

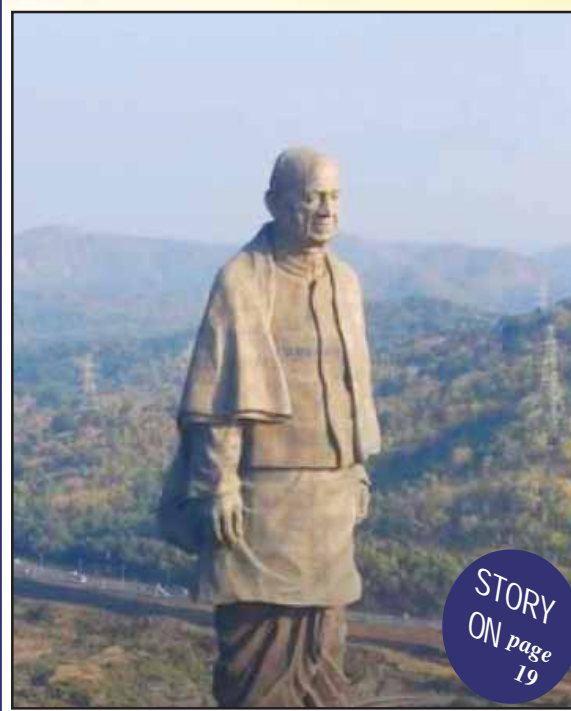
Kareena Kapoor, Shilpa Shetty,
 Alia Bhatt: 10 most stunning
 Diwali 2018 looks in pics



Sessions's ouster throws future of special counsel probe into question



'No UK Aid Used To Fund India's Statue of Unity': UK Govt



North India exposed to severe air pollution levels morning after Diwali

Lucknow and Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar's capital Patna recorded severe air quality index (AQI) of 421, 401 and 423 respectively around 9am.



(News Agencies) Large parts of north India woke up to "severe" air quality on Thursday, a day after Diwali firecrackers added to the already deteriorating pollution levels across the region. Lucknow and Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar's capital Patna recorded severe air quality index (AQI) of 421, 401 and 423 respectively around 9am. Delhi, Uttar Pradesh's Agra and Ghaziabad and Faridabad in Haryana also had AQI in "very poor" category with the air quality worsening very rapidly at individual stations in the national capital after 3am on Thursday. Particulate matter or PM2.5 (fine,

respirable pollution particles) levels went up to "severe +" category considered to be the most dangerous that can trigger health impacts even among healthy people. .PM2.5 levels peaked to more than 1,000 micrograms per cubic metres at some stations in Delhi on Thursday morning but the average levels hovered around 700 micrograms per cubic metres compared to a safe standard of 60 micrograms per cubic metres. Urbanemissions.info, a research organisation that tracks air quality in all districts through satellite measurements, released a district wise map on Thursday showing the northern states in severe air quality.

Scars of demonetisation more visible: Manmohan Singh on 2 years of notes ban



(News Agencies) On the second anniversary of demonetisation, former prime minister Manmohan Singh called it an "ill-thought" move that unleashed havoc on the Indian economy. He has advised the Narendra Modi government against any more "unorthodox measures". "Today marks the 2nd anniversary of the ill-fated and ill-thought demonetisation exercise ... The havoc that it unleashed on Indian economy and society is now evident to everyone," Singh said in a statement on Thursday.

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Donald Trump *KNEW* about hush money payments to women claiming they had sex with him

prosecutors find as they investigate whether this violated campaign finance law

Donald Trump directly asked for a hush money payment to be made to a Playboy model who claimed they had an affair then thanked the National Enquirer's boss for paying her federal prosecutors have found, it was reported Friday.

The Wall Street Journal said that prosecutors had evidence that Trump had intervened directly to suppress alleged sexual encounters 'several' times.

Trump asked David Pecker, the CEO of the National Enquirer parent company AMI, how he could help his campaign in August 2015, and Pecker told him that he could buy the silence of women claiming sexual encounters with the then candidate.

The prosecutors with the evidence are from the Southern District of New York, who are acting separately from Robert Mueller's special counsel investigation.

The Friday report casts doubt on two years of denials by Trump and his legal team that he knew about hush money payments to Playboy model Karen McDougal and porn star Stormy Daniels.

It says that Trump directed the deals during meetings and in telephone calls with Michael Cohen, his longtime attorney and fixer.

Among the payments made by AMI were \$150,000 to McDougal. The payment was made by a direct request from Trump to Pecker.

The now-president later

thanked Pecker, the newspaper reported. It cited interviews with more than 30 people as well as court and company documents.

The Journal reported that Trump was involved in the hush payments at 'nearly every step of the agreements' and 'directed deals'.

It said evidence has been gathered by federal prosecutors in the Southern District of New York - the same district which has secured the guilty plea from Cohen for which he can expect to send time in prison.

The Mueller probe handed the Cohen case off to SDNY after deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein signed off.

The bombshell report comes days after Trump forced out attorney general Jeff Sessions and installed political loyalist Matt Whitaker as acting head of the Justice Department, with authority over the Russia probe.

Campaign finance violation Cohen pleaded guilty in federal court in connection to campaign finance violations, and faces sentencing in December. He pleaded under penalty of perjury that he made an illegal campaign finance contribution 'at the direction of' a person who is Trump, although he didn't say Trump's name in court.

Cohen's charging document stated that he 'coordinated with one or more members of the campaign, including

through meetings and phone calls, about the fact, nature, and timing of the payments.' That phrasing referred to Trump, officials familiar with it told the Journal.

But it is not clear whether Trump committed a crime through his participation in the scheme. A conviction on campaign finance charges would require him to have knowingly and willfully violated restrictions.

According to the Journal report, Pecker researched campaign finance laws and contacted an 'election law specialist' about the \$150,000 payment.

'The question was: Would American Media's payment amount to an illegal campaign contribution to Mr. Trump? Corporations are barred under federal law from giving directly to candidates, either in cash or in-kind contributions,' according to the account. Pecker concluded that the deal as structured was in the clear, since McDougal was required to perform work in the form of promised magazine covers and fitness columns she was to write.

Cohen's lawyer, Lanny Davis, said at the time of Cohen's plea: 'Donald Trump directed [Cohen] to commit a crime by making payments to two women for the principal purpose of influencing an election.'

The prosecutors drew up an 80-page draft indictment against Cohen in August in which Trump's role was outlined and he was described as a 'member of the

campaign.'

When Cohen agreed to a deal, a shorter 22-page charging document said that the attorney 'coordinated with one or more members of the campaign, including through meetings and phone calls, about the fact, nature, and timing of the payments.'

Call for Trump indictment

That was a reference to Trump, the newspaper said. The development prompted a call from Michael Avenatti, the attorney for Stormy Daniels, for the immediate indictment of the president.

There is an unresolved legal dispute about whether sitting president can be indicted, and such a move, if it occurred, would ultimately end up in the Supreme Court.

The paper said Cohen has told prosecutors that Trump was directly involved in the payment of Daniels and that Pecker refused to provide money from AMI to her because he did not want the National Enquirer's

parent company paying a porn star.

The development was published shortly after a tweetstorm from Trump about the recount of senate and gubernatorial election results in Broward County, Florida.

Immunity deals

And the fresh reports come after revelations in August that Pecker reached an immunity deal with prosecutors.

It followed longtime Donald Trump lawyer Cohen's guilty plea to eight counts - including campaign finance violations related to payments to two women who claim they had affairs with Trump.

The extent of the terms of the immunity deal are unknown. The Associated Press reported that Pecker 'kept a safe containing documents on hush-money payments and other damaging stories it killed as part of its relationship with Donald Trump leading up to the 2016 presidential election.'

Trump referenced Pecker in a recording made by Cohen of discussions surrounding a \$150,000 payment by AMI to former Playboy model Karen McDougal. Prosecutors included substantial information about the payment in the charging document against Michael Cohen.



Alaska voters make history by rejecting judge who approved no jail time for man who 'choked, kidnapped and masturbated on a woman'

(News Agencies) In an unprecedented move, Alaska voters have ousted a judge who signed off on a controversial plea deal that let a man serve only one year of home confinement for choking and masturbating on an Alaska Native woman. Voters on Tuesday opted to not retain Superior Court Judge Michael Corey, who oversaw the assault sentencing of 34-year-old Justin Schneider. Schneider in September pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a year in prison. With credit for time served in home confinement, he walked out of the plea hearing a free man. Police say in August 2017, Schneider, an air traffic controller and a married father-of-two, offered a ride home to a female hitchhiker at a gas station in Anchorage. He told her his name was 'Dan' and agreed to drive her to

the town of Muldoon. They had never met before, she told police. She got into the car and they drove off but stopped at a construction site nearby instead of the town where he had promised to take her. He asked her to get out of the car then, and 'full on tackled' her, according to charging documents. As he choked her, Schneider told the victim that he was going to kill her. She lost consciousness thinking that she was about to die, the documents say. When she woke up, he was zipping up his pants. He had masturbated on her and offered her a tissue to clean it up with. 'The man told her that he wasn't really going to kill her, that he needed her to believe she was going to die so that he could be sexually fulfilled,' his arrest affidavit states. She saved the tissue and gave it to police afterwards. She also told



them his license plate number. Schneider initially faced up to 99 years behind bars, but prosecutors said they could not prove kidnapping because the victim got into the man's car willingly and that the plea deal followed the law. He was never charged with sexual assault despite the nature of his crime because in Alaska, masturbating over a victim is not considered a sexual assault. In court in September, prosecutor Andrew Grannik said: 'I would like the gentleman to be on notice that that is his one pass - it's not really a

pass - but given the conduct, one might consider that it is.' Because Schneider had no past criminal record, sentencing guidelines for a felony B assault are between zero and two years. Judge Corey acknowledged the sentence was light but deferred to prosecutors on what could be proven. Part of his reasoning was that Schneider 'would not be in jail for the rest of his life even if he had been convicted on all counts' despite the 99-year maximum sentence that applies to kidnapping. The shockingly lenient

sentence prompted sexual assault survivor Elizabeth Williams to launch a grassroots campaign called No More Free Passes, asking voters to oust Judge Corey from the bench. Alaskans deserve more than the status quo. Alaskans deserve better than sloppy plea deals and 'free passes' for violence,' a post on the campaign's Facebook page read on Tuesday morning. Three Alaska gubernatorial candidates expressed disgust with Schneider's sentence ahead of the midterm elections. Incumbent Governor Bill Walker called the crime and sentence 'terrible,' and blamed the outcome of the case on a 'loophole' in the state's sex offense laws. As KTVA first reported, Corey defended himself in a video message shared on Facebook before the election, saying his hands were tied. 'We judges must

follow the law, even when that produces a result that we strongly dislike,' he said. Corey was elected to the bench in 2014 and the Alaska Judicial Council recommended him, along with every other judge, on the ballot for retention. Since the Council began evaluating judges for retention in 1976, voters have never before rejected a judge recommended for retention. In the wake of Tuesday's vote, Williams thanked voters for making history by unseating Corey 'by a popular consensus.' Her Facebook message then took a conciliatory tone, stating that going forward, she and her supporters will no longer be discussing Corey. 'I believe his family and friends when they tell me he is a great man, husband, and father,' she wrote. 'He deserves privacy and peace during this time. We wish him nothing but the best in his future.'

US to exempt eight countries from new Iran oil sanctions

Waivers are being granted to countries that have shown they've made "important moves" toward reducing Iranian oil imports to zero, US said.



(News Agencies) Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said eight governments are going to receive temporary waivers from US sanctions on the import of Iranian crude that snap back on Monday following President Donald Trump's decision to quit the Iran nuclear agreement reached in 2015. Waivers are being granted to countries that have shown they've made "important moves" toward reducing Iranian oil imports to zero, Pompeo told reporters on a

conference call Friday. Of the eight countries receiving the waivers, six will import at "greatly reduced levels," he said. The other two are at or near zero but receiving a waiver gives them flexibility and time to end their dependence on Iranian oil imports. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the US is "intent on ensuring that global funds stop flowing to the coffers of the Iranian regime." Ahead of Friday's call, a senior administration official

said the eight countries included Japan, India and South Korea. China -- the leading importer of Iranian oil -- is still in discussions with the US on terms, but is among the eight, according to

people familiar with the discussions who also asked not to be identified. Mnuchin also signaled that Swift, the global financial messaging system, could be subject to sanctions if it doesn't

comply with U.S. sanctions by handling transactions with Iranian institutions in violation of restrictions. Global benchmark Brent crude has fallen about 15 percent from over \$85 a

barrel last month on increasing speculation that at least some nations will get waivers, as well as signs that other OPEC members will pump more to offset any supply gap

Underperforming Chinese workers made to drink urine, eat bugs

(News Agencies) Workers at a Chinese home renovation company who failed to complete their tasks had to drink urine, eat cockroaches or get whipped by a belt. Others had to shave their heads or drink water from a toilet bowl and had their salaries withheld by a month, according to images and videos on Chinese social media cited by state media. The punishments were all publicly meted out in the presence of other staff, state media said, citing

workers who had quit the company in the southwestern province of Guizhou. Forgetful staff who did not wear leather shoes to work or failed to turn up in formal attire were given 50 yuan (\$7.20) fines. Their misdemeanours were duly recorded in little, white slips. But most staff chose to stay despite the punishments, which started this year, state media said. Three managers at the company were jailed from five to 10 days on the charge of humiliating others, according to a



social media post by the local public security bureau. Labour conditions in China have often been described by activists as harsh and unforgiving, with workers having to work excessive hours and live in

cramped quarters on meagre wages. At the Guizhou company, many of the punished showed little outward sign of unhappiness, according to state media, choosing instead to accept their fate

Dead brothel owner, Dennis Hof, wins Nevada state assembly seat



(News Agencies) A Nevada Republican candidate has won a heavily Republican state legislative district. Dennis Hof defeated a Donald Trump-style

Republican candidate has won a heavily Republican state legislative district. Dennis Hof defeated a Donald Trump-style

Romanov in the race for Nevada's 36th Assembly District, which includes rural communities and large stretches of desert in the southern part of the state. County officials will appoint a Republican to take his place in the seat. Hof was found dead on October 16 after a weekend of parties celebrating his 72nd birthday. Officials are still determining his cause of death, but they don't suspect foul play. Hof owned a handful of

brothels in Nevada, the only state that allows them to legally operate.

