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'HARSH': 'I HAD NO INCOME'**

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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New STNM Hospital was prematurely rushed to inauguration: Minister



**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 31 JUL:**

Health Minister Dr MK Sharma today alleged that the previous government started the new STNM Hospital at Sochaygang in a rushed manner without bothering to complete even the civil engineering works. He mentioned that most of the facilities were not in the order and construction work was still going on in the hospital complex despite it having been opened.

He was replying to queries put forth by MLA Aditya Golay Tamang during the question hour on the third day of the Budget Session of Sikkim Legislative Assembly on Wednesday.

The Minister further stated that there were many lapses and that several corrective measures need to be undertaken in the hospital.

He added that there were engineering defects and that many things were need to be

placed in order.

He stressed that the earlier government started the hospital without completing all works and without adequate preparation.

He expressed that the present government was very serious about providing the latest and high technology services to the people of Sikkim.

He assured to put all things in order to provide qualitative health service to the people.

Responding to que-



informed that the capacity of hospital was increased to 1,000 beds mainly to accommodate additional specialities and super specialities and related facilities and also to meet the demands of the ever-increasing number of patients.

"At present, there are five super specialities and 19 specialties available in the hospital. The final cost on the project including equipment is Rs 1,281.00 crores and till date expenditure on the project is Rs 1163.68 crores," he informed.

It has been informed that out of 1,047 beds, 75 beds for TB Isolation ward were under construction and 972 beds were ready.

It is added that out of these 972 beds, 639 beds are not handed over to Health Department and 333 beds were in the process of handing over to the department.

He informed that out of 639 beds handed over to Health Department, presently 537 beds were operational and were available for patients.

Not boycott by SDF, it was PS Tamang's swearing in as CM which gave Sikkim its Blackest Day: SDF

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 31 JUL:

Sikkim Democratic Front has rubbished the statement of Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] that the boycott of the assembly session by SDF legislators was a black day for Sikkim. SDF has instead countered that the blackest day for democracy in Sikkim arrived on 02 May 2019 when Mr Tamang was sworn in as the Chief Minister even though the rules don't permit to become even an MLA.

An SDF press release issued by its spokesperson, JB Darnal, highlights that the entire country and world witnessed how the SKM government failed to uphold the dignity and decorum of the State Legislative Assembly by insisting that Mr Tamang be appointed

Chief Minister.

The release adds that using unparliamentarily, undemocratic and inappropriate words against former CM, the SDF president Pawan Chamling and other legislators of SDF in the Assembly by SKM supporters was another black day in the political history of the country. This one too by SKM.

The release states that it abject failure of the SKM government that the Assembly authorities have not been able to take any action against the anti-social elements who attacked the longest serving Chief Minister of the country while the Assembly was in session.

The release adds that the decision of SDF legislators to boycott the Assembly session until Mr Tamang remains the CM was a principled stand

taken to uphold the decorum of the Assembly and register the party's protest against the mockery of imposing a person disqualified from holding any public office as the Chief Minister of the State.

The release also points out that Mr Tamang, after he won the 2009 assembly election from Upper Burtuk constituency, and then went against SDF when he was not inducted into the Council of Ministers due to the corruption case against him, had not participated in any proceedings or discussions in the Assembly from 2009 to 2014.

The release further invites Mr Tamang to share details of how many Assembly session he attended after being elected in 2014.

check out an experiment with some podcasting from Sikkim.

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www.summittimes.com
or find us on SoundCloud at
https://soundcloud.com/tsheringeden-506860426/stray-thoughts-01

SDF govt spent Rs 7.59 cr to publish books on Chamling in 20 years

GANGTOK, JUL 31 (PTI): The erstwhile Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) government had spent Rs 7.59 crore to publish 52 books on former chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling, the House was informed on Wednesday.

The state Information and Public Relations(IPR) department Minister LN Sharma replying to a question by MLA Bishnu Kumar Sharma said that the department had published a total of 52 books on Chamling between 1999 and 2019 at an expense of Rs 7,58,94,283.

While bills related to the publication of books whose serial number is between one to 45 have been settled, an outstanding liability of Rs 1,25,76,000 for those between serial number 46 to 52 is pending with the department, he said.

The books had been published by IPR department on the direction of the Chamling himself.

Chamling, a five-term chief minister, ruled Sikkim from 1994 to 2019 before his party, the SDF was ousted from power by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha headed by Prem Singh Tamang in a closely-fought assembly polls earlier this year.

BUDGET SESSION

Assembly passes amendment easing payment of motor vehicle road tax

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 31 JUL:

The third day of the Budget Session 2019-20 of Sikkim Legislative Assembly started with question hour on Wednesday. During the question hour, three legislators, Bishnu Kumar Sharma, Sunita Gajmer and Aditya Golay placed queries with the concerned Ministers.

In response to a question put forth by MLA Aditya Golay Tamang, Forest Minister Karma Lodoy Bhutia stated that the Department will put in place norms providing due relaxation for environmental clearances to carry out development works of the Government.

While replying to Ms Gajmer who sought a detailed list of funds received by the state under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, Tourism Minister BS Pant mentioned in the year 2015-16, the approved amount was Rs 98.04 Crore and that the amount released by the Ministry so far is Rs 78.44 Crore of which Rs 75.95 Crore has been spent.

He further informed that fund approved for the Swadesh Darshan Scheme-2 in the year 2016-17 was Rs

Day-3 packed with Q&As and financial business



95.32 Crore and the amount released by the Ministry so far was Rs. 73.21 Crore and expenditure till date is Rs. 36.96 Crore.

It is added that funds received under this scheme have been utilized and were being used in many projects and locations.

Replying to a question placed by MLA Bishnu Kumar Sharma, Animal Husbandry Minister LN Sharma informed the House that the department has distributed 824 milch cows in the last five years.

He shared that according to the

Estimate Survey Report carried out regularly by the department under Integrated Sample Survey Scheme for Estimation of Milk, Meat and Egg, data revealed that milk production in the State has increased significantly in the last five years.

The State annual milk production has reached 61.244 thousand tons from 49.990 ton in the year 2014-15 and the State is producing 1.68 lakhs litres of milk per day. Minister also provided the district-wise breakup of the milch cattle distribution in the last five years.

On a supplementary question by the Mr Bishnu Kumar Sharma, he informed that the government was taking concrete steps to ensure that farmers get the best price for their produce.

Replying to a question put forth by the MLA Sunita Gajmer, the Minister for Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Kunga Nima Lepcha informed that the work of up-gradation of the Jorethang playground was initiated by the Buildings and Housing Department and the work has not yet been handed over to

turn to pg02

DC-West convenes meeting to improve learning outcomes at govt schools

GYALSHING, 31 JUL [IPR]: A co-ordination meeting of Primary School heads from various schools under HRDD with District Collector, West, Karma R Bonpo was held at the Zilla Panchayat Bhawan conference hall today.

Addressing the school heads, the DC explained that the main intention behind the meeting was to improve learning outcomes at government schools of the district. In order to achieve that aim, a detailed blueprint needs to be charted and

the meeting was being organized to brainstorm towards that purpose.

The DC stressed that efforts and initiatives of schools heads and teachers was most important to drive quality education.

Since school heads are at the forefront of this mission, he urged them to immerse themselves wholeheartedly in this noble mission.

Quality teachers are the key ingredients to delivery quality education for which emphasis will



need to be on training and skilling of teachers.

In order to improve the skill sets of teachers,

a detailed training plan needs to be worked out. He stated a committee of motivated and dedicated

teachers will be formed to drive this initiative.

The DC added that schools heads should

take up leadership roles and motivate their teachers to work on the delivery of quality education.

He urged all school heads to sensitize their teachers on learning outcomes of students, generate lesson plans and monitor the progress of each and every student.

He also urged every school head to work independently and with innovation in their schools. He urged the school heads to identify quality teachers and make them subject experts so that responsibility for every subject is fixed.

The DC stated that he *turn to pg02*

DCW demands Unnao rape survivor be airlifted to Delhi

NEW DELHI, JUL 31 (PTI): Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) chief Swati Maliwal met Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel on Wednesday and urged her to ensure that the Unnao rape survivor who was critically injured in a car-truck collision was airlifted to Delhi for treatment.

Maliwal also hit out at Yogi Adityanath, wondering why the chief minister had not yet met the 19-year-old woman, who accused Bharatiya Janata

Party legislator Kuldeep Singh Sengar of raping her at his residence in 2017.

The rape survivor was travelling with her family when a truck hit their car in Rae Bareilly on Sunday. Two family members were killed, while the woman and her lawyer suffered critical injuries and are undergoing treatment at a Lucknow hospital. The family has alleged there was a conspiracy behind the incident.

“Met @anandiben-

patel ji & demanded airlifting Unnao victim 2 Delhi 4 best treatment, compensation 4 victim & removal of Sengar from BJP and Legislative Assembly,” Maliwal posted on Twitter.

The DCW chairperson also requested the governor and Adityanath to meet the woman, and demanded that the case should be fast-tracked.

In a series of questions, Maliwal asked Adityanath why no action had been taken against the

rape-accused legislator despite “33 complaints” made by the woman in the past one year.

“Why haven’t you (Adityanath) met the victim till now? Why has compensation not been given to them?” she asked on Twitter. “Why is Sengar still an MLA? Why has the son-in-law of UP minister Arun Singh not been arrested?”

The state BJP had said on Tuesday that Sengar was suspended from the party “long ago”. The party,

however, has not given the date when this suspension took place.

“Why has no action been taken against the SP (superintendent of police) and the personal security staff who used to leak information to Sengar? Why has the victim not been taken to Delhi for treatment?” asked Maliwal, who has been in Lucknow from Monday to meet the victim.

Sengar, a political strongman and a four-time MLA from the state,

was arrested in April last year in connection with the rape case.

The CBI, which has taken over the case, has booked Sengar and nine others on murder charges in connection with the collision.

“DCW will fight for the victim and her family till our last breath. We urge the UP government to act before it is too late,” she said. “With delay of every passing minute, they are strangulating the flow of justice.”

Govt focusing on cancer research, to set up 1.5 lakh wellness centres by 2022: Harsh Vardhan

New Delhi, Jul 31 (PTI): The government is giving keen attention to research for combating cancer through national as well as international collaborations and plans to establish 1.5 lakh health and wellness clinics in the country by 2022, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

The minister said that at present there are 482 centres in the country for cancer treatment with 695 teletherapy machines.

He was replying to a discussion on the need to ensure basic facilities and affordable treatment to cancer patients raised by Samajwadi Party’s Chandrapal Singh Yadav.

“Health and Wellness clinics are another component of Ayushman Bharat scheme. By December 31, 2022, we want to establish 1.5 lakh health and wellness clinics out of which, 19,000-20,000 have already been established and by March 31 (2020) this figure will reach 40,000,” Harsh Vardhan said.

The minister said the ‘National Cancer Grid’ initiative for uniform treatment of cancer patients was being closely monitored by the Prime Minister, with 177 institutions, activists, patients and advocacy groups associated with it.

He shared that eight institutions have already been dedicated towards this objective, while two are in the offing in Odisha and Bihar.

He underlined that India was one of the seven founding member countries among the 40 nations globally which have established an international cancer genome consortium, and are engaged in extensive work in the area through the consortium. He observed that 60-70 per cent of the common cancers detected in India are preventable and highlighted the significance of early diagnosis.

