



**GOLAY TOURS THROUGH
GYALSHING-BERMIOK ON
PARIVARTAN SANKALP YATRA**
pg02

**INDIA CHASE SLICE OF HISTORY
AGAINST NETHERLANDS IN
WC QUARTERFINAL**
pg05



**SIKKIM INTER CHURCH
FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT
2018 KICKS OFF**
pg03

SummitTIMES

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O N T O P O F T H E N E W S

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SDF GOVERNMENT COMPLETES 24 YEARS

Inability to instil sense of ownership among Sikkimese, SDF's only weakness: CM

**ARPAN PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 12 DEC:**

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling led ruling Sikkim Democratic Front completed 24 years in power today and the day was celebrated across the state at the grass root level with every ward hosting a celebration.

fulfilled in another two months.

While interacting with the media at the Chief Minister's official residence earlier today, the Chief Minister said that his government has been able to win the hearts of the people and fulfil promises without any compromise.

"It was not an easy task to remain in

sense of ownership amongst the Sikkimese.

"We have not been able to make people understand and realize that in a true de-



contest the 2019 election with the faces chosen by the people themselves and will support whosoever will be chosen by the people as a candidate. The SDF party will involve people in the selection process of the candidate and also take advice from them, he added.

Rejecting possibilities of alliance with any other political party, Mr Chamling said, "This time there are many regional and national parties in the fray which is good for democracy and it's a healthy sign that we are moving towards a mature democracy." He expressed hope that people will vote with their conscience and the party will accept the people's mandate, whatever the outcome.

Regarding the opposition's allegations, Mr Chamling said, "There is a difference between sight and vision. Having a vision is more important. The statements of the opposition come from a place where there is no vision."

Sikkim Democratic Front Party [SDF] was formed on 04 March, 1994.

"As we are set to celebrate the completion of 24 years of the formation of SDF Government and step into the 25th year, I congratulate the people of Sikkim on this stupendous achievement. I also thank them from the bottom of my heart for their unwavering support and faith reposed on me and the SDF Party in all these years.

I seek your continued support and co-operation for peace and more progress of Sikkim. Let's join hands to take Sikkim to greater heights and glory".

On the occasion of Government Formation Day, the Chief Minister expressed his gratitude to the people who have reposed their faith in his party for five terms.

He stated that his government has been able to deliver on almost all promises and any remaining promises will be

power and I never thought that I will rule the state for 24 long years and serve the people. During my government, there has been development and that's why people have been choosing me as the CM," Mr Chamling said.

The CM said that the only weakness of the party has been its inability to instil a

mocracy, people are supreme, and that is SDF party's huge weakness and that we accept," he said.

On the upcoming elections, the CM said that SDF will

Seti Jhora accident claims one



**SUMMIT REPORT
KALIMPONG, 12 DEC:**

Macheng Lepcha (44) was killed in a road mishap at Seti Jhora today and his wife, Chewang Doma Bhutia, sustained to grievous injuries when the Honda City [SK/1/TR/2018/3045] he was driving skidded off the NH-10 at Seti Jhora and crashed around 50ft off the road. They were travelling from Gangtok to Siliguri.

While the body of the deceased was taken to Kalimpong District Hospital, the injured wife has been rushed to Siliguri for treatment. The couple was travelling to Siliguri to meet their son, it is informed.

Mr Lepcha, it is learnt was an ARTO, and resided in Arithang, Gangtok.

Couple Killed in Road mishap at Martam



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 12 DEC:**

A couple from Ranipool area in East Sikkim lost their lives in an accident at Martam village on Wednesday afternoon.

PT Lama his wife Najma Khatoon were driving black swift desire which went off almost 700 feet below the road at Pagla Bhir.

The couple had gone to visit Rumtek monastery, the sources informed.

Tamang runs a shop at CRH, Manipal and Najma was employee in postal department.

The case is under investigation and the reason of the accident is yet to be known.

Failure to consult opposition has delayed LT Assembly seats, SKM claims

**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 12 DEC:**

A high-level delegation of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party recently met the Union Ministers in New Delhi on inclusion of eleven left out communities of Sikkim in the list of Scheduled Tribes and to grant of seats to Limboo and Tamang in the State Assembly.

The 10-member SKM delegation discussed and submitted an eight-page memorandum along with supporting documents with the request to introduce and pass bills in the upcoming Parliamentary session for the inclusion of eleven left out communities of Sikkim in the list of Scheduled Tribes and to grant seats to Limboo and Tamang in the State Assembly.

Addressing a press conference on Tuesday, SKM senior vice-president, TN Sharma, who was a member in the delegation to New Delhi, informed that the delegation met the Union Minister



ter for Tribal Affairs, Jual Oram and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju, on these demands of the State. He informed that the delegation had a brief discussion on these issues with Central Ministers and submitted a memorandum on the same.

He added that copies of the memorandum have also been posted to the Prime Minister's Office and office of the Union Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Sharma expressed

that the tour was very successful with fruitful discussions with the Central Ministers and the party is hopeful that these bills would be introduced in the upcoming Parliamentary session.

However, he mentioned that discussions with the Central Ministers indicated that if the State government had taken these issues with the consensus of opposition parties and concerned organisations then the Centre would

had fulfilled these demands long time back.

SKM working president, MP Subba also mentioned that during the discussion with the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs the party feels that if the State government had taken the formula for LT seat reservation with the consensus of opposition and concerned organisations then LT communities would have been enjoying their constitutional right by now.

turn to pg02

Assembly election results: Most exit polls failed to get it right

NEW DELHI, DEC 12 (PTI): Most exit polls failed to predict the massive mandate that the Congress got in Chhattisgarh, but got their forecast of a tight finish in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh right.

In Rajasthan and Telangana, the exit polls got the winner right but failed to gauge the level of the victory margins for the assembly elections for which the votes were counted on Tuesday.

They predicted a clear win for the Congress in Rajasthan, but when the results were out, the party could not achieve the magic figure

on its own, getting 99 of 199 seats, just shy of the majority mark.

In Telangana, it was a landslide victory for the Telangana Rashtriya Samiti, which got 88 of the 119 constituencies, leaving the Congress trailing far behind with 19.

In the northeastern state of Mizoram, where the Congress was ousted from power, the regional Mizo National Front performed much better than the exit poll prediction, bagging 26 of 40 seats.

In Madhya Pradesh - where the results went down to the wire with the Congress getting 114 seats, just two short of a simple

majority in the 230-member assembly, and the BJP 109 -- ABP News predicted a clear defeat for the BJP (94 seats) and victory for the Congress (126).

While Republic TV-Jan Ki Baat gave 108-128 seats to the BJP and 95-115 to the Congress, India Today-Axis said the saffron party could win 102-120 seats as against 104-122 for the Congress.

The Times Now-CNX exit poll predicted a majority for the BJP in MP with 126 seats and gave the Congress a tally of 89 seats.

In Chhattisgarh, the BJP was reduced to 15 seats while the Congress bagged 68 seats in the

90-member assembly seat. The Ajit Jogi-led Janta Congress Chhattisgarh and the BSP alliance together bagged seven seats.

Quite in contrast to the declared results, the ABP and the Times Now-CNX exit polls predicted victory for the BJP. Though India Today-Axis said the Congress would triumph, it did not get its numbers right.

Times Now-CNX gave a simple majority to the BJP in Chhattisgarh, saying it may win 46 seats while the opposition Congress may bag 35 seats. ABP News said the BJP may get up to 52 seats against 35 of the Congress.

The India Today-Axis predicted that the Congress would end Chief Minister Raman Singh's 15-year reign by winning anywhere between 55-65 seats. The BJP, it said, may be reduced to 21-31 seats. All the exit polls said the alliance of former chief minister Ajit Jogi's Janta Congress Chhattisgarh (Jogi) and the BSP may win between three and eight seats, which may help him to emerge as a king-maker in the event of a hung house. This was fairly accurate with the BSP getting two seats and the JCC five

turn to pg02

Father kills his daughter for being little late

**SUMMIT REPORT
KALIMPONG, 12 DEC:**

A 13-year-old was killed by her 44-year-old father on 09 December in the outskirts of Kalimpong after he lost his temper because she returned home late.

It is further learned that after killing her, he buried her body near the house. Since the two lived by themselves, no one noticed anything amiss.

However, on 11 December, the accused reportedly confided in his father about the incident

and the police was informed.

After the accused was taken into custody, the dead body was recovered in the presence of the Magistrate and sent to North Bengal Medical College and Hospital for autopsy.

Today, the accused was produced in Court that sent to seven days police remand.

He has been charged under Section 302 of the IPC, Section 201 and also section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offense Act.

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Dam Safety Bill in Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI, DEC 12 (PTI): The government Wednesday introduced the Dam Safety Bill in the Lok Sabha, a legislation which will help states and Union Territories adopt uniform procedures to ensure safety of reservoirs. The bill also provides for surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of specified dams to prevent dam failure-related disasters. The bill provides for establishment of the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) as a regulatory body which shall discharge functions to implement the policy, guidelines and standards for dam safety in the country.

The legislation also provides for constitution of a State Committee on Dam Safety (SCDS) by the state government that will ensure proper surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of all specified dams in that state and ensure their safe functioning.

Golay tours through Gyalshing-Bermiok on Parivartan Sankalp Yatra

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 DEC:

The eleventh day of the ongoing Parivartan Sankalp Yatra of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party started from Rungdu and concluded at Barthang under Gyalshing Bermiok constituency on Wednesday. SKM president, PS Tamang [Golay], interacted with the people of Rungdu, Sommok, Lower Martam, Upper Bermiok, Jogi Gaon, Thangsing and Bermiok Bazaar today.

An SKM press release informs that while addressing the people at Barthang, the SKM president stated that the ongoing tour has revealed that the SDF government has failed to fulfill even the basic minimum needs of the people of Sikkim in the past 25 years. He added that the people have been deprived of various schemes and benefits and the government has



been a total failure in this regard. He alleged that SDF does not have any policy for sustainable development of Sikkim. He contended that now that the people of Sikkim have become aware, no one could either buy or intimidate them.

He also questioned the government on the distribution of laptops to

students and releasing of other benefits to the people so near the elections.

Mr Tamang mentioned that the upcoming election was to save the very existence of Sikkim. He also alleged that the present government has one injustice to the Limboo and Tamang communities and even churches of Sikkim.

He explained that the

main objective of the ongoing tour was to have direct interaction with the people and to take account of the works done by the SDF government in the past 25 years.

He alleged corruption in Central funds and claimed that the policies of the SDF government have caused unemployment and led to suicides in the State.

He lashed out against the State government on several other issues.

The release informs that people of the area placed various grievances and issues of the area with the visiting leader. It is informed that ten families from Chingthang and one family from Mingyong and three from Martam joined SKM today.

