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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## State Govt seeks MCI nod for state-run teaching hospital



**Medical college expected to begin session June 2019**

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 NOV:**  
The State Government has applied to the

Medical Council of India seeking affiliation for a proposed state-run medical college. The medical college is proposed to be part of the 1,000-bed multi-specialty hospital coming up at Sichey [see accompanying pic]. While the hospital itself is slated for a 28 December inauguration, the State Government is

confident that the medical college will be able to begin its first session in June 2019.

The State Government application with MCI seeks affiliation to begin with a batch of 100 students in the initial stage. The Health Department is very optimistic and confident that the MCI affiliation

and permission will arrive in time for the medical college to begin from June 2019.

When contacted, the Secretary, Health Department, Vishal Chauhan, confirmed the information and informed that the multi-specialty hospital, developed with the aim to affordable and quality healthcare

within the State, was also ready for inauguration. While the inauguration, as mentioned earlier is slated for Dec-end, the hospital itself is expected to be fully functional in January next.

As for the staffing of this multi-specialty hospital, the Secretary informed that the State Government was keen to bring back

specialists from Sikkim currently working outside the State.

"Sikkim's own manpower working outside the State in different private hospitals across the country will be invited to run the multi-specialty hospital to provide best the medical facilities to the people here itself," he said.

It may be recalled that the Chief Minister had also remarked recently that relaxations to the service rules will be considered to bring back Sikkim's specialists and retain them here so that patients here receive the best attendance.

The Secretary, in turn, added that to meet the requirement of the best healthcare professionals, the state government has initiated the recruitment process for specialists and will invite applications through the Sikkim Public Services Commission soon.

In these regard, the Chief Minister has already appealed to doctors

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## 110 MW Chuzachen HEP inaugurated



**CM heralds investors as Development Partners; Remarks next election is to save the people of Sikkim**

**ARPAN PRADHAN  
RONGLI, 18 NOV:**

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling was at Rongli to today to mark the successful commencement of the 110 Mega Watt Chuzachen Hydroelectric Power Project (CHEPP) which officially began power generation today.

Applauding the work of the project developer, Gati Infrastructure, and their various other contributions to the Sikkimese Society Mr. Chamling has said that he prefers to call investors "Development Partners" of the State.

Gati is headed by the Agarwal family and the contributions of the Agarwal family to the state of Sikkim is immense, the CM added.

He remarked that while the Chuzachen HEP will contribute to the State Government's revenue, its more significant contribution has been in providing employment to people of the locality.

He also said that not only direct employment, but the local people have benefited in many other ways as well. The project, for instance, has increased the demand for local vegetable and other local products which were supplied by the people of the locality. And many have also received contracts under the project

which has been helpful to all, he added.

Similarly, the valuation of the land has also increased and various kind developmental works have taken place in the locality, the Chief Minister added.

Given the local make-up of the audience, the CM also touched on the upcoming elections and said, "The upcoming election will be more challenging for the people of Sikkim to choose the Right Leader and the Right Government. This time, the election is not to save the government but to save the people of Sikkim."

The CM stated that the State Government has created suitable, peaceful and industry-friendly environment for investors to come into the state which attracted companies like Gati Infrastructure to invest here.

He admitted that the years Sikkim had lost before industry was given a push here made things challenging initially, and remarked that it was gratifying to now see the fruits of their earlier labour when such big projects commence operations.

He also announced that the government will soon be holding a Kri-shi Sammelan (Farmers' Conference) and Panchayat Sammelan.

He also announced that the Government will soon be distributing laptops to the students of classes X, XI, XII and College.

On the occasion, the CM also took part in a plantation drive.

The Chuzachen HEP is designed by Colenco, Switzerland, and is built with two reservoirs - on Rongli Chu and Rangpo Chu. The project consists of

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**Petrol price cut by 20 paise; rates back at mid-August levels**

**NEW DELHI, NOV 18 (PTI):** Petrol price Sunday was cut by 20 paise a litre and diesel by 18 paise, the 29th straight daily reduction in rates that has wiped away all of the massive price increase in petrol witnessed in two months since mid-August that had triggered a political uproar.

Petrol price in Delhi was cut to Rs 76.71 a litre from Rs 76.91 on Saturday, according to a price notification issued by state-owned fuel retailers. Diesel is being now sold at Rs 71.56 per litre as compared to Rs 71.74 on Saturday.

With this, the reduction in rates in the last one month totals Rs 7.29 per litre for petrol and Rs 3.89 a litre for diesel.

Rates have been on the decline since October 18. This has wiped out all of the price hike on petrol in two months beginning August 16 and more than half on diesel.

The reduction in diesel rates has been slower due to moderate fall in its benchmark international prices, according to oil company price notifications.

Petrol price had touched a record high of Rs 84 per litre in Delhi and Rs 91.34 in Mumbai on October 4. Diesel on that day had peaked to an

turn to pg02

## SKM convenes first public meeting in North Sikkim since 2014 elections

**Party receives slew of crossovers**

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 NOV:**

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha convened a public meeting at Phensang under Kabi Lungchok constituency today. This, an SKM press release points out, was the first public meeting of the party in North Sikkim since the 2014 elections.

Addressed by the SKM party president, PS Tamang [Golay], MLAs Kunga Nima Lepcha, Sangha MLA Sonam Lama and the party spokesperson Jacob Khaling among others, the highlight of the day was the joining of 614 families who crossed over from the Sikkim



Democratic Front and officially joined the SKM today.

These 614 families, an SKM press release informs, are made up of 105 families from Tumin Lingee under the leadership of Samdup Bhutia, 439 families from Kabi Lungchok under the leadership of Karma Loday, 60 families from Dzongu and 10 families from Lachen Mangon.

Also on the day, Mr Tamang inaugurated the new party office at Phensang.

In his address, the SKM party president contended that the SDF played the politics of fear in 2009 and that it was only the arrival of SKM in 2014 that the

fear psychosis was lifted and people empowered to speak and vote freely; a power they used that year to elect an SKM candidate from Kabi-Lungchok.

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## BRO personnel brave adverse weather conditions to lay first glaciated road in Ladakh

**SRINAGAR, NOV 18 (PTI):** Braving extremely adverse weather conditions, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), under Project Himank, is carving out the world's first glaciated motorable road.

"The BRO is laying the motorable roads by cutting the world's highest glaciers which are here in eastern Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir," an official of the BRO said.

Being constructed at an altitude of over 17,800 feet, the road from Sasoma to Saser La will be a vital link paved in a region which is mostly cut-off during the severe winter months.

Saser La, also known as Saser Pass, is a high mountain pass

which lies in the Karakoram range. It is located on the ancient summer caravan route from Leh in Ladakh to Yarkand in the Tarim Basin.

"As the temperature in the region falls to minus 50 degrees Celsius during winter and hovers around 12 degrees Celsius during peak summer, work in such condition is a herculean task.

"Besides, the biting cold and bone chilling winds, there are dangers of unseen crevasses and avalanches. Further, the glaciers shift constantly when the snow melts, adding to the difficulty in construction, he said.

The months when construction works can be taken up are few,



forcing officials to be ready with plans and strategies in advance to achieve targets.

"The short working period

needs to be utilised to the maximum, thus requiring effective management of manpower and resources. Planning of work starts four to

five months prior to the working season," he said.

The official said meticulous planning and hard work of the BRO officers has been extremely essential for the successful completion of the tasks.

"There is little a BRO personnel can do to stop an ice-wall or crevasse opening on what is essentially a moving block of ice, but due to commitment of jawans and strategic need the project moves forward despite challenges.

"Due to good equipment, other resources, training and medical facilities for BRO personnel, works in the hostile high altitude areas are possible, he said.



## Annual Plan meeting at Dikchu-Zang and Lower Rakdong



### SUMMIT REPORT

**DIKCHU, 18 Nov:**

A daylong preparation of annual plan 2019-20 and PRA exercise was held at Dikchu-Zang and Lower Rakdong wards of Rakdong-Tintek Gram Panchayat Unit, East Sikkim, under the chair-

manship of Zilla Panchayat, BB Gurung, and Panchayat President, Tika Maya Pandey, RDA, RB Rai, officials from the line departments, other panchayat members, standing committee and the villagers today.

The ward panchayat

Dikchu-Zang, Chandra Lal Sharma, and ward Panchayat pf Lower Rakdong, Hemlata Nepal, presented the detailed report of their respective wards and the necessary developmental work to be undertaken.

### SKM convenes first...

He sought the people's continued support for the upcoming election as well and also lashed out against the State Government and the SDF for inconsistencies, opportunism and manipulation.

Contending that North district was ignored by the SDF Government because it has only three MLAs in the Assembly, Mr Tamang assured that SKM was committed to deliver real development balancing environment and infrastructure to the district if voted into office.

MLA Mr Lepcha alleged that the SDF Government has been distorting the history of Sikkim with utter disregard to the sentiments of the common people who have huge respect for their culture, traditions and beliefs.

Similarly, the Sangha MLA thanked the people of the constituency who had shown faith in SKM in the 2014 elections and expressed confidence that the people will give a fitting reply for the betrayal of their elected representative who crossed over to SDF.

SKM spokesperson, Jacob Khaling, in his address, claimed that SKM will win in South and West districts where the party, he claimed, has gained unprecedented ground.

New appointment letters were also handed over by the party president to Chung Chung Bhutia (president, Chalak Morcha), Chungkipu Lepcha (vice president in-charge Nari Wing North), Tshering Wanchuk Lepcha (general secretary in-charge Educated Unemployed Youth North-East), S Gamsyo Pulger (advisor), CL Denzongpa (advisor) followed by different District and ward level appointments.

### Petrol price cut by 20 paise...

all-time high of Rs 75.45 a litre in Delhi and Rs 80.10 in Mumbai.

Prices had started to climb from August 16. Petrol in Delhi was priced at Rs 77.14 per litre and in Mumbai it cost Rs 84.58 on August 15. Diesel on that day was priced at Rs 68.72 per litre in Delhi and at Rs 72.96 in Mumbai.

Petrol in Mumbai Sunday cost Rs 82.28 per litre and diesel was priced at Rs 74.97.

Between August 16 and October 4, petrol price was hiked by Rs 6.86 per litre and diesel by Rs 6.73.

On that day, the government decided to cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 1.50 per litre each and asked state-owned fuel retailers to subsidise prices by another Re 1 a litre by reducing their margins. Many states including Maharashtra matched that with a reduction in local sales tax or VAT.

Subsequent to this, the petrol price came down to Rs 81.50 per litre in Delhi and diesel to Rs 72.95 a litre on October 5. In Mumbai rates fell to Rs 86.97 per litre for petrol and Rs 77.45 in case of diesel.

As the international oil prices continued to rise, price of petrol and diesel in Delhi increased to Rs 82.83 and Rs 75.69 on October 17. In Mumbai, rates touched Rs 88.29 a litre for petrol and Rs 79.35 for diesel.

But since then, international oil prices have been falling and rupee has also appreciated, resulting in decline in retail rates.

Industry source said as per the assessment, the retail prices of petrol and diesel may reign easy in the next few days.

The retail selling price of petrol and diesel is dependent on the international prices of benchmark fuel and the rupee-US dollar exchange rate. This is because a large proportion of country's requirement is met through imports.

### State Govt seeks...

and healthcare professionals working outside the State to return and deliver on the potential of the new hospital.

On 16 November last week, the Chief Minister had expressed displeasure over the lackadaisical approach of the Health Department and urged its personnel to live up to the expectations of the public to make Sikkim's healthcare system world class.

It may be mentioned here that the said hospital has been developed over a lavish space and constructed at the cost of around Rs 1,800 crore through state plan project out of which Rs 300 cr was taken as soft loan.

