"Nepal wants to reap benefit from the economic rise of both China and India," he said.

Prachanda also underlined the need for forging trilateral partnership, among Nepal, India and China.

Centre's effort to prevent coal strike may go futile: Union leader

KOLKATA, SEP 15 (PTI): The Centre's attempt to prevent trade unions of the coal sector from carrying out the strike on September 24 is likely to go in vain as workmen are keen to go ahead with their decision protesting 100 per cent foreign direct investment in mining, a union leader said.

Chances that coal production remains uninterrupted due to the strike seem to be bleak, trade union leaders said.

The central government has convened a meeting with trade unions on Sunday evening and the matters pertaining to the strike feature in the agenda for discussion, they said.

"A meeting has been convened by coal joint secretary.

We will attend the meeting and will not

withdraw the strike in any circumstance as government is going ahead with privatisation and anti-Coal India steps," All India Coal Workers' Federation General Secretary DD Ramanandan told PTI.

Five federations representing over half-a-million workers of Coal India Ltd, along with Singareni Collieries and the state-owned coal firms have called for a strike on September 24, seeking withdrawal of the central government's decision to allow 100 percent foreign direct investment in coal mining.

Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), the trade union affiliate of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, is not a signatory with other federations for the one-day strike notice but it has served a five-day

strike notice from September 23 to September 27 on the same issue.

BMS leader BK Rai said they will not attend the meeting convened by the centre and are "serious" about the strike. "We will strike on September 24 but now it is to be seen whether other unions will join us for the five-day strike," he said.

Ramanandan said a high level committee has recommended to move away from allotting mines on a nomination basis to PSUs and suggested that Coal India should auction 222 non-operational and loss-making mines on production sharing basis, which will not provide any benefit to the miner, he said.

Under these circumstances, at least one-day strike seems imminent, he added.

Sonowal assures Assam govt's support for NRL expansion project



GUWAHATI, SEP 15 (PTI): Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Sunday assured the state government's full support for the timely completion of the expansion project of the Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL).

The foundation stone of the expansion project was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January this year.

The chief minister while reviewing the preliminary progress of the project at Numaligarh, urged the NRL officials to adhere to the timeframe as per the roadmap prepared for the execution of the expansion project, an official spokesman said here.

Sonowal assured the NRL officials that the state government would extend all required support for the timely completion of the expansion

project, he said.

Sonowal said that as the bio-fuel plant is expected to generate huge direct and indirect employment, NRL must carry out a study to identify the size of skilled manpower required to run the plant as well as the ancillary industries so that necessary skill development initiatives could be taken.

He also requested the NRL officials to prepare an assessment report to guide the government on skill enhancement and maximization of people's involvement in the proposed project.

The chief minister also appreciated the efforts of NRL officials under the leadership of its managing director SK Baruah in convincing the Union government to make highest ever investment for a single project in the North

East amounting to Rs 22,594 crore.

He expressed hope that augmentation of the capacity of NRL would not only benefit its production capacity but also make the state visible in the industrial landscape of South East Asia.

The cabinet committee on economic affairs has approved the project and construction on the proposed 6 MMTPA refinery would start from 2020 with mechanical completion by 2023, the spokesman said.

During the meeting NRL's managing director also handed over to the chief minister, the company's final dividends of Rs 27.24 crore.

Altogether a dividend of Rs 154 crore has been given to the state government by NRL during the current financial year, officials said.

Guides, drivers at Bengal's Gorumara National Park told not to post wildlife photos on social media

JALPAIGURI, SEP 15 (PTI): Safari jeep drivers and guides working at the Gorumara National Park in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district were on Sunday asked by the authorities to refrain from posting photographs of wild animals on the social media.

The national park authorities said the photographs provide vital information about the location of the wild animals to poachers, making their work easy.

The instruction was issued on Sunday by Gorumara south division ranger Ayan Chakraborty to the jeep drivers and guides working at the national park.

He, along with Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) Janmejey Pal, briefed them at the Lataguri Environmental Observatory here, a day before the reopening of all the protected forest areas in the region on

Monday. The protected forests remain closed from June 15 to September 15 every year during the breeding period of the animals.

The decision to prevent posting of photographs of the wild animals on the social media was taken by the Forest Department during a recent meeting held here, an official of the department said.

The photographs of the wildlife put on social media by the safari jeep drivers and the guides give the poachers information about the whereabouts of their prey, he said. The people working in the national park have to be very alert regarding this issue, he said.

Chakraborty also warned of penal action against anyone found littering the protected forest area with plastic. The area has been declared a "no-plastic zone".

Protect constitutional rights in 'Super Emergency' era: Mamata



KOLKATA, SEP 15 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has reiterated that the country is going through a period of "Super Emergency" and called on people to protect the rights and freedom guaranteed by the Constitution. On the occasion of the International Day of Democracy on Sunday, she urged the countrymen to safeguard the constitutional values upon which independent India was founded.

"On the #InternationalDayofDemocracy today (Sunday), let us once again pledge to safeguard the constitutional values

our country was founded on. "In this era of 'Super Emergency', we must do all it takes to protect the rights and freedoms that our Constitution guarantees," she tweeted.

The Trinamool Congress supremo has time and again said that the country is going through 'Super Emergency' under the BJP-led NDA rule at the Centre.

The United Nations General Assembly had in 2007 resolved to observe September 15 every year as the International Day of Democracy to uphold and promote the principles of democracy.

Balakot air strikes theme of Kolkata Durga Puja marquee



KOLKATA, SEP 15 (PTI): A Durga Puja committee in Kolkata is decorating its pandal (marquee) this year on the theme of Balakot air strikes, in which Indian Air Force (IAF) jets had bombed a terror outfit's training camp in Pakistan.

The Young Boys Club Sarbojanin Durga Puja Committee in central Kolkata is recreating the events of the air strike with clay models and digital projection on its 50th anniversary of conducting the annual fiesta.

"Sixty five models of approaching IAF personnel and fleeing and dead terrorists will be placed at the entrance to the pandal with a model of an IAF aircraft hovering over it," the committee's spokesperson Vikrant Singh told PTI on Saturday. He said a

life-size model of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman will greet the visitors to the pandal.

Wing Commander Varthaman was captured by the Pakistan Army after his MiG-21 Bison jet was shot down by Pakistani jets in a dogfight on February 27, a day after the strike.

Before his jet was hit, Varthaman had downed an F-16 fighter of the Pakistan Air Force.

He was released by Pakistan on March 1.

"What better an occasion than the 50th year of our Durga Puja to remind the revelers visiting our pandal and to educate our children about the achievement of IAF pilots," he said.

Singh said the forest cover surrounding the targeted camp would be recreated through digital

projection.

The models are being crafted by artisans from Purba Medinipur district, he said.

The air strikes in Pakistan's Balakot was conducted by the IAF after a suicide attack on a CRPF convoy in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama on February 14 had claimed the lives of 40 personnel.

