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WEATHER TEMPERATURE

STATION	MAX TEMPERATURE ACT	MIN TEMPERATURE ACT
SRINAGAR	9.0	-1.8
JAMMU	26.1	7.7
LEH	2.9	-11.0
KARGIL	-2.5	-14.5

SUNSET TUESDAY: 05:25 PM
SUNRISE WEDNESDAY: 07:32 AM

LOCAL FORECAST OF SRINAGAR
Generally Cloudy sky.. Maximum & Minimum temperatures will be around 08°C & -2°C respectively.

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Mehbooba's amnesty to stone-pelters evokes positive response among youth

Bilal Bashir Bhat

Srinagar, Dec 19: The amnesty to first-time booked stone pelters by withdrawing First Time Reports (FIRs) has evoked a positive response from the youth who from several years had to present themselves before court after short spans of time. Though Mehbooba Mufti herself is not the architect of the verdict of amnesty this decision has been implicit in creating a positive change among the youth towards the state's first lady Chief Minister who remained center for opprobrium ever since she took command of the 'unholy' alliance.

The Mehbooba Mufti led government's initiative to drop charges against an estimated 4,500 people, mostly youth involved in stone-pelting incidents based on recommendations by the Centre's interlocutor Dineshwar Sharma has evoked a positive response from different sections of society.

The announcement has brought a sigh of relief to the thousands of families whose children had to face immense difficulties related to education, job opportunity and travel documents due to the FIRs against them. The relief is not limited to the youth and their families only but also to those alleged stone pelters who are based outside Kashmir and were compelled to present themselves before the court of law.

Talking to Kashmir News Bureau, a youth (name withheld) said, "the decision to withdraw cases against youth has changed my perspective towards the CM Mehbooba Mufti, I was falsely booked during 2010 agitation, but since then almost from past seven years I had to appear before court periodically after three months." He further stated "being a businessman I have no dealings with court, but the factual reality is that I visited all the three complexes of court that were shifted from time to time to different vicinities in the past seven years."

Another youth pleading anonymity recounted his ordeal with Kashmir

See **Pelters**....Pg 02

MEHBOOBA CONGRATULATES PRIME MINISTER FOR WINNING GUJARAT, HIMACHAL PRADESH ELECTIONS

Jammu, Dec 18: Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti today congratulated Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and his party on the decisive victory in Himachal Pradesh and retaining power in Gujarat.

The Chief Minister described the election results in these states as an endorsement of the governance and developmental agenda of the Prime Minister. "These results are an endorsement of his Government's governance, developmental and economic agenda," she said in her statement.

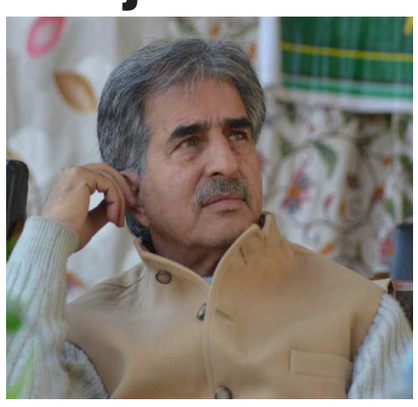
Mehbooba Mufti hoped that the Prime Minister would give a new impetus to his developmental and political agenda.

The Chief Minister said that,

See **Mehbooba**....Pg 02

'Tasaduq Mufti's induction in cabinet'

PDP rules out change, drop of any minister yet, 'Minister change CM's prerogative': Sartaj Madni



Srinagar, Dec 18: With the reports that one of the ministers, who happens to be the maternal uncle of Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, is likely to be removed from the council of ministers to make room for the Tassaduq Hussain Mufti in cabinet, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on Monday maintained that the party has not decided anything yet in this regard and that rumors are not to be believed.

"Though the ministerial change is a prerogative of Chief Minister, but nothing has been decided yet on the change or drop of any ministers." Maternal uncle of Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti and PDP Vice President Sartaj Madni told KNS over phone.

Madni rules out any resentment in the party over possible induction of Tasaduq Mufti in the cabinet. "Everyone is working under the leadership of Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti. There is no resentment in the party over any issue and I can say that the leadership of the Party president Mehbooba Mufti is endorsed by one and all," Madni maintained.

There are reports that chief minister Mehbooba Mufti is likely to induct her brother Tassaduq Hussain Mufti as tourism minister, a portfolio which is currently with her.

Tasadauq Mufti had joined the Mehbooba-led Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on the first death anniversary of his father and PDP stalwart, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, in January this year.

He is being nominated as the Member of Legislative Council against a vacancy that arose after the resignation of Vikramaditya Singh from the PDP as well as Upper House.

Sources said that while the recommendation of the state cabinet for the nomination of Tasaduq Mufti has reached Raj Bhawan Jammu for the approval of Governor N N Vohra , the decks have been cleared for nomination of Tassaduq Mufti to the Legislative

See **Madni**....Pg 02

MIGRANT FAMILIES STAGE PROTEST

Demand probe into 'irregularities'

Kupwara, Dec 18: Muslim migrant families from Keran Sector of frontier district Kupwara Monday staged a protest here in Press Enclave Srinagar demanding probe into irregularities done in the distribution of relief and aid by district administration Kupwara.

District administration Kupwara in North Kashmir has deprived 19 Muslim migrant families of aid and relief who were 'forcibly' vacated by Indian Army in 1990 from their native place Bore in Keran Sector.

"Our ancestors lived in Bore Keran Sector of North Kashmir's Kupwara district. After the eruption of militancy, army 'forcibly' vacated us from our native place in

See **Migrant**....Pg 02

Governor convenes Emergency Meeting of Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board to discuss directions of National Green Tribunal

Jammu, Dec 18: Governor N.N. Vohra, Chairman of Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB), has convened an emergency meeting of the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board on 9th of January, 2018 to discuss the recent directions passed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in regard to the conduct of the Shri Amarnathji Yatra and decide further course of action.

In the discussions held with CEO of SASB, legal advisors and others concerned, the strong protests over NGT's directions, received from various social, religious and political organizations were taken note of. It was especially pointed out that NGT had issued directions without first affording a full opportunity to the SASB to present its case. CEO stated that further legal action regarding filing of Appeal etc. shall be taken after discussions in the SASB.

It is to be recalled that the NGT, in the case titled "Gauri Maulekhi V/s State of J&K and others" had passed interim orders on 13th December, 2017 which, interalia,directed that the area from the end point of stairs to the Holy Cave shall be treated as a Silence Zone. The Tribunal had further directed that all the directions

See **Governor**....Pg 02

USA IS FOLLOWING INDIAN POLICY ON LONGSTANDING KASHMIR DISPUTE: PAKISTAN

Srinagar Dec 18: Pakistan's National Security Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Nasser Janjua said on Monday said that the United States of America (USA) is following Indian policy on the longstanding Kashmir dispute.

Speaking at a Pakistan's Security Policy Seminar, Janjua lamented that despite Pakistan giving the most human and economic sacrifices in the war against terrorism, the world has still not respected the vital role it has played.

He said that Pakistan has defeated the heinous ambitions of its enemy as the insurgents in Balochistan are putting down their weapons and choosing to say 'Jeevay Jeevay Pakistan' (Long live Pakistan).

Lt Gen (retd) Janjua said that India is threatening Pakistan with a conventional war. The US has given India

See **Pakistan**....Pg 02

NC leadership protests at Polo View against civilian killing and power woes

Srinagar, Dec 18: Opposition National Conference (NC) Monday staged a protest against power woes and civilian killing in Kupwara.

Reports said that after assembling at party headquarters at Nawai-Subh here in Kashmir capital Srinagar, the party workers led by General Secretary Ali Muhammad Sagar carried out a rally and headed towards Lal Chowk in Srinagar.

While talking to reporters, Ali Muhammad Sagar said that this protest rally was organized to rue the affairs of the state. "There is no government on the ground. There is no electricity and no drinking water. Arrest spree and killings are the order of the day," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, YNC Provincial President Salman Ali Sagar decried the arrogant and insensitive behaviour of the PDP-BJP Government towards the people in

See **NC**....Pg 02

SEARCH OPERATION LUNCHED IN DIFFERENT VILLAGES OF SHOPIAN

Shopian, Dec 18: Government Forces on Monday launched a Cordon and Search operation in multiple villages of South Kashmir's Shopian district.

The searches were conducted under 'Operation All Out' that has so far given tremendous success to Indian combined Forces in Kashmir.

An official said that Cordon and Search operations hadbeen launched in different villages including Chatripora, Vehil, Nowgam, Panduchan, Kapran, Rey Kapran, Dangam and Wangam.

The belt put under siege is known as the hot bed for militancy.

See **Search**....Pg 02

Executive Magistrates working like OGW's of Police Officer, Says Er Rasheed

Handwara, Dec 18, CNS: Rejecting magisterial probe in Thandipora youth, Asif's killing at the hands of Army, AIP Supremo and MLA Langate Er. Rasheed has said that when these probes have yielded nothing in the past, how it could yield any result this time.

While addressing a function at Langate today Rasheed said, "Let Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti or anybody else show a single instance when the magisterial probe has yielded anything or fixed the responsibility on anyone in hundreds of such incidents and probes since 1989."

"The Magisterial enquiry has also lost the relevance after Army tried to justify the killing of Asif by claiming that he was caught in the cross fire between militants and forces. Though nobody raises fingers on the wisdom

See **Rasheed**....Pg 02

DAK DEMANDS CENTRE FOR MEDICAL OFFICERS INTERVIEW AT SRINAGAR

Urges CM to take up matter with appropriate authorities

Srinagar, Dec 18: President, Doctors Association Kashmir (DAK) Dr Suhail Naik appeals the Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission (JKPSC) for setting up of centre for interviews of Medical Officer (MO) posts at Srinagar. It is pertinent to mention that result of screening test held for MO posts was recently announced by JKPSC and interviews for final selection of Medical Officers will commence very soon.

"Our state at Srinagar has been conducting other exams of national level like Union Public Service Commission(UPSC) since long in a fair and uninterrupted manner but it's regretful that the said interviews are not being held at Srinagar during winters for unknown reasons making the candidates to suffer unnecessarily " said Dr Naik.

See **DAK**....Pg 02

BJP retains power in Gujarat but just barely

Gandhinagar: The ruling BJP was on Monday set to retain power in Gujarat, just edging past the half-way mark in one of the most bitterly contested elections that saw the Congress improve its tally compared to five years ago.

Election Commission officials said the Bharatiya Janata Party, on course for its sixth consecutive win, had bagged 58 seats and was leading in 41 while the Congress had won 50 and was forging ahead in 27 more.

Smaller parties and independents had won three seats and were leading in three.

While the BJP celebrated all across Gujarat and in Delhi, the 99-seat tally was far less than the 150 BJP President Amit Shah had set for the party to win and 16 less than what it got in 2012 despite intense campaigning by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Congress, its campaign led by its now President Rahul Gandhi, was poised to finish with a tally of 77, 16 more than what it bagged five years ago.

Outside Parliament, a beaming Modi flashed a V-sign to celebrate the victory in his home state. Senior BJP leaders taunted Rahul Gandhi and said the result proved that the people had embraced the Gujarat model of development.

See **BJP**....Pg 02

SAAKSHAR BHARAT MISSION EMPLOYEES STAGE PROTEST, DEMAND CLEAR CUT JOB POLICY

Srinagar, Dec 18: The members of All J&K Saakshar Bharat Mission (SBM) Employees Forum, engaged under centrally sponsored Literacy Mission programme in the School Education Department held protest demonstration here on Monday.

A large number of SBM employees including females, assembled here in Press Enclave and started protest demonstration. Under the leadership of Ishfaq Ahmed Shah, president of the Forum, protesters shouted slogans in support of their demands.

These agitating employees were demanding their regularization and release of their wages. They said that about 7000 youth were engaged under SBM as district,

See **Policy**....Pg 02

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY HELPS IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION'

DIPR will continue organising such programmes: Dir Info

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 18-A-three-day National Workshop on Wildlife Photography with the theme 'A step towards wildlife conservation' concluded a Dachigam National Park here today.

The first of its kind workshop on wildlife photography was organized by Department of Information and Public Relations, (DIPR) in collaboration with Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF-India) and was supported by J&K Department of Wildlife, Valley Skill and Craft Development Institute Kashmir and Gulshan Books.

Director, Department of Information and Public Relations, Muneer-Ul-Islam lauded the role of his team and team from WWF-India for being proactive in organising the programme. He said the Department would continue its endeavours to organise more such programmes, workshops seminars and field interactions. He said that the Department is in a process to organise some more interesting programmes for the journalist fraternity of the State. He said that organising Wildlife photography workshop is a step towards wildlife conservation.

He appreciated participants for showing up their keen interest in the Departmental activities, saying that the DIPR had got massive response for the programme.

On second day of National Wildlife Photography Workshop, various speakers spoke on the aesthetics of capturing and documenting wildlife.

Former Director of the Bombay Natural History Society, Dr Asad Rafi Rahmani while sharing his experiences said that such workshops were need of the hour at a time when the world is witnessing so much of destruction in wildlife and nature. Dr Rehmani, who has spent more than 35 years crusading for the conservation of nature and is well known the world over for his field research including Bustard Conservation Programme, Bird Community Studies of the Western Ghats, and Forest Owlet Project, lauded the role of DIPR and WWF-India for organising the workshop.