State-Level Tribal Fest begins at Namprikdang on Thurs

GANGTOK, 12 DEC [IPR]: The four-day long State Level Tribal Festival is scheduled to commence on 13 December at Namprikdang, Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim.

The festival is being organised by the Tribal Research Institute, Social Justice, Empowerment & Welfare Department, in collaboration with the District Administration of North Sikkim and the Namprikdang, Namsoong Festival Celebration Committee, funded by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

The primary objective behind organising the State Level Tribal Festival is to provide a platform and to showcase the traditional talents of the Bhutia, Lepcha, Limboo, Tamang & Sherpa tribal communities of the State.

Outstanding achievers belonging to the

Schedule Tribes category will also be felicitated for their contributions in the fields of Sports, Science & Technology, Language/ literature, culture, Biodiversity conservation.

Major attractions of the festival will be display of local tribal food, arts & artefacts, presentation of cultural dance, traditional activities of Maharashtra by artist representing Hind Prashisthan Mardani Akhada, Kolapur.

Tribal Achievers Awards will be conferred on Jas Raj Subba, Norzong Lepcha, Norbu Tamang, Dorjee Sherpa, Kiden Bhutia, Namgyal Lepcha.

Professor Prakash Pattanaik, Head of the Department, Modern Indian Languages, Delhi University, will be attending the festival as a special guest. The organiser's have invited all to attend.

LTVC meets Congress leaders in New Delhi



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 DEC: A team of Limboo Ta-

mang Voluntary Committee [LTVC] of office-bearers met the All

India Congress Committee general secretary, Luizinho Falerio, and Sikkim in-charge, Pradyut Manik, on 06 Dec at AICC head office, Akbar road in New Delhi, a press release informs.

The team comprised of LTVC president, Yehang Tshong, joint secretary, Kishor Tamang and treasurer, Susan Subba. They had a brief discussion regarding LT Assembly seat reservation issue in Sikkim and requested the Congress party and its

MPs to raise the bill regarding Limboo and Tamang Scheduled Tribes Assembly seats in the upcoming Winter Parliament Session 2018, the release informs.

The release adds that they assured that the Congress party is sympathetic towards LT communities and committed towards protection of Article 371F and promised to talk with Party leaders on the issue.

LTVC also submitted their memorandum at Congress President Rahul Gandhi's office.

Sikkim Women's Cricket Team register second win in One Day League

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 12 DEC:

Sikkim Senior Women's Cricket Team is playing Senior Women's One Day League 2018-19 for the first time in the history of Indian domestic cricket along with the other North-eastern States, Bihar, Puducherry and Uttarakhanda in the plate division.

So far, Sikkim has played 5 matches out of 8 in the league. After registering the first victory in their fourth match with 216 runs against Mizoram at Cuttack, Sikkim has also recorded their second win today against Bihar at Ravenshaw University Ground 2, Cuttack with 78 runs. Sikkim earns 4 Point(s) with this win and is standing with 8 Point(s) in the point table.

Sikkim won the toss and elected to bat first but Bihar restricted the home side to 176 runs of 49.1 overs. Cap-



tain Archana Das (82), Ananya Upendran (26), Tshering Ongmu Lepcha (20) and Priyanka Acharya (13) helped Sikkim reach this score. In the Second Innings Sikkim showed brilliant bowling and bowled out Bihar for 98 runs in 35.5 overs. Priyanka Acharya

took 5 wickets, Archana Das 2 wickets and Ananya Upendran, Dichen Ongmu Lepcha and Munnu Hangma Limboo took 1 wicket each. After Dichen Ongmu Lepcha, Priyanka Acharya has become the second woman player to have a 5 wicket haul in a One Day Match.

These wins have boosted the confidence of the players and they want to win the remaining matches of the tournament. Sikkim will be facing Puducherry next at Ravenshaw University Ground 1, Cuttack, Odisha on 14 December 2018.

Assembly election results...

In Rajasthan, India Today-Axis said the opposition party may win 119-141 out of 199 seats for which elections were held. The BJP, it added, may win 55-72 seats.

Times Now-CNX forecast 105 seats for the Congress and 85 for the BJP.

ABP News also predicted a victory for the Congress, saying it may bag 101 seats while the BJP may end up with 83 and others with 15 seats.

Republic TV-Jan Ki Baat forecast a tighter race between the two parties. It gave the Congress and the BJP 81-101 and 83-103 seats respectively.

In Mizoram, almost all exit polls predicted a win for the MNF and defeat of the Congress but none could assess the margins of defeat and victory.

In Telangana as well, most exit polls said TRS would win without getting being able to make an assessment of the margins.

Republic TV forecast 50-65 for the TRS and Times Now gave it 66 seats.

TV9 Telugu was closer with a 75-85 tally for the TRS but India Today was the most accurate, forecasting 75-91.

In Mizoram, where the Congress has been in power for two consecutive terms, Times Now-CNX said the ruling party may get 16 seats. It predicted 18 seats for Mizo National Front (MNF) in the 40-member assembly.

Failure to consult...

He alleged that the State government was not sincere on the issue and has been confusing the Centre.

Likewise, former Lok Sabha MP and SKM vice-president, Nakul Das Rai, stated that the discussions reveal that if the State government had placed the proposal for the seat reservation during the last delimitation in 2003 or in 2011 census then LT would have already got their seats by now.

He mentioned that during the discussion, Mr Rijju mentioned that although Sikkim government has been claiming development in the State, the development was not at par with the money provided by the Centre. He claimed that the SKM delegation's visit to the Centre will definitely make a big impact. Mr Rai informed that SKM has also requested other MPs to take these issues seriously.

SKM vice-president, Kado Tshering Bhutia, questioned the Chief Minister on whether he would fulfill his announcement to resign from politics if LT Assembly seats are not provided before the 2019 election.

Likewise, SKM Vice-President, Anand Lama, stated that contradictory statements recently given by Lok Sabha MP, PD Rai, points towards the ruling party's lack of confidence on seat reservation. SKM spokesperson, Jacob Khaling stated that being a part of NDA, SDF government should press the Centre to place these bills in the upcoming Parliamentary session otherwise it has no right to alliance with the NDA. He further demanded that SDF government should give justice to Limboo and Tamang and eleven left out communities. SKM also said that it is ready to extend its support if the SDF government is serious on these issues.

WRITE US: Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair

game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence.

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com



Students get on-the-job training in hospitality and tourism

**NITESH R PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 12 DEC:**

Under the aegis of Sikkim United Tourism Organisation (SUTO), more than 20 students have successfully completed on-the-job training in hospitality and tourism sectors.

This was informed at a valedictory function held in the capital where the students of Mangalbaria Senior Secondary School, West Sikkim were given certificates on suc-

cessful completion of the course. A student, Dechen Wangda Bhutia thanked the organizers for giving them practical training since school is mostly just theory.

It must be noted that Tourism has been incorporated as a subject in the curriculum of schools in the state.

President, SUTO, Lalit Gurung while interacting with Summit-Times has stated that along with theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge for skill de-

velopment is a must in today's world particularly in Sikkim with the tourism industry becoming the prime employer.

He further appealed to the government that basic computer knowledge is also a must in order to empower the students for tasks like preparing the itineraries and smart schedules for tourists.

Similarly, vice president, SUTO, Ganesh Shiwakoti, appealed to the government for

construction of tourism colleges across the four districts along with establishment of Tourism University in the state.

He added that it is imperative for the government to establish one in order to make our students realize the full potential of tourism industry in Sikkim along with imparting knowledge on a self-sustaining profession like tourism.

Teacher, Phiroj Gurung, Mangalbaria Se-

nior Secondary School while thanking the students and organizers stated that tourism has been the biggest achievement in recent years and there is an urgent need for our youth to grasp the opportunity.

SUTO announced voluntary membership to all students who have successfully completed the course and has further informed that students can always contact them for guidance.

Sikkim Inter Church Football Tournament 2018 kicks off



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 12 DEC:**

The 7th Sikkim Inter Church Football Tournament 2018 kicked off here at Paljor Stadium on Tuesday. Sixteen teams from different parts of the State are participating in this league-cum-knock out football tournament, which is being organised by Sikkim Christian Sports Committee [SCSC].

The inaugural match of the tournament between Bethany Church and Bethesda Church ended in a goalless draw. In the second match of the day, a hatrick by Smile Lepcha helped ICYM to outplay Embassy of Hope 3-0. The last match of the day between Mangan United and EPCS Sang also ended in a goalless draw.

United Christian Wel-

fare Society of Sikkim [UCWSS] president, Elder Patrus Gurung was present as the chief guest of the inaugural day.

Speaking to media person, SCSC general secretary, Andrew Chettri mentioned that the tournament was the annual event of SCSC with the main aim to spot and promote local talents especially from the rural pockets of the State by providing a state-level platform. He added that the tournament would also help promote unity and brotherhood among members of different churches and also encourage young people towards a healthy lifestyle.

Mr Chettri informed that with slight changes the organising committee has introduced league system in the tournament from this year. The partic-

ipating teams have been divided into eight groups having two teams each and only the group topper will enter the quarter-final round of the tournament.

He also mentioned that this year there are fewer teams in the tournament compared to previous years because different churches are busy preparing for Christmas. The tournament is usually held in the month of September or October every year but due to unavailability of the ground it has been shifted to the month of December this year.

The final match of the tournament is scheduled to be played on 21 December. The tournament carries a cash prize of Rs 30,000 to the winner and Rs 20,000 to the runner-up.

Himali Bela associate editor in mourning

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 12 DEC:**

KC Pradhan, the father of a senior journalist and associate editor of Himali Bela, Rajendra Pradhan, passed away at the age of 75 years at around 4 AM early this morning.

The Late Mr Pradhan of Chilauney in Dooars leaves behind his wife, Renuka Pradhan, four

sons, a daughter and grandchildren. He was born in year 1943 and worked for a long period at GREF and retired in the year 2003.

The final rituals will be carried out at the ancestral village, Chilauney.

A press communique from Himali Bela has conveyed condolence to the bereaved family members.

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

NYK district level declamation contest at Namchi

**SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 12 DEC:**

Nehru Yuva Kendra Namchi organized the district level Declamation contest on the topic "Patriotism and Nation Building" as a part of Republic Day Celebration 2018 on the theme 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'. The contest was participated by 10 youths who were screened and selected from block level by national volunteers.

The district level Declamation contest was adjudged by a panel of three judges namely Bharat Jyoti Award-ee, Som Bahadur Rai, Kanchan Banerjee, GT Dong School, Accountant NYK, Dilip Sharma, from Namchi, in the presence of Program Coordinator VBDAS and Red Ribbon Club, Kishor Baniya, Motivator cum managing director of Multimedia Namchi, Ravi Khaling, NYV Suyog Pradhan, Chandan Rai and Elishibha Rai.