He also starred in the HBO adult reality series *Cathouse* and wrote a book titled *The Art of the Pimp*, akin to Mr Trump's book *The Art of the Deal*. Hof was found dead at his Love Ranch brothel about an hour outside Las Vegas. His body was discovered by porn actor Ron Jeremy and a prostitute at the brothel. Hof had spent the four previous days

partying with notables from the sex industry and political world to celebrate his birthday.

The evening prior to his death, he celebrated with a political rally at a hotel and casino called the Pahrump Nugget, according to *The New Yorker*. He continued the festivities at his brothel with rap star Flavour Flav and porn-film actor Ron Jeremy.

The brothel where his body was found is where NBA player Lamar Odom was found unconscious in 2015.

Moonlite Bunny Ranch owner Dennis Hof gives an insight into his business

About 20 brothels operate in Nevada, mostly in rural areas. They're banned in the counties that contain Las Vegas and Reno. The state doesn't publicise how many are open, and most owners keep a

much lower profile than Hof did.

Hof ran for office in 2016 as a Libertarian but lost the race. This year, he ran as a Republican and earned backing from Trump associate Roger Stone and tax-cut activist Grover Norquist.

He up-ended Nevada politics this summer when he ousted an incumbent Republican politician in a primary, celebrating at an election night party with "Hollywood Madam" Heidi Fleiss.

He said an anti-brothel push and regulatory problems he faced this year were political retribution.

Nevada's 36th Assembly District has long been a Republican-held seat.

The sprawling assembly district that touches both California and Utah and includes the Nevada National Security Site where nuclear weapons were once tested.

Attacker among 13 dead in shooting at southern California bar

(News Agencies) A gunman killed 12 people, including a deputy sheriff, when he opened fire in a bar in Southern California on Wednesday night, Ventura County Sheriff Geoff Dean said on Thursday.

The gunman was also killed, Dean said, without saying how he died. Many other people were

wounded in the attack in Thousand Oaks, a Los Angeles suburb.

The Sheriff's Office Sgt Eric Buchow said hundreds of people were inside the Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks at 11:20 pm (12.50 pm Thursday IST), and shots were still being fired when deputies arrived.

The bar was hosting a

college country music night. Nick Steinwender, student body president at nearby California Lutheran University, rushed to the scene when he heard about a shooting at the bar where he knew friends and fellow students were inside.

"It was chaos, people jumping out of windows, people hopping over gates to get out" Steinwender told

KABC-TV.

He said he heard from people inside that they were hiding in bathrooms and the attic of the bar. It has been "quite some time" since there was a shooting of any kind in Thousand Oaks, a city of about 130,000 people about 40 miles (64 kilometers) west of Los Angeles, just across the county line.

US Attorney General Jeff Sessions resigns at Trump's request

Sessions, who had recused himself from the Russia probe, asked to resign after Republicans lost control of Congress

(News Agencies) US President Donald Trump forced out Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Wednesday, less than 24 hours Republican party lost control of the House of Representatives.

Sessions informed Trump of his resignation in a letter sent to the president earlier in the day. In the letter, which was widely shared by US media, Sessions said he was resigning "at your (Trump's) request".

On Twitter, Trump thanked Sessions for his service and wished him well. He said Matthew G Whitaker, Sessions's chief of staff, would become the acting attorney general until a replacement is announced, which the president said would come at a later date. In the resignation letter, Sessions said he was honoured to have worked "to implement the law enforcement agenda" that formed a central part of the

Trump campaign for presidency. We did our part to restore immigration enforcement," he wrote. The former senator was a key figure in implementing Trump's anti-immigration agenda. He threatened sanctuary cities, which are cities and states that that limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities, with a withdrawal of federal funds and instituted a "zero tolerance" policy for those found crossing the border into the US without documents. What's next for the Mueller probe?

Trump's criticism of Sessions stemmed over Sessions decision to recuse himself from an investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential election. The US president did not hesitate to make those criticisms public. "If all of the Russian meddling took place during the Obama



Administration, right up to January 20th, why aren't they the subject of the investigation? Why didn't Obama do something about the meddling? Why aren't Dem crimes under investigation? Ask Jeff Sessions!" He wrote on Twitter in February.

Trump blamed the decision for opening the door to the appointment of special counsel Robert Mueller, who took over the Russia investigation and began examining whether Trump's hectoring or Sessions was part of a broader effort to obstruct justice and stymie the

probe. Mueller is overseen by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who reports to Sessions. There were reports Trump may fire Rosenstein, a frequent critic of the president, earlier this year, but last month Trump said he had no plans to get rid of the deputy attorney general. US media reported on Wednesday that Whitaker, who has criticised Mueller in the past, would likely oversee the Russia probe. Trump was buoyed on Wednesday by victories that added to the Republican majority in the US Senate, telling

reporters at the White House that the gains outweighed the Democrats' takeover of the House. He added that he was willing to work with Democrats on key priorities but felt any House investigations of his administration would hurt prospects for bipartisanship.

'Very suspect'

Following Sessions's resignation, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee said he wants "answers immediately". Jerry Nadler is in line to become the chairman of the Judiciary panel when Democrats take control of the House in January. He tweeted that "we will be holding people accountable". He added that it would be "wholly inappropriate" if Whitaker takes on the role of supervising the probe. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Shumer said it is

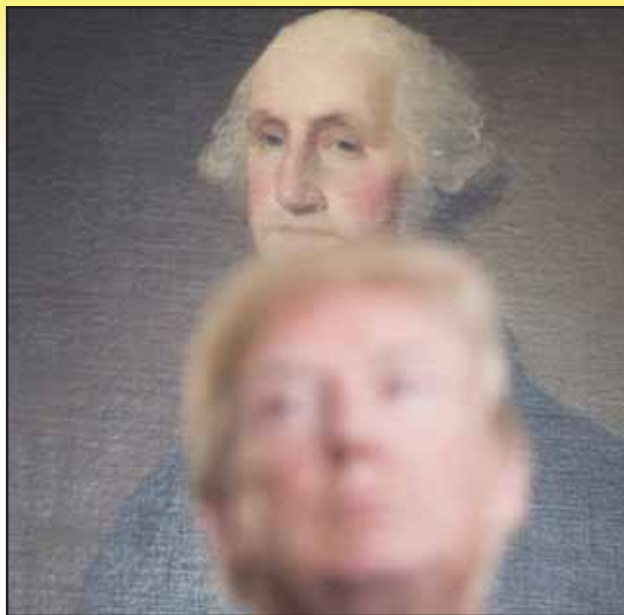
"paramount" that the Mueller investigation be protected by Trump's new attorney general.

He called the timing of Sessions's departure "very suspect", adding that it would spark a "constitutional crisis" if Trump forced out Sessions as a "prelude" to ending or limiting Mueller's investigation. Democratic House leader, Nancy Pelosi, called the firing of Sessions "another blatant attempt" by Donald Trump to end the Mueller investigation, and criticised his choice of acting replacement. "Given his record of threats to undermine (and) weaken the Russia investigation, Matthew Whitaker should recuse himself from any involvement in Mueller's investigation. Congress must take immediate action to protect the rule of law and integrity of the investigation.

Cornered and raging, Trump begins his coverup. Here's how Democrats can respond

(News Agencies) President Trump has forced out his attorney general and replaced him with a loyalist who will now oversee special counsel Robert S. Mueller III's investigation. Speculation is rampant: Will the new acting attorney general fire Mueller? Constrain his investigation? Block Mueller's findings from going public? We don't know whether Matthew Whitaker, Trump's replacement for Jeff Sessions, will go through with these things. But here's something we can conclude right now: Trump surely picked Whitaker, Sessions's chief of staff, expressly to put him in the position of being able to do any and all of them. Unlike Sessions, who recused himself from the probe, Whitaker will oversee it, whereas before, that had fallen to Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein. Whitaker can theoretically fire Mueller by invoking some rationale that fulfills the relevant regulations' requirement for "cause," or he can revoke those regulations. Or he can severely limit the scope of the investigation, or starve it of funds. Ask yourself: What would this look like if Republicans had held the House? We would be concluding that Trump is taking steps to close down

or limit the probe, or keep its findings covered up, in the full knowledge that congressional Republicans will let him get away with it. Which is why it's a good thing that Democrats did capture the House. At his news conference on Wednesday in the wake of the Democratic victory, Trump raged over the investigation. He said that if House Democrats investigate his administration — an activity known as congressional oversight — that the White House can retaliate by investigating Democrats. Trump vowed a "warlike posture." This lays the groundwork to dramatically resist whatever Democrats do in response to Trump's moves against the Mueller probe. So what can Democrats do in these scenarios, once they're in the majority? Here's a rundown: House Democrats can investigate the firing of Sessions. The question of whether Trump fired Sessions or whether Sessions merely resigned is critical. If Trump fired Sessions, it might not be legit that Trump replaced him with an acting attorney general (Whitaker) who didn't require Senate confirmation (which Trump may have wanted to do to insulate the replacement from questioning from senators about his



intention toward the Mueller probe). Mueller could conceivably challenge the appointment in court if Whitaker does try to shut down or severely constrain the probe. Though the White House claims Sessions resigned at Trump's "request," it seems obvious that Trump did fire him. The Post reports that Sessions thought staying would protect "the investigation's integrity," which would leave the country "better served," as its findings will be "more credible to the American public." So House Democrats can try to investigate the circumstances leading up to Sessions's "resignation," to determine whether Sessions did resist it and was fired. "The rationale

would be that they were investigating to determine whether Sessions was fired as part of a conspiracy to obstruct justice," Josh Chafetz, a professor at Cornell Law School, told me. "This could entail requests for documents and witness testimony." Subpoena Sessions himself. House Democrats can try to question Sessions himself, both about the circumstances surrounding his firing and, more broadly, about private meetings in which Trump raged at Sessions for failing to protect him from the investigation. Sessions would likely assert executive privilege regarding his conversations with Trump. But Democrats have recourse. They can "haul Sessions in and make him refuse to answer questions live, on TV," Chafetz told me. "Then, after some arguing back and forth, if Democrats decide that the assertion of privilege is improper, they can hold him in contempt." Whether that would do much is anybody's guess, but at least the spectacle of Sessions refusing to say whether Trump forced him out and why would be dramatized for the country. Subpoena Mueller's findings. Under the regulations governing the special counsel, he is to provide a "confidential" report explaining his conclusions to the person overseeing the probe — who would have been Rosenstein but now will be Whitaker. It is Whitaker who is then supposed to provide a report to the bipartisan leaders of the House and Senate judiciary committees, which gives him a great deal of discretion to decide how much to put in that report. Whitaker could theoretically report little to nothing, in effect covering up what Mueller learned. "Democrats could subpoena Mueller's findings," Chafetz tells me. "But expect the White House to put up a fight in response to the subpoena." Other legal experts think that if the White House defied such a subpoena, the courts would rule against them, meaning Congress would get Mueller's findings. As Chafetz has written elsewhere, one key thing Democrats must think hard about is how to use such proceedings to inform the public about what's happening, both for political and substantive reasons. Impeach the acting attorney general. This is a far-fetched scenario, but it's not an impossibility. As it is, Whitaker has publicly opined that Mueller has gone too far in probing Trump's finances and has openly suggested that one option is to de-fund the investigation. On these grounds, Democrats have called for his recusal. Here an irony kicks in. A handful of House Republicans loyal to Trump tried to impeach Rosenstein earlier this year on grounds so specious that even many Republicans, including the leadership, rejected it. It's hard to say what circumstances might justify such a move against Whitaker, if any, but if he shuts down the Mueller probe without good cause, that might be seen as extremely serious misconduct — far more serious than what Republicans alleged against Rosenstein.

The world must act against the nation-state law in Israel

(News Agencies) The controversial Jewish Nation-State Bill is gaining negative attention every passing day. The Bill passed after a stormy debate in Knesset officially defined Israel as the national homeland for Jewish people and asserts that "the realisation of the right to national self-determination is unique to the Jewish citizen". The law also enshrines united Jerusalem as the capital and Hebrew as its State language, stripping Arabic of its former status as an official language. While Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu applauded the Bill as historic, it has sparked outrage among the Arab

community of Israel and from the international community as well. The European Union, the Muslim World League and all Arab nations collectively opposed it as it disregards the 21% of Arabs in the country. The new law is also against the spirit of democratic Israel which promises to treat all its citizens with equal political and social rights. The Right wing government under Benjamin Netanyahu has made a series of irrational, unconstitutional decisions since it came into power. In December last year, US President Donald Trump also announced the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Though it was rejected by



a majority of world leaders and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the motion was vetoed by the United States. In May this year, the Trump administration officially opened its embassy in Jerusalem. This decision sparked protests and worldwide criticism. In addition, David Friedman who supports West Bank Settlement construction

was appointed as the US Ambassador to Israel, just after entering the White House. Many of the President's key advisors including his son-in-law Jared Kushner are Jewish. The US government has also announced its cutting of over \$200 million in aid to Palestine, after which a total of 250 employees in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip are expected to lose their jobs. From the Temple Mount of the Jews to Haram al-Sharif of the Arabs, the country is a stronghold for two religious identities. The al-Aqsa Mosque is also the third holiest site for Muslims. Palestinians view east Jerusalem as occupied territory and have been claiming it for their state capital. Banning Palestinians' entry into the mosque, firing tear gas at worshippers and conducting raids by Israeli forces have become routinely activities. But it is true that the Palestine movement has become weaker in the recent past. A number of seminars have been organised in solidarity with Palestine but the unmatched leadership of Yaseer Arafat seems to be missing. There was a time when this movement had the support of leaders including the India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. India was also the first non-Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with Palestine. Most of the world leaders even today stand in solidarity with Palestine. The United Nations and other international forums should look into arbitrary acts of Israel and help establish peace in the region. It will bring peace to the region and give justice to millions of people stranded in an unending blood bath.

