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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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HC imposes Rs 2.26 cr fine on IK Gujral Punjab Technical University

University directed to pay Rs 1 lac each to 226 Sikkimese students

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 JUL:**

The High Court of Sikkim today imposed Rs. 2.26 crore fine on the IK Gujral Punjab Technical University and directed the University to pay a sum of Rs.1 lakh each to the 226 petitioner students by 31 August 2019 and submit report before the next hearing.

226 Sikkimese students who pursued BATHM (Airlines, Tourism and Hospitality Management) and Bachelor in Management Studies [Spa, Health and Resort] courses at ITFT Chandigarh which was under IK Gujral Punjab Technical University during 2013-15 had approached the High Court in 2016 seeking court directions and recognition of their degrees by the University Grants Commission.

While passing the order, Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai pulled up the University for the total ineptitude and cavalier attitude adopted by them towards the circumstance of the petitioner students adding that as a result of their inaction the petitioners are in limbo and their future in jeopardy.

NSH cut off at Chaten, repairs still awaited

**WANGCHUK BHUTIA
LACHEN, 22 JUL:**

The section of North Sikkim Highway at Chaten, about 4 KMs short of Lachen was washed away on 20 July, and residents are fuming that no restoration work has been initiated at site thus far.

The Lachen Pipon and residents said today that the disruption was inconveniencing every-

one and that the district administration and GREF should take immediate steps to repair the road.

To facilitate transshipment, Power department officials stationed at Lachen have constructed a log bridge across the damaged section. While this works as a stop-gap, temporary arrangement, the people have demanded a more durable solution.

The court said that despite several standing orders of the court, specific warnings are being flouted by the University and not being taken with the seriousness the case deserves.

Even after having been given the green signal by the UGC for protecting the interest of the students, the university has failed to take steps as directed for which the university shall be liable to compensate each student, the court further noted.

Registrar of the university, Dr. S. S. Walia, has been directed to be present in person before the Court on

the next date. Further, if IK Gujral Punjab Technical University fails to comply with the order dated 15 May 2019 by the next hearing, the High Court shall be compelled to initiate necessary legal action against them for disobedience of the orders.

Senior Counsel, A K Upadhyaya representing the respondent University, in its submission, had stated that there was no direction by the Court to submit compliance report in its order dated 15-05-2019.

This, the court termed "absolutely unacceptable" and "preposterous".

Once directions are issued by the Court it is a foregone conclusion and expected that compliance thereof or difficulties in compliance should be made known to the Court by filing affidavit to that extent, the court said while passing the order.

It may be recalled that students from Sikkim were sent to study to the University by the State Social Welfare Department. The students later found out that courses offered in the institute were not approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

The next hearing is scheduled for 06 Sept.

Govt to expedite police action on CMO missing files case

Termination of services of those on extension

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 JUL:**

The State Government has decided to "expedite police action" in the matter of files allegedly missing from the Chief Minister's Office, an IPR press release informs. This was among various other matters discussed at a Cabinet meeting held today.

The Cabinet has taken "very serious view of the missing files in the erstwhile Chief Minister's Office or elsewhere," the release states.

"As it was causing unwarranted distress to the persons concerned, it was decided to expedite Police action in the matter," the Cabinet is reported to have resolved.



With regard to employees on service extension, it was decided that "services of those persons who had finished their tenure shall be terminated forthwith."

Despite the introduction of five-day week, attendance and punctuality of government employees continues to

disappoint, the Cabinet noted and directed Secretaries of all departments to "tighten their belts" and take necessary action against erring employees.

"It was also decided that no employee shall give a joint representation nor he/she will carry his/her own file.

Assembly of such people in the corridors of Tashing Secretariat will not be tolerated," the release mentions. However, there are no further details given for this particular direction.

The meeting also discussed the explanatory memorandum, annual financial

statement, estimate of receipt and the proposed demand for grant for the year 2019-2020 in detail. Deliberations were held on resources- tax and non-tax revenue, share of state in central taxes and grant-in-aid from Government of India under various CSS Schemes and Central Sector Schemes. The borrowing ceiling limit also came up for discussion.

Draft of Sikkim Appropriation Bill, 2019 was approved. Proposed provisions for Departments such as Agriculture, Buildings, HRDD, Forest, Health, Commerce and Industries, IPR, LRDM, Motor Vehicle, Power, Roads & Bridges, RMDD, Social Justice, Tourism & Urban Development were discussed and approved.

The Cabinet also took note of compliance of the earlier Cabinet decision of 15.07.2019 in respect of 8 to 10 Departments.

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Entrepreneurship World Cup East India finale held at SMIT

**SHRAVAN CHETTRI
MAJHITAR, 22 JUL:**

The finale of the East India edition of Entrepreneurship World Cup was organised by Atal Incubation Centre-Sikkim Manipal University Technology Business Incubation Foundation (AIC-SMU) at SMIT University, Majhitar today.

EWC was brought to India this year by Misk Global Forum and the Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN). It is a global pitch competition with a shot at life changing prizes. With 100,000 entrants from around the world, EWC elevates entrepreneurs, providing individuals with tools and resources to grow their venture.

Participants from five regions i.e. East, West, North, South and Central India are participating in the competition where in 20 teams from each region will compete to



win the regional rounds. The top teams from each region will participate in the national finals to be held in August.

The global finals will be held in Riyadh in November, where participants will fight with international start-ups to come closer to the prize money of \$5 Million sponsored by the Prince of Dubai, Mohammed bin Salman.

The event in Sikkim was judged by Karma Bhutia, Rupesh Mishra, Karma Palzor and De-

boshis Chakraborty and Director SMIT, Ashish Sharma. The winners were chosen on the basis of innovation and technology implemented to ensure the best startup.

Some of the show-stopping innovations presented at the finale were 'Nearby' an application which connects people to help boost their offline business to a vast group of online population. 'Guide Ratna' an application which focuses on providing people

with tourist guides and packages was another contestant.

One of the highly anticipated ideas was that of SMIT student, Sumit who has been working on a model which helps reduce car accidents, a technology that can connect cars and help prevent road accidents.

"The model that I am currently working on is not only a medium to earn profit but to make people understand the value of human life," said Sumit.

Gold touches all-time high of Rs 35,970 per 10 gram

NEW DELHI, JUL 22 (PTI): Gold prices touched a new high of Rs 35,970 per 10 gram in the national capital after gaining Rs 100 on Monday due to continued buying from jewellers, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Silver also followed the suit and gained Rs 260 to Rs 41,960 per kg due to fresh buying from industrial units

and coin makers. "Today's (Monday) gold price of Rs 35,970 per 10 gram is the highest till date," said Surendra Jain, vice-president of All India Sarafa Association.

Traders attributed the rise in gold prices to strong demand from local jewellers. Besides, the decline in equity markets also aided the rally in the precious metal as in-

vestors moved towards safe-haven assets like gold.

Globally, spot gold was trading almost flat at USD 1,425.60 an ounce, while silver quoting higher at USD 16.40 per ounce.

In the national capital, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity gained Rs 100 each to Rs 35,970 and Rs 35,800 per 10 gram, respectively.

Sovereign gold also

advanced by Rs 100 to Rs 27,500 per eight gram.

On Saturday, gold had declined by Rs 80 to Rs 35,870 per 10 gram.

Silver ready rose Rs 260 to Rs 41,960 per kg, while weekly-based delivery climbed Rs 391 to Rs 41,073 per kg.

Price of silver coins held flat at Rs 84,000 for buying and Rs 85,000 for selling of 100 pieces.



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Shrawani Parva gets underway at Siddheshvara Dham



NAMCHI, 22 JUL (IPR): Month-long 'Shrawani Parva' in devotion of Lord Shiva commenced at Siddheshvara Dham, Solophok today.

Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad accompanied by First Lady, Kamala Devi attended the inaugural day as the chief guest. Others present

were Minister Buildings & Housing and Transport Departments, Sanjeet Kharel, DC South, Ragul K, ADC South, Satyen Pradhan along with officials of various government departments and other dignitaries.

The Governor along with the dignitaries visited Siddheshvara Dham

complex and offered his prayers and attended the hawan performed at the complex.

In the morning hours, Minister, Sanjeet Kharel along with other devotees from in and around Namchi and Namthang also visited the Shiva temple at Kholaghari where he offered his



prayers and carried the holy water to be offered at the main shrine at Siddheshvara Dham, Solophok.

It may be mentioned here that the auspicious month of Shrawan or Sawan has started from 17 July. Devotees in large numbers throng Lord

Shiva and Goddess Parvati temples in huge numbers and pay their obeisance in the form of prayers and offerings. It may also be noted that during this month long celebration, on each of the four Mondays, Rudraabhishek, Hawan and Maha Aarati is organised respectively.

ASG[T]BS group wants old working committee to resign

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 JUL:

A meeting of All Sikkim Gurung [Tamu] Boudha Sangh members was held here at Janta Bhawan on Monday chaired by YP Gurung. The meeting, which had State Bank of Sikkim chairperson, DB Gurung, as chief guest, was attended by 150 representatives from all four districts.

A press release from the organization informs that the meeting thoroughly discussed the

construction of Gurung Rodhi Ghar, work on which had started a few years but has still not been completed.

On the completion of the tenure of the old working committee of the organization, an interim committee of All Sikkim Gurung [Tamu] Boudha Sangh was constituted for one month until the new committee is elected, the release adds.

The meeting also passed a resolution asking members of the old working committee to

submit their resignations within a month.

The interim committee is led by Laxman Gurung of Dentam as president, Mahendra Gurung [Shreebadam] as vice-president, Dr Bhushan Gurung [Chakung] as general secretary, Pawan Gurung [Gangtok] as treasurer and DB Gurung, N Bikram Gurung, YP Gurung, DP Gurung, Khilwara Gurung, Navin Gurung, JB Gurung, Samita Gurung and Pushpa Lata Gurung as advisors.

SDF mourns passing away of active worker

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 JUL:

Sikkim Democratic Front convened a condolence meeting today to mourn the passing of an active social media worker of North Sikkim, Lhendup Dorjee Lepcha [Lickmoo]. The meeting, held at SDF Bhawan here, observed a two-minute

silence in the memory of the departed soul.

An SDF press release informs that the late Lhendup Dorjee Lepcha was the eldest son of Tenzing Tshering Lepcha and Chunki Lhamu Lachungpa of Chungthang in North Sikkim and passed away on 21 July following a long ailment.

SDF President Pawan Chamling and the entire

SDF family pays deep tribute to the late Mr Lepcha and extends heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family. The final rites of Lhendup Dorjee Lepcha are scheduled for 23 July at his residence at Chungthang in North Sikkim.