## Centre probing multi-crore post-matric scholarship scam: Vijay Sampla

**DHARMENDRA JOSHI**

**SHIMLA, NOV 18 (PTI):**

The central government is conducting an inquiry into an alleged multi-crore scam in post-matric scholarships for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Classes students, Union minister Vijay Sampla said Sunday.

Talking to wPTI on phone, the Union minister of state for social justice and empowerment said, "We got reports about the scam from not only Himachal Pradesh but other parts of the country as well. Scam of Rs 450 crore was also reported from my home state Punjab."

"Taking cognisance of these reports, the Social Justice and Empowerment Department is already conducting an inquiry into the matter," Sampla said.

An audit of the distribution of post-matric scholarship was also on and appropriate action would be taken after getting a report on it, he said.

The department was considering taking corrective steps to check fraud and the scholarship money might now be directly deposited in the Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of eligible SC/BC/OBC students after checking their attendance in educational institutions, he added.

Sampla said the post-matric scholarship was launched in 2008-09 and under it the department used to provide an amount to the states.

The PMO has a "mor-

### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 18 Nov:**

Sikkim Unemployed Agriculture and Horticulture Graduates Association [SUAHGA] has demanded that the State government abide strictly to service rules in the interest of agriculture and horticulture graduates of Sikkim. The organisation has demanded that no further relaxation of service rules be considered since such compromises were tantamount to suppression of their fundamental rights.

Addressing a press conference here yesterday, SUAHGA president, Rebecca Gurung, informed that at present, Sikkim has around 800 graduates, post graduates and PhD degree holders from agriculture and horticulture disciplines who have been running from pillar to post for employment.

She added that the State Agriculture Service Rule 1994 and Sikkim State Subordinate Agriculture Service Rule 2001 clearly state that vacancies be filled in 50:50 ratio - 50% by pro-

motion and 50% by direct recruitment. She went on to inform that the State government has not made any recruitments in the State Agriculture Service since 1996 except for VLV posts for which the minimum qualification is just class XII passed.

"This is the main reason behind the lack of technical personnel in the department and the complete deprivation of technical graduates. Due to lack of opportunities, many highly qualified individuals were compelled to sit for interviews for the VLV post," she detailed.

Ms Gurung stated



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"This is the main reason behind the lack of technical personnel in the department and the complete deprivation of technical graduates. Due to lack of opportunities, many highly qualified individuals were compelled to sit for interviews for the VLV post," she detailed.

Ms Gurung stated

that the concerned department has been relaxing the service rules (claiming one-time relaxation every time) which has worked against the interests and rights of agriculture and horticulture graduates.

She informed that SUAHGA has approached all the higher authorities several times but not received any positive response or written explanation.

She informed that after a long gap of 23 years, advertisements announcing 23 posts of Agriculture Development Officers, Horticulture Development Officers and Watershed Development

Officers were published earlier this year.

She added that these 23 posts cover merely 3% of the 800 agriculture and horticulture graduates in the State. And this too has not gone smoothly.

"...in the process we faced many chaotic situations as all horticulture graduates were put in rejection list due to some technical error and non-amendment of service rule in spite of clear indication of post as ADO, HDO and WDO," she informed.

She added that despite several queries and even a legal notice, the concerned department has failed to offer

any explanations.

And even as this confusion prevails, the Department went ahead and promoted 63 employees, who do not even meet eligibility criteria, as ADO, HDO and WDO without maintaining the proper ratio and one allegedly illegal appointment in the post of HI was done.

The Association is demanding timely recruitment of required strength and stressed that the service rules be strictly followed.

Ms Gurung also stressed that the State government should be strict in implementing MoUs with different agricultural and horticultural organisations to ensure employment to local graduates.

She also urged the government to open a State Agriculture University for the upliftment of the state organic mission. She also appealed the government to revise the cadre and amend the service rules taking professionalism and technical expertise into consideration.

## CIC again asks PMO, RBI to disclose wilful defaulters' list, Raghuram Rajan's letter on bad loans

**NEW DELHI, NOV 18**

**(PTI):** Severely admonishing the RBI and the PMO, the Central Information Commission has again directed them to disclose the list of wilful defaulters and Raghuram Rajan's letter on bad loans.

In an exhaustive 66-page order, the panel pulled up the Prime Minister's Office for not complying with its directive to disclose the letter from former RBI Governor Rajan on bad loans.

Information Commissioner Sridhar Acharyulu said, "If there is any objection based on any exception, the PMO should have pleaded such provision and justify their denial."

He said the PMO refused to comply with the direction of disclosure of action on Rajan's letter on "grounds which are not legal, which is unfortunate".

Acharyulu was hearing the plea of one Sandeep Singh who had sought details of bank loan defaulters.

The commission had earlier issued a show cause notice to RBI Governor Urjit Patel for "dishonouring" a Supreme Court judgment and CIC directive on disclosure of the list of wilful defaulters.

The PMO has a "mor-

al, constitutional and political duty" to tell the citizens of India as to who are the defaulters and what action has been taken to recover the huge loans advanced to them by banks, from out of taxpayer's money, he said.

The commissioner said several categories of information were declared by the RBI as not disclosable as part of their disclosure policy' and the RBI calls the exceptional clauses under the RTI Act as enabling' provisions.

"It is against the RTI Act, the collective intention of Parliament, affront to democracy, reflecting disrespect to the Supreme Court's directions in RBI v Jayantilal N Mistry case. The RBI has a strong legal team with experienced legal experts and meritorious graduates from National Law Schools, yet has audacity to openly defy RTI Act, CIC directions and judgment of the Supreme Court," he said.

He said as per law, in each RTI request, the CPIO and First Appealing Authority (FAA) of the RBI need to justify the denial under exceptions prescribed under sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act.

"But any public authority cannot declare that it will never give such information as de-

clared by the RBI. Exceptional provisions under the RTI Act cannot straight away enable a public authority to deny in advance," he said.

Acharyulu said in spite of the Supreme Court's direction that Section 22 of the RTI Act will override the RBI Act and other Acts, the RBI again quoted those Acts and declared that it would not give information.

"The RBI has totally ignored the provisions of the RTI Act," he said.

This non-disclosure in the name of disclosure' policy is also in contradiction of various office memorandum and guidelines issued by the Department of Personnel and Training under the RTI Act, he said.

"If the RBI does not respect the SC orders and denies the citizens right to information, it will result in perpetuation of financial regime of secrecy that is potential enough to facilitate financial frauds and allow fraudulent rich and influential business persons to flee the country, as witnessed in recent times," Acharyulu said.

He again directed the PMO to disclose the names of the defaulters, action taken for recovery of loans in response to Rajan's letter and the policy, if any, about recovery

from defaulters including high-profile ones.

Acharyulu also urged parliamentary committees such as Public Accounts Committee, Committee on Finance and Committee on Estimates to deliberate the issues raised in this case as they are also seized of such matters.

"The commission directs the office of this CIC to present the copy of this order to concerned officers of Parliament who are responsible for placing such papers before respective committees within one week from the date of issue of this order," he said.

He rejected the submission of the representative from the PMO who had informed the CIC that the RTI application in this particular case had been filed by the applicant with the Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGEAT) and no copy of the said RTI was received in the PMO from either the applicant or on transfer from any other public authority.

Acharyulu said, "The PMO contended that as the original RTI application, first and second appeals were not filed with the PMO, the direction to provide information was not maintainable and hence the compliance

question does not arise."

"The commission cannot agree with this kind of attempt to deny the substantive part of information access by unreasonable procedural interpretations without any legal basis. There is no provision in the RTI Act that prevents the Information Commission from directing any public authority to provide information if that is possibly available with them," he said.

He said information pertaining the identities of loan defaulters and action taken against them is an issue of larger public interest.

"The stand taken by the PMO in this case will not serve any public interest, and compel the citizen to start his effort ab initio, by filing an RTI request with PMO, treating as a separate unconnected public authority and reach the ultimate level at the CIC or up to the Supreme Court, if the government prefers to litigate with the citizen and ultimately it has to give that information.

"This was not the intention of Parliament in passing the RTI Act, 2005 that aimed at creating a practical regime and not procedural tangles to delay and deny the access to public information," he said.

### 110 MW Chuzachen...

a unique headrace tunnel and penstock, which is the only one of its kind in India crossing over the Rangpo chu through an aqueduct. The turbine installed at the project is the first unit manufactured at Vadodara by Alstom (France).

Addressing the event, Mahendra Agarwal of Gati Infrastructure expressed gratitude towards the Chief Minister and the State government for the support they provided during the period of construction of the project.

Gati Infrastructure has the unique distinction of being the first independent hydroelectric power project in the North East Region and the Chief Minister Pawan Chamling has been the force behind opening up the hydro power sector in Sikkim, he said.

Speaking exclusively to SummitTimes, Meera Madhusudan, one of the Directors one of Gati Infrastructure, said that Gati has contributed to the state of Sikkim in many ways and informed that the company has more plans, including some more hydel projects, for Sikkim.

She said, "I am also from Sikkim, so I want to contribute more to the Sikkimese society".

## To raise a toast or not: Liquor a poll issue on platter of all Mizoram parties

**TRIDEEP LAHKAR**

**AIZAWL, NOV 18 (PTI):**

There are promises that are made in a poll season and most of them remain promises, but in the election season of this small hill state, all major political parties say they are serious when it comes to liquor -- whether to ban it or not, and whether to ban it fully or partially.

Mizoram will vote on November 28 for 40 assembly seats to decide who will form the next government in this highly-literate and Chris-

tian-majority state.

The state has a total population of about 10 lakh people only, but elections here are being seen as very important for the Congress and Mizoram National Party (MNF), who have ruled Mizoram ever since it became a full-fledged state in 1987, as also for the BJP that sees it as the 'final frontier' in the North-East.

While the ruling Congress is against total prohibition, the main opposition MNF wants a complete ban. The BJP has taken

a middle path by proposing to ban the liquor coming from outside the state and encourage only locally produced ones.

"It (liquor) is an epidemic, a big plague in Mizoram. We are going to solve the drug and alcohol problem by a total prohibition of liquor. We will fight totally against the drugs," MNF President and former Chief Minister Zoramthanga told PTI in an interview.

When the state Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla was in office for his third

term, he introduced the Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition Act banning sale and consumption of alcohol effective from February 20, 1997.

In 2007, the Act was amended during the MNF chief minister Zoramthanga's rule to allow wine to be made from guavas and grapes, but with restrictions on the alcohol content and the volume possessed.

During Thanhawla's fifth term, Mizoram repealed prohibition on July 10, 2014.



**Gangtok on Sunday, 18 Nov**  
Temp: 13°C/07°C  
Forecast: Mostly cloudy, a couple of showers and a thunderstorm, mainly later  
Sunrise: 5:58 AM  
Sunset: 4:43 PM

### Suspected traffickers behind bars

**YOGEN THATAL**

**SINGTAM, 18 NOV:**

In quick follow-up to West Bengal police busting a suspected human trafficking gang at NJP railway station a few days back, an action from which 15 minors from Sikkim were also rescued, Singtam Police also effected the arrest of a woman from Aadarsh Gaon here and a man from Dikchu of being involved in the crime. The NJP rescue was reported on 14 November, Children's Day. The case remains under investigation.



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 18 NOV:**

**R**of Remanti Sangeet Academy, is currently on a national tour, and

today called on legendary singers Kavita Krishnamurthy and Usha Uthup, meetings, which Remanti shares, have filled her with



more enthusiasm and inspiration. The meetings went well, with Ms Krishnamurthy, upon learning where Remanti hails from, ex-

claimed, "You stay in the most beautiful State of India." She was also delighted to learn about Remanti Sangeet Academy and all that Remanti

has been trying to do to take the pursuit of music to newer heights in Sikkim.