During the discussion, members of various parties demanded that cancer detection and treatment centres be opened in every district of the country to help mitigate the problem of the poor suffering from the disease.

They also sought increase in government

spending on healthcare and reduction in cost of cancer treatment and medicines.

Congress leader and former health minister Ghulam Nabi Azad sought the status on various programmes of erstwhile UPA government for boosting infrastructure, human resources and awareness in health care sector particularly killer diseases cancer, diabetics and hypertension.

He told the House that the UPA government had give Rs 5 crore each to 640 districts for early detection of killer diseases and Rs 120 crore per hospital to states for making those as centres for treating such diseases.

He suggested the government provide more funds for creating infrastructure, human resources and awareness for early detection of these diseases.

Jogen Chowdhury (Trinamool Congress) said more women in India die of breast and cervical cancer. He called for making HPV vaccine part of the immunisation programme.

“Why is it not a part of the national immunisation programme,” he asked.

Prasanna Acharya (BJD) said everyone cannot afford to go to private hospitals and the government needs to set up cancer-detection institutes in each district where the disease is more rampant.

Various members including Birendra Prasad Baishya of the AGP, Binoy Viswam from CPI, Narendra Jadhav (Nominated) and Ramdas Athawale from the RPI (A) also spoke on the issue and gave suggestions to improve facilities for cancer treatment. Jadhav said he was himself was afflicted by cancer in 2017.

Once the minister’s reply was over, some members wanted to seek clarification on related issues. However, Deputy Chairman Harivansh turned down the request citing lack of time.

Congress leaders protested, with P Chidambaram saying that the discussion should not be reduced to a “boring monologue”.

“We have a right to ask questions,” party leader Anand Sharma said.

Adult Learners complete Basic Literacy Prog in Lingi Payong



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 31 JUL:

Adult learners who were enrolled for Basic Literacy Programme organised by Sikkim Literacy Mission Authority (SLMA) and Directorate of Literacy and Continuing Education under

Human Resource Development Department, Government of Sikkim were presented certificates in a simple programme held at Lingi Payong School, a press release informs.

Sixteen candidates appeared for the exam

under the programme from Lingmoo Payong GPU on 30 Mar, 2018. Headmaster of the school congratulated the participants for their commendable effort and wished them good luck for the future.

Three teachers from

the school who were the coordinators handed over the certificates to the participants. This programme was launched by Government of Sikkim and HRDD to make Sikkim fully literate state by 2020, the release adds.

Dhoni joins Army troops in militancy-infested south Kashmir on 2-week stint

SRINAGAR, JUL 31 (PTI):

Mahendra Singh Dhoni, an honorary lieutenant colonel in the Territorial Army, joined Army troops in the militancy-infested south Kashmir region on Wednesday to carry out patrolling, guard duties and similar responsibilities just like other soldiers. The former Indian cricket team captain will be staying with his 106 TA Battalion (Para) till August 15 and under take duties with the troops, Army officials said. “Lt Col Dhoni arrived here today and has joined his unit,” one of the officials said.

The unit is deployed in the militancy-infested south Kashmir region as part of Victor Force. The 38-year-old World Cup winning captain’s two-week stint with his unit was approved by the Army headquarters last week on Dhoni’s request.

Dhoni was accorded the honorary rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 2011. He is also a qualified paratrooper after having completed five parachute training jumps. The wicket-keeper-batsman has been conferred the Padma Bhushan, the country’s third highest civilian award, by President Ramnath Kovind at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Awareness on Scholarship Schemes at Soreng



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 31 JUL:

An awareness programme on scholarship schemes under Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare department was conducted at Soreng School Auditorium Hall, a press release informs.

Additional Secretary, Benu Gurung, informed about the various scholarship schemes of the State and Centre.

The programme was attended by Deputy Director, Tshering Dorjee Bhutia of Welfare Division as well as HRDD officials, School heads & panchayats of Soreng Sub Division.

during which school heads shared their experience and innovative initiatives. All the school heads were motivated to take forward the mission of quality education and stated that regular sensitization and leadership program should be held at the block and cluster level.

The meeting also had the presence of Addl Director HRDD, T Eden Bhutia, Deputy Director HRDD, PL Subba and AD Gey/ BAC, Raju Bhandari, HRDD.

Gandhi’s ‘Shanti...’

people’s initiative to combat violence by Acharya Vinoba Bhave in 1957 to deal with riots in villages. The organisation was later led by Jayaprakash Narayan and had 6,000 members at its peak.

“What we want to do is constructive work, re-establish Shanti Sena through groups of volunteers who would work in society. This is the need of the hour everywhere. We are always expecting the government to do all the work, these groups contribute to nation building through non-violence,” said Di-

pankar Shrigyan, Director, GSDS.

The decision to revive Gandhi’s army was taken in the backdrop of the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi to revisit one of his significant initiatives.

This initiative comes at a time when Vinoba Bhave’s 125th birth anniversary will be celebrated next year.

A major meeting is also being organized in Manjeswaram in Kerala, the place where the foundation of Shanti Sena was laid, on August 23 and 24.

Day-3 packed...

Sports & Youth Affairs Department, nor any intimation has been received regarding present position of work. He added that the Sports & Youth Affairs Department has not made any expenditure with regard to the above work.

The Minister added that till 2018-19, the State Government did not make any provision for upgradation of Jorethang playground. However, during the current financial year, the present Government has proposed to make a provision to complete the work.

Replying to a question Ms Gajmer, Power Minister MN Sherpa informed the House that the total fund allocated to Sikkim under Deendayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana since 2014 was Rs 26.07 Crore.

During the Legislative Business, the Sikkim Motor Vehicle Taxation (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was passed by the House. The Statement of objects and reasons of the Bill states that in order to facilitate the general public of Sikkim, the State Government has proposed the amendment to introduce online payment of taxes and a one-time tax consisting of single / lump sum amount payable of the existing annual tax for 5 (five) years at a time for all category of vehicles.

The Financial Business saw discussion, voting and subsequent passing of Separate Demands for Grants of various government departments.

The House passed the Demands for Grants under the Charge of Minister for Tourism & Civil Aviation and Commerce & Industries Departments. Likewise, the Demands for Grants under the charge of Minister of Human Resource Development, Law, Legal, Legislative & Parliamentary Affairs, Land Revenue & Disaster Management and Sports & Youth Affairs Departments were passed by the House.

The Demands for Grants under the charge of Minister for Urban Development & Housing and Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Departments were passed by the House.

The House also passed the Demands for Grants under the charge of Minister for Energy & Power and Labour Departments. Likewise, the Demands for Grants under the charge of Minister for Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, Mines, Minerals & Geology and Science & Technology Departments were also passed by the House.

The Demands for Grants under the charge of Minister of Health Care, Human Services & Family Welfare and Social Justice, Empowerment & Welfare Departments were also passed by the House. Replying to a question of the Member Aditya Golay Tamang, the Minister-in-Charge of Health Dr MK Sharma stated that the Government is committed to improve the health services in the State and all measures would be taken to ensure access to quality health care services for the people. He informed about the recent recruitment of staff nurses as well as the proposal to recruit doctors and paramedical staff to fill the manpower requirement in all hospitals and health centres throughout the State.

Likewise, the House passed the Demands for Grants under the charge of Minister of Food Security & Agriculture Development, Horticulture & Cash Crops Development, Animal Husbandry, Livestock, Fisheries & Veterinary Services, Information & Public Relations and Printing & Stationery Departments.

KUTSE SHEGU

The Kutse Shegu of late Norbu Tshering Bhutia (Khamdong Norbu) who passed away on 19th of June 2019, falls on the 6th of August 2019. Family members, friends and well wishers are most welcome in joining us in offering prayers for his departed soul at our residence at Khamdong, East Sikkim. We wish to thank all of you who supported us during the time of our grief with your condolences and apologise in case we weren’t able to do so personally.



Pempa Doma Bhutia (Khamdong Anyola) Sonam Wangdi, Tashi Chopel, K.P.Tshering, Karma Loday, Karma Thendup, Karma Yenten (sons), Karma Doma (daughter) and Family Members Khamdong.

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URGENTLY REQUIRED:
Urgent Recruitment for a waiter with atleast 3 years experience and one kitchen helper. Contact: Hotel Paramount, Dentam, West Sikkim- 9735909625 / 8348285444

WANTED
HOUSEKEEPER/BABYSITTER .
Contact: 9933443442/9800500696.

GENERAL INFORMATION

This is for general information of all concerned that Hotel Parasol Residency, Panihouse, Deorali East Sikkim shall remain closed for a period of six months for carrying out necessary repairs. All concerned tour operators and clients are requested to refrain from booking or deal with any sort with regard to Hotel Parasol Residency, Panihouse, Deorali, East Sikkim.

Mr. Subash Lama Proprietor Hotel Parasol Residency, Panihouse, Deorali, East Sikkim

Four & half Storied building on SALE, behind Hotel Agarwal at Pani House, Gangtok, East Sikkim. Interested parties may also buy flats – 2 flats – 1650 sq.ft, 1 Flat – 1186 sq.ft & 1 Flat on top (1 & half)- 3000 sq.ft. Contact: -9434751150

Talk on Emotional Intelligence at SRM University

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 31 JUL:

SRM University Sikkim conducted a short talk today on "Emotional Intelligence" by Padma Shree Prof. Ghese Nawang Samten, Vice Chancellor, University of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, as per a press release.

The talk witnessed the participation of all the faculty members of the University. Prof Samten highlighted the importance of eliminating negative emotions like anger, ego, hatred and inculcating more positive emotions like compassion and love.

He mentioned the three stages to manage these emotions namely, reduce, subdue and eliminate.



He emphasized on being aware of the various emotions one goes through and

managing them. Meditation was one of the important ways he underlined to un-

derstand and control human emotions.

He also reiterated

that study of emotions has become one of the prime researches in neuropsychology currently. He shed some light upon the concept of Social-Emotional learning (SEL), which is largely adopted by schools, corporate houses and Institutions to manage the emotional balance of employees and to release stress.

"Understanding and being aware of our emotions would help us solve many major problems of our lives," he said.

The session was followed by queries and discussion. The program concluded with the felicitation of Prof Samten by the Vice Chancellor of SRM University Sikkim, Prof Ch. Satish Kumar.

Sikkim Judicial Academy holds workshops for Judges



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 31 JUL:

Sikkim Judicial Academy organised two workshops on 27 Jul, 2019. The first workshop was on "Motor Vehicle Act, 1988 vis-a-vis The Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989 and The Sikkim Motor Vehicle Rules, 1991" and the participants were District & Session Judges of all

the districts along with officers from the State Transport Department, as per a press release.

The second workshop was on "Recent Developments in Commercial Law and Law of Arbitration" and the participants were District & Session Judges of all the districts. The Resource Person for both the workshops was Senior

Advocate, Ashwini Kumar Mata from New Delhi.

In both the sessions the Resource Person discussed all the important provisions of the statutes along with the recent judgments of the Supreme Court of India. He also explained the provisions with analogies. Both the sessions were very interactive and engaging.

Pema Dorjee selected as official for Indian Strengthlifting Federation



SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 31 JUL:

International strength-lifter, Pema Dorjee Bhutia of Sikkim has been selected as an official of the Indian Strengthlifting Federation for the 1st Senior Master Men & Women Western Strength Lifting & Incline Bench Press Championship 2019 to be held from 02 to 04 August at Balod, Chhattisgarh.