He said that capturing the wilderness in your eyes is one thing and capturing the minute details of the woods in your camera lenses is a different ball of game. "Generally people indulge in wildlife photography because they want to peruse it either as their hobby, passion or profession. However, not many people know that their hobby, passion or profession can help a lot in the conservation of wildlife," he said.

Speaking to the participants, noted award winning wildlife photographer, Dhritiman Mukherjee said that organising such kind of events in order to educate youngsters about wildlife conservation was a welcome step and the organisers must be appreciated for

that. He also spoke about his work in relation to the world wildlife.

"Such programmes inculcate a sense of belonging to your own nature," he said. "In my whole career, this is a first kind of workshop at a place like Kashmir which is so close to my heart," he said, adding "I have been coming to this place from last over one decade and covering its wildlife, flora and fauna. This workshop is a dimension to my experience."

Mukherjee's works are regularly published in National and International print and digital media including BBC, National Geographic, New York Times, Lonely Planet, WWF, London Geographic, Telegraph, and The Guardian.

Earlier, Intisar Sohail from Department of Wildlife delivered a lecture on wildlife scenario Jammu and Kashmir; he informed the participant's about number of Bird as well as Animal species of the state. He urged participants to take an active part in wildlife conservation as many Animal and Bird species are on the verge of extinction as some bird species have alread disappeared. He also presented a PP Presentation to share his photographs, research and contribution towards the wildlife conservation.

Cinematographer and Producer, EMMRC, University of Kashmir, Shafqat Habib also delivered a lecture on Do's and Dont's of wildlife filmmaking and shared his work and experience of wildlife filming. He also screened documentary films to inform audience how important is wildlife conservation to maintain an ecological balance and how humans exploit animals for their vested interests. The documentary highlights various issues and threats faced by the wildlife creatures across the country.

After screening the films he also interacted with the participants and answers the questions raised by them.

Dr Rouf Hamza Boda, a naturalist, also presented his paper and shared his experience and contribution toward the wildlife conservation and impact of modern and changing trends of society on wildlife. He highlighted causes of spread of disease like Rabies due to absence of Vultures in food chains . He also urged the need for taking positive and innovative measures towards wildlife conservation to avoid extinction of more animals and bird species.

A short film 'The Great Outdoors' were also screened based on a life of a wildlife photographer to motivate participants to take wildlife photography as a profession rather than hobby and contribute towards wildlife conservation.

Noted Landscape Photographer, Mukhtar Ahmad took one technical session with the participants.

Young filmmaker, Visalat Dada screened and analysed Bert Haanstra's documentary film 'Zoo' a relational comparison of expression to understand behaviour of humans and caged animals.

The films highlights need for rehabilitating animals without out tuning their habitat and making the laughing stock or element of entertainment after caging them in zoos. Dada while interacting with the participants discussed various aspects of filming wildlife.

The workshop was formally inaugurated by minister for Forest, Environment and Ecology, Chaudhary Lal Singh, who was the chief guest on the occasion. On the occasion, the photographs by various wildlife photographers were put on display and the various books written on Kashmir were also available for sale.

Dr Pankaj Chandan from WWF-India educated the participants about the passion and patience for wildlife photography.

The programme was coordinated by Nazir Ganaie and Is'haq

Continue from Front Page.....

PELTERS

News Bureau, he said "I had qualified interview for a Multi-National Company (MNC) and was supposed to be posted at Dubai, but due to the FIR against me, I was not able to obtain my passport which resulted in mental and psychological trauma, but now this announcement has evoked my expectations and I hope it won't be limited to announcement only but will have practical implications on ground for my better future."

Pertinently, in 2011, the then Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also announced an amnesty for nearly 1,200 young men. However, in today's case, he credited central government in ordering the withdrawal of cases. "Dineshwar Sharma & Home Ministry in Delhi ordered the withdrawal of cases. Ms. Mufti was left to sign the file," Omar Tweeted.

Meanwhile demanding the revocation of 'black laws' like AFSPA and PSA the chairman of moderate faction of Hurriyat (M) Mirwaiz Umar Farooq termed the announcement as a "Cosmetic Effort," Mirwaiz in a tweet said "If Government is serious & sincere & there is really a change of heart & approach then all political prisoners should be immediately released, their freedom restored & AFSPA, PSA revoked."

Pertinently, the killing spree and rain of pellets which left thousands maimed in 2016 created the rage among youth against the Mehbooba Mufti led government. The 'anti-people' decision to forge alliance with BJP was also a reason to evolve Mehbooba center for opprobrium in Kashmir.

MEHBOOBA

under the determined leadership of Narendra Modi, people of Jammu & Kashmir have nurtured the hope of resolution of many of their monumental problems and difficulties. She said times have come to meet the challenges boldly and ensure a dignified and peaceful resolution of the problems confronting the State so that a peaceful, safe and prosperous future to our younger generation is ensured. "That was the basic idea behind the alliance stitched together by the two parties", she said in her statement.

MADNI

Council, few days before start of budget session of the Legislature on January 2. Sources ruled out ruled out his immediate induction in the Council of Ministry.

However if Party sources are to be believed then Tassaduq would be inducted in the cabinet before the Budget Session of the Assembly.

On his nomination to the Upper House, Tassaduq would get only remaining tem of Vikramaditya i.e. about three and a half years.

The Legislative Council has the provision of nomination of eight members by the Governor on the advice of State Government from among the people, who distinguished themselves in various fields. All eight MLCs-four each from PDP and BJP-were nominated in March 2015.

The last Cabinet reshuffle had taken place in first week of February this year with the re-induction of Altaf Bukhari as the Education Minister, keeping one post vacant in the quota of PDP. Another coalition partner, the BJP has exhausted its quota in the Ministry.

After Altaf Bukhari's re-induction and change in portfolios, Sports Minister Imran Raza Ansari and Horticulture Minister Basharat Bukhari had resigned over allotment of insignificant portfolios to them but had resumed work on the advice of the Chief Minister as they had been assured some better portfolios.

MIGRANT

1990 with a promise that government will provide us aid and relief," the migrants told news agency CNS adding that they have lost their identity and have been living in scattered form.

They said in 1993 Government issued a formal order under which all the 19 migrated families were entitled for aid and relief. "From past couple of years, we are being deprived of this relief. While the irony is that some 'corrupt' officials have entered the names of their relatives in the migrant list and are getting benefits," they said.

"A clerk in Kupwara District Administration Relief Section office has been misleading the top officials in this regard. The fact is that instead of we people, the relief is being given to those who were lately and illegally enlisted into the migrant list," the protesters said.

"The irony is that the name of a former MLA and an ICDS official has also been illegally entered into the list of migrants."

GOVERNOR

shall be implemented without default and no Committee or Authority / Board will have the right to sit over the implementation of these directions. However, in its subsequent order of 14th of December, 2017 the NGT clarified that there will be maintenance of silence by the devotees/ pilgrims or anybody while standing in front of Shri Amarnathji Maha Shivling and no such restriction is applicable to any other part including the main stairs leading to the Holy Cave and during the performance of daily Arti. Further, the NGT in its order dated 13th of December, 2017 has also imposed restrictions on the carrying of material by any person, pilgrim or devotee from the last stair leading to the Cave. NGT subsequently clarified, in its order of 14th December 2017, that interalia, this restriction would be applicable at the last proximately 30 steps leading to the Holy Cave.

In its order dated 15th of November, 2017, NGT had constituted a Committee of Experts headed by Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. This Committee has been directed to submit its report on various aspects including restrictions on the noise level. As regards the issue of noise near the Shrine, the aforesaid Committee had recommended that the matter needs to be deliberated after proper data collection. This recommendation of the Committee of Experts was placed before NGT, in its hearing held on 13th December, 2017.

As regards the functioning of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi pilgrimage, the NGT had, in its order of 13 November, 2017, interalia, directed the Shrine Board: to operationalise the new 7 Km. Tarakote Marg, between Banganga and Adhkuwari, by 24th November 2017; that every effort should be made not to raise any new construction at the Bhawan; and that the number of pilgrims at the Bhawan should be restricted to 50,000 per day and excess thereof should be halted either at Katra or Adhkuwari.

In view of the dateline given by the NGT in regard to the still to be completed Tarakote Marg the Shrine Board was left with no option except to file before the Supreme Court for granting extension of time for operationalisation of the Tarakote Marg till 28th February 2018, keeping in view the need to protect the safety concerns of the Yatris. The Supreme Court has granted a Stay Order regarding the opening of the track. The Board has also appealed against the NGT's directions related to capping of Yatra and restrictions of new constructions at Bhawan on the grounds that it is unreasonable and premature to impose such restrictions till the ongoing Master Plan of Bhawan and extended Shrine area is finalised and approved by the Board. This matter is awaiting further hearing in the Supreme Court.

PAKISTAN

role in Afghanistan's political process, giving New Delhi priority over Islamabad, and has opposed the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), he pointed out.

"Taliban are getting stronger in Afghanistan, and Pakistan has faced heavy human and economic loss in its war against terrorism but the US is blaming Pakistan for its own failure in Afghanistan," the adviser remarked.

He said that terrorism in Pakistan emerged after the country decided to support the US and the West.

The national security adviser said that in opposition to China and Russia, the US has disrupted the balance of power in South Asia. "Security in South Asia is under pressure," he said.

NC

general and the youth in particular was condemnable and deflated all claims and rhetoric of the Chief Minister. "This Government has declared an open war on the people and especially the youth. Thousands of students who have to prepare for crucial examinations cannot study because of the unprecedented power crisis in the State. If our youth have to worry about these basic necessities, how will they study and work and contribute towards the progress and growth of the State? All claims of the Government have proven to be hollow", Salman Ali Sagar said.

The protesters were carrying banners carrying messages like "Stop civilian killings", "Stop RSS agenda" and "Provide basic facilities to people".

They termed the government probe into the killing of Kupwara driver as an "eye-wash".

"Probes ordered in the past have yielded nothing," they said.Asif Iqbal, a cab driver, was killed in army firing in Thandipora village of Kupwara district late Saturday night, locals said. However, army said that he was killed in "cross-firing" with militants during an ambush.

The protesters were carrying lanters to symbolize the power woes.

The protesters tried to proceed towards city centre Lal Chowk, however, they were stopped by police near Polo View.

SEARCH

Meanwhile, clashes erupted in Batmuran Wanpora area of South Kashmir's Shopian village after Government Forces launched a Cordon and Search Operation there.

Reports said that people made announcements from loud speakers asking locals to come out from the houses as they believed that two to three militants were trapped in the village.

Locals informed that clashes erupted while Government Forces used tear-smoke shells to disperse the protesters.

"We heard that two to three militants are present in the village. But one can't say with authority," said a local.

A police official said that search operation was launched in the area after Forces received inputs about the presence of militants.

RASHEED

of the deputy commissioners and others who have been conducting these enquires from time to time but in a situation when they have been left at the mercy of security forces, how they can dare to even dream of doing justice."

He said that the only job Deputy Commissioners have been left to do, is to slap PSA's on innocents and there can be hardly an instance when a Deputy Commissioner would have dared to reject police's dossier.

"Even these Magistrates have been forced to slap PSA after PSA on those who have never come out of Jails and police lockups since decades. The Deputy Commissioners have become like OGW's of SHO's and conducting enquires through them is nothing but shielding the killers, buying time and misleading the world. If the deputy commissioners and other bureaucrats are dependent on their security and movement on the men in uniform, one can understand their worth and compulsions."

Er. Rasheed reminded Mehbooba Mufti of her claims having no faith on these probes when she was in the opposition and said that now her following footprints of Omer Abdullah by ordering these fake probes will yield nothing but just erode the credibility of state institutions further.

Er. Rasheed added that if Mehbooba means business she must ensure that those involved in cold blooded murder of Asif are put behind the bars and then o only one can believe in the assurances given by the state government and the Army.

DAK

Dr Naik further added that the MO interviews is scheduled to be conducted in extreme winter and it has been observed over the years in past that most of the times the roads remain blocked and air traffic is also disrupted and all the aspiring doctors who have to appear for the interview will have to travel to Jammu which will not only be arduous for them but will also hit the patient care badly as most of the candidates are working in Health department under National Health Mission(NHM) or other schemes or are undergoing residency in Medical Colleges and thus will not be available at their station.

President DAK, Dr Suhail Naik has urged the Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti to take up the matter with appropriate authorities and make it sure that the interview center is allotted to Srinagar as well so that candidates and Health Care doesn't suffer.

BJP

But the BJP's overall vote share in the state plunged from 60.11 per cent notched in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls to 49 per cent, indicating a sharp erosion in support base in a state which the party considers its fortress.

The vote share of the Congress, which joined hands with Patidar leader Hardik Patel, Dalit leader Jignesh Mevani and OBC leader Alpesh Thakore, soared from 33.45 per cent of 2014 to 41.5 per cent.

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Smriti Irani brushed aside reports of BJP's waning support, saying the winner was always the king. "Jo jeeta wo hi Sikander."

As the vote count began across Gujarat at 8 a.m., at one point the Congress leads went past the BJP's, giving a scare to the ruling party and sending the stock markets plunging down.

The BJP, however, managed to recover lost ground and eventually went past the half-way mark of 92 seats needed to control the 182-member House.

Chief Minister Vijay Rupani (Rajkot West) and Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel (Mehsana) trailed to the Congress early in the day before bouncing back and winning. While Rupani won by 50,412 votes, Patel's victory margin was 7,951 votes.