The meeting with Ms Uthup was even more special because, as Remanti shares, it was her blessings at their last meeting which inspired her to open Remanti Sangeet Academy.

Needless to add, Ms Uthup was delighted to learn that the academy had been established and was doing well.

"Meeting the legendary singers and gathering their musical knowledge were lifetime achievements in themselves and I will continuously work hard for the progress of Music & Art in Sikkim," Remanti shares.

### RKS felicitates nine journo



**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 18 NOV:**

Rastriya Kavi Sangam, Sikkim, celebrated National Press Day at Rangpo Mandi Bazar today with the felicitation of nine journalists - Deepak Gurung, Pokhraj Rai, Deepak Mukhiya, Biswa Gurung, Suresh K Lama, Krish Mohan Prasad, Ketan Mangla, Mani Kumar Pradhan and Shiv

Darnal. Sanjay Agarwal, convener of the RKS informs that RKS has been organising Kavya Goshti from the past two months and that this was the third episode and was dedicated to feting journalists of the area.

The felicitations were handed over by chief guest for the day, Joseph Lepcha, president of the Press Club of Sikkim.

## Grenade attack on Sant Nirankari Mission congregation in Amritsar, 3 dead

**AMRITSAR, NOV 18 (PTI):** Three persons were killed and at least 10 injured in a grenade attack on a prayer hall brimming with around 200 devotees on the outskirts of the city on Sunday.

The blast occurred during a religious gathering of the Nirankari sect at Nirankari Bhavan in Adliwal village near Amritsar's Rajasansi, which is close to the international airport.

According to eyewitness accounts, the grenade was lobbed by bike-borne persons.

"A grenade was lobbed and three people have died in the inci-

dent while 10 have been injured in the incident, two of them critically," Inspector General of Police SS Parmar, who visited the incident spot, told reporters.

Quoting eyewitness accounts, the IG said the two accused were carrying a pistol and after hurling the explosive, they escaped from the site.

A hunt is on to nab them, he said.

He said about 200 devotees were inside the hall at the time of the incident. No CCTV was installed at the premises, according to preliminary investigations. Punjab

Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh condemned the attack.

After reviewing the law and order situation, he directed the Home Secretary, DGP (Law and Order) and DG Intelligence to rush to Rajasansi for supervising investigations.

Some eyewitness accounts said that two armed and masked persons, who were on a motorcycle forced their way inside the Bhavan by pointing a gun at a woman devotee who was on duty at the gate.

"After they gained entry, they threw a grenade-like object at the congregation and

escaped," said an eyewitness.

After the incident, the Bhavan was sealed by the police and security was stepped up at other 'Nirankari Bhavans' in the state. The Sant Nirankari Mission is a spiritual organisation.

Punjab was on an alert following an input claiming that a group of six to seven JeM terrorists were reportedly in the state, possibly in Ferozepur area.

The state was put on alert after four persons snatched a SUV from driver at gunpoint near Madhopur in Pathankot district last week.

## It's time to deliver, says India's vice-captain ahead of hockey World Cup

**BHUBANESWAR, NOV 18 (PTI):** The preparations are done and it is time to deliver in the tournament that matters the most after a mediocre year, Indian hockey team vice-captain Chinglensana Singh Kanguijam said Sunday ahead of the World Cup.

The mega event begins November 28 and will conclude on December 16 at the city's Kalinga Stadium.

"The past three months in particular have been very challenging for us with the training intensifying as it's important for us to peak at the World Cup. The

team is aware that this year could have been much better for us in terms of results but now is the time to do away with the bitterness of the past performances by doing well at the prestigious event," said Chinglensana.

Playing in the mid-field alongside skipper Manpreet Singh and youngsters Sumit and Nilakanta Sharma, Chinglensana exuded confidence about his team's prospects.

"Every single player has worked tremendously hard and it is time to convert all that into good results. I be-

lieve the World Cup will be a battle of mental strength as much as it is going to be about fitness and team strategies.

"It is an advantage that almost everyone in the team has the experience of playing top-quality matches in the Kalinga Stadium during the Hockey India League and are aware of the atmosphere the fans create here.

"It's also a plus point to have the Junior World Cup winners who have experienced 20,000 people cheering for them during the 2016 Junior World Cup in Lucknow," added the

Manipur-born player.

Chinglensana, who has so far played 199 international matches, is slated to complete a milestone on the opening day of India's campaign against South Africa.

"Yes, if everything goes right, I will be playing my milestone match in front of our home crowd and there is no better feeling than completing 200 matches for India in front of the fantastic Bhubaneswar crowd. It is one of my favourite venues in the world. I am looking forward to it and we are all eager to make a positive start," he said.

## Centre probing multi-crore post-matric scholarship scam: Vijay Sampla

**DHARMENDRA JOSHI**

**SHIMLA, NOV 18 (PTI):**

The central government is conducting an inquiry into an alleged multi-crore scam in post-matric scholarships for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Classes students, Union minister Vijay Sampla said Sunday.

Talking to PTI on phone, the Union minister of state for social justice and empowerment said, "We got reports about the scam from not only Himachal Pradesh but other parts of the country as well. Scam of Rs 450 crore was also reported from my home state Punjab."

"Taking cognisance of these reports, the Social Justice and Empowerment Department is already conducting an inquiry into the matter," Sampla said.

An audit of the distribution of post-matric scholarship was also on and appropriate action would be taken after getting a report on it, he said.

The department was considering taking corrective steps to check fraud and the scholarship money might now be directly deposited in the Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of eligible SC/BC/OBC students after checking their attendance in educational institutions, he added.

Sampla said the post-matric scholarship was launched in 2008-09 and under it the department used to provide an amount to the states.

Later, an online system was launched and the states directly deposited the scholarship amount to bank

accounts of the beneficiary students whose annual family income was below Rs 2 lakh. The amount was then revised to Rs 2.5 lakh, he said. The students would be provided the money for fees, books and other financial support as scholarship but there were several reports across the country that the money was being deposited in fake bank accounts, Sampla said.

An FIR was registered by the Himachal Pradesh Education Department in Shimla Friday through its official, Shakti Bhushan, who had conducted a preliminary inquiry into the alleged scam.

During the probe, it was found that 250 students of Kangra district took admissions in two centres of Fatehpur and Vadukar centres (Karnataka) of Lovely Profes-

sional University (LPU), they added.

The scholarship money was deposited in fake accounts which were opened using the students' Aadhaar details, they added.

A total scholarship amount of Rs 260 crore was distributed to students from the state from 2013-14 to 2016-17, a state education official said.

The official said only Rs 50 crore was distributed for students studying in about 2,500 government institutions in the state. Rs 210 crore was distributed to students shown to be studying in 300 private institutions, located in and outside Himachal Pradesh, he said.

A state official said the Himachal Pradesh government had already decided to hand over the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

### 3 trafficked children rescued in Assam

**HAILAKANDI (ASSAM), JAN 8 (PTI):**

Three children, allegedly trafficked and confined as bonded labourers, were rescued in a joint operation from three establishments in Assam's Hailakandi district. Acting on a tip-off that the minors were employed as child labourers, searches were conducted by the Labour Department, local police, and Childline and Child Welfare Committee, following which the children suspected to be aged below 14 years, were rescued, District Labour Officer Alimuddin Barbhuiya said today. The employers have been asked to provide

documents to prove age of the children, rescued yesterday.

"We are also looking into the need to subject the children to age-termination test. If the children are found to be younger than 14 years, we shall file cases against the employers under Section 67 of The Factories Act 1948 which provides for a fine upto Rs two lakh and jail term extending to two years for employing children below 14 years of age, Barbhuiya said. The boys were produced before the District Child Protection Society and presently under its custody.

### Govt to organise National Integration Week from Nov 25

**NEW DELHI, NOV 18 (PTI):**

The National Integration Week will be observed across the country beginning November 25 with an aim to foster and reinforce the spirit of communal harmony.

The government will organise meetings and seminars during the 'Qaumi Ekta Week' (National Integration Week) to emphasise on themes of secularism, anti-communalism and non-violence.

Besides, November 20 will be observed as

"Welfare of Minorities Day" when fraternal processions will be taken out in riot-prone towns, according to an official release.

November 21 will be observed as "Linguistic Harmony Day" when special literary functions and 'Kavi Sammelans' will be organised to enable people of each region to appreciate the linguistic heritage of other parts of India.

The release said November 22 will be observed as "Weaker Sections Day".





# SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

## Make Tourism Even More Hassle-Free

### *Hospitality should extend from facilities to policy for the sector to boom louder*

Just about every new construction in Gangtok is a hotel in the making. In fact, the hotel construction boom is not a uniquely Gangtok undertaking anymore and the entire region appears to be investing heavily in this sector. From homestays to 5-Star resorts and the entire spectrum in between, tourism is attracting enterprise at a hitherto unheard of scale. Time to take a pause, step back, evaluate and plan in earnest.

Tourism has marched strong in Sikkim, its infrastructural and locational disadvantages notwithstanding. Living in Sikkim, one tends to overlook just how handsomely this sector has grown in the State in the very recent past and it is on occasions like the recent string of bumper tourist seasons and the slow-down with winter, that a stock-taking becomes necessary. Sikkim, of late, has been receiving more visitors annually than it has people residing here! The Lonely Planet endorsement of Sikkim as the No. 1 destination to visit is a further reiteration of the State's still growing appeal. This needs to be leveraged more aggressively. To start with, Sikkim should work even more concertedly to ensure that visitors enjoy themselves here, impressed as much by the State's hospitality as by its obvious natural beauty. And when one speaks of hospitality, it is about more than just the smiles of taxi drivers and the hotel staff, it is also about the ease with which the guests can arrive and travel here – the rules and paperwork they need to negotiate.

Needless to add, this sector needs some ironing, but that falls in the policy-framing domain and one hopes wider consensus is developed to make Sikkim more tourist-friendly in how easily it can be accessed and how convenient moving around here can get. Before one proceeds, one needs to add that this process has improved manifold in the recent past as well.

Not so long ago, tourism in Sikkim was essentially about catering to the spillover from Darjeeling; hosting tourists who were left with a day or two on their Darjeeling itinerary. Some of the older hoteliers will attest to this. That is clearly no longer the case anymore. Sikkim enjoys all the standard attractions of hill-escapes and has also managed to add some more value to it. Apart from Casinos which are trying to develop a whole new clientele for tourism in Sikkim, the State's traditional strong points have been in focus for some years as well. Sikkim's potential for alpine style climbing escapes continues to be explored, albeit in fits and starts, and is being promoted by intrepid climbers. The appeal of its landscape, the significance of its religious history and the diversity of its indigenous cultures are well recognized and continue to mesmerize guests, making repeat visits an easy sell. It routinely figures among the recipients of tourism industry-related awards. Tourism-specific infrastructure, from hotels to foot trails to village homestays, is being developed across the State and village tourism has been announced as a mission pursuit by the State Government. Impressive additions have been made to the places to visit list, starting from Guru Rinpoche's statue at Samdrupse a decade and a half back to Char Dhaam at Solophok and Tathagatha Tsai at Rabongla since and now the Chenrezig statue in West Sikkim. All these investments and achievements are impressive and welcome, but are let down by the fact that policies and rules governing travel to and within Sikkim are regressive and tourist unfriendly. The fact that foreign tourists require a special permit to be able to even enter Sikkim delivers the first stumbling block. Admittedly, from a time when this permit had to once be applied for at embassies in their respective countries to now arriving at the border checkpoints here and getting their travel documents stamped, is a substantial improvement. Acquiring the permit is a token formality now, but the fact that it still needs to be acquired stretches out the infamous Indian red-tape that every foreign tourist instinctively dreads. Extra paperwork discourages tourists, and since information is never very clear, not everyone knows that this is a mere formality and that it takes only minutes to get stamped into Sikkim. And after that is the dampener that awaits every foreign tourist on a Sikkim visit – news that the more exciting and appealing destinations in the State remain out of bounds for foreigners. And then there is the frustration of realising that even travel within Sikkim has its unique complications which make impromptu changes in plans and itineraries nearly impossible.