He will serve the championship as an international referee. Mr

Bhutia left for the championship on Wednesday.

He expressed his happiness on the getting an opportunity to serve a prestigious championship as a referee.

He also expressed gratitude towards Indian Strengthlifting Federation for providing him the opportunity. He also expressed his commitment to bring out more national and international referees and lifters from all corners of the State in near future.

CCD founder's body found on river bank near Mangaluru, cops say could be suicide

MANGALURU/BENGALURU, JUL 31 (PTI): The body of Cafe Coffee Day founder VG Siddhartha, who went missing two days ago, was found by local fishermen and patrolling policemen on the banks of the Nethravathi river near Mangaluru on Wednesday.

A police official said "everything" points to suicide but nothing can be ruled out until the investigation is over.

Siddhartha, whose chain of cafes helped make coffee a lifestyle beverage and brought in latte, cappuccino, Americano and espresso into the urban Indian lexicon, was 59. He is survived by his wife Malavika and two sons.

His body was identified by his friends, said Dakshina Kannada district Deputy Commissioner Sasikanth Senthil.

The body of Siddhartha, who purportedly wrote a farewell letter to the Board of Directors and employees of his company Coffee Day Enterprises and alleged harassment from lenders and tax authorities, was traced after nearly two days of an intensive search operation.

The search involved multiple agencies which scoured the waters under a bridge across Nethravathi, where Siddhartha was reportedly last seen on Monday night, officials said.

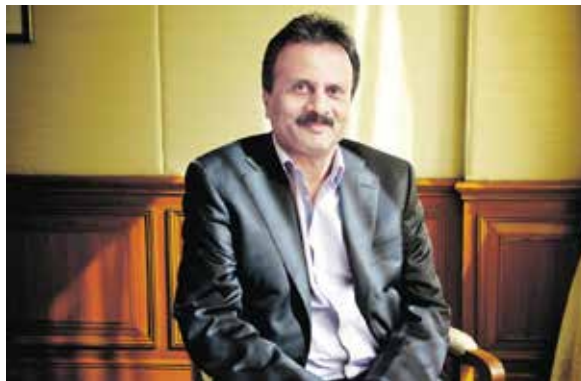
"We have found the body. They (Siddhartha's family) are making arrangements for the funeral. I will also attend it. I have no words to comfort the family," Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa said in Bengaluru.

"He had more assets than liabilities," Yediyurappa added.

After the post-mortem at Wenlock Hospital in Mangaluru, the body was taken to his hometown of Chikmagalur, where the funeral is scheduled to take place.

A senior police official told PTI, "Investigation is going on. Prima facie every thing points out to that (suicide) only. But we still we can't rule out anything. We will have to finish the investigation".

Senthil said the body was spotted by local fishermen and police, who



had been patrolling on the banks of the river.

The authorities predicted the probable location where the body could be traced using a "model" developed by the Hyderabad-based Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), which makes predictions based on current, low and high tide among other parameters, he said.

Reacting to Siddhartha's death, the Karnataka Congress said on Twitter, "Result of harassment by IT officials and decline of India's entrepreneurial position turning virulent by the day, with Tax Terror & collapse of economy."

"Companies which flourished under UPA have been shut down with many people being jobless," it added.

Former Karnataka chief minister and senior Congress leader Siddaramaiah said Siddhartha's death is both "disturbing and mysterious".

"The reasons and the invisible hands that ended his life in this tragic way should be unearthed through impartial & fair investigation", Siddaramaiah said, referring to a letter purportedly written by Siddhartha, where he alleged harassment by the Income Tax department.

He said the letter supposed to have been written by Siddhartha discussed "tax terrorism", which is the "ugly face of politically motivated institutions".

"What signals are we sending to the budding entrepreneurs without even an attempt to reform?", he asked.

In his letter, allegedly written to the Board of Directors and employees of Coffee Day Enterprises, Siddhartha complained of "a lot of harassment" from the previous DG Income Tax.

The IT department

refuted the charges and said it had acted according to the provisions of the Income Tax Act.

Political leaders condoled the death of the coffee tycoon, who was also the son-in-law of former Karnataka chief minister and BJP leader S M Krishna.

Former prime minister H D Deve Gowda said, "I am shocked by the demise of V G Siddhartha. He was a very simple man. I knew him for the past 35 years. He had paved way for jobs for thousands of people. The government should properly investigate the cause of his tragic death."

Siddhartha went missing on Monday night near Ullal bridge on Nethravathi river.

The businessman left Bengaluru for Sakleshpur in Hassan district in a car on Monday afternoon. On the way, he asked his driver to go towards Mangaluru, police said. He got off the car and told his driver to wait for him at the end of the bridge, saying he was going for a walk.

On Tuesday, a fisherman claimed he saw someone jumping off the bridge. The letter purportedly written by Siddhartha, whose authenticity could not be independently verified, also showed he was under "tremendous pressure" from lenders.

"I have failed as an entrepreneur," he said in the alleged letter.

Siddhartha said he had fought for a long time, but "today I gave up as I could not take any more pressure from one of the private equity partners forcing me to buy back shares, a transaction I had partially completed six months ago by borrowing a large sum of money from a friend". "Tremendous pressure from other lenders lead to me succumbing to the situation," he said in the letter.

CBI's closure report in sacrilege cases has left Sikhs anguished: Amarinder



CHANDIGARH, JUL 31

(PTI): Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday said the closure report filed by the CBI in sacrilege incidents has caused a "deep sense of anguish" among the Sikh community.

The chief minister sought the immediate withdrawal of the report and reopening of probe by the premier investigating agency into the cases of desecration of holy texts.

"It (CBI's closure report) has caused a deep sense of hurt and anguish among the Sikh community and should be immediately withdrawn to ensure further detailed investigations in the matter," Amarinder Singh said in a statement here.

The chief minister accused the CBI of not only "overlooking" certain crucial aspects of the investigation but also accused it of failing in its duty to identify culprits and bring them to book, as was expected of the premier agency.

On July 4, the CBI had filed its closure report in a special CBI court in Mohali, giving a clean chit to the accused in the three incidents of desecration of Guru Granth Sahib in 2015 in Faridkot.

The agency had rejected the findings of the Punjab Police Special Investigation Team (SIT) in the case.

The state police had named Dera followers

including Mohinder Pal Bittu (who was murdered in Nabha jail last month), Shakti Singh and Sukhjinder Singh as accused in three sacrilege incidents.

The previous SAD-BJP government had handed over the cases-- theft of a 'bir' (copy) of Guru Granth Sahib from a Burj Jawahar Singh Walagurdwara on June 1, 2015, putting up of hand-written sacrilegious posters in Bargari and Burj Jawahar Singh Wala on September 25 and torn pages of the holy book being found at Bargari on October 12, 2015 in Faridkot to the CBI for investigation.

Demanding reopening of the cases for further investigations, Amarinder Singh said "for reasons best known to them", the CBI had "unexpectedly" closed the cases in an "unusually hurried" manner, which raised several questions on its handling of the matter.

Many aspects of the cases, including financial transactions and linkages with foreign based entities, have been "conveniently ignored" in the CBI probe, the CM noted, seeking a review of the closure decision.

The CBI had also not identified and examined certain key witnesses/suspects whose examination could have shed light on the cases dismissed by the agency in its clo-

sure report, he added.

The Chief Minister pointed out that the CBI was controlled by the central government led by the BJP-- an ally of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which was in power in Punjab when the sacrilege incidents took place.

The needle of suspicion in the Bargari sacrilege case had been pointed at the SAD by the Justice Ranjit Singh (Retd) Commission, he observed, adding that, given this context, the CBI decision to file closure report was "highly questionable".

The "unexpected" decision of the CBI to file the closure report had "pained" not just the Sikhs in India and but also the large Sikh diaspora abroad, he added.

The sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib was a grave and sensitive issue which could not be dismissed in this manner, without taking action against those guilty of perpetuating the crime, said the CM.

"Such an act could have serious repercussions for the state's law and order, which could in turn have major consequences for the country," said Amarinder Singh.

Given the sensitivity of the issue, the need for a fair and impartial probe into every aspect of the issue was needed to take the case to its logical conclusion, he added.

Students clear what everyone else ignores



YOGEN THATAL

SINGTAM, 31 JUL:

It has been a week now that a mudslide at Ward 02 here opposite to Marwari Dharmasala peeled down below Government Senior Secondary School and the inconvenience began for residents of the area and all the students who have to pass this way to reach school.

The concerned agencies remained oblivious to the situation and the perilous eyesore remained uncleared.

Finally, students had to step up because no one else would.

Today, a group of seven students of Commerce stream carried out a cleanliness drive and tried to clear out the slide debris.

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Taking Pot-Shots at Corruption

Easiest target, empty bullets

Corruption is the use of public office for private gain. The prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 defines bribery as “a public servant taking gratification other than legal remuneration in respect of an official act; a public servant obtaining a valuable thing, without consideration from the person concerned in proceeding or the business transacted by such a public servant; and criminal misconduct”. Typical bureaucratise, we know, and requiring more than one read to comprehend. That must explain why corruption in Sikkim continues to be spoken of in variants of scale as if being corrupt was not problem enough. Or maybe not, because politics has so divided the people that even their instinctive responses to issues are now dictated by their political leaning and most don't even bat an eyelid when they claim to see virtue in behaviours they had until recently vehemently rejected as sins.

Returning to corruption - speak to anyone on the streets, and they will insist - and one speaks of the country and not just the State here - that work just won't get done if there was no graft involved. Most would have us believe this, but is it really so? It shouldn't, but it is. And this is because the two common interpretations of corruption are skewed. First, let us take the example of how political parties see corruption. Corruption for parties the world over is something that the opposition does. Since in most democracies the reins of office change often, parties in Opposition will blame those in power and since the opposition is invariably a former government [or a government in waiting], graft charges become convenient ploys to pin down opponents. This is not necessarily because there are too many instances of corruption [given India's dismal track-record of convictions, there appears to be too little corruption in higher places], but because corruption allegations demand no substantiation. The people will believe the corruption charges because according to them everyone is corrupt and because the investigating agencies are controlled by the State, the investigations can be made to stretch ever longer and then the courts can take up more time. Few expect corruption charges to stick, but it at least keeps an opponent occupied on another front. Examples abound, the Hawala scandal, the Bofors issue, the coal and the 3G cases and while on it, also the steady march of Sikkim's leaders in-waiting making frequent trips to Delhi with corruption charges against the present dispensation. And the list keeps growing longer with still more cases, still more allegations still more complaints. The bottomline however is that corruption charges are just sticks with which to whip up headlines or witch-hunts depending upon who holds the whip. Now, let's see how the people understand corruption. For most, it is something that gets their work done. They feed the monster to make their own lives better. That said, they still see themselves as suffering because of the corruption, not as cogs of the nexus. Many who make a noise about corruption are either politically motivated or are offended because someone else benefited from the graft when even they were in the race. This then is a corrupt practice as well.

