I am alive and well, says “missing” candidate

MY OWN PARTY LET ME DOWN: PALDEN

“CONFUSING DIRECTIONS ON HOW TO FILE NOMINATIONS LED TO THE FIASCO”

Monday, 26 April 2004
Vol. 3 No. 28
Gangtok □ Rs. 3

Central Pendam, 25 April: Addressing a public meeting here today, the Chief Minister and SDF president, Pawan Chamling, took his battle against Gorkha Apex Committee and its president, GM Rai, to his home turf. Mr. Rai hails from Singtam and is contesting the Assembly polls from this constituency.

Speaking to NOW over the phone from an undisclosed location, Mr. Bhutia, who sounded tired and agitated, said that he had not been “abducted,” or “bought over,” but was hiding from Congress leaders who were instigating people against him.

Chamling takes the battle against GAC to Central Pendam

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 25 April: There are some who suspect him of being “killed,” other who see an abduction and more who believe he sold-out. Over the last couple of days, Palden Bhutia, has made more headlines than he did while he was campaigning at Kabire-Tingda from where he failed to file his nomination papers despite having made it to the DC [North’s] office on the last day for filing, 23 April. His supporters are angry and hurt and some are baying for his blood. Allegations are flying so thick and fast that even the Cong [I] high-command seems divided on what the party line should be. While some say he was bought, others, while speaking from the same dais, announce that he has been “abducted.” In all this, Mr. Bhutia’s side of the story remains unreported because he has been in hiding since 23 April. Today, he called newspaper offices with his version of the events.

Northern Rejections: We Deserved Time: Kazi

No Adjournments Possible After Verdict, Says DC

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 25 April: Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee’s spokesperson, Jigme N. Kazi, while commenting on the yesterday’s rejection of nomination papers of three Cong [I] candidates in South Sikkim, said that the matter would be taken up “legally” with the concerned authorities.

“We will take up the issue with the electoral department along with the chief electoral officer, Mr. TT Dorjee and also with the Election Commission,” he said. He further revealed that they were hopeful of a positive response and added that in the event that a “favourable response” did not come their way, they would “move the Courts.”

He says that a petition will be filed against the Returning Officer of the concerned districts.

Mr. Kazi claims that the sealed envelopes containing the Forms A and B - which failed the scrutiny - had been submitted to the DC [North], who is the Returning Officer, on 22 April itself.

“The RO should have opened the envelopes on that day itself and verified its contents and if there were any lapses then we should have been informed so we could make the required rectification,” he says. Mr. Kazi claims that the DC is obliged to inform the concerned parties of any such lapses.

The DC [North], Vishal Chauhan, when contacted over the phone, said that Mr. Kazi is mistaken if he feels that the party should have been informed of the lapses in advance.

“The Election Commission of India will take it up with the electoral department along with the chief electoral officer,” he said.

Mr. Chauhan also said that he had not received any complaints.

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Santragis will vote against Congress, claims Upreti

Turn to pg 5

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A Nursing Home Just Like Your Own Home
It is interesting how esoteric Article 371F remains for the Sikkimese and upholding the “sanctity” of Article 371F. Sanctity, which means the terminology that we associate with it. We also speak of protecting things can go out of hand. India knows only too well how faith and its invocations that are always on his lips. He might not understand the full import of the words he utters, but he will never question them.