The BJP also held on in most seats affected by the Patidar agitation demanding job quotas, provoking community leader Hardik Patel to complain about faulty Electronic Voting Machines.

While the BJP dominated over the Congress in South, Central and North Gujarat, the Congress held the upper hand in the sprawling Saurashtra/Kutch region.

The BJP also proved its sway over urban centres while the Congress seats came mostly from rural regions.

All Congress Chief Ministerial contenders lost -- Shaktisinh Gohil (Mandvi), Arjun Modhwadia (Bokhiria) and Siddharth Patel (Dabhoi).

But the BJP suffered a setback in Unjha constituency which includes Modi's hometown Vardana where he grew up.

The Gujarat election was held on December 9 and 14 and was marked by a viciousness that pitted Prime Minister Modi against the Congress, including his predecessor Manmohan Singh.Modi had been the Gujarat Chief Minister from 2001 until he became the Prime Minister in 2014. It was the first Assembly election in Gujarat after Modi shifted to New Delhi.

POLICY

block and Panchayat coordinators across the State under the scheme but they are denied their wages. They were imparting education to the elderly people and enhancing literacy rate in the State.

They further claimed that their services are being utilized for examination duty, academic support, elections and other surveys etc. The Adult Education is the national concern and these people should be provided justice.

The protesters told news agency CNS that there is no clear job policy for them. "Governmnet made a road map for daily rated workers but ignored us completely," they said.

The protesters also staged protest inside DDC office Srinagar. Deputy Commissioner Srinagar assured them that he will take up their matter with higher-ups.

Employ technological interventions, ethnic wisdom to create cost effective infra: Naeem Akhtar

JAMMU, DECEMBER 18 – Minister for Public Works, Naeem Akhtar today stressed upon Engineers to focus on optimal utilization of available resources, based on latest technological interventions incorporated with ethnic wisdom while developing new structures in the state.

The Minister said this during his visit to the Office of Chief Engineer, Designs, Inspection and Quality Control Department in Jammu.

The Minister emphasized upon the need to develop quality and cost effective infrastructure in the state. He asked the Engineers to set a new trend in construction of buildings by introducing modern concepts of tapping solar energy and rain water harvesting to develop them as construction models for other agencies to follow.

"The emphasis of the department is to make perfect designs and ensure quality in execution of works," the Minister said, adding, the engineers have been directed to convert vacant land here into model landscape project.

He directed the Research Officer to conduct on-site testing of bitumen content, profile gradient, dimension thickness, impact value, grading of aggregates, crushing value density and other tests to ensure that quality material is used in execution of projects.

He asked the Chief Engineer to organize workshops and refresher courses for engineers, besides sending them to Central Building Research Institute (CBRI) to familiarize them with latest trends in building science and technology.

While inspecting various wings of the Department, the Minister stressed for maintaining cleanliness in the offices and take up maintenance works from time to time.

The Minister called for procurement of machine that detects and repairs potholes faster than the conventional methods as it can prove helpful in snow bound areas.

Commissioner Secretary, Public Works (R&B) Sanjeev Verma, Chief Engineer, Designs, Inspection and Quality Control Rajeev Gandotra, Executive Engineers, Research Officer and other engineers were present on the occasion.

Governor and First Lady host participants of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" at Raj Bhavan

JAMMU, DECEMBER 18: Governor N.N. Vohra and First Lady Mrs. Usha Vohra hosted the participants of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat Programme" which is a youth exchange programme organized by the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, Jammu & Kashmir, at the Raj Bhavan here today. 50 Students from Tamil Nadu and 50 from J&K are participating in this programme.

Highlighting the importance of Youth Exchange Programmes, Governor observed that these are extremely valuable in promoting awareness, knowledge and understanding of the linguistic, religious and cultural diversity of the numerous communities in our vast country with 1.33 billion population.

Governor appreciated the endeavour of the Nehru Yuva Kendra J&K to encourage and enable the participating students from J&K to learn 100 sentences of Tamil and for the students from Tamil Nadu to learn J&K languages.

Governor hoped that sustained efforts shall continue to be made to significantly enlarge the scope of the Youth Exchange Programme and advised the Nehru Yuva Kendra to also enable youth exchange programmes within the State of J&K.

At the Governor's invitation, who is Chairman of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, the participating youth shall be visiting the Holy Shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi. Governor asked CEO of the Shrine Board to make all arrangements for the visit of the youth to the Shrine, who shall be treated as guests of the Board.

Governor and First Lady lauded the exuberance of the participants from the States of J&K and Tamil Nadu who presented a scintillating cultural programme showcasing the rich cultural diversity of their States.

The Welcome Address was presented by Shri Sukhdev Singh, State Director, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangthan and a Vote of Thanks was given by Sh. Karunakaran. M, Group Leader, Tamil Nadu.

Prof. Zahoor Ahmad Chatt, Director Colleges; Sh. S.S. Kashyap, Deputy Director Nehru Yuva Kendra, J&K, were among those present on the occasion.

Veeri reviews progress on Rs 45.54 cr Land Records Modernization Programme

'Digitization of records would bring much needed transparency in land mapping'

JAMMU, DECEMBER 18: Minister for Revenue, Relief, Rehabilitation and Disaster Management, Abdul Rehman Veeri, today stressed upon the authorities of Land Records Management Agency (LRMA) to speed up th process of Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP) for timely completion of this ambitious project.

The Minister said this while chairing a meeting with the Revenue officers convened to review the progress on digitization process of land records in the State.

Commissioner/Secretary Revenue Shahid Anayatullah, Financial Commissioner Revenue Lokesh Jha, Divisional Commissioner, Jammu, M. K. Bhandari, District Development Commissioner, Jammu, Kumar Rajiv Ranjan, Regional Director, Survey of Land Records, Kashmir S. A. Mir, Regional Director, Survey of Land Records, Jammu, Rifat Kohli, senior officers of M/S RAMTech Software Solutions Pvt. Ltd and other officers of Revenue and JKLRMA were present in the meeting.

The meeting was informed that phase-I of Rs 45.54 crore Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme was initiated in November 2015 in the State and JKLRMA has taken up Jammu and Srinagar districts for all activities including scanning of revenue documents, maps and digitization of cadastral maps, establishment of ground control points and development of web-based enterprise geo-information system.

It was given out in the meeting that 10 more districts including Poonch, Rajouri, Udhampur, Ramban, Doda, Baramulla, Anantnag, Bandipora, Leh and Kargil will be taken up under the programme in the phase-II starting from March, 2018 to March, 2020, while as remaining 10 districts of the State including Kathua, Samba, Reasi, Kishtwar, Kulgam, Shopian, Budgam, Ganderbal, Pulwama and Kupwara would be taken up in phase-III starting from April, 2020 to March, 2022. The Minister said that digitization of land records would bring much needed transparency in the land mapping at individual and institutional level.

Veeri directed the concerned to ensure that the work on digitization of land records taken up in two Tehsils, one each in Jammu and Srinagar districts, should be finalized by March, 2018.

He directed them to speed up the process by employing additional manpower on the job so that these two tehsils are projected as model tehsils.

The Minister asked officers to furnish exact details of land retrieved so far, so that the necessary funds are arranged besides directing officers to ensure fencing of retrieved revenue land. He said that the retrieved land can be utilized for creating infrastructure of public importance.

The Minister said that the two vital Revenue Institutes in Srinagar and Jammu should be revamped on modern lines for which the necessary funds should be earmarked in the next year's capex budget

The Minister stressed upon them to coordinate different departments for realization of development goals of the government.

Mir Zahoor inspects functioning of Kralsangri Plantation Nursery

Reviews timber, firewood supply position

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 18: Minister of State for Forest, Environment, Animal, Sheep Husbandry, Cooperative and Fisheries, Mir Zahoor Ahmad, today visited Plantation Nursery Kralsangri and took stock of its functioning.

The Minister inspected various ongoing development works in the nursery including construction of protection bunds, renovation of foot path and related works. He asked the concerned officers to speed up these works to ensure timely completion.

The Minister exhorted upon the officers to make sure that the plantation drives being launched across the region especially on degraded forest land are conducted in letter and spirit. "Public participation is essential rather integral for preservation of environment and expansion of green cover in the state", he asserted.

Mir Zahoor, while expressing concern over illegal felling of woods, asked the officials to keep a strict vigil on smugglers to contain this menace.

Earlier, the Minister convened a meeting with the officers of Forest, State Forest Corporation and other Wings of Forest Department to review the stock position of timber and firewood in the Valley.

The Minister, while taking stock of supply of firewood to Masjid's and Imam Badas, was informed that 40,000 quintal of firewood has been distributed among 1180 Masjid Sharief's of Srinagar district against the target of 1220. He was also informed that 80 percent fire wood supply has been supplied to Mosque of rural areas till date.

Chief Conservator of Forest, Kashmir Nisar Ahmad Darzi briefed the meeting about the activities and achievements of the department.

Addressing the meeting, the Minister asked the concerned to strictly adhere to the target given to them and distribute the timber and firewood among the needy consumers on first cum first basis.

Among others, Conservator of Forest North & South, Chief Conservators, Chief General Manager, State Forest Corporation, Divisional Forest Officer, Urban and other concerned officers of Forest and its allied wings were present in the meeting.

Employees Core strength of JK Bank and their welfare a priority : Parvez Ahmed

Jammu, Dec 18:. Parvez Ahmed, Chairman and CEO, J&K Bank today launched comprehensive preventive Health Check up campaign for its employees in Jammu in association with its General Insurance partner Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company under latter's nationwide campaign "Dil ko Dhadakne Do". The campaign was launched in presence of Chief Distribution Officer Bajaj Allianz, Mr.T.A. Ramalingam, Executive Presidents, J&K Bank Mr. Vagish Chander & Mr. S S Sehgal, Senior Officers from Bank and Bajaj Allianz at Zonal Office, Jammu.

Interacting after inaugurating the campaign by lighting the Ceremonial lamp Chairman and CEO Mr. Parvez Ahmed said," Employees are the core strength of JK Bank and their welfare is a priority for the bank. The challenging and demanding job profile of a banker which is primarily sedentary in nature necessitates that the employees follow the old age wisdom of health is wealth. Employees can deliver their productive best on every front only when they are feeling best from inside as productivity of an individual is directly linked with robust health".

Urging upon all the employees to take advantage of the Camp he said keeping a close check timely on indicators of our health profile can go a long way in aligning ourselves to growing age issues, responsibilities and families. To further enhance the employee well-being, he directed bank's team to work on a broad plan and explore modalities to offer such door-step preventive health check up facilities to employees and their families in future across all zones of the Bank.

Earlier, CDO Bajaj Allianz, Mr. Ramalingam acknowledged the whole hearted support of the bank for the initiative. He appreciated the remarkable customer focus and concern for best customer practices demonstrated by the Chairman JK Bank during the interactions held post 2014 floods wherein he desired hassle free claim processing services in times of distress for the bank's customers.

Regional Head Bajaj Allianz Mr. Ajaz Khan presented the vote of thanks. Later, Mr. Ahmed and team went through the arrangements of the campaign and expressed gratitude to Bajaj Allianz for this noble gesture towards bank's employees. He requested the Bajaj Allianz officials to take the campaign to all the zones of the bank at the earliest possible so that all the employees of the Bank are benefitted.

The two day campaign aims to offer free health screening, medical tests and awareness regarding heart related ailments due to sedentary lifestyle for the employees of bank. Notably a similar three day campaign was held in JK Bank, Corporate Headquarters Srinagar from 15th December to 17th December.

AN-32 Courier service for Kargil to start in first week of Jan: Haji Anayat Ali

JAMMU DECEMBER, 18: Chairman, Legislative Council, Haji Anayat Ali today convened a meeting with Civil Administration, Police and Aviation authorities to review the status of initiating AN-32 Courier Service operations for Kargil during current winter season.

The meeting was attended by MLA Zanskar, Syed Mohammad Baqir Rizvi, MLA Kargil, Asgar Ali Karbalai, Chief Executive Councilor, Kacho Ahmed Khan, Divisional Commissioner Jammu, M K Bhandari, Director Airports, D K Gautam, Commissioner Civil Aviation, Sunil Kannath, Director Disaster Management, Aamir Ali, SSP Udhampur, Rayees Ahmed Bhat and other senior officers.

During the meeting, threadbare discussion was held on the matter in which legislators and other concerned senior officers put their valuable suggestions for smooth operation of AN-32 Courier Service for Kargil.

On the occasion, the Aviation/Air Force authorities informed that service will be started in the first week of January 2018. They also informed the Chairman of the necessary steps being taken up by them in this regard.

The Chairman directed the concerned departments to maintain close coordination for smooth operation of the service during this winter season. He directed for all necessary steps to be taken to provide better services than last year to the passengers so that people can travel smoothly during this winter season.

The Chairman also passed directions to the higher authorities to provide basic facilities during stay of passengers at Srinagar and Jammu Airports.

It was also decided in the meeting that in case of cancellation of any sortie due to bad weather, other reasons, necessary announcements should be made earlier through mass media to avoid any inconvenience to passengers.