One could go on and on, but the point has been made. For a State investing so much as Sikkim is on tourism and harbouring aspirations as high as the State does from this sector, the policy interventions required to make it more accessible and tourist-friendly need to be more forcefully voiced. No amount of promotion and publicity will deliver the tourist traffic Sikkim has potential for unless guests can holiday without worries of documents and logistics weighing them down. Commission agents can afford to live in the moment and not bother about long-term ramifications, policy makers and the stakeholders, however, cannot afford such slackness and need to constantly work at refining policy and rules to make holidays in Sikkim as hassle-free as possible. And while on this topic, irritations like the recent drama over route permits with Bengal will also need to be stamped out much faster because nothing spoils a holiday more than monumentally than a preponed, forced departure.

# Fine particle air pollution is a public health emergency hiding in plain sight

DOUGLAS BRUGGE &  
KEVIN JAMES LANE  
*theconversation.com*

Ambient air pollution is the largest environmental health problem in the United States and in the world more generally. Fine particulate matter smaller than 2.5 millionths of a meter, known as PM<sub>2.5</sub>, was the fifth-leading cause of death in the world in 2015, factoring in approximately 4.1 million global deaths annually. In the United States, PM<sub>2.5</sub> contributed to about 88,000 deaths in 2015 – more than diabetes, influenza, kidney disease or suicide.

Current evidence suggests that PM<sub>2.5</sub> alone causes more deaths and illnesses than all other environmental exposures combined. For that reason, one of us (Douglas Brugge) recently wrote a book to try to spread the word to the broader public.

Developed countries have made progress in reducing particulate air pollution in recent decades, but much remains to be done to further reduce this hazard. And the situation has gotten dramatically worse in many developing countries – most notably, China and India, which have industrialized faster and on vaster scales than ever seen before. According to the World Health Organization, more than 90 percent of the world's children breathe air so polluted it threatens their health and development.

As environmental health specialists, we believe the problem of fine particulate air pollution deserves much more attention, including in the United States. New research is connecting PM<sub>2.5</sub> exposure to an alarming array of health effects. At the same time, the Trump administration's efforts to support the fossil fuel industry could increase these emissions when the goal should be further reducing them.

#### WHERE THERE'S SMOKE ...

Particulate matter is produced mainly by burning things. In the United States, the majority of PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions come from industrial activities, motor vehicles, cooking and fuel combustion, often including wood. There is a similar suite of sources in developing countries, but often with more industrial production and more burning of solid fuels in homes.

Wildfires are also an important and growing source, and winds can transport wildfire emissions hundreds of miles from fire regions. In August 2018, environmental regulators in Michigan reported that fine particles from wildfires burning in California were impacting their state's air quality.

Most deaths and many illnesses caused by particulate air pollution are cardiovascular – mainly heart attacks and strokes. Obviously, air pollution affects the lungs because it enters them as we breathe. But once PM enters the lungs, it causes an inflammatory response that sends signals throughout the body, much as a bacterial infection would. Additionally, the smallest particles and fragments of larger particles can leave the lungs and travel through the blood.

Emerging research continues to expand the boundaries of health impacts from PM<sub>2.5</sub> exposure. To us, the most notable new concern is that it appears to affect brain development and has adverse cognitive impacts. The smallest particles can even travel directly from the nose into the brain via the olfactory nerve.

There is growing evidence that PM<sub>2.5</sub>, as well as even smaller particles called ultrafine particles, affect children's central nervous systems. They also can accelerate the pace of cognitive decline in adults and increase the risk in susceptible adults of developing Alzheimer's disease.

PM<sub>2.5</sub> has received much of the research and policy attention in recent years, but other types of particles also raise concerns. Ultrafines are less studied than PM<sub>2.5</sub> and are not yet considered in risk estimates or air pollution regulations. Coarse PM, which is larger and typically comes from physical processes like tire and brake wear, may also pose health risks.

#### REGULATORY PUSH AND PULL

The progress that developed countries have made in addressing air pollution, especially PM, demonstrates that regulation works. Before the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was established in 1970, air quality in Los Angeles, New York and other major U.S. cities bore a striking resemblance to Beijing and Delhi today. Increasingly stringent air pollution regulations enacted since then have protected public health and undoubtedly saved millions of lives.

But it wasn't easy. The first regulatory limits on PM<sub>2.5</sub> were proposed in the 1990s, after two important studies showed that it had major health impacts. But industry push-back was fierce, and included accusations that the science behind the studies was flawed or even fraudulent. Ultimately federal regulations were enacted, and follow-up studies and reanalysis confirmed the original findings.

Now the Trump administration is working to reduce the role of science in shaping air pollution policy and reverse regulatory decisions by the Obama administration. One new appointee to the EPA's Science Advisory Board, Robert Phalen, a professor of medicine at the University of California, Irvine, is known for asserting that modern air is actually too clean for optimal health, even though the empirical evidence does not support this argument.

On Oct. 11, 2018, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler disbanded a critical air pollution science advisory group that dealt specifically with PM regulation. Critics called this an effort to limit the role that current scientific evidence plays in establishing national air quality standards that will protect public health with an adequate margin of safety, as required under the Clean Air Act.

Opponents of regulating PM<sub>2.5</sub> in the 1990s at least acknowledged that science had a role to play, although they tried to discredit studies that supported the case for regulation. The new approach seems to be to try to cut scientific evidence out of the process entirely.

#### NO TIME FOR COMPLACENCY

In late October 2018, the World Health Organization convened a special conference on global air pollution and health. The agency's heightened interest appears to be motivated by risk estimates that show air pollution to be a concern of similar magnitude to more traditional public health targets, such as diet and physical activity.

Conferees endorsed a goal of reducing global deaths from air pollution by two-thirds by 2030. This is a highly aspirational target, but it may focus renewed attention on strategies such as reducing economic barriers that make it hard to deploy pollution control technologies in developing countries.

In any case, past and current research clearly show that now is not the time to move away from regulating air pollution that arises largely from burning fossil fuels, in the United States or abroad.

*[Douglas Brugge is Professor of Public Health and Community Medicine, Tufts University; Kevin James Lane is Assistant Professor of Environmental Health, Boston University]*

# For the sake of kids, embrace math

ANDY HARGREAVES & PASI SAHLBERG  
*theconversation.com*

Mathematics is causing headaches in schools across Canada, Australia and many other parts of the world. Teachers in both Canada and Australia feel neither competent nor confident in math and, frankly, they are the first to admit it.

As researchers, educators and authors who have advised globally about best practices for improving learning and achievement, we have had opportunities to notice common trends and obstacles, and notable gains, in math education.

Up close, we've heard from teachers in Ontario, Canada, and in Australia and we've considered how people can best collaborate to protect and grow students' love of learning.

We've seen that some math improvement efforts get bogged down by fears of the unknown. Others get an initial spark but soon lose energy. Let's start with the bad news.

#### 'WAY MORE EFFECTIVE?'

In response to a year-on-year decline in math scores, Ontario, for example, has started to give math achievement high priority. An underlying principle of the Ontario mathematics curriculum is to "investigate ideas and concepts through problem solving." A September report from Canadian think tank The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity pointed out that inquiry-based approaches to mathematics actually get better results than more "basic" alternatives.

But many parents and some educators remain skeptical, if not downright hostile, towards unfamiliar math strategies.

In Australia, critics of inquiry-based mathematics curricula have suggested a change of course. In a recent story in the Sydney Morning Herald, with the headline "There is a better

way of teaching bored Australian students," a research fellow at Australian think tank the Centre for Independent Studies lamented that "explicit, direct instruction across the board is way more effective in achieving higher student

strategy consumed all the attention and left math with too little oxygen. It's almost impossible to reform literacy and math all at once — the scope is too great, so the effort either leaves one of them to fall by the wayside by default or just

feel competent in math and confident enough to teach students what mathematics is and what mathematicians do. Many schools also have shortages of colleagues with the expertise to help them.

Some of the current an-



outcomes." One could not help but wonder how many parents might have been nodding their heads over their coffee.

But while we can't resolve the math problem simply by getting "back to basics," we can revive good ideas about math education.

#### MORE OXYGEN PLEASE

From the early 2000s, Ontario's government pledged to improve achievement in literacy and math (or numeracy, as it was then called). The government invested significant resources and established a Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat to spearhead the effort.

Principals made literacy their top priority. Expert coaches worked alongside classroom teachers, demonstrating effective strategies and giving teachers feedback on how to use them with students.

The gains in literacy were impressive and are now the envy of the world.

But, like in a number of other countries, the literacy

burns teachers out.

It's time to give math reform the same treatment as literacy. But math reform has to confront an obstacle that literacy reform didn't: Almost every primary and elementary teacher in many countries, including Canada and Australia, loves reading, writing and books, as do many of the kids. Literacy reform had a lot to build on. This is not the case with math.

In interviews one of us conducted last year with more than 200 Ontario educators, teachers would say things like: "I'm not a math person."

One principal reflected how they had all been "amazing readers and writers." But she also wondered: "Did we share that similar passion and appetite for numeracy?"

FEAR OF MATH VS. HIGH-ER SALARY

Compared to literacy, there is a shortage of teachers who

swers to this problem — such as more hours allocated to how to teach math during elementary teacher training, or assigning professional development days to improving math teaching — won't do any harm. But we must also address how confident and comfortable, and not just minimally competent, elementary teachers need to feel about math.

In Ontario, for example, 80 percent of elementary teachers have no university qualification in math. However, in Finland, one of the world's leading performers in mathematics, around half of elementary teachers have studied math or science and how to teach them effectively during their university degrees.

Second, in Singapore, the world's No. 1 performer in math, elementary teachers are paid as much as engineers when they start teaching. This means students who are good at math choose teaching based

on their mission and purpose in life, not on salary differentials. Perhaps Canada and Australia need to think harder about how to attract more people with math and science backgrounds into elementary teaching.

#### TEACHER AND PARENT AID

Third, improving teaching mathematics should be built on collaboration between experienced teachers and those with less confidence in schools. This coaching should focus not just on how to teach math but also on teachers' relationship to math generally.

Intensive coaching was a big factor in raising literacy achievement. Because math expertise is now thinner, teachers need more resources and resourcefulness in classrooms.

Last, parents have a responsibility for their children's math development too. But two-thirds of surveyed Ontario parents don't know how to help their elementary-aged children with mathematics.

Supporting school interventions known as family math that help parents converse about numbers and shapes with their children as easily as they might about words could do a lot to rectify this.

We need to make math as much a priority now as literacy has been. We need to get teachers in primary or elementary schools just as comfortable as well as competent with math and how to teach it successfully to all children as they are with reading in their lives as well as in their classes.

If we avoid falling for simplistic solutions, then eventually, the words "I am not a math person" may become a thing of the past.

*[Andy Hargreaves is Research Professor in Education, Boston College; Pasi Sahlberg is Professor of Education Policy, UNSW]*



# Only 15 women candidates in fray for Mizoram Assembly election

TRIDEEP LAHKAR

**AIZAWL, Nov 18 (PTI):** Only 15 candidates out of the over 200 in fray for the Mizoram Assembly elections are women even as the state has more female voters as compared to male.

The BJP, which has never won a seat in the state, has fielded the highest number of six women candidates.

Its state president J V Hluna said Mizo women were not traditionally interested in politics, but now they were participating in social activities and it has submitted a memorandum to all political parties to field women candidates.