If Trump was this bad in 2018, what about 2020?

The midterm election is history, but the ongoing crisis that is Donald Trump's presidency is far from over. Having reprised the fear-mongering, race-baiting and deceit that propelled him to the Oval Office, Trump in 2018 showed he will continue to lie and deceive and disrupt. If you expected a reprieve from the chaos, forget about it.

A president like no other, whose personality is the subject of constant alarm, Trump has been reliably divisive and reckless since he began seeking the Oval Office. This consistency tells us to expect more of the same. If Trump was this bad in 2018 when his name wasn't on the ballot, what can we expect in 2020 when he's actually running for something?

Although Republicans lost the House of Representatives, the forecasted blue wave that washed them out of power was not a tsunami, and the President is likely to conclude that his days of rage on the campaign trail helped the GOP gain seats in the Senate. House Democrats may now be empowered to confront him, but Trump will almost certainly try to divide the country further with appeals to fear and tribalism.

In the final days of the campaign, Trump added extra energy to his usual arm-waving, rubber-faced wild man act as he raced around the country like a deranged rock star on a manic Appeal to Fear Concert Tour. Bigotry, fear-mongering and falsehoods were once again his go-to themes. He also shifted his attack on the free press, blaming journalists for the political violence he helped stoke with rage-filled rhetoric. "You know, you're creating violence with your question," Trump told a reporter at the end of the campaign. With this classic example of Trump-speak, the President equated civil inquiry with incitements delivered by the most powerful person on Earth. He later undermined public confidence in the election by warning of voter fraud. It was a false alarm clearly intended to delegitimize the results. Trump will be able to say that his anger and negativity worked well in Senate races in North Dakota, Indiana and Missouri, where GOP candidates ousted Democrats. But elsewhere even victorious Republicans, such as Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, did not perform like the favorites they were. A regular president would find these outcomes sobering, but Trump is not a regular president. He could sift the results and conclude that with a little more demagoguery he might have done better.

Near the end of his barnstorming tour Trump told a crowd that news coverage of his visit to a Pittsburgh synagogue where 11 worshippers had been killed by a gunman presented a false picture of a

mass protest that arose in the nearby streets. "They want to stoke resentment," said the President. "It has to stop," he said.

In blaming the press, Trump performed two of his favorite tricks. The first involved turning the truth inside out to deflect attention. The synagogue suspect's online postings show he was motivated by the kind of anti-immigrant hatred Trump has made central to his own political identity. Like Trump, he reportedly called asylum seekers "invaders." Trump's second trick in this case showed him applying a gross misinterpretation to a news event to make people afraid.

The synagogue killings occurred as the President's messages about a large group of asylum-seekers walking toward America from the south reached a hate-filled fevered pitch. With no evidence he suggested the walkers included criminals and terrorists and that billionaire philanthropist-investor George Soros funded their walk.

Soros is the Jewish boogeyman of right-wing fanatics, and his image is routinely evoked as a dog whistle to anti-Semites. The day before the synagogue massacre, Trump smiled when some visitors at the White House called out Soros' name, and he joined in when other chanted, "Lock him up!" Falsehoods and distortions are Trump's hallmarks, and according to the fact-checkers at The Washington Post he has averaged 10 per day since getting elected. As the 2018 race heated up he tripled his average and on just one day, while campaigning in Texas for Cruz, he issued 83 false and misleading statements. Among the whoppers he issued again and again were claims that his 2017 tax cut was the biggest in history (it wasn't) and that the wall he promised to build on the border with Mexico is under construction (it's not). Many are inclined to dismiss Trump's distortions as somehow spontaneous or unplanned; they are anything but. For example, his team had signs printed and distributed at his rallies, one of which read, "Finish the wall" -- reinforcing his claim that something was being built and need only be completed. In reality, some fences are being repaired and extended, but no new wall is being constructed along a boundary that stretches roughly 2,000 miles.

However, the signs waved by his supporters and the chants of "Finish the wall!" set just the right conditions for people to catch the contagion of fear and rage. It was political theater out of the demagogue's handbook, and Trump plays it like a master.

The real meaning of American citizenship

As thousands of migrants stream toward our southern border, it is more apparent now than ever that America's immigration system is broken. The best way to stop the slow-motion catastrophe we see coming up through Mexico is to immediately reform our immigration laws and then firmly and fairly enforce them. To do that the right way, we first need to rediscover and re-emphasize the meaning of American citizenship. I recently attended a naturalization ceremony at Washington's Headquarters in Morristown, New Jersey. Nothing reminds a natural-born American how privileged he is to have been born here than attending such an event. At the ceremony, 24 people from 15 countries around the world participated. They came from places ranging from China to Israel, Ghana to Honduras. The opportunities and hope that America offered to each were unique, but they all had worked hard to pass their citizenship test and put thoughtful consideration into the decision to become an American. And they all had done so through an entirely legal, painstaking process into which they poured tremendous time and effort with a love of our country and a respect for the rule of law.

At the climax of the event, each new citizen raised his or her right hand and took the Oath of Allegiance to the United States. The Oath acknowledges and accepts the obligations of citizenship, while also granting the new Americans a range of new rights. Those obligations include coming to the nation's defense in time of war, performing civilian acts of national importance when necessary, and upholding and defending the Constitution and the laws of our nation. Perhaps the most beautiful

thing about the obligations of citizenship is that they are not owed to some king or dictator, but to each other and now all of us -- to "We the People." The look of joy and elation on the faces of the newly minted Americans I met last month was a priceless reminder of so much that unites us as a nation, and what is truly good and decent about it. The ceremony, and the hundreds like them that occur all around the country each year, remind us that American citizenship is indeed unique. It does not rely exclusively on one's ancestry or where one was born. Anyone can be an American citizen if he or she pursues citizenship in the right way. That reality has been one of our nation's great strengths over the course of our history, and the making of new American citizens is something to celebrate everywhere, every time.

But when immigration laws are flouted, when politicians confer the privileges of citizenship on some without demanding corresponding obligations, and when borders are erased, American citizenship is devalued. Sanctuary cities, public financial aid for non-citizen college students, and drivers licenses for illegal immigrants are all examples of policies that grant the blessings of citizenship to those who do not possess it. "Citizenship lite" attracts millions to America from across the globe -- like the migrant caravan we see in motion today -- who seek the peace and prosperity only America offers, but who do so in unlawful ways. Devaluing citizenship also undermines the confidence of Americans citizens in their government's as well as the government's commitment to the people it is supposed to serve.



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Busting three myths holding us back from improving air quality

The problem of air pollution can broadly be categorised into two parts — indoor and outdoor. Fourteen of the 20 cities with the most polluted air in the world are from India.

Globally, air pollution kills over 65 lakh people every year. This is five times the number of another global killer — road accidents — which kills around 13 lakh people. In fact, the amount of lives lost due to air pollution is double the amount of lives lost due to serious conditions and diseases such as AIDS, TB and malaria combined. While we see a lot of talk and action with regard to these major diseases, there is hardly anything about air pollution, which is equally life threatening.



The problem of air pollution can broadly be categorised into two parts — indoor and outdoor. It is estimated that about half of the air pollution deaths take place due to poor fuel used in cooking. But, as the economic conditions improve, so does the cooking fuel. However, the other half of the deaths are linked to outdoor air quality, which is directly impacted by motor vehicles, power plants, industries, waste burning etc. In this case, as the income increases, so does the consumption and the quality of air, thereby, suffers inversely. Therefore, this is a much bigger and trickier problem to solve because on one side, there are multiple sources, and on the other side, there are economic

arguments.

Fourteen of the 20 cities with the most polluted air in the world are from India. In fact, Delhi-NCR is the worst of the lot. One of the key reasons for this toxic air is PM 2.5, an ultra-fine particulate matter with a size of 2.5 micrometres. Just for comparison, PM2.5 is 40 times smaller than human hair. These particles often constitute toxic organic compounds and heavy metals. Due to their small size, they can travel deep into our body and infiltrate our lungs and even our bloodstream, causing serious diseases like lung cancer.

Therefore, the question is even with so much knowledge, why are we not able to do anything to

improve our air quality? Let me explain three myths that's holding us back. Pollution is a seasonal problem.

Unfortunately, the air pollution conversation mostly happens around stubble burning and Diwali time, giving it a seasonal flavour. But is air pollution seasonal in Delhi-NCR? The answer, unfortunately, is no, because as per reports, Delhi experienced zero 'good' quality air days between March and May 2018. This basically means that air pollution is now a year-round phenomenon in our cities. Episodic events like stubble burning, Diwali and climatic conditions aggravate the problem

but the air quality in Delhi-NCR is bad all-round the year. Period. Therefore, addressing the issue of farm fire and fireworks during Diwali are important but, to emphasize on air pollution throughout the year is equally necessary because air pollution is all around the year and not seasonal.

Increasing roads will reduce pollution

Gurugram is currently in the middle of a debate or protest on creating a link through the biodiversity park. Agencies and consultants proposing this road think it will reduce congestion and improve air quality, even if it means destroying the urban forest, but creating more roads does just the opposite — it brings in more traffic due to the latent demand. With more traffic comes more emissions, which significantly decreases the air quality. Therefore, the transport solution to air pollution is not in creating more roads but restricting roads. Cities need to create a dense network of streets and not widen highways or expressways. They also need to rapidly increase the supply of public transport and shift to cleaner fuels for vehicles and switch to zero emission vehicles like

electric. Yes, outdoor air pollution is a complex issue and had it been simple, you would not have been reading this part of the article. However, this doesn't mean that nothing can be done. The problem is that air flow does not follow any administrative or political boundaries. Therefore, it is important to effectively address the air pollution in Delhi or Gurugram? and action must be taken in the 'air shed' area of Greater Delhi. And, this is where things get complicated because it means that state governments of Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan must come together for solving this crisis as one state alone cannot achieve substantive change. In fact, cities like Beijing, Los Angeles, Paris, etc, have shown that improving air quality is possible provided we do the right things at the right time.

Air pollution is an epidemic and needs a full-fledged war to combat its menace. We need central and state governments to come together to solve this menace. While economic development is important, it should not come at the cost of human lives, because, as they say, "You can't count all your money by holding your breath." Can you?

Why UP matters so much to the BJP

UP has always enjoyed disproportionate influence in Indian politics because of its size, demographic composition, share of Lok Sabha seats, and the leadership pool it has sent to national politics. BJP's rise and fall in Delhi has coincided with how it has fared in the

India's general elections are enormously complex. Analysis of the 2019 battle revolves around many variables: the issue of leadership; the state of alliances on both sides; the political fault-lines in each state; and the micro-caste dynamics and voting patterns in each constituency. But at another level, the outcome of 2019 will hinge on one basic question: how will the Bharatiya Janata Party perform in Uttar Pradesh? The answer to that single question will determine if India will once again have a majority government of the BJP; a coalition government led by a BJP which does not have a majority on its own; or a government of the non-BJP parties.

UP has always enjoyed disproportionate influence in Indian politics because of its size, demographic composition, share of Lok Sabha seats, and the leadership pool it has sent to national politics. BJP's rise and fall in Delhi has coincided with how it has fared in the state. And that is why UP mattered so much to the BJP in 2014. Its success in the state -- it won 71 seats of its own and 73 with allies out of 80 -- made all the difference and helped the BJP become the single largest party and have a majority on its own (the first time in 30 years a government had one). Its success in the 2017 elections only bolstered its hold over political imagination and

institutions of the state.

But 2019 is neither 2017 nor 2014. Two facts have changed. The BJP, instead of being the challenger, is now the incumbent. Instead of a fragmented opposition, it now faces a united opposition and the impact of the alliance between Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party and the Rashtriya Lok Dal was visible in Gorakhpur, Phulpur and Kairana bypolls. The BJP is aware of the scale of challenge at hand. It is hoping to neutralise this with a fourfold strategy. One, it will bank on Narendra Modi's image and the absence of a clear Prime Ministerial challenger in the opposition ranks. Two, it will hope that central welfare schemes, particularly rural



housing and gas cylinders, will expand its vote base. There, it believes that the increasing fervour around Ram Temple and Hindutva issues will mobilise the 'Hindu vote'. And four, the BJP is doing what it has so skilfully done under Amit Shah, with a sharp focus on organisational activities,

work at the booth level, and relentless public outreach through all methods including new technologies. Whether all this will be enough for the party to retain its dominance, or at the very least, minimise its losses in the state will determine who governs India in 2019.

The Sabarimala verdict establishes the supremacy of Constitutional morality

As the country moves forward, the far reaching socio-economic consequences of this historic verdict will unfold themselves



(News Agencies) While considering the recent verdict of the apex court invalidating the legal restrictions on the entry of women between the ages of 10 and 50 years into Sabarimala temple, it must be borne in mind that this ban was enforced strictly after the Kerala high court verdict in 1991. There have been many earlier instances of women of all ages entering the Sabarimala temple complex to offer prayers and perform rituals such as the annaprasan of their children. The affidavit given by the Kerala government/ Travancore Devaswom Board stands testimony to this.