Meanwhile, another Durga Puja pandal is getting decorated on a theme on various wings of the Kolkata Police.

"We will pay tributes to Kolkata Police through digital projection and display of clay models on Bomb Squad, River Traffic Police, Dog Squad, Cyber Crime Cell and Mounted Police wings of the force," said a spokesperson of Kailash Bose Street Puja Committee in north Kolkata.

Bees delay Kolkata-Agartala flight

KOLKATA, SEP 15 (PTI): A Kolkata-Agartala Air India flight was delayed for around two hours on Sunday after a swarm of bees was noticed in front of the aircraft while it was taxiing towards the main runway here, an airlines official said.

The plane with 136 passengers and crew members on board the AI 743 flight was scheduled

to depart at 9.40 am.

The bees were noticed by the pilots when the Airbus A319 was moving towards the runway for the take-off.

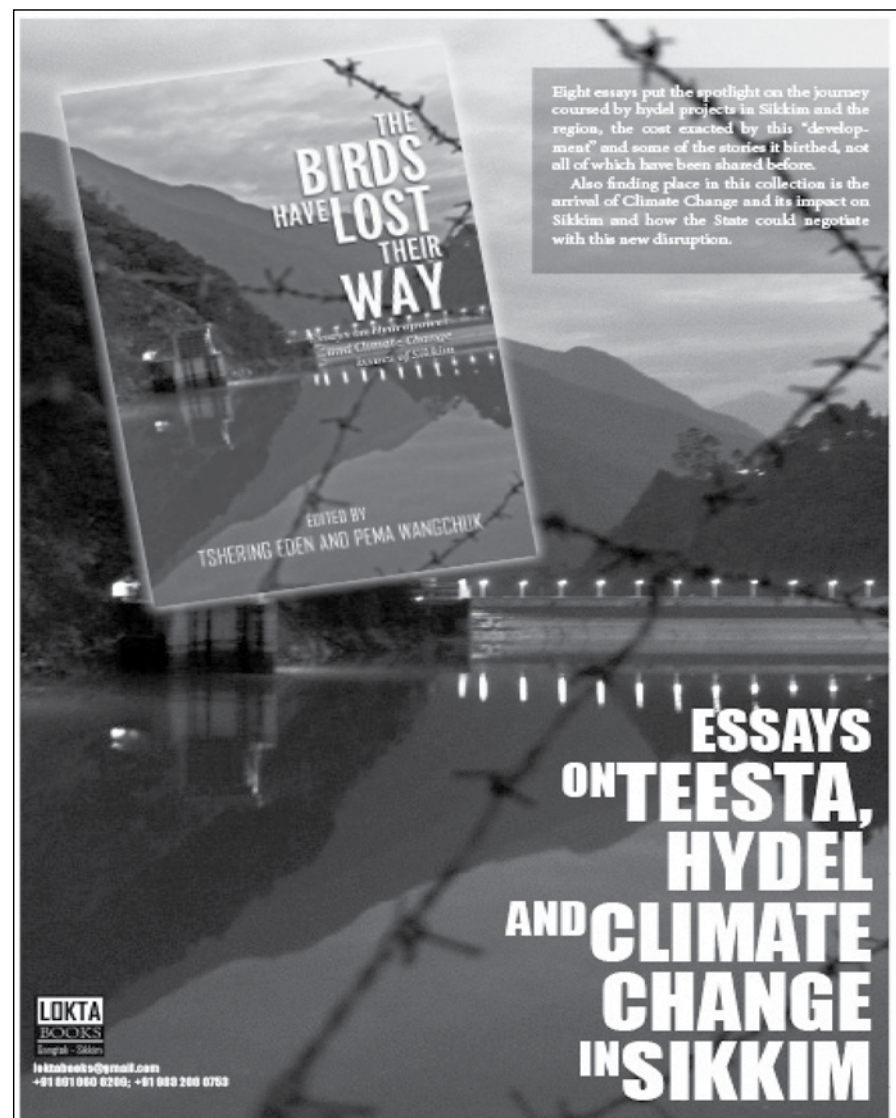
The pilots brought the aircraft to a standstill as further movement could have damaged the plane and harmed the passengers if the bees entered it through the engines, the Air India spokesperson

said. Fire services personnel were called to tackle the problem.

It was found that the bees did not enter the aircraft nor any damage was caused to the plane.

Before this incident, the flight had been delayed for some time due to a technical snag.

The plane finally embarked for the Tripura capital at 12.45 pm.



Ponting eyes batting shake-up for Australia summer Tests

SYDNEY, SEPT 15 (AFP): Only three Australian batsmen are certain to start the summer Test series against Pakistan, according to former skipper Ricky Ponting, with David Warner among them.

Ponting, who has been a sounding board for coach Justin Langer in recent months, unsurprisingly nominated the in-form Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne as the other two.

That leaves holes to fill and Australia's greatest run scorer said he would like to see young prospect Will Pucovski, who has battled mental health issues, given a debut in the first Test at the Gabba on November 12.

"Warner's going to be a lock," Ponting told cricket.com.au, despite the opener having a miserable Ashes tour where he has struggled to get into double digits.

"I don't care if he gets another duck in the second innings of this Test match (at the Oval), he's going to be a lock for the Australian summer. Marnus is an absolute lock. Smith's a lock.

"(There are) still question marks around the guys in the middle, (Matthew) Wade and (Travis) Head," he added. "(Opener Marcus) Harris has looked tested against good quality fast bowling in this series."

Australia have chopped and changed their top and middle order against England, with Usman Khawaja and Cameron Bancroft among those dropped after failing to fire.

Their lack of form could open the door to Joe Burns and Kurtis Patterson, who were controversially left out of the squad for England despite making centuries in their last home Test against Sri Lanka.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey could also get a look in, although Ponting said Tim Paine should continue as captain during the summer Tests against Pakistan and New Zealand.

"With so many gaps like that, I'd like to see somebody like Pucovski get an opportunity," he added.

"Everyone's talked about him for a long time. A couple of years before the next Ashes series you want to try and blood someone in that No.6 role and he'd be the obvious candidate."

The 21-year-old smashed a superb 243 for Victoria against Western Australia last season, which saw him parachuted into the national setup for two Tests against Sri Lanka.

He was overlooked for the first one in Brisbane and again missed out on selection for the second in Canberra before being released to deal with mental health issues.

He had suffered similar problems in the past.

"Time to turn the page"- Neymar scores stunning winner on PSG return

PARIS, SEPT 15 (AFP): Neymar shrugged off a hostile reception as he marked his return to action for Paris Saint-Germain with a stunning injury-time winner, and then insisted it was time to move on from the saga of his aborted return to Barcelona.

The world's most expensive player was booed and insulted by sections of the PSG support in the Ligue 1 match against Strasbourg at the Parc des Princes.