India's second moon mission launched successfully; ISRO takes control of spacecraft, lunar landing on Sept 7

VIJAY KARTHIK

SRIHARIKOTA (AP), JUL 22 (PTI): Aiming to take a "billion dreams to the moon", India on Monday successfully launched its second lunar mission Chandrayaan-2 on-board its powerful rocket GSLV-MkIII-M1 from the spaceport here to explore the uncharted south pole of the celestial body by landing a rover.

The geosynchronous satellite launch vehicle lifted-off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre here into cloudy skies at 2.43 pm and successfully placed the 3,850-kg Chandrayaan-2 into the earth orbit 16 minutes and 14 seconds later.

Immediately after Chandrayaan-2's separation from the rocket, the solar array of the spacecraft automatically got deployed and the ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network at Bengaluru successfully took control of the spacecraft, the Indian Space Research Organisation said in a statement later.

According to the statement, Chandrayaan-2, a three-module spacecraft comprising orbiter, lander and rover, will be subjected to a series of orbit manoeuvres using its onboard propulsion system to take it to the vicinity of Moon over the next weeks with the rover soft landing planned on September 7.

The success of the mission, helmed by two women Ritu Karidhal (Mission Director) and M Vanitha (Project Director), brought huge relief for ISRO scientists after the July 15 launch was called off just about an hour left following a technical glitch in the rocket.

The Rs 978 crore mission, that will mark a giant leap in India's space programme and make it only the fourth country to land a rover on Moon, was rescheduled to Monday after scientists corrected the technical glitch in the three-stage rocket.

In a textbook launch, the towering GSLV-MkIII-M1, in its first operational flight, lifted off majestically from the second launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre here, over 100 km from Chennai, as the scientists broke into jubilation.

"Chandrayaan-2 is unique because it will explore and perform studies on the south pole region of lunar terrain which is not explored and sampled by any past mission. This mission will offer new knowledge about the moon," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a congratulatory tweet.

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Chief Ministers of Kerala and Tamil Nadu K Vijayan and K Palaniswami respectively and Kerala Governor P Sathasivam were among those who congratulated the ISRO for the feat.

Scientists led by ISRO chief K Sivan watched the launch sequence in rapt attention and broke into applause after every key stage of the rockets flight which progressed precisely as programmed.

A visibly relieved Sivan, who announced the success of the mission, said, "It is the beginning of a historical journey of India towards the moon."

Today is a historical day for Space Science and Technology in India. I am extremely happy to announce that GSLV MkIII-M1 successfully injected Chandrayaan-2 into an orbit of 6,000 Km more than the intended orbit..." he said.

"We bounced back in flying colours after the earlier technical snag," he said about the glitch that made the space agency reschedule the Chandrayaan-2 launch from July 15 to Monday.

There will be 15 "very crucial manoeuvres" in the next one and half months before the orbiter is brought around the moon, he said in his post-launch

address from mission control centre.

"After that the D-Day will come and on that day we are going to experience 15 minutes of terror, to ensure the landing is safely near the South Pole," he added.

ISRO had last week called off the launch with just 56 minutes of the countdown left, a decision that was later hailed by space experts as a prudent measure not to risk the mission.

After taking remedial action based on an analysis carried out by a team set up to look into the snag, the space agency announced the rescheduled lift-off four days ago, indicating the confidence of the scientists which stood vindicated with the successful launch.

"Chandrayaan 2 is ready to take a billion dreams to the moon now stronger than ever before! Join us for the launch on Monday 22 July, 2019 at 2:43 PM IST," ISRO had tweeted on July 18 while announcing the rescheduled launch.

Chandrayaan-2 comes 11 years after ISRO's successful first lunar mission Chandrayaan-1 which scripted history by making more than 3,400 orbits around the Moon and was operational for 312 days till August 29, 2009.

Billed as the most complex and prestigious mission undertaken by ISRO since its inception, Chandrayaan-2 will make India the fourth country to soft land a rover on the lunar surface after Russia, the United States and China.

The 43.43m tall rocket GSLV-MkIII-M1 dubbed as Baahubali for its ability to carry heavy payloads successfully placed the Chandrayaan-2 into an elliptical earth orbit.

The spacecraft is now revolving round the earth with a perigee (nearest point to Earth) of 169.7 km

and an apogee (farthest point to Earth) of 45,475 km, ISRO said.

From here onwards, the mission will undergo a series of manoeuvres to carry out different phases of the mission over the next 48 days before the soft landing in the South Pole region of the moon where no country has gone so far.

Subsequent to the rescheduling of the launch, the space agency has tweaked the orbital phases, increasing Earth-bound phase to 23 days as against 17 days planned originally.

Using the onboard propulsion system, scientists will undertake a series of manoeuvres to raise the Chandrayaan-2 orbit in steps and then place it in the Lunar Transfer Trajectory to enable the spacecraft travel to the vicinity of the Moon, the ISRO statement said.

After leaving earth orbit and on entering Moon's sphere of influence, the propulsion system of Chandrayaan-2 will be fired to slow down the spacecraft to capture a preliminary orbit around the Moon.

It would then perform a series of complex braking manoeuvres and the soft landing of the lander - Vikram carrying rover Pragyan, one of the toughest phases of the mission and described by the ISRO chief as "15 minutes of terror (filled moments), would be made.

The mission, which carries a total of 13 payloads, including three from the Europe, two from the US and one Bulgaria, seeks to improve understanding of the moon which could lead to discoveries that will benefit India and humanity as a whole.

A Laser Retro-reflector Array (LRA) of US space agency NASA is among the payloads and

is aimed at understanding dynamics of Earth's moon system and deriving clues on Lunar interior.

According to ISRO, the mission objective was to develop and demonstrate the key technologies for end-to-end lunar mission capability, including soft-landing and roving on the lunar surface.

It aims to further expand knowledge about the Moon through a detailed study of its topography, mineralogy, surface chemical composition, thermo-physical characteristics and atmosphere leading to a better understanding of the origin and evolution of the Moon.

ISRO said the lunar South Pole is an interesting surface area which remains in shadow than North Pole.

There is a possibility of the presence of water in permanently shadowed areas around it, the agency said, adding craters in the South Pole region have cold traps and contain fossil record of the early solar system.

The lander Vikram, named after father of Indian space research programme Dr Vikram A Sarabhai, carrying the rover Pragyan, will be landed in a high plain between two craters at a latitude of about 70 degrees South of the moon.

Then the 27-kg Pragyan meaning wisdom in Sanskrit and a six-wheeled robotic vehicle, will set out on its job of collecting information on lunar surface.

A safe site free of hazards for landing would be decided based on pictures sent back by the camera onboard the lander and after touchdown the rover will carry out experiments for 14 Earth days, equals one Lunar Day.

The launch was witnessed by 7,500 people who were accommodated at a viewing gallery, located a few kms from the launchpad, thrown open to the public by the ISRO in May last.

HFCs asked to desist from home loans involving pre-EMI by builders

NEW DELHI, JUL 22 (PTI): Worried over frauds by builders, the National Housing Bank (NHB) has asked housing finance companies (HFCs) to "desist" from offering loans under subvention scheme wherein real estate developers pay pre-EMIs on behalf of home buyers for a certain period.

The direction has been issued by the NHB in view of several complaints of frauds allegedly committed by certain builders using subvention schemes.

Reacting to the NHB Circular, property consultant Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said this would definitely put even more strain on many developers that are already facing precarious liquidity situation.

"Based on a review of the matter, HFCs are advised to desist from

offering loan products involving servicing of the loan dues by builders/developers etc. on behalf of the borrowers," NHB said in a circular.

It has clarified that the stipulation related to subvention scheme would also be effected in cases wherein the HFC is yet to commence disbursements under the sanctioned cases.

Citing its earlier order in 2016, the NHB said that disbursement of housing loans by HFCs should be strictly linked to the stages of construction and no upfront disbursement should be made in case of incomplete/un-constructed projects.

"It is reiterated that disbursement of housing loans sanctioned to individuals should be closely linked to the stages of construction of the housing project/houses," the circular said.

In cases of projects sponsored by Government/Statutory Authorities, HFCs may disburse the loans as per the payment stages prescribed by such authorities, even where payments sought from house buyers are not linked to the stages of construction, provided such authorities have no past history of non-completion of projects.

"HFCs should have in place a well-defined mechanism for effective monitoring of the progress of construction of housing projects and obtaining consent of the borrower(s) prior to release of payments to the builder/developer," it added.

Merely obtaining a borrower's consent and release of funds by the company without linkage to the stage of construction will be seen as dereliction of duty by the HFC, the NHB warned.

NIM mountaineers climb unscalded Mt Mumba

UTTARKASHI, JUL 22 (PTI): A team of mountaineers from the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering climbed the unscalded Mount Mumba peak in Nelang-Jadung valley on the Indo-China border, NIM principal said.

The five-member team had set out on the expedition on July 14 and reached the summit of the 17174 ft peak on July 18, NIM principal Colonel Amit Bisht said.

Bisht, who led the team, said it was for the first time that Mount Mumba was scaled by a team of mountaineers.

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Governor interacts with farmers, visits industrial units in South

NAMCHI, 22 JUL (IPR): Governor, Ganga Prasad accompanied by Minister and Namthang Rateypani MLA, Sanjeet Kharel visited and interacted with progressive farmers of South District at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Namthang today.

Joining him were DC (South), Ragul K, JD ICAR-NOFRI, Tadong GOI, Dr RK Avasthe, Sr Scientist and Head KVK Namthang, IP Shivakoti alongside officials of line departments and progressive farmers of South District.

Addressing the gathering the Governor advocated and encouraged the farming community of the district to avail the benefits of the government sponsored crop insurance scheme Prime Minister Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) which aims to reduce the premium burden on farmers and ensure early settlement of crop assurance claim for the full insured sum. The Governor further stated that since Sikkim's economy is linked with agriculture which is a major source of livelihood and economic security of the Sikkimese, the



farmers can practice sustainable means of farming backed by a robust system of marketing. The Governor also apprised the gathering upon PM-KISAN scheme which provides a payment of 6000 rupees annually to the farmers in three equal installments and asked them to forward the list of genuine beneficiaries to the authorities to avail the grant.

Additionally, he also reinforced the demand of power tillers in all the GPUs under the Constituency as he stated it to be a very important consideration for the farmers working on small-sized and hilly terrain farms. He also emphasized the public of the area to give due importance to promoting village tourism in their area besides improving agricultural productivity.

Similarly, he also urged all the stakeholders to strive towards making Namthang Rateypani a model Constituency in terms of tourism related activities and exhorted the need of a monthly meeting in the KVK for timely updates and reports.