PHE Minister inaugurates WSS Zain u Din Wali at Aishmuqam

ANANTNAG, DECEMBER 18- Minister for PHE and I&FC, Sham Lal Chaudhary inaugurated and commissioned the Water Supply Scheme Zain u Din Wali here at Aishmuqam today. The inaugural function was attended by Member Legislative Assembly Pahalgam, Altaf Ahmad Wani, District Development Commissioner, Mohammad Younis Malik, Chief Engineer PHE, Abdul Wahid, Chief Engineer I&FC Shahnawaz Ahmad, Superintending Engineers and Executive Engineers of these departments and other concerned officers.

The scheme will cater to a population of 13066 souls which has been constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 892 lakh, of which, Rs 710 lakh have been released so far. The WSS is being fed by Langna Nallah at Wadbal and Langnai. The scheme will be feeding 7 habitations including Grend Aish, Zigpora, Sajnay Colony, Chek Jumoo, Shaldraged, Pimbdara, Iram Colony and a large number of floating and nomadic populations.

Meanwhile, the Minister also interacted with several delegations of locals and casual labourers who presented their demands before him for redressal. He assured the people that their demands will be genuinely considered and necessary measures shall be taken to address them.

Later, the Minister also chaired a review meeting of PHE and I&FC Departments and took stock of snow clearance preparations in the area. He also reviewed the status of directions passed by Chief Minister regarding provision of drinking water, flood control and irrigation facilities.

DAILY Time and Us SRINAGAR J&K Editorial

FEED THE CURE: ON PAYING TB PATIENTS

The Central TB Division has said the government would hand over a sum of □500 a month to each of India's 35 lakh diagnosed TB patients in order to strengthen the fight against the disease. The funds are intended to offset the loss of wages due to TB, and to help with travel and nutrition. Yet, much more needs to be done to protect TB patients from the effects of malnutrition, which has a complicated relationship with TB. An early study from a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany in the 1940s showed that Soviet inmates, who didn't receive extra rations from the Red Cross as their British counterparts did, were around 16 times more likely to develop the disease. Since then, evidence linking low body mass index and nutritional deficiencies with higher rates of disease has piled up. It is a vicious cycle, because TB itself triggers malnutrition by hurting the patient's appetite. One calculation suggests that half of all adult Indian TB patients get the disease due to malnutrition. Sadly, despite the evidence on the TB-diet link, it is still not clear how best to fix the problem, given the lack of research into interventions that can speed up recovery. A few small-scale studies have looked at cure rates among those patients consuming cereal-lentil powders or micronutrients such as Vitamin A and zinc, with mixed results.

But lack of data isn't a justification for inaction. In a guidance document this March, the Central TB Division proposed extensive interventions to tackle the problem. One recommendation was to double the rations under the public distribution system to families of TB patients, so that they are less likely to contract the disease. Because TB patients also need a high protein intake, the document recommends a second set of supplements, such as oilseeds and dried milk powder, which they wouldn't have to share with the family. Given these recommendations and the scale of India's malnutrition problem, the proposed assistance of □500 may not make any dent, especially if patients are not counselled on their ideal diet. India needs to fine-tune these interventions with further evidence so that policy can be more precisely targeted. Do pre-packaged protein powders work better than rations of cereals and pulses? Do TB patients need more of certain vitamins and minerals than healthy people do? These are difficult questions to answer. A recently announced 2000-subject study by the Indian Council of Medical Research in Jharkhand may go some way in plugging this knowledge gap, but more research is required. A better diet is a no-brainer for an illness like this, historically called "Consumption" because of how it ate away at patients. But understanding what constitutes such a diet, and making sure that patients get it, isn't as straightforward.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE LINES

V. Sudarshan

Last week, ahead of the 20th round of the now moribund talks between the Special Representatives of India and China entrusted with finding an early settlement of the border question, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, after meeting External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and the National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, set out parameters that he implied needed to be bilaterally addressed with urgency. In sum, the remarks constitute quite a lecture. They lay the initiative for corrective measures comprehensively at New Delhi's door and make it difficult to gloss over their implications. Whereas, the statements made by New Delhi appear, in contrast, to be conciliatory and more hopeful.

The set of remarks, therefore, broadly underpin the direction of ties with China in the near term. A course correction is being sought, months after the Doklam crisis has been perceived to have been set at rest.

THE IMPORT

While it is not clear if it is a negotiating tactic, here is the listing, in no particular order of priority, so the import of the Wang Yi stipulations is not lost in translation: that India-China relations were at a crucial moment at present; he used the phrase "critical period" after he met Ms. Swaraj. That both countries needed to make the "correct choice regarding the future direction of bilateral relations". That the results of the efforts made for "overall development momentum were unsatisfactory". The most important thing to do was (emphasis added) "genuine cultivation of mutual trust". So long as mutual trust continued to be absent, "some individual issues will keep fermenting and spilling over, thus eroding the overall situation of bilateral relations". That the "Dong Lang incident caused by the Indian border troops' illegal crossing of the China-India boundary into the Chinese territory was a severe test for bilateral relations... lessons should be learned to prevent similar incidents from happening again". That the two countries "should properly control and handle problems left over from history and some specific issues in bilateral relations by putting them in the right place of China-India relations, without politicizing and complicating them to hamper the overall development of China-India relations".

Mr. Wang also set out some tasks that needed to be undertaken: both sides should enhance strategic communications at all levels, restore established dialogue mechanisms (emphasis added), deepen practical co-operation in various fields "and meanwhile, well manage existing differences and well safeguard peace and tranquillity in border areas". He also specifically alluded to the benefits that await India were it to come aboard the Belt and Road Initiative, which New Delhi has shown some reluctance towards. Thus some of the Chinese goals and the problems have been clearly set out in public.

This is the clearest confirmation yet that the "dialogue mechanism" —where the two Special Representatives (SR) meet, and set up with so much fanfare in 2003 — may have over the last decade-and-a-half or so, been more or less transformed into an exercise in general fatuity. Just like the Joint Working Group that looked at clarifying the border areas before the SRs came along. In the meanwhile, four Special Representatives have changed — Brajesh Mishra, J.N. Dixit, M.K. Narayanan, as well as Shivshankar Menon. Will Ajit Doval, or the one who follows him eventually, or the one afterwards, be able to make a difference?

A SLIDE

It is also significant that Mr. Wang's candid remarks should come days after the tenth round of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Co-ordination on India China Border Affairs, (WMCC) which concluded with a positive spin having been imparted to them as having been "constructive and forward looking", but without firm dates for the next meeting.

What a slide it has been. The SR dialogue was set up after lengthy diplomatic negotiations had yielded the "Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the Boundary Question". The hard-fought principles set out that the eventually delineated boundary would "be along well-defined and easily identifiable natural geographical features" and that the due interest of the settled populations in the border areas would be taken care of. It was expected that the exploration for the framework for the boundary settlement would commence thereafter.

CLARITY ON THE BORDER

In the meanwhile, some of the expectations had rewritten themselves. The Joint Working Group — that had been clarifying the border areas with a view to leading up to exchange of maps on a mutually agreed scale on where the Line of Actual Control (LAC) lay in each others' perception — had run itself into the ground. This was after sample maps were exchanged in the Middle Sector without having been able to progress to the Western and Eastern Sectors. There was a time when as many as four lines ran across the border areas: one where we perceived the LAC to be, one where the Chinese perceived the LAC to be, one where we perceived the Chinese perceived the line to be and one where the Chinese perceived where we thought our line lay. The last two lines were somewhat guess-worked from the military graffiti, tell-tale traces that our armies leave behind when they foray into the border areas asserting perceptional rights through patrols, the same way as animals mark territory. It is not even clear whether we have spoken of each other's perception of the LAC for the last decade.

This after China had till the middle of the 1980s seemed open to a process that would let India keep the areas in the East while they held on to those in the West. The fond hope was of an "LAC plus" solution. That changed as well. As did the pious intention to earnestly look for an early solution. Utterances of visiting Chinese premiers introduced new nuances into the diplomatic liturgy, emphasising the complexity of the issue, underlining the difficulty of its resolution, and, thereby, leaving it to future generations to grapple with. Instead of enlarging commonalities, what is being expanded instead are the divergences: whether it is China's opposition to India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group, or its steadfast support to Pakistan's mollycoddling of terrorist groups that are inimical to India, or its pointed message to encourage Bhutan to settle its boundary dispute with China in a way that would make the Indian Army's presence in Doklam eventually redundant. Just look at the Chinese penetration of the area we consider to be our backyard: whether it is Sri Lanka, Nepal, and now the Maldives. Can Bhutan be far behind?

To this day, even though a military hotline between the two army headquarters had been agreed upon years ago, it has not materialised. This is something that would be logical, even imperative, given that both countries have improved their border infrastructure in terms of roads and accessibility in such a way that increases the possibilities of troops chancing upon each other. Therefore, transgressions will increase in terms of frequency, duration, depth, and intensity. The aim should be to evolve a stronger mechanism to manage the border areas more effectively to ensure equilibrium. This must include a more robust code of military conduct, even though neither side has sought to alter border reality through use of force.

It is time New Delhi put more effort into strengthening India's presence in those areas where we are present, where we consider to be them as our border, and live with it rather than to wait for Beijing to alter reality again. It is easier to make provisions to better live with it than to squander energies resolving it. If we don't let the boundary question detain us, we will be in a better position to enlarge the areas where we can more fruitfully, in the Asian Century, engage the Chinese in line with the bilateral intentions that envisaged the simultaneous rise of both China and India.

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Is the Bharatiya Janata Party jittery in Gujarat?

Pawan Khera

Elections are a contest between perception and reality. In Gujarat, Narendra Modi and Amit Shah have struggled with both the content of their narrative and its packaging. The 2014 campaign was built on the perception of the Gujarat model, which had takers because of the anger — justified or not — against the incumbent UPA government. With his oratorical skills, Mr. Modi successfully packaged the dream of a better India, while marketing the fallacy of a vibrant Gujarat.

As Prime Minister, Mr. Modi has started believing in both the belief and the model that he packaged. This is not unusual for those who lock themselves up in echo chambers, except that he finds himself more and more lonely in his belief.

As Prime Minister, Mr. Modi may have wrested States from the Congress and other regional parties. However, the BJP under him has not retained a single State where the party was already in power, unless it considers Goa a victory. Anti-incumbency and victimhood have been the go-to cards for Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah in every election. Gujarat is the first test for them where they can neither tap into anti-incumbency nor play victim.

When your party has been in power for 22 years, who do you blame for all the questions hurled at you? Mr. Modi and his party are not accustomed to answering questions. And Gujarat has asked tough, embarrassing and disconcerting questions in the last one month.

Rahul Gandhi kept his campaign focussed on the ground reality of Gujarat. The condition of groundnut, potato, and cotton farmers; the problems faced by students on account of high fees in self-financed educational institutions; the double whammy of demonetisation and the goods and services tax and their impact on traders and medium and small-scale enterprises; the gaping social inequalities that led to growing demands for reservations — all of these expose the government's skewed development model. Mr. Gandhi tweeted one question a day. Instead of responding to these uncomfortable questions, Mr. Modi attempted to take cover behind distortions of history or out-of-context remarks by mythical Congress workers.

The alacrity with which Mr. Gandhi suspended Mani Shankar Aiyar for an uncalled-for remark on Mr. Modi brought the focus of the campaign back to real issues. Mr. Modi went a little too far in attributing bizarre motives to a dinner attended by Dr. Manmohan Singh, distinguished diplomats, journalists, and former Army chief Deepak Kapoor, among others. Dr. Singh's sharp reaction took Mr. Modi and his party by surprise and made Mr. Modi realise that he had gone too far in his attempt to escape scrutiny on the myths of the Gujarat model.

Mr. Gandhi held a press conference on the last day of campaigning and took difficult questions with sincerity and ease. The Congress narrative was consistent and stayed on course, while the BJP kept fumbling for a foothold. There are genuine concerns over knee-jerk decisions in the name of economic policies. The restlessness of the youth is understandable. The farmer is justifiably angry. Gujarat is rightly restless. It has witnessed the outcome of growth without development, consistent low per capita expenditure on social sectors, and the government's obsession with visible physical infrastructure rather than actual investment in human capital.

Gujarat is a pragmatic, innovative and progressive State. No one should try and fool a Gujarati through symbolism and optics. Gujarat has often shown how to get rid of the status quo.

While there is nothing extraordinary about these elections, there are people desperate to see the BJP's wings clipped. This is wishful thinking. They are oblivious to the fact that the Indian polity is undergoing a transformation. Traditional factors that shape voting decisions are changing. Hence, Gujarat is unlikely to fulfill the expectations of those basing their predictions on traditional psephological calculations.

There are four distinct factors behind the BJP's confidence about its success. First, the unparalleled quality of development governance in the State. Greater participation of people in development governance, centrality of the common man in policies and programmes, and an innovative approach to finding enduring solutions are the three principal factors giving an undisputed edge to governance in Gujarat. From the days of his chief ministership, Mr. Modi has been stressing on development as a popular movement and not just a government scheme or a programme. Village water distribution bodies, governed majorly by women, have remained a key to judicious and frictionless distribution of water to farm fields across the State. This has greatly contributed to agricultural development. Janmarg, the famous Bus Rapid Transport System in Ahmedabad, and the modern, well equipped bus port in Vadodara are testimony to how the common man has always remained central to the governance philosophy of successive BJP governments. Much before the dawn of the Metro era in Delhi, Ahmedabad established that BRTS also could be made a success. Till date, the Janmarg of Ahmedabad is the only successful BRTS in India. While police reforms continue to wait in many States, Gujarat has adopted a policy of ensuring that all new police stations will now house a library, a crèche and a gymnasium, and they will also draw their own energy from solar panels on their roofs. Would people not support those who have taken such commendable initiatives?