That seemed set to be the only story of the afternoon until the second minute of added time when, with the game still goalless, the Brazilian met Abdou Diallo's cross with an acrobatic effort that sent the ball arcing back over his own head and in off the post, sealing a 1-0 win.

It was a remarkable goal and a reminder of why PSG paid a world record 222 million euros (264 million at the time) to sign Neymar in 2017. It also leaves them two points clear of Rennes at the top of Ligue 1.

"I made it clear that I have nothing against the fans, nothing against Paris Saint-Germain as a club. Everyone knows I wanted to leave. I am not going to get into the details of what happened," he said after the game.

"It is time to turn the page. Today I am a Paris Saint-Germain player and I am going to give everything on the field."

He had not played for his club since May



and had been left on the sidelines in their first four league games of the campaign because of the uncertainty surrounding his future.

However, having been resigned to a third season in France, he was handed a start by coach Thomas Tuchel here, and loud jeers greeted his name as the teams were read out. He was also regularly whistled by fans when he touched the ball.

"It is not the first time I have been booed by everyone," Neymar admitted.

"I played in Brazil away from home, I was widely booed. I have played in finals and been booed, I have played here in France, away from home, and also been booed.

"It is sad but I know

that, from now on, every game I play will be an away game."

One banner unfurled in Portuguese, aimed at Neymar's father who is also his agent, read: "Neymar Senior, sell your son in the Vila Mimosa".

Vila Mimosa is a district of Rio de Janeiro notorious for prostitution.

Another banner mockingly called Neymar "Calimero", a reference to the always unlucky Italian cartoon character.

Certainly not much was going right on the field for the 27-year-old or for his team, who had been held by Strasbourg twice in the league last season.

- REVENGE -

Neymar hit the post direct from a corner late on but ended up getting his revenge -- it was against Strasbourg that

he suffered a broken foot back in January.

"It was not easy because he is a very sensitive kid," Tuchel said.

"It wasn't easy for the supporters either during the transfer window, so we have to accept their reaction. He can play better but he needs several matches to get his rhythm back."

As brilliant as the goal was, it was not met with unanimous approval by supporters, but Neymar will clearly be missed when he sits out Wednesday's Champions League opener against Real Madrid due to suspension.

PSG were still without the injured Kylian Mbappe and Edinson Cavani here, but Mauro Icardi appeared as a substitute after arriving

on loan from Inter Milan just before the transfer deadline. New goalkeeper Keylor Navas started in goal following his arrival from Real and excelled himself with one early save from Ludovic Ajorque. Lamine Kone headed over for the visitors late in the first half, and it was not until the latter stages that the hosts began to apply concerted pressure.

Neymar burst through in the 76th minute only to be denied by Matz Sels, and Strasbourg's Belgian goalkeeper then made a stunning save to tip Ander Herrera's deflected effort around the post.

There was nothing Sels could do, however, when Neymar produced his moment of magic at the death.

Australia having a 'mare' with Ashes DRS calls

LONDON, SEPT 15 (AFP): Australia captain Tim Paine admitted he was having "a mare" after twice failing to review umpiring decisions in the fifth Ashes Test even though the challenges would have brought wickets. England, seeking to level the series at 2-2, are firmly in control of the final Test with two days to go, 382 runs ahead with two second-innings wickets left.

Australia toiled in the field at the Oval on the third day of the match on Saturday and were not helped by Paine's misjudgements.

Joe Denly, who went on to score 94, should have been out lbw to Mitchell Marsh when he was on 54 but Australia opted not to review the not-out decision.

Later on the skipper, who is the team's wicket-keeper, failed to review a not-out decision against Jos Buttler after an appeal for lbw, with replays showing Nathan Lyon's delivery would have hit the stumps.

Buttler, then on 19, went on to score 47.

"I'm getting it wrong," said a tetchy Paine.

"I don't know what else to say. We're having a mare (nightmare). We've got it wrong."

"It's fast," he added.

"It's a tough job as I've said throughout the whole Test series. I've got a new respect for umpiring, particularly in Test cricket because it's a hard job." When asked what he could do about

it, he said sarcastically that he would enrol in "umpiring school" when he returned home to Australia. Paine said after his side's defeat in the third Test at Headingley that he would be putting someone else in charge of the team's reviews.

During the closing stages of that match, Lyon had a huge appeal for lbw against Ben Stokes but the England vice-captain was given not out and Australia could not challenge that verdict as they had used up all their reviews. Their misery was compounded when replays revealed that Stokes would have been given out.

Paine said it was sometimes difficult to judge from behind the stumps, saying he was not sure where the ball hit Denly, for example.

The skipper said his team, guaranteed to retain the Ashes urn, still had a chance to win the series outright.

"The only thing that's been a bit upsetting this Test match is our catching and our referrals but that's not anything new," he added. He described his top-scorer Steve Smith as a "freak" after he took a stunning diving slip catch late on to see the back of Chris Woakes.

"Cricketers like him, I think Stokes is the same, they're just in the contest and in the game all the time," he said. "That's what makes great cricketers great because they're always in the contest, they're always aware of what's happening.

Benzema brilliance inspires Real, Fati lights up Barca

MADRID, SEPT 15 (AFP): Karim Benzema scored twice for Real Madrid in a 3-2 win against Levante with Eden Hazard making his La Liga debut while later Barcelona breezed to a 5-2 win against Valencia with more magic from 16-year-old Ansu Fati.

Benzema's goals came just six minutes apart in the first half at a wet Santiago Bernabeu, before Casemiro put Real 3-0 up. However Levante, who had won their previous two outings, made a fight of it in the second half as they pulled goals back through Borja Mayoral and Gonzalo Melero. "The second half was more difficult for us, but the overall feeling was positive," said coach Zinedine Zidane, whose team had drawn their previous two games.

"We have got the three points and we were incredible in the first half, the way we played, the goals, the commitment. We just need to stay focused for the full 90 minutes."

Hazard also came off the bench for the final half-hour to make his first La Liga appearance after a thigh injury had interrupted the start of his Real career following his 100 million-euro (110 million) move from Chelsea.

The Belgian could now start when Real go to Paris Saint-Germain for their opening Champions League game on Wednesday. "I am happy for him," said Zidane. "He will do us good. He is not ready yet though -- he has only trained four times with the team. But when everyone is fit, when we have our rhythm, we will hurt teams."

Gareth Bale will also be available to face PSG after suspension kept him out here, but Sergio Ramos will be unable to play because of a European ban.

Zidane was also without the injured Luka Modric here. However, as well as Hazard, fellow summer signing Eder Militao came off the bench in the second half and the former Porto defender could start in Paris.

- FATI SCORES AGAIN -

Real would have won by a greater margin here had it not been for some inspired goalkeeping from Aitor Fernandez, who produced a stunning



one-handed stop to keep out a Benzema shot midway through the first half.