The Governor and Area MLA also participated in a plantation

drive and took a brief tour of the agricultural farms in the vicinity of KVK, Namthang.

Minister cum Area MLA, Sanjeet Kharel also spoke on the occasion wherein he placed demands in view of the greater good of the progressive farmers of Namthang Rateypani Constituency.

Later during the day, the Governor accompanied by his en-

tourage visited the Godrej Consumer Products Limited at Mamring as part of his day-long tour.

Upon his visit, it was informed by HR that the Unit which has been functional since 2006 has producing two categories of its product namely Godrej shaving cream and Godrej Aer pocket which he informed that the latter product is i.e. Godrej aer pocket is manufactured only in Sikkim and sold pan-India.

The Governor also took stock of the working conditions of the unit, strength of staff, both local and non-locals, basic minimum facilities and future course of action of the unit.

In his brief address, Governor stressed upon the introduction of new variants of Godrej products thereby increasing its production and generation of local employment.

Subsequently, the Governor also visited Zy-dus Healthcare Limited at Bagheykhola East Sikkim and also interacted with the management and staff of the company.

Lok Sabha passes amendment to RTI Act, Oppn slams govt

NEW DELHI, JUL 22 (PTI): Lok Sabha on Monday passed the bill amending the Right To Information Act, amid objections by the Opposition which alleged that it was an attempt to undermine the law and make the transparency panel a "toothless tiger".

The Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019, takes away the stature of information commissioners from equivalent of election commissioners, with their salaries and service conditions to be specified by the government.

Rejecting the opposition's charge that the Bill will weaken the Act, the government said it was fully committed to transparency and autonomy of the institution.

Replying to a debate on the Bill, Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh said the bill aims at institutionalisation, streamlining and ease of delivery of services.

Several members of opposition including from the BSP and the TMC opposed consideration and passage of the Bill and called for a division of votes. But they were defeated by 218-79 votes.

After this the leader of principal opposition party Congress, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, sought a clarification which was disallowed by the Speaker.

Unhappy with this, members of the opposition parties staged a walk out.

The Bill was later passed by voice vote.

Pointing out that the existing legislation has certain gaps, Singh said the amendments seek to address them.

There was no provision to frame rules and this Bill will address that, he said.

"Without amending Section 27, you cannot frame rules," he said, adding, Section 12 (4) which deals with the autonomy has been left untouched.

With regard to Section 13 (5) which deals with salaries, allowances and other terms and conditions of the service of the Chief Information Commissioner, he said the government is yet to deliberate on salaries.

He said it strengthens the overall structure and described it as an enabling legislation for administrative purposes.

"This government is absolutely committed to full transparency and autonomy," he said.

Leading the opposition charge during the debate on the Bill, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said that under the proposed changes the government can hire and fire independent information commissioners.

"It is not RTI Amendment bill but RTI elimination bill," he said.

The RTI Act was a monumental achievement for the country's democracy and it challenged the vested interests of the government, the former Union minister said.

He questioned why the Bill has been brought "without any public consultation".

"Why is the government desperate to rush through the bill? Is it because the Central Information Commission (CIC) delivered an order on the Prime Minister's educational detail," Tharoor asked.

Iran says it arrested 17 CIA spies, some sentenced to death

DUBAI, JUL 22 (AP): Iran said Monday it has arrested 17 Iranian nationals allegedly recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency to spy on the country's nuclear and military sites, and that some of them have already been sentenced to death. The arrests took place over the past months, and those taken into custody worked on "sensitive sites" in the country's military and nuclear facilities, an Iranian intelligence official told a press conference in Tehran. He did not elaborate, say how many of them were sentenced to death or when the sentences were handed down. President Donald Trump tweeted that the claim had "zero truth," calling Iran a "total mess."

The announcement

comes as Iran's nuclear deal with world powers is unraveling and tensions have spiked in the Persian Gulf region. The crisis stems from Trump's decision to pull the United States out of the agreement last year and intensify sanctions on the country. The Iranian official did not give his name but was identified as the director of the counterespionage department of Iran's Intelligence Ministry. It's rare in Iran for intelligence officials to appear before media, or for any official to give a press conference without identifying himself.

The official claimed that none of the 17, who allegedly had "sophisticated training," had succeeded in their sabotage missions. Their spying mis-

sions included collecting information at the facilities where they worked, carrying out technical and intelligence activities, and transferring and installing monitoring devices, he said.

The official further claimed the CIA had promised U.S. visas or jobs in America and that some of the agents had turned and were now working with his department "against the US."

He also handed out a CD with a video recording of an alleged foreign female spy working for the CIA. The disc also included names of several U.S. Embassy staff in Turkey, India, Zimbabwe and Austria who Iran claims were in touch with the recruited Iranian spies.

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Mamata flays BJP for IT notice to apex body of Durga Puja organisers

KOLKATA, JUL 22 (PTI): Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday lashed out at the BJP-led central government for tax notice issued to the Durga Puja Committees Forum, an apex body of the worship organisers in the state.

She argued that the 'puja committees' must not be put under the income tax net.

Accusing the BJP of doing politics in the name of Hindu religion during elections, the chief minister rued that the same people were seeking to tax Durga Puja organisers after the polling.

"During the elections, they (the BJP) talk of the Hindu religion and then they try to collect income tax from organisers of the Durga Puja, the greatest festival of the Hindus. This is not right," said Banerjee.

The BJP is perceived in the state to be trying to gain control of the well-known Durga Puja committees in a bid to reach out to more people.

The income tax notice to the Durga Puja Committees Forum was reportedly sent last week.

The chief minister argued the puja committees in the state organise Durga Puja with donations from the common people and the sponsors, and accordingly, cannot be brought under the income tax net.

She said the festival is a social function and not a commercial one while the government too has some social obligations.

"The Durga Puja committees collect donations from common people and also seek sponsors to organise the 'pujas'. They don't do it from their earnings. So, where is the

question of filing IT returns?" she asked.

"I condemn this attitude of the Centre to bring puja committees under the income tax net. This is an insult to the pujas. This is not a commercial function but a social one and the government has social obligations. We have a social compulsion towards the society," said Banerjee.

The Forum, which comprises Durga Puja committees, has been asked by the Income Tax department to file returns on its expenses during the festival.

"The Durga Puja committees also generate thousands of employment opportunities during this time. I feel so bad the manner in which they are being harassed by the IT Department. I feel devastated," said the chief minister.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
RURAL MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
TASHILING, GANGTOK - 737101, SIKKIM

Corrigendum

In the recently published tender BID ID No SK-PMGSY II Batch I Retender 04 Online (2019-20), the following details of Tender for online bidding may be read as

PMGSY-II (Batch-I) 2018-19

Sl	District	Pkg.No	Block	Name of Road works	Road length in kms	Tender amount (Rs in lakhs)	Tender rate (above/below/at par)	Contract value(Rs in lakhs)	Earnest Money (rs. In lakhs)	Tender form cost	Completion time
1	North & East	SK01/02 PKG1 RT4	Mangan	MRL 06-DAC road to North Sikkim Academy	1.00	79.94	All Class I-B Contractors enlisted with the Sikkim Public Works Department	Within STATE through e-tendering system	20.02	50000	1 year
			Gangtok	MRL04-Rumtek Rey Ranka Road to Falay Busty via Tyempem Busty	2.30	178.18					
			Pakyong	T08-Andheri to Gakcha	2.50	196.34					
				MRL-23-Pakyong Machong SPWD road Km2 to Pachey via Theeng dara.	2.50	193.29					
			Tender Value in Lakhs	10.30	800.94						
2	South	SK03 PKG@ RT4	Jorethang	MRL04-Link road from Mungram to Golitar Tamley Pokhari	2.00	167.47	All Class II-B Contractors enlisted with the Sikkim Public Works Department	Within the DISTRICT through e-tendering system	11.98	50000	1 year
			Namchi	MRL01-Phongla Mamring to Kanam Busty	2.00	158.22					
				T10-Phongla Mamring Road to Pamphok	2.00	153.38					
						Tender Value in Lakhs					

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender online for bidding	Last date of time for seeking tender clarification	Date & time of Opening of tender.
		From To		
Chief Engineer, RMDD	SK-PMGSY II Batch I Retender 04 Online (2019-20)	02/07/2019 from 10 AM	1/08/2019 to 10.00 AM	23/07/2019 upto 4.30 PM
				01/08/2019 from 11.00 AM

Sd/-
Chief Engineer I cum Empowered Officer
Rural Management & Development Department
Government of Sikkim, Gangtok

R.O No. - 97/IPR/Pub/Classi./2019-20 Date. 19.7.2019

Iran and US refusing to budge as tit-for-tat ship seizures in Middle East raise the temperature

TONY WALKER
theconversation.com

In a world run ragged by multiple crises and an unravelling of American global leadership, military confrontation in the Gulf poses risks that extend well beyond the region itself.

One of the greater risks is to a global economy dependent on the continued flow of oil from Middle East producers in the Persian Gulf.

A Gulf crisis is the last thing the world needs when confidence between Washington and its European allies has been undermined by an unpredictable Donald Trump administration.

Tensions between the US and China over multiple trade and other issues are not helping.

These are high octane moments in the Gulf as America and its allies confront difficult choices in how to deal with an Iran that has clearly decided to test the limits of western tolerance.

Iran's seizure in international sea-lanes of a British-owned tanker in the Gulf of Oman at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf itself is highly provocative.

Britain, with Boris Johnson likely to be installed as its new prime minister this week, is facing a test of its resolve. Its ability to navigate its way through this crisis carries with it real risks of wider conflict.

Detention of the Stena Impero in retaliation for Britain's seizure earlier this month off Gibraltar of the Iranian oil carrier, the Grace 1, represents a significant escalation of what had been a war of words between Tehran and London.

Iran's wider purpose is to raise the costs to the west of maintaining security in the Persian Gulf in response to American-imposed sanctions that are strangling the Iranian economy.

Attacks on oil tankers and facilities in the Gulf over the past month are widely attributed to Iran or its proxies. These attacks have reminded the international community that one-third of the world's seaborne oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz every day.

Iran has the ability, if only temporarily, to shut down a choke point that is critical to the well-being of the global economy. Interference with oil shipments from the Gulf would prompt a spike in prices and prove a drag on slowing economic activity globally.

Tehran's regime is playing a high stakes game born of its worsening economy. American-imposed sanctions are doing real harm to livelihoods and well-being of Iranians.

Reports of sporadic civil unrest over rising prices and shortages attest to the challenges facing the regime.