The second factor is the waning influence of the appeal of caste and community. A State that has seen rapid urbanisation and a remarkable spread of education need not continue to think along the lines of caste and community. Identity issues have some influence; one can't expect these factors to disappear totally. But to believe that the next generation of Patidars will be sold to quota promises that cannot be implemented is an insult to their wisdom. Again, to think that communities will vote as a monolithic block is nothing but self-deception.

Third, the Opposition has made several self-goals that have inadvertently helped the BJP. It started with ridiculing development, forgetting the transformation that development has brought.

Rahul Gandhi put up nice campaign; results a win for Congress: Ashok Gehlot

GANDHI NAGAR: As the BJP appeared to be on its way to retain power in Gujarat, senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot said he saw the results as a "victory" for the party due to the response its chief Rahul Gandhi's campaign got from the people.Gehlot, the Congress election in-charge for Gujarat, said Gandhi ran a nice campaign in the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.Trends from 181 seats in the state, gave the BJP a lead in over a 100 seats while the Congress was following with 69. The simple majority mark in the 182-member Assembly is 92. The Congress, however, appears to be on its way to improve its 2012 tally."The way the Congress campaigned and the way Rahul Gandhi did bus trips, we put

up a very nice campaign. Whatever the results, the country will see this as the Congress' victory," Gehlot said.

"Through the campaigning and manifesto, we have been successful in reflecting the feelings of the people of Gujarat and we believe we have been successful in that," he said.

To a question, Gehlot said the saffron party tried to turn the direction of the campaign by raising the 'son of the soil' issue."The BJP tried to turn the campaign in another direction by its 'son of the soil' comments and saying that he (Modi) is a prime minister from Gujarat. We have given a very nice message to the people of Gujarat," he said. He said it is not the culture of the Congress to make such comments.

"Rahulji (Gandhi) had said that Congress people will not make such comments against the prime minister. The manner in which the prime minister made comments against Manmohan Singhji, Soniaji and Rahulji, we did not want to respond to them in the same language," he said.

CMD Dr M Ravi Kanth inaugurates HUDCO Bhawan in Jammu

JAMMU, DECEMBER 18 – Chairman & Managing Director, Housing & Urban Development Corporation Ltd (HUDCO) Dr. M. Ravi Kanth, today inaugurated the HUDCO Bhawan at Railhead Complex, Jammu, to continue its mission of improving access to housing for all and providing sustainable infrastructure in human settlements besides improving the living conditions of people at large.

Vice-Chairman, JDA, Rajesh Kumar Shavan, Managing Director, J&K Housing Board Dr. Manmohan Singh, Officers of SBI, Amanullah Tak, Joint Controller Communication Accounts, DoT and general public across all sections of society were also present on the occasion.

CMD HUDCO, in his address, assured full participation in various development activities in the State. He said that since its inception in 1970, HUDCO has so far assisted 117 projects in Jammu & Kashmir with loan assistance of Rs 547 crore.

He informed that HUDCO, being one of the Central Nodal Agencies, for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY) – Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) has entered MoU with 69 banks in all over the country, including 04 banks of J&K State and so far released an amount of Rs 115 lakh of subsidy for CLSS.

CMD stressed the need for clearing the long pending default of J&K Co-operative Housing Corporation for further lending to the State of Jammu & Kashmir and he sought the co-operation of all the concerned in this regard.

CMD also appreciated the efforts of all the employees of Regional Office for successfully giving momentum to the developmental activities in Jammu & Kashmir.

No time limit prescribed in MCC to release election manifesto: EC

NEW DELHI: After the Congress party raised questions against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for releasing its manifesto a day before phase one of the Gujarat polls, the Election Commission of India (EC) has cleared that there is no time limit prescribed in the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) to release an election manifesto."Under the extant provisions, there is no time limit prescribed in the MCC to release election manifesto by political parties. No instruction of the Commission is issued in this regard," the statement by the EC read.The statement further reads, "The Commission is of considered view that due to multi-fold expansion of digital and electronic media,the extant MCC, Section 126 of the R.P Act, 1951 and other related provisions require revisiting to cater to the requirements and challenges of the present and emerging situations."A day before voting in the first phase of Assembly polls in Gujarat, the ruling BJP had released its manifesto, promising an inclusive development in the state.

The BJP's poll manifesto was released after Congress President Rahul Gandhi and party leader Ahmed Patel slammed the ruling party in Gujarat for not bringing out its manifesto before the polling.The state saw aggressive campaigning from the Congress Party and the BJP, both leaving no stone unturned to ensure victory.Gujarat has a total number of 182 Assembly seats and the polling was held in two phases on December 9 and 14.The counting of votes will take place on Monday.

Former CEC says political parties blame EVM when they lose in polls

NEW DELHI: Former Chief Election Commissioner Naveen Chawla on Monday asserted that political parties or candidate tended to cry foul and blame the electronic voting machines (EVMs) when they are losing the elections."I have observed that when a political party or a candidate lose, they tend to blame the machine and I think that's unfair," Naveen Chawla told ANI.

He added that people should have faith not only in the Election Commission (EC) but also the courts, who have called the EVM has one of the technological wonders."We must have faith in the EC and also in the courts as all of them have examined different

aspects of EVM as well," said the former CEC.

According to early trends, the Congress was giving tough fight to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in both the states.

At the time of reporting, the BJP was leading on 94 seats while Congress on 64 in Gujarat.

In Himachal Pradesh, the trends seemed to follow the same until BJP took a lead by 15 seats.

The counting of votes for 68 Assembly seats in Himachal Pradesh and 182 constituencies in Gujarat began at 8 am today.

The hill state went to polls on November 9 while elections were held in two phases in Gujarat on November 9 and 14 respectively.

'Tortured' Hindus get shelter in India: Mohan Bhagwat

Agartala: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat has said that the "tortured" Hindus from across the world come to India for shelter.Stating that India is a land of Hindus, the RSS chief said while addressing a public function at the Swami Vivekananda Maidan here, "The tortured Hindus from across the world come to the country and get shelter. Hindus believe in truth, but the world respects strength. There is strength in organisation. Being organised is the natural law"."Hindutva is different from Hinduism and today the disturbed Western world is eagerly waiting with expectations towards India's Hinduism and it philosophy which has its roots deep in 'Sanatan Dharm' and shall revive their society out of the curse.

So, to fulfill their expectations Hinduism has become more important today," he added.As part of his four-day Tripura visit, Bhagwat addressed a mammoth rally of Tripura Hindu Malayama, where saints and believers gathered at the Swami Vivekananda Stadium. There, the RSS chief asked the Hindu believers to unite against the evil forces.

According to him, the best part of Hinduism, which earlier had its followers spread across from the Afghanistan to Burma, is that it does any mechanism of conversion and thus is not a threat to any religion.

Bhagwat also stated that in the multi-religious and multi-cultural Indian society, every citizen has the right to practice their own religion provided that they are devoted towards their motherland.He also urged the Hindus to get organised and trained at the RSS "shakhas" (daily meetings), claiming that these were the only places where one could prepare for nation-building and self- development."The 'sanatan dharma' wants to work together with everybody on board", he further said.

CM Rupani retains BJP's prestigious Rajkot (West) seat

RAJKOT: After trailing for some time, Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani finally secured a comfortable win from Rajkot West seat by 131586 votes.

Rupani, the state chief since August last year, was behind his Congress rival Indranil Rajguru in Rajkot West in the first hour.

The Rajkot (West) is a prestigious seat as Prime Minister Narendra Modi contested from here as Gujarat chief minister in 2002.

This seat has been with the BJP for over three decades. The seat is also known as the CM seat in the state. Rupani defeated Congress' Jayantibhai Kalaria by a margin of 23, 740 votes.

Largest constituency in the Saurashtra region, this seat is totally dominated by urban voters.

There are total 316665 registered voters. As per caste equation, there are about 42,000 Kadwa Patels, 33,000 Leuva Patels, 25,000 Brahmins, 35,000 Kshatriyas, 25,000 Baniyas and around 10,000 Jains. The assembly constituency represents Rajkot Taluka (Part) - Rajkot Municipal Corporation (Part) Ward No. - 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24.

Since the Congress' campaign across Gujarat revolved around highlighting ill effects of demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax (GST), the party saw it is an opportunity to woo around mainly businessmen 35000 Baniyas and Jains of Rajkot East.

Former CECs say EVMs can't be tampered

NEW DELHI: Three former Chief Election Commissioners (CEC) of India on Monday said the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) can't be tampered with.

Talking to ANI, former CEC N Gopalaswami said to say EVMs can be tampered is absolutely incorrect.

"EVMs are stand alone machines, aren't connected to any network, and can't be influenced over Bluetooth or wireless message, so to say EVMs have something wrong is absolutely incorrect. It's only a glorified calculator, moment you open it, it goes dead," Gopalaswami said.

Former CEC H.S. Brahma also averred that EVM and VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) machines cannot be tampered with.

"I firmly believe that our EVMs, VVPATs cannot be tampered with. This matter should be closed once and for all as it is tried and tested. EVM is a standalone machine, question of hacking doesn't arise," Brahma said.

Another former CEC Naveen Chawla echoed similar sentiments and said EVMs cannot be tampered with now or even in the future.

"EVMs cannot be tampered with, even in the future. I am very clear about this. During my time, BJP had raised doubts on EVM so we had also held a demonstration like earlier this year for all to come and try rig it," Chawla said.

The statements of these former Chief Election Commissioners came after Mumbai Congress Chief Sanjay Nirupam on Monday said the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) victory in Gujarat was due to EVMs.

The counting of votes in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh is underway and the BJP is set to form next governments in both the states.

People in Gujarat, Himachal recognised BJP's work for development: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI: Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday expressed happiness over the victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections and said people in both the states recognised the work done by the party for development.

"The work done by the party workers right from booth workers to the Prime Minister's level is commendable. Everybody has put their best foot forward and both Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh have recognised the good work going on in the name of development," Sitharaman said.

Echoing similar sentiment, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju hailed the poll outcome and said that the victory was expected.

At the time of reporting, the saffron party was leading in 99 of Gujarat's 182 seats while in Himachal Pradesh it was leading in 43 seats.

Poll outcomes are stern reply to those spreading rumours: Devendra Fadnavis

NAGPUR: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said that the Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat Assembly election results are a stern reply to those spreading rumours against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)."The election results are a stern reply to all those spreading rumours. Today, Himachal has come under the BJP's reign as the 19th state and the way the party has won in both (Gujarat) the states under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guidance, shows that this is like a final verdict by the people of the nation," said Fadnavis here.

He added that the BJP's win is due to Prime Minister Modi's model of development.

"It is this belief on development that can take the nation forward," said Fadnavis.

At the time of reporting, the BJP has won 68 seats, while the Congress has won 59 in Gujarat.

In Himachal Pradesh, the BJP has won 16 seats, while the Congress has won eight.

The BJP workers have started celebrating all over the nation as the trends indicate party's victory in both the states.

The counting of votes for 68 Assembly seats in Himachal Pradesh and 182 constituencies in Gujarat began at 8 am on Monday.

PEOPLE REJECTED CONGRESS' DIVISIVE POLITICS: YOGI ADITYANATH

LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said people have rejected divisive politics of the Congress party.

He made this statement after the result trends showed that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) marching ahead to form next governments in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh.

"People have rejected the divisive politics of Congress. The BJP's win has once again proved that the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is very popular. The county has accepted the revolutionary reformist economic steps taken by him," Adityanath said.

Without naming Congress, the Uttar Pradesh chief minister said those who had doubted the BJP's victory in Gujarat should now accept the glorious leadership of Prime Minister Modi.

"The win in Gujarat has many meanings, especially for the friends of Congress and the opposition who questioned the development of Gujarat. The fifth consecutive win of the BJP in Gujarat is people's mandate for Prime Minister Modi's leadership and his policies. Congress has lost its stronghold in Himachal Pradesh. The way Congress did divisive politics by forgetting development and patriotism; it has been rejected by the people," Adityanath said.

"Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh have shown that the country will not accept divisive politics. Had the Congress learnt lessons from Uttar Pradesh elections then it would not have done divisive politics in Gujarat. By giving prominence to divisive

politics over development, the Congress party divided the society on the lines of caste. Then its leadership played the 'Janeu' card. Earlier, people of UP had said they won't accept two youth (Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav), and now people of Gujarat have rejected the effort of making a team of four youth (Rahul Gandhi, Hardik Patel, Alpesh Thakor, Jignesh Mevani)," the UP chief minister said.

Taking a dig on Rahul Gandhi's elevation as the Congress president, Adityanath said, "We had earlier said that the change in the Congress party leadership will be a good omen for the BJP."Yogi Adityanath said the BJP in Uttar Pradesh is working in the direction of ensuring winning 80 Lok Sabha seats in 2019 general elections.

"Now, the BJP's victories in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh have become a backgrounder of 2019 general elections. Now, Congress leaders should introspect whether they want to fight 2019 elections or not.

We are working in the direction of winning 80 Lok Sabha seats in 2019 general elections, and hopefully achieve this target," the UP chief minister said.

Adityanath also said that these victories have once again proved the election management skills of BJP President Amit Shah.