He does not even feel the need to interpret the meanings. Till such time, then, shared within private spaces, and as the moment this incomplete knowledge is exploited in the public domain, things can go out of hand. India knows only too well how faith and its interpretations have often been exploited to bloody ends by various factions. In the case of Sikkim, Article 371F occupies a similarly edified position. It is respected, only cursorily understood and passionately protected. While no one questions the reasoning behind the Article, it is still sketche. And let me go. I went straight to the market, where I found her adoptive mother, Shakhag Achala. “Oh my son” Shakhag Achala said, “I am happy to see you still alive and standing before me healthy and well. Where are you staying?” then she asked me to come that evening to her house. After this her mother called Milima and said: “This is your brother Twan Yang! Do you remember him?” But Milima was very shy and bowed her head, and I felt sad that even my own sister did not recognize me. When I told Milima’s adoptive mother that I would be only a short time in Kalimpong, she said, “Why not stay in my house? Go with Milima and bring your things here.” I said, “All right.” And together we went back to Nanna Amala. She, however, would not let me go, but said, “First you must pay back all the money your father owed to the Marwari which I have paid.” I replied: “I do not know anything about all this. If that is so I will speak to Mr. Tharchin.” Now, Nanna Amala once more had a Ti. betan husband, as her first husband had died long ago. He began to fight with me and nearly killed me in the back but I managed to get hold of my things and hurried straight to my sister’s home.

The next day my sister’s adoptive mother and I went to Mr. Tharchin to settle this dispute. I asked him to arrange it somehow so that I should no longer belong to Nanna Amala, and I also told him that this family were trying to beat me or perhaps to murder me out of anger because I had not paid them the money owned by my father. Mr. Tharchin said it was too bad for them to act so wickedly toward an orphan boy. Then Mr. Tharchin’s children died, and his adoptive mother that Nanna Amala had lost her reputation among the Tibetans. Her daughter Lancho had been married to a Mr. Tewa in Darjeeling, and then she herself had run away to Darjeeling and married the same man leaving all her children behind in a destitute condition. She had not paid the house rent to the Marwari when she ran away, so the Marwari had come and had impounded all the household things which she had sold to pay for the house rent. Turn- ing to me, Mrs. Tharchin said: “Twan Yang, what would have been the condition if you had stayed in this household? You are in- deed a lucky boy to have come to India.”

So Nanna Amala had run away to Darjeeling and mother and daughter together lived with the same man and both became mothers by one father. However both these children died and the daughter also. But Nanna Amala returned to Kalimpong to show her lost face to the Tibetans and Chinamen there, who all knew about her terrible conduct. Mr. Tharchin thought that she was no good at all, but as the family were Christians and as the sons were in difficulty he let them stay in the Tibetan press room. Then Mr. Tharchin said that, as to the matter between Nanna Amala, and me he would see whether it was settled for good and all.

K alimpong is a comfortable place to live in. That is, if you get used to the lacerated roads and the million vans that ply on them. Also not to mention the occa- sional water shortage and the dirty scattering of dilapidated houses that greet your sight as you enter into town near the Novely cinema. Cer- tainly, the way that the town has grown in the last decade or so gives one the impression that the town planners have all along looked the other way while builders/homeown- ers had a free run over the town and the suburban landscape. Maybe they were looking at the mountains. Which, thankfully, do not belong to either the municipal- ity, or the forest department or the tourism guys. Otherwise, they would have this bright idea of do- ing it up with ceramic tiles and float the ground out with ceramic tiles and float it up with ceramic tiles and float it up with ceramic tiles and float...
A small stick is planted next to a sapling, tied lightly by a string, so that the sapling grows straight and tall. A fully-grown tree, once crooked, can never be straightened. This is the belief that makes the Pradhans send their two children to Bal Vikas classes every Sunday morning.

Bal Vikas run by Sai Samiti, also known as education in human values. It trains children from the age of 5 to the age of 15. Complementing the school education, emphasis is on imparting teachings on human values.

“During my childhood days, Bal Vikas was an integral part of my being. I looked forward to it every Sunday, because it was a time to meet up with lots of friends and get involved in lots of activities that were not only educative but informative and contributed a great deal to your spiritual development as well,” recollects Suma, a computer operator.

“Those were also the days when there was no cable TV or the Internet. So, Sundays meant time spent in the Bal Vikas classes where one got to know about the country’s rich cultural heritage, our religion and the importance of family values, universal brotherhood and sanskar. We were not only given spiritual and moral education, but the emphasis was also on all-round development of the individual. I still remember the Vedic mantras and bhajans that I learnt during my Bal Vikas days,” she adds.