It goes without saying that corruption cannot survive without political patronage, but blaming politicians alone will not suffice. Since it is the electorate which made them powerful enough to sidestep rules and hoodwink due process, it is also the electorate's responsibility to keep them honest. No politician will continue to be corrupt or continue looking the other way if the voters send out a clear signal that they will not tolerate it. Okay, maybe they won't turn honest overnight, but will at least begin by toning down the flamboyance with which ill-gotten gains are flaunted at present. Even that would at least be a beginning and from there could start the process of addressing corruption in more practical terms as against the rhetoric [which inflames passions but does not resolve] or the equally disconcerting chest-beating which speaks of corruption in comparative terms [as if being less corrupt was a virtue of some sorts]. One needs to accept that corruption cannot be graded since one is either corrupt or honest and there are no in-betweens. It is not about being less or more corrupt, because once someone is corrupt, then the scale of the scam is decided by the opportunity available and not the sensibilities of the corrupt person.

WRITE US:

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Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Hong Kong protests: city workers, expats and unions join clamour, making it ever harder for China to ignore

MICHAEL JOSEPH RICHARDSON
theconversation.com

The Cathay Pacific Airways Flight Attendants Union recently encouraged staff to join protests at Hong Kong's international airport. It should be noted that Cathay Pacific itself clarified in a note to the Global Times that it was not the event's organiser, and that the protest didn't constitute industrial action by its employees.

There have now been eight consecutive weeks of anti-government protests in Hong Kong. They started in opposition to (now suspended) extradition legislation, which would have seen suspects in the special administrative region sent to mainland China, but have since grown into a wider movement calling for the resignation of Carrie Lam, the leader of Hong Kong.

But while it is attracting global attention now, the movement has a long history that puts the unprecedented move of Cathay Pacific's flight aviation union in context.

A student strike in late September 2014 saw the birth of Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP). The occupation took hold of several key areas of the city that year, with campaigners employing non-violent civil disobedience. It officially lasted for 79 days, although its legacy is still being written.

Back then, the movement was focused on the right to universal suffrage, a fair and transparent electoral system, and ultimately an open democratic process. Pacifist symbols (yellow umbrellas, protective face masks and eye goggles) were deployed against police aggression (pepper spray and tear gas) – and the so-called “Umbrella Revolution” was born.

In 2017, 20 years after Britain's colonial role of the territory came to an end, Lam, Beijing's favoured candidate, was appointed Hong Kong's leader, a move widely criticised by pro-democracy campaigners.

Further controversy followed a year later with

the opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuai-Macau Bridge, which was described by independent lawmaker Claudia Mo as an “umbilical cord” to China.

RESISTANCE

The mainland, over time, has been tightening its grip. But recent events at Hong Kong's international airport and across the city show just how strong the resistance to perceived Chinese influence has become.

The well-educated middle classes are also front and centre of this resistance movement. In Annals of the American Association of Geographers, I argued that the mobilisation of professional, politically-oriented Hong Kong Chinese has seen the movement employing the “weapons of the well-educated”.

The phrase refers to political scientist and anthropologist James C Scott's important 1980s work *Weapons of the Weak*, which explored peasant resistance in Malaysia. He described “the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on”.

In modern Hong Kong, however, a very different demographic has been taking a stand. There, justice is being called for by locally born, Hong Kong citizens, many of whom were, or are, students at the city's universities. This makes the movement harder to ignore and more difficult to silence.

EVOLVING PROTEST

But the current protests have led me to revise this thinking further and to conclude that the protests have now become the “weapons of the well-connected”. The protests have been reinvigorated by further support from much of the city's expatriate community, a topic I am currently researching. As part of this, I interviewed a 20-something half British, half Malaysian Chinese working in Hong Kong. Reflecting on their involvement in the anti-extradition protests earlier this month, they stated:

“I do want to reiterate that these events have

completely altered my view of HK [Hong Kong] society – particularly the police. You grow up thinking that the police are on your side and will always protect you ... but I no longer trust the police and I don't like them. The force used was completely unnecessary and an abuse of power and authority.

“I also think the way that the bill [the controversial extradition law] was very quickly rushed through the system was a complete abuse of authority by Carrie Lam and her government. When I was tear gassed the second time, I was away from the large crowd that the police were kettling. The riot police were standing in a line and had their backs to me; we were about 200 metres behind them – unmoving and unarmed. It suddenly went silent and then I saw at least five gas canisters beneath my feet. ‘Surreal’ doesn't begin to cover it.”

They powerfully finished the interview by saying: “As much as I am now anti-police and anti-establishment, I have never felt more proud to call myself a Hong Konger; and I think many people will feel the same way.”

The role of city workers in the protests certainly shows how things have evolved since the 2014 Umbrella Revolution, which was an overwhelmingly local movement. While the political outlook of Hong Kong's business elite had previously been largely apolitical, the perceived Chinese encroachment is now so great that even organisations are beginning to speak out.

The protests have already been aided by UK government support, causing increased tensions with the Chinese ambassador in London – and now they have the support of the Cathay Pacific Airways Flight Attendants Union. Hong Kong's future as a special administrative region of China is unclear, but the connections forged with the international business community have changed the nature of protest in the city. And China will likely find it harder and harder not to listen.

[the writer is Lecturer of Human Geography, Newcastle University]



Some good conservation news: India's tiger numbers are going up

MATT HAYWARD & JOSEPH K. BUMP
theconversation.com

Indian tiger numbers are up, according to one of the most detailed wildlife surveys ever conducted. Tiger populations have risen by 6%, to roughly 3,000 animals.

The massive survey may set a new world standard in counting large carnivores. The encouraging results validate India's impressive investments in tiger conservation.

A MAMMOTH EFFORT

Large, solitary predators hate being seen. They owe their entire existence to being able to avoid detection by prey and sneak close before attacking.

Hence, when we want to count tigers, the tigers don't help. But accurate population numbers are fundamental to good conservation. Every four years since 2006, the Indian government conducts a national census of tigers and other wildlife.

The efforts the project team undertakes to derive the tiger population estimate are nothing short of phenomenal: 44,000 field staff conducted almost 318,000 habitat surveys across 20 tiger-occupied states of India. Some 381,400 km² was checked for tigers and their prey.

(There is an application in with the Guinness Book of World Records

to see if this is the largest wildlife survey ever conducted anywhere in the world.)

The team placed paired camera traps at 26,760 locations across 139 study sites and these collected almost 35 million photos (including 76,523 tiger and 51,337 leopard photos). These camera traps covered 86% of the entire tiger distribution in India. Where it was too dangerous to work in the field (14% of the tigers' distribution) because of political conflict, robust models estimated population numbers.

COUNT THE TIGERS

Collecting this volume of data would be an utter waste of time if it were poorly analysed. The teams took advice from some of the world's foremost experts to sort the photos: pattern matching experts who could identify whether a photo of a tiger taken in the monsoon matched that of a tiger taken in the dry season while walking at a different angle, machine learning experts to speed up species identification, and spatial analysis experts to estimate the populations of tigers and their prey.

The research team took this advice and coupled it with their own knowledge of tiger ecology to develop a census that is unique among large carnivore studies.

We were fortunate enough to be among the non-Indian scientists invited to review this process. Peer review is a crucial part of any scientific endeavour, and especially important as early Indian tiger surveys were notoriously unreliable.

ACTUAL NUMBERS

So how did they do? A total of 2,461 individual tigers older than one year of age were photo-captured. The overall tiger population in India was estimated at 2,967 individuals (with an error range of roughly 12%).

Out of this, 83.4% were estimated from camera-trap photos, and the rest estimated from robust modelling. Tiger numbers have increased by 6% per year, continuing the rate of increase from the 2014 census. This is a wonderful success for Indian conservation efforts.

However not all is rosy. There has been a 20% decline in areas occupied by tigers in 2014 to today, although tigers have moved into some new areas (some 8% of their Indian range is new). The coordinators of the tiger survey – Yadvendradev Jhala and Qamar Qureshi – conclude that while established and secure tiger populations in some parts of India have increased, small, isolated populations and those along corridors between established popula-

tions have gone extinct.

This highlights the need for conservation efforts to focus on improving connectivity between isolated populations, while incentivising the relocation of people out of core tiger areas, reducing poaching and improving habitat to increase prey resources.

This will be no easy task with India's burgeoning population, but investment from private sector tourist corporations in land acquisition along corridors and the creation of community conservancies could supplement government funding for expanding protected corridors.

The success of India's census has led the governments of Nepal and Bangladesh to employ the same project team to help estimate their own tiger populations. These methods can – and should – be employed for other iconic, charismatic species that can be individually identified, such as jaguars in South and Central America; leopards, cheetahs, and hyenas in Africa, and possibly even quolls in Australia.

[Matt Hayward is Associate professor, University of Newcastle; Joseph K. Bump is Associate Professor, Gordon W. Gullion Endowed Chair in Forest Wildlife Research and Education, University of Minnesota]

NGT dismisses plea for reconstituting panel on Subansiri hydro project

NEW DELHI, JUL 31 (PTI): Clearing the decks for the Lower Subansiri hydro-electric project on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, NGT Wednesday dismissed a plea seeking reconstitution of the Environment Ministry committee which was set up to study the project.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said it not found any material on record justifying the plea of “bias” with regard to the existing committee on the 2000 MW project.

“The EAC has conducted the appraisal. The competent Authority has agreed with the same. Mere association of organisations with the project in professional capacity is not enough to hold that any expert who worked in such association will have an institutional bias,” said the bench also comprising Justices S P Wangdi and K Ramakrishnan.

It is not the case of the applicant that any of the experts have any “pecuniary interest or personal interest”, NGT said.

“Pre-disposition which may disable a person from going into the merits may also be bias but no such pre-disposition has been shown. The plea of the applicant is farfetched. Moreover, the present Committee has only recommendatory role. There is safeguard



of further evaluation by experts. The project is to advance public interest,” it said.

The tribunal was hearing pleas filed by activists Aabhijeet Sharma and Guwahati-based Tularam Gogoi seeking directions to reconstitute the expert committee on ground of bias.

The committee comprises Prabhas Pande, Engineer in Geology, I D Gupta, Seismologist and P M Scott, Hydrologist from North-East.

The plea challenged the constitution of the committee with the objection that Gupta had been consulted by the earlier Project Oversight Committee and Scott was a Member of Brahmaputra Board and his inclusion will result in conflict of interest. The Ministry

of Environment and Forests (MoEF), in an affidavit filed before the NGT, said the names of the experts were finalised by the ministry in consultation with Ministry of Earth Sciences, Central Water Commission and they are from fields of Seismology, Geology and Hydrology. They did not suffer from any bias and were experts in the field, it said.

National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited also opposed the prayer by stating that the members of the expert committee are highly qualified and there was no basis for attributing any bias to them.

NHPC said: “The cost of the project as assessed in December, 2002 was Rs 6,285.33 crore. Due to delay, the cost has al-

ready gone to Rs 18,000 crore. A sum of Rs 9,610 has already been invested. 50 per cent of the work has been completed till December, 2011. Each day delay was causing loss of Rs 10 crore. The project has been duly cleared by all the statutory authorities and is for flood moderation and electricity generation which is to promote public interest.”

An NHPC official said it will now take three-and-a-half year to build this project and start the generation.

Subansiri Lower Hydro Electric Project has been set up by NHPC over the river Subansiri at Assam, Arunachal Pradesh border to generate 2000 MW of power.

Environment Clearance for the project was

given by the MoEF in the year 2003. The EC was subject to certain conditions, including the ecological flow downstream of the river Subansiri.