The main argument against women of

menstruating age entering Sabarimala advanced before the Supreme Court during its hearing and repeated by those who are agitating against the verdict even today is based on the "impurity" of women during menstruation. The deity in Sabarimala—Lord Ayyappa—is in the "Naishtik Brahmachari" form; he abhors the presence of women of "impurity" and would like no disturbance to his brahmacharya. Male devotees on their pilgrimage are also enjoined by custom to practice severe penance including abstinence for 41 days before ascending the 18 steps of Sabarimala to offer their prayers. There are

no authentic historical records about the origin of the Sabarimala temple including the installation of the idol of Lord Ayyappa in the Naishtik Brahmachari form and the customs, practices and rituals with which the pilgrimage started. However, there is historical evidence to establish that customs and rituals of the Sabarimala pilgrimage have been undergoing changes from time to time in response to changing circumstances. Besides the fact that women of all ages entered the temple before the high court injunction, the following facts are widely known. For instance, the kodiyyattam (flag-hoisting ceremony) and padipooja (worship of the holy 18 steps) were not in vogue earlier. No poojas were offered to Malikappurathamma in the earlier days, but they are offered at present. Many Sabarimala pilgrims still remember the customary practice of

breaking fresh coconut while ascending the sacred 18 steps which has now been given up. "The most celebrated breach" of the taboo against entry of women of all ages into the Sabarimala is that of the queen of the Travancore royal family. Elaborate arguments centering round the customary practice being enforced on the basis of the Kerala High Court verdict of 1991 with reference to Articles 13, 14, 15, 17 and 25 of the Constitution of India were advanced before the apex court by a galaxy of legal luminaries. Most of them representing several Hindu organisations and institutions such as the Nair Service Society, the Pandalam Royal family, which claims to have special rights and privileges in respect of Sabarimala, and the high priests of Sabarimala vehemently opposed entry of women of all ages. After considering the arguments advanced

for and against, the Apex Court with the dissenting voice of the only woman judge on the bench repudiated the Kerala High Court verdict of 1991 and upheld the right of women of all ages to enter into Sabarimala temple for offering prayers.

Shorn of the main assertions of the advocates of customary practices and rituals associated with Sabarimala and legal niceties, the crux of the matter is faith versus the law. Arguing that faith has no rationale and its validity or relevance cannot be tested against man-made laws, it has been argued for a long time in different contexts that faith is supreme in human affairs.

Going through the Supreme Court verdict given by the Chief Justice and three of his brother judges, it is amply clear that they have once and for all repudiated the supremacy

of faith over the Constitution. On the underlying basic principle that the Constitution of India is supreme, the Chief Justice and his companion judges in different words unequivocally upheld that even in matters of religious faith, Governments, religious and other institutions and the people of India are bound by the constitution of the country. This historic verdict supersedes all other laws of the land and customary practices and beliefs and traditions of different religions/faith which are contrary to it. Thus, on the one hand, it proclaims the triumph of women's rights towards equality with men and on the other it establishes the supremacy of Constitutional morality over customary laws, rituals and traditions. The far reaching socio-economic and political consequences of this historic verdict will unfold themselves as the country moves forward.

'1996 will be repeated in 2019': HD Kumaraswamy after meeting Chandrababu Naidu

The hour-long meeting, scheduled earlier, came two days after results of by-elections to five seats in the state were announced

(News Agencies) Mission Team Opposition took Andhra Pradesh chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu today to Bengaluru, where he met his Karnataka counterpart HD Kumaraswamy and his father and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda of the Janata Dal (Secular). The hour-long meeting, scheduled earlier, came two days after results of by-elections to five seats in the state were announced. The Congress-JD(S) coalition won four seats, defeating the Bharatiya Janata Party even in its stronghold of Ballari. The partners are holding up the victory as a glimpse of the impact that an opposition alliance can have next year, with the Congress describing it as a "teaser for 2019." Naidu - currently meeting opposition

leaders of all hue in an attempt to build a national alliance to take on the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha election - said after today's meeting that the bypoll results in Karnataka had boosted his endeavour to unite the opposition. "What happened in Karnataka? [The coalition] swept the elections and that shows the mood of the nation. We will all discuss together how to take this forward," he said. All three leaders addressed reporters together after their meeting at Deve Gowda's residence. "This meeting was conducted to strengthen the hands of all secular forces for the nation. After Chandrababu Naidu's return to national politics, I feel 1996 will be repeated again in 2019," Kumaraswamy said, referring to a third front government formed that year



with Deve Gowda at its head. He said that the meeting was part of a series of initiatives being taken by regional leaders and that they had also been invited to attend a public event planned by west Bengal chief minister Mamata Bannerjee in January. Deve Gowda said it was the responsibility of secular parties to band together to defeat the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, accusing Prime

Minister Narendra Modi of "destabilising" constitutional institutions. "In this regard, Chandrababu Naidu has taken the lead and has met Rahul Gandhi, regional leaders like Sharad Pawar (Nationalist Congress Party), Farooq Abdullah (National Conference), Mayawati (Bahujan Samaj Party), Mamata Bannerjee (Triamool Congress) and MK Stalin (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)," the xx-year-old

former PM said.

Naidu, who met Rahul Gandhi last week in what the latter called the meeting "momentous", has been in touch with the JD(S) since Kumaraswamy became chief minister in May and had held talks with Deve Gowda before the assembly elections. The Andhra CM, who is the boss of the Telugu DEsam Party, was a BJP ally till March this year, when he exited the NDA over his state not being granted special status. Today he said the economy is in the doldrums, highlighting that it was the second anniversary of the prime minister's decision to demonetise Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes in 2016. "Two years ago, they did the demonetisation and no results have come. On the other hand, the economy is

in trouble, with petrol prices increasing day by day. The devaluation of the rupee has meant that it is trading at 73 to a dollar and economists expect it to reach 76. Devaluation and demonetisation have ensured that the economy is in doldrums," he said. He also said that the primary task at the moment was protecting democracy and the nation, and autonomous institutions, which he alleged were under threat. "People like us have to join together to save the nation and democracy. All institutions are being destroyed, the CBI, which was a premier institution for probing corruption," he said. "The Reserve Bank of India was an autonomous regulatory body, but it, too, is under threat now, Naidu said.



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Shivraj Chouhan's brother-in-law in Congress' fourth list for Madhya Pradesh elections

The Congress on Wednesday released its fourth list of candidates for the November 28 Madhya Pradesh assembly elections.

(News Agencies) The Congress on Wednesday released its fourth list of candidates for the November 28 Madhya Pradesh assembly elections. Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's brother-in-law Sanjay Singh Masani, who joined the party last week, also figures in the 29-name list.

With the fourth list which has 27 new candidates and two candidates replacing those announced in the earlier lists, the Congress has named 211 of its candidates for the 230-strong assembly.

The first list of 155 names was released late on Saturday night, while the second and third lists with 16 and 13 names came out on Sunday and Monday.

According to the fourth list, Masani, the brother of Shivraj Chouhan's wife Sadhna Singh, has been fielded from Waraseoni in Balaghat district.

Masani, who has done bit roles in Bollywood, had joined the Congress on Saturday in the presence of former union minister and Madhya Pradesh Congress president Kamal Nath and the state's campaign com-

mittee chairman Jyotiraditya Scindia.

The development, which the Congress said was a major setback for the Bharatiya Janata Party, came a day after a former Congress MP switched sides to join the BJP.

The BJP, however, had played down the defection. "The Congress might feel happy, but it will have no impact on the party. It might be news for the media, it is not for us," party spokesperson Rajneesh Agrawal had said then, adding that Singh has no political background.



Rajasthan elections 2018, a litmus test for BJP poll strategy

The BJP has ensured every booth-level committee has representatives of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, who constitute about 60% of Rajasthan's population, a BJP leader familiar with party strategy said.

(News Agencies) The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has introduced social engineering in booth-level committees and increased its focus on women and retired army personnel in a bid to counter anti-incumbency in Rajasthan.

The December 7 election is seen as a test of the BJP's ability to win two consecutive terms in Rajasthan — a feat no political party has achieved in 25 years.

Rajasthan is high on the political agenda of BJP president Amit Shah, who has visited the state at least 15 times between June and October to rejuvenate a cadre demoralised by bypoll losses.

BJP leaders said Shah held meetings with retired personnel of army and paramilitary forces, farmers, members of disadvantaged communities, and women's groups, apart from addressing the concerns of party workers. As a counter, the Congress has promised 'One Rank One Pension,' or OROP and loan waiver for farmers. The NDA government had also implemented OROP but personnel claim it has not been fully implemented.

"We have successfully dealt with the anger of workers," said Satish Poonia, who, along with Union minister Arjun Meghwal and junior agriculture minister Gajendra Shekawat, has been entrusted by Shah to get feedback on possible candidates. "We prepared a plan to get in touch with 10 million workers ... listen to them and address their concerns. We got them engaged in different activities to

make them feel that they are important for the party."

The BJP has ensured every booth-level committee has representatives of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, who constitute about 60% of Rajasthan's population, a BJP leader familiar with party strategy said.

The party has identified 20 million beneficiaries of 12 central and state government schemes.

"If we are able to get (votes of) half of them, we will be able to beat anti-incumbency," said BJP state president Madan Lal Saini. The party's central leadership has also engaged independent agencies to gauge the mood of voters. "I got three calls in the past week from different people with similar questions," said Amit Saini, a resident of Jaipur.

BJP spokesperson Mukesh Pareek said he was not aware of any such calls but did not rule out the possibility of voters being contacted for feedback.

The BJP also believes declaring Vasundhara Raje as the CM candidate will help show there is confusion in the Congress over leadership and attract women voters. "We want to tell people that there is clarity in BJP over the leadership while in the Congress there is confusion between Sachin Pilot (state Congress chief) and Ashok Gehlot (former CM)," said BJP Rajya Sabha member Kirori Lal Meena.

The BJP is targeting Pilot more than Gehlot to benefit from intense caste rivalries, another leader said. Pilot is from the Gujjar community, considered politically and socially a rival of another dominant community, the Meenas. Their areas of influ-

ence overlap in about 50 assembly constituencies of southern and eastern Rajasthan. "...political dynamics are such that if Pilot is seen as a future CM, the Meena will automatically vote against the Congress," Poonia said. Congress spokesperson Satyendra Singh Raghav said the party was fighting under Rahul Gandhi and there was no confusion over leadership. "Our party believes in democracy and it is the MLAs who decide their leader. BJP's statements are out of frustration..." he said.

Political analyst Narayan Bareth said the BJP's efforts had



worked to its advantage. "In elections, management plays a key role and there the BJP has the

upper hand. Anti-incumbency is there, and it remains to be seen how the BJP deals with it."

Sabarimala row Highlights: Section 144 imposed in 2 more areas, extended till October 22
Police and protesters are in a showdown as devotees block women's path to the temple. Here are the highlights from Sabarimala.



(News Agencies) On day three of the Sabarimala temple opening, devotees continue to throng the

hill for completing their pilgrimage to the Ayyappa temple. However, tension remains as women attempt to enter the temple. After two women unsuccessfully attempted to trek up to the hill-shrine, two women undertook the long walk on Friday morning under a police guard of more than 150 personnel. Devotees have been aggressively protesting a Supreme Court order that allows women of menstrual age to enter the temple, a ban that was followed for decades as a religious practice. With the Kerala government saying it will follow the court order and ensure women are allowed in the temple, protests have swept across the state leading to a state-wide shutdown. The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) is meeting today to find a resolution.



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CBI director Alok Verma appears before CVC, counters corruption charges

The Supreme Court had on October 26 asked the Central Vigilance Commission to complete within two weeks its inquiry into the allegations against CBI director Alok Verma levelled by Rakesh Asthana. The two weeks time limit ends on Sunday and the Supreme Court is scheduled to hear the matter on Monday.

(News Agencies) CBI Director Alok Verma Friday appeared before a panel headed by Central Vigilance Commissioner K V Chowdary and countered the corruption charges levelled against him by his deputy and special director in the probe agency Rakesh Asthana for the second consecutive day, officials said. Verma is understood to have given point-wise refusal to all the allegations levelled by Asthana before the panel comprising Vigilance Commissioners T M Bhasin and Sharad Kumar, they said. Justice A K Patnaik, a retired Supreme Court



judge, who has been asked by the apex court to supervise the CVC inquiry was also present, officials said. Verma came to the CVC office early Friday morning and stayed there for about an hour, they said. He did not give any comment to the media waiting outside the CVC's

office. The Supreme Court had on October 26 asked the Central Vigilance Commission to complete within two weeks its inquiry into the allegations against Verma levelled by Asthana. The two weeks time limit ends on Sunday and the Supreme Court is scheduled to hear the mat-

ter on Monday. Feuding of officers Verma and Asthana have been sent on leave by the government. Besides Verma, Asthana also had on Thursday met the CVC. He is understood to have given documentary evidence in support of his charges levelled against Verma, the officials said. The Commission had re-

cently examined some CBI officials probing crucial cases which figured in Asthana's complaint of corruption against the probe agency's chief Verma, they said. The officials said CBI personnel from the rank of inspector up to superintendent of police were called and their versions recorded before a

senior CVC official. These officials, who had recorded their statements included those who had handled the Moin Qureshi bribery case, IRCTC scam involving former railway minister Lalu Prasad, and the cattle smuggling case in which a senior BSF officer was caught with wands of cash in Kerala.