Sanctions are crippling Iran's ability to export its oil, overwhelmingly its main source of foreign exchange. The US says that since oil sanctions



were tightened last November, Iran has lost something like US\$10 billion in revenue foregone.

The International Monetary Fund reports that Iran's economy shrank by 3.9% last year. It is expected to shrink by a further 6% this year. Unemployment has risen sharply.

At the same time, the value of the Iranian rial against the US dollar has collapsed by 60% in the past year, adding to cost of imports and fueling inflation.

There are reported shortages of imported medicines.

It is against this background that Tehran has clearly embarked on a campaign to remind the West of its ability to increase the costs of maintaining regional security.

Tehran's message is this is not a zero game. For Washington and its allies, the question becomes: how does the international community respond to Iranian provocations?

Does it allow the US, egged on by the Sunni Gulf state like Saudi Arabia, to lead it into a military confrontation with Iran, or does it seek to deescalate potential conflict?

This is a question the federal government needs to ponder since it is likely Australia would be asked to make a contribution in the event of a continued deterioration of the security environment.

Given the stakes involved, the wisest course would seem to be reopening discussions with Teh-

ran about Gulf security and an American-imposed sanctions regime.

However, this will be easier said than done. Washington would need to unscramble an ill-advised decision to abrogate a 2015 agreement to freeze Iran's nuclear program. The US reimposed sanctions that had been eased under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiated painstakingly over some months by the Barack Obama administration.

Trump's decision to abandon the JCPOA and reimpose sanctions is what has brought the Gulf to the brink. If conflict results, this will be a heavy price for capricious American policymaking.

Iran was complying with its obligations under the JCPOA. But it has now indicated it will resume enriching uranium above agreed levels.

Faced with the possibility of renewed conflict in the Gulf, Trump himself has offered to talk to Iranian leaders "without preconditions". Tehran has said it will not negotiate without an easing of sanctions.

Overcoming this impasse will require concessions Washington has not yet indicated it is prepared to make. In the meantime, the risk of wider conflict grows.

This is just the scenario Middle East experts have been warning about.

[The writer is Adjunct Professor, School of Communications, La Trobe University]

Stand Up, Not Clamp Down Sikkim needs to be brave, not prudish in tackling substance abuse and suicides

Sometime in early 2016, the Social Justice, Empowerment & Welfare Department was handed over a detailed list of what was expected of it. Most of the directions were routine reminders of what a Department with an elaborate, self-explanatory name like "Social Justice, Empowerment & Welfare Department" should have been doing all along. These included directions like working in close coordination with other related departments, preparing workable plans to make Sikkim malnutrition free etc. There were also some specific directions which one hopes the Department got working on. In fact, because the directions were issued more than two years ago, one hopes that some of these tasks have already been completed. For instance, one of the directions issued to the Department was to conduct/ commission a study on suicides and its causes in Sikkim. This was a necessary and welcome initiative, but since one has not heard any further developments on this count, the file to commission such a study is probably still being processed or maybe the study remains a work in progress.

Meanwhile, Sikkim continues to lose people to suicides. Worse still, it still does not know why the numbers are so disturbingly high. Hopefully, this newspaper is wrong in speculating that the study is caught in red tape; hopefully, the study has been undertaken and its findings submitted and are being deliberated upon.

Further, the Department was also asked to come up with programmes to fight drug abuse and alcoholism with special focus on high relapse rates. That was also a welcome intervention, but not one as easily delegated as, say, a study on suicides. This one requires much wider collaborations, a stronger will to take criticism and a more resolute commitment to address the challenge. It would be unfair to expect bureaucrats in a transferable job to get so invested in a cause/ issue, and it is unlikely that a problem as big as substance abuse can get solved through departmental interventions alone. It is a good sign that the government is seized of the matter and is consistently making policy-level commitments reiterating its willingness to address the issue as was recently reiterated by the Chief Minister as well when he put on record that addicts and peddlers need to be tackled differently and that the mission against substance abuse needs to be more nuanced and compassionate.

While this is a good place to begin from, it is never advisable for governments to get involved in all aspects of social interventions. As it is, there is too much government in all fields of activity in Sikkim and if even social responsibilities are passed on to it, what will the rest of the society contribute? Another important reason why the battle against substance abuse should not be led by the government is because government directives and orders lack the light touch required to address a problem as complicated as substance abuse. One of the proposals on how to address the problem, for instance, was to expel students from school after three warning if they still consume alcohol, and expel them straightaway if they abuse drugs! Alcoholism and drug abuse while on duty by government servants was also to attract termination from service! Apart from the legal minefield that such diktats are walking into, they are also highly insensitive because surely, there must be better ways to end addiction and alcoholism than removing addicts and alcoholics from the scene.

Sikkim needs to be brave, not prudish in tackling substance abuse.

Is Instagram's removal of its 'like' counter a turning point in social media?

KANE X. FAUCHER
theconversation.com

Instagram's recent decision to remove its "like" counter from its platform in select geographic regions is an interesting, perhaps long overdue, measure. Although recently users in Canada reported seeing the "like" counter back on for a day, the counter is currently off. The roll-out is a techno-social experiment, and there are advantages — and a few unintended consequences — of such an action.

Numerous studies have demonstrated how the competitive pursuit of increasing those social media counters can affect self-esteem, particularly among younger users. The removal of the counter may work to remove the incentive to treat social media as a form of numbers-based competition and align more with social collaboration.

However, removing a counter does not eliminate competition. There are non-numeric ways to foster competition. In terms of signalling our approval and support of another user's content, we can post a comment or repost it.

One of the recommendations I proposed in my book on online social capital was to remove these counters or to make them solely visible to the user. It is exciting to see a platform such as Instagram, with its parent company Facebook, take the concerns of cyberpsychology literature seriously.

Will this mark an actual turning point in social media, or will the experiment run its course before everything returns to the status quo?

ELEMENT OF RISK?

As an experiment, there is an element of risk for the social media platform.

However, Instagram's popularity cements its presence in the social media landscape so it can afford to take a few risks. This one, ostensibly, for the more philanthropic purpose of mental wellness.

Hopefully, it signals a new accord between the platform and its users; with Instagram acknowledging the social responsibility that comes with the power of social media.

Much of Instagram's revenue stream is dependent on matching ads to users. To do this, the platform look at both the user's time spent logged in and their engagement (viewing, posts, etc.). Some form of metric must be in place (publicly visible or not) to make the case that there is a good return on

investment (ROI) for ad placement.

Instagram's scale of the user base already speaks to the market potential of funding a company's social media advertising budget. The demographic and market matching will likely still work as intended, given that the algorithm remains in place.

CONSEQUENCES OF REMOVING NUMBERS

For all the benefits of removing these counters — and I see several — we should consider the unintended consequences of such a measure. How will it play among a user base that has become accustomed to the presence of these counters? How will this decision impact fledgling microcelebrities and social media influencers who use this competitive entrepreneurial path in the gig economy?

Without these counters in place, it makes it much harder for the influencer to make the case that they are indeed influential in the endorsement of products and services. This change potentially reduces their ability to pitch their effectiveness to companies in securing new work.

Of course, there are other measures — some more organic or by inference — that can be made, but it would not be difficult to conceive of the possibility that, sans counters, there is not an easy path to track ROI. There may be a follower count, but that speaks only to impressions not engagement.

Influencers, and businesses depend on metrics produced by counters to measure their reach and field test marketing tactics. In the end, however, the removal of these counters may make it even harder for new social media influencers to build reputation, while the already established influencers prosper on the basis of their existing follower base.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COLLABORATION

Without having ready and easy numbers to assess performance and justify expenditure, the removal of the like counter may deprive businesses of some much-needed market intelligence. On the other hand, the removal of these high "like" scores may also function to restore the more socially collaborative rather than competitive nature of social media. It may improve user self-esteem in such a way that social validation may have to come through substantive engagement as opposed to comparing "like" counts.

A potentially significant advantage in removing these counters is that it may reduce the revenue

stream of click farms whose whole purpose seems ethically dubious, and whose labour conditions are not always fair. Those operations will likely still prosper by producing fake followers as long as those counters are still visible.

One might cynically say that the removal of these counters will not put an end to social herding. Removing the appearance of the counters does not mean their process has vanished. The big platforms can still track and trace who sees and engages with what. And that knowledge informs the algorithm to determine the visibility (and invisibility) of content on each user's feed. Users may still pay more attention to already established celebrities and public figures, but that is unlikely to change whether there are "like" counters or not.

A TURNING POINT IN SOCIAL MEDIA

What effect might the removal of the like counter have on the purveyors of fake news and digital astroturfing campaigns? It may not effectively jeopardize their efforts. As long as the algorithm remains unchanged, fake news that gains traction in the social media landscape will still be visible in the news feeds of many users even despite herculean efforts by social media platforms to address this problem.

Bringing the conversation back to the regular, non-famous user, the number of likes is one less arguably trivial or fleeting status symbol to boast about. It is one less way of measuring and ranking one another — at least with the ease of seeing numeric counters. For many social media users, they may not remember a time when those counters were not present. The early adopters of social media would, however. Some might argue that removing the counters may be a flawed move: it makes curation of content that is relevant more difficult. But the algorithm that sifts and sorts on behalf of the user remains intact. If this hiding or removing social media counters catches on, how will you know if anyone "likes" that meme you created, that photo of your food or those selfies snapped in Paris? Perhaps it won't matter, and comments from a more intimate group of followers may provide a bit more validation than simply clicking or tapping an up-thumb icon. It is far too early to tell if this will significantly alter user behaviour and how, but social media did reasonably well in the early days without these counters.

[The writer is Assistant Professor - Faculty of Information and Media Studies, Western University]

I'm daughter of this soil, hope to get permanent or longer resident permit: Taslima

MONA PARTHSARATHI
NEW DELHI, JULY 22 (PTI): Relieved after getting a one-year extension on her residence permit, Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen has expressed hope that the government will consider giving her either a longer permit or a permanent one as she is the "daughter of this soil" and even her cat is Indian.

"India is my home. It would have been better if I did not need to worry every year. There is also the option of issuing residence permit for five or 10 years. I requested former home minister Rajnath Singh ji for this in 2014 as I want to live in India for rest of my life," she told PTI in an interview.

Nasreen's residence permit was extended for one year by the Home Ministry on Sunday. She is a citizen of Sweden and has been getting residence permit on a continuous basis since 2004.

The 56-year-old writer was last week given a three-month residence permit following which she took to Twitter to request Home Minister Amit Shah to extend it for one year.

"I am called a foreigner but I feel like the daughter of this soil. I hope the government will reconsider giving me a permanent or a longer resident permit. I have passed 25 years in exile, still I have to worry every year about the ground beneath my feet. It affects my writing also," she said.