The tribunal on October 16, 2017, in a detailed judgement, noted that neither the project nor the EC were under challenge and only challenge was to safety and downstream impact in the course of operation of the project.

“Having regard to the sensitive location and the precautionary and the sustainable development principles, the tribunal had directed the MoEF to constitute a committee of three Expert Members to give their opinion with regard to the Terms of Reference for which Project Oversight Committee was constituted,” it said.

Assam Co India tea brand fetches “record” Rs 70,501 per kg

GUWAHATI, JUL 31 (PTI): A specialty orthodox tea variety from Dibrugarh's Maijan Tea Estate set a new record on Wednesday, as it was auctioned for Rs 70,501 per kg at the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre (GTAC), an official said.

Two kg of the hand-made ‘Maijan Golden Tips’ of the Assam Company India Ltd was purchased by city-based Mundhra Tea Company for a European buyer, Guwahati Tea Auction Buyers Association (GTABA) Secretary Dinesh Bihani told PTI.

“A single line of Maijan Golden Tips was sold at Rs 70,501 per kg at the

GTAC, creating a world record for any public auction in the history of Assam tea... The entire lot of 2 kg was bought... for a buyer from Belgium,” Bihani said.

On Tuesday, Manohari Gold, another specialty orthodox tea variety from Manohari Tea Estate, was sold at Rs 50,000 a kg under the public auction system.

Teas were earlier sold at higher prices, but through private negotiations, he said.

“Bidding for the tea started at Rs 2,605 per kg and it was sold at a world record for specialty tea in any tea auction across the globe,”

Bihani claimed.

“Maijan Golden Tips is entirely hand-made and no machines were used during the manufacturing process,” Assam Company CEO Vijay Singh told PTI.

In a release, the company also said the industry should focus on production of good quality teas to spur demand, which will eventually “increase the per capita consumption... from the present 750 gm per consumer (one of the lowest in the world).”

The Assam Company is planning to produce and offer large quantities of specialty teas, the release added.

First-time MLA elected deputy speaker of Assam Assembly

GUWAHATI, JUL 31 (PTI): First-time MLA Aminul Haque Laskar of the BJP was elected unopposed as the deputy speaker of the Assam Assembly on Wednesday.

Laskar, the sole Muslim member of the ruling BJP in the House, was elected from Sonai constituency in Barak Valley's Cachar district.

Speaker H N Goswami announced that Laskar

was the only candidate to file the nomination papers for the post and he was elected without contest. Laskar is the third person to be elected as the deputy speaker in the present Assembly after the BJP government to power in 2016 in the state.

The post of deputy speaker fell vacant following the election of the BJP's Kripanath Mallah

as Lok Sabha MP.

Mallah was unanimously elected to the post on September 18 after Dilip Kumar Paul resigned citing personal reasons.

Laskar thanked Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Speaker H N Goswami, his party colleagues and opposition members for reposing faith and confidence in him.

Japanese auction model suggested for tea e-auction in India

KOLKATA, JUL 31 (PTI): Two IIM Bangalore professors on Wednesday suggested introduction of Japanese model of e-auction in tea to replace the existing system so that better price discovery could be achieved.

The existing e-auction was introduced in 2010 based on a software developed by the NSEIT.

The recommendations made by the two professors, B Mahadevan and J Sreelata, said there is need for improved price dynamism as the current one lacks it.

They said the present auctioning system is complex and lacked transparency as the reserve price (RP) was made known to the buyers and subject to revisions.

Mahadevan, addressing an audience of the stakeholder including

officials of the Tea Board, said the RP should not be revealed to the buyer.

Another problem was the divisibility of lots which was making the operations more complex, coupled with high number of grades, he said.

Mahadevan said at present there are 918 grades of tea on offer at the auctions which was incredibly high and in complete variance with other tea countries like Sri Lanka and Kenya.

According to him, the number of grades should not be more than 30 in the new system.

Mahadevan said the auctioning system needs to be simplified and there was need to increase the number of bids and buyers on the platform.

The two professors harped on improving the quality of tea to be of-

fered on the system and urged the Tea Board for certifying quality which would also simplify the auctioning system.

“Tea Board must act on ensuring quality. It has to play the role”, Mahadevan said.

According to their analysis, auction prices had been more or less flat in the country in the last five years.

“India fetches the lowest price for bulk tea as compared to countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Kenya”.

Tea Board deputy chairman Arun Ray said when asked that the recommendations suggested by the two professors would be looked into and taken to its logical conclusion.

Tea Board had mandated the IIM (B) professors for coming out with a new model for e-auctioning.

OPD services affected in West Bengal state-run hospitals

KOLKATA, JUL 31 (PTI): The Outdoor Patient Departments in most state-run hospitals in West Bengal were affected on Wednesday after doctors stayed away from providing non-essential services, in response to an IMA call.

However, emergency services and other departments remained operational.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has called for a 24-hour withdrawal of non-essential services across the country on Wednesday to protest against the National Medical Commission Bill which was passed in the Lok Sabha on July 29.

Doctors in OPDs across state-run hospitals in Kolkata, Murshidabad and Hooghly reportedly stayed off their

duties, even as patients waited in serpentine queues for treatment.

The bill provides for setting up of a National Medical Commission in place of the Medical Council of India (MCI) for development and regulation of all aspects of medical education, profession and institutions.

The medical fraternity is anguished that the health minister, a surgeon, instead of including key recommendations made by the Parliament Standing Committee, replaced many provisions with clauses detrimental to the doctors' community.

The fraternity claims that the bill will encourage quackery.

The IMA termed the bill as ‘anti-poor, anti-student and undemocratic’.

Iconic Kolkata Durga Puja shifted due to safety concerns



KOLKATA, JUL 31 (PTI): The crowd-puller Durga Puja at Mohammad Ali Park will be shifted to a nearby fire station this year due to the dilapidated condition of a British-era reservoir underneath the park, a puja committee member said on Wednesday.

The decision to shift the city's iconic puja from its venue, since 1969, was taken by Fire and Emergency Services Minister Sujit Bose keeping in mind the safety of revellers visiting the park during the festivities, he said.

“Mayor Firhad Hakim had informed the puja organisers that experts from Jadavpur University have declared the reservoir unsafe and warned against holding any public event in the park till the repair is done. The Mayor requested us to choose an alternative venue this year,” he said.

Bose visited the Central Avenue Fire Station along with puja organisers on Tuesday and approved the new location, he said.

The committee member said that the puja used to be held at the fire

station before 1969.

“We did not want Mohammad Ali Park Durga Puja to be halted this year due to unavailability of the park. But the organisers must adhere to the safety guidelines in the new venue,” Bose said.

The minister said that Fire Services will ensure that the organisers keep space for free movement of fire tenders.

Puja Committee general secretary Surendra Kumar Sharma said that the organisers will start erecting the canopy at the new venue by the end of this week.

Calcutta HC judge bars journalists from entering her courtroom

KOLKATA, JUL 31 (PTI): Calcutta High Court judge Samapti Chattopadhyay, who is hearing the Bongaon Municipality trust vote and other local body cases, on Wednesday barred journalists from entering her court room till further orders.

At the commencement of the hearing on the Bongaon matter, Justice Chattopadhyay orally directed that reporters would not be allowed to

be present in her court room, during hearing of cases, till further orders.

Eleven BJP councillors had moved the high court claiming they had not been allowed to enter the municipal body office for participating in a ‘no trust’ vote against the chairman and that Justice Chattopadhyay's earlier order on moving a no-confidence motion was not followed by the administration. The high

court judge has recently pulled up the West Bengal government over several issues, including the manner of holding trust votes in municipal bodies and illegal filling up of water bodies.

State-empanelled lawyers had on July 22 decided to not attend the court of Justice Chattopadhyay protesting her remarks against the West Bengal government, only to rescind the decision a day later.

Militant arrested; arms recovered in Manipur

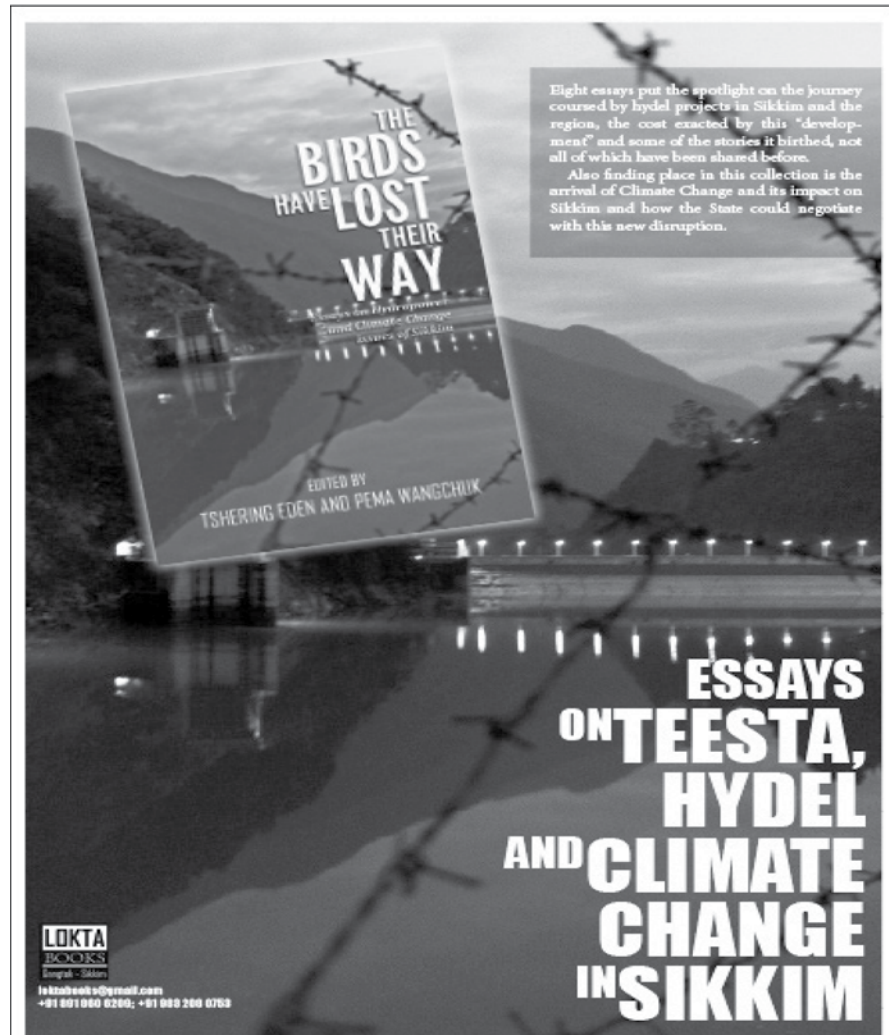


IMPHAL, JUL 31 (PTI): A militant has been arrested and a cache of arms and ammunition recovered in separate incidents in Manipur, police said. A team of Manipur Police arrested the militant, belonging to Kangleipak Communist Party (KK Nganba group), while conducting a search operation at Thoubal Bazaar area on Monday, a statement said.

Meanwhile, a combined team of Manipur

Police and Assam Rifles recovered a cache of arms and ammunition, during a search operation for Kuki National Front (KNF-N) militants, at B Gamnom village in Imphal East district on Saturday, it said.

The cache, comprising an AK-47 rifle, a Lethod gun with four shells and a large number of AK-47 bullets were found buried in the ground, it said.