CBI chief Alok Verma, deputy Rakesh Asthana meet CVC

(News Agencies) CBI director Alok Verma and special director Rakesh Asthana Thursday met Central Vigilance Commissioner K V Chowdary and are understood to have given their views on an ongoing probe into corruption charges against them, officials said. Verma and Asthana reached the Central Vigilance Commission around 1 pm and stayed for about an hour, they said. They met Chowdary and Vigilance Commissioner Sharad Kumar, the officials said, without citing any other



details. On October 26, the Supreme Court had asked the Central Vigilance Commission to complete within two weeks its inquiry into

allegations against Verma levelled by Asthana. Verma and Asthana have been sent on leave by the central government

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Delhi, Mumbai model for airports in 6 non-metro cities

The six airports are Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram and Mangaluru

(News Agencies) Airports at six Indian cities – Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Guwahati, Jaipur, Thiruvananthapuram and Mangaluru – will be developed and managed through the public private partnership (PPP) model on the lines of the Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kochi airports, the government said on Thursday.

Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad told reporters that the proposal to hand over the airports, presently run by the Airports Authority of India (AAI), to PPP operators had been approved “in principle” at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“We have taken a major decision in the direction of reforms. We have taken Indian airports forward through the PPP model. Airports run through PPP mode have consistently figured in the top five Airport Council Interna-

tional rankings,” Prasad said. “There, the reform initiated in the field of airport management has been globally recognised,” he added. For instance, the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), which handled 63.5 million passengers in 2017, putting it on the list of 20 busiest airports in the world, was also the fastest growing major airport over the last four years, according to an internal report by the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL).

The report, based on data from Airports Council International, the global body that monitors airport traffic, puts Delhi’s compound annual growth rate (CAGR) between 2014 and 2017 at 14.3%. It was the highest among airports handling at least 40 million passengers per annum, comfortably ahead of Incheon, South Korea (10.5%); Pudong in Shanghai, China (10.4%), and Dubai, UAE

(7.4%).

Delhi International Airport is a joint venture, formed as a consortium between GMR Group, AAI and Fraport AG & Eraman Malaysia. “We have given in-principle approval for the management, operation and development of Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Guwahati, Jaipur, Thiruvananthapuram and Mangaluru airports” on the public-private partnership model, Prasad said, adding that the proposal reflected the reform instincts of the NDA government. The in-principle approval will enable the leasing out of the six airports – presently run by the AAI – for development, operation and management on the PPP model by the Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC), an official statement said. The tendering process may begin after the Cabinet nod.

Past attempt to partially privatise



airports has failed. The AAI in 2014 issued a tender for the privatisation of Jaipur and Ahmedabad airports but failed to get any bids. The Cabinet had in May approved investments for expansion and upgradation of in-

tegrated terminals at Chennai, Guwahati and Lucknow airports at a cost of ~ 2,467 crore, Rs 1,232 crore and Rs 1,383 crore, respectively. But now the process will be overseen by a private party, an official said.

Demonetisation a ‘shrewd scheme’ to help PM’s ‘suit-booted friends’: Rahul Gandhi



(News Agencies) Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that demonetisation was a planned “brutal conspiracy” and a “shrewd scheme” to convert the black money of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “suit-booted friends”.

On the second anniversary of demonetisation, he also said that there was nothing innocent about this “scam” and claimed that drawing any other meaning out of it was an insult to the intelligence of the nation.

Gandhi’s remarks came after former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s scathing assessment of the demonetisation exercise. He said the “scars and wounds” it caused are getting more visible

with time and the decision’s second anniversary is a day to remember how “economic misadventures” can roil the nation. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley made a strong defence, saying demonetisation resulted in formalisation of economy and increased tax base, with the government earmarking more resources for the poor and infrastructure development. “Note ban was a premeditated brutal conspiracy. This scam was a shrewd scheme to convert the black money of Prime Minister’s suit-booted friends to white. Nothing was innocent in this scam. Drawing any other meaning of it would be an insult of the intelligence of the nation,” Gandhi tweeted in Hindi.

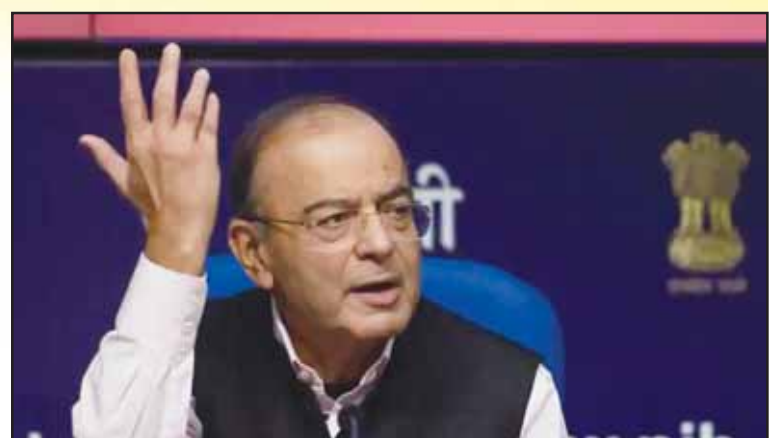
Needed to shake system, says Arun Jaitley on demonetisation anniversary

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said confiscation of the banned currency notes was not the objective of demonetisation

(News Agencies) Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Thursday strongly defended the centre’s demonetisation decision two years ago, asserting that the system needed to be shaken to make India move from cash to digital transactions. Political sparring between the ruling party BJP and the opposition has marked the second anniversary of the notes ban.

“An ill-informed criticism of the demonetisation is that almost the entire cash money got deposited in the banks. Confiscation of currency was not an objective of demonetisation,” Jaitley said in a blog post that comes ahead of nationwide protests planned by the Congress tomorrow.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the sudden decision to cancel Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes on November 8 two years ago. The move sucked out 86 per cent of currency notes, leading to a huge cash crunch in the economy for months. Jaitley said getting the money into the formal economy



and making the holders pay tax was the broader objective of the notes ban decision

There were 3.8 crore filers of income tax returns when the NDA government came to power in May 2014.

“In the first four years of this Government, it has increased to 6.86 crore,” he said. “By the time the first five years of this Government are over, we will be close to doubling the (tax) assessee base,” he said, attributing the sharp increase to the notes ban decision. “Despite an annual income tax relief of Rs. 97,000 Crore given to the smaller tax payers and a Rs. 80,000 Crore relief given to

the GST assesses, tax collections have gone up. Rates of taxes, both direct and indirect have been reduced, but tax collections have gone up. The tax base has been expanded. GST rates on 334 commodities which were paying an effective 31% tax pre-GST have witnessed a tax reduction,” he wrote.

The government, he stressed, has used these resources for better infrastructure creation, social sector and rural India.

“More formalisation, more revenue, more resources for the poor, better Infrastructure, and a better quality of life for our citizens,” he said.

Too close for comfort: China to build port in Myanmar, 3rd in India's vicinity

India will be closely following the developments following an agreement between China and Myanmar on Thursday to develop a multi-billion dollar deep sea port in Kyaukpyu on the coast of Bay of Bengal, fourth in India's neighbourhood.

(News Agencies) India will be closely following the developments following an agreement between China and Myanmar on Thursday to develop a multi-billion dollar deep sea port in Kyaukpyu on the coast of Bay of Bengal, third in India's neighbourhood.



China has already helped build port in Gwadar in Pakistan and Hambantota in Sri Lanka. It is also funding the development of the Chittagong port in Bangladesh.

Located on the western coast of Myanmar in Rakhine state, the scaled-down port, part of a special economic zone (SEZ), when developed will not be far away from a submarine base India is developing on its east coast, close to

Vishakhapatnam.

Though the total China-Myanmar investment into the Kyaukpyu project has been scaled down to \$1.3 billion (initial phase) from the earlier \$7 billion figure, the port will be of great strategic significance to China as it navigates its way into the Bay of Bengal – and the Indian Ocean -- considered within New Delhi's range of influence. China's investment in the project

was reduced following Myanmar's concerns of falling into a debt-trap.

Nonetheless, the port will boost the China-Myanmar economic corridor and will be another road-sea link under President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Oil and natural gas pipelines are already functioning between the fishing town of Kyaukpyu and Kunming in China's

Yunnan province, bordering Myanmar.

For Myanmar, the project promises employment to thousands and billions in tax revenue in the future, according to Chinese media. The deal took years to finalise because of differences on "...financing and other issues," the tabloid Global Times said in report.

"At a ceremony in the Myanmar capital of Nay Pyi Taw, the Chinese consortium led by State-owned conglomerate Citic Group signed the framework agreement with the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone Management Committee on the development of the deep-sea port," the report said.

China will invest 70 per

cent of the \$1.3 billion while Myanmar will finance the rest in the initial phase, which will include two berths.

The signing of the framework agreement marks a significant step for the port project, which has been stalled since 2015, and for the continued implementation of BRI, under increased scrutiny because of cases such as the Kyaukpyu port project.

"Prolonged negotiations fueled criticism of the BRI, which some foreign critics said could add to local debts and even threaten other countries' sovereignty," the GT report said. China has maintained that the BRI is an open platform to facilitate regional and global economic integra-

tion and help countries along the routes with economic growth and job creation.

"The Kyaukpyu project is estimated to bring 100,000 jobs to the local community and will contribute as much as \$15 billion in tax revenue to Myanmar. Once completed, the port will have an annual gross output of \$3.2 billion," the report added.

The CITIC Consortium comprises China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd. (CHEC), China Merchants Holdings (International) Co. LTD (CMHI), TEDA Investment Holding (TEDA) and Yunnan Construction Engineering Group (YNJG) as well as Thailand's Charoen Pokphand Group Company Limited (CP Group).

BJP's new math to make room for partner Nitish Kumar in 2019

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is yet to announce a seat-sharing agreement in Bihar for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, but has said it will contest an equal number of seats as the Janata Dal (United).

(News Agencies) Candidate selection for about half of the 40 Lok Sabha constituencies is on the table for discussion as the three National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners from 2014 make room for chief minister Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) into the coalition for the 2019 elections, according to three leaders familiar with negotiations. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is yet to announce a seat-sharing agreement in Bihar, but has said it will contest an equal number of seats as the JD(U). This means the BJP will have to let go of several seats where it won five years ago. Partnering with the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) of Ram Vilas Paswan and the Rashtriya Lok Samta Party of Upendra Kushwaha in 2014, the BJP won 22 out of 30 seats it contested in 2014. The LJP won six out of seven seats and the RLSP won all three seats it contested, making the Bihar polls a virtual rout by the NDA. "Now some (BJP legislators) will be dropped; a few will change their constituencies, and there will be exchange of seats between partners," said a BJP leader who asked not to be named.

The broad agreement being discussed within the Bihar NDA is

17 seats each to the BJP and the JD(U), four to the LJP and two to the RLSP, a second leader said. To make this agreement work, the LJP may be given one Rajya Sabha seat as compensation.

A third leader said 72-year-old Union minister Paswan may not contest from his bastion Hajipur, a parliamentary constituency he first won in 1977 with a margin of over 4,00,000 votes, and opt for a Rajya Sabha berth instead. "This decision is based on health considerations," the leader said. Rajya Sabha will have two vacancies from BJP-ruled Assam next June and six from Tamil Nadu in July.

If Paswan does not contest, Hajipur may go to his parliamentary son Chirag Paswan, who is currently an MP from Jamui, a Lok Sabha seat which will then have a new candidate.

Paswan's brother Ramchandra is an MP from Samastipur and is likely to retain the seat. But the LJP may cede Vaishali and Munger Lok Sabha constituencies to create space for Nitish within the NDA fold.

Suspended Darbhanga MP Kirti Azad and rebel Patna Sahib MP Shatrughan Singh will not get BJP tickets, the first leader said. While Patna Sahib will remain

with the BJP, the JD(U) is pitching for Darbhanga.

The three leaders also spoke about talks among several senior leaders about changing their constituencies – Union minister Giriraj Singh, who is an MP from Nawada, wants to take the Begusarai seat that was held by BJP'S Bhola Singh, who died last month; Union minister and Buxar MP Ashwini Choubey wants to shift to his home town Bhagalpur where former Union minister Syed Shahnawaz Hussain lost in 2014; Hussain is also in contention for Bhagalpur. Nitish quit the NDA in 2013, protesting against Narendra Modi's elevation as the BJP'S campaign committee chief. He joined hands with the



Rashtriya Janata Dal of Lalu Prasad for the 2015 assembly election. He returned to the NDA in 2017.

Dr Shaibal Gupta, director of Patna-based Asian Development Research Institute, said Bihar politics was going through a lot

of change. "Socialist veterans such as Paswan and Lalu are trying to pass on the baton to the second generation, and those who did not come through a political process, like bureaucrats turned-politicians, are looking for a safer seat," he said.

Madras HC rejects Dayanidhi Maran, brother Kalanidhi's petition to cancel charges against them in illegal telephone exchange case

(News Agencies)The Madras High Court has rejected former communication minister Dayanidhi Maran and brother, Kalanidhi petition to cancel charges against them for allegedly setting up of illegal telephone exchanges. The Maran brothers had contended that the accusation was "lame" and wanted it to be quashed. Charges have been framed by a CBI court based on the investi-

gating officer's opinion and not on materials available on record.

The CBI court in Chennai on August 30 framed charges and ordered trial of Dayanidhi Maran and six others in the case of "illegal" telephone exchanges, allegedly set up to benefit the Sun TV Network of his brother Kalanidhi Maran during 2004-06. Maran had argued that the restriction to have only three connections would apply only to MPs

as per the Salaries and Allowances of Members of Parliament Act and not to a Cabinet minister. "There is no statutory bar for a minister to have more than three telephone service connections," he argued. The former minister did not have 764 telephone connections as alleged by the CBI, and even if he had, there was no statutory bar against it, he had petitioned.

Delhi records 'worst air quality of year' after Diwali: Officials

The air quality index (AQI) was recorded at "severe-plus emergency" category due to rampant bursting of toxic firecrackers, they said.