"I feel Delhi is the only place in the sub-continent where I can live peacefully. I would



have been very happy if I could live in East or West Bengal but now it is not possible. Now, I want to live the rest of my life in Delhi. If you don't consider me Indian, my cat is Indian, who is like my daughter and has been with me for 16 years," she added.

Nasreen said that despite several countries offering her permanent residence, she chose India as she felt a cultural connect here.

"My home, my books, my clothes, and my documents everything is here. I don't have any home somewhere else. I am settled here. Why I should leave India," she said when asked about the reason for staying in the country.

"I am a European citizen but I left Europe and the US to live here. I chose India over all other countries which offered me citizenship or permanent resident permit," said Nasreen.

She feels that India is much more liberal than any other country in the world as far as freedom of speech is concerned.

"The Constitution gives you human rights and freedom of speech. There has been a lot of criticism of the government which gets published,

so how can I say there is no freedom of speech. I have seen many nations where there is no such freedom," she said when asked about the notion in a section of society that there was curtailment of freedom of speech.

The author said there were such issues in the US as well during the Iraq war, but they happen several times and go away as well.

"It's not like nobody is allowed to criticize or oppose the government. Sometimes on social media we get attacked when we write something that people don't like. It happens but it is not that dangerous that I will be sent to jail. I don't think that it is an alarming situation in India," said the writer.

"As far as mob violence is concerned it is not staged by government. Some anti-social elements do it and they should be punished strictly," she said.

She said the English sequel of her popular novel 'Lajja' is getting released next year.

"I am writing so many things. In the beginning of next year Harper Collins will release the sequel of Lajja called 'Besharam (shameless),' Nasreen said.

Five injured in clash between suspected BJP, TMC supporters



KOLKATA, JUL 22 (PTI): At least five people were injured in a clash between two groups of people allegedly belonging to the Trinamool Congress and the BJP over a blood donation camp in the city's Behala area, police said Monday.

The incident happened around 10 pm on Sunday when the groups scuffled over a minor issue pertaining to the camp, a senior officer of Behala Police Station said.

Security has been

beefed up in the area to thwart any untoward incident, the officer said.

TMC supporters had blocked a stretch of Roy Bahadur Road on Sunday night in protest against the alleged attack on two of its partymen, leading to traffic snarls, he said.

The blockade was withdrawn after about two hours, following the intervention of local TMC councillor and IC, (Sewerage and Drainage), Tarak Singh.

"We have requested the police to take proper action against the

culprits, who are trying to disturb peace in this area.

"I have heard there was a clash but I have no clue about who were involved in the incident. A few of our men have been attacked," Singh said.

Local BJP leader Dipankar Banik, who claimed to have organised the blood donation camp in his personal capacity, said he was also attacked.

"We want immediate action against those involved in the attack," Banik added.

Nadda pulls up Pragma Singh Thakur for her toilet remarks

NEW DELHI, JUL 22 (PTI): BJP working president J P Nadda Monday "pulled up" Bhopal MP Pragma Singh Thakur for her remarks that she was not elected to the Lok Sabha for cleaning up toilets, comments that were seen to be mocking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Swachh Bharat' campaign.

She was summoned to the BJP headquarters, where Nadda conveyed

to her the party leadership's displeasure with her comments made at Sehore in Madhya Pradesh on Sunday, party sources said.

Thakur was pulled up and asked to refrain from making statements that go against the party's programmes and ideology, they said.

The BJP MP declined to speak to reporters as she left the party office.

Addressing a meeting

of BJP workers in Madhya Pradesh, Thakur, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case who is currently out on bail, said the job of an MP is to work with MLAs, corporators and public representatives to ensure development.

"So keep this in mind... We are not here for cleaning a drain. Is it clear?. We are absolutely not (here) for cleaning your toilets. The work which we are supposed to do and elected

for, we will do it honestly. This we had said in the past, saying it today and stick to it in future as well," she said. Thakur had won her maiden election from Bhopal Lok Sabha seat by defeating Congress leader Digvijay Singh.

But this is not the first time she has left the BJP red-faced.

During the Lok Sabha poll campaign, she had hailed Mahatma Gandhi's killer Nathuram Godse as a "patriot".

She was forced to apologise after he comments triggered an outrage, and Modi went on to say that he would not be able to forgive her despite the apology. She was issued a showcause notice as well.

Mizoram re-identifies 26,128 Bru refugees in 6 relief camps of Tripura

AIZAWL, JUL 22 (PTI): Mizoram officials have re-identified 26,128 Bru refugees belonging to 4,278 families lodged in six relief camps in North Tripura district, state Home Secretary Lalbiakzama said on Monday.

The re-identification of the bona fide residents of Mizoram, as part of the repatriation process of the Bru refugees lodged in the relief camps, was completed on July 20, Lalbiakzama said.

The figure was not final as scrutiny would be held after a meeting with the officials, who returned from Tripura, the home secretary said.

Officials from Mamit, Kolasib and Lunglei districts conducted the head count to figure out who are willing to return to Mizoram, from where the Bru community people had fled to Tripura in 1997 due to ethnic unrest.

Lalbiakzama told PTI that the officials undertook the second phase of identification from July 3 and completed the exercise within the time-frame of July 20.

In the previous head count conducted in No-



vember last, 32,876 Brus belonging to 5,407 families were found in the relief camps in North Tripura district.

Of them, only 33 families had returned during repatriation in 2018 and 5,374 Bru families were estimated to have been remaining in the relief camps.

The re-identification was necessitated as there is a possibility of change in the number of people in the camps due to births and deaths, and availability of proper documents, official sources said.

The state government was making preparations for the final round of repatriation of the Bru people from Tripura to Mizoram which is sched-

uled to begin in early September, the home secretary said.

"It will depend on the weather, and of course the preparedness of the Ministry of Home Affairs as well as Tripura government, as coordinated efforts of all the stakeholders are crucial," he said.

All the identified families expressed their willingness to return to Mizoram though opposition from hardliners and anti repatriation elements could not be ruled out, he said.

The Centre, in association with the governments of Mizoram and Tripura, had been repatriating the displaced Brus in phases.

The Centre, state governments of Mizoram and Tripura and the Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF), the apex body of the Bru community in the relief camps, had on July 3, 2018 signed an agreement for repatriation of all the Bru refugees from Tripura before September 30 last.

As the move did not succeed, it was decided to resume the process this year.

The Centre had earlier decided to discontinue all kinds of subsistence allowances, including ration supplies and cash dole, to the Bru refugees from October 1 last year, but continued with the assistance on humanitar-

ian grounds.

Meanwhile, the Bru refugees recently demanded that Mizoram government resettle them in southern Mizoram due to "shortage of land" in Mamit and Kolasib districts where majority of them were to be resettled, the sources said.

The state government rejected the demand saying that the July 3 agreement should stand, the sources said.

According to the pact, the families would have to be resettled in those districts where they used to stay before fleeing to Tripura.

The Brus are in Tripura since late 1997 in the wake of a communal tension triggered by the murder of a forest guard inside the Dampa Tiger Reserve on October 21, 1997 by Bru National Liberation Front militants.

The first attempt to repatriate them in 2009 failed and triggered another wave of exodus after the killing of a youth three days before the commencement of the repatriation process.

IIT-G plans to set up extension centres in NE states

NEW DELHI, JUL 22 (PTI): The IIT-Guwahati is planning to set up extension centres in northeastern states and run programmes to bring Class 12 students from state-run schools for exposure visits at its campus.

"We plan to expand the reach of the institute to other parts of the northeast by opening extension centres with necessary approval from the HRD Ministry," Director, IIT Guwahati, TG Sitharam, said.

Sitharam took charge of the top post at the prestigious engineering institute earlier this month.

"We also plan to run programmes to bring several Class 12 students from 12 government-run schools of northeastern states to the IIT-Guwahati campus for exposure visit," the director said.

Sitharam said stu-

dents will visit research facilities and interact with the faculty at the institute.

"Besides this, the institute plans to create awareness and training for the rural masses about rural technologies which IIT-G is working on," he said.

Union HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' had recently visited the IIT-Guwahati campus.

"The minister identified some key focus areas for the institute wherein he mentioned IIT-Guwahati to collaborate with other esteemed institutes in the country along with institutes of the northeast region," Sitharam said.

The institute is committed to working in this direction so that "we can extend our contribution towards the development of our country," he said.

Toll in Assam flood climbs to 66, over 30 lakh affected

GUWAHATI, JUL 22 (PTI): The flood situation in Assam remained grim with the toll touching 66 on Monday following the death of two more persons, as 30.55 lakh people is 18 of the state's 33 districts were affected by the deluge.

The calamity has also claimed the lives of 187 animals, including 16 rhinos in the Kaziranga National Park. However, in another rhino habitat -- the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary -- not a single animal has died in the flood.

The two fresh deaths were reported from Dhubri and Dhemaji districts, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said in its evening bulletin.

Altogether 96,890 displaced persons are

sheltered in 757 relief camps and relief distribution centres set up by district administrations, it said.

A total of 2,283 villages and 1.14 lakh hectare agricultural field are still inundated in the flood-hit districts.

In the Kaziranga National Park in Golaghat district, the animal death toll due to drowning include 15 rhinos, 103 hog deer, one elephant, six swamp deer, 12 sambhar, two water buffaloes, 13 wild boars, three porcupines, a Forest and Environment department release said on Monday.

Another rhino and 10 hog deer also perished due to other reasons, the release said adding 64 animals, including two rhinos, were rescued.

State Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya said the personnel and volunteers at the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary have done an impressive job by keeping the number of animal death toll at zero this time.

"Their hard work and dedication should be inspiration for the whole society," Suklabaidya said after visiting Pabitora in Morigaon district and chairing a review meeting.

Meanwhile, the mighty Brahmaputra river is flowing above the danger level at Neamatighat in Jorhat district and Dhubri district, Jia Bharali at N T Road Crossing in Sonitpur district and Kopili at Dharamtul in Nagaon district, the ASDMA said.

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

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

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Hima Das nearing her best: High Performance Director

PHILEM DIPAK SINGH NEW DELHI, JULY 22 (PTI): Indian athletics' High Performance Director Volker Herrmann feels star sprinter Hima Das is nearing her best, having won five successive gold medals in three weeks in Europe.

The 19-year-old Hima has won five races -- four in 200m and one in her pet 400m event -- in Poland and Czech Republic since July 2. She has been improving on her timing even though the field in all the five races was mediocre.