Three youths, Bijay Rai from Namchi Block, Sharoon Rai and Jyoti Sharma from Ravangla Block were adjudged first, second and third respectively and given cash award of Rs. 5000, Rs 2000 and Rs. 1000 respectively and certificates as well.

OBITUARY

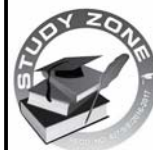


Lakpa Tsering Ethenpa, 88, passed away, Monday, 10th December 2018 at Neotia Hospital, Siliguri.

Those that remember him in his hometown at Gangtok, he was a common feature in all the social occasions. Everyone who knew him, loved him for his active spirit and everyone had different names for him. To his contemporaries, he was simply called 'Lakpala', for youngsters he was their beloved 'Pala' or 'Popola'. His absence is a loss to not just his family members but to everyone who knew him because the twinkle in his eyes, his mischievous smile, his ever helping hands (mostly clutching a newspaper), his gentle guttural, and his tender love for all he knew always combined to work a magic. Who could resist his purity, his sincerity, his drive to bring out the best in everyone he met, in everyone he worked with, no matter what their age, what their standing in life, what their ideas or opinions. He always tried to do better, this was perhaps the principle of his life, to strive for something better, not once but always.

Lakpa Tsering Ethenpa's funeral service will take place on 14th December 2018, Friday, at 8 a.m. from Ethenpa Villa, Tadong to Decheling.

*Ethenpa Family
Ethenpa Villa
Lower Tadong
GANGTOK.*



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SFA mourns demise of Lakpa Tshering Ethenpa

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 12 DEC:**

Sikkim Football Association has expressed its heartfelt condolence on the sad demise of Lakpa Tshering Ethenpa, the father of its president, Menla Ethenpa, and vice-president, Dr Sonam Ethenpa of SFA. SFA members convened a condolence meeting here on Tuesday and

expressed their deep condolence and also observed two-minute silence as a mark of respect and offered prayers to the departed soul.

An SFA press release informs that he was 88 years old, when he breathed his last at 2 pm on Monday [10 December 2018] at Neotia Healthcare, Siliguri, where he was under-

going treatment for the past couple of weeks. He was a celebrated footballer of yesteryears.

SFA members expressed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and prayed for courage to the family members to sail through this difficult time. The funeral will be held on Friday morning [14 December].

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

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

**ESSAYS
ON TEESTA,
HYDEL
AND CLIMATE
CHANGE
IN SIKKIM**

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SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Congratulations on Starting 25!

SDF and its Govt should now take stock, celebrate and plan ahead

The Sikkim Democratic Front Government completes 24 years in office today and begins its 25th. Congratulations are in order because governments rarely last this long, anywhere. It is not yet clear how the government plans to celebrate this milestone, but expect it to elaborate, given that elections are now round the corner. Even without the latter countdown, this should always have been a significant occasion. The party and its government deserve congratulations, because to be fair, twenty-five years of peaceful reign is something that not even the monarchy enjoyed in Sikkim.

The Namgyal dynasty, ever since its inception, was either hounded by incursions by ambitious and martial neighbours or troubled by durbar conspiracies and later by the high-handed British and an over-bearing India. Democracy did not guarantee smooth sailing for governments either. Let's start with the first term – LD Kazi was running on an extension in 1979 when the notorious Bill of 1979 rearranging the seat reservation system got tabled and the man who heralded democracy into Sikkim, found his near absolute majority in the Assembly reduced to a minority. In the over five years that he was in office, political exigencies saw him switch his alignment to three parties and still he had to eventually leave office not on the expiry of his term but through a resignation. The next Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, even though he was CM for three terms, went through three political parties during his fourteen year rule. He started off with Sikkim Janata Party in 1979, merged with the Congress mid-way, was removed in 1984 and returned with Sikkim Sangram Parishad in 1984. He went through politically trying times which eventually cost him his government in 1994 when he was evicted from power with six months still left to his term. When the SDF was voted into power in 1994, it arrived to a history of frequently shifting political fortunes; and now, it sits in the unique position of the longest serving government currently in office anywhere in the country. It commands recognition for having survived this long, and governments in our country don't stay around for this long any more. In contrast, SDF has sustained rather well, not only surviving minor hiccups without things getting out of hand, but has also, in 2014, battled through and emerged victorious from what was arguably its toughest electoral battle yet.

That said, while celebrations and back-slapping are expected and even recommended for anniversaries, the party and its government owe the State and its people an honest exercise in self-appraisal. The party arrived into power in 1994 on the promise of change and succeeded remarkably in running with the same plank even in Elections 2009 when it undertook a major revamp and presented more new candidates for the people than had debuted in the Assembly in SDF colours in 1994. The elections of 2014 were about securing the developmental model crafted by the SDF, and yet again, despite a bitter campaign, the people returned it to power. Unfortunately, where the party should have been more grateful for having majority support even in its fifth straight election at a time when electorates tire in less than five years elsewhere, the party snubbed the verdict with a self-goal by sulking when it should have exulted. Precious time was lost, and this was unfortunate because the fifth term has been one of effusive recognition of Sikkim's programmes and missions by Delhi, and had the mood been more open and mature, these could have been leverage much better. What the party should also recognize is that while dissidence and rebellion are neither new to politics nor to the SDF, the present term has been noticeably without any hemorrhaging in the party ranks, save very minor dissidence.

When the party appraises its Government, it should pay special attention to its latest term in office. The continuing endorsement of the people was obviously in expectation of more radical changes. The politicians know best what the people aspire for, so they should know what is expected of them. The party and the government should also take some tips from what is happening at the national and international levels. Many see the changes all over the world as people and their governments veering towards the extreme Right. This is only partly correct, and can also be seen as a sign of the people fed up with status quo and willing to even suffer for Change even from established agencies.

This Government Formation Day, the party and its government should revisit the promise it made to the people in 1994 through to 2014 and decide how it has delivered on it. The present Government is only mid-way through its term, an honest appraisal and course-correction, if required, is what not only the people of Sikkim, but also a government that has been at the helm for 22 years now, deserves.

Those designer babies everyone is freaking out about – it's not likely to happen

A CECILE JW JANSSENS
theconversation.com

When Adam Nash was still an embryo, living in a dish in the lab, scientists tested his DNA to make sure it was free of Fanconi anemia, the rare inherited blood disease from which his sister Molly suffered. They also checked his DNA for a marker that would reveal whether he shared the same tissue type. Molly needed a donor match for stem cell therapy, and her parents were determined to find one. Adam was conceived so the stem cells in his umbilical cord could be the lifesaving treatment for his sister.

Adam Nash is considered to be the first designer baby, born in 2000 using in vitro fertilization with pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, a technique used to choose desired characteristics. The media covered the story with empathy for the parents' motives but not without reminding the reader that "eye color, athletic ability, beauty, intelligence, height, stopping a propensity towards obesity, guaranteeing freedom from certain mental and physical illnesses, all of these could in the future be available to parents deciding to have a designer baby."

The designer babies have thus been called the "future-we-should-not-want" for each new reproductive technology or intervention. But the babies never came and are nowhere close. I am not surprised.

I study the prediction of complex diseases and human traits that result from interactions between multiple genes and lifestyle factors. This research shows that geneticists cannot read the genetic code and know who will be above average in intelligence and athleticism. Such traits and diseases that result from multiple genes and lifestyle factors cannot be predicted using just DNA, and cannot be designed. Not now. And very unlikely ever.

DESIGNER BABIES ARE NEXT

The inevitable rise of designer babies was proclaimed in 1978 after the birth of Louise Brown, the first IVF baby, as the next step toward "a brave world where parents can select their child's gender and traits." The same situation occurred in 1994 when a 59-year-old British woman stretched the limits of nature by giving birth to twins using donated eggs that were implanted in her womb at a fertility clinic in Italy.

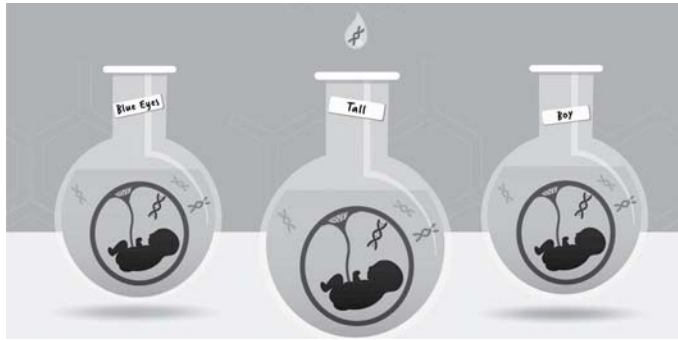
The response was the same in 1999, when a fertility clinic in Fairfax, Virginia, offered sex selection of embryos to screen against diseases that only happen in boys. In 2013, when 23andMe was granted a patent for a tool that predicts the likelihood of traits in babies based on DNA of two parents, the question of patenting designer babies was raised. In 2016, when the U.K. permitted a woman to donate her healthy mitochondria to a couple using IVF to conceive a child, raising the number of parents to three, fears of unnatural children rose again. Last month, when Genomic Prediction, a

New Jersey company, announced its DNA screening panel for embryos would also assess the risk for complex diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease that are caused by multiple genes, fears of engineering babies with high IQ or athletic prowess emerged.

The same issues arose on Nov. 26 when He Jiankui reported at the Second International Summit on Human Genome Editing in Hong Kong that he had successfully edited the DNA of twin baby girls born last month.

The designer baby doom scenarios have not evolved with the technology. It's been the same story for decades. It's the same "desirable" traits and the same assumption that parents want to select these traits if technology allowed. But no one seems to be questioning whether these traits are solely a product of our genes such that they can be selected or edited in embryos.

Wondering about designer babies was under-



standable in the early days, but repetition of these supposed fears now suggests lack of understanding of how DNA, and the genes they encode, work.

DESIGNING FAVORABLE TRAITS IN BABIES IS NOT SIMPLE

Although there are exceptions, DNA generally differs between people in two ways: There are DNA mutations and DNA variations.

Mutations cause rare diseases like Huntington's disease and cystic fibrosis, which are caused by a single gene. Mutations in the BRCA genes substantially increase the risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Selecting embryos that do not have these mutations removes the entire or main cause of disease – women who don't have BRCA mutations can still develop breast cancer through other causes, like all women.

Variations are changes in the genetic code that are more common than mutations and associated with common traits and diseases. DNA variants increase the likelihood that you may have a trait or develop a disease but do not determine or cause it. Association means that in several large study populations, a DNA variant was more frequent among people with the trait than those without, often only slightly more frequent.