The BJP is followed by the Zoram Thar, an Evangelist political party, which has fielded five women aspirants.

While the outgoing government's minister Vanlalawmpui Chawngthu is fighting on a Congress ticket, two women are contesting for the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM). The NCP has given ticket to only one woman.

The powerful Mizo National Front (MNF)



has not fielded any woman candidate for the election. MNF president Zoramthanga told PTI, "We fielded women candidates in 1987 and we had even a woman minister. But later in our women wing, we don't have suitable candidate."

In all, there are 201 candidates in the state which goes to poll on November 28 to elect members for the 40-member Assembly. The assistant professor of the Regional

Institute of Paramedical and Nursing Sciences (RIPANS) R Lalawmpui said that women in Mizoram had never thought about the issue seriously as it was their mindset that politics was for men only.

Lalawmpui, however, said that given a chance she would take part in politics as she felt that young women should join politics.

First time voter and a college student R Lallaw-

mawmi said "While voting, absence of women candidate will not cross my mind. "In fact, I never thought about it. I'll not take part in politics as I am not interested," said the teenager, who is a member of the U-19 state cricket team and a sub-junior state badminton player.

"Every political party has a women's front, but hardly any woman candidate," Aizawl District Basketball Association

general secretary Emanuel L. Ralte said. According to the final roll published on September 27 this year for the Assembly polls, Mizoram has a total voter of 7,68,181 persons, of which 3,74,496 are males and 3,93,685 females.

Barring Mamit district, the remaining seven districts of Kolasib, Aizawl, Champhai, Serchhip, Lunglei, Lawngtlai and Siahia have higher number of female voters than male electorate.

# Only 3.5 lakh out of 40 lakh so far apply for inclusion in NRC

**GUWAHATI, Nov 18 (PTI):** About 4.5 lakh people, out of the total 40 lakh, who were excluded in the draft National Register of Citizens (NRC), have claimed that they are Indian nationals, two months after the window opens for claims and objections in the Supreme Court-monitored exercise, sources said Sunday.

Besides, less than 200 applications have been received by the authorities challenging the inclusion of the names of suspected illegal immigrants in the NRC, a list of Assam's residents. So far, about 4.5 lakh people have submitted applications for inclusion of their names in the NRC and they have submitted relevant documents claiming that they are Indian citizens, a source privy to the development said.

The issue of low turnout in the claims and objections period was also discussed at Saturday's high-level meeting in New Delhi attended by Home Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP president Amit Shah, Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Home Secretary Rajiv Gauba, Director of Intelligence Bureau Rajiv Jain, among others.

The Supreme Court has also finalised a set of standard operating procedure (SOP) for disposal of claims and objections in the updation of the NRC.

The draft NRC was published on July 30 and included the names of 2.9 crore people out of the total applications of 3.29 crore.

There has been a huge controversy over exclusion of 40 lakh people from the draft NRC.

Following a directive of the Supreme Court, the



process of filing claims and objections to the draft NRC began on September 25 and it will come to an end on December 15.

Initially, the apex court had allowed the claimants to rely on any of the 10 documents -- land documents, permanent residential certificate issued from outside the state, passport, Life Insurance Corporation of India policy, any licence or certificate issued by any government authority. Document showing service or employment under the government or public sector undertaking, bank or post office accounts, birth certificates issued by a competent authority, educational certificate issued by boards or universities and records or processes pertaining to court provided they are part of processing in a judicial or revenue court. However, on November 1, the court allowed five additional documents to reply upon for inclusion of names in the NRC.

The additional papers are -- 1951 NRC, electoral roll up to March 24, 1971, citizenship certificate, refugee registration certificate and ration card. For the claims and objections process, forms are available in 2,500 'Seva Kend-

ras' in Assam, where people can file their appeal in their respective areas, another source said.

People can file corrections to their names that are in the draft and also raise objections against suspected foreigners.

The updation of the NRC, the massive exercise to identify genuine Indian nationals living in Assam, excluded over 40 lakh people from the draft list published on July 30, creating a huge political controversy.

The exercise is aimed at identifying illegal immigrants in the state that borders Bangladesh was carried out only in Assam, which faced influx of people from Bangladesh since the early 20th century.

When the NRC was first prepared in Assam way back in 1951, the state had 80 lakh citizens then. As per the 2011 census, Assam's total population is over 3.11 crore. The process of identification of illegal immigrants in Assam has been widely debated and become a contentious issue in the state's politics.

A six-year agitation demanding identification and deportation of illegal immigrants was launched by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) in 1979.

## Tripura to host 7th International Tourism Mart from Nov 22



**AGARTALA, Nov 18 (PTI):** Tripura will be hosting a 3-day tourism fair from November 22 to promote the tourism industry in the northeastern states of the country, a minister said Sunday.

The 3-day long International Tourism Mart would begin here from November 22 with an objective to promote tourism in the northeastern states. We are hosting the event with funding from the Ministry of Tourism," state Tourism Minister Pranajit Singha Roy told a press conference here.

The International Tourism Mart is an annual event that is held in the northeastern states. Tripura will be hosting it for the first time this year. The estimated bud-

get of the fair this year is Rs 2.6 crore.

The minister said that at least 60 tour operators from 18 foreign countries including Bangladesh, USA, Canada, Australia, Japan, China, Thailand, South Africa and Russia would attend the fair and engage in dialogue with the state tour operators, attend seminars and visit different tourist spots of the state.

"We want to promote tourism and reach out to the international buyers. Presence of the international tour operators would help achieving our objective of promoting tourism," he said.

Singha Roy also added that cultural events would be arranged for foreign tour operators at

Neermahal at Melaghar in Sipahijala district, located about 55 km from here.

Neermahal, known as the water palace, was the summer palace of Tripura's last ruler, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, which was built about 100 years ago. Tripura, a princely state, which joined the Indian territory on October 15, 1949. "Union Tourism Minister Alphons Kanthanam would attend the mart with 100 domestic tourist operators from the northeastern states," Singha Roy said.

He also added that handicraft items of the states, tea, pineapple and traditional apparel would be given to the tour operators as gift for promoting tourism.

## Northeastern states agree to implement RERA

**NEW DELHI, Nov 18 (PTI):** Nearly two years after the Real Estate Regulation Act (RERA) was enacted by the Parliament, six northeastern states have finally agreed to implement the law, paving way for protecting the interest of home-buyers in these states.

Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim had failed to notify RERA due to land and other issues.

The development comes after a team of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA) Ministry visited the northeastern states on October 26 and held a workshop with their representatives and discussed the issues coming in the way of notifying the Act.

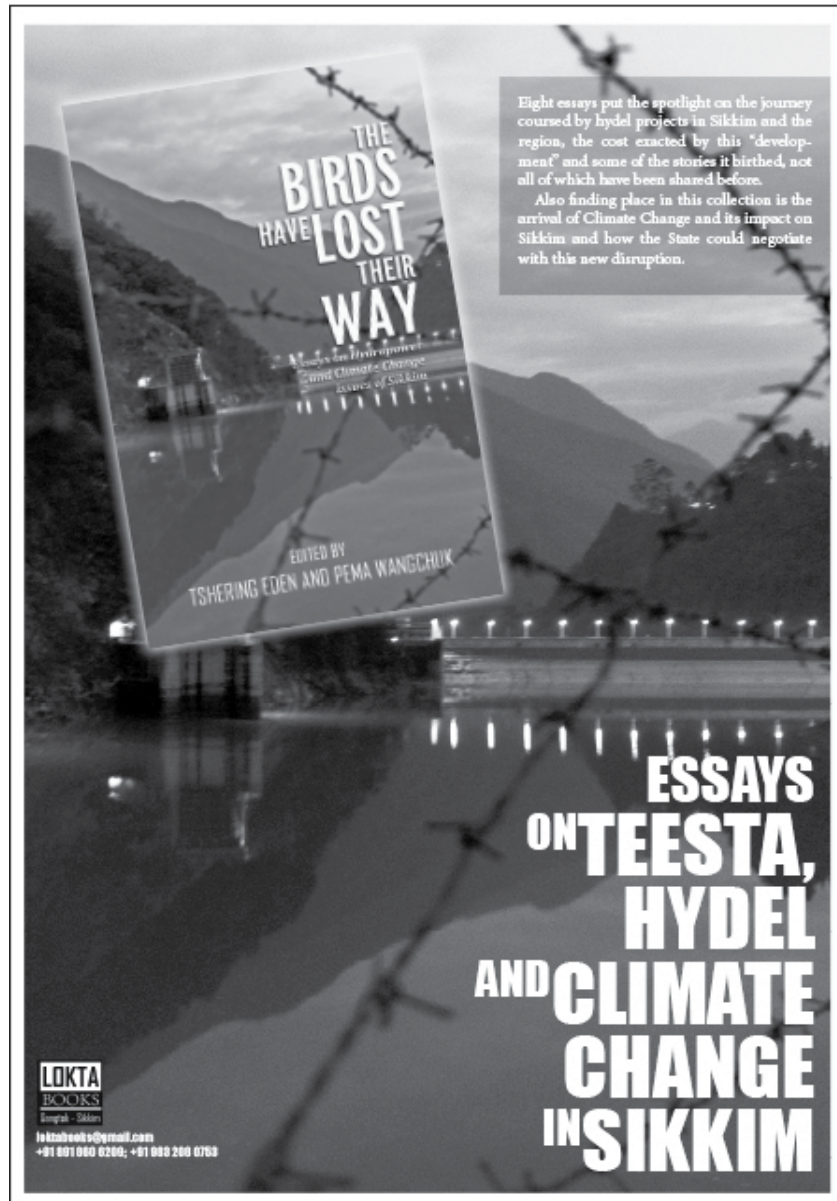
"Northeastern states have agreed to implement RERA. We are helping them in notifying the RERA rules," HUA Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra told PTI.

Sources said representatives of these states had some issues about the implementation of RERA, but the ministry officials cleared all their doubts in the last month's workshop.

The Act, which provides proper protection to home buyers, was enacted by the Parliament in 2016. The states were given powers to notify their respective rules and appoint regulatory authorities.

All states and Union Territories in the country had notified the rules under RERA, except the six northeastern states and West Bengal. The Act is not applicable in Jammu and Kashmir.

According to the ministry, 33,750 real estate projects have been registered under RERA, while 26,018 agents have been regis-



## No promise for Union Territory in Bodo areas in Assam: Interlocutor

**NEW DELHI, Nov 18 (PTI):** The Central government has not given any promise to any group to constitute a Union Territory for the Bodo dominated areas in Assam, Centre's interlocutor for talks with Assam-based militant groups A B Mathur said Sunday.

The comments come amid strong protests by some non-Bodo organisations in Assam against any such move.

"It is absolutely wrong. No promise has been given to anyone," Mathur told PTI when

asked whether the central government has given any promise to constitute a union territory in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) in Assam.

Mathur said he did not have any formal meeting with any delegation of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in the recent past.

"Two-three leaders of the ABSU came to see me four days ago. It was not a formal meeting. I did not give any promise to them. All news about the Union Territory is abso-

lutely wrong," he said.

Director General (Special Branch) of the Assam Police Pallav Bhattacharjee said all speculation about the Union Territory for the BTAD was completely wrong. "There is no question of giving any promise to any group on constitution of a Union Territory for the BTAD," he told PTI.

Following the speculation a number of organisations in Assam have called for a 'bandh' against the reported move.



# When you have good team, you have to perform well: Harmanpreet

**PROVIDENCE, Nov 18 (PTI):** India captain Harmanpreet Kaur said that her team is bound to perform well because of the quality in the side which was proved during their thumping 48-run win against Australia in the final group league encounter of the ICC Women's World T20.