"Hima is progressing in the right direction. If you want to run sub 50 seconds (in 400m) you also have to be able to run sub 22.80 in 200m. She is getting closer," Herrmann said, explaining why she began with 200m races before switching to 400m in her last race on July 20 when she clocked a season best time of 52.09.

Hima is yet to qualify in either 200m or 400m for the World Championships, to be held in Doha from September 26 to October 6. The World

Championships qualifying mark stands at 23.02 and 51.80.

Her male counterpart Muhammed Anas has qualified for the World Championships after bettering his own 400m national record last week.

"We also have Muhammed Anas breaking his own record and that is quite promising," said the 38-year-old Herrmann who took charge on July 1.

The highly qualified German, who has worked in similar capacity in his native country and Singapore, said athletes around the world have been making changes in their training due to the World Championships happening late in the season, and the Indians are also adjusting accordingly.

"All around the world, the athletes are facing the same problem. The coaches have to rush the whole preparation model. The athletes will need to peak twice, the first (peak) right now and second by the end of September.

"We are preparing a



series of competition to raise our performance level and then we will continue on a slightly higher level with higher intensity towards World Championships," he added.

He said 25 to 30 Indian athletes can qualify for next year's Tokyo Olympics.

"In men's and wom-

en's 400m relay, the eight finalists at World Championships will directly qualify for Tokyo and in certain ways, that is the easiest for us to qualify. Mixed 400m relay is another one we can qualify. Then, we are in a good situation in javelin throw and 400m.

"Tokyo is exactly one year from now. We will

work on the strengths and weaknesses of our athletes to do our best. But we need to look forward to 2024 and 2028 Olympics."

Herrmann said his plan is to make three different strategies for the three upcoming Olympics.

"First for Tokyo, we will work with the cur-

rent athletes in high performance team. Secondly for 2024, besides the current athletes we have to find talented ones at youth and junior levels who have potential to be at top level in five years from now. They can be 15, 16 and 17 years of age," he said.

"For 2028 Olympics, we have to work with

10, 11 or 12 years old children. To be honest, these are athletes with which we can initiate change in Indian athletics. We need to work at state and district level, give proper foundation to these kids, more towards core training and technical model.

"India should develop its own philosophy and not copy from say USA or another country to face specific challenges it has. The working of officials should be streamlined and coaching methods should be same throughout the country."

He said that training of high performance athletes should focus more on increasing intensive quality sessions rather than on volume, and provide enough recovery time.

"The modern method of training is to increase number of intensive sessions and achieve high quality. You cannot have high volume and high intensity. But you have to have enough recovery time. Otherwise, you will have injury and mental fatigue.

"The ideal training is to ensure 100 per cent in few events like World Championships or Olympics. It is important to give one time 90m throw (in javelin) instead of five time 85m.

"Unlike other sports, it is not enough to give 96 or 97 per cent in a top event, you have to be 100 per cent. The three or four per cent make all the difference."

On India's high performance pool of athletes, Herrmann said, "130 or 140 elite athletes in national camps currently is too small a percentage of total population. In USA, there were 200 thousand athletes competing in NCAA.

"But I am optimistic of Indian athletics making strides in coming years. The government and the AFI are working hard and other stakeholders are also interested in taking athletics forward. We need involvement of state and district officials in a big way for grassroots development. We need step-by-step approach to take Indian athletics to next level.

Griezmann says heart with Barca after ugly Atletico exit

TOKYO, JUL 22 (AFP): Antoine Griezmann on Monday said he couldn't wait to make his Barcelona debut and that his heart was with the team as he tries to move on from a sour exit from Spanish rivals Atletico Madrid.

Griezmann's 120 million euros transfer was contested by Atletico, who insisted Barcelona should have paid a higher price for the World Cup-winning French striker.

But he told media in Tokyo: "I am very happy about the outcome of my transfer. I am very eager to play as soon as possible."

"I wish Atletico players all the best of luck. I am focused on giving my all so that Barca will deliver good results," he said in Spanish through a translator.



Barcelona's offer triggered Griezmann's release clause but Atletico said the Catalan club negotiated the deal before the buy-out price dropped from 200 million euros at the start of July.

Atletico are reportedly planning to take their case to FIFA.

Griezmann voiced his appreciation for his time at Atletico and his strong relationship with their

coach, Diego Simeone. But the Frenchman said he was now committed to Barca.

"I am focused on fitting in among the Barcelona players. My heart is here with them," he said.

The Spanish giants will play a friendly against Chelsea on Tuesday, and on Saturday they face Japan's Vissel Kobe, who feature ex-Barca players Andres Iniesta, David Villa and Sergi Samper.

India A claim 4-1 series win over WI A with 8-wicket win in final one-dayer

ANTIGUA, JUL 22 (PTI): India A's top-order, led by opener Rituraj Gaikwad, fired in unison to steer the team to a convincing eight-wicket win in the fifth and final unofficial one-dayer against the West Indies A, completing a 4-1 series triumph here.

Rahul Chahar (2/53) and his cousin Deepak (2/39), along with pacer Navdeep Saini (2/31) -- all of whom made the cut for India's limited over squad on Sunday --, picked up two wickets each to help India A dismiss West Indies A for 236 in 47.4 overs.

Gaikwad (99) then led the chase but missed out on a well-deserved century. His fellow opener Shubman Gill (69) and first-down Shreyas Iyer (61) also blasted half-centuries as India A overhauled the target in 33 overs at Coolidge Cricket Ground here.

Gill hit eight fours and three sixes in a 40-ball 69 to share an opening stand of 110 with Gaikwad. He was dis-



missed by the off-spinner Rahkeem Cornwall in the 12th over.

Gaikwad then took India A to the brink of victory before being removed by Keemo Paul with the visitors needing just 15. His 89-ball innings was laced with 11 fours and three sixes.

Iyer, who added 112 runs for the second wicket with Gaikwad, remained unconquered with 61 off 64 balls. He had three hits to the fence and cleared the ropes twice.

Earlier, electing to bat, West Indies A made a good start with opener Sunil Ambris cracking a 52-ball 61 studded with

seven boundaries and two sixes to give the team early momentum.

But India A's bowlers triggered a collapse, reducing the hosts from 77 for no loss to 103 for six.

Sherfane Rutherford then came up with a 70-ball 65 to lift West Indies A to 236. Khary Pierre hit four boundaries and a six in his unbeaten 35 off 34 balls before running out of partners.

India A 237 for 2 (Gaikwad 99, Gill 69, Iyer 61 not out; Keemo Paul 1/37) beat West Indies A 236 (Rutherford 65, Ambris 61; Navdeep Saini 2/31, Deepak Chahar 2/39, Rahul Chahar 2/53) by eight wickets.

Sindhu looks to complete unfinished business in Japan



TOKYO, JUL 22 (PTI): Ace Indian shuttler P V Sindhu will have to quickly pick up the pieces after her deflating loss in the Indonesia Open final and prepare for the next battle at the Japan Open BWF World Tour Super 750 starting here Tuesday.

The USD 750,000 tournament will also see the return of Saina Nehwal, who had missed the Indonesia Open Super 1000 event due to fitness issues.

Sindhu missed an opportunity to break a seven-month title drought when she lost in straight games to Akane Yamaguchi in Jakarta on Sunday and the Indian will look to go the full distance when she opens against China's Han Yue here.

If she crosses the opening hurdle, Sindhu will face either Scotland's Kirsty Gilmour or Japan's Aya Ohori in the second round.

The fifth seed will also aim to avenge her final loss to Yamaguchi as she is likely to face the world no 4 Japanese in the quarterfinals.

"Overall, it was a good tournament for me at Indonesia and I hope I can take the confidence going forward and do well at Japan," Sindhu had said after the finals on Sunday.

Saina, seeded eighth and the only Indian to win a title this season, will open against Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan, an opponent against whom she enjoys a 3-1 head-to-head lead.

In men's singles, it will be an all-Indian opening round battle between HS Prannoy

and eighth seed Kidambi Srikanth.

The duo has faced each other five times so far in the international circuit with Srikanth having the last laugh in the past four occasions.

Among other Indians, B Sai Praneeth, who had reached the finals of the Swiss Open, will face Japan's Kenta Nishimoto.

Sameer Verma, who had missed the Indonesia Open due to a shoulder problem, will look to test his fitness against Denmark's Anders Antonsen, runner-up in Jakarta after a marathon final on Sunday.

In the doubles draw, the men's pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will square off against England's Marcus Ellis and Chris Langridge, who won a bronze medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Manu Attri and B Sumee Reddy will cross swords with Malaysia's Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin in another men's doubles match.

The women's doubles pair of Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy will face off against the Korean combination of Kim So Yeong and Kong Hee Yong in the opening round.

The mixed doubles pair of Pranaav Jerry Chopra and Sikki will face an uphill task when they meet top-seeded Chinese combination of Zheng Si Wei and Huang Ya Qiong, who claimed the Indonesia Open title on Sunday.

Satwiksairaj and Ashwini will open against German pair of Marvin Seidel and Linda Efler in another mixed doubles match.

Isner beats Bublik for fourth Newport ATP title



NEW YORK, JUL 22 (AFP): American John Isner captured his fourth title at the ATP grass court tournament at Newport, Rhode Island, beating Alexander Bublik 7-6 (7/2), 6-3.

Isner, who was sidelined by a stress fracture in his left foot for three months after reaching the Miami final in March, was the top seed in the tournament that he also won in 2011, 2012 and 2017.

Bublik, the seventh-seeded 22-year-old from Kazakhstan who was playing in his first ATP final, double-faulted on break point to fall behind 3-2 in the second set, and that was the only opening the big-serving Isner needed.

The 34-year-old American -- who produced only a modest five

aces but put 79 percent of his first serves in play -- finished off the match with a forehand winner even as he slipped on the grass and sprawled forward.

He converted all three of his break points in the game, including on match point when the Kazakh failed in his bid to catch Isner out with an underarm serve on the final point.

While that didn't pan out, Isner urged Bublik to continue to pursue his "quirky" game.

"It was a lot of fun to play against you today," Isner told him.

"You're very quirky, but I mean that in a very sincere way. You're fantastic for the game and we all hope you continue to have great results in the future because guys like you are important to

keep tennis exciting."

The towering American also had words of thanks for his team, especially his physical therapist.

"It's not easy keeping a guy like myself healthy," said Isner, who is slated to appear next week in Atlanta, Georgia, in search of a sixth title in the BB&T Open.

Bublik, who has toiled largely on the ATP Challenger Tour, is assured of reaching a career-high ATP ranking on Monday, when he will break into the top 75 for the first time.

Bublik had earned the first break of the match at 5-5 in the opening set, but he double-faulted on break point in the next game as it went to a tiebreaker that Isner dominated.