Twenty years on the classes are still going strong. Today Bal Vikas classes are being run in various localities of Gangtok, adding value to today’s educational system which does not lay adequate emphasis on the very important aspect of inculcating human values.

Although the classes are focused on the teachings of Sri Sai Baba, there are activities all round the year—concerts, music and dance, debates and elocutions to participate in bringing together the essence of all religions of the world. Bal Vikas also undertakes various social service programmes to help the needy and deprived.

Rebecca Mukhia, a teacher at Bal Vikas, says that the programme lays a good foundation for the children and helps them throughout their lives in taking the right decisions.

According to Shiva Nepal, Deorali Samiti Convener, the Bal Vikas classes are open for all. “It is not about religious conversion, only about opening up of the mind. We focus on spiritual matters because that helps in every aspect of life and it is something that is missing in today’s education system.”

And Bal Vikas does just that. Ensure that the child does not grow up only on standard modern education, but on spiritual and moral values that will help her to become one, wholesome, individual.

**THE BAL VIKAS INITIATIVE**

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GANGTOK, 25 April: The imprisoned Panchen Lama turned 15 today. He is the youngest political prisoner and the Tibetan community of Sikkim took out a procession through town today to spread awareness on the gross crime and to press for an early release of the Panchen Lama.

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**FOR THE PANCHEN LAMA**

GANGTOK, 25 April: The imprisoned Panchen Lama turned 15 today. In prison. He was arrested on 14 May, 1995, three days after he was recognised as the eleventh Panchen Lama. He is the youngest political prisoner and the Tibetan community of Sikkim took...
Congress leaders wave black flags at Ranipool meet

a NOW REPORT

RANIPool, 25 April: The state Congress president, Nar Bahadur Bhandari addressed a Cong [I] public meeting here at Ranipool today. With him were other Cong [I] heavyweights Biraj Adhikari, Lok Sabha candidate, Tansen Buthia, candidate for Pathing, Bharat Basnet (Loosing Pachekhani), DB Gurung [Geyzing], Delay Namgyal [Rumtek] and other candidates of the party.

The highlight of the meet was the denouncement of the alleged buying-over of the Cong [I] candidate from Kabi, Palden Buthia by the SDF. All the Congress party speakers vehemently criticized the SDF for subverting the democratic process and waved black flags to demonstrate their protest over the same.

Mr. Bhandari first assured the people over the dependability of EVMs saying that he had been to Manipur where they were first used. On the Kabi-Tingda incident, he accused the ruling party of playing "dirty politics" and also hinted that more money could change hands in an attempt to buy over the people to the SDF.

On the rejection of the three Congress candidates from South Sikkim yesterday, he claimed that even if the papers had some mistakes in them, the candidates should have been given a couple of days time to rectify those mistakes. According to him, the rejections were “mysterious” since nominations of all Congress candidates in the other districts were found to be in order. lambasting Mr. Chamling’s policies, he said that only the Cong [I] could bring about real development since it was truly concerned about the interests of the people. The SDF, he alleged, was neck deep in corrupt practices.

Bharat Basnet, while speaking to the audience, said the Kabi incident was a “rape of the democratic system.” Former SIBLAC convener, Mr. Bhutia contended that the episode was a “humiliation” of the BLs of Sikkim.

"The entire people of Sikkim, particularly the BLs, have been disgraced by this act of bribery,” he said.

He further questioned the in-cumbent government’s claims to uphold the interests of the people of the state.

"We stand for the adherence to the provisions of Article 371F which gives Sikkim its unique identity in the Indian Union,” he said. On the issue of the reopening of Nathula he said it was a secondary matter as the main issue was the restoration of the political rights of the people of Sikkim which were being “diluted” by the SDF.