Atletico Madrid retained their place at the top of the table, but only by one point from Real Madrid after their first defeat of the season when they lost 2-0 at Real Sociedad at the Basque club's newly refurbished stadium.

Later, former Real Madrid assistant coach Albert Celades replaced sacked Marcelino Garcia Toral as boss of Valencia who were routed 5-2 at Barcelona.

With Lionel Messi still out and watching from the stands it was left to Fati, the teenager from Guinea-Bissau, to take the plaudits.

Fati, who became the third youngest La Liga scorer when he came off the bench to net in a 2-2 draw at Osasuna this month, scored again in the second minute, before providing the assist for Frenkie de Jong's 7th minute goal.

The teenager earned his standing ovation from the Camp Nou crowd when he came off after an hour.

"It's not usual that on his first touch he scores, and on his second he sets up a goal," said Barca coach Ernesto Valverde. "To get used to being a Barca player is work for anyone, even more so for a boy so young, but he's a balanced kid, he strikes me as being at ease."

Kevin Gameiro got Valencia off the mark but a brace from the fit again Luis Suarez after a contribution from Gerard Pique meant Max Gomez's injury time second for the visitors was purely academic.

Boutier and Hall fightback sets up Solheim Cup cliffhanger

Gleneagles (UK), Sept 15 (AFP): Celine Boutier and Georgia Hall were the European heroines on Saturday as Europe desperately clung on to the hope of regaining the Solheim Cup at Gleneagles. After a punishing series of fourballs in blustery, cold weather, the Americans emerged as 2.5-1.5 winners to leave the score tied at 8-8 going into Sunday's final 12 singles.

As holders, the US team needs to win six of the matches to claim the trophy for the third year in a row. With all four matches going to the final two holes, fortunes swung to and fro.

At one stage, the visitors were ahead in every match.

But Boutier, the French rookie, and Hall, the 2018 Women's British Open Champion, staged a magnificent comeback against Ally McDonald and Angel Yin to claim a vital full point.

Four down after seven holes and still three down with five to play, Hall and Boutier won the next four on the trot to take a one hole lead and they added another at the 18th for a two hole victory. Boutier produced three stunning highlights -- she holed from 20 feet for an eagle two at the short, par 4 14th and then made birdies at the 16th and 18th.

Hall and 25-year-old Frenchwoman Boutier have won three out of three matches.

"It's a great way to start my Solheim career. I had a great partner. The eagle was important -- it kept us right in it," said Boutier. Hall said the conditions were line playing an extra adversary. "We didn't make the best of starts, but it was horrendous out there. We just had to dig deep and I am so happy," she said.

- 'REAL BATTLE' -

The home team, a point to the good overnight, was still ahead after a share of the morning foursomes.

In a nervy top four-ball, Brittany Altomare

and Annie Park closed out a vital match by one hole against Anne Van Dam and Suzann Pettersen. The other point for the United States came from Lizette Salas and Danielle Kang in the final match, beating Carlota Ciganda and Azahara Munoz by two holes.

"I thought we might not get finished in the dark so it was great not to have to go up the 18th," said Kang.

"The weather was awful -- I have never been so cold -- but so excited to win." The second match was honours even.

Caroline Masson had an eight foot birdie putt at the last to snatch victory for Europe.

But her effort hit the hole and stayed out.

In the opening match of the morning foursomes, Morgan Pressel and Marina Alex helped set the tone for the day by turning around a four hole deficit after six holes into a 2 and 1 victory over Van Dam and Anna Nordqvist.

The second US point in the foursomes came from the Korda sisters, Jessica and Nelly scoring a record 6 and 5 win over Ciganda and Bronte Law.

The sisters -- Florida-based daughters of former Grand Slam tennis Champion Petr Korda -- have both won 2.5 points from three matches. One real blight on the day was the pace of play, with rounds taking well over five hours.

"The afternoon was huge and it was great to win the series," said US skipper Juli Inkster, who steered her side to victory in 2015 and 2017.

"I'm ecstatic to be tied and so proud of my team in these tough conditions. Now it is all to play for." Her Europe counterpart Catriona Matthew will hope history repeats itself. The only other time the teams were tied going into the singles was in Ireland in 2011 -- Europe went on to win. "The singles are going to be a real battle," said Matthew. "But we will be ready to go and we will see what happens."

Kavinder Bisht moves ahead with tough win at World Boxing

EKATERINBURG (RUSSIA), SEP 15 (PTI): Asian silver-medallist Kavinder Singh Bisht (57kg) advanced to the pre-quarterfinals with a hard-fought win over China's Chena Zhihao in the World Men's Boxing Championships here on Sunday.

The fifth seeded Indian left his rival with a bloodied face before the judges ruled 3-2 in his favour after an exhausting bout during which both the boxers managed to connect very few impactful punches.

The 26-year-old Indian Air Force man, who was a quarterfinalist in the 2017 Hamburg edition and is among the strongest contenders for a medal this time around, stood out for his pace and endurance during Sunday's bout.

Earlier, second seed and Asian champion Amit Panghal (52kg) and

Commonwealth Games silver-medallist Manish Kaushik (63kg) advanced to the pre-quarterfinals after claiming dominating wins in their respective second round bouts.

The world championship was meant to be an Olympic qualifier and features the revised eight weight categories (52kg, 57kg, 61kg, 69kg, 75kg, 81kg, 91kg, +91kg) earmarked for Tokyo 2020, instead of the traditional 10 divisions.

However, the event was stripped of that status after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) lost patience with the long-standing administrative mess in the International Boxing Association (AIBA).

The IOC took control of the Olympics qualification process, which will now start next year with the Asian qualifiers in February.

Hong Kong returns to violence with tear gas and molotovs

HONG KONG, SEP 15 (AFP): Hong Kong riot police fired tear gas and water cannons at hardcore pro-democracy protesters hurling rocks and petrol bombs on Sunday, tipping the violence-plagued city back into chaos after a brief lull in clashes.

Tens of thousands of people defied authorities to march through the streets of the city in an unsanctioned rally on Sunday, the latest expression of a popular revolt that has raged for the last 99 days.

But the rally descended into violence when small groups of hardcore activists -- known within the movement as the "braves" -- tried to attack the city's main government complex.

Police fired repeated volleys of tear gas and deployed water cannon trucks after Molotov cocktails and rocks were thrown over security barriers surrounding the complex, which has become a frequent flashpoint in the ongoing protests.

The clashes ended a relative lull in recent days in the intensity of skirmishes between police and protesters.

The once-stable international hub has been convulsed by weeks of huge, sometimes violent rallies calling for greater democratic freedoms and police accountability.

The movement is the biggest challenge to China's rule since the city was handed back by Britain in 1997 and shows no sign of ending, with local leaders and Beijing taking a hard line.



Under a deal signed with Britain ahead of the handover, Hong Kong is allowed to keep its unique freedoms for 50 years.