These variants don't determine a trait, but increase its likelihood by interacting with other DNA variants and nongenetic influences such as upbringing, lifestyle and environment. To design such traits in embryos would require multiple DNA

changes in multiple genes and orchestrating or controlling relevant environment and lifestyle influences too.

Let's compare it to driving a car. DNA mutations are like the flat tires and the failing brakes: technical problems that make driving problematic, no matter where you drive. DNA variations are like the color and the type of car, or other features of the car that may affect the driving experience and even might create problems over time. For example, a convertible is a delight when driving on Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard on a breezy summer evening, but cruel when crossing a high mountain pass in midwinter. Whether features of the car are an asset or a liability depends on the context and that context might change — they are never ideal all the time.

ANOTHER HURDLE

Most DNA mutations do nothing else other than cause the disease, but DNA variations may play a role in many diseases and traits. Take variations in the MC1R "red hair" gene, which not only increases the chance that your child will have red hair, but also increases their risk of skin cancer. Or variations in the OCA2 and HERC2 "eye color" genes that are also associated with the risk of various cancers, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. To be sure, these are statistical associations, reported in the scientific literature, some may be confirmed; others may not. But the message is clear: Editing DNA variations for "desirable" traits may have adverse consequences, including many that scientists don't know about yet.

We can see this in the analysis of He Jiankui's gene-edited babies. By trying to make the babies resistant to HIV, He might have greatly increased susceptibility to infections by West Nile virus or influenza.

To be sure, even though complex traits such as intelligence, athletics and musicality cannot be selected or designed, there will be opportunists who will try to offer these traits, even if totally premature and unsupported by science. Like Stephen Hsu, the co-founder of Genomic Prediction who said about his offer to test embryos for polygenic risk, the risk of a disease based on multiple genes, "I think people are going to demand that. If we don't do it, some other company will." And also He said: "There will be someone, somewhere, who is doing this. If it's not me, it's someone else." People need to be protected against this irresponsible and unethical use of DNA testing and editing.

Science brought incredible progress in reproductive technology, but didn't bring designer babies one step closer. The creation of designer babies is not limited by technology, but by biology: The origins of common traits and diseases are too complex and intertwined to modify the DNA without introducing unwanted effects.

[the writer is Research Professor of Epidemiology, Emory University]

How new media platforms have become powerful across Africa

GEORGE OGOLA
theconversation.com

Online platforms have become an important site for political and social engagement. On the one hand they have been praised for their progressive characteristics. This is because they offer great organising potential, enhance political accountability and disrupt old media practices that tend to exclude less powerful voices from important social and political discussions.

On the other hand, they have invited notes of caution. This is because new media platforms embolden and even midwife bullies, ethnic jingoists, and nationalist radicals who are a threat to social cohesion.

Both points of view have merit. New media platforms can be powerful forces for democracy and also a space for dangerous, sectarian and divisive ideas. A number of governments seem to be exploiting these fears in a bid to control these platforms.

These attempts are likely to become a lot more commonplace across Africa. Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Gambia have already passed laws that target social media users specifically. Some of these laws criminalise free speech online, while others have made the use of social media too expensive for users.

Nevertheless, new media platforms are increasingly being used. Their importance on the political landscape can't be over-emphasised. This is because they have allowed people excluded from public communication to articulate their fears and desires in a way that wasn't previously possible. The widespread use

of applications such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp has been particularly instrumental in including a broad range of users in public discussions.

YOUR HEADING HERE

Rather than rely on the mainstream press to cover important political stories, citizens are able to discuss issues in the digital space. When their stories go viral the mainstream media then begins to cover them as important news items.

Twitter in particular has become a useful political tool for many. And Twitter's standard vernaculars such as hashtags and memes have also been creatively appropriated to reflect local inflections. Humour, local languages, and idioms abound.

The fact that participants are also able to "tag" their leaders further means that authority is confronted directly. And a poor person living in an informal settlement is now able to confront the head of state with just as much authority as anyone else. These small victories matter.

These platforms have also enabled users to link local issues with international concerns to give them global currency and legitimacy. In Kenya for example, an anti-rape campaign which coalesced around #JusticeForKemundo could be seamlessly linked to the [#MeToo movement], a similar rebuke and articulation of anger against sexual violence against women.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

The shift from legacy media has not been accidental. A number of African governments still exert enormous control over the media sector. The is because the state remains the single largest adver-

tiser in the media in sub-Saharan Africa, and so can influence coverage and content.

In some countries, presidents and high-level politicians even own media houses.

This is why the digital space is so important. The emergence of a relatively new structure of communication – which is amorphous, unrestrained, and largely unaffected by state control – has meant there are new ways of holding governments to account.

But their popularity has drawn negative reactions from some governments.

CRACKING DOWN

Some are now employing digitally savvy state operatives to counter opposition discourses online.

Others have gone further by enforcing regulations to control online discourse through punitive laws and taxation.

In Tanzania for example, digital content producers – including bloggers – are required to get yearly licences which cost \$900 dollars. In Uganda, data bundles are now much more expensive with a \$0.05 levy charged per day. And Zambia plans to introduce similar measures.

Other countries have been a lot more brazen in their efforts to clamp down on free online speech. Cameroon, Egypt, and Ethiopia, for example, have regularly shut down the internet. Users considered too critical of the government are routinely arrested, threatened or even jailed.

FAKE NEWS

This is not to say that new media platforms are entirely without problems. Social media has been used to create and disseminate fake news. This has

contributed to a dangerous regime of misinformation that has undermined democratic processes in a number of African countries.

This was the case during Kenya's 2017 general elections when the ruling Jubilee party employed Cambridge Analytica, a UK-based public relations company, to boost its electoral prospects. The company was later accused of manipulating social media and using bots to create and circulate fake news.

Similarly, in South Africa, both the ruling African National Congress and the opposition Democratic Alliance were reported to have used social media to spread fake news to besmirch opponents during municipal elections.

These trends reflect the fact that fake news, misinformation and disinformation have infected the continent's body politic, which is a dangerous development.

FUTURE THREATS

It's however safe to say that new media platforms are now firmly part of Africa's public culture and any attempt to stop, frustrate or undermine their significance in public life is bound to fail.

However, the creative use to which they are put must be constructive and progressive. For example, in countries where collective political organisation and expression is increasingly being undermined by the state – such as Tanzania – instances of self-expression through new media form important pockets of resistance. These pockets, when viewed collectively, can help focus attention on state repression and excesses.

[the writer is Reader in Journalism, University of Central Lancashire]

SC to hear Indigo Airlines challenging Meghalaya HC order to make Umroi airport operational

NEW DELHI, DEC 12 (PTI):

Indigo airlines Wednesday moved the Supreme Court challenging the Meghalaya High Court direction to all commercial operators and the Ministry of Civil Aviation to urgently take a decision to start flights from Umroi airport, 30 km from capital Shillong. The apex court was told that the high court on its own had last week taken up the matter and asked the Director General of Civil Aviation, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Airport Authority of India Chairman to hold a meeting within a week on the issue of making the airport operational.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the Indigo Airlines, mentioned the petition before a bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, which agreed to give it an urgent hearing on Thursday.

The bench, also comprising Justices S K Kaul and K M Joseph, was told that the airport was not ready for landing of big aircraft and does not have fire-fighting facilities.

"The operation can't

start," Rohatgi submitted before the bench.

The high court on December 7 had directed that the exercise for taking decision to make operational the airport has to be completed within seven days and had posted the matter for further hearing on December 14.

Besides Indigo, other operators were also represented by their advocates before the high court.

The brief hearing also witnessed lighter moments when the bench told Rohatgi that he will now be identified as as Indigo's counsel.

"You will have tremendous disadvantage," the CJI said indicating there would be lot of requests to him.

When Rohatgi mentioned the matter, the CJI asked him "Who are you?"

He replied "I am Indigo."

"We are always going to remember you are Indigo. You may have tremendous disadvantage since you are Indigo," Justice Gogoi said evoking quick response from Rohatgi that "I will get it fixed if there are difficulties".

Traditional village heads take out a rally in Nagaland

KOHIMA, DEC 12 (PTI): Hundreds of traditional village heads in Nagaland Wednesday took out a rally here demanding an early settlement of the vexed Naga political problem.

Hundreds of goan bu-rah (traditional village heads) under the aegis of Nagaland Goan Burah Federation (NGBF) took out a rally carrying placards which read "we want early solution" and "Nagas demand early solution to the Naga political problem."

They marched till Raj Bhavan and submitted a representation to the prime min-

ister through the state Governor PB Acharya.

"In the land of the Nagas, the peoples anticipation and desire for an honourable and acceptable political solution, through political dialogue with Naga political groups namely, working committee (WC) comprising of multiple Naga groups and NSCN (IM) is very high," the GB Federation stated through the memorandum.

NGBF president Shaleem Konyak, generation Shikuto Zalipu and Kohima District GB Association president Vineipra Pieny appended the memorandum.

60 speakers to attend Apeejay Kolkata Lit Fest in Jan

KOLKATA, DEC 12 (PTI): The 10th edition of the Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival (AKLF) will present an array of speakers - from authors to historians, and from actors to politicians - to be held in the city next month.

A total of 60 speakers would attend the AKLF, a three-day meet of literary minds from across the world at different heritage venues of Park Street, and deliver talks on diverse issues, AKLF Director Maina Bhagat told a press meet here Wednesday.

Authors Upamanyu Chatterjee and Devdutt Pattanaik, historian Ramchandra Guha, columnist Shobhaa De, actor Naseeruddin Shah, director Ratna Pathak Shah, biographer-researcher Rajmohan Gandhi and politician Shashi Tharoor are some of the glitterati to be present at the meet.

The three-day event beginning from January 18 will have sessions

such as "The Great Indian paradox" to be attended by Tharoor, 'Does Gandhi Still Matter?' to be discussed by Ramchandra Guha, 'Crossing the Line Perspectives on the 'Me Too' crisis' to be deliberated on by Shobhaa De, Bhagat said.

The speaker list will also include former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, German poet Ulrike Almut Sandig, Australian restaurateur Michelle Garnaut and writer Syeda Hamid, Bhagat said.

In the run up to the literary festival there will be #letscelebrate campaign for a month across heritage places of the city.

"We have taken the literary festival from its earlier venue in St Pauls Cathedral to Park Street this year. We are celebrating the heritage feature of this road," she said.

Remembering heritage is part of a literature festival, Bhagat said.

SC extends time till Dec 31 for filing claims for inclusion in Assam NRC

NEW DELHI, DEC 12 (PTI):

The Supreme Court on Wednesday extended to December 31 the deadline for filing claims and objections for inclusion of names in the National Register of Citizens for Assam by those who have been left out in the draft NRC.