The Lok Sabha candidate, on his part, promised to look into the issue of Article 371F if he was elected to Delhi and within a year place his findings before the people of the state.

“You will know within one year of the various dilutions that have been effected on it by the incumbent government,” he promised.

POWERPLAY

SANGRAMIS WILL VOTE AGAINST CONG, CLAIMS UPRETI

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 25 April: Lack of funds may have constricted the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) from fielding more than two candidates for the polls, but it has not distracted the party from going full steam to prevent the Congress, led by Mr. Bhandari make any inroads into the state. The SSP has also not taken the constraints we are facing right now, but we will make sure that in those elections this time. We are determined to keep him away at any cost,” Rajendra Upreti, working president and the Lok Sabha candidate of the party said here today.

“We may have fielded only two candidates due to the financial constraints we are facing right now, but we have been able to prove to the people and especially our detractors that we are still alive and kicking. This will also prove that the party’s red and white flag and its symbol, the elephant, are still with us,” he said.

Having won the first “battle” against Mr. Bhandari when the Election Commission of India passed a verdict saying that the SSP still existed as a party and that it could use the party symbol and the flag, the party is now focusing on how to retrieve the property that earlier belonged to the party, the eye to be his own. We will take this matter up very seriously and continue with our legal action against him,” Mr. Upreti said.

Mr. Upreti claims that the party has enough proof that the Bhawan belongs to the SSP.

There are several documents and instances where Mr. Bhandari has clearly mentioned that the Bhawan is a property of the SSP and it has been just rented out to the Congress to be used as its party headquarters. We have documents to prove that. Let Mr. Bhandari prove that the Bhawan belongs to him only, otherwise he should return us all the funds and properties that belong to the SSP,” he said.

However, the real fight, in these elections, would be between the Mr. Bhandari and the SSP. Mr. Upreti said.

“Since we have fielded only two candidates, we are certainly outnumbered by the Congress candidates. But we will make sure that in those constituencies where we don’t have a candidate, our supporters vote against the Congress. Mr. Bhandari should not be allowed to come to the power at any cost,” he said.

Mr. Bhandari is yet to reply to the legal notice sent by the party on its claims on the Bhawan. Mr. Upreti added. Besides Mr. Upreti for the Lok Sabha, the SSP has fielded Devi Prasad Dahal from Gangtok.
Contd from pg 1

secret parleys with the Congress chief,” Mr. Chamling said.

While admitting that the two organisations had put his office as the Chief Minister under “tremendous pressure” to toe their line, Mr. Chamling said: “Only I know how much pressure the two groups put on me. I am glad I did not give in, because it is obvious that they were both fanning communal passions for personal political gains.”

Singling Mr. Rai out for some special bars, Mr. Chamling told the gathering that Sikkim being a democracy, they were free to back whichever party they wanted. “In GM Rai’s case, just remember, he comes to you with his compliments of development, of social upliftment. He has only the communal card to play. There is no way he can form the next government or even be a part of it. Do you think he will continue distributing leaflets like he is doing at present after 10 May,” he questioned.

Confident that he was on his way to lead the next government in Sikkim, Mr. Chamling said: “The first government of the 21st century will be youthful, action and development oriented.”

“I am not troubled about the elections. What I am concerned about is Sikkim’s future and how things can be improved further; of how all aspirations of the people can be fulfilled,” he concluded.

CHAMILG TAKES THE BATTLE AGAINST GAC TO CENTRAL PENDAM

Contd from pg 1

dia guidelines are very clear. As re-
turning officers, we are supposed to conduct a preliminary scrutiny only of the nomination papers, which we did. In fact the nomination papers of all rejected candidates are in order. As far as the Form-A and B submitted by the party is concerned, the returning officer is under no such obligation. Whenever it is submitted, they are gone through on the day of the scruti-

ny. To recheck the contents of the said forms is the responsibility of the party advocate,” the DC explains.

But Congress’ woes don’t end there.