ATK rope in Aussie midfielder Dario Vidosic

KOLKATA, JUL 22 (PTI): Former champions ATK Monday signed Croatia-born Aussie midfielder Dario Vidosic for the upcoming season of the Indian Super League.

Vidosic is an attacking midfielder, who doubles up as a winger.

"Dario is an experienced campaigner and a wonderful addition to the team. I am looking forward to working with him and create a strong attacking midfield that will support the strikers ably," ATK head coach Antonio

Lpez Habas said in a statement.

The 32-year-old began his career in the A-League, signing a two-year contract with Queensland Roar for the 2006-07 season.

After that he had a successful stint with German club 1 FC Nurnberg in the Bundesliga.

"I am happy to have signed for ATK. This will be exciting and a new experience for me. I am hoping that I can help ATK lift the Cup again," the Australian said.

Vidosic then joined Wellington Phoenix in

2017 for a couple of months before moving to Melbourne City.

In 2006, Vidosic was selected in the Australian Under-20 squad and competed in the 2006 AFC Youth Championships in India.

He then played for the Under-23 national team in an Olympic qualifier in Adelaide next year, scoring the 11th goal in Australia's 11-0 win over Chinese Taipei.

In 2009, Vidosic made his debut for the senior national team in their last World Cup qualifier against Japan.

UK PM race between Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt to conclude

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, JUL 22 (PTI): Britain's prime ministerial race entered its final phase as voting closes on Monday evening for counting to begin before Theresa May's successor is unveiled on Tuesday.

The frontrunner throughout the contest has been former foreign secretary Boris Johnson as the Conservative Party's over 160,000 members up and down the UK filed in their postal votes to decide between him and the current foreign secretary, Jeremy Hunt.

They have until 1700 local time to ensure their ballot papers have been submitted in the election after which the counting process is set to begin, with the party's influential 1922 Committee in charge of the election of the new Tory leader who will take charge at Downing Street.

In terms of timeline, May will carry on as caretaker PM for a few days still as she is set to address her final Prime Minister's Questions session in the House of Commons on Wednesday after which she will head to Buckingham Palace to formally offer her resignation to Queen Elizabeth II.

The 93-year-old monarch will then meet the newly-elected Conser-



ervative Party leader and invite him to form a new government. The new PM then traditionally makes a statement on the steps of 10 Downing Street before taking official charge before Parliament's summer recess is set to kick off from Friday until early September.

In one of final major prime ministerial acts, May is chairing the government's emergency Cobra meeting on Monday after a British-flagged tanker was seized by Iran in the Gulf last week.

She will receive updates from ministers and officials on the crisis since the vessel and its crew, including Indian nationals, was seized. It will be one of the first big internation-

al issue to address for any new PM as well.

With just hours to go before the vote closes, Johnson used his weekly newspaper column in the 'Daily Telegraph' to compare the Brexit negotiations and meeting the October 31 deadline for Britain to leave the European Union (EU) with the same "can-do spirit" behind putting a man on the moon 50 years ago.

He called for optimism in the approach to resolving the controversial Irish backstop issue, the controversial insurance policy insisted upon by the EU but seen as a means of keeping the UK tied to European rules even after Brexit.

The conundrum had resulted in May losing repeated parliamentary votes over her Brexit

agreement, ultimately leading to her forced departure as British prime minister.

"If they could use hand-knitted computer code to make a frictionless re-entry to Earth's atmosphere in 1969, we can solve the problem of frictionless trade at the Northern Irish border," writes Johnson.

"It is time this country recovered some of its can-do spirit. We can come out of the EU on October 31, and yes, we certainly have the technology to do so. What we need now is the will and the drive," he said.

He has come under severe criticism from leading politicians, including former British Prime Minister Tony Blair from the Opposition Labour Party, who

warned against the prospect of a chaotic no-deal Brexit something Johnson has refused to rule out on several occasions.

Blair writes in 'The Times' to warn that "crashing out without public endorsement would be a gargantuan risk" and "no one knows with certainty the impact of no-deal".

"It could be merely very difficult or it could be catastrophic," he said.

Meanwhile, senior UK Cabinet members Chancellor Philip Hammond and justice secretary David Gauke have declared their intention to resign if Johnson is the one elected as party leader and Prime Minister, in line with their firm opposition to a no-deal Brexit. A number of other Cabinet members are set to follow suit in the event that Johnson wins race over similar Brexit-related concerns.

Besides the Tory leadership race this week, the new leader of the pro-EU Liberal Democrat party is also set to conclude on Monday.

Liberal Democrat parliamentarians Jo Swinson and Sir Ed Davey are battling it out to succeed Sir Vince Cable as party leader and one of them will be announced as the new leader at the end of the vote.

Final hours of voting in race to become British PM

London, Jul 22 (AFP): The voting closes Monday in the contest to become Britain's next prime minister, with Boris Johnson expected to be confirmed as the winner charged with delivering Brexit.

After a month-long contest between former London mayor Johnson and Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, the postal votes of up to 160,000 grassroots Conservatives will decide the governing party's next leader.

The voting window slams shut at 5:00pm (1600 GMT).

The result will be announced on Tuesday, with the winner immediately becoming the new Conservative leader, the victor taking office as prime minister on Wednesday.

Both candidates have had a rocky end to the campaign.

Finance minister Philip Hammond announced Sunday that he would make a point of



resigning before Johnson became prime minister, saying he could never agree to his Brexit strategy.

Meanwhile Hunt has had to deal with the fallout of Iran's seizure of a British-flagged tanker in the Gulf.

In one of her final acts as prime minister, Theresa May will chair a meeting of Britain's COBR emergencies committee at around 10:30am

(0930 GMT).

"As well as receiving the latest updates from ministers and officials, the COBR meeting will discuss the maintenance of the security of shipping in the Persian Gulf," a Downing Street spokeswoman said.

Hunt said parliament would be updated Monday on the situation in the Gulf.

The final posted votes will be delivered to Con-

servative headquarters in London on Monday morning. Any last remaining votes will have to be delivered by hand or courier.

An online poll of 1,199 members conducted Friday and Saturday by the Conservative Home website put Johnson on 73 per cent.

Bookmakers give Hunt around a one in 15 chance of winning.

Shares blast off as 'China's Nasdaq' debuts

Shanghai, Jul 22 (AFP): Shares on Shanghai's new Nasdaq-style technology board soared Monday, with one firm rocketing more than 500 per cent, as investors rushed to grab a piece of China's latest market liberalisation in a frenzied debut.

All 25 components on the Shanghai Stock Exchange's Sci-Tech Innovation Board, or STAR Market, were driven sharply higher in a hearty initial endorsement of China's plan to use the board to help fund fast-growing tech firms and discourage them listing abroad.

Anji Technology, a solar energy battery manufacturer, closed morning trade up 415.44 per cent at 202 yuan after earlier soaring as high as 520

per cent. The board's biggest component, China Railway Signal & Communication, rose 125.64 per cent to 13.20 yuan on market-leading turnover of 7.6 billion yuan (USD 1.1 billion).

The introduction of the board, for which listing and trading rules have been dramatically eased, represents one of China's most significant financial market reforms yet and a potential weapon in its growing tech rivalry with the United States.

The tech board is yet to draw any household names.

But China hopes it will eventually include listings from among the country's rich stable of

tech "unicorns" -- startups valued at a minimum 1 billion -- which include Alibaba-linked mobile-payments pioneer Ant Financial, ride-sharing giant Didi Chuxing, and online-services platform Meituan-Dianping.

China's government envisions the board being mentioned in the same breath someday as the tech-heavy Nasdaq, encouraging firms to list at home after the likes of Alibaba and Baidu chose Wall Street.

That will take time -- the Nasdaq has more than 3,000 companies listed and is one of the world's biggest exchanges.

"I think the science and technology board will develop into a major and important sector in Chi-

na's capital markets, but it will take a long time, maybe 10 years, 20 years, or even longer," said Jiang Liangqing, a fund manager at Ruisen Capital Management.

It is a leap of faith for China's volatility-averse authorities, as its stocks have been given relatively free rein.

For the first time, Chinese companies can list without a track record of past profits or restrictions on IPO pricing.

There will be no limits on price movements for the first five days of trading, after which a daily 20 percent band is imposed.

China's two main exchanges in Shanghai and Shenzhen are subject to a 10 percent band to contain volatility.

IMF urges Pakistan to mobilise domestic tax revenue

LALIT K JHA

WASHINGTON, JUL 22 (PTI): The IMF has urged Pakistan to mobilise domestic tax revenues to provide for the social and development spending and place debt on a downward trend.

The statement of International Monetary Fund (IMF) Acting Managing Director David Lipton came after he met Prime Minister Imran Khan who is on a three-day official visit to the US at the invitation of President Donald Trump.

"I highlighted the need to mobilise domestic tax revenue now and on into the future



ported by the IMF.

"Their programme aims to stabilise the economy, strengthen institutions and thereby put Pakistan on a path of sustainable and balanced growth," Lipton said.

The IMF, together with other international partners, is working closely with the government of Pakistan to support the implementation of the authorities' economic reform programme, he said.

Recently, the IMF cleared a USD 6 billion bailout package to cash-strapped Pakistan to overcome economic difficulties.

to provide reliably for needed social and development spending, while placing debt on a firm downward trend," Lipton said Sunday.

He said that they discussed recent economic developments and the implementation of the authority's economic reform programme sup-

Trump presidential election linked to rise in premature births among US Latina women: Study

WASHINGTON, JUL 22 (PTI): A significant jump in premature births among Latina women living in the US occurred in the nine months following the 2016 election of US President Donald Trump, according to a study.

The study, published in the journal JAMA Network Open, was prompted by smaller studies that had suggested adverse, stress-related health effects among Latin Americans in the US after the Trump election.

The new analysis, based on US government data on more than 33 million live births in the country, found an excess of 2,337 preterm births to US Latinas compared to what would have been expected given trends in preterm birth in the years prior to the election.

This is roughly 3.5 per cent more preterm births than expected given projections from pre-election data, said researchers from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the US.

Preterm birth, defined as birth before 37 weeks of gestation, is associated with a wide range of negative health consequences, from a greater risk of death in infancy to developmental problems later in life.

"The 2016 election,

following campaign promises of mass deportation and the roll-back of policies such as DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme, may have adversely affected the health of Latinas and their newborns," said Alison Gemmill, an assistant professor in the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health at the Bloomberg School.

Researchers know that stress in pregnant women can bring an elevated risk of preterm birth.

Previous studies also suggest that anti-immigrant policies or actions can stress immigrant women and make them less likely to seek prenatal care, researchers said.