India were already in semi-finals after winning their first three matches but didn't let the intensity down against the formidable 'Southern Stars' in an inconsequential last group league encounter.

"When you have a good team, you have to perform well," Harmanpreet said at the end of the match on Saturday.

After a below-par fielding performance against Pakistan, Indian women were excellent against Australia.

"I am very happy with the (performance from the) girls. We worked very hard and today, we fielded well. I am proud of the girls. Hope the sort of partnership I had with Smriti (68 in 7 overs) can keep coming."



Opener Smriti Mandhana, who finally converted a start, got 83 off 55 balls and thanked Veda Krishnamurthy for insisting on a DRS when she thought the she was gone.

"First three matches I got starts but couldn't convert it. So I just wanted to score big today," said Mandhana, adding, "Veda insisted on the review, and thanks to her we got 20-30 runs extra."

Harmanpreet's deputy also echoed her

skipper's sentiments that both bowling and fielding were top notch against the Aussies.

"The way we bowled and fielded today was the best of the four games, but batting-wise the performance against New Zealand was better."

Team's youngest member Jemimah Rodrigues said that endeavour will be to keep up the momentum in the upcoming semi-finals on November 23.

"I think it's import-

ant not just because it's Australia, but for ourselves and our team, because we've got the momentum," Rodrigues was quoted as saying by ICC website.

"So we need to keep that momentum, keep doing the things, don't focus mainly on the results. So I think it plays a huge impact on our team and I think we look forward to it, but not get carried away and try to do even better in the semi-finals," Rodrigues said.

Rodrigues said that Harmanpreet's epic 171 during last year's ODI World Cup also came up for discussion during the team meeting on the eve of the Australia match.

"Yes, (that knock) was definitely discussed (before the match)," revealed Rodrigues. "In our meetings, it's always good to remember the good stuff we've done. And it plays an impact and motivates each other. So we have spoken about that."

## 'Bold' England seal Sri Lanka series and Root wants more

**KANDY, Nov 18 (AFP):** Captain Joe Root set his sights on taking England to the top of the world rankings after his spin trio finished off Sri Lanka in the second Test on Sunday to seal the series with a match to spare.

England needed just 30 minutes on the fifth day to take the final three Sri Lanka wickets. Jack Leach got last man Malinda Pushpakumara caught and bowled to claim his first five-wicket Test haul.

Moeen Ali took four wickets and Adil Rashid one as England's three frontline spinners accounted for the whole innings, as well as 18 of Sri Lanka's 20 wickets in the game overall.

Root's 124 in England's second innings also played a key role in the 57-run victory and earned him the man-of-the-match award.

Celebrating England's first away series win since beating South Africa in 2015-16 and his first away triumph as captain, Root sees England -- who are currently ranked third in

the world -- challenging India for the top Test team spot.

"It was a brilliant Test match," said Root, whose team had to twice fight back after their top order batsmen gave away cheap wickets.

"It ebbed and flowed throughout, like against India in the summer, and it's pleasing to see another close game go our way."

"We said we'd come out here and play bold cricket, and be courageous. It's easy to talk a good game but we've backed it up," Root said. "We have to keep looking to improve. The team has grown in the last 18 months but we are not the finished article. We want to get to number one in the world and that means performing in all conditions around the world."

Sri Lanka needed 301 in their second innings to register an upset win but managed just 243 at the Pallekele ground.

They started the day needing 75 more runs and with three wickets

in hand had an outside chance.

After Niroshan Dickwella was caught by Ben Stokes off Moeen Ali for 35 -- the first wicket of the morning -- Sri Lanka's hopes were all but extinguished.

Moeen then struck No. 10 batsman Suranga Lakmal, the Sri Lanka skipper, on the pad next ball for a strong lbw appeal which was turned down. He bowled Lakmal his very next delivery.

Pushpakumara lasted only eight balls before chipping the ball back to Leach and the game was over.

Lakmal insisted his side had been "unlucky". But England's triumph followed a crushing 211-run win in the first Test in Galle, and was set up by masterful performances from Leach, Ali and Rashid.

The spinners were dominant for both sides, as Sri Lanka's Dilruwan Perera took seven wickets in the game and Aki-la Dananjaya -- who now goes off for an investigation into his bowling action -- eight. "It feels good to have three spinners in the team. We all know our roles and help each other out. It's nice to make history and hopefully we can carry that on now," said Rashid. Leach, playing just his third Test, said the game had been "unbelievable".

Root insisted that England will not ease up for the third and final Test which starts in Colombo on Friday.

He faces some tough selection choices after stand-in wicketkeeper Ben Foakes again shone with the bat -- hitting a crucial unbeaten 65 in the second innings -- just as Jonny Bairstow steps up claims for a recall after injury.

Sri Lanka will be looking to strengthen their rebuilding, said coach Chandika Hathurusingha. "We're looking at the bigger picture," he said.

"This is the first series we lost this year. We won against South Africa 2-0. In these two games there were very close games. We had the opportunity to win both games at times."

"England played better cricket than us. We have to accept that. We have to learn from these mistakes," he added.

## 14th edition of children's festival begins

**NEW DELHI, Nov 18 (PTI):** The 14th edition of international children's theatre festival, 'JashneBachpan', was inaugurated here Saturday evening with folk dance performances from Assam, Rajasthan, Punjab, Manipur among other states. Organised by the National School of Drama (NSD), the opening ceremony of the theatre festival saw "Udaan", an act comprising of four presentations by groups -- Thangata Pung Cholam (Manipur), Kalboliya (Rajasthan), Gotipua (Odisha) and Bhanga/folk song (Punjab).

Speaking at the event, Arun Goel, Secretary, Ministry of Culture, said that festivals like "JashneBachchan help children to develop their personality". "Theatre is something which is not given to us by the colonial powers, rather it is our own art form which was born in our own land and has been practised since ages," Goel said.

The nine-day theatre festival will see performances from Switzerland, Sri Lanka and Indonesia along with their Indian counterparts here.

Abdul Latif Khatana, the chief of NSD's Theatre in Education Company, shared the highlight's of this year's edition.

"We have plays talking about various issues be it gender discrimination or parent-child relationship. We also have theatrical interpretation of Ramayana and Alice & Wonderland. This time we have three-year old play group to 133-year old play group," he said.

The drama school also invited about 800 underprivileged children from various NGOs across Delhi and NCR to "inculcate enthusiasm for art and culture along with entertainment at a global platform".

## Ireland's 113-year wait over after historic win over All Blacks

**ANDY BULL the Gaurdian**

In the minutes before kick-off, the All Blacks' Steve Hansen handed over a wodge of notes to Ireland's coach, Joe Schmidt. What was it Steve? A card? A letter? A contract? No, Hansen explained later, it was €760. He had needed a few extra tickets for the game and the only way to do it was to ask Schmidt to buy them for him. This game was such a hot ticket that even Hansen had to pull strings to get people in. But then the Irish had been waiting 113 years for this, ever since they first played, and first lost to the All Blacks here in Dublin back in 1905. Ask around Dublin, or any other place Irish fans were watching on Saturday night, and they will tell you the wait was worth it.

There are plenty of good yarns about Ireland's home matches against the All Blacks in that time. They are all heartbreakers, though, not a happy ending among them. They had played 16 home Tests against New Zealand before this one, lost 15 and drawn one. It all added up to a lot of ifs, buts, glorious stories about players who almost did, teams who couldn't quite, and wins that nearly were. Like the one draw, in 1973, which was settled in the end by a freak gust of wind that blew Barry McGann's last-minute conversion just wide of the upright. Or at least, that's what they'll tell you.



Or the 6-5 loss in 1963, Ireland scuppered this time by an English referee who disallowed a fine try by the flanker Eamon Maguire. They say the All Black captain, Wilson Whineray, said himself the score was good, and should have stood. Then there were the last-minute twists. In 1978 Ireland were tied 6-6 in injury time when Andy Dalton snuck around the front of the lineup to score the match-winner. Or 2012, when Aaron Cruden missed his first attempt at the match-winning conversion but made the second after the ref allowed him to take it again because Ireland had charged off the line early.

That loss, 24-22, was at the end of Joe Schmidt's first season with the team. It was a watershed. The result was the

same as always but everything else was about to change. Five years on, Steve Hansen says that Ireland have just become the best team in the world and the favourites for next year's World Cup. Schmidt wasn't having it. But it is true that in the two years since they last lost to New Zealand, in the revenge leg after their famous first-ever win against them in Chicago, Ireland have won 11 Tests out of 12, compared to New Zealand's 10 out of 13.

So the Irish were not favourites for this match, exactly, but you wouldn't have called them underdogs either. Hansen certainly wanted them to feel the pressure of it, thinking, perhaps, that expectations might get to them. They didn't. During the All Black haka, Ireland's players lined up shoulder to

shoulder and took a step forward together, to meet the challenge. That set the tone for what was, as Schmidt said, one of the great collective performances. You can't start name-checking the standout Irish players without running through the entire side.

Peter O'Mahony won man of the match just because of all that dirty work he did in defence, diving down into the breakdown like he was ferreting around to find a set of keys his kids had dropped into the waste bin. At one point O'Mahony saved a near-certain try by whipping a grubber kick away from Ben Smith just as he was closing in on the line and running full tilt. It was a kind of high-speed conjuring trick.

Now you see it, Ben, now you don't. But O'Mahony was only one hero among many. Here were Devin Toner and James Ryan, laying waste to Brodie Retallick and Sam Whitelock, the world's best pair of locks. There was Keith Earls, hopping and skipping through the New Zealand line like he was running barefoot over broken glass. And Kieran Marmion, appearing as if by magic to make a crucial cover tackle on Rieko Ioane just as he was kicking for the Irish try line, Rob Kearney, here, there, and everywhere, at full back. And Jacob Stockdale, young enough to be foolish enough to try to chip the ball over Retallick even though he had made a mess of the same move moments earlier.

## Creation of small states only way to solve political, economic disparities: NFNS

**DIGAMBAR PATOWARY**

**NEW DELHI, Nov 18 (PTI):** Creation of small states is the only way to solve political, social and economic disparities, a body of organisations spearheading separate state movements has claimed.

The National Federation of New States (NFNS), a conglomerate eight separate state movement bodies, has been demanding regions of Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Bodoland and Karbi in Assam, Gorkhaland in West Bengal, Kukiland in Manipur, Tripraland in Tripura, Poorvanchal in Uttar Pradesh and Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh be given statehood.

Political regimes have been neglecting demands for creation of separate states and only before an election, political parties try to pacify people demanding separate statehood with assurances to fulfil their demand, NFNS general secretary Munish Tamang alleged.

To put more pressure on the

Centre to create states on the basis of language, ethnicity and economy, the organisation in a meeting on Wednesday here has also decided to launch an movement.

"The fulfilment of the longstanding demand of creation of small states is the only way to ameliorate the prevalent political, social and economic disparity of regions demanding separate statehood," Tamang said.

During the meeting leaders of separate state movements, also chalked out new strategies to intensify the agitation for creation of new states.

The NFNS called upon all regional and national political parties to engage with the idea of creation of new states in the country keeping in mind the Constitution of India.

Harkha Bahadur Chetri, one of the pioneers of the Gorkhaland movement, strongly opposed the manner in which the political dispensation both in New Delhi and West

Bengal has ignored the demands of a separate state of Gorkhaland.

He asked the Gorkha people to come together and fight for their demands. "Self-representational aspirations being the foundation and corner-stone of democracy and as a true democratic country, the government must find ways to accommodate the aspirations of the people to represent themselves administratively, socially and politically," Chetri said. Shrineewas Khandewale a prominent leader of the Vidarbha statehood movement claimed that it is a myth that man-aging a large state is viable."

Citing the example of Kerala, he said it is much smaller than Maharashtra, but the southern state is better managed and more developed.