The party is also unhappy with the DC’s refusal to grant them time for the scrutiny process. The re-
jec-
tions came about when the Form-B, which is supposed to be signed by the respective party presidents, both in Sikkim, was not received in time.

The DC had earlier given them time to correct the anomaly and that nothing far as the Form-A and B submitted by the DC refused to grant Congress time to rectify the mistakes.

“When we came to know of the lapses in the Form-B we sought permission from the DC in writing to rectify the document. He didn’t accept our appeal,” Mr. Kazi said.

The DC [South], when con-
tacted, explained that the scrutiny process is like a judicial proceed-
ing and just like any court case, an adjournment is possible. And ad-

Mr. Targain, when contacted to comment on the allegation, said, “I have only two words in response baseless allegations.”

GANGTOK, 25 April: The state Congress general secretary in charge for North Sikkim, Tseten Lepcha, while talking to NOW! has said that what happened at Kabi Tingda, the constituency where Mr. Lepcha failed to file his nomination papers, was “unfair” and went against every “norm and ethic” of politics. The state Congress, he said had set up an inquiry committee to investigate the matter and Mr. Lepcha stressed that this committee should “expose all the conspirators, both overt and covert,” involved in the incident.

“As the general secretary in-
charge for North Sikkim, I feel per-
sonally very let down, I, as well as every Congress supporter in North Sikkim, have resolved that we would make good the loss of Kabi-Tingda, where we were sure to win, with a victory at Lachen Mangshila,” he announced.

Mr. Lepcha left for North Sikkim soon after speaking to NOW! and said he would be tak-
ing stock of the situation there and working out the definite route to victory. In Lachen-Mangshila, the Cong [I] candidate, Anil Lachenpa, goes in a tough fight against sitting MLA and Power Minister, Hishey Lachungpa. While Mr. Lachenpa makes his political debut this time, Mr. Lachungpa started off with the constituency in 1994 and has been representing it since.

Lachen to compensate for Kabı, assures Tseten

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Contd from pg 1

But why did he not file his nomination papers?

“The party high-command completely confused me with con-
flicting directives all the time. At first, our legal advisor, Hem Lall
Bhandari, told me to file my nomi-
nation in a particular format. Then, he called up and said that I sub-
mit my papers with 40 proposers. He told me he was privy to some in-
formation would lead to the rejec-
tion of my opponent’s nomination papers so I should wait till the last
hour of the last day to file my nomi-
nation so that the other camp did not come to know of our plan. Then
I was told of a change again. This
time, I was told to file nominations with only one proposer. In fact, the
day I was leaving to file my nomi-
nations, even Anil Lachenpa told me the same thing. There were
many supporters who had come to
my home in Kabi to wish me luck as
I left to file my nominations and in
all the confusion, when I reached
the District Administrative Centre
of Mangan, I realised that I did not
have the right nomination papers
with me. It was already 12:30 by
Then I noticed that there was no one in the
high-command willing to listen to me,
I also realised that those who had been
working against me would instigate
violence against me. That is why I
immediately went into hiding.”

Mr. Bhutia refused to divulge
where he was. All he said was that he
was fine and not kept under duress.
What about the allegation that he
had sold out?

“See, I left a salary [as the
Upadhakshya, North] and a red light
to contest the elections under Mr.
Bhandari’s leadership. I had con-
tested the last elections under him
too. If I wanted money, would I have
left a ruling party? There are some
who are even alleging that I took Rs.
50 lakhs to fail the nomination and
that this amount is deposited in my
account in Siliguri. For them, I will
say only this much - prove it, or pre-
pare to face a defamation case. I am
hiding because the Congress high-
command, first failed me and then
tried to brand me traitor in the eyes
of my own supporters. If there is any
culpit in this fiasco, it is the people
who confused me throughout and
those who plotted against me even as I worked diligently for the party.
I am the victim, not the perpetrator.”