Saina, Srikanth progress; Sourabh crashes out

BANGKOK, JUL 31 (PTI): Star Indian shuttler Saina Nehwal returned to the court in style, registering a straight-game win over local hope Phittayaporn Chaiwan, to sail into the women's singles second round of the Thailand Open here on Wednesday. Returning to action after nearly two months, Saina, who made last-minute withdrawals from Indonesia Open and last week's Japan Open because of injuries, got past Chaiwan 21-17 21-19 in her opening round contest. The seventh seeded Indian will next play the winner of another first round match between Japan's Sayaka Takahashi and Ruseli Hartawan of Indonesia.

It was good news for Indians in the men's singles event as well as the likes of Kidambi Srikanth, H S Prannoy, Parupalli Kashyap and Shubhanker Dey all progressed to the next round by overcoming their respective rivals.

Fifth seed Srikanth was made to toil hard for one hour and seven minutes by Chinese qualifier Ren Peng Bo before the Indian came out victorious 21-13 17-21 21-19. Srikanth will be up against Thailand's Khosit Phetpradab in the second round.

Later in the day, Prannoy defeated Hong Kong's Wong Wing Ki Vincent of 21-16 22-20, while Kashyap came from a game down to beat Israel's Misha Zilberman 18-21 21-8 21-14. Both Prannoy and Kashyap have tough second round encounters in hand as they are up against sixth seeded Japanese Kenta Nishimoto and third seed Chou Tien Chen of Taipei respectively. Lady luck smiled on Subhanker Dey as he was handed a walkover by top seed and world number 1 Kento Momota of Japan in his opening round contest.

However, it was curtains for Sourabh Verma. He fought hard for 64 minutes against seventh seed Kanta Tsuneyama of Japan before going down 21-23 21-19 5-21 in his opening match. Earlier in the day, the mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa recorded one of the biggest wins of their career, stunning Olympic silver medallists Chan Peng Soon and Goh Liu Ying in the first round.

The unseeded Indian pair battled for one hour and two minutes to get past the fifth seeded Malaysian duo of Soon and Ying 21-18 18-21 21-17.

It is only the second time that world number 23 Ponnappa and Rankireddy got the better of Soon and Ying, ranked 5th in the world. The Indian pair had defeated their Malaysian opponents in the mixed team event of Gold Coast Commonwealth Games last year. Ponnappa and Rankireddy will play Indonesia's Alfian Eko Prasetya and Marsheilla Gischa Islami in the second round. The other Indian mixed doubles pair of Pranaav Jerry Chopra and N Sikki Reddy eased past Japanese duo of Kohei Gondo and Ayane Kurihara 21-16 21-13.

England seek a 'double' as Australia eye Ashes history

BIRMINGHAM, JUL 31 (AFP): England return to 'Fortress Edgbaston' for the first Test against Australia on Thursday looking to round off an already memorable season by completing a World Cup and Ashes double.

If the World Cup remains the pinnacle of the 50-over game, for England and Australia there's nothing quite like a renewal of Test cricket's oldest rivalry.

But now there's arguably more at stake for both sides than the series result.

For England, a home season billed as the most important in a generation started brilliantly with their impressive run to a first men's World Cup title.

International cricket in Britain emerged from behind its satellite television paywall for the first time since the celebrated 2005 Ashes so that millions could watch England's nerve-shredding Super Over win against New Zealand at Lord's earlier this month.

Building on that groundswell of support is a key part of the England and Wales Cricket Board's post-tournament strategy. Regaining the Ashes represents an ideal chance to keep those new followers on board, even if none of the five Tests are on free-to-air



television. For Australia, an Ashes series win under the dignified leadership of Tim Paine would help draw a line under the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa that led to long bans for former captain Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft.

All three batsmen are likely to feature at Edgbaston, with Bancroft set to hear the same booing

that greeted Smith and Warner during the World Cup. Australia have not won an Ashes in England for 19 years, with their batsmen struggling against the heavily stitched Dukes ball on pitches that offer seam movement.

Yet the first Test will be Australia's opening first-class match of the tour, although the likes of Bancroft, who has

been captaining English county side Durham, have recent experience of local conditions.

The way an England side featuring several World Cup stars were dismissed for just 85 by Ireland at Lord's last week before winning the first Test between the countries tells its own story of ongoing top-order woes. England captain Joe Root plans

to move back to number three to help shore up a top order featuring novice Surrey openers Rory Burns and Jason Roy.

James Anderson, England's all-time leading Test wicket-taker, is set to return from a calf injury to lead an attack that could feature World Cup hero Jofra Archer.

-KEEP THE ENERGY GOING- Australia, meanwhile, are poised to put

their faith in a rapid four-man attack featuring James Pattinson and Pat Cummins.

Several of England's World Cup winners appeared jaded against Ireland but Anderson, who no longer plays one-day internationals and so was not involved in that success, hopes he can revive any flagging spirits.

"For some of us this is the start of our inter-

national summer and it's our job to keep the energy going as a team," said Anderson, 37 on Tuesday. With runs expected to be at premium while the bowlers hold sway, England will hope all-rounders such as Ben Stokes, restored to the vice-captaincy, can again make valuable contributions with the bat.

Australia have not won at Edgbaston in any format since 2001, a run that includes their recent World Cup semi-final loss to England, when Roy made a sparkling 85.

England, by contrast, have won their last 11 internationals at the raucous Birmingham ground. But a congested schedule, the result of officials cramming an Ashes into the same season as a lengthy World Cup, could have a bigger bearing on the series, the first in the ICC's new World Test Championship.

"I really believe it's a big ask for the fast bowlers on both sides to play five Tests in six weeks," said Australia great Steve Waugh, the victorious captain in the 2001 Ashes, who is mentoring the current squad.

"Depth in the squad will be important but I honestly think if I was a betting man I wouldn't back either side because I don't know who's going to win."

Captaincy came as surprise but ready to shoulder responsibility: Harmanpreet

BENGALURU, JUL 31 (PTI): The captaincy announcement came as a surprise to him but India drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh said on Wednesday he is up for the challenge in the upcoming Olympic Test event.

In the absence of regular skipper Manpreet Singh, who has been rested along with a few senior players, Harmanpreet will wear the captain's armband in the Test event involving India, Malaysia, New Zealand and hosts Japan.

The tournament starts on August 17.

"When I was told that I would be leading the team, it was a pleasant surprise. It is an honour and big responsibility. I am excited and looking forward to the challenge," said Harmanpreet, who

was part of India's Junior World Cup winning side in 2016.

Harmanpreet was one of the youngest in the Indian team that played at the 2016 Rio Olympics, a place he secured after a memorable outing in the FIH Champions Trophy in London only months before the sporting extravaganza.

India won a historic silver medal at the 2016 FIH Champions Trophy, and Harmanpreet was adjudged the Rising Player of the Tournament.

"When I look back, I feel fortunate to have come into the Indian team at a time when there were stalwarts from whom I could learn a lot. Players like Sardar Singh and VR Raghunath had a positive impact during my nascent days in the senior

team and their guidance helped me soak up the pressure of international hockey," he said.

Talking about the upcoming tournament, Harmanpreet said he is eyeing nothing less than the top spot in his maiden assignment as skipper.

"Malaysia, Japan and New Zealand are good teams to play against and see where we stand as a unit ahead of the Olympic Qualifiers. Malaysia recently beat Germany in a match and Japan too are doing well while New Zealand is coming into the event with good exposure from the FIH Pro League," he said.

"In the absence of senior players who are rested, it is important we step up our game. We are well-prepared. We will be playing every match with the intent to win."

Never asked umpire to cancel four off overthrow in WC final: Stokes

LONDON, JUL 31 (PTI): With his "hand on heart", England's World Cup hero Ben Stokes says he never asked the umpires to cancel the four runs off an overthrow during the epic final against New Zealand.

One of the biggest turning points of the July 14 final was the overthrow on the fourth ball of the final over bowled by Trent Boult. In a bid to complete his second run, a diving Stokes, his bat outstretched, accidentally deflected the ball coming from the deep mid-wicket region to the third man boundary.

"I saw all of that. I was thinking to myself, did I say that? But hand on heart, I did not go up to the umpires and say something like that to the umpires," Stokes said



in the latest episode of BBC podcast 'Tuffers and Vaughan'. Stokes, who remained not out on 84 at the end of regulation play before swinging his bat again in the Super Over, said he apologised to New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson and wicketkeeper Tom Latham as the ball rolled past the boundary.

"I went straight to Tom Latham and said 'Mate, I am so sorry', looked over to Kane (Williamson) and

said 'I'm sorry,' he said. Stokes' England teammate James Anderson had earlier claimed that the all-rounder had asked for the four overthrow runs to be cancelled.

Stokes said he has seen the 50th over of the England inning multiple times since the July 14 evening at Lord's and said it was "nerve-wracking to watch" despite the fact that his team is already a World Cup winner.

Caster Semenya blocked from competing at world championships

PAUL SEMENYA
theGuardian

Caster Semenya will not compete at the World Championships in Doha after a Swiss court stood behind an IAAF rule that would require her to take testosterone-reducing medication. The South African had been expected to defend her world 800m title in late September after the Swiss Supreme Court had temporarily exempted her from an IAAF rule relating to athletes with differences in sexual development (DSD). That decision has now been overturned by a tribunal at the same court.

In a statement issued through her PR agency, Semenya said: "I am very disappointed to be kept from defending my hard-earned title, but this will not deter me from continuing my fight for the human rights of all of the female athletes concerned." Last month



the Swiss Supreme Court temporarily suspended the IAAF rule that requires all DSD athletes to reduce their testosterone to below five nmol/L for at least six months if they want to compete internationally at all distances from 400m to a mile.

The rule had been at the centre of a landmark

case brought against the IAAF by Semenya at the court of arbitration for sport (Cas). That case found in favour of the international athletic body and its claim that high levels of testosterone provided a material advantage in women's competition.

Semenya has refused to take hormone medica-

tion and is in the process of appealing against the Cas decision. A temporary stay of the rule had been granted while that appeal continued but the court decided to overturn that decision after finding that the "high threshold" for any suspension had not been fulfilled. Dorothee Schramm, the lawyer leading her appeal, said: "The judge's procedural decision has no impact on the appeal itself. We will continue to pursue Caster's appeal and fight for her fundamental human rights. A race is always decided at the finish line."

In a statement, the IAAF said: "We understand the Swiss Federal Tribunal will be issuing its full decision on this order tomorrow (Wednesday) and the IAAF will comment once the tribunal makes its reasoning public."

Harbhajan's Khel Ratna snub: Punjab Minister orders probe into alleged delay

CHANDIGARH, JUL 31 (PTI): The Punjab government has ordered an inquiry into the allegations levelled by veteran India player Harbhajan Singh that administrative delay on the part of state's sports department was the reason for the rejection of his nomination for the prestigious Khel Ratna Award.

The off-spinner's nomination for Khel Ratna award has been rejected by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) on grounds that his documents reached late.

Harbhajan requested Punjab Sports minister Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi's intervention in the matter and the minis-

ter subsequently ordered a probe into the alleged delay in sending his documents to the centre.

"I have ordered an inquiry into the matter. The director (Sports) has been tasked to carry out the inquiry," Punjab Sports Minister Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi told PTI Wednesday.

In a video uploaded on his twitter handle, Harbhajan claimed he had timely submitted his form for the nomination to Punjab Sports department for the award.