But democracy activists accuse Beijing of renegeing on those promises by tightening political control over the semi-autonomous territory and refusing calls for universal suffrage.

Earlier on Sunday, protesters rallied outside Britain's consulate in Hong Kong, demanding London do more to protect its former colonial subjects and ramp up pressure on Beijing over sliding freedoms.

Hundreds of demonstrators sang "God Save the Queen" and "Rule Britannia" outside the consulate, waving the Union Jack as well as Hong Kong's colonial-era flags.

Many of the protest signs accused Britain of not doing enough to confront Beijing over its tightening grip on the semi-autonomous city.

"Sino-British Joint Declaration is VOID," one read, referencing the 1984 agreement that paved the way for the city's handover, a deal that Hong Kongers were given no say over.

"So far, I'm quite disappointed by the fact that the UK hasn't done anything to support us," protester Alex Leung, a recent graduate, told AFP.

Many called for Hong Kongers who want to leave the city to be granted citizenship in Britain or other Commonwealth nations.

Some Hong Kongers were given British National Overseas (BNO) passports before the handover, a document that allows holders easy travel to the UK but grants no working or residency rights.

"At least with the full citizenship, they can protect Hong Kong people from the Chinese government," protester Anthony Chau, who holds a BNO passport, told AFP.

Earlier this week, some 130 UK lawmakers signed a joint letter calling for Britain and Commonwealth countries to come up with an "insurance policy" for Hong Kongers to resettle overseas should they wish to.

Hong Kong's summer of rage was sparked by plans to allow extraditions to the authoritarian mainland, a move that promoted million to hit the streets.

As Beijing and local city leaders doubled down, the movement rapidly snowballed into a much wider anti-government movement.

The widely loathed extradition bill has now been withdrawn.

But the pro-democracy movement has vowed to continue until key demands are met, including an inquiry into the police, an amnesty for those arrested and universal suffrage.

"We have a right to go to protests, to the streets, and we have to

voice our demands to the government," said a secondary school student at Sunday's unsanctioned rally who gave his name as Alvin.

Both Lam and Beijing have shown little appetite for making any further concessions.

Lam has said she is willing to hold a dialogue but protesters must abandon violence first.

But the movement is leaderless -- a response to authorities prosecuting high-profile democracy figures from previous protests -- making it difficult for Lam to know who to negotiate with.

Online message boards have filled with plans for new rallies and strikes in the coming weeks, fuelled by two key anniversaries.

September 28 is the fifth anniversary of the start of the failed pro-democracy Umbrella Movement protests while October 1 is the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China.

Embattled Israeli PM fights for survival in do-over election

JERUSALEM, SEP 15 (AP): A visibly frantic Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is in the fight of his political life as the country heads to national elections for the second time this year.

With Netanyahu locked in a razor tight race and facing the likelihood of criminal corruption charges, a decisive victory in Tuesday's vote may be the only thing to keep him out of the courtroom. A repeat of the deadlock in April's election, or a victory by challenger Benny Gantz, could spell the end of the career of the man who has led the country for the past decade.

Netanyahu's daily campaign stunts have helped him set the national agenda a tactic the media-savvy Israeli leader has perfected throughout his three decades in national politics. But it may well be the things he can't control including a former political ally turned rival and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip that bring him down.

Throughout the abbreviated campaign, Netanyahu has seemed to create new headlines at will.

One day he is jetting off for meetings with world leaders. The next, he claims to unveil a previously undisclosed Iranian nuclear site.

Then he vows to annex parts of the occupied

West Bank. Nearly every day, he issues unfounded warnings about the country's Arab minority "stealing" the election, drawing accusations of incitement and racism.

"Netanyahu is always worried. That's why he has survived this long," said Anshel Pfeffer, a columnist at the Haaretz newspaper and author of a recent biography of Netanyahu. "Every election campaign he enters convinced that he can lose, and that's how he fights it, with his back to the wall," he said.

By many counts, the strategy has worked. Netanyahu, the country's longest-serving prime minister, has dominated the political discourse during a campaign that is seen as a referendum on his rule. His opponents, meanwhile, have been forced to react to his ever-shifting tactics.

Netanyahu has turned to a familiar playbook presenting himself as a global statesman who is uniquely qualified to lead the country while also portraying himself as the underdog, lashing out at perceived domestic enemies who he claims are conspiring against him.

During a Channel 12 TV interview late Saturday, Netanyahu appeared distressed and combative. He smirked, shook his head and raised his voice as he accused the media of "inciting" against him,

angrily rejected the legal case against him and issued dire warnings that his Likud party will lose. "Victory is not in our pocket," he said. At the same time, he claimed the country understands that only he can lead.

His campaign ads portray him as being in a "different league" and show him embracing his friend, President Donald Trump, as well as Russian President Vladimir Putin, India's Narendra Modi and other world leaders. Last week, Netanyahu rushed to Sochi, Russia, for talks with Putin about Iran.

"The public is saying, 'We understand that you are a world-class leader,'" he told Channel 12.

Echoing Trump, Netanyahu routinely lashes out at the media, the judiciary, prosecutors and other alleged foes. But it has been his attacks on Israel's Arab minority that have caused the most controversy. Netanyahu has long targeted Israeli Arabs to rally his working-class, nationalist base implying that they are a fifth column threatening the county.

In the current campaign, he has taken these tactics to a new level. He sparked uproar by leading a failed effort to allow activists to film voters at polling stations, claiming without evidence that they were needed to prevent fraud in Arab districts.

Malala urges UN to help Kashmiri children go back to school

LONDON, SEP 15 (PTI): Nobel Peace Prize winner and Pakistani education rights activist Malala Yousafzai has urged the UN to work towards peace in Kashmir and help children go back to school amid the tense situation in the Valley.

Normal life has remained affected in Kashmir since August 5, when the special status for Jammu and Kashmir was scrapped and restrictions were imposed. Most shops and schools remain shut and public transport has gone off the roads.

"I am asking leaders, at #UNGA and beyond, to work towards peace in Kashmir, listen to Kashmiri voices and help children go safely back to school," the youngest ever Nobel Laureate



tweeted on Saturday. Malala, 22, said she is deeply concerned about reports of students who have not been able to attend school for more than 40 days, about girls who are afraid to leave their homes.

"I wanted to hear directly from girls living in Kashmir right now. It took a lot of work from a lot of people to get their stories because of the communications blackout. Kashmiris are cut off from the world and un-

able to make their voices heard. #LetKashmir-Speak," she tweeted.

As the shutdown in the Valley entered its 41st day on Saturday, most of the shops and other business establishments remained closed. Internet services remained suspended across all platforms.

While landline phones across the Valley were functional, voice calls on mobile devices were working only in Kupwara and Handwara police districts of north Kashmir.

Imran Khan warns of possibility of conventional war with India

ISLAMABAD, SEP 15 (PTI): Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has said there was no question of talking to New Delhi after it revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, as he warned about the possibility of a conventional war with India which could go beyond the subcontinent.