"Apart from the dynamic leadership of the BJP, the credit of these victories also goes to the hard work of millions of BJP workers. On behalf of Uttar Pradesh, I congratulate Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP President Amit Shah and the BJP workers for the victory in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh," Adityanath said.

At the time of filing this report, the BJP was leading on 85 seats, and Congress on 62, both having won 15, in the Gujarat assembly elections for 182 seats.

In Himachal Pradesh, the BJP was leading in 40 seats, having won 3 and Congress on 19, having won 2, out of total 68 seats.

Being repetitive might be an early sign of dementia: Study

Dementia is a collection of symptoms that can occur due to a variety of possible diseases. The symptoms include impairments in thought, communication, and memory.But, according to a recent research, being repetitive could also be an early sign of dementia. Repeating daily tasks, like shaving or collecting items, may be a sign of a neurodegenerative condition. Asking the same questions in conversation, after they've been answered, may also point to dementia. According to the researchers at The Alzheimer's Association, "The main cause of behavioural symptoms in Alzheimer's, and other progressive dementias, is the deterioration of brain cells which causes a decline in the individual's ability to make sense of the world. In the case of repetition, the person may not remember that she or he has just asked a question or completed a task."hey further said, "Environmental influences also can cause symptoms or make them worse. People with dementia who ask questions repeatedly may be trying to express a specific concern, ask for help, or cope with frustration, anxiety or insecurity."

Forgetting what they had for breakfast, or where they left certain objects, are symptoms of neurodegenerative conditions.Depression is also a typical early sign of dementia.Mood changes or a shift in personality could point to the condition.Other early signs include apathy, listlessness, confusion, a failing sense of direction, and difficulty following conversations. According to a report, almost 47 million people are living with dementia around the world with 4.1 million of them belonging to India. This is expected to double by 2035.

Penalise stress, anxiety by cycling regularly

Cycling can be one of the easiest ways to stay fit. Besides controlling your weight, it can reduce depression, stress and anxiety, say experts.R.M. Anjana, Managing Director at Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre and Deepali Badoni, Physiotherapist at AktivHealth Clinic, talk about the benefits of cycling:

Cycling is an aerobic exercise which has several health benefits. It reduces the risk of heart diseases. The activity boosts production of chemicals like serotonin, dopamine and phenylethylamine in the brain that makes you feel happy and keeps depression at bay.

Static cycling is better for people suffering from knee or joint pain. People suffering from diabetes should make sure that they are well-hydrated while cycling. Type-1 diabetics should carry some carbohydrate based snacks if they are cycling for more than an hour.Diabetics can track their blood sugar before, during, and after exercise using a finger-stick style blood glucose meter or a continuous glucose monitor (CGM). A prescription for a CGM is required if you are cycling regularly, especially over long distances or in races.Cycling has all sorts of health benefits. It is easy on the hip and knee joints and still engages your legs to provide a sense of freedom. As compared to running, biking is far lower impact and engages the muscles in the legs without as much force coming down on the knees. You will gradually begin to see an improvement in the muscle tone of your legs, thighs, rear end and hips. Cycling reduces the blood cholesterol levels improving your heart and lungs function thus reducing your risks for cardio-vascular diseases.

40 percent of cancer-related deaths are preventable, say researchers

Perhaps one of the most terrifying diseases known to mankind, cancer affects not just the patient, but the people connected to them as well.

It can be a devastating ordeal, because even if detected and treated early, cancer still has a reasonable chance to be fatal for the patient suffering from it and can immensely affect family and close friends too.

An Australian study has, however, found that nearly 40 percent of cancer- related deaths are preventable, mostly through lifestyle changes.

Researchers from QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Australia examined eight groups of "modifiable" risk factors that international research bodies have declared to be causes of cancer. They included tobacco smoke, dietary factors, alcohol consumption, being overweight or obese, physical inactivity, ultraviolet (UV) exposure, infections, and hormonal factors.

The researchers analysed data to determine how many cancer deaths each year are caused by those modifiable factors and are therefore, in theory, preventable. In the study published in the International Journal of Cancer, they found the modifiable factors were responsible for 41 percent of cancer deaths among Australian men and 34 percent of cancer deaths in women.

"By far the biggest preventable cause of cancer deaths in Australia is tobacco smoke. Cancer caused by smoking and passive smoking killed 9,921 people in 2013 and accounted for 23 percent of all cancer deaths," said Professor David Whiteman, head of QIMR Berghofers Cancer Control Group. "The other major factors were poor diet, being overweight or obese, and infections, which each caused about five per cent of all cancer deaths in 2013," said Whiteman.

"Poor diet was responsible for 2,329 deaths from cancer, being overweight or obese for 1,990 deaths, and infections for 1,981 deaths," he said.

The researchers found that cancers responsible for the largest numbers of potentially preventable deaths were lung, bowel, cutaneous (skin) melanoma, liver, and stomach cancers. The proportions of potentially preventable cancer deaths are higher among men than women because, on average, men smoke and drink more, spend more time in the sun, and dont eat as well, they said.

"While in many cases cancer is tragically unavoidable, this study highlights what we have known for years: cancer is not always a matter of genetics or bad luck," said Whiteman. "This study shows that in theory, about 17,000 cancer deaths could be prevented each year if people followed accepted guidelines to minimise their exposure to risk factors," he said.

Researchers said that there is a lot people can do to reduce their risk of developing and dying from cancer. "If you currently smoke, seek advice on how to quit. Limit your intake of red and processed meats and look for opportunities to incorporate extra fruit, vegetables and fibre into your diet," said Whiteman.

Erectile dysfunction may elevate heart disease risk in youngsters

A study suggests that erectile dysfunction, inability to get or keep an erection firm enough to have sexual intercourse, in young men may be a cause for increased risk of early cardiovascular disease.According to researchers, in addition to health and quality of life for men, erectile dysfunction has long been associated with CV disease.Risk factors for erectile dysfunction and CV disease are similar - including older age, smoking, obesity and diabetes, among others.Dr Chukwuemeka Osondu from Baptist Health South Florida, Bryan Vo from Florida International University, Ehimen Aneni from Mount Sinai Medical Center and colleagues sought to establish erectile dysfunction as a simple and effective marker of underlying subclinical CV disease.

They hypothesized that measures of erectile dysfunction could be a simple effective CV disease risk stratification tool, particularly in young men who are less likely to undergo aggressive CVD risk assessment and management.

The team conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 28 studies that examined the link between erectile dysfunction and measures of early CV disease.

The results suggested that a significant association of erectile dysfunction with impaired endothelial function (measured by brachial flow-mediated dilation using ultrasound), a marker of the ability of blood vessels to relax that is an early event in vascular disease development.

The authors reported that erectile dysfunction was associated with increased carotid intimal medial thickness (carotid IMT), an early manifestation of atherosclerosis.

The results for the association of erectile dysfunction and coronary artery calcium scoring were inconclusive due to small number of studies with limited sample size."Our study findings indicate that [young] men [with erectile dysfunction] are at greater risk of having identifiable subclinical CV disease and will benefit from an active CV disease work-up," they noted.

5 surprising factors that can cause male infertility and tips to prevent it

Infertility, for long has been primarily considered as a problem faced by only women. But, many researches have been conducted to prove that men are equally responsible for being infertile. In the contemporary society, one's profession and lifestyle plays a vital role in determining how fertile one is. According to Dr. Anubha Singh, Gynecologist and IVF specialist from Shantah IVF Centre, New Delhi, there are a number of factors controlling male fertility. For instance:

- if one sits on a chair for longer duration, it can overheat their testicles.

- keeping a laptop on the lap for a prolonged period can result in a low sperm count.

- wearing tight pants can damage one's testicles and also cause infertility.

- Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can also result in infertility.

- Stress and anxiety also affects one's sperm count. Given below are a few essential tips for men to fight infertility:

1. Give up drinking and smoking

The harmful ingredients in tobacco smoking can kill sperm cells. On the other hand, alcohol does no good either. Excessive alcohol consumption can reduce libido and also destroy the quality and structure of the sperm.

2. Reduce stress

To combat stress, one can try mind relaxing exercises such as yoga, deep breathing, or even listen to soothing music. These activities shall help one in coping with everyday stress.

3. Limit weight lifting

Lifting heavy weights can help one improve sperm concentration, but in case one is overdoing it, then it can be a cause of worry. Exercise in moderation for a healthy sperm count.

4. Eat healthy food

Consume healthy food such as nutritious vegetables, nuts and fresh fruits to improve sperm quality. Vitamin C and E are very important for men. Moreover, drinking four glasses of fresh orange juice a day can help the defective sperm count drop from 20% to 11%. 5. Sound sleep

Sleep for at least seven to eight hours every day as it will help restore the reproductive system and reduces stress. Lack of sleep can disrupt one's cycle of sperm production.

6. Seek expert help

One can also seek help to understand whether he needs to undergo any infertility treatment. However, sometimes basic lifestyle changes are enough to increase one's chances of conception.

DON'T SAY CHEESE: INDIAN STUDY SAYS CLICKING SELFIES IS A MENTAL DISORDER

"Selfitis" - the obsession of taking selfies on smartphones - may be a real disorder that requires treatment, according to a study conducted in India.Researchers at Nottingham Trent University in the UK and the Thiagarajar School of Management (TSM) in Tamil Nadu began investigating the phenomenon after a hoax story appeared in the media in 2014 claiming 'selfitis' had been termed as a genuine mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association.

They have now confirmed its existence and developed the 'Selfitis Behaviour Scale' which can be used to assess its severity. The scale was developed using a large number of focus groups with 200 participants and the scale was tested via a survey of 400 participants.

Participants were based in India because the country has the most users on Facebook, as well as the highest number of deaths as a result of trying to take selfies in dangerous locations.

The findings, published in the International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction confirmed that there are three levels of selfitis. Borderline is defined as taking selfies at least three times a day but not posting them on social media.

Acute selfitis describes taking selfies at least three times a day and posting each one on social media. Chronic selfitis is the uncontrollable urge to take photos of one self round the clock and posting the photos on social media more than six times a day, researchers said.

Six motivating factors were identified, with selfitis sufferers typically seeking to increase their self-confidence, seek attention, improve their mood, connect with the environment around them (to create a record of memories), increase their conformity with the social group around them, as well as being socially competitive.

The prevalence of these factors determined the level of selfitis severity. "A few years ago, stories appeared in the media claiming that the condition of selfitis was to be classed as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association," said Mark Griffiths, from Nottingham Trent University. "While the story was revealed to be a hoax, it did not mean that the condition of selfitis did not exist," Griffiths said.

"We have now appeared to confirm its existence and developed the world's first Selfitis Behaviour Scale to assess the condition," he said. "Typically, those with the condition suffer from a lack of self-confidence and are seeking to 'fit in' with those around them, and may display symptoms similar to other potentially addictive behaviours," said Janarthanan Balakrishnan, assistant professor at TSM.

"Now the existence of the condition appears to have been confirmed, it is hoped that further research will be carried out to understand more about how and why people develop this potentially obsessive behaviour, and what can be done to help people who are the most affected," he said.

For first time, India not being blamed for collapse of WTO talks: Prabhu

Commerce and Industry minister Suresh Prabhu said this was probably the first time in recent history that India was not being blamed for the collapse of talks at the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

"We came here with an open mind" but things did not move because of the adamant attitude of some members, Prabhu told reporters here.The talks at the 11th ministerial conference of the WTO collapsed with the US going back on the commitment made by it along with other member countries to find a permanent solution to the public food stockpile issue.

Following the breakdown of talks, there was no ministerial declaration at the end of the conference, though chair and Argentinean minister Susana Malcorra made a statement highlighting the developments.

"This is (for the) first time that India is not being blamed...we are definitely not going back as villains," Prabhu said, adding the country has not lost anything but gained a lot, especially in terms of the goodwill

of the developing nations.

At previous ministerial meetings, India was often blamed for adopting an uncompromising and stern attitude which thwarted attempts of member nations to reach consensus on key issues.The minister said that during the course of the 11th ministerial conference, he had over two dozen bilateral meetings during which he explained the position of India as well the developing nations on different issues.

Observing that trade negotiations are always difficult, the minister said "we knew that nothing was going to happen because of the way the US administrating was moving... questioning the efficiency of the global trading system."

As regards the food security issue, the minister said that India was keen to have a permanent solution which ought to have been better than the 'Peace Clause' and led the battle for it.However, talks reached a dead end after Assistant US Trade Representative Sharon Bomer Lauritsen in a small group meeting said that permanent solution to the food stockholding issue was not acceptable to America.

The minister said that US objections were not directed against India but some other country, probably China.

Under the global trade norms, a WTO member country's food subsidy bill should not breach the limit of 10 per cent of the value of production based on the reference price of 1986-88.

Apprehending that full implementation of food security programme may result in breach of the WTO cap, India has been seeking amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap.

As an interim measure, the WTO members at the Bali ministerial meeting in December 2013 had agreed to put in place a mechanism popularly called the Peace Clause and had committed to negotiate an agreement for permanent solution at the 11th ministerial meeting at Buenos Aires.However, as no agreement was reached at MC 11, Peace Clause will continue and also the existing mandate to find a permanent solution.

During the ministerial, Prabhu said, India continued to press for reduction of farm subsidies by the developed countries and resisted inclusion of new issues on the negotiating table lest it should dilute the commitment to complete the existing agenda.

The minister further said there is life after Buenos Aires and the WTO will continue to thrive as a transparent multilateral trading organisation for the good of the world.