"I have come to know through media that a file recommending my name for Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award sent by Punjab government to the

Centre has been rejected with the reason being that papers reached very late," Harbhajan said.

"I have come to know that because of delay, my nomination will not be considered for this award this time and because of which I will not get this award," he rued.

Harbhajan claimed that he furnished the relevant documents on March 20 but now he understands that there was a delay in sending his papers to the centre that ultimately led to his rejection.

"As far as I (can) recollect, I submitted papers on March 20 with your (Sodhi) office and this form was supposed to

reach Delhi within 10-15 days and why it was not submitted timely. Had this form submitted timely, I probably would have got the award this year which comes as a motivation and encouragement for any sportsperson," he further said.

The cricketer, who is the third highest wicket taker for India in Test cricket requested the minister to re-send his application for next year.

"If such delays continue to take place then players will lag behind which is not right and I hope you (Sodhi) will take action on it and forward my nomination again to the government of India," said Harbhajan.

Israel approves Palestinian construction in West Bank

JERUSALEM, JUL 31 (AP): Israel's Cabinet on Tuesday unanimously approved a proposal to build over 700 housing units for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank in addition to 6,000 Israeli settlement housing units. An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity to describe the closed-door meeting, said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government advanced the proposal late Tuesday.

It appeared timed to coincide with a visit by President Donald Trump's son-in-law and chief Mideast envoy Jared Kushner, who is expected in the region this week.

The permits would be for construction in Area C, the roughly 60 Per cent of the West Bank where Israel exercises full control and where most Jewish settlements are located.

Netanyahu's government has approved the construction of tens of thousands of settler homes, but permits for Palestinian construction are extremely rare.

Israel captured the West Bank, along with



east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, in the 1967 Mideast war.

The Palestinians seek these areas as parts of a future state. Most of the international community considers Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal under international law and an impediment to a two-state solution to the conflict.

Touring new construction in the West Bank settlement of Efrat, south of Jerusalem, Netanyahu said Wednesday that "not a single settle-

ment or a single settler will ever be uprooted."

Transportation Minister Bezalet Smotrich, a religious nationalist in Netanyahu's government, wrote on Facebook that he backed the construction of Palestinian housing in Area C because "it prevents the establishment of a terrorist Arab state in the heart of the land" and asserts Israeli sovereignty over Area C.

The Western-backed Palestinian Authority has control of civilian

affairs in Areas A and B, which include the West Bank's main Palestinian cities and towns. Kushner is returning to the Middle East this week to promote the administration's call for a 50 billion economic support plan for the Palestinians, which would accompany a Mideast peace plan that the administration has yet to release.

The Palestinians have rejected the agreement out of hand and cut off all contact with the Trump administration, saying its

policies are unfairly biased toward Israel.

The Trump's administration's Mideast team is spearheaded by people with close ties to Israel's settler movement. His ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, recently told the New York Times that Israel has the "right" to annex some of the West Bank.

Both critics and supporters of the settlements say the White House's friendly attitude has encouraged a jump in settlement activity.

Bus strikes roadside bomb in Afghanistan, 32 killed

KABUL, JUL 31 (AP): A roadside bomb tore through a bus in western Afghanistan on Wednesday, killing at least 32 people, including women and children, a provincial official said.

Mohibullah Mohib, spokesman for the police chief in Farah province, said 15 others were wounded with most in critical condition, indicating the death toll could rise.

The bus was traveling on a main highway between the western city of Herat and the southern city of Kandahar. No one immediately claimed responsibility, but Taliban insurgents operate in the region and frequently use roadside bombs to target government officials and security forces.

The Taliban have kept up a steady tempo of at-

tacks even as they have held several rounds of peace talks with the United States aimed at ending the 18-year war.

The attack came a day after the U.N. mission in Afghanistan released a report saying that most civilian deaths in the first half of the year were caused by Afghan forces and their international allies.

The report apparently referred to civilians killed during Afghan and U.S. military operations against insurgents.

The U.N. report said 403 civilians were killed by Afghan forces in the first six months of the year and another 314 by international forces, a total of 717. That's compared to 531 killed by the Taliban, an Islamic State affiliate and other militants during the same pe-

riod. It said 300 of those killed by militants were directly targeted.

The U.N. said the leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries was "ground engagements," which caused one in three casualties. Roadside bombs were a close second, accounting for 28%. Afghanistan is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world a legacy of decades of war. The Taliban, who effectively control half the country, have been meeting with U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad since late last year.

They appear to be closing in on an agreement whereby American forces would withdraw from Afghanistan in return for guarantees that it would not be used as a launch-pad for international terror attacks.

Tensions high as Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters face court

HONG KONG, JUL 31 (AFP): Dozens of Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters appeared in court Wednesday after being charged with rioting, setting the stage for further unrest in a weeks-long crisis that has rocked the global financial hub. The announcement on Tuesday night that 44 people had been charged with rioting -- an offence that carries a jail term of up to 10 years -- immediately triggered another round of clashes between police and protesters. Supporters continued to voice their outrage as they stood for hours on Wednesday outside court, braving heavy winds and rain, as the accused rioters appeared before a judge.

"Release the righteous... no rioters, only tyranny... reclaim Hong Kong, the revolution of our times," the supporters chanted at various times throughout the day. The protesters were generally calm as they took turns to appear in front of the judge, who formally read the charges and granted them bail.

The range of their professions reflected the wide support across Hong Kong society for the pro-democracy movement. They included a teacher, a nurse, an airline pilot, a barber, a chef, an electrician, a construction worker and unemployed people, according to their charge sheets.

Semi-autonomous Hong Kong has endured more than seven weeks of unrest that began with a government bid to introduce a law that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China.

The protests evolved into a movement for deeper democratic reforms and an end to eroding freedoms, in the

most significant challenge to Beijing's rule since the city's handover from Britain in 1997. In the latest confrontation, police used pepper spray and batons against hundreds of protesters who had gathered outside a police station in solidarity with those who had just been charged. Footage broadcast live on television showed an officer aiming a shotgun at protesters who were throwing objects at him.

The previous two weekends had seen a surge in the level of violence used by both protesters and police, who repeatedly fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse projectile-throwing crowds. A mob of pro-government thugs also attacked protesters, putting 45 people in hospital.

The 44 protesters were charged for their alleged role in running battles between police and protesters in a well-heeled residential neighbourhood on the main island on Sunday.

The move to charge protesters with rioting came a day after Beijing publicly threw its weight behind Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam and the police, saying violent protesters must be swiftly punished. "No civilised society or rule of law society will tolerate rampant violence," Yang Guang, spokesman for the cabinet-level Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, told reporters.

But while Beijing has issued increasingly shrill condemnations of the protests, it has left the city's government to deal with the situation. Lam has shown no sign of backing down beyond agreeing to suspend the extradition bill, and has made few public appearances.

Prosecutors charge former Audi boss in emissions scandal

FRANKFURT, JUL 31 (AP): German prosecutors have charged the former head of Audi, Volkswagen's luxury division, with fraud in connection with sales of cars with software that enabled cheating on emissions tests, adding another chapter to VW's diesel scandal that has seen its former CEO charged in the US and two executives go to prison there.

Prosecutors in Munich said Wednesday in a news release that they had charged Rupert Stadler and three other individuals. The three unnamed individuals were charged with having developed engines used in Audi, Volkswagen and Porsche models that had software that made the emissions controls work better on the test stand than in real-life driving. Stadler was charged with having known about the manipulation in Audi and Volkswagen cars and with continuing to sell the models despite that knowledge. Prosecutors said he found out about the impermissible software at the end of September 2015, at the latest, when the Volkswagen scandal broke, but continued permitting rigged cars to be sold.

In Stadler's case, the accusations related to 251,000 Audi vehicles, 71,500 Volkswagen vehicles, and 112,000 Porsche cars, sold in the U.S. and Europe.

Volkswagen was caught by U.S. authorities in September, 2015, and paid more than 30 billion euros (33.5 billion) in fines and civil settlements.

Siddhartha's death: Mallya brands Indian government "vicious and unrelenting"

BY ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, JUL 31 (PTI): Embattled liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya has dubbed the Indian government "vicious and unrelenting" in his latest intervention on social media, as he spoke out in support of Cafe Coffee Day founder V G Siddhartha who was found dead on Wednesday amid financial troubles.

The body of 59-year-old Siddhartha, who went missing two days ago, was found by local fishermen and patrolling policemen on the banks of the Netravathi river near Mangaluru.

The 63-year-old former Kingfisher Airlines boss, who is fighting extradition to India in relation to fraud and money laundering allegations, accused the government of not doing enough to support entrepreneurs in debt.

"I am indirectly related to VG Siddhartha. Excellent human and brilliant entrepreneur. I am devastated with the contents of his letter," said Mallya on Twitter.

"The Govt Agencies and Banks can drive anyone to despair. See what they are doing to me despite offer of full repayment. Vicious and unrelenting," he said.

Siddhartha's body was found after a note left by him accusing the Income Tax Department. While the authenticity of the letter is now being questioned, Mallya compared the situation of debtors in India with those in the West.

"In Western Countries, Government and Banks help borrow-



ers repay their debts. In my case they are obstructing every possible effort for me to repay my debt whilst competing for my assets. As far as the prima facie criminal case goes wait for the appeal granted," he said, also re-tweeting a series of other Twitter messages related to the financial pressures on Siddhartha.

In reference to the latest proceedings by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against him in India, Mallya reiterated that McDowell Holdings Limited is an independent listed company in India and the suggestion by the Indian investigating agencies that it is a "dummy" company is "preposterous".

"All my financial affairs including my sources of income and expenditure are fully disclosed before English Courts in proceedings initiated by Banks," he said.

Mallya also sought to distance himself from any connection

with Shashikanth, a former managing director of United Breweries Holdings Ltd (UBHL), saying he had no contact with him for the past three years.

He also denied any knowledge about Shashikanth's company Ultimate Branding Worldwide or its activities and claimed he had never heard of and had no connection with Tammy International Dubai being linked with Mallya as part of the ED investigation.

The businessman branded the latest allegations an "inaccurate version of facts" and once again took aim at the media for publishing "nonsense" for sensational headlines about him.

Mallya remains on bail pending his UK High Court appeal, now scheduled for February 2020, in the extradition proceedings brought by India in relation to charges of fraud and money laundering amounting to an alleged Rs 9,000 crores.

Iran dismisses Pompeo's 'hypocritical' offer to visit

TEHRAN, JUL 31 (AP): Iran has dismissed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's offer to visit and address the Iranian people as a "hypocritical gesture." "You don't need to come to Iran," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on the sidelines of a Cabinet meeting Wednesday, in remarks directed at Pompeo.

He suggested Pompeo instead grant visas for Iranian reporters to travel to the U.S. and interview him, accusing

him of having rejected their requests.

On Monday, Pompeo tweeted: "We aren't afraid of (Zarif) coming to America where he enjoys the right to speak freely."

"Are the facts of the (Khamenei) regime so bad he cannot let me do the same thing in Tehran?" he said, referring to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"What if his people heard the truth, unfiltered, unabridged?" U.S.-Iranian tensions

have soared since the Trump administration withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers last year and imposed crippling sanctions on the country.

In recent months, the U.S. has boosted its military presence in the Persian Gulf while Iran has begun openly exceeding limits on its nuclear activities, saying it can no longer fully abide by the 2015 deal unless European signatories to the agreement provide some kind of economic relief.