"So that's why we have approached the United Nations, we are approaching every international forum, that they must act right now," he said. Khan said he "absolutely" believes war with India could be a possibility. "...this is a potential disaster that would go way beyond the Indian subcontinent," Khan said.

He said that Pakistan would never start a war.

"I am a pacifist, I am anti-war, I believe that wars do not solve any problems," he told Al Jazeera. "When two nuclear-armed countries fight, if they fight a conventional war, there is every possibility that it is going to end up into nuclear war. The unthinkable," he said.

"If say Pakistan, God forbid, we are fighting a conventional war, we are losing, and if a country is stuck between the choice: either you surrender or you fight 'till death for your freedom, I know Pakistanis will fight to death for their freedom," he said. Tensions

between India and Pakistan spiked after New Delhi abrogated provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution to withdraw Jammu and Kashmir's special status and bifurcated it into two Union Territories.

Pakistan downgraded its diplomatic relations with India and expelled the Indian high commissioner following the revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir on August 5. Khan claimed that Pakistan till recently had made attempts to open dialogue with India "to live as civilised neighbours, to resolve our difference [over Kashmir] ... through a political settlement". He alleged that India tried to blacklist in FATF (Financial Action Task Force).

"If Pakistan is pushed into the blacklist of FATF that means there will be sanctions on Pakistan. So they were trying to bankrupt us economically, so that's when we pulled back. And that's when we realised that this government is on an agenda ... to push Pakistan to disaster," says Khan.

"There is no question of talking to the Indian government right now after they revoked this article 370 of their own constitution and they annexed Kashmir illegally against the UN Security Council resolution," Khan said.

Iran refutes US accusations over Saudi attacks

TEHRAN, SEP 15 (AFP): Iran on Sunday dismissed US accusations it was behind drone attacks on Saudi oil installations, suggesting the United States was seeking a pretext to retaliate against the Islamic republic.

"Such fruitless and blind accusations and remarks are incomprehensible and meaningless," foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi was quoted as saying in a statement.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemned Iran after Saturday's attacks, which knocked out half of Saudi Arabia's oil production.

Yemen's Iran-aligned Shiite Huthi rebels claimed responsibility for the drone strikes, but Pompeo said "there is no evidence the attacks came from Yemen".

"The United States will work with our partners and allies to ensure that energy markets remain well supplied and Iran is held accountable for its aggression," the top US diplomat tweeted.

Mousavi said the US allegations over the pre-dawn strikes on Abqaiq and Khurais in Eastern Province were meant to justify actions against Iran.

"Such remarks... are more like plotting by intelligence and secret



organisations to damage the reputation of a country and create a framework for future actions," he said.

Tehran and Washington have been at loggerheads since May last year when President Donald Trump pulled out of a 2015 deal that promised Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear programme.

Since the withdrawal, the United States has slapped crippling sanctions on Iran as part of a campaign of "maximum pressure" and the Islamic republic has responded by reducing its commitments to the nuclear accord.

"The Americans have taken the policy of 'maximum pressure' which has apparently turned into 'maximum lying' due to their failures," said Mousavi.

The arch-foes were on the cusp of confrontation in June when Iran downed a US drone and

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Fighting The Good Fight: 5 TIFF Films About Journos And Activists

In a post-truth world where the ruling classes often accuse journalists of peddling fake news when the latter attempt to do what they are in the game for - separate facts from false narratives - nothing could be more refreshing than watching cinematic tales that draw upon accounts of media persons and the findings of activists to construct entertaining and thought-provoking fiction rooted in the real world.

Five such films, among them an independent entry from Bangladesh, stood out in the 44th Toronto International Film Festival. Interestingly, three of these films tilted more towards stories of a personal nature than narratives of immediate political impact.

A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

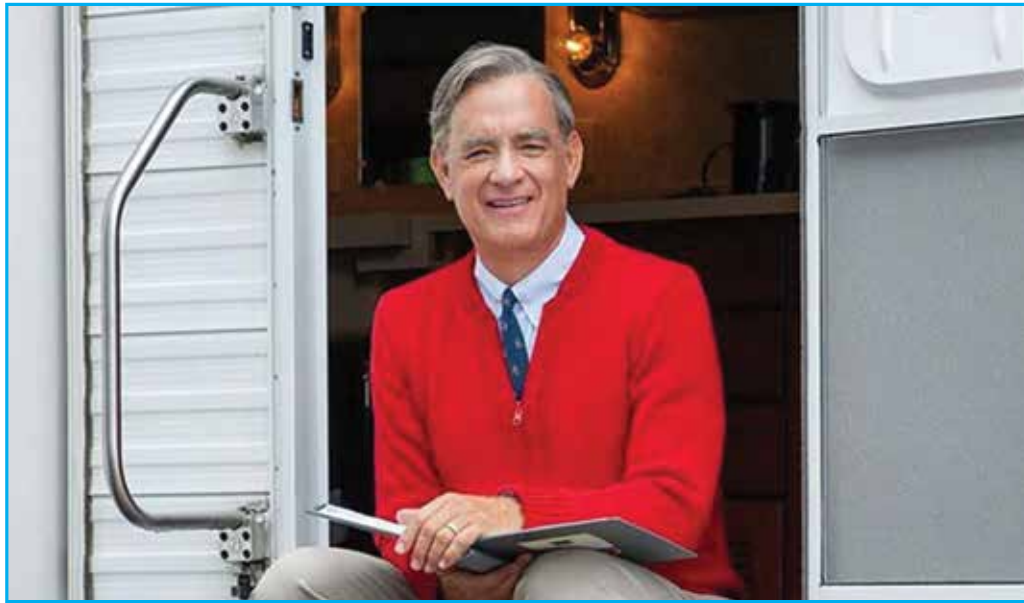
Directed by Marielle Heller (2018's Can You Ever Forgive Me?), the film is inspired by an Esquire cover story, Can You Say... Hero?, by Tom Junod. With the exception of children's television show host Fred Rogers, played with admirable acuity by Tom Hanks, the principal characters in this heart-warming drama about the friendship between a cynical investigative journalist (Matthew Rhys) and a sage-like television personality have had their names changed although they are all extensions of real-life people. Describing 'Mister Rogers' as a "hokey kid show", journo Lloyd Vogel balks at the idea of profiling the former for his magazine. "I don't do puff pieces," he tells the editor. His stinging putdown is: "He plays with puppets for a living." Rogers, on the other hand, is driven by the simple desire "to give children positive ways to deal with life". A Beautiful Day In The Neighborhood celebrates a sort of pure idealism that the world is now dangerously devoid of. It also probes the mind of a broken man, whose pursuit of truth in the line of duty and estrangement with his father have left him a tad scarred. The encounter with Fred Rogers changes him forever.