The draft NRC was published on July 30 in which names of 2.89 crore of the 3.29 crore people were included. The names of 40,70,707 people did not figure in the list. Of these, 37,59,630 names have been rejected and the remaining 2,48,077 are on hold.

A special bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice R F Nariman considered the plea of Assam government that the deadline of December 15, fixed for filing

claims and objections by those left out in the draft NRC, be extended by till January 15 next year.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for Assam government, said that out of 40.70 lakh left out persons, so far 14.28 lakh persons have filed the claims and objections with the authorities for inclusion in the NRC.

There has been surge in such applications in last few weeks and hence, the deadline be extended by one more month, he said.

The apex court, however, said that it would extend the deadline by another 15 days and now the left out persons can file their claims and objections till December 31.

It also made clear that the deadline for verifying the claims for inclusion

in the NRC would be now February 15, 2019 instead of February 1.

The bench also ordered that the copies of the draft NRC be made available for inspection by common people at District Collector, subdivisional, circle, gram panchayat offices so that people can either seek inclusion or object to wrongful inclusions in the NRC.

The bench took note of submission of senior advocate Kapil Sibal that NRC authorities are not considering legally valid documents, which have come into being after August 31, 2015, for verifying claims for inclusion. August 31, 2015 was deadline for registration of names in the draft NRC.

"We direct the NRC authorities to accept such documents which

are legally valid and permissible regardless of the date of issuance of such documents," the bench said.

Earlier, the apex court had allowed the use of five more documents by claimants for the draft Assam NRC, saying the premise "better to exclude genuine person than to include a wrongful person" can't be accepted.

It had over-ruled the objections of state NRC coordinator Prateek Hajela that the documents to be relied upon to stake claim such as refugee registration certificate and ration card can be forged.

The claimants for draft Assam NRC can now stake claim with the help of total 15 documents provided in List-A of the claim form.

The five new docu-

ments allowed by the bench to prove the legacy for the claimants include extract of names in NRC, 1951; extract/certified copy of Electoral Rolls up to the midnight of March 24, 1971 and Citizenship Certificate and refugee certificate issued by competent authority (up to March 24, 1971 midnight).

The other two legacy documents include Certified copies of pre-1971 Electoral Roll, particularly, those issued from Tripura and the ration card.

The court had also accepted the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) prepared by Centre and had fixed the time line for various stage in publication of draft final NRC.

The apex court had on September 5 had allowed use any one of the 10 of a total 15 docu-

ments provided in List-A of the claim form to be used by the claimants for proving legacy.

The ten legacy documents which were made admissible include land documents like registered sale deed, permanent residential certificate issued from outside the State, passport and LIC insurance policy of the relevant period.

The first draft of the NRC for Assam was published on the intervening night of December 31 and January 1 in accordance with the top court's direction. Names of 1.9 crore people out of the 3.29 crore applicants were incorporated then.

Assam, which had faced influx of people from Bangladesh since the early 20th century, is the only state to have an NRC, first prepared in 1951.

No proposal to discontinue AFSPA in Arunachal's Tirap, Changlang, Lomding areas



NEW DELHI, DEC 12 (PTI):

There is no proposal under consideration to discontinue the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in Tirap, Changlang and Longding areas of Arunachal Pradesh, the government informed the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

Minister of State for Defence Subhash Bhamre said on November 17, during an operation conducted in the area of Laptang

in Khonsa Circle, an insurgent was apprehended who gave inputs about presence of "war like stories" in stores of three houses in Longkjon village in Lomding district.

As a follow up to the inputs, on November 18-19 an Army column searched the three suspected houses in Longkjon, Bhamre said in a written reply to a question.

"The search operation was conducted in

accordance with the laid down procedures, causing no undue harassment of the locals. Post the search operation, a No Objection Certificate was obtained from the village elders.

"Based on certain allegations regarding misbehaviour and harassment, the incident was inquired into and villagers have confirmed that there are no complaints against the Army," he said.

Air Force has 13 per cent of women officers, the highest among 3 forces



NEW DELHI, DEC 12 (PTI):

The Air Force has 13.09 per cent of women officers, the highest among all three forces, Minister of State for Defence Subhash Bhamre said Wednesday.

The Army has 3.80 per cent of women officers, while the Navy has six per cent of women officers, he said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

The Air Force has

13.09 per cent of women officers in its force.

Women are recruited in the Army, Navy and the Air Force only in the officer's rank.

In response to a question, on import of missiles from Russia that could attract US sanctions, the Minister said the government was aware of all developments that may impact the procurement of defence equipments.

To another query, Bhamre said a Board of Enquiry has been constituted to look into the explosion incident outside the demolition pit.

On November 20, while shifting one of the unserviceable ammunition from the vehicle to the demolition pit, one of the boxes fell and exploded killing six persons and injuring 19 in Maharashtra's Wardha district.

Yogi Adityanath attends symbolic wedding of Lord Rama in Nepal

SHIRISH B PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, DEC 12 (PTI):

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday attended the symbolic wedding of Lord Rama with Sita and offered prayers at the famous Janaki temple in Nepal's historic Janakpur city.

Adityanath, who arrived in Janakpur as head of the Indian delegation to participate in 'Vivah Panchami' celebrations, was welcomed by Chief Minister of Province 2 Mohammad Lalbabu Raut Gaddi at the airport.

Janakpur is known as the birth place of Sita. A massive Janaki temple was built in memory of Sita in 1910. The three-storied structure made entirely of stone and marble is 50-metre high and spread over 4,860 sq feet.

Adityanath went straight to Janaki temple from the airport. He offered prayers and circumambulated the temple.

Janakpur city was decorated with colourful lights, paper flags and banners. Flowers were showered from helicop-



ter while Adityanath was offering prayer at the temple. In the afternoon, he participated in Ram-Sita 'Swayamvar' and wedding ceremony at famous Rangabhoomi in Barah Bigha ground.

The 'Swayamvar' is enacted every year on 'Vivaha Panchami' to commemorate Ram-Sita marriage.

Both the chief ministers and Mayor of Janakpur Lal Kishor Sah witnessed the rituals of 'Vivaha Panchami'.

Nepalese Minister for Tourism and Culture Ravindra Adhikari and Indian Ambassador to Nepal Manjeev Singh Puri were also present on the occasion.

The 'Vivaha Panchami' is celebrated in Janakpur every year to mark Ram-Sita marriage, which is a unique example of centuries old strong ties between the people of Nepal and India.

According to the Ramayana, Lord Rama of Ayodhya had married

Sita in Janakpur.

Adityanath also attended Mithila cultural programme.

Lalbabu hosted a lunch in the honour of Adityanath at Madhesh Bhawan - residence of the Chief Minister of Province 2. The lunch was attended by various political leaders and dignitaries.

Adityanath also met with senior leaders from federal government and Province 2 before returning home after concluding his day-long visit.

Zoramthanga to be sworn in as Mizoram CM on Saturday

AIZAWL, DEC 12 (PTI):

Mizo National Front (MNF) president Zoramthanga would be sworn-in as the chief minister of Mizoram at the Raj Bhavan here at 12 noon on Saturday, state protocol department officials said Wednesday.

Governor Kummanam Rajasekharan formally invited Zoramthanga on Wednesday to form the next government after receiving the signed notification of the result from Election Commission officials who arrived here late in the evening, Raj Bhavan sources said.

The Governor also dissolved the seventh state legislative assembly during the day to pave the way for the constitution of the eighth assembly, the sources said.

The protocol department officials said it was not known whether all 12 members of the council of ministers would be sworn-in on

December 15.

The MNF returned to power in Mizoram by bagging 26 seats of the 40-member state legislature after a decade which saw the crumbling of the last Congress bastion in the north east.

This followed the newly-formed unregistered Zoram Peoples Movement securing eight seats, which is three more than the outgoing Congress.

The BJP opened its account for the first time in the state by bagging a seat while the Congress managed to win five seats in the assembly polls held on November 28.

Zoramthanga, who has been chief minister of Mizoram twice, was back with a bang on Tuesday after being in political wilderness for two assembly terms.

The 74-year-old rebel-turned-politician was a former underground leader and a close aide of the legendary MNF leader Lalenga.

Dortmund top Champions League group after win at Monaco

MONACO, DEC 12 (AFP): Borussia Dortmund qualified as Group A winners for the Champions League last 16 after beating Thierry Henry's Monaco 2-0 on Tuesday.

Portugal's Raphael Guerreiro scored twice to claim all three points for the visitors as Atletico Madrid could only draw 0-0 at Club Brugge.

Lucien Favre made nine changes from Saturday's derby victory against Schalke which continued their superb unbeaten start to the Bundesliga season.

"It's a perfect evening. On the whole it was a deserved victory," Favre said.

Henry started four teenagers in a meaningless game for the Ligue 1 strugglers who were guaranteed to finish bottom of the group for a second straight campaign after defeat at Atletico in round five.

The former France striker stated he used the fixture as a warm-up for Sunday's domestic trip to Lyon.

"Dortmund posed a real challenge. We'll recover quickly and prepare for Lyon," he said.

"Right now we have a problem, to sort things out in Ligue 1."

Monaco have failed to win in 14 European games and the Germans made it through to the knockout stage of the top-tier competition after having to settle for a Europa League place last season.

With a quarter of an hour on the clock the Germans attacked and the ball was worked to striker Maximilian Philipp inside the box.

His low cross found winger Guerreiro at the back post to tap in.

Dortmund centre-back Abdou Diallo, who spent three seasons with the principality outfit earlier in his career, wasted a good chance on the half-hour mark as he scuffed his shot wide despite being unmarked in the box.

In a scrappy second half neither team could muster a clear shot on goal until Guerreiro added his second of the game and fourth in the competition so far this season from a delicate Paco Alcacer lay-off on 88 minutes.

In Belgium it finished goalless between Club Brugge and Atletico and the Germans finished above the Spanish club on their head-to-head record.

SAUMOJYOTI S CHOUDHURY

BHUBANESWAR, DEC 12 (PTI): Their shoulders are burdened with weight of expectations but it won't be easy for India to end a 43-year long wait when they take on mighty Netherlands in the quarterfinal of the men's hockey World Cup, here Thursday.

Boasting a rich hockey legacy, India last played in the semi-final of the World Cup way back in 1975 when they went on to lift their maiden title.

Of late, the game has witnessed an upward trend in the country but the history does not favour the hosts against the mighty Dutchmen, whom the Indians have never beaten in the World Cup.

In the six earlier meetings at the quadrennial event, Netherlands defeated India five times while one ended in a draw.

And if Manpreet Singh and his men get past the Dutch on Thursday, they will not only break a jinx but also rewrite history and ink their names in the one of the golden chapters of the Indian hockey.