The Trump administration has said its policies are aimed at changing Iran's behavior in the region, not its government.

Zarif, a relative moderate within Iran's clerically-overseen political system, was an architect of the nuclear agreement.

The U.S. and Iran cut off all diplomatic relations after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but the U.S. allows Iranian officials to visit the United Nations headquarters in New York.





DEMI PARADISE! Super fan, Demi Burnett and singer, Demi Lovato was seen at the finale for The Bachelorette with alum Bachelor in Paradise Demi.

Cardi B calls off concert due to 'security threat'

LOS ANGELES, JUL 31 (PTI): Rapper Cardi B has cancelled her Indianapolis concert, citing a "security threat".

In a post on Twitter, the 26-year-old singer apologised to her fans for the cancellation and said the police is investigating the threat.

"Dear Indiana people I'm so sorry for today. I will like to let you know I was at the venue I was even rehearsing a new move I been excited to do on my show. Unfortunately there was a security threat that is currently under investigation right now. My safety and your safety first," she tweeted. The Indianapolis Police Department said the threat was "unverified" and there was no known cause for alarm.

"This evening, there was a scheduled concert at Bankers Life. We were notified of an unverified threat to the artist and the artist cancelled this evening's concert - there is no immediate threat to public safety, this not an active incident. Ongoing investigation #IMPDNow" the police tweeted. The organizer, Bankers Life Fieldhouse, said the concert has been rescheduled to September 11.

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Sunil Grover Says Life Before 'Gutthi' Was 'Harsh': 'I Had No Income'

Actor Sunil Grover, who made a mark on the small screen with his perfect comic timing as 'Gutthi' and 'Dr Mashoor Gulati' on Comedy Nights With Kapil and The Kapil Sharma Show, shared that his life prior to "Gutthi" was quite "harsh." In a recent post for

no income and was given a harsh reality check. I was demotivated," he further said.

Sunil Grover said that even though he was demotivated, he never stopped looking for work. "I didn't want to let my dreams go. So I picked up the pieces and rigorously looked for work. But the road was still rocky. Once I'd been selected to act in a TV show - we'd even shot for a few days. But when I stopped getting my time to come on set, I called the team - they said I'd been replaced. At the same time I also started getting work in voiceovers. So when I'd be rejected from TV and films, I had a cushion to fall back upon - something that most didn't have. I realised how fortunate I was and regained my strength bit by bit."



Further, the Bharat actor said: "Around that time, I got offered to do a radio show. It was only going to be aired in Delhi, but when that show went live, it went viral! They decided to air it across India! After that, I got work in radio, TV and films. Soon 'Gutthi' happened and in no time, became a household name! I remember I was called on a live show and when I went on stage, the

audience was roaring for me! I turned to make sure there wasn't anyone else, whom they were clapping for - but it was all for me."

"It took several moments like that, to bring back that young boy in me, who used to think that he could conquer the world. The young boy who used to make sure that everyone around him was smiling and entertained. The young boy who didn't let failures dim his dreams and overpower his need for victory. So even though I've come this far... this young boy has a long way to go," said Sunil Grover.

Sunil Grover has worked in several films and television shows such as The Legend of Bhagat Singh (2002), Ghajini (2008), Heropanti (2014), Gabbar Is Back (2015), Pataakha (2018) and Bharat (2019). His list of TV shows include Gutter Gu, Comedy Nights With Kapil, The Kapil Sharma Show, Mad In India, Comedy Circus, Indian Idol 9, Sabse Bada Kalakar and Dus Ka Dum.

Alfred Molina to make directorial debut with 'Lilian'

LOS ANGELES, JUL 31 (PTI): Veteran actor Alfred Molina is donning the director's hat with "Lilian", a big screen adaptation of the Jill Gascoine novel.

Molina is also attached to executive produce the indie along with Kelly Kahl and Derek Beamer, reported Deadline. Amy Lowe Starbin is penning the script of the film, which will be backed by Cannonball Productions. The story follows cancer survivor Jessica who leaves her husband and children in England to visit a friend in the US hoping to rediscover the joy of life. Once she reaches America, she unexpectedly finds herself falling for another woman.

The actor, who has credits across film and TV from "Boogie Nights", "Frida", "Spider-Man 2" to "Feud", said he always knew he would eventually turn director.

"When I was young I was moved by the films of Carol Reed - that's what started this journey in fact - that was the first time I realised there was a guiding hand behind the camera. "The idea of being that guiding hand has always interested me. When I read the novel 'Lilian' years

ago it touched me deeply - I started seeing the film and feeling the characters' journeys-and



like that I knew that I wanted to direct this film," Molina said. Production is expected to begin here in late 2019.

Taapsee lived with real life 'revolver dadis' before shooting 'Saand Ki Aankh'



MUMBAI, JUL 31 (PTI): Actor Taapsee Pannu has revealed that she spent time with Chandro and Prakash Tomar, subjects of her upcoming "Saand Ki Aankh", to get into the skin of her character. "Saand Ki Aankh" follows the inspiring story of the world's oldest sharpshooters, Chandro and Prakash fondly known as the "Revolver Dadis".

Taapsee is portraying Prakash in the Tushar Hiranandani-directed film, while Bhumi Pednekar is essaying the role of Chandro.

To experience the village life first hand and get to know them personally, Taapsee stayed in their original home in the interiors of UP, to better understand the kind of lives

the duo lead, and interacted with their family and neighbours.

"It was the best experience for me so far. Living in Johri and spending time with these two ladies, who has strength and compassion was very inspiring. There were so many stories to hear from them and so much to learn," Taapsee said in a statement.

A lot of jewellery and outfits which the actor sports in the film have been borrowed from their actual wardrobe, the markers said.

Produced by Reliance Entertainment, Anurag Kashyap, Nidhi Parmar and Chalk n Cheese Films, the film is scheduled to be released on Diwali.

Viola Davis developing 'Fast Color' series for Amazon

LOS ANGELES, JUL 31 (PTI): Oscar winner Viola Davis is working on the series adaptation of Julia Hart's 2018 critically-acclaimed feature "Fast Color". According to The Hollywood Reporter, Davis and her husband Julius Tennon's banner JuVee Productions is backing the project for Amazon.

Hart's film, which premiered at South by Southwest (SXSW) festival in 2018 and was released theatrically in

the US by Codeblack Films, follows three African-American women (Lorraine Toussaint, Gugu Mbatha-Raw and Saniyya Sidney) from different generations who have superpowers.

The director, who co-wrote the film with Jordan Horowitz, will also helm the pilot episode of the series.

The show will focus on Ruth (Mbatha-Raw's character), a runaway and drug addict who returns home

and rediscovers powers she thought she had lost and that her family has long kept secret. Three generations of black women reconnect, and as they learn more about those who came before, they realise one of them could save the world.

Hart and Horowitz will pen the pilot and they will also executive produce along with Davis, Tennon, Andrew Wang, Mickey Liddell and Pete Shilaimon.

ARIES: Think about all the people you have let into your space, professionally and otherwise. Are they the kinds who take pride in watching you grow, and support you to reach greater heights? Or are they the sort who drain you of your vitality and make you question your abilities? Your vibe attracts your tribe, and your tribe affects your vibe, Aries. A massive clean up is in order.

Tip: Reconsider your circle.

TAURUS: This is the affirmation you have been looking for. The sweat, blood and tears have paid off, Taurus, and magnificently so. Take a bow. The next stage of your career is about a massive expansion. For some, this could manifest as an opportunity abroad or an association with foreign clients. Set a strong intention for the life you want to create for yourself over the next few years, and get ready to take action.

Tip: Massive expansion is on the cards.

GEMINI: Here's to your Motley crew, who shows up for you every time you are in the midst of chaos. Lean on them, Gemini, knowing fully well that this storm is about to pass. In the realm of work, you are protected by

co-workers who believe in you and your goals. See how you can take on Mission Damage Control together. Trust that the outcome of Plan B will be far better than you can imagine.

Tip: Here's to the Motley crew that always shows up for you.

CANCER: Ready to join the league of the power players, Cancer? This is a big week for you on the career front. Be seen. Be heard. Make an appearance at the events that matter. Your work has already spoken about you. Now it's time for you to speak about your work. Learning to toot your horn in a tactful manner promises to open the right doors for you.

Tip: Get ready to join the league of the power players.

LEO: The sweat, blood and tears are paying off, Leo. This is a major fruition period for you. You are receiving the kind of wealth that was once a distant dream. Be wise with your resources. See how you can create a reserve that supports your dreams and ventures. Remember, you didn't get here alone. You had a well-meaning crew walking with you. As an empowered leader, it is your duty to make them feel appreciated in return.

Tip: This is a time of fruition in your world.

VIRGO: A powerful affirmation to make you a money magnet: "I am aligned with the energy of wealth and abundance". Repeat these powerful words to yourself in the mirror, or write them down on a piece of paper. Let this dark moon help you break the subconscious patterns that are coming in the way of attracting the wealth you deserve. You are creating a life for yourself that supports you in every single way.

Tip: Break free from the subconscious patterns that are coming in way of free-flowing abundance.

LIBRA: It's not just about making money, is it? It's about making your money work for you—something you haven't been able to do in the past. But you're learning from your mistakes, Libra. You're understanding how to be wiser with your funds. Keep planting and nurturing your seeds with intention. You are now laying the foundation of a life that is abundant in every single way.

Tip: You're learning how to make your money work for you.

SCORPIO: What if we said that everything you desire is well within your reach? Spoiler alert: we live in a benevolent Universe, Scorpio, one that wants you to live life queen-size.

Expect the unexpected today when it comes to your finances. A big breakthrough moment will not only reaffirm your faith in your own abilities, but also help you build the financially stable life you always envisioned for yourself.

Tip: You are now building the foundation of a prosperous life.

SAGITTARIUS: What if your life experiences have the capacity to awaken others and inspire them to pursue their sacred purpose? Don't shy away from what you were sent here to do. It's time to step into your own, and shine your light on those around you. But that doesn't mean everything in your life is picture perfect. You could still be dealing with pain and trauma on the personal front. You know what they say, Sag? You're allowed to be a masterpiece and a work-in-progress at the same time.

Tip: Step into your light as a healer and facilitator.

CAPRICORN: Watch your patterns with money, Capricorn. Are you repeating the same mistakes over and over? You deserve to live a life that is creatively and financially satisfying. Examine where and how you are holding your-

self back and make the required changes. For some, this may involve having a not-so-pleasant conversation. Don't put it off anymore.

Tip: Re-examine your relationship with money.

AQUARIUS: Emotional turbulence may be a constant at this point. Don't let that distract you from your sacred purpose. Sometimes, you just have to put your noise-cancelling headphones and focus on hustling hard. Everything else can wait, Aquarius. For some of you, the opportunity to learn from a maven in the industry could arise. Stay humble.

Tip: Put your noise-cancelling headphones on and hustle hard.

PISCES: The message is repeating itself over and over: it's not that they don't care about you. They are going through internal turmoil at this point, which is reflected in all of their relationships. Give them the time they need to heal from the old traumas. A good way to stay sane is to focus on the tasks that make your life fulfilling—art and music, for instance. PS: Continue to build that multimillion dollar empire.

Tip: Give them the time and space they need to heal from their traumas.