HUSTLERS

Closely following the structure of a 2015 New York magazine article by Jessica Pressler, Lorena Scafaria's playful take on a group of former strip club dancers who, as part of a clearly illegal plan, gang up to clean out their sleazy Wall Street clients after the 2008 financial crash. It is a film that is marked by

healthy irreverence as it gives all the power in the story to the women who, apart from being spectacularly good at their jobs, know exactly how to give as good as they get. The film is funny and sexy, but also unsparingly defiant as the women (led by Jennifer Lopez, back with a bang, and Crazy Rich Asians' Constance Wu) form a sorority that isn't just about empowerment but also about the irresponsibility of wealthy men who control the financial markets and whose

their best friend in their hour of crisis. The Friend, on which Teague was an executive producer, is markedly different from films that spring from journalistic accounts because it isn't about the grave challenges facing the world at large. It stays within a personal space where impending death, marital woes and an unstinted helping hand extended by a true friend are the key plot elements. The film's sustained air of solemnity lends it great gravitas yet never robs it of its



profligacy led to a meltdown that spared nobody, least of all the strip club where the girls worked. Hustlers is a joy to watch. The 'revenge' saga would have been dismissed as fanciful hadn't it been based a true story. The performances are wonderful and Scafaria's screenplay refrains from indulging in dull over-illumination, which imparts tremendous pace to the narrative. The story is told in flashbacks through the means of an interview with one of the key characters by a journalist (Julia Stiles, an actress who has written on the subject of gender for The Guardian).

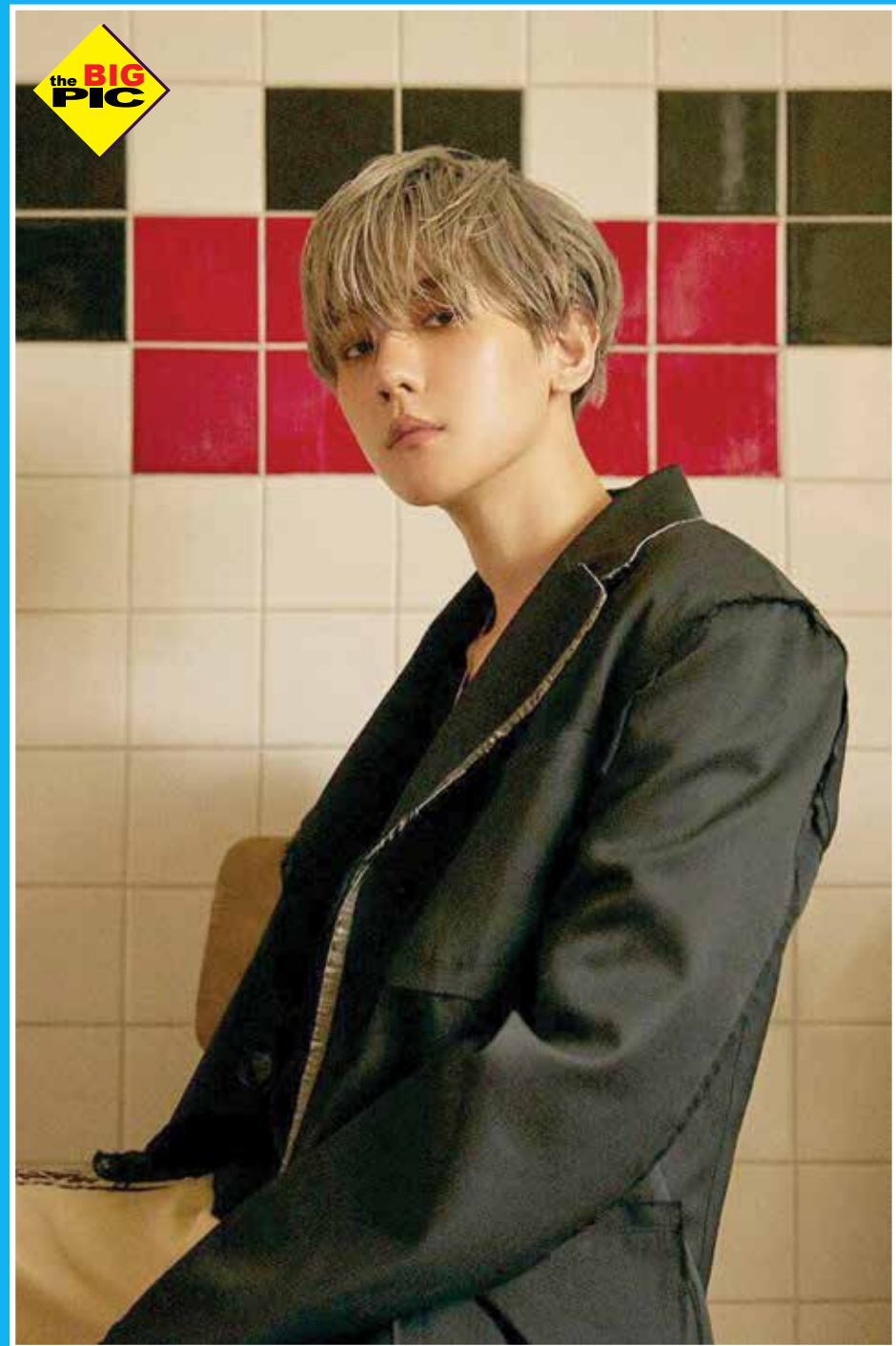
THE FRIEND

Documentarian Gabriela Cowperthwaite, who specializes in probing social, cultural and environmental issues through her films, makes her narrative feature debut with this Casey Affleck, Dakota Johnson and Jason Segel starrer. The film is based on correspondent Matthew Teague's essay, The Friend: Live Is Not A Big Enough Word, originally published in the May 2015 issue of Esquire. The writer's young wife had died of cancer and the piece that he penned by way of a tribute to her became a heartfelt acknowledgement of the generous support that the couple received from

easy warmth and humanity.

JUST MERCY

Just Mercy, adapted by director Destin Daniel Cretton from a book by Harvard-educated lawyer Bryan Stevenson, focuses on the activist's war to secure justice for individuals given the rough end of the legal stick. The role of the protagonist is played magnificently by Michael B. Jordan). The film hinges on the case of Walter McMillan (Jamie B. Foxx), a black man condemned to death on flimsy evidence for the murder of a white teenager. It presents the tale in a manner that is conventional, but the narrative is packed with stirring moments involving a man who decides to step up, set up a practice in Alabama, and make a difference to people who really need him. In today's world, that itself is an act of courage and urgency - the film portrays Stevenson's struggles as a means to calling out a lopsided legal system that is all too eager to assume black people as guilty and the white populace as innocent. If Tom Hanks' real-life character in A Beautiful Day In The Neighborhood asserts that "each one of us is precious" (albeit in a less pressing context), Stevenson believes that every life is "meaningful".