India to host meeting of some WTO members in February

Prabhu said India will call a meeting of some WTO members in February to muster support for food security and other issues.

"We are planning a meeting of WTO members in February," the minister said, adding it would be like a mini-ministerial meeting.

Although the contours of the meeting would be worked out later, he said the aim was to bring like-minded nations together and explain to them the country's position as well as concerns over issues of common interest.

Blockchain adds Bitcoin Cash to its wallet for Indian users

Digital wallet for cryptocurrencies Blockchain on Monday announced the introduction of Bitcoin Cash to its popular consumer wallet. Customers who had bitcoin in their Blockchain wallets prior to August 1 will automatically see an equal amount of Bitcoin Cash reflected in their accounts, the company said.New users can get started with Bitcoin Cash by simply trading bitcoin or ether for Bitcoin Cash using the exchange integration."We are thrilled to fully support Bitcoin Cash through our wallet and will continue to find ways to make interacting with digital assets even easier across all of India," Nic Cary, President of Blockchain, said in a statement.

Limited support for Bitcoin Cash has been available since October, but customers will now have access to a full suite of options and functionality. Customers can easily toggle between bitcoin, ether and Bitcoin Cash to send and exchange funds, safely manage balances and monitor market prices all from one central place.

With the addition of Bitcoin Cash, Blockchain is now the largest digital wallet provider for bitcoin, ether and Bitcoin Cash with over 20 million users, the company claimed. The price of bitcoin rose over 10 per cent to 1.99 million yen ($17,594) this month, coinciding with its futures debut on a major US stock exchange.

IT-ITeS SSC NASSCOM inks MoU to launch employability enhancement programs

In a bid to enhance skills and employment in the IT sector in India, IT-ITeS Sector Skills Council NASSCOM (SSC NASSCOM) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam University (AKTU) to launch Employability Enhancement Programs (EEP).

The strategic alliance with Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam University aims to offer programs to undergraduate students either as an elective course to existing courses, or as add-on programs with the goal to enhance their employability skills."Collaborating with academia will contribute to the mission of developing a skills ready workforce for the IT-BPM industry. According to the National Skills Mission, by 2022 about 350 million professionals would need to be skilled to become employable, to achieve this target, a structured approach involving all stakeholders are imperative," Dr. Sandhya Chintala, Executive Director, SSC NASSCOM and Vice President, NASSCOM said highlighting that the skills gap needs to be addressed.SSC NASSCOM will also facilitate the Train-the-Trainer (TTT) program for university or college faculty members involved in this project, to provide a holistic view of the essential pedagogy and principles fundamental to the course.

Under this MoU, SSC NASSCOM will provide guidelines and recommendations related to program particulars, such as faculty selection, student selection, infrastructure for training, and evaluation. Post successful completion of the trainings SSC NASSCOM, as the awarding body shall also participate in the assessment and certification process.

The QP certification will be conjunction with the Ministry of Skill development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and NSDC (National Skills development Corporation).

"This will allow us to further provide faculty with the ability to build technical expertise with experiential learning on state of art technologies which will help in enhancing student employability," Dr. Vinay Kumar Pathak, Honorable Vice Chancellor of Dr. APJ AKTU said.

American Express eliminating signature requirement post credit card purchases

Multinational financial services corporation American Express has announced that its users will no longer be required to sign after making credit card purchases, starting April 2018.The New-York based conglomerate is doing away with signatures globally, and just in the US, contrary to the current policy, reports The Verge.

The decision follows the advancement in fraud detection on the behalf of the company, which has led to the elimination of signatures to fight fraudulent activities.

Amex has also highlighted an improvement in contactless payments, rising popularity of online shopping, and the use of "advanced machine learning algorithms" to help prevent fraud more efficiently than comparing a signature, as noted by Jaromir Divilek, an executive VP at American Express.

Paytm QR announces direct payment acceptance into bank accounts

Digital payment giant Paytm has announced that its QR now allows offline merchants to accept unlimited payments directly into their bank accounts at zero charge, in a bid to democratise mobile payments for both merchants and consumers by offering them more choices and convenience.Now, consumers can scan and pay at merchant outlets using their preferred payment methods such as Paytm, UPI, Cards and net-banking.Paytm aims at extending its support to all major payments instruments so that both small and large merchants alike get the flexibility of accepting payments from a wider set of consumers, and help them grow their businesses.

The company's 10,000-strong sales team across the country is working closely with in-store merchants and helping them gain understanding on the added benefits and convenience of using Paytm QR. It will invest Rs. 500 crore in the upcoming calendar year to conduct merchant training and awareness initiatives to expand the reach and acceptance.

Paytm QR has eliminated the need for additional spends on POS machines for merchants and it has been supporting them in their day-to-day business. Currently, Paytm offers customers a wide range of offline and in-store payment use-cases including parking, tolls, kirana stores, utility, temples, local transport, railway and metros, school and college fee and challan among others.With the company's clear focus on payments expansion, it expects to grow Paytm's five million merchant base and targets six fold growth in offline payments by mid next year."With Paytm QR, our merchant partners can now accept payments at zero charge, directly in their bank accounts through multiple payment instruments including UPI and cards.

And there is no monthly limit on collecting payments from their customers. We will continue to invest in expanding our payments network till the time every small and large merchant gets the power of mobile payments with Paytm," said Kiran Vasireddy, COO - Paytm.

Moody's, ICRA: Stable outlook for Indian power sector over next 12-18 months

Moody's Investors Service and its Indian affiliate, ICRA on Monday said that their stable outlook for the power sector in India over the next 12-18 months reflects their expectation of generally stable industry conditions and government policy initiatives.

Improvements in the financial position of state-owned electricity distribution companies are likely to be seen in this period.

"India's state-owned power distribution companies will demonstrate weak to moderate financial profiles. Nevertheless, we do not expect the emergence of material off-taker risk over the next 12-18 months. Consequently, India's independent power producers should maintain credit metrics consistent with their current credit quality," said Moody's VP and senior analyst, Abhishek Tyagi.

The Indian government's debt restructuring of the financially weak distribution utilities under the Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY) will gradually improve the financial conditions of state-owned distribution companies, thereby alleviating off-taker risk, which is a key negative factor for the credit quality of power generators, Moody's said in an official release.India will see a change in its energy mix towards renewables, as the country adds more capacity and moves towards its commitments under the Paris Agreement on climate change. However, the growth in renewable generation capacity will put pressure on conventional power generation."Greater funding diversity will help the power companies to expand capacities and add renewable capacities, although corporate-type debt funding will remain dominant for power companies in India," Tyagi added highlighting that bonds issued by Indian renewable generators in 2017 are examples of interest by institutional funds in the sector.

The rise in India's share of renewable energy in the overall capacity addition will be aided by improved tariff competitiveness, a supportive regulatory framework and strong policy support.

However, upward pressure on the module price level, aggressive bidding and the possible risk of anti-dumping duties being imposed could impact fresh bidding for solar projects. For example, the recent aggressive bidding by independent power producers (IPPs) for solar and wind energy projects poses credit concerns.

Devise simple health insurance products to enhance coverage-IRDAI chief

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) Chairman T S Vijayan on Monday underscored the need to devise health insurance products that are simple and intelligible to the customers, provide coverage to the aged and infirm and those suffering from chronic ailments, bring down distribution costs and ensure that there is no profiteering to the detriment of the insured.Inaugurating the 10th edition of 'FICCI Health Insurance Conference 2017' here today, Vijayan said the goal of achieving inclusive, accessible and affordable health insurance by 2025 was laudable and was in keeping with the millennium development goals.To this could be added another aim, that of responsibility and responsiveness in the delivery of health insurance service as suggested by Dr. Sanjaya Baru, Secretary General of FICCI.Vijayan said the time was perhaps ripe to look at introducing community group insurance products to bring down distribution costs and determining the genuineness of health insurance claims. The veracity of claims by an insured person could be verified through members of a community or group so that insurance companies were not unnecessarily burdened with fictitious claims.The IRDAI chief also underlined the need for standardization of costs of healthcare from one hospital to another in a city. This analysis could be done procedure-wise in a particular city to allow the insured to opt for a hospital of his choice.Vijayan spoke of the need to bring down out of pocket expenses of patients, currently reckoned at 62 percent of all healthcare costs. This was extremely high and leads to impoverishment of the patients, he said. In comparison, out of pocket hospital expenses in developed countries such as the US and UK were 20% and in BRICS countries about 20-25 percent. Vijayan released three knowledge papers -- FICCI- KPMG Knowledge Paper on 'MSME Group Health Insurance Penetration in India', FICCI- KPMG Knowledge Paper on 'Health Savings Account in India' and FICCI- EY Knowledge Paper on 'Distribution2.0 - Improving Distribution in Health Insurance'. (These reports can be accessed via this link) G Srinivasan, Chairman, FICCI Health Insurance Committee, said that while life expectancy in India has gone up significantly, the disease burden is still very high.

Times Network hosts Digital India Summit and Awards 4.0

Times Network, a part of India's largest media conglomerate, The Times Group, launched the fourth edition of its 'Times Network Digital India Summit and Awards 4.0' on Monday.

Attended by some of the most valued dignitaries in India, the summit aimed at deliberating on key challenges and laid out key imperatives and framework for turning the vision of 'Digital India' into a reality, through a series of panel discussion and deliberations.

The summit kicked off with the keynote address by the Chief Guest, Union Minister for Law and Justice and Electronics and Information Technology, Ravi Shankar Prasad. The participants at the first session of the panel discussion themed "Digital India- Where Do Things Stand? A Real Time Assessment" were Aruna Sundararajan, Secretary, DoT; Debjani Ghosh, President Designate, Nasscom; Rajkiran Rai, MD and CEO, Union Bank of India; Sri Rajan, Chairman, Bain and Co India and Karan Bajwa, MD IBM India.

Talking extensively about the growth, opportunities and possibilities of the digital connectivity in India, Ravi Shankar Prasad stated, "Digital India which is a flagship initiative the government is designed to empower and to help the poor and the underprivileged. We are focusing on providing the affordable and inclusive digital media to the masses.

Today we have well over 1 billion mobile phones in the country with 350 million being smartphones which defines the digital identity of the nation. Low cost technology for inclusive growth is crucial."

He also touched upon the benefits of digital India in the wake of enrolling Aadhaar. "With enrollment of 1.18 billion Aadhaar cards, we were able to save 49,000 crore of the exchequer which was previously looted by the middlemen in the public distribution system." Further talking about the inclusion of the digital resources, he highlighted that "India has digital aspiration, appetite and customer. We are heading towards a revolution of digital media in this country."

"Over the last 3 years, Digital India Summit and Awards, has enjoyed tremendous response from both delegates and participants alike.

With an unwavering focus on building a digitally empowered India, the 4th edition of Digital India Summit is another step towards bridging the 'digital divide' and finding solutions and opportunities to create robust security architecture," said MK Anand, MD & CEO, Times Network.

Rajkiran Rai, MD and CEO, Union Bank of India said, "Digital India is one of the biggest government programs in the world to bring about sustainable and inclusive societal transformation using digital technologies. The process of making India into a trillion-dollar digital economy has begun and Digital India is making this dream a reality.

We at Union Bank are committed to help India achieve its digital vision. We are proud to partner Times Network for the last 3 years in this impact initiative."

During the intriguing session on 'Digital India- Where Do Things Stand? A Real Time Assessment', Aruna Sundararajan, Secretary, DoT, said, "Digital India is an aspiration. We are focused to enable digital opportunities to reach to the masses and leverage them." She additionally highlighted the issue of data protection in the discussion as she stated, "We are planning a robust data protection framework to empower the digital mandate. Data protection is beyond Aadhaar; issue of privacy is a global threat."

Stating the issue of data protection in the digital domain, Debjani Ghosh, President Designate, Nasscom said, "Critical end to end data policy is a must. The emerging technology needs solid building blocks of data privacy which will enhance the dependency on the digital media. Digital solutions can enhance the employment in the rural areas if we cater it to the most underprivileged parts of India."

Rajan S Mathews, Director General, COAI speaking on the vision of 5G in India emphasized on the periphery of competitive landscape of the telecom industry. He said, "We need to position ourselves in the telecom industry with the spectrum auctions pricing methodology. We need more spectrum in the upcoming time to leverage the last customer of a telecom company."

Dr. TP Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship addressed a panel discussion on the theme of 'Developing A Digital Workforce- The Ground Realities'. He said "Skills acquisition needs to be more aspirational.

Our jobs are not aspirational. Soft skill developments programs including life skills and ITI which are the game changers under the Skill India campaign of the government can play pivotal role in shaping the skill development sector in this country."

The summit had discussions on the relevance of 5G in India, how Fintech has helped in the growth of Digital India and discussed the importance of data security in India.

The session extensively talked about the opportunities and challenges in the digital world when the country is looking for economic independence.

SRI LANKA SEEK HISTORIC series triumph in India

VISAKHAPATNAM: An imposing line-up and an impeccable record in this port city make India the clear favourites as they seek to clinch another series win against Sri Lanka in the third and final ODI here on Sunday.

India have not lost a series at home since the defeat to South Africa in October 2015.Sri Lanka, on the other hand, are seeking to win their first-ever bilateral series in India, having lost eight and drawn one.Skipper Rohit Sharma led the fightback for India in Mohali with a superb double century, his third in ODIs after the team had been outplayed in the series opener in Dharamsala.