Moreover, although most Latinas living in the US are citizens or otherwise documented immigrants and would not be directly threatened by tighter policies for undocumented immigrants, they are very likely to have close friends or family members who would be threatened by such policies, they said.

The study was prompted by a smaller study in 2018 by other researchers, who found a moderately elevated rate of preterm births to foreign-born Latina

women in New York City from September 1, 2015 to July 31, 2016 compared to January 1, 2017 to August 31, 2017.

Gemmill and her colleagues decided to investigate this issue on a national level, using more rigorous methodology that would account, for example, for the slow rise in the national preterm rate that has been observed since 2014.

In their analysis, Gemmill and colleagues used a database from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that covers essentially all live births in the US.

First, the researchers tracked preterm births to self-identified Latina women over the previous administration, January 2009 to October 2016.

They then used those data to generate an estimate of expected preterm births during the following nine months, from November 2016 to July 2017.

Next, the researchers compared those expected numbers to the actual numbers of preterm births to Latina women during the nine months after the election.

They found there were 1,342 preterm births above the expected number of 36,828, and 995 preterm births of female infants above the expected 30,687.

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Embarrassing, shameful: America Ferrera on 'send her back' chants

LOS ANGELES, JUL 22 (PTI): America Ferrera has slammed the chants of "send her back" at a President Donald Trump rally recently, calling the incident "embarrassing and shameful".

The slogans were targeted at Democratic representative Ilhan Omar earlier this week at the event, which saw Trump mock congresswomen from the opposition.

"It's devastating and shocking and embarrassing and shameful," Ferrera told Variety.

The Emmy-winning actor, who has been vocal on the issues of immigration and racism, said to reach a solution, identifying the problem is the first step.

"All of these issues have been there under the surface and they're boiling up and it's really hard to face and look at.

"But in order to solve the problem we have to be aware that the problem is there. I think we're at a point where people are having to reckon with the reality of where we are at," Ferrera said.

At the rally, the POTUS had lashed out against the women of colour with liberal

views -- Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan.

Except others, Omar wasn't born in the US and came to the country as a child after fleeing Somalia with her family.

"Tonight I have a suggestion for the hate-filled extremists who are constantly trying to tear our country down.

"They never have anything good to say. That's why I say, 'Hey if you don't like it, let 'em leave, let 'em leave,'" Trump told the crowd in North Carolina.

This channelled the prez supporters to raise "send her back" slogans.

Omar responded to the chants on Wednesday night with a series of tweets, including one quoting Maya Angelou's defiant poem, "Still I Rise."

Trump also hit back at the congresswomen on Sunday on Twitter and told them to "go back" where they came from, causing another uproar amid his stand on racism and immigration.



Charlie Barnett joins 'Arrow' final season cast



LOS ANGELES, JUL 22 (PTI): "Russian Doll" actor Charlie Barnett is the latest addition to the "Arrow"-verse.

The actor has boarded "Arrow" as a series regular and will play the role of John Diggle, Jr, son of David Ramsey character John Diggle/Spartan.

According to Variety, news of his casting was announced at the show's last San Diego Comic-Con panel.

The CW series will end after season eight, which premieres in October.

Executive producer Marc Guggenheim revealed that Barnett's character has "a bit of an edge to him" and will don a costume that fans will find "very surprising".

"We wanna go out while people are still talking about the show and the show is still the show, we don't want to turn it into something less than just to keep going," Guggenheim said about the team's decision to end the series after season eight.

Kiara celebrates 'Kabir Singh' success, thanks director for giving her a flawed, real character

MUMBAI, JUL 22 (PTI): Kiara Advani is on cloud nine following the golden box office run of "Kabir Singh" and the actor has credited her director Sandeep Reddy Vanga co-star Shahid Kapoor for their passion and conviction towards the film.

In a lengthy Instagram post, Kiara thanked the team and the audience for believing in Kabir and Preeti's love story.

"A year ago I stepped into the shoes of Preeti, shy, demure, and basically the complete opposite of me. But I also saw her strength, conviction, her love and her passion and couldn't help but feel for the love story that you all rooted for with me," she wrote alongside a poster of the movie.

The actor feels lucky to have got the opportunity to work with Shahid, who she said was her confidant and friend on the sets.

"Kabir, aka @shahidkapoor my co-star... who completed and made this story so real and believable. Already missing your craziness mama, couldn't have been luckier to work together on this special film."

Even though helmer Sandeep has received a lot of flak for his projection of romance in the movie, Kiara said he made the film "unapologetically".

"... His passion for films, his craziness and honesty gave us the opportunity to play characters that were flawed, imperfect and so real that you can't stop yourself from feeling for them," she added.

The actor also thanked the producers, the director of pho-



tography, singers, music composers and her personal team for contributing to the project.

The film has been in the headlines since its release with many calling it "misogynistic" and "toxic".

"Kabir Singh" has minted over Rs 270 crore in its five-week-long run in the cinemas.

Star value a brutal truth we need to accept: Taapsee on 'Mission Mangal' poster controversy

NEW DELHI, JUL 22 (PTI): Taapsee Pannu has a message for the critics of the first poster of "Mission Mangal" which courted controversy for giving Akshay Kumar a bigger display than his women colleagues: star value is a "brutal truth" that must be accepted.

Taapsee said instead of questioning the poster, people need to be the change they want to see.

The actor plays Kritika Aggarwal, one of the female scientists spearheading India's mission to send a spacecraft to orbit Mars in the film, slated to be released on Independence Day.

Akshay plays Rakesh Dhawan, a scientist, who is in-charge of the mission.

"The problem is not from this end (the film). The people who are not happy about it, they need to do something because there's a reason behind it...

"The star value is such... That's a brutal truth that we need to accept and then think that there is no point questioning it. Be the reason to change this truth," Taapsee told PTI on the sidelines of 10th Jagran Film Festival, that concluded on Sunday.

"Mission Mangal", directed by Jagan Shakti, is based on real-life scientists, who contributed to India's first interplanetary expedition, Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM), launched by Indian Research Space Organisation (ISRO) in 2013.

The 31-year-old actor said the film would have managed a good run at the box office even if the five female cast members -- Vidya Balan, Sonakshi Sinha, Kirti Kulhari, Nithya Menon and her -- were not a part of the movie.

"Had we, the five women actors, not been a part of this film, there would have been some impact on the collections



but not that much as the content of the movie would have remained as strong as it is now. There's already a big superstar in the film," she said referring to Akshay.

"We five being a part of it just makes it go higher. But the box office wouldn't have dropped even if we were not in the film. Pick up any of our films, the five ladies, add them together and compare the collection of the opening day of all those films with an Akshay Kumar movie..." she added.

At the trailer launch of the film last week, Akshay addressed the flak that the poster received, assuring the audience that "Mission Mangal" belongs to its female cast.

"This film belongs to these ladies and it will always belong to them," he had said. Taapsee has previously collaborated with Akshay in "Baby" and "Naam Shabana".



SMILES ALL AROUND! The model, Hailey Bieber sports a white dress and matching sneakers while out in sunny Los Angeles.

THE DAY AHEAD

ARIES:

Daily reminder, Aries: we are not here to wage wars. We are here to spread the message of love, compassion and empathy. Where are you vibrating at? Are you letting your reactive nature get the better of you again? Back off when you sense a volatile situation. No argument is worth losing your peace of mind over.

TAURUS:

A Monk Who Sold His Ferrari quote to inspire you: "Just because it's never been done, doesn't mean it can't be done." This phase of your life calls for great daring. It requires you to invest in your larger-than-life ideas. Remember, everything you desire awaits you on the other side of fear. Given that your entrepreneurship skills are especially sharp at this point, you'll have no trouble taking the kind of risks that promise phenomenal results.

GEMINI:

Your success is no accident. An almost lethal mix of hard work, perseverance and sacrifice has brought you where you are

today. Don't let anybody dull your sparkle or make you question your abilities. For some, opportunities to work, study or move abroad could be opening up. Alternatively, you could be thinking about initiating a big move. PS: The world is truly your oyster.

CANCER:

The tug of war is getting exhausting. Clearly define your priorities so you can achieve your targets in the most efficient manner. Some of you may feel like you are stuck in a rut. Be accountable for your time and energy, Cancer. Start by eliminating the mundane that is parading under the garb of 'urgent tasks'. See how and where you can delegate. **LEO:**

Sometimes, the perfect opportunity is in front of you, but the clouds of confusion created by your monkey mind keep you from realising it. Things to do at the start of this week: get out of your own way, especially in the realm of your career and life path. Learning to strike when the iron is hot will open the gateway to success.

VIRGO:

Ready to receive that big fat bonus from the Universe? This week, you're destiny's favourite child—a well-deserved position that promises many perks. Resist the urge to spend your big bucks immediately. Instead, focus on savings and investments. Find new ways to make your money work for you.

LIBRA:

Caught in yet another drama? Stay centred, Libra. You don't want to bring that energy into the workspace. Be cognizant of where your employees and co-workers are at as well. There's a good chance they are going through trials and tribulations of their own. As a result, they may not be able to achieve the required targets or check off the tasks that have been delegated to them. Understanding things from their perspective will prevent setback on the work front.

SCORPIO:

Are you an Eat, Pray, Love kind of girl

or do you find pleasure while cruising through big cities? Opportunities to travel and take your work afar could be opening up for you. Remember, you can ace the project, woo the big guys, come back home with a fat paycheque and make time for fun. Sneak in a solo adventure (or 20). The Universe wants you to be the wildest version of yourself.

SAGITTARIUS:

Wise words courtesy of spiritual master Mooji: "The highest purpose of the body is to wake up to the truth of who you are. If it is for some other purpose, then the body is just the pyjama of the being." We've all been awakened for a reason, Sagittarius. Don't put your pyjamas back on and go back to sleep. What the Universe wants you to remember: **CAPRICORN:** You're not going to need good luck charms to attract suitors—not with crazy alignment in your stars. Many opportunities will come knocking at your door. Play your cards right and you will witness immense growth. What's more? Seren-

dipitous encounters could align you with power players. The remuneration you're hoping for may be slow to come though. Continue to focus on the long-term goals here.

AQUARIUS:

"I live my life based on two principles. One, I live as if today was my last day on Earth. Two, I live today as if I am going to live forever." Let Osho's words awaken your spirit of adventure and remind you of your wildish nature. What's that one thing you've been holding yourself back from? The daring you're looking for is already within you.

PISCES:

You know that feeling of achieving the one thing you never thought you could? Those commoners would kill to be where you are today, Pisces. Continue to prioritise greatness, to move forward and onwards despite the many adversaries. You are on your way to redefine success. Tip: This is a big breakthrough moments in your journey.