Delhi's air quality worsened through the day and went off the charts by the evening as the city recorded its worst quality air of the year the morning after Diwali, authorities said Thursday.

The air quality index (AQI) was recorded at "severe-plus emergency" category due to rampant bursting of toxic firecrackers, they said. In gross violation of a Supreme Court order, people in several cities burst firecrackers until at least midnight, two hours after the 10 pm deadline. Loud bangs rent the air in New Delhi. Violations were also recorded in Mumbai, Kolkata, Jaipur and other major cities. Partly as a result of smoke from the firecrackers, the overall AQI in Delhi jumped to 642 which falls in the "severe-plus emergency" category, according to data by the Centre-run SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research).

"The Delhi Air Quality Index is 500+ at present. Early morning at 1 am, smoke layer became thick and started to trap pollutants near the surface rapidly.

However, air quality is recovering from the afternoon and is likely to touch 'very poor' range by night provided no additional local emissions are added anymore," it said in its report.

The contribution of PM2.5 and PM10 had increased from 50 per cent to 70 per cent last night, indicating an increased share of locally generated firecracker emissions, the SAFAR said.

The overall AQI of the city was 11 times the permissible limit. An AQI between 0 and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". AQI above 500 falls in the "severe-plus emergency" category. The sharp spike in pollution is caused by rampant burning of firecrackers that has led to the formation of a smoky layer across the national capital and drastically reduced visibility, the authorities said. The SAFAR had warned that even if partial toxic firecrackers as compared to last year were burnt, then the air quality would fall in the "se-

vere" category.

On Thursday, the PM2.5 (particles in the air with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres) level was recorded at 492 µgm-3, more than eight times the permissible limit.

The PM10 (particles in the air with a diameter of less than 10 micrometres) level was recorded at six times the permissible limit at 618 µgm-3, according to the SAFAR. India's official permissible PM2.5 limit is 60 µgm-3, while that of PM10 level is 100 µgm-3. Ultra fine particulate pollutants PM2.5 and PM10 in the air pose health hazards as they can enter the respiratory system and reach the bloodstream.

Twenty three areas in Delhi recorded "severe" air quality while eight areas recorded "very poor" quality air, according to data of the Central Pollution Control Board. A "severe plus emergency" level AQI essentially means that even healthy people may suffer from respiratory illnesses on prolonged exposure. This air will seriously affect those with ailments, according to the



advisory issued by the SAFAR. Delhi's air quality is expected to remain in this category over the next two days as the smoke emitted by fire crackers has slowed down the process of pollutant dispersion, the agency said. The Supreme Court has allowed bursting of firecrackers from 8 pm to 10 pm only on Diwali and other festivals. The top court also allowed manufacture and sale of just "green crackers" which have low emission of light, sound and harmful chemicals. The court said the police should ensure that there was no sale of banned firecrackers and in case of any violation, the Sta-

tion House Officer (SHO) of the police station of the area would be held personally liable and this would amount to committing contempt of the court. Despite the order, certain places recorded violations where firecrackers were burnt before and after the set time frame. These included Mayur Vihar Extension, Lajpat Nagar, Lutyens' Delhi, IP extension, Dwarka and Noida Sector 78. The police admitted that violations were observed and it would take serious legal action against the people violating the apex court order. They said they were continuously patrolling the areas to check for violations.

To counter Congress' attack on 2 years of demonetisation, BJP poses 10 questions

The BJP posed 10 questions after the Congress posted '#DestructionByDemonetisation' posts on Twitter and its senior leader Manmohan Singh called it an "ill-thought" move that unleashed havoc on the Indian economy.



In an attack on the Congress for criticising the NDA government's demonetisation decision, the BJP on Thursday posed 10 questions to the party about its "politics and anti-development mindset"

"Why does Congress find merit in protesting against every anti-corruption measure of the Government of India? What do they fear? #Corrupt Congress FearsDemo," the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) questioned on Twitter.

"Why is it that wherever black money is there, the Congress is not far behind #CorruptCongressFearsDemo,"

it asked.

This came after the Congress posted '#Destruction By Demonetisation' posts on Twitter and its senior leader Manmohan Singh called it an "ill-thought" move that unleashed havoc on the Indian economy. He also advised the Narendra Modi government against any more "unorthodox measures".

The Congress has also planned protests across the country on November 9 to mark the second anniversary of demonetisation.

Before the questions, Union finance minister Arun Jaitley strongly defended the Centre's

demonetisation decision, asserting that the system needed to be shaken to make India move from cash to digital transactions.

"An ill-informed criticism of the demonetisation is that almost the entire cash money got deposited in the banks. Confis-

cation of currency was not an objective of demonetisation," Jaitley said in a blog post.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced on November 8, 2016, that all Rs 1000 and Rs 500 notes, comprising 86% of the total value of the currency in circulation at that

time, would no longer be recognised as legal tender.

Independent analysis of the data over the last years has pointed the decision did help formalise the economy but that there are many indicators that small businesses were hit by the sudden decision.

Now, Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani talks about renaming Ahmedabad

Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani on Thursday said his government was exploring legal options on renaming Ahmedabad, days after his Uttar Pradesh counterpart Yogi Adityanath changed Faizabad

to Ayodhya and Allahabad to Prayagraj. "We are contemplating changing the name of Ahmedabad to Karnavati, the talks of which have been going on since a long time... We will think about it in the time to come," Rupani said.

The chief minister added that all legal aspects would be explored



tribut as Ayodhya, amid much speculation about 'good news' about the temple town.

After Allahabad was renamed Prayagraj last month, many groups in Uttar Pradesh are reviving their demand for renaming cities, towns and districts.

There are demands to rename Azamgarh district as Aryamgarh; Faizabad as Saket; Aligarh as Harigarh; and Muzaffarnagar as Laxminagar.

Months after assuming power at the Centre in 2014, the BJP-led NDA government consented to officially rename Bangalore as Bengaluru.

Sessions's ouster throws future of special counsel probe into question

The future of the special counsel investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 campaign was thrown into uncertainty Wednesday after President Trump ousted Attorney General Jeff Sessions, giving a political loyalist oversight of the probe.

Trump named as acting attorney general Matthew G. Whitaker, Sessions's chief of staff, who as a legal commentator last year wrote that special counsel Robert S. Mueller III appeared to be taking his investigation too far. A Justice Department official said Wednesday that Whitaker would assume final decision-making authority over the special counsel probe instead of Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein.

Since last year, Rosenstein has overseen the investigation because Sessions, a key Trump surrogate in 2016, recused himself from dealing with matters involving the campaign. It wasn't immediately clear what role, if any, Rosenstein may play in the probe going forward.

As acting attorney general, Whitaker could sharply curtail Mueller's authority, cut his budget or order him to cease lines of inquiry.

Within hours of his appointment, there were mounting calls by congressional Democrats and government watchdog groups for Whitaker to recuse himself, citing critical comments he made about Mueller's investigation.

Furious Democrats, emboldened by winning control of the House in Tuesday's elections, also promised to investigate Sessions's forced resignation and suggested Trump's actions could amount to obstruction of justice if he intended to disrupt the criminal probe.

"There is no mistaking what this means, and what is at stake: this is a constitutionally perilous moment for our country and for the President," Rep. Jerrold Nadler (N.Y.) said in a statement. He is set to take over in January as chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, the panel that would oversee any impeachment proceedings.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut called Wednesday's events "a break-the-glass moment" and said he would be introducing legislation to protect Mueller's work. "Any attempt to limit his resources or the scope of his investigation is

unacceptable," he said. "The world, and history, are watching." A spokesman for Mueller declined to comment.

Trump's decision to push Sessions out conflicted with comments he offered during a news conference on Wednesday when he insisted he had a right to end the investigation but said that he would prefer to "let it go on."

"I could fire everybody right now, but I don't want to stop it because politically I don't like stopping it," Trump said. "It's a disgrace. It should never have been started, because there is no crime."

Justice Department officials said Whitaker will follow the regular process for reviewing possible ethical conflicts, a process that involves ethics lawyers reviewing an official's past work to see whether there are financial or personal conflicts that preclude them from being involved in particular cases.

Whitaker, a former U.S. attorney in Iowa, once mused as a legal commentator about how a Sessions replacement might reduce Mueller's budget "so low that his investigation grinds to almost a halt." In an August 2017 tweet, he wrote that an opinion piece calling the special counsel investigation a "Mueller lynch mob" was "worth a read."

Whitaker also wrote in a September 2017 column that Mueller had "come up to a red line in the Russia 2016 election-meddling investigation that he is dangerously close to crossing" after CNN reported that the special counsel could be looking into Trump and his associates' financial ties to Russia.

He also has ties to Sam Clovis, who served as Trump's national campaign chairman and has been interviewed as a witness by Mueller's investigators about his interactions with foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos. Whitaker chaired Clovis's campaign for Iowa state treasurer in 2014. "We're currently friends," Clovis said of Whitaker in an interview with The Washington Post on Wednesday. "I texted him congratulations today."

Whitaker has not been confirmed by the Senate and, by law, can

serve for only 210 days before he must be replaced by someone who has been confirmed. That period could be extended if Trump nominates a replacement who is not immediately



confirmed.

If Whitaker takes over direct supervision of the Russia investigation from Rosenstein, he would assume budget authority for Mueller's work, giving him the ability to sharply reduce Mueller's staff and resources. His approval would also be required before Mueller could take major investigative steps, including asking a grand jury for additional indictments.

Any report that Mueller issues describing his overall findings would be submitted to Whitaker, who could decide it contained privileged material that should not be made public.

"Discretion is such a part of what prosecutors do," said former U.S. attorney Barbara McQuade. "He can't obstruct justice, but he would have the ability to make discretionary decisions that could in many ways influence the outcome of the investigation." Still, Whitaker faces some limitations.

Justice Department regulations would allow him to fire Mueller, but only for misconduct, conflict of interest or other "good cause." The regulations would allow him to reject requests by Mueller to take major steps in the investigation. Should he do so, however, he would be required to provide the chairmen and ranking members of the House and Senate judiciary committees a "description and explanation of instances" in which he overruled the special counsel. Whitaker's appointment comes at a particularly critical moment, just as Mueller was expected to end what has been a publicly quiet phase of his investigation.

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Whitaker's appointment comes at a particularly critical moment, just as Mueller was expected to end what has been a publicly quiet phase of his investigation. For months, Mueller has been seeking to question Trump as part of his investigation, which is also examining whether the president has sought to obstruct the probe.

Mueller's prosecutors have laid out detailed allegations of how Russia sought to manipulate Americans through social media, break into state voting systems and hack the email accounts of Democratic committees and party leaders.

But the special counsel's team has not indicated publicly that it has drawn any conclusions about whether Trump associates conspired with the Russians or whether the president obstructed justice.

[Newly empowered, House Democrats plan to launch immediate investigations of Trump, but leaders are wary of impeachment. Behind the scenes, Mueller's investigators have been intensively gathering evidence and questioning witnesses in recent weeks. The grand jury hearing evidence in the Russia investigation has been seen meeting at a federal courthouse in Washington on six of the last eight Fridays. Based on witnesses who have been called to the grand jury, the special counsel appears to be intensely focused on Stone.

The longtime Trump friend and former adviser is under scrutiny for claims he made in the 2016 campaign that suggested he was in contact with WikiLeaks. In the final months of the White House race, the group published Democratic emails that prosecutors allege were hacked by Russian military operatives. Stone has repeatedly maintained that he was not in touch with WikiLeaks and did not have advance knowledge of its plans. He said he based his comments on publicly available interviews with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and tips from associates, including New York comedian and radio host Randy Credico, who interviewed Assange on his program in August 2016.

Credico has denied serving as a back channel to Assange for Stone.

In recent weeks, two more Stone associates testified before the grand jury — among at least nine people connected to Stone who have been contacted by prosecutors so far.

Filmmaker David Lugo and lawyer Tyler Nixon both told The Post last month that Credico acknowledged to them he gave Stone information from Assange. Lugo, who appeared before the grand jury Oct. 19, said he turned over text messages and emails to Mueller's team. Nixon said he testified last week.

Separately, conservative writer Jerome Corsi was interviewed by investigators over three days last week and appears to be emerging as a key witness in the Mueller investigation into Stone's activities. In an appearance on his live-streamed Internet show Monday, Corsi told viewers that he has been in near-continuous contact with Mueller's team in recent weeks. "It's been two months, on a really constant basis in the Mueller investigation. It's been one of the biggest pushes of my life," said Corsi, who added that he could provide no specifics of his interactions with Mueller. David Gray, an attorney for Corsi, declined to comment. Meanwhile, the special counsel must decide whether to accept only written answers from the president or to fight for an interview. Such a move would probably require issuing a subpoena to the president, which would then draw a legal challenge from Trump's team.

'No UK Aid Used To Fund India's Statue of Unity': UK Govt

The Department for International Development (DFID) has issued a statement in response to British media criticising India's Statue of Unity.

DFID, that uses a blog to respond to media stories discussing UK aid, has responded to the article by The Daily Mail and the Mail Online and said that "no UK aid has been used to fund this statue".

UK's media was awash with disapproval of the expenditure, claiming that India was given more than 1 billion pounds of aid by the UK in the years that it was spending extravagantly to built the world's tallest statue. In a caustic article published by The Daily Mail, in which it tore into India's decision to pour funds into

the statue, it wrote that official figures show that in the 56 months it took to construct the 330 million pound Statue of Unity, UK taxpayers donated 1.17 billion pounds to India.

"As the cash rolled in from Britain, the Indian authorities poured billions of rupees into building the 597-foot-tall bronze likeness of Sardar Patel, one of the heroes of India's independence movement," the article said.