Sharma and his men will look to ride the momentum after a big win in the second game and seal the series at the ACA-VDCA stadium.

The Indian team have lost only once at the venue in the seven games played here (with one being washed out) and will hope to keep winning on what has generally been a high-scoring ground.

Defeat in Dharamsala meant India can't overtake South Africa in the ODI rankings but a series win is at stake. Rohit's men will look to maintain supremacy over the visiting Lankans, having won the Test series earlier.

Hosts remain favourites

The India captain will look to continue the good work and domination of the Lankan attack while the other batsmen will also hope to be among runs. After being shot out for 112 in Dharamsala, the host batting line-up regained its mojo as Rohit led from the front.

The importance of bowling well in the first 10 overs can't be overemphasised and the lead bowlers Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Jasprit Bumrah would be well aware of this as would Lanka's spearhead Suranga Lakmal.

Sri Lanka, buoyed by news about the availability of ace all-rounder Angelo Mathews for the crucial game, will be give it their all to snatch a much-needed series win, in what has been a tough year for them.

Mathews scored a ton, albeit in a losing cause in Mohali and will be the lynchpin of the batting unit, which is short on experience, as the squad aims to secure a rare series win in India.

The Lankans were brought crashing down to earth after a good win at Dharamsala and their batsmen capitulated under the pressure of chasing a mammoth score.

Mathews' return to form must be heartening news for them as is the fact that he is bowling some overs, and with a degree of success too.

Upul Tharanga needs to step up and make a bigger contribution.

The other batters including Lahiru Thirimanne, Danusha Gunathilaka and Niroshan Dickwella, have been inconsistent and will have to find ways to make sizeable scores.

The bowlers, on the other hand, will look to recover quickly from the horror show as Rohit turned on the heat. Nuwan Pradeep, who was taken for 106 in 10 overs, will look for redemption if he retains his place in the XI while Suranga Lakmal holds the key for Sri Lanka.

Failure of stalwarts LEAVES ENGLAND ON A KNIFE-EDGE

PERTH: The torrid form of England's senior players showed no sign of ending on Sunday, as paceman Stuart Broad went wicketless and opener Alastair Cook's 150th Test was spoilt by another cheap dismissal on day four of the third Ashes Test.

Already 2-0 down in the series, England finished a rain-hit day at the WACA in a precarious position of 132 for four, still trailing Australia by 127 runs with an innings to spare.Dismissed for seven in the first innings, Cook was caught and bowled for 14 by seamer Josh Hazlewood to continue a dreadful series with the bat.The former skipper has scored only 83 runs in the series at an average of 13.83, comfortably the worst of England's specialist batsmen.Captain Joe Root said prior to the match that he and his senior teammates needed to lift if England were to claw their way back into the series."It probably will take one of the senior players to... really take it on and do something special this game," the young captain had said.Root himself was also unable to capitalise on starts of 20 and 14, leaving the unbeaten pair of Dawid Malan and Jonny Bairstow to rescue the team again after they combined in a first innings stand of 237 runs.

"If [Cook and Root] don't score runs, you expect them next innings to score runs," England number three James Vince told reporters after a knock of 55, having fallen to an unplayable Mitchell Starc delivery that jagged back into his stumps."They've shown over their careers that they often don't have long periods without scoring runs."

England have long relied on Cook and Root to lay a solid foundation, so the lack of runs from the duo has put a heavy burden on the inexperienced trio of opener Mark Stoneman, Vince and Malan.

The tourists also have struggled with their bowling.

Veteran James Anderson (4-116) battled hard but his long-time pace partner Broad finished wicketless for 142 runs on Sunday, his worst ever test bowling figures.

The 31-year-old has not collected a five-wicket haul in 22 Test matches since January, 2016.

England have few other options. Fellow seamer Craig Overton may be sidelined for the rest of the series with a broken rib, leaving right-arm seamer Jake Ball in reserve.

Ball was dropped after poor returns of 1-77 and 0-38 during the first Test in Brisbane.

The bowling concerns have also extended to all-rounder Moeen Ali, whose off-spin produced figures of 1-120 on Sunday. For the series, he has only managed three wickets at a miserable 105.33 apiece.

He has been equally ineffective with the bat, scoring just 105 runs at an average of 21.00. The responsibility to produce 'something special' that Root demanded from his senior team mates will now fall to Malan and Bairstow on day five.

Ashes: Steve Smith unsure of Mitchell Starc's participation in Melbourne

SYDNEY: Australia skipper Steve Smith is unsure whether Mitchell Starc will play any further part in the Ashes, after the fast bowler ended the third-Test victory in Perth with a bruised right heel. Smith's men reclaimed the famous little urn at the WACA on Monday, dismissing England for 218 to complete an innings-and-41-run victory that puts them 3-0 up in the five-match rubber.Aftewards, Starc - the series' leading wicket-taker with 19 scalps - made it clear to Smith he wants to feature in the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.Yet although the paceman was named in an unchanged Australia squad for the MCG, it is possible the hosts will draft in back-up seamer Jackson Bird now the series has been won.

"Having seen him just there, he just said, 'I'm playing'. Whether he has a choice in the matter, I'm not sure, but he wants to play," said Smith of Starc in his post-match news conference.

"I think he was a little bit sore. He said it didn't get any worse when he was bowling, but I guess it's something that we have to sum up."We've wrapped the series up here. We'd obviously love to win 5-0 and have the 'Big Three' [of Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins] going all the time, but we've also got an important tour to South Africa after this series, which we'd love to have him available for."We'll see how he pulls up over the next couple of days. I'm sure that will determine which way we go."

The pace of Starc, Hazlewood and Cummins has been highlighted as a key factor in Australia's success, with England lacking seamers able to bowl at similar velocity."I think here in Australia it certainly makes a difference on the flatter tracks, where there isn't much sideways movement," Smith added. "That extra air speed can make a big difference.

"We've worked really hard to ensure that we had these three big quicks on the park and ready for this series. A couple of them skipped the one-day series in India and we knew what was coming up. We were preparing for this series and we wanted those 'Big Three' on the park to do what they've done in the last three Test matches."A lot of praise has got to go to the medical staff for ensuring those guys are ready to go and also the selectors."Australia remain on course to record a third 5-0 whitewash of England in four home Ashes series and Smith added: "I'd love to do that. I was part of the series back in 2013-14 when we did that and it was an amazing part of my life.

Jose Mourinho refuses to give up on Manchester United's title hopes

WEST BROMWICH: Jose Mourinho insisted Manchester United will not give up on the Premier League title race after his side cut Manchester City's lead back to 11 points.Mourinho's side won 2-1 at West Bromwich Albion on Sunday with goals from Romelu Lukaku and Jesse Lingard before Gareth Barry replied for the hosts. And Mourinho is adamant United will keep going until the end of the season despite their Manchester rivals' huge lead at the top."I know that the questions are always coming in the same direction and I keep saying the same," Mourinho said."Our last match in the Premier League is Watford at Old Trafford, in mid-May, and until then in every match we go - every match we will try to win.

"If people ask that question to us and then you do it to the third team and the fourth and to the fifth and to the sixth, probably they will disappear.

Probably they want to go on holidays. We don't want to go on holidays. We want to play until the last match."

Mourinho refused to be drawn on the leaked video which emerged on social media before United's victory at the Hawthorns, showing City players celebrating Saturday's win against Tottenham by taunting United over their cautious style of play with the words "park the bus".

"I didn't see, I didn't watch," Mourinho said. "I am not interested in doing that."You are the ones to make your evaluations, your comments. For me, nothing."

United are set to check on the fitness of captain Antonio Valencia after he limped off with a sore hamstring after 66 minutes at West Brom.The full-back will be assessed ahead of the League Cup trip to Bristol City on Wednesday and next Saturday's Premier League game at Leicester.

Pardew errors

"The Valencia injury is what I call a December injury," said Mourinho."It is an injury of the accumulation of fatigue. It is a muscular one - hamstring. Big, small, medium? I don't know."He is an experienced guy who will know not to let it go to difficult limits.

"But it is an injury of fatigue - everyone in the Premier League, especially the ones with more accumulation of cups and European cups, are at risk."

Meanwhile, West Brom are still without a win in four games under new boss Alan Pardew despite an improved second-half display against United.And Pardew admitted his own errors after the game. "We were disappointed in the first half and I think I picked the wrong team," he said."The boys gave me so much at Liverpool, obviously I'm getting to know them, but I didn't think we had that energy in the first half that we need against Man United. It was too comfortable for them."Second half, we had some experience in Gareth Barry, I thought he made a big difference when he came on."And then Chris Brunt came on and suddenly we looked threatening from the moment he entered the pitch."It was a lesson for the other players in having confidence in what you're doing."There are some good managers at the bottom of the league and some good squads and we're not going to make it up playing like we did in the first half."

Rohit Sharma climbs to fifth in ICC ODI rankings, Virat Kohli leads charts

DUBAI: Rohit Sharma's third career double hundred in the just concluded series against Sri Lanka has pushed him up two spots to fifth in the latest ICC ODI Player Rankings among batsmen.

It's the first time that Rohit has crossed the 800-point mark as he ended the three-match ODI series which India won 2 -1 with 816 points.

Though he has enjoyed a career-high ranking of third in February 2016, he reached a personal high of 825 points after the second match in Mohali when he struck an unbeaten 208, his third ODI double-century.Rohit's opening partner Shikhar Dhawan, named player of the series, too has gained one slot to reach 14th position after aggregating 168 runs including an unbeaten 100 in Visakhapatnam. Dhawan had slammed 68 in the second match, figuring in a 115-run opening stand with Rohit.

Virat Kohli, who rested himself from the Sri Lanka series, still leads the batting chart with 876 points, ahead of South African A B de Villiers (872).Among the bowlers, Indian leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal has moved up 23 places to take 28th place after finishing with six wickets in the series. Chinaman bowler Kuldeep Yadav has moved up 16 places to take a career-best 56th slot while all- rounder Hardik Pandya has gained 10 slots to also reach a career-best 45th position.

For Sri Lanka, Upul Tharanga has gained 15 places to reach 36th position among batsmen with his current tally of 571 points, his highest in five years. Niroshan Dickwella has gained seven places to take 37th position.

Pace bowler Suranga Lakmal (up 14 places to 22nd) and all-rounder Angelo Mathews (up nine places to 45th) have moved up in the list for bowlers.

There has been no change of positions in the ICC ODI Team Rankings. India (second with 119 points) could have overtaken South Africa (121) to take top position with a 3-0 win against Sri Lanka but that was ruled out early as they lost the opening match on a seaming track in Dharamsala.

Barcelona thrash Deportivo la Coruna, move 11 points clear of Real Madrid

MADRID: Barcelona opened up an 11-point La Liga lead over Real Madrid ahead of next weekend's Clasico between the Spanish giants as Luis Suarez and Paulinho each scored twice in a 4-0 thrashing of Deportivo la Coruna on Sunday.

Lionel Messi also saw a penalty saved and hit the woodwork three times as Barca regained their six-point lead over Atletico Madrid in second place.

Real remain down in fourth, but do have a game in hand on their rivals as they missed out on domestic action this weekend to win the Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi on Saturday.

"I know people fixate on the difference between us and Real Madrid, but Atletico are just six points behind," said Barca boss Ernesto Valverde.

"No matter what happens on Saturday, there is still a world of a way to go in La Liga." The only drawback for Barca as they extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 24 games since they were beaten by Real on their last visit to the Santiago Bernabeu in the Spanish Super Cup back in August, was a muscle injury to Paco Alcacer that will keep the forward out for three weeks.

Messi paraded his fourth golden boot award -- after being the leading scorer in Europe last season -- before kick-off and could barely believe his luck as he failed to add to his 18 goals already this

term.The Argentine has now hit the woodwork 14 times this season, but still had a huge role to play in three of Barca's four goals.

Only a series of saves from Ruben Martinez to deny Messi and Aleix Vidal delayed Barca until the 29th minute from going in front when Messi presented Suarez with an early Christmas present to tap in from close range.

More goal-line controversyMessi then smashed against the bar, but the woodwork wasn't so forgiving for Deportivo when Messi's next attempt came off the post and into Paulinho's path to make it 2-0 before half-time.

Suarez thought he had his second of the night moments later when the ball looked to have crossed the line.However, for the second time in less than a month Barca were foiled by La Liga's lack of goal-line technology as the goal wasn't awarded.

"I could see clearly from my position after shooting because I was right by the goal line," Suarez told BeIN Sports Spain.The Uruguayan, though, had to wait just two minutes into the second half to net his fourth goal in three games by sweeping home Sergi Roberto's cross.

Messi hit the woodwork for a third time and then saw Martinez brilliantly save his effort from the spot after Suarez was upended inside the area.

But Martinez was helpless as Paulinho profited from a repeat of his first goal when he rolled into an empty net on the rebound after Jordi Alba also hit the frame of the goal.

Earlier, Villarreal bounced back from three straight defeats as Pablo Fornals grabbed the only goal in a 1-0 win at Celta Vigo.Victory allowed Villarreal to leapfrog back above Girona into sixth after the Catalans had edged the battle of the high-flying newly-promoted sides over Getafe 1-0 thanks to Cristhian Stuani's early goal.

Managerless Las Palmas struck twice in the last 10 minutes to snatch a 2-2 draw with Espanyol, but remain rooted to the foot of the table.

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