"It (a large state) is not so as would be clear from various reports of the government and Reserve Bank of India," he said.

He called upon all bodies fighting for separate states to put pressure

on the government to formulate a procedure for giving statehood to the regions.

"People of my region will demand from all political parties seeking votes in the coming general elections to take a stand on Vidarbha's statehood demand."

"We have enough assurances from political parties and now we need action for creation of a new state of Vidarbha", Khandewale added. NFNS secretary and president All Bodo Students' Union ( ABSU) Pramod Boro said the NFNS will continue pressing for creation of new states in a democratic and non-violent manner, and in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

The ABSU had spearheaded the Bodoland movement in Assam.

"To counter so-called mainstream politics by some opportunist individuals we must be united and raise our collective voice as much as we can as it is already too late."

"If these are not resolved in due

time, some culturally rich communities may also lose their identity and become part of uncultured group of people and the meaning and objective of freedom will be hopelessly," said Boro. He said a separate Bodoland state movement has brought ethnic Bodo tribals together.

"Now, Bodos of the world are united for the cause of Bodoland state and our movement is heading towards achieving the goal," Boro said. Mangal Debburma, a noted leader of the Tripraland movement, alleged that ethnic tribal communities of Tripura became minorities in their own land due to influx of Bengali Hindus from Bangladesh in the state.

"If influx from Bangladesh continues into Tripura, we will at a loss of identity and culture totally. Only a separate state for tribals of Tripura can save our identity and culture," Debburma said.

He added that a separate Tripraland statehood agitation will be more intense in the state.



# Death toll rises to 76 in California fire with winds ahead

**CHICO (CALIFORNIA), NOV 18 (AP):** Northern California crews battling the country's deadliest wildfire in a century were bracing for strong winds, with gusts up to 50 miles per hour, creating the potential to erode gains they have made in containing a disaster that has killed at least 76 and levelled a town.

Even as hundreds of searchers sift through the rubble in the town of Paradise looking for the dead, nearly 1,300 people remain unaccounted for more than a week after the fire sparked in Butte County, Sheriff Kory Honea announced Saturday night. Authorities stressed that the long roster does not mean they believe all those people are missing.

Honea pleaded with fire evacuees Saturday to review the list of those reported as unreachable by family and friends and call if they are safe.

Deputies have located hundreds of people to date, but the overall number keeps growing because they are adding more names, including those from the disaster's chaotic early hours, Honea said.

"It's really very important for you to take a look at the list and call us if you're on the list," he said.

The remains of five more people were found Saturday, including four in the decimated town of Paradise and one in nearby Concow, bringing the



number of dead to 76.

Honea said among the dead was Lolene Rios, 56, whose son Jed tearfully told KXTV in Sacramento that his mother "had endless amount of love for me".

President Donald Trump toured the area Saturday, joined by California's outgoing and incoming governors, both Democrats who have traded sharp barbs with the Republican administration.

He also visited Southern California, where firefighters were making progress on a wildfire that tore through communities west of Los Angeles from Thousand Oaks to Malibu,

killing three people.

The president pledged the full support of the federal government. Gov. Jerry Brown and Governor-elect Gavin Newsom thanked him for coming out.

"We've never seen anything like this in California, we've never seen anything like this yet. It's like total devastation," Trump said as he stood amid the ruins of Paradise.

Rain was forecast for mid-week, which could help firefighters but also complicate the search for remains.

Northern California's Camp Fire has destroyed nearly 10,000 homes and torched

233 square miles (603 square kilometres).

It is 55 per cent contained.

The fire zone in Northern California is to some extent Trump country, and that enthusiasm was on display as dozens of people cheered and waved flags as his motorcade went by.

Kevin Cory, a wildfire evacuee who lost his home in Paradise, praised Trump for coming to a state that is often at odds with the White House.

"I think that California's been really horrible to him and the fights. I mean they're suing him," he said. "It's back and forth between the state and the

feds. It's not right."

But for the most part, survivors, some who had barely escaped and no longer had homes, were too busy packing up what little they had left or seeking help to pay much attention to the president's visit.

Michelle Mack Couch, 49, waited in line to get into a Federal Emergency Management Agency center in the city of Chico. She needed a walker for her elderly mother and tags for her car.

"Let's hope he gets us some help," said Couch, who voted for Trump and whose rental home burned down last week. But as far as taking time out to watch the president, she said wryly, "We don't have a TV anymore."

Honea expressed hope that Trump's visit would help with recovery, saying the tour by the Republican president and California's Democratic leaders "signals a spirit of cooperation here that ultimately benefit this community and get us on a path toward recovery".

In Southern California, Trump also met briefly at an airport hangar with families and first responders touched by the shooting at the Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks more than a week ago.

Trump called the shooting at a country music bar, which left 12 dead, "a horrible, horrible event."

## Police called on diplomats as APEC summit tensions boil over

**PORT MORESBY, NOV 18 (AFP):** Police were called when Chinese officials attempted to "barge" into the office of Papua New Guinea's foreign minister, it emerged Sunday, as APEC summit tensions boiled over.

The Chinese delegates "tried to barge in" to Rimbink Pato's Port Moresby office Saturday, in an eleventh-hour bid to influence a summit draft communique, but were denied entry, three sources with knowledge of the situation told AFP.

"Police were posted outside the minister's office after they tried to barge in," one source privy to summit negotiations told AFP, requesting anonymity.

The diplomatic incident came with tensions already high at a summit of Asian-Pacific leaders that has been overshadowed by a spat between the United States and China.

Pato had refused to meet with the delegates, according to a source, who said: "It's not appropriate for the minister to

negotiate solo with the Chinese. The Chinese negotiating officials know this." The minister himself sought to downplay the incident, telling AFP: "There wasn't an issue." Asked about the incident, Chinese foreign ministry official Zhang Xiaolong told reporters: "It's not true. It's simply not true."

APEC nations usually agree a joint statement but officials are struggling to bridge deep divides on trade policy and admit that a formal communique may not be issued.

This is not the first time Chinese officials have been involved in a tense incident at a regional meeting.

At the Pacific Islands Forum in September, Nauru's president demanded China apologise after its delegation walked out of a meeting when the host refused to let an envoy speak until island leaders had finished.

"They're not our friends. They just need us for their own purposes," President Baron Waqa said at the time.

## Taliban hold talks with US envoy in Qatar

**ISLAMABAD, NOV 18 (AP):** The Taliban have held three days of talks with US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in the Gulf state of Qatar, where the Afghan insurgent group has a political office, a Taliban official and another individual close to the group said Sunday.

The talks are aimed at renewing the Afghan peace process and eventually winding down America's longest war. Seventeen years after the US-led invasion that ended Taliban rule, the militants control nearly half of Afghanistan and carry out near-daily attacks on local security forces and government officials.

The two individuals said Khairullah Khairkhwa, the former Taliban governor of Herat, and Mohammed Fazl, a former Taliban military chief, attended the marathon talks. The two individuals spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the sensitive negotiations.

US officials could not immediately be reached for comment. The State Department has refused to comment on reported talks with the Taliban.

A third individual with knowledge of the discussions said the Taliban pressed for a postponement of next year's presidential elections and the establishment of an interim government under a neutral leadership. Abdul Sattar Sirat, an ethnic Tajik and Islamic scholar, was suggested as a candidate to lead an interim administration.

The individual, who also spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks, said Khalilzad wants to reach a settlement within six months, a timescale the Taliban said was too short. Khalilzad also proposed a cease-fire, which the Taliban rejected, the individual said, adding that there was no agreement on the release of prisoners, opening the Taliban

office or lifting a Taliban travel ban.

Khairkhwa and Fazl were among five senior Taliban members released from the US prison at Guantanamo Bay in 2014 in exchange for US Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who was captured by the Taliban after walking off his base in Afghanistan in 2009. The five are now based in Qatar, and are seen as having enough stature to sell a peace deal to insurgents fighting on the front lines.

President Donald Trump harshly criticised the 2014 prisoner exchange, and in a speech last August pledged to send in additional US forces and redouble efforts to defeat the Taliban. But that strategy has had little if any impact on the ground, with the Taliban keeping up a steady tempo of attacks and an Islamic State affiliate carrying out massive bombings targeting minority Shiites.

The Trump administration now appears focused on reaching a political settlement with the Taliban, and has given in to a number of the group's longstanding demands, beginning with the holding of direct talks. The Taliban have long refused US demands to negotiate with the Western-backed government in Kabul, which the insurgents view as a puppet regime.

Pakistan has meanwhile released a number of high-level Taliban prisoners, including the movement's co-founder, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. The releases are widely seen as a US-directed move aimed at encouraging the Taliban to participate in talks.

In a lengthy statement issued earlier this month, the Taliban had demanded the lifting of sanctions against the group's leaders, the release of prisoners and the recognition of their office in Qatar. The Afghan government is deeply opposed to any recognition of the Qatar office, which the Taliban in the past have billed as a government in exile.

## Trump says there will be 'a report' by Tuesday on Khashoggi's murder

**WASHINGTON, NOV 18 (PTI):** US President Donald Trump has said he had spoken with the CIA chief on the agency's assessment of the killing of Jamal Khashoggi and that there will be a "very full report" by Tuesday, amid reports that it had held the powerful Saudi crown prince responsible for the murder of the dissident journalist.

The death of 59-year-old Khashoggi, a onetime insider turned critic of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and a resident of the US, has spurred a wave of international anger against Saudi Arabia and its ruler.

In an interaction with reporters in California on Saturday, Trump said that he spoke with Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Gina Haspel, who has been studying this case very closely. "It's a horrible thing that took place, the killing of a journalist...It should never have happened," Trump said.

Asked about reports that the CIA had assessed involvement by the crown prince, the president said, "they haven't assessed anything yet. It's too early. That was a very premature report."

"We'll be having a very full report over the next two days, probably Monday or Tuesday," Trump said.

He then said more definitely that there would be "a report on Tuesday."

The report will address what "we think the overall impact was and who caused it, and who did it."

## Interpol meets to select new president after China's arrest



**DUBAI, NOV 18 (AP):** Police chiefs from around the world gathered in Dubai on Sunday for Interpol's general assembly to select a new president after the agency's former leader was detained in China.

Meng Hongwei who was China's vice minister of public security while also leading Interpol went missing while on a trip to China in September. It later emerged that the long-time Communist Party insider with decades of experience in China's security apparatus was detained as part of a sweeping purge against allegedly corrupt or disloyal officials under President Xi Jinping's authoritarian administration.

Interpol member-states will also be deciding whether to accept Kosovo as a full member, which would allow officials there to file red notices for Serbian officials that Kosovo considers war criminals.

The red notices are alerts circulated by Interpol to all member countries that identify a person wanted for arrest by another country. Interpol says there are 57,289 active red notices around the world.

Interpol acts as a clearinghouse for national police services that want to hunt down suspects outside their borders. The body, however, has faced criticism

that governments have abused the "red notice" system to go after political enemies and dissidents, even though its charter explicitly proclaims its neutrality and prohibits the use of police notices for political reasons.

Two years ago, Interpol introduced new measures aimed at strengthening the legal framework around the red notice system. As part of the changes, an international team of lawyers and experts first check a notice's compliance with Interpol rules and regulations before it goes out.

Interpol also introduced an appeals body for those targeted with red notices. Chinese authorities say Meng is being lawfully investigated for taking bribes and other crimes.

China's beleaguered rights activists point out that as someone with a seat atop the country's powerful public security apparatus, Meng helped build the opaque system of largely unchecked power wielded by the ruling Communist Party to which he's now fallen victim.

Meng's wife has told The Associated Press from France that the bribery accusation he faces is just an excuse for a lengthy detention and that he is being persecuted for political reasons.