The article went on to state that the UK had given India 300 million pounds in 2012, when the erection of the statue had begun. The Daily Mail further claimed that in 2013, 268 million pounds more was given and 278 million in 2014. In 2015, the amount

given was 185 million and smaller amounts followed.

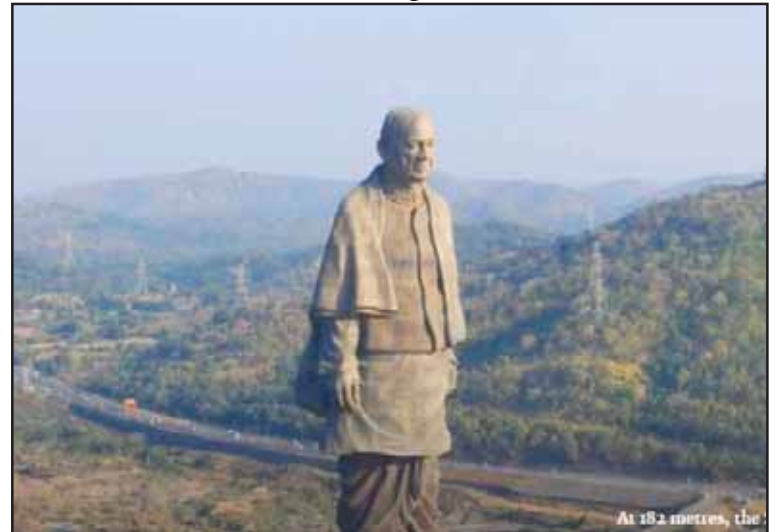
It wasn't just the British media that was upset by what they see as squandering UK taxpayers' money.

The MP went on to say that the statue showed that UK did not need to give money to a nation that could afford to build this giant statue.

Also Read : Infographic: Facts About Statue of Unity, Tallest in the World

"What it proves is that we should not be giving money to India. It is up to them how they spend their money but if they can afford this statue, then it is clearly a country we should not need to be giving aid to", he said.

The article further went on to say

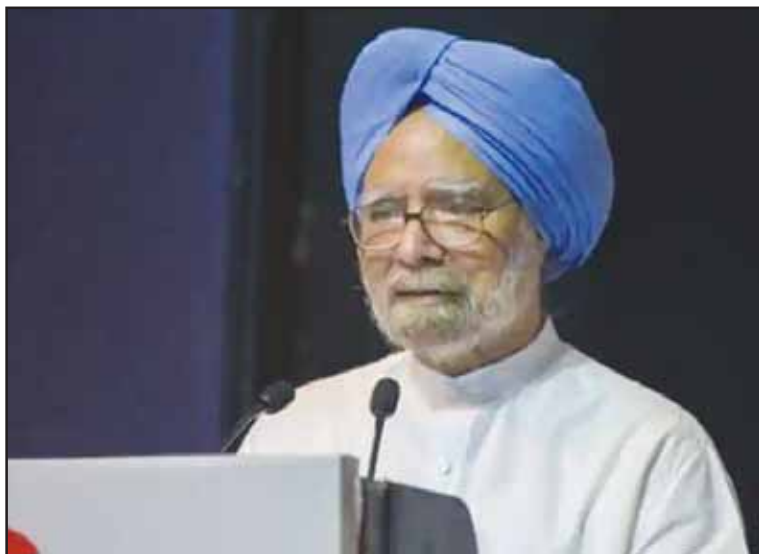


that while India had not directly spent the aid money on the statue, it went towards funding projects India could have afforded itself had it not been lavishing

funds on the memorial. It also noted that India gives out more aid than it receives despite dealing with problems in disease and healthcare.

Scars of demonetisation more visible: Manmohan Singh on 2 years of notes ban

Manmohan Singh said that demonetisation had impacted every single person, regardless of age, gender, religion, occupation or creed



The former prime minister, also a noted economist, warned that the impact of the note ban was beginning to manifest now. "We are yet to understand and experience the full impact of the demonetisation exercise. With a depreciating currency and rising global oil prices, macro-economic headwinds are also starting to blow now."

Singh said the notes ban had impacted every person, regardless of age, gender, religion, occupation or creed. "It's often said that time is a great healer. But unfortunately, in case of

demonetisation, the scars and wounds of demonetisation are only getting more visible with time." Singh said that beyond the steep drop in headline GDP growth numbers after demonetisation, the deeper ramifications of notebandi were still unraveling. He added that small and medium businesses that are the cornerstone of India's economy were yet to recover from the demonetisation shock.

"This has had a direct impact on employment as the economy continues to struggle to create enough new jobs for our youth. The

financial markets are volatile as the liquidity crisis wrought by demonetisation is taking its eventual toll on infrastructure lenders and non-bank financial services firms, he said.

Advising the government to not resort to further 'unorthodox, short-term economic measures' that can cause uncertainty in the economy and financial markets, Singh said, "Today is a day to remember how economic misadventures can roil the nation for a long time and understand that economic policymaking should be handled with thought and care."

TMC worker killed in Bengal, fifth political worker to be murdered since Durga Puja

A political blame game started after Pintu Sinha's death with leaders of the Trinamool Congress alleging that the Bharatiya Janata Party-backed goons were behind the murder.

A 42-year-old man associated with the ruling Trinamool Congress has died after being shot by two men allegedly backed by the BJP, in the fifth killing of political workers in West Bengal in nearly three weeks.

Pintu Sinha died on Thursday night in Kolkata's SSKM Hospital, where he was admitted after he was shot at allegedly by the men who barged into his house on November 6, the day of Kali Puja. Sinha was a resident of Parui village in Purulia district, about 275 km to the west of state capital Kolkata.

"We have arrested Babu Bauri and Indrajit Roy in connection with the incident. An investigation is continuing to find out the motive of the crime," district superintendent of police Akash

Magharia said.

A district court on Friday sent the two men to police custody for seven days.

A political blame game started after Sinha's death with leaders of the Trinamool Congress alleging that the Bharatiya Janata Party-backed goons were behind the murder.

"They (BJP) want to stop the development drive in the state and, therefore, they hired goons from neighbouring Jharkhand," Trinamool Lok Sabha MP and Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, who is scheduled to visit Sinha's family on Saturday, alleged.

"The BJP wants to create unrest in the area. But we will not allow anyone to create any turmoil. We are going to organise a protest

rally on Saturday," state minister Shantiram Mahato, who is also a Trinamool leader of the district, said.

The BJP's state unit general



secretary Sayantan Basu said his party "does not engage in the politics of murder and bloodshed". "It could be an outcome of the factional feud that characterises Trinamool Congress," Basu said. Sinha was shot at only a couple of days after Sheikh Afzal, a 34-year-old Trinamool supporter, was

attacked in Khairashole area of Birbhum district. Afzal was shot on November 5 but he survived as the bullet hit him in the waist.

A Congress worker Mohammad Samiruddin, 42, was killed and two others critically injured on November 4 when Trinamool Congress supporters allegedly fired on them in Chopra area of North Dinajpur district, claimed Congress block president Asok Roy.

Hamidul Rahaman, Trinamool MLA from Chopra, trashed the allegation against his party workers.

Rampada Bera, a BJP worker, was hacked to death with sharp weapons in Dhamal village in Jhargram district on November 2. The BJP's Bengal unit president Dilip Ghosh alleged that the ruling

party's supporters committed the crime.

Then the body of Tapas Bagdi, a 35-year-old BJP worker, was found hanging in Labhpur area of Birbhum on October 22.

"Murder of BJP worker Tapas Bagdi in Birbhum's Dwarka Village will only spread the angst towards tyrannical Mamata Govt like a forest fire in WB. BJP will continue to seek justice and democracy in WB," Union minister and BJP lawmaker from Asansol Babul Supriyo had tweeted.

Dipak Ghosh, Khairashole block president of Trinamool Congress, was shot at on October 21 and died in a hospital two days later. The ruling party's Birbhum district president Anubrata Mondal had alleged that BJP-backed toughs were behind the crime.

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Maldives president-elect Solih invites PM Narendra Modi to swearing-in ceremony: Report

Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party's candidate, emerged victorious over incumbent president Abdulla Yameen in the election held on September 23. He will be sworn in on November 17.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been invited to the swearing-in ceremony of the Maldives' president-elect Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, according to a Maldives media report Thursday. Solih, 56, the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party's candidate, emerged victorious over incumbent president Abdulla Yameen in the election held on September 23. He will be

sworn in on November 17. The president-elect had extended the invitation during a phone call by Modi, after Solih's victory in the September 23 presidential elections, spokesperson for Solih, Mariya Ahmed Didi was quoted as saying in 'The Edition'. Modi had also invited Solih to visit India, Mariya said, adding that the president-elect had accepted the invitation. The

two leaders agreed to work closely together to further strengthen the close, friendly and good neighbourly relations between the two countries.

Maldives is the only SAARC country that Modi has not visited. His visit to the archipelago was cancelled in March 2015 due to the volatile political situation. India's ties with the Maldives came under

strain after president Yameen declared Emergency in the country on February 5, following an order by the country's Supreme Court to release a group of Opposition leaders, who had been convicted in widely criticised trials. India had criticised the Yameen government for the imposition of the Emergency and urged it to restore the credibility of the electoral and political



process by releasing presidential election political prisoners. The Emergency was lifted 45 days later. In July, India expressed concern over the announcement of the

'Let people decide': Sri Lankans want a vote as crisis drags on

Colombo residents urge leaders to call snap elections as power struggle over two rival prime ministers strain economy.

Colombo, Sri Lanka - In the labyrinth corridors of power in Colombo, politicians loyal to two rival prime ministers have been fighting tooth and nail to muster enough votes to prove a majority when the country's suspended parliament meets next week.

But on the streets of the Sri Lankan capital, home to almost one million people, the country's protracted power struggle feels all too distant.

"All these politicians are crooks. All of them," AK Piyadasa, an 83-year-old merchant, said matter-of-factly. "There's no one to help us."

It's a sentiment that reverberates throughout Colombo - from the busy Pettah market, where AK Piyadasa sells plastic combs and strainers on a street corner, through the bustling middle-class neighbourhood of Wellawatta, to the quiet leafy suburb of Rajagiriyaya. The chorus of despair - "everything is expensive", "my life hasn't improved at all", "politicians don't care about us" - seems to prevail across this multi-ethnic seaside city, where residents have been brought to their knees after years of high taxes,

stagnant wages and a falling currency.

Grievances over the stuttering economy and the country's direction have gained new impetus over the past two weeks following President Maithripala Sirisena's decision to abruptly fire Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and replace him with Mahinda Rajapaksa, a controversial former president accused of corruption and grave human rights abuses.

The shock moves, which included a presidential order to suspend parliamentary proceedings, have plunged Sri Lanka into constitutional chaos. According to legal experts, the president has the authority to appoint the prime minister, but does not have the power to sack the incumbent.

Since being fired, Wickremesinghe has remained holed up in the prime ministerial residence while also demanding a parliamentary vote to prove his majority. Amid mounting pressure, Sirisena, who denies acting unconstitutionally, recalled parliament on November 14, when Wickremesinghe's supporters are hoping to table a no-confidence motion against Rajapaksa. With both Wickremesinghe and Rajapaksa claiming to

be the country's rightful prime minister, the turmoil risks straining a struggling economy - already at its lowest level in 16 years - as well as threatening major development projects and scaring off tourists amid warnings of violence.

"Wickremesinghe is useless. No one has benefitted from him," said 25-year-old Pradeep Udaykumar, who barely makes ends meet by selling mobile phone batteries in Pettah. Nearby, a 40-year-old sunglasses vendor, W Ravindran, said: "No one cares about the poor. Politicians - they make deals and they look after themselves. It's us who suffer."

A 60-year-old woman selling lottery tickets echoed the same sentiment. The only way out, she said, was a general election. "That way, everyone has a say." 'Go to the people' That call for new polls seems to be on everyone's lips in Colombo, partly because of a widespread belief that those already elected will not act in the public interest. The disenchantment has only grown in recent days over allegations that legislators

have been taking millions of dollars in bribes to switch support, as well as long-standing grievances over the electorate's effect on the political process.

"Go to the people," urged a Muslim man. "Let the people decide," said a Tamil woman. "We need change," added a 21-year-old female university student.

That's also a message Rajapaksa has been eager to trumpet.

His Sri Lanka Podujana Permanuna trounced Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) in local council elections earlier this year, and observers say his party is likely to come out on top if snap elections are held.

That's partly because Rajapaksa, 72, continues to command huge support among Sri Lanka's Sinhalese majority, who make up about 75 percent of the population. For many of them, the former president is a hero.

At a rally in Colombo on Monday, Upali Wijeykoon, a former soldier and the sole survivor of a mine explosion in 1992, said Rajapaksa "saved" Sri Lanka by ending the war, which according to the United Nations claimed



more than 100,000 lives over three decades. Upali, 58, travelled more than eight hours from his village in the country's central highlands to attend the mass rally, which organisers said gathered more than 100,000 people despite heavy rains.

"I lost both my legs. I love my country and I have done whatever I can to safeguard our sovereignty," Upali said over the din of patriotic songs and chants. Blasting Wickremesinghe for "selling national assets to foreign countries", the former soldier said the government's decision to cut fertiliser subsidies has "destroyed the agricultural sector" in his home town of Horowpathana, where farming was the main source of income.

Return of fear But on the opposite side, particularly among members of the country's Tamil and Muslim minorities, the fear that

Rajapaksa will roll back freedoms and democratic gains made under Wickremesinghe is more than real.

"Under Mahinda Rajapaksa people saw development. They had money. But under Ranil Wickremesinghe, I feel safer," said Giyas Deen, a 52-year-old imam from the city of Galle in the country's south. Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, we can all live together now." Deen, a father of two, said Rajapaksa had empowered Buddhist nationalists "who believe Sri Lanka is for Buddhists only", adding he now feared a resurgence of anti-Muslim violence - such as the 2014 clashes between Buddhists and Muslims in the town of Aluthgama, in which at least four people were killed and more than a dozen Muslim houses were torched to the ground.