“My own party let me down,” Mr.
Bhutia insists while adding that his
family is still receiving threatening
calls from Congress leaders. “If any-
things happens to them, I will hold the
Congress leaders responsible.”

Meanwhile, Congress leaders
insist that Mr. Bhutia has indeed
sold out and was only mouthing
what his new masters were telling
him to. They maintain that the party
has not threatened his family.

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NEWSSCAN

My own party let me down: Palden

Ananth Kriya

Ananth Kriya, late Dipu Khawas, son of NK
Khawas of DPH Road, Gangtok, who left for
his heavenly abode on 16 April 2004 falls on
27 April 2004.

All friends, well-wishers and relatives are re-
quested to join us in offering prayer at our resi-
dence at DPH Road, Gangtok.

We wish to thank all those who stood by us
during the time of bereavement and regret our
inability to thank them individually.

NK Khawas, Garuji, Triveni Mandir, Melli [father]
& family

Anthysti Kriya

Anthysti Kriya of late Dipu Khawas, son of NK
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The first time I noticed the boy he was late for the class. He looked untidy with his shirtsleeves unbuttoned, his small frame, dishevelled hair rushing past me into the room. I got a “whiff” of something, maybe a cough syrup, maybe some fancy tobacco, I could not tell. I wanted to ignore it as I did in my earlier days but for some reason a creeping doubt nagged me persistently.

Feeling that something was not right I moved to the desk where the boy sat with his head lowered as though his feet had suddenly caught his fancy. I asked him a few questions but he would turn his face away from me and answer or would just clamp shut his mouth and speak to me through clenched teeth.

The class watched us silently. They were studying how the new teacher would handle this situation. Without preliminaries I found myself asking him if he had consumed anything impermissible.

He denied.

I told him as gently as possible that if he had, then he should not repeat the mistake and should try and give up bad habits before it had a complete grip on him.

He nodded in acknowledgement as though he agreed with me.

I moved away but again found myself peering over my shoulders and looking at his copy. He tried to scribble something; his handwriting was sketchy and nervous as he shook and jolted. His hands were tattooed and bedecked with rings of all weird designs.

Somehow, his denials did not convince me. I began watching that child. I talked about him to my colleague. She said that he might be on drugs. Her suspicion lent strength to our fears.

With the onset of winter, the exam season approached. I was on invigilation duty in class X room. The young boy, Anmol, was giving his exams in that room. He knew I was watching him and so he was on his best behaviour. I looked over at his answer sheet. He was constructing a sentence with the phrase “stand on one’s feet”. He had written, “I think I will never be able to stand on my own feet.”

That sentence made me sad and amused at the same time. In my heart I made up my mind to follow him discreetly and check out the vice he was living in.

After the examination, I followed him home. He meandered along the road picking sticks and hitting the walls adjacent to the road as he loitered about playing with the dogs on the street. It was almost an hour but he had not even covered a ten-minute walk. I was getting impatient. After another half an hour or so, he purposefully peered over a hedge, opened a green gate and went in.

I realized I was in my neighbourhood.

From where I stood in the corner, I could see my flat. It looked beautiful at the same time. In my evening adult voices raised in argument as a little boy softly whispered in the dark.

The very gardens I bared, naked as a baby. The ground beneath ready to slip. Lead me to a ceaseless fall.

All that I am now a monster Shunned and hated When all I ask is an ear To the truth I have to share A heart I have to tear To show my soul is clean That I have hope for slowly dies That to love and be loved Too much to ask?

To understand and be understood Too much to beg? Trust and be trusted Too much to plead? To be looked at me them As me. Yes as me.

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SAFETY & SECURITY

OVERWORKED POLICE DOGS LOSING SENSE OF SMELL

MADRID: Madrid’s police dogs and their trainers have been so overworked since the 11 March Madrid train bombings that the dogs were losing their ability to detect bombs, a police union official said.

Madrid has received an average of 15 bomb threats a day since the train bombings that killed 191 people, said Jose Canales, an officer.