Going by present

India chase slice of history against Netherlands in WC quarterfinal



form and rankings, there is hardly anything to differentiate between the two sides.

While Netherlands are placed fourth in the current world rankings, India are a rung below in the fifth position.

The last time India and Netherlands faced each in the Champions Trophy earlier this, the match had ended in a 1-1 draw.

The over-all head-to-head record belongs to Netherlands. In the 105

games played between the two sides so far, India have won 33, lost 48 while the rest ended in draws.

However, the two sides have shared the spoils since 2013. India and Netherlands have faced each other nine times since 2013, winning four apiece while one game finished in a draw.

And for India captain Manpreet Singh past results hold significance.

"The past results mat-

ter a lot because Netherlands have a better result against us. But, we have played well against them recently. We have also beaten them, drew against them at the Champions Trophy. Indian hockey has improved a lot. The match will be tough and whichever team plays better will win, Manpreet said.

The India-Netherlands duel is expected to be a fast-paced, attacking encounter with both the teams heavily relying on their goal scoring abili-

ties to come out winners.

Both India and Netherlands have scored heavily in the poll stages. While India have scored 12 goals and conceded three, the Dutch have pumped in 18 goals and conceded five.

In the likes of captain Billy Bakker, Seve van Ass, Jeroen Hertzberger, Mirco Pruijser, Robert Kemperman, Thiery Brinkman, the Dutch have got plenty of experience in the midfield and its strike force. It will be

a real test for the Indian defence on Thursday.

The Indians too would be relying on their strikers Mandeep Singh, Simranjeet Singh, Lalit Upadhyay and Akashdeep Singh to continue their good work.

With the Kalinga Stadium expected to be packed to its full capacity, there will also be tremendous pressure on the Indian team and the Dutch will be more than happy to exploit any mistake.

"This will be not be the first time. We have played in front of big crowds in pool games and in the past as well. We are used to playing in front of big crowds, Netherlands coach Max Caldas said.

"We always try to play in our own pace, whether it is fast or slow. We like to dictate. We are not concerned about India because we can't influence what India will do."

Netherlands skipper Bakker added: "The Indian team also has lot of pressure. They need to perform in front of their home crowd. So I feel the pressure is more on the Indian team than us."

Meanwhile in the first quarterfinal, Germany will take on Belgium.

England shock Argentina 3-2 to move into World Cup semi-finals



BHUBANESWAR, DEC 12 (PTI): England stunned Olympic champions Argentina 3-2 to book their place in the semi-finals of the 14th men's Hockey World Cup here on Wednesday.

England, who conceded the lead in the 17th minute, staged a superb come back to make their third successive semi-final appearance in the history of the tournament. England scored three field goals through Barry Middleton (27th minute), Will Calnan (45th) and Harry Martin (49th), while Gonzalo Peillat (17th, 48th) struck both the goals for the losers at the Kalinga Stadium.

Argentina, the bronze medallist in 2014, had themselves to blame for the defeat as they missed chances galore and got into panic mode after conceding the third goal.

Both Argentina and England were levelled 1-1 till 45th minutes but three goals in the last quarter changed the whole scenario.

Will Calnan made it 2-1 for England before

Peillat drew parity in the 48th minute.

But a minute later Martin shocked the Los Leones with a field strike to hand England the decisive lead.

Earlier, realising that slow pace is not helping them, England raised their tempo and that paid dividends as they earned their first penalty corner in the 11th minute.

Luke Taylor's effort from the resultant set piece earned them another penalty corner immediately but Argentina defended stoutly to keep their rivals at bay.

Argentina secured its first penalty corner in the 17th minute and drag-flick expert Peillat scored with a powerful flick to take the lead.

While Argentina players were celebrating, England almost equalised with a brisk counter-attack only for David Condon to miss a sitter.

Thereafter, the Los Leones surprisingly adopted a defensive approach and that worked in England's favour.

Mark Gleghorne's

fine run down from the right flank and his subsequent cross was cleared by England defenders which laid in front of an unmarked Middleton, who slotted home with a powerful shot past goalkeeper Juan Vivaldi to level the scores.

Buoyed by the equaliser, England went on the offensive but failed to get past Argentina's crowded defence.

Argentina, on the other hand, adopted a wait and watch policy to launch counter-attacks.

But it was not to be as England striker Zachary Wallace made an impressive run into the Argentine circle and was brought down inside, which earned the Los Leones back-to-back penalty corners but they wasted both.

In the last quarter, Argentina equalised through Peillat's penalty corner conversion before Martin struck a minute later with a field strike to hand England the unexpected winner.

'Life saver' Alisson, Salah strike take Liverpool into last 16

LIVERPOOL, DEC 12 (AFP): Goalkeeper Alisson Becker was labelled a "life saver" by Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp for a last-gasp save that secured a 1-0 win over Napoli at Anfield and progress to the last 16 of the Champions League on Tuesday.

Mohamed Salah's stunning solo effort put the hosts in front 11 minutes before half-time, but Liverpool were nearly made to pay for their profligacy in missing a series of second-half chances.

Alisson had barely been tested until the Brazilian number one spread himself brilliantly to deny Arkadiusz Milik a dramatic stoppage-time equaliser and go a long way to justifying the then-world record 67-million (85 million) fee for a goalkeeper Liverpool paid Roma in July.

"If I knew Alisson was this good -- I would have paid double," joked Klopp.

"The goal Mo scored, what a goal! And the save Ali made (was) unbelievable. It was of course a life saver tonight." Despite losing all three of their away games in Group C, three home wins at fortress Anfield were enough to see Liverpool through to the knockout stage on goals scored over the Italians in second place behind Paris Saint-Germain, who won 4-1 away to Red Star Belgrade to secure top spot.

"I'm still full of adrenaline, I could feel it in bubbles," added Klopp.

"This game was just amazing. The boys played with their whole heart on the pitch." Liverpool's charge to the Champions League final last season was spearheaded by Salah's 44-goal season.

And after signalling his return to top form by scoring a hat-trick in a 4-0 win at Bournemouth on Saturday that sent Liverpool to the top of the Premier League, Salah's 13th goal of the campaign relegated Napoli to the Europa League in the new year despite losing for the first time in Europe this season.

"It's a real shame our efforts haven't been rewarded," said Napoli coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"We have no regrets. Overall the group of players have done extremely well, we took it down to the wire.

"You can't expect to come to Liverpool and create 10 really good chances, we had one or

two and didn't have the luck to take one of them." The outcome could have been very different if Virgil van Dijk had been sent off rather than just shown a yellow card that will keep him out of the first leg of Liverpool's last-16 tie for a dangerous league on Dries Mertens after just 15 minutes.

UEFA will introduce the video assistant referee (VAR) system for the last 16, but Ancelotti bemoaned the delay in using the technology during the group stage.

"Seeing on the video, I knew it was a red card," added Ancelotti. "When VAR comes in (to) the Champions

League, it is too late."

Liverpool took control as the first half wore on and broke the deadlock when Salah outmuscled Mario Rui and skipped past Kalidou Koulibaly before squeezing the ball underneath Ospina from a narrow angle.

Had Liverpool conceded they would have had to win by two goals due to their 1-0 defeat in Naples, and the hosts failed to cash in on their dominance of the early stages of the second half and avoid a nervy ending.

Salah pulled his shot into the side-netting with a far better angle from the one he scored, while



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Real Kashmir FC jump to third sport with 6-1 win over Shillong Lajong

SRINAGAR, DEC 11 (PTI): Abednedo Kofi struck twice as debutants Real Kashmir FC hammered Shillong Lajong FC 6-1 to jump to the third spot in the Hero I-League, here on Tuesday as their run of six continuous home matches came

to a roaring end.

With their fourth win out of seven games, Kashmir soared to third on the points table, levelled with second-placed Churchill Brothers on points but a tad behind on goal difference.

Kashmir's goals were scored by Ghana-

ian forward Kofi, Mason Robertson, Nagen Tamang, Gnohere Krizo and Suruchandra Singh.

Samuel Lyngdoh got Shillong's lone goal as the Meghalaya outfit remained at 10th place after eight games with just four points to show for their efforts.

The home team's Scottish coach David Robertson fielded an unchanged side while Alison Kharsyntiew made two changes to the side which started against Neroca in the previous game which they lost. Hardy Cliff Nongbri and Sheen

Stevenson made starts while Awmpuia and Nabin Rabha started on the bench.

Nagen Tamang got the first chance of the game as early as the third minute when he hit straight to keeper Neithoville Chaliu from close.

UN honours Indian startup which recycles floral waste from temples to clean Ganga

TG BIJU KATOWICE (POLAND), DEC 12 (PTI): An Indian startup which works to clean up the mighty river Ganga by recycling thousands of tonnes of floral waste from temples has been honoured by the UN here. Uttar Pradesh-based 'HelpUsGreen' has come up with the world's first profitable solution to the monumental temple waste problem: 'flowercycling', a UN document said, hailing the initiative. As many as 1,260 women have been supported through the startup to date and 19 children whose mothers used to work as manual scavengers have started going to school, it said. The startup collects 8.4 tonnes of floral waste



from temples in Uttar Pradesh on a daily basis. These sacred flowers are handcrafted into charcoal-free incense, organic vermicompost and biodegradable packaging material through its 'flowercycling' technology. Women collect floral-waste daily from

temples. The waste is up-cycled to produce organic fertilisers, natural incense, and biodegradable packaging material. The Indian initiative along with other game-changing initiatives from 13 other countries were honoured as winners of the United

Nations Climate Action Award at a special ceremony at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 24) in Katowice on Tuesday. "These activities shine a light on scalable climate action around the world. They are proof that climate action isn't

only possible, it is innovative, it is exciting, and it makes a real difference," said Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UN Climate Change. According to the UN, 11,060 metric tonnes of temple-waste has been flowercycled to date by the women working with the Indian initiative. As much as 110 metric tonnes of chemical pesticides that enter the river through temple waste have been offset, the income of 73 manual scavenger families has increased at least six-fold and 365 families have been impacted by it through increased living standards and stable income, it said. Across the country, people bring flowers to temples daily as gifts

for the gods, blessings for life, for celebrations to the tune of more than 800 million metric tonnes per year. These flowers are thrown into the river Ganga and India's other sacred rivers, a beautiful religious ritual that is having an unfortunate effect. As the flowers rot, they fill the rivers with waste, dumping toxins like arsenic, lead and cadmium from pesticides, thus causing pollution and enormous levels of water-borne diseases. Flowers, incense and other religious items come in plastic packaging adorned with images of gods. Devotees do not want to throw away this packaging, so they either leave the packaging under trees or immerse it into water bodies.