As more than 1,000

delegates from 192 member-states began filling the main hall for the annual event, Interpol Secretary-General Jurgen Stock explained to reporters that the agency's rules did not allow for Meng to continue acting as president.

Meng had been serving as president since November 2016, and his term was due to end in 2020.

He said Interpol received Meng's resignation letter from China on October 7 and that Interpol was notified by Chinese authorities that Meng is no longer a delegate to Interpol. "It sounds a little technical but again that automatically leads to the fact, according to our rules, that he is not the president anymore," Stock said. "We had to take the measures to ensure the functioning of the organization."

Meng's representatives say Interpol accepted an unsigned resignation letter without any resistance and without evidence of his consent.

In Meng's place on Sunday, senior vice president of Interpol's executive committee, Kim Jong Yang of South Korea who was previously named acting president helped open the ceremony for the general assembly meeting.

A little more than a week ago, Stock told reporters in France where Interpol is headquartered that there was no reason for him to suspect that anything about Meng's resignation "was forced or wrong."

He said he "encouraged" Chinese authorities to provide information about Meng's location and legal status but can do no more because the role of Interpol is "not to govern over member states."

## Sri Lanka president seeks talks to end power struggle



**COLOMBO, NOV 18 (AFP):** Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena on Sunday called crucial talks with political leaders in a bid to end a power struggle with the prime minister he sacked last month.

The Indian Ocean nation has been paralysed since October 26 when Sirisena deposed Ranil Wickremesinghe as premier and replaced him with a former rival Mahinda Rajapakse.

Wickremesinghe insists he is still prime minister while parliament voted twice last week to reject Rajapakse.

"President Sirisena will chair a meeting of representatives of political parties in parliament today," his office said in a statement.

"The president has called this meeting in order to end the current political unrest and conflict situation and to allow the normal functioning of the parliament."

Brawling erupted in parliament with Rajapakse loyalists smashing furniture, throwing chilli powder and projectiles at rivals in a bid to disrupt a no-confidence motion against the disput-

ed prime minister.

After the second vote against Rajapakse on Friday, Wickremesinghe demanded that his government be restored, but there has been no response from Sirisena yet.

Wickremesinghe has said Sri Lanka needs "stability" and that he was ready to work with Sirisena despite the personality clash that triggered the constitutional crisis.

After sacking Wickremesinghe on October 26, Sirisena dissolved parliament on November 9, but the Supreme Court suspended his action and restored parliament pending a full hearing into the legality of his actions.

For 19 days, Sri Lanka had two claimants to the prime minister's post, but on Thursday parliament speaker Karu Jayasuriya held that he would recognise neither as premier. Officially, Sri Lanka no longer has a government.

Legislators say that with the administration at a standstill key sectors such as tourism are taking a serious battering.

Both sides have also warned that a prolonged power vacuum could lead to unrest.



# Newlyweds Deepika-Ranveer arrive in India

**MUMBAI, Nov 18 (PTI):** Flashing smiles at the bevy of paparazzi and fans waiting for them at the airport, Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh returned home Sunday morning in India after their wedding in Italy.

The couple brought the otherwise busy Mumbai airport to a standstill as they walked hand-in-hand and waved at the camerapersons and fans amid loud cheers.

The duo wore Sabyasachi, who also designed their wedding trousseau. Both of them chose traditional wear for the airport look, which was also colour coordinated.

While Ranveer looked dapper in a bright red and golden jacket over a beige silk kurta pyjama, Deepika looked ethereal in churidar suit with heavily embroidered red Benarasi dupatta.

Deepika and Ranveer reached the latter's house which was decked up with lights and flowers for 'Grah Pravesh'.

After reaching home, both of them came out and posed for the media. They also folded their hands and said, "Thank you," after the journalists and camerapersons shouted, "Badhai ho".

Ranveer and Deepika, who dated for six years, tied the knot earlier this week in two ceremonies at Lake Como, Italy.

On November 14 morning, the couple solemnised their relationship in a South Indian wedding. It was followed by a North Indian ceremony on November 15.

Deepika and Ranveer will host a reception each in Bengaluru and Mumbai on November 21 and 28, respectively.



**GIGGLES FOR DAYS!** Hugh Jackman & Emily Blunt can't keep a straight face at the Variety Studio: Actors on Actors event.

## Nick Jonas Marks 13 Years Since Diabetes Diagnosis While Priyanka Chopra Shows Support

Nick Jonas is feeling thankful and grateful to his loved ones as he marks 13 years since he was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, while his fiancée Priyanka Chopra expressed support for her beau.

The 26-year-old pop star shared on Instagram on Friday night an alarming throwback photo of himself as a teenager, in good spirits but looking gaunt. The pic was taken shortly after his diagnosis of the autoimmune disease, when his pancreas stopped producing insulin, which regulates his blood sugar level. His body had begun to burn muscle and fat for energy, causing him to lose weight rapidly. He could have died had he not been put on life-long synthetic insulin therapy on time.

"13 years ago today I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. The picture on the left is me a few weeks after my diagnosis. Barely 100



pounds after having lost so much weight from my blood sugar being so high before going to the doctor where I would find out I was diabetic," he wrote. "On the right is me now. Happy and healthy. Prioritizing my physical health, working out and eating healthy and keeping my blood sugar in check."

**KOMAL PANCHAMATIA**

**MUMBAI, Nov 18 (PTI):** "After some time there will another Pankaj Tripathi", says the award winning actor, admitting he is aware that every actor in the film industry today is replaceable.

Tripathi has made a significant mark in the past few years after a long struggle before the glory. He shot to fame with Anurag Kashyap's 2012 gangster drama "Gangs of Wasseypur" but before that he slogged for years and kept working hard, till the industry took notice of his talent.

Reflecting on his early days, Tripathi, a student of NSD, told PTI, "I was not worried much back then. Now, when I am successful I am not arrogant, I am not flying high. I know that I am popular now and there is stardom but it is not at all permanent.

"I know after sometime there will another Pankaj Tripathi. My success might fade away as they will find a new name. I was not worried then, I am not worried now."

The actor believes in staying happy in the moment. "I live in the present," he adds. Tripathi is glad he is getting to play such varied roles -- an upright CRPF officer Atma Singh in "Newton", Narottam Mishra in "Bareilly Ki Barfi" to Rudra Bhaiya in latest hit "Street".

"Whatever is happening with me is unexpected. I came here for survival and I was hoping that I would be able to run my house by acting in films. Things are better today. I have increased my fee as well. But I work on my conditions. As a person, I am still grounded and humble," he says.

Tripathi is excited for Satish Kaushik's "Kaagaz", based on the life of Bharat Lal aka Lal Bihari from Azamgarh, who fought a legal battle for 18 years to prove that he is alive. He has been shooting for the biographical drama, in which he plays the lead role. The actor says

while his hands are full with meaty roles currently, he wishes to concentrate on one project at a time. "Today, I want to do one film at a time. There is too much load that I am not taking up or signing any new film. I am already booked till next year September. My dates are full. I am getting lot of good scripts but my dates are full so I am unable to say yes to them.

"I had never imagined that after coming to Mumbai that as an actor my dates would be booked in six-eight months in advance. I had never imagined all this to happen."

He understands, playing the lead role in a film is a huge responsibility but according to him, it is also an opportunity to showcase his talent.

Tripathi, who doesn't believe in the term character artiste, says, "Heroes are also playing characters. Today, audience have a platform to give their opinion not just about the film but about the actor or

supporting actors. "I am happy people have given me so much love in the films that I have done, where I was not in the lead." The multi-faceted actor struggled for over a decade before establishing himself in Bollywood. He says he is reaping the benefit of his hardwork today.

"All this is because of my hard work. Today, I understand that hard work always pays off, good artists are always worshipped. Earlier, supporting actors were not getting that much recognition and respect but that is not the case today." His other projects include "Shakeela" biopic, web-series "Mirzapur", Hrithik Roshan's "Super 30", "Luka Chupki", "Abhi Toh Party Shuru Hui Hai". "I also have 'Panga' with Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari. She is a friend and we have decided that I will always act in her films. I don't know what role I have in this film but I have to keep aside a week to ten days."

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**SEPARATE HOSTEL FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.**

**ARIES:** Things have probably been going well lately in the love and romance department, Aries. You find that communication has improved, and the witty banter is invigorating and educational. Today there may be a blip on the radar. You may have been so caught up in the good parts that you failed to take care of the details and do the actual work needed to make things run smoothly.

**TAURUS:** You may be feeling emotionally good, Taurus, but unfortunately the people around you don't seem to share this feeling. Your first instinct may be to sacrifice yourself in order to make the path easier for the next guy. Remember that other people need to learn how to do things on their own. If someone is in a bad mood, let them be in a bad mood. You may be better off spending the day alone.

**GEMINI:** There's an advantage to joining people in a social or family situation, Gemini. Your role today is to bridge communication gaps. Be aware of details that need doing, but don't feel like you have to do them all yourself. This is a good time to delegate responsibility. Keep track of who is in charge of what or you could end up taking up the slack for a job that someone else is supposed to do.

**CANCER:** Calm down and get organized before you spread your ideas to others, Cancer. This is especially true when it comes to love and romance. As soon as this topic comes up, you tense up and erupt inappropriately. Ground yourself and find your center of balance - literally and figuratively - before you proceed. Don't worry about getting the upper hand. What you need to do is join hands.

**LEO:** You've reached a climactic time of year regarding love and romance, Leo. This is the time when your dream finally materializes or you realize that all your efforts are failures. It all depends on how you played your cards over the past few months. This is one of those moments of reckoning when you face reality. You must bring your craft to the landing strip and check in with mission control.

**VIRGO:** Your emotions are solid and you feel good, Virgo. At the same time, you may be tongue-tied. You're having a hard time expressing your true feelings in the way you'd like to, especially when it comes to love and romance. Perhaps you have so many thoughts that you don't know how to sort them out, or which to disclose and which to keep hidden.

**LIBRA:** Matters of love and romance should be going well, but

try not to overdo it, Libra. Be careful of getting so caught up in the fantasy of romance that you fail to take care of the details. Today is a good day to get the foundation solid before you start building. If you've already started building, you may need to stand back and consider areas in which some extra support beams may be necessary.

**SCORPIO:** This is one of those days when the road forks in several directions and you must decide which way to go, Scorpio. This usually isn't hard. You just go with the flow. But now things are flowing in multiple directions and you need to figure out which way to go. Stick with the way that seems most natural. Remember that whatever choice you make will be the right one.

**SAGITTARIUS:** Your plane is fueled, your bags packed, and you

have clearance from the control tower, but for some reason, Sagittarius, you just can't seem to get off the ground. Perhaps there are details of the trip that you haven't taken into account. People are firing questions at you, and you don't have all the answers. This is especially true when it comes to matters of love and romance.

**CAPRICORN:** The person who is most organized and stable will win the race, so let it be you, Capricorn. Be careful, though. Other people may try to distract you from your work. You may be in the middle of an important project and decide to take a break. Before you know it, the phone rings and suddenly you're trapped with no escape. The break that you hoped would take no more than five minutes has turned into a big interruption.

**AQUARIUS:** Your brain is buzz-

ing in high gear, Aquarius. Anyone else would get dizzy trying to process even a fraction of the things that filter through your head in one day. The key for you is to not speak every single thought aloud but to keep your processing internal. People want to hear your final decision, not the process you went through to reach it. You will save everyone a lot of time if you do.

**PISCES:** You may have a hard time relating to people in social situations, Pisces. Perhaps you're frustrated at hearing the same shallow conversations over and over. While you mingle with dozens of different people, all you can think about is how nice it would be if you could be home in front of the TV. Your best plan is to avoid situations that you know you won't enjoy. There's no sense in torturing yourself.