SUPERM CROWNS THEIR LEADER: Every K-pop group needs a leader, and it's no exception for SM Entertainment's newly formed mega boyband SuperM! With members hailing from different boy bands — among them, EXO, SHINee, NCT and WayV — the task of choosing a leader must have seemed daunting, but Taemin, Baekhyun, Kai, Taeyong, Mark, Ten and Lucas all seemed to have formed a comfortable rapport with one another, as seen in their latest Instagram Live session with their fans. Lasting over 27 minutes long, the session covered a range of topics, with the matter of deciding their leader done on the spot as well. The group almost unanimously chose EXO's Baekhyun, although he recommended Taemin for the job.

Alia Bhatt talks 'Takht' with Karan Johar, shares on Instagram

Mumbai, Sep 15 (PTI): Alia Bhatt and Karan Johar spent their weekend discussing their upcoming much-anticipated collaboration, "Takht". The actor on Saturday took to Instagram to share a glimpse of her talks with Karan.

"Takht", which has a screenplay by Sumit Roy and dialogues penned by Hussain Haidry, will be directed by Karan.

Set in the Mughal era, the film also stars Vicky Kaushal, Ranveer Singh, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Anil Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar and Jahnvi Kapoor.

Alia shared an Instagram Story which featured the director sitting in a chair in what appeared to be an office cabin. The "Raazi" star wasn't visible in the post but shared a sneak

peek of a red mug with written "Takht" on it. It appears that the film's preparation have begun as both Alia and Ranveer were



spotted outside Dharma Productions office on Saturday. "Takht" marks Karan's return to direction three years after the release of "Ae Dil Hai Mushkil".

Amanda Seyfried in negotiations to star in 'Things Heard & Seen'

LOS ANGELES, SEP 15 (PTI): Amanda Seyfried is in talks to feature in horror thriller "Things Heard & Seen" set at Netflix. According to The Hollywood Reporter, the film is an adaptation of Elizabeth Brundage's novel "All Things Cease to Appear". Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini have penned the script and will direct. The story revolves around a young couple who move to a farm near a small town in upstate New York. The new house is haunted, cursed by the murder of its former owners, and as secrets are revealed, the darkness in the couple's marriage is also exposed.

Seyfried will play the wife. As per the sources, the tone of the project is similar to

the streamer's acclaimed series "The Haunting of Hill House". Anthony Bregman, along with Stefanie Azpiazu, Peter Cron and Julie



Cohen, are attached to produce.

The makers are hoping to begin shooting later this year.

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ARIES: Oh, to be in alignment, Aries! Everything is going to work out better than you can imagine. Trust. With Lady Luck smiling down at you, be rest assured that blocks that stood in your path will be cleared. Plus, opportunities you could never dream of will come knocking at your door. Know that this is the sum of your own efforts. Get into action mode, like you always do. You have the power to make this venture a huge success.

Tip: Ready, set, go!

TAURUS: If you've been working yourself to the bone, know that a crash and burn is inevitable. Take a good look at that to-do list. What are the tasks that need your immediate attention? What are the things that can be dealt with later? Two words: bare minimum. While you're at it, cancel any and all plans that require you to leave your most authentic self at home. Learn to balance work with play and play with work will help you be your most creative self, Taurus.

Tip: Find that elusive work-life balance.

GEMINI: You are on the road to recovery, Gemini. What a wonderful feeling to be unfettered by the things that previously brought you down! Remember, happiness is a fleeting emotion.

Inner peace on the hand? She's here to stay, provided you make space. PS: It's a good idea to spread them good vibes like the flu as you go about your day.

Tip: Better days are coming!

CANCER: Cancer, you have a knack for finding solutions that help people move closer to their goals and get organised. Consider this as superpower. This phase of your life requires you to step into bigger shoes. To accept greater responsibility and lead your team towards success. Remember, finding a balance between the head and the heart is the secret to being invincible.

Tip: Look for leadership roles to shine.

LEO: Multitasking isn't all that it's cracked up to be. The so-called powerplayers have you fooled. Your end-of-the-week task list requires you to channel your inner Zen Master and focus on one thing at a time. Consider the 1-3-5 method when getting organised: do the most important thing first (yes, the one you've been avoiding), three medium things next, and five little things last.

Tip: Prioritising is the key to efficiency.

VIRGO: On the cards today: telepathic communication and synchronistic encounters. The

Universe is talking to you in signs and symbols. Be cognizant of the messages that are coming through. Connecting with your inner witch/Magi promises to be just as important. Pull out them cards and crystals, Virgo. You're more intuitive than you give yourself credit for. Tip: Let your intuition help you find the right answers.

LIBRA: Two words: facts + figures. This is not the time to let your emotions come in the way. Libra, your strong sense of Justice will help you make the right decisions. Clarity is another keyword for you today. You are channelling the right ideas. Figure out how to put them into action! Take charge of your life and lead from the front. A new career path is opening up for some you. Don't be afraid to take the plunge.

Tip: Take charge and lead from the front.

SCORPIO: Ah, the good old days! Stop reminiscing and start acting. A reunion is on the cards today. Scorpio, get ready to make new memories for your soul circle. But it's not just about the emotional. You're being asked to seek help creatively/professionally, especially if you're feeling blocked in any way. A conversation with your loved ones could help you gain fresh perspective and take things to the next level.

Tip: Spending time with those who make you feel at home.

SAGITTARIUS: What is we said each thought is charged with a powerful intention? Would that inspire you to reroute your thoughts? Stop focusing on what hasn't worked out and turn the wheel of Fortune around. Journal prompt: If today is the first day of the rest of your life, what would the next six months look like? Sow your seeds with intention, Sagittarius. Major openings await you on the work front.

Tip: Be cognizant of the openings that are showing up.

CAPRICORN: Two is your magic number, Capricorn. The cards are urging you to sync your forces with that one person who makes you feel invincible. Oh, the territories you will conquer when you are on the same page! Overheard at the cosmic conference: your partnership is evolving to a whole new level. Some of you may find the mentor you've been hoping and praying for. Be open to their guidance. They will help you get in touch with your best

self and create opportunities you could only dream of.

Tip: Welcome this connection with open arms.

AQUARIUS: The more you try to push the so-called negative thoughts away, the more they will haunt you. Express, don't suppress. Let things come to the surface. Learn to watch what's coming up rather than engaging with it. This is the secret to freeing yourself from self-sabotaging patterns. Some of you may find yourself confronted by your sexual wounds. Do you want to give your past power over your present? Keep this in mind as and when love comes knocking at your door.

Tip: Free yourself from the past traumas.

PISCES: You've come a long way, Pisces. Now, get ready for your next big move. There's a whole world out there waiting to be conquered. Check in with your vision board before you step forward. The good news: the obstacles that stood in your way are now being cleared. Remember, there's a lot your experiences have taught you. When people come seeking wise counsel, trust yourself to guide them on their path.

Tip: Plan for the future and take the first step.