Blow to Sirisena as Lankan Parliament adopts confidence motion on ousted PM Wickremesinghe



COLOMBO, DEC 12 (PTI): Sri Lanka's ousted prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe emphatically proved his majority in Parliament on Wednesday, weeks after being sacked by President Maithripala Sirisena in a controversial move that plunged the island nation into a political turmoil. As many as 117 out of 225 lawmakers in Parliament voted to pass a confidence motion in his leadership.

The motion's approval could be seen as a blow to President Sirisena who has steadfastly refused to reappoint 69-year-old Wickremesinghe due to his personal dislike of the ousted prime minister. Sri Lanka is going through a major political crisis since October 26 when President Maithripala Sirisena, in a controversial move, removed Wickremesinghe and installed ex-strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa in his place. Rajapaksa has so far failed to prove his majority in Parliament.

The main Tamil minority party TNA voted in favour of the confidence motion. However, the Marxist JVP, which has protested Sirisena's extra constitutional action, abstained from voting. If the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)'s six lawmakers had voted in his favour, Wickremesinghe would have commanded an unassailable majority in the House despite the president's refusal to reinstate him. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau voiced concern over the detention. "This has our attention at the very highest level of our government," said Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland. China had warned Canada of "grave consequences" over Meng's arrest as it demanded her release, although Canada said no link between the two cases had been established.

MP Keheliya Rambukwella said that they do not accept the motion of confidence presented and passed in support of Wickremesinghe in Parliament, Daily Mirror reported. Legislators supporting Sirisena and Rajapaksa have been boycotting Parliament since November 17 when there were violent scenes of fighting, breaking up of furniture and throwing chilli powder. Two key court orders on the legality of Sirisena's action await delivery. The one on Parliament's sacking is expected this week. Sirisena, after sacking Wickremesinghe on October 26, dissolved Parliament and called for a snap election on January 5. However, the Supreme Court overturned his decision. Sirisena said that he has always taken decisions in the best interest of the country and the people. United National Party (UNP) leader Wickremesinghe last week urged the President not to "be like Hitler and some of the other dictators who used the referendum". Sirisena has said that Wickremesinghe is a stubborn, headstrong person who was following far right wing neo-liberal policies. Wickremesinghe and Rajapaksa both claim to be the prime ministers with the former claiming that his dismissal is invalid because he still holds a majority in the 225-member Parliament. Prior to the crisis, Wickramasinghe's UNP had the backing of 106 parliamentarians while Rajapaksa and Sirisena combine had 95 seats. The President has said that due to sharp personal differences with Wickremesinghe, he would not reappoint him as the Prime Minister. However, Wickremesinghe's UNP claims that Sirisena will be left with no choice as he would be the man who will command the confidence in the House. Meanwhile, UPFA

North and South Korean soldiers enter each other's territory

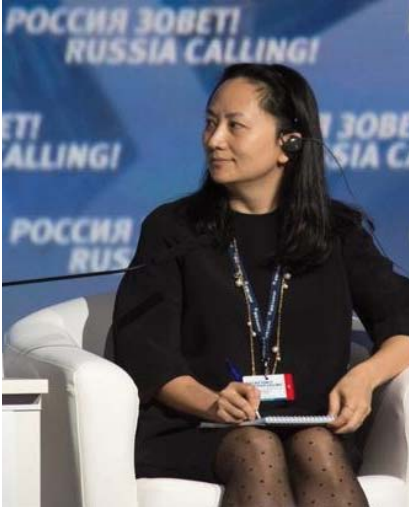


SEOUL, DEC 12 (AFP): Soldiers from North and South Korea crossed into each other's territory peacefully for the first time on Wednesday, Seoul said, as they began checking the dismantlement of guard posts in the Demilitarized Zone. The North invaded the South in 1950, triggering the Korean War, and Seoul went on to change hands four times as Pyongyang's Chinese-backed forces and the US-led UN troops supporting the South fought their way up and down the peninsula and back again. The conflict ended in an armistice in 1953, leaving the two technically still in a state of war, but a rapid reconciliation has taken place this year. The South's President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong Un, leader of the nuclear-armed North, agreed to remove a limited number of guard posts along their heavily-fortified frontier at a September summit in Pyongyang, among other measures. North Korea blew up 10 of its facilities in November, while the South tore 10 down on its own side using excavators. South Korean inspectors visited each of the guard posts on the North's side on Wednesday to make sure they had been dismantled and all firearms and troops removed, Seoul's defence ministry said. North Korean inspectors carried out the same process at the South's bunkers in the afternoon, it added. Video footage showed armed South Korean soldiers shaking hands with North Korean personnel at the military demarcation

line in the centre of the DMZ, before crossing to the other side. Led by the North Koreans, the Southerners walked along a path where the North's guard posts had once stood, soldiers from both sides taking photos and filming the process as they chatted. "This marks the first time since the division that the soldiers of the North and South... are peacefully crossing the military demarcation line," the ministry said in a statement. The North is known to have more guard posts -- which include both surface structures and underground elements -- and according to Yonhap news agency it now has around 150 in the DMZ, with the South having about 50. Despite its name, the area around the DMZ is one of the most fortified places on earth, replete with minefields and barbed-wire fences. But under the plans to ease tensions agreed in Pyongyang, the two Koreas have demilitarised the border truce village of Panmunjom, leaving it manned by 35 unarmed personnel from each side. Officially called the Joint Security Area (JSA), the enclave is the only spot along the 250-kilometre (155-mile) frontier where soldiers from the two Koreas and the US-led UN Command stand face to face. The dovish Moon has pursued a policy of engagement with the North, in increasing contrast to Washington, which insists pressure should be maintained on Pyongyang until it denuclearises. (

Huawei executive gets bail in case rattling China ties

VANCOUVER, DEC 12 (AFP): A Canadian court has granted bail to a top Chinese telecom company executive wanted in the United States, as diplomatic tensions turned to the detention of a former Canadian diplomat in Beijing. Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Huawei, was released on USD 7.5 million bail on Tuesday in a case that has rattled relations between China, the United States and Canada. Meng, who faces a US extradition bid on charges related to alleged violations of Iran sanctions, was also ordered to surrender her passport and will be subjected to electronic monitoring. Meng, who faces a US extradition bid on charges related to alleged violations of Iran sanctions, was also ordered to surrender her passport and will be subjected to electronic monitoring. Meng, who faces a US extradition bid on charges related to alleged violations of Iran sanctions, was also ordered to surrender her passport and will be subjected to electronic monitoring.



raised concerns that it could derail a US-China trade war. US officials have said the arrest was unrelated to the trade talks, but President Donald Trump told Reuters he "would certainly intervene" in the case if it can help strike a deal with China. "If US officials and the US government want to make positive efforts towards the right direction about the issue, we welcome them," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said Wednesday at a regular briefing. Huawei is a strategically key company for China's global high-tech ambitions but some of its services have been blocked in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Britain over security concerns. Meng, who is the daughter of Huawei's founder, is accused of lying to bankers about the use of a covert subsidiary to sell to Iran in breach of sanctions. If convicted, she faces more than 30 years in prison. The extradition process, scheduled to start on February 6, could take months, even years, if appeals are made in the case. Her lawyer, David Martin, argued that she was not a flight risk because it would otherwise "embarrass China itself". She had also cited

health reasons for requesting bail. During a pause in proceedings, Martin said Meng looked forward to spending time with family, reading novels and maybe applying to a doctorate program while the extradition case plays out. Huawei said in a statement it was confident that the courts would "reach a just conclusion" in the case and stressed that the company complies with all laws and sanctions. While Meng secured her release, the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank said its North East Asia senior adviser, former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig, was detained by Chinese state security in Beijing on Monday and has had no information about him since then. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau voiced concern over the detention. "This has our attention at the very highest level of our government," said Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland. China had warned Canada of "grave consequences" over Meng's arrest as it demanded her release, although Canada said no link between the two cases had been established.

Theresa May to contest confidence vote 'with everything I've got'

ADITI KHANNA LONDON, DEC 12 (PTI): Embattled British Prime Minister Theresa May will face a vote of no-confidence on Wednesday triggered by her own party lawmakers over her handling of the controversial Brexit deal, as she vowed to fight the latest challenge to her leadership with "everything I have got". May is set to face a vote of no-confidence in her leadership after the required 48 MPs from her Conservative Party filed letters with the influential 1922 Committee, which represents rank-and-file Conservative MPs in the House of Commons. "I will contest that vote with everything I

have got," May said in a statement at Downing Street, warning that the leadership challenge will delay or even cancel Brexit. "I stand ready to finish the job," the 62-year-old prime minister said. May, who has been prime minister since shortly after the UK voted to leave the 28-member European Union in June, 2016, has faced criticism in her party for the Brexit plan she has negotiated. The vote will take place in the form of a secret ballot on Wednesday evening. May will need to convince a majority of MPs (158 out of 315 Conservative MPs) to be able to win the vote and then her leadership cannot be challenged for a year. However, if she loses

the party will have to elect a new leader who will then go on to become the next British Prime Minister. The challenge to her leadership has been brought by Conservative MPs who think May has watered down the Brexit voters were promised in the landmark referendum held in 2016. May had seen off an attempt by this group of Brexiters to get rid of her last month. The latest leadership challenge comes as she was desperately trying to rescue her Brexit deal as she tried to convince European Union (EU) leaders to offer some concessions to convince Britain's MPs to vote for it on

Tuesday, a day after she postponed a crucial parliamentary vote scheduled for this week over the Withdrawal Agreement struck with the EU. She was due to travel to Dublin on Wednesday but will now remain in London to contest the no-confidence vote. In her statement delivered early on Wednesday, May said: "A leadership election would not change the fundamentals of the negotiation or the Parliamentary arithmetic. "Weeks spent tearing ourselves apart will only create more division just as we should be standing together to serve our country. None of that would be in the national interest."

France hunts for Christmas market attack gunman

STRASBOURG (FRANCE), DEC 12 (AFP): A fugitive gunman who opened fire on Christmas shoppers at a market in Strasbourg, eastern France, shouted "Allahu akbar" (God is greatest) during his killing spree, French officials said Wednesday as anti-terror police joined a giant manhunt. The attack took place Tuesday night around 8 pm (1900 GMT) in the heart of the medieval city as the market was closing, leaving two dead and 13 injured. Witnesses said the suspect, a 29-year-old Strasbourg native identified as Cherif C., cried "Allahu Akbar" as he opened fire with a handgun and stabbed

passers-by, France's anti-terror prosecutor Remy Heitz said Wednesday. The man, who was on a watchlist for suspected religious extremists, had already been sentenced 27 times in France, Germany and Switzerland for crimes including violence and robbery. Four people connected to him were detained in Strasbourg overnight, he added. The man was flagged by French security forces in 2015 as a possible extremist while in prison, after he "called for practising a radical form of religion," deputy interior minister Laurent Nunez told France Inter radio Wednesday.