THE FUTURE, NOW!

ARIES: You may go on a long trip. Speculation will yield returns. You may take up a new assignment. You may go on a long trip. An overseas job is indicated. Those continuing their studies will do well. Political life will be very successful.

TAURUS: There will be no changes in your routine. Cash flow will be very good. Unemployment will be brought under control. You will enjoy good health. You will find an improvement in your business.

GEMINI: Financial crisis, tension, worries will be over. Peace and harmony will prevail. Your father’s health may suffer a setback. Medical expenditure will be more. Trading and agency businesses will earn a good turnover. Life will be happy and harmonious.

CANCER: You may take up new business activities. Businesswill be very brisk. Social status will be maintained. Long drawn litigations will be over. Worry will be over. Those in trade or with agencies will find little improvement. Free flow of cash will be maintained.

LEO: You may be in a position to take a new decision in business matters. Family life will be comfortable. You may get new north-facing property. Expansion in business is indicated. Export businesses will do well. Understanding with your life partner will be very good.

VIRGO: You may be in a position to take a new decision in business matters. Family life will be comfortable. You may get new north-facing property. Expansion in business is indicated. Export businesses will do well. Understanding with your life partner will be very good.

LIBRA: You may be in a position to take a new decision in business matters. Family life will be comfortable. You may get new north-facing property. Expansion in business is indicated. Export businesses will do well. Understanding with your life partner will be very good.

SAGITTARIUS:Financial crisis, tension, worries will be over. Peace and harmony will prevail. The overtime is extra. Life will be happy and harmonious.

AQUARIUS: You may be in a position to take a new decision in business matters. Family life will be comfortable. You may get new north-facing property. Expansion in business is indicated. Export businesses will do well. Understanding with your life partner will be very good.

PISCES: Financial crisis, tension, worries will be over. Peace and harmony will prevail. The overtime is extra. Life will be happy and harmonious.

RAVENSHORE

SHARON STONE RECOGNIZED BY LESBIAN GROUP

SAN FRANCISCO: Actress Sharon Stone has been recognized by the National Center for Lesbian Rights for her support of gay and lesbian civil rights. Stone, who has helped raise millions of dollars for AIDS research and has portrayed lesbian characters in her movies, was set to receive the NCLR Spirit Award at the organization’s 27th anniversary gala in San Francisco. Stone’s contributions include raising money for the American Foundation for AIDS Research, founding the less-than-lyrical, campy Pizza Hope, and working with Project Angel Food, a Los Angeles County program that brings food to homedbound victims of AIDS.

BEYONCE, JAY-Z BRING GLAMOUR TO COURTROOM

PHILADELPHIA: Pop diva Beyoncé and her rap-star boyfriend Jay-Z brought glamour and glitz to a Philadelphia courthouse. The famous couple was in town Friday for the trial of Beanie Sigel, a rapper and protege of Jay-Z. Sigel faces attempted murder charges related to the slayings of Terrence Speller outside a West Philadelphia bar last summer. Beyoncé, a singer and actor, drew plenty of stares from jurors and others when she appeared in the courtroom dressed in a white blouson and designer pants.

SANTA BARBARA: Financially strapped Santa Barbara County has spent $273,000 so far to prosecute Michael Jackson for child molestation - and the bill keeps growing. The amount includes lawyers’ fees, court staff hours and overtime for sheriff’s deputies, said Jason Stivell, special projects manager in the county administrator’s office.

Some of the money comes from current budgets set aside for trials and district attorney’s investigations, but the overtime pay is extra.

The expense of trying Jackson and of dealing with hordes of media and fans is unwelcome in a county already facing an estimated $32 million deficit in the 2004-2005 budget.

The Final

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She and Jay-Z giggled and chatted in a row of seats also occupied by Sigel’s mother and France Roc-A-Fella Records executive Damon Dash.

After the jury was released for the weekend, Beyoncé was swiftly escorted out a back door.

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