'Go Goa Gone' sequel is better than the first film: Vir Das

Actor-comedian Vir Das believes the sequel to his 2013 hit zombie comedy "Go Goa Gone" is going to be better and crazier than the original.

The film, which also featured Kunal Kemmu, Anand Tiwari and Saif Ali Khan, will be once again helmed by director duo Raj Nidimoru, and Krishna DK.

"We just had a meeting. It was wonderful. We all kind of realised 'I missed you a lot in the last four years now let's go and make this movie'. None of us expected 'Go Goa Gone' to be the cult film that it turned out to be. We were just making a film with passion and we hoped that somebody would get it and somebody would watch it.

"The fact that Saif would end up campaigning the film or that it would get the kind of audience it did, we didn't expect any of that. But now the pressure is definitely there to make a good film. It has to be just as crazy as the first one. So we had a meeting with the directors and I can confidently tell you that it's better than the first film," Vir told PTI.

The film is expected to go on floors in February.

Currently Vir is filming for his first American TV series in Prague. The ABC series titled "Whiskey Cavalier", is produced by Warner Brothers.

The actor says he was roped in for the series after the success of his first Netflix comedy special "Abroad Understanding".

"It's my first time on American TV and I'm very excited. It happened because of the Netflix special, they saw me after that and an offer came in from ABC. It's a funny action comedy.

"It's a very fresh experience for me because I'm on set with American actors who are established TV stars, they've been on TV for 20-30 years so I'm the new guy. It's always fun to be the fresher," he said.

The actor revealed that the series will come out early next year.

Vir is also excited about his second Netflix comedy special, "Losing IT", which premieres on the streaming service on December 11.

The actor said he came up with the ideas for the special while he was travelling across the globe for eight months.

"I decided that I need to travel a little bit, to get better as a comedian. I need to travel and get out into the world. So I took eight months off from anything that I was doing and I did a world tour. I ended up going to 28-29 countries across the world, every single continent I went to.

"And while I was travelling and doing shows, I started writing. So this show that's going to come out is the culmination of that world trip," he said.



RAD IN PLAID! Singer/actress Miley Cyrus was spotted heading to a recording studio in Manhattan.

Using Laxmi Agarwal as lens to tell larger story on acid violence in India: Meghna Gulzar

RADHIKA SHARMA

NEW DELHI, DEC 11 (PTI): Filmmaker Meghna Gulzar, who is set to direct a film on acid attack survivor Laxmi Agarwal, says the movie is an attempt to explore a larger story on acid violence in the country through the real life subject.

Deepika Padukone will be playing the lead role in the film, which marks the actor's first stint into production.

Meghna says Laxmi's case is the most revealing example of how India's law, medicine and administration machinery came together for justice.

"In the film with Deepika on acid violence, I'm using Laxmi Agarwal as a subject because she is the most known acid fighter. Plus her case and her story has been the most relevant in terms of where legislation on acid violence, medical advancement, compensation for victims and things like that was concerned.

"There was a whole socio-medical and legal impact that her case had. Therefore, I am using her as a lens to tell a larger story on acid violence in India because even though acid is banned and the sale of acid is regulated in our country as of five years now, we still have acid attacks. It is still the simplest thing to get in a 'kirana' store in a tier-3 city," the director told PTI in an interview.

In 2005, while Laxmi was waiting at a bus stop in Delhi, she was attacked by an assailant, a man twice her age, known to her family and an unlikely suitor whose advances she had declined.

The film will showcase her journey in the time after her attack spanning a decade, a significant part of the story is the game-changing PIL in the Supreme Court which inspired the amendment on acid laws in 2013.

Meghna is not new to recreating real life stories on the big screen, having made "Talvar", a critically-acclaimed film on 2008 Aarushi-Hemraj twin murders of Noida and this year's "Raazi", which is based on a book inspired by a



real-life account of a female spy.

The director has another project that will delve into the life of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw but it is a not a biopic.

"The film on Field Marshal Manekshaw is not a biopic. I'm looking at the man, his life and his times," she says, adding with a heavy sigh, "I'm way over my head over here (the story)".

Meghna does not like being called a female filmmaker but says the concept of "male gaze" is relevant in cinema.

She says every story has to be told from a certain perspective: case in point her film "Talvar", which, she believes, required a male gaze.

"And I was a woman telling the story. It's the most masculine film I've ever made, there's no room for emotion. There's one female character in that movie which is Konkona and the girl who comes only for a few seconds at the end of the film.

"Everything was about male gaze so even when you're staging a scene you've to go into the mind of all the different male characters. How would they stand,

how would they react, how would they react to each other. What would their response be, what would their posture be?"

Meghna says she was careful in not taking sides with the story that became a tabloid fodder.

And yet she wanted to give it a moral compass.

"With 'Talvar', I said, 'I'm being objective'. I'm telling you both sides of the story but when I put that video footage at the end of the film which showed the only time that the girl was alive. That was my moral compass that I was leaving you with, that okay this is actually what happened, these two people died," she said.

"If you want your story to be grey, there will be no moral compass. If you want to give a very definite take to the audience that they can go home with, at the end of your film, you will have a moral compass, and that moral compass could be any device. Sometimes the audience finds a moral compass that you didn't even realise you placed and that's the beauty of it," she added.

Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' most-streamed song from 20th century

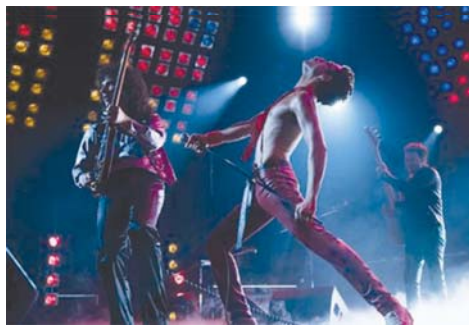
Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" has become the world's most-streamed song from the 20th century, four decades after the number was first recorded.

The single, which inspired the title of the recent Rami Malek-starrer Freddie Mercury biopic, is also the most-streamed classic rock song of all time, a release on the official page of the British rock band said quoting Universal Music Group.

The original song and official video for Bohemian Rhapsody, taken from the group's 1975 album "A Night at the Opera", has surpassed 1.6 billion streams globally across all major streaming services.

"So the River of Rock Music has metamorphosed into streams! Very happy that our music is still flowing to the max!," Brian May, Queen's guitarist, and a founding member said.

"Bohemian Rhapsody" is considered one of the greatest songs ever recorded. In 2004, the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame and Freddie Mercury's vocal performance was named by the read-



ers of Rolling Stone magazine as the best in rock history.

The anthem's streaming success can also be contributed to the popularity of the film, which has become the highest grossing music biopic in history. Malek has been hailed universally for his empathic portrayal of Mercury, who died in 1991 of bronchial pneumonia resulting from AIDS.

Malek, in an interview with PTI ahead of the film's release in India, said he had never worked so hard on anything because he wanted to honour Mercury and Queen's musical legacy.

"I am honoured to be the person to contribute to Freddie's story and be a tiny part of Queen's legacy. The ability to bring it to a new generation is special and I am very fortunate to be a part of it.

"I have never worked this hard as on this to honour a human being. I probably asked for too many takes because I did not want to lie awake at night thinking 'I did not do everything that I could while I was on the set'. I pushed myself to the absolute limit," Malek had said.

ARIES: Limits? What limits? Today's Sagittarius new moon in your fiercely independent ninth house can help you to bust out of a rut. Whether you're game to be your own boss or say sayonara to a bad deal, it's time to emancipate yourself!

TAURUS: Solid as a rock! If that's your motto AND your goal for your personal and professional life, get serious about allowing only those kinds of people and scenarios into your world. Smooth-talking players and unreliable partners won't cut it for your pragmatic sign.

GEMINI: Two's your lucky number today, as a Sagittarius new moon powers up your seventh house of committed relationships. Whether you're single or attached, working with a business cohort or flying solo, you will attract all kinds of worthy partner possibilities. These could be new folks or friends (or friends of friends) that you're see-

ing with fresh eyes.

CANCER: A Sagittarius new moon powers up your sixth house of self-care, motivating you to shed some limiting habits and replace them with healthy new ones. Don't wait for New Year's to make your resolutions or start a new eating plan or exercise routine. Plenty of gyms and yoga and Pilates studios are offering deals NOW. So get out there and do your best negotiating.

LEO: No use trying to play small today, Leo. Wherever you go, the spotlight is going to find and follow you. This is what happens when a Sagittarius new moon activates your fifth house of glamour and fame. Without even trying, your self-loving vibes and innate confidence will come beaming through.

VIRGO: Home and hearth, kith and kin: These are a few of your favorite things today, as a Sagittarius new moon activates your domestic

fourth house. Has life been zipping along at breakneck speed, causing you to unintentionally give short shrift to some of your nearest and dearest?

LIBRA: Hello, superconnector! Today's Sagittarius new moon accentuates your third house of community, crowning you social director. You're comfortable bringing together like-minded folks for work, play or romance, but under this lunar power, you're really fired up. So why not turn it into a sideline business and make a little moola facilitating a joint venture?

SCORPIO: Today's Sagittarius new moon in your second house of finances turns your attention to the all-important subjects of work and money. New moons bring the opportunity for a fresh start, and who couldn't use a little economic stimulation during the holidays? Start by realistically assessing your gifting budget.

SAGITTARIUS: Happy personal New Year! Today marks the only Sagittarius new moon of the year and, for you, the first day of a powerful six-month cycle. You've got the cosmos on your side, so make a bold move toward realizing your wildest dreams. Here's a manifesting tip: The clearer your goals, the faster you'll be able to make them a reality.

CAPRICORN: You're no quitter, Cap, but sometimes even your persevering sign is forced to admit that enough is enough. And today—with the only Sagittarius new moon of the year activating your twelfth house of endings—may be one of those days. It's not a sign of weakness but of strength to walk away from an untenable or unfulfilling situation.

AQUARIUS: You're the most indie-spirited sign of the zodiac, Aquarius, but you're also its consummate team player. And today, the only Sagittarius new moon of

the year lands in your collaboration station, sparking an inventive team project. Your tribe's no herd of cloned sheep, and the respect you pay one another makes it easy to subdue your ego and work toward a common goal. Feeling sporty? Look for an indoor athletic league, or play to your sign's strengths and find a meaningful humanitarian project to support.

PISCES: The only Sagittarius new moon of the year lands in your tenth house of professional success today, rousing your inner tycoon from a long nap. Even though you resonate more with creative types, that doesn't mean you can't run a profitable company. If you do need some support on the business side, align yourself with someone with complementary skills. Get clarity on your career goals by writing them down. For the next six months, keep that list in plain sight—and let the manifestation begin!