Afghan forces killed as Taliban continues deadly attacks

At least 14 soldiers killed in the latest Taliban group attack as the Afghan forces reel from renewed violence.

At least 14 Afghan army soldiers were killed in Takhar province after midnight on Thursday in the latest attack by Taliban armed group, which has killed or wounded dozens of security forces this week.

Six soldiers are missing and 16 others wounded in the attack on military base in Khawja Ghar district, provincial council member Mohammad Azam Afzali told Al Jazeera.

In the neighbouring Kunduz province, at least seven army soldiers were killed and several others were wounded on Wednesday, Afzali added.

Also on Thursday, Taliban attacked and overran two checkpoints in Ghazni's Jaghori district, killing several local police forces, as fighting continued.

Jaghori resident Asad Arman told

DPA news agency that army commandos had reached the district by helicopter early Thursday, forcing the fighters to retreat.

Jaghori, a predominantly Hazara Shia dominated district, is one of the safest in the province, which has come under Taliban attacks following the armed group's assault on neighbouring Uruzgan province. On Sunday, at least 13 policemen were killed in Khogyani district after Taliban fighters attacked their checkpoint, according to Ghazni governor spokesman Arif Noori.

Taliban fighters have ramped up attacks on Afghan security forces and government facilities in recent months, leaving troops thinly stretched throughout the country. A US watchdog agency said last week that the Afghan

government was struggling to recover control of districts lost to the Taliban while casualties among security forces had reached record levels.

The government had control or influence over 65 percent of the population but only 55.5 percent of Afghanistan's 407 districts, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said in a report. The latest phase of Afghanistan's decades-old war began in 2001, when the US-led troops overthrew the Taliban government in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States. Moscow peace talks amid escalation of violence across the country, Russia is facilitating a peace conference on Friday attended by officials from the High Peace Council (HPC) and members of the



Taliban group based in Doha, Qatar.

The HPC established by the Afghan government told local media "that the meeting is aimed at brokering talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban". Russia invited 12 countries and the Taliban, but the United States and the US-backed Afghan government have stayed

away from the peace talks.

Representatives from Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are expected to attend, officials said.

Diplomatic engagement between the Taliban and the US gained momentum last month after the US special envoy for peace in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, met Taliban leaders in Qatar.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Criticized In European Parliament



Trump and his approach towards China and Pakistan.

He opined that "Pakistan has burnt its bridges with the United States and China is now one of its last options for salvage."

Highlighting the current global balance of power, Dr Stott elaborated that the relationship Washington maintains with Islamabad is determined by the relation it maintains with Beijing, meaning that the US sees Pakistan through the prism of its connection with China.

Dr Matthew McCartney, Director of the South Asia Program, approached the topic of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor from an economic perspective.

He explained how China and Pakistan have extensive historical connections and that the two countries' relations go back very far while arguing that the development of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is the natural course of action for the two countries and in essence is a connotation of projects that had been previously planned.

"The financing of infrastructure by China is more opportunistic for Pakistan since the money from the IMF or the United States would have more stringent conditions and regulations," he

claimed.

According to his findings, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is small in terms of proportions by historical standards and most likely will not make a large impact as may have been advertised. He further exhibited how infrastructure usually diminishes the disparity of prices of goods, yet since in Pakistan there already exists a low disparity, transportation and infrastructure are not the aspects which would drive prices in the country.

Dr McCartney stated that China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will have little impact on the prosperity of the country and could prove to be negative for Pakistan.

Dr Dorothea Vandamme, Research Associate at the University of Louvain, deliberated upon the role of the Pakistani Military Establishment in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

She explained, "The military establishment in Pakistan has vouched for a more influential and dominant role in the construction of the CPEC and the building of the CPEC has only further reinforced the role of the powerful Army".

According to her, this has been

displayed via the safeguarding of the CPEC project by armed personnel, providing security for Chinese workers and army personnel and thereby trying to ensure the stability and continuity of the project.

According to her data, there have been 15,000 troops dedicated to this division, a number which is expected to rise to 25,000, while China remains Pakistan's largest supplier of arms and continuously keep displaying the pattern of being more inclined towards negotiating with the Pakistani Military rather than with the civil government of Pakistan.

Mr Fernando Burges, Programme Manager at the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), provided his perspective on the negative repercussion stemming from the construction of the CPEC, which goes through Gilgit Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

While arguing that in this backdrop, the CPEC is illegal, Burges said that the people of Gilgit Baltistan have been stripped away of their natural resources of their land and forced to accept the CPEC project without any compensation in return.

BRUSSELS (BELGIUM): The Members of European Parliament and scholars have strongly criticised the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) while discussing the interrelated legal, geo-strategic, economic and environmental impacts at the European Parliament in Brussels on Tuesday.

They were speaking at a seminar "CPEC - East India Company Mark II?" which was organised by the European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS) under the aegis of Jonathan Bullock, the Member of European Parliament.

Junaid Qureshi, Director of EFSAS chaired the seminar. Geoffrey van Orden, Members of the European Parliament, analysed whether the building of the multi-billion Economic

Corridor throughout Pakistan had parallels with the East India Company and argued that acquiring control of trade, inevitably translates into governmental influence, which is very well the case with China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

He further said the current China-Pak stalemate according to which, if the investments on behalf of China towards Pakistan are of such colossal magnitude and the obligations of Pakistan towards China are so unbearably high, Pakistan might find itself in a situation where the only possible solution for overcoming this issue is through its transfer of power, independence and sovereignty to Beijing.

Dr Paul Stott, Lecturer at the University of Leicester, focused on the evolution of the United States under President Donald

Was Imran's visit to China a failure? Yes. Here's why

As Prime Minister Imran Khan returns from his trip to China, one thing is becoming glaringly clear: the Pakistani state is completely clueless regarding the larger objectives of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

To say that the prime minister's trip was successful would be a flat out lie at this stage. What happened in Beijing is a learning moment for the government of Pakistan that

I fear will be forgotten.

The purpose of this article is not to simply point out the ineptness of our government but to analyse exactly what happened, what the problems are, the harsh realities and then detailing what needs to be done to address them.

Since it took office, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) has repeated that it will try to renegotiate existing China-



Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) contracts, as well as its terms and conditions.

It has also declared that it will demand that China realign CPEC to the government's own goals and agenda. These claims have been popular with the educated support base of the PTI and even seemingly sensible people have bought into it.

Mere tributary

But the problem with this is that, first and foremost, those in power fundamentally do not understand the conceptual framework of BRI, of which CPEC is a small portion.

BRI spans about 60 countries over multiple continents and covers about 70 per cent of the world's population in its design. CPEC is a mere tributary within that large network. BRI consists of three overland and three maritime routes. So, in the larger scheme of things, Pakistan is just one of 60 countries China is working with to create potential for sustaining what President Xi Jinping refers to as the Chinese Dream.

Most BRI contracts are not between governments but instead between Chinese companies and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to facilitate projects for the larger BRI initiative. Read next: Pakistan's debt policy has brought us to the brink. Another five years of the same is unsustainable. In that context, when the new government claims it will renegotiate contracts, as well as terms and conditions, it is forgetting to mention that it will have to do them with Chinese companies and SOEs, not with the Chinese government. Secondly, because CPEC is an overland project, any arbitration that happens i.e. if the government were to try to renegotiate any contract in place, they will have to refer to the BRI court in Xi'an, which falls under Chinese law. That means either the government must engage a law firm to represent it on each contract it wants to renegotiate or try to contest cases itself. Worse still is the fact that the government has practically no idea what it wants to renegotiate in the first place. That is the crux of the problem Pakistan faces: the state simply does not understand the conceptual basis of BRI or CPEC and, hence, cannot even define what it means.

What is BRI?

That raises questions no one seems to have addressed in discussions on this subject in Pakistan: what is the conceptual basis of BRI, and what is CPEC?

To understand BRI, one must go back to President Xi's speech in 2013 where he laid out the idea of Community of Shared Destiny.

That is the basis of BRI.

This means that it is a framework under which willing partners enter the fold to help create a community that shares its destiny with China's.

Therein lies what President Xi refers to as the Chinese Dream, which is essentially sustained growth for China through trade.

Thus, BRI is a framework to achieve the Chinese Dream via creating a community of countries that have tied their economic destiny to that of China. If China keeps doing well, so will everyone else in that community.

Bangladesh rescues 33 'Malaysia-bound' Rohingya from sea

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh (AFP) - Bangladesh's coast guard rescued 33 Rohingya and detained six alleged human traffickers from a fishing trawler headed for Malaysia in the Bay of Bengal, an official said on Wednesday (Nov 7). The rescued included 14 men, 10 women and nine children who had been living in refugee camps in the southeastern Bangladesh district of Cox's Bazar, according to Fayeazul Islam Mondol, coast guard commander in the southeastern coastal town of Teknaf. "We have captured six traffickers as well. All of them are Bangladeshi," he told AFP.

Some 720,000 refugees of the persecuted Myanmar minority have taken shelter in Bangladesh camps since August last year.

They fled what the UN has described as ethnic cleansing in Buddhist-majority Myanmar's western Rakhine state, and have joined some 300,000 refugees already living in camps in Cox's Bazar. People smugglers in recent years have sent tens of thousands of

Rohingya from the Bangladesh camps to Malaysia, before Bangladesh launched a crackdown in 2015 after Thai authorities discovered mass graves and boats overcrowded with thousands of migrants drifted at sea.

Mondol said the Rohingya rescued Wednesday had boarded a dilapidated fishing trawler on an uncertain "sea voyage to Malaysia". The boat was intercepted on Wednesday evening by a coast guard boat near Saint Martin's Island, the last territory of Bangladesh, situated only a few kilometres away from Myanmar's Anauk Myinhlut coastline.

One of the arrested traffickers, Abdus Shukur, 55, told AFP that the fishing trawler had been due to transfer the Rohingya to a bigger Malaysia-bound ship moored near the island in the Bay of Bengal.

"We were forced by an influential local to take these (Rohingya) people on the fishing boat. We were instructed to board them on an awaiting ship near Saint Martin's," Shukur said

Bangladesh opposition leader Zia returns to jail



DHAKA: Bangladesh authorities on Thursday sent opposition leader Khaleda Zia back to jail after a month of treatment in hospital, an official said. The move came just ahead of the official announcement of the date of a general election which the 73-year-old Zia will almost certainly be excluded from because of the prison terms she is serving. Hospital director Brig. Gen. Abdullah al Harun told

reporters Zia had been cleared to go back to Dhaka Central Jail. "Her health has been in adequately stable condition." One of her aides, Zahid Hossain, alleged however that Zia's doctors had not approved her return to jail. Zia's lawyers have previously accused the government of putting the health of the two-time former prime minister at risk by refusing her specialized care in prison. Zia was jailed for five years in

February for corruption and has since been held at the British colonial-era prison which was abandoned in 2016 but brought back into service to keep her. She was taken to hospital last month when her condition deteriorated. Her doctors say Zia cannot use her left hand because of severe arthritis. She is diabetic and also has problems with her neck and shoulder. During her time in hospital, Zia was sentenced to seven years in jail in a new graft case while an appeal court doubled the term from the original case to 10 years. Zia is now running out of time to make an appeal that could clear her to run in the election expected at the end of December. Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party has condemned the cases as politically motivated to keep her out of an election showdown with current prime minister and arch-rival Sheikh Hasina.

The making of an opioid epidemic

Jane Ballantyne was, at one time, a true believer. The British-born doctor, who trained as an anaesthetist on the NHS before her appointment to head the pain department at Harvard and its associated hospital, drank up the promise of opioid painkillers – drugs such as morphine and methadone – in the late 1990s. Ballantyne listened to the evangelists among her colleagues who painted the drugs as magic bullets against the scourge of chronic pain blighting millions of American lives. Doctors such as Russell Portenoy at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York saw how effective morphine was in easing the pain of dying cancer patients thanks to the hospice movement that came out of the UK in the 1970s. Why, the new thinking went, could the same opioids not be made to work for people grappling with the physical and mental toll of debilitating pain from arthritis, wrecked knees and bodies worn out by physically demanding jobs? As Portenoy saw it, opiates were effective painkillers through most of recorded history and it was only outdated fears about addiction that prevented the drugs still playing that role.

Opioids were languishing from the legacy of an earlier epidemic that prompted President Theodore Roosevelt to appoint the US's first opium commissioner, Dr Hamilton Wright, in 1908. Portenoy wanted to liberate them from this taint. Wright described Americans as "the greatest drug fiends in the world", and opium and morphine as a "national curse". After that the medical profession treated opioid pain relief with what Portenoy and his colleagues regarded as unwarranted fear, stigmatising a valuable medicine.

These new evangelists painted a picture of a nation awash in chronic pain that could be relieved if only the medical profession would overcome its prejudices. They constructed a web of claims they said were rooted in science to back their case, including an assertion that the risk of addiction from narcotic painkillers was "less than 1%" and that dosages could be increased without limit until the pain was overcome. But the evidence was, at best, thin and in time would not stand up to detailed scrutiny. One theory,

promoted by Dr David Haddox, was that patients genuinely experiencing pain could not become addicted to opioids because the pain neutralised the euphoria caused by the narcotic. He said that what looked to prescribing doctors like a patient hooked on the drug was "pseudo-addiction". Portenoy toured the country, describing opioids as a gift from nature and promoting access to narcotics as a moral argument. Being pain-free was a human right, he said. In 1993, he told the New York Times of a "growing literature showing that these drugs can be used for a long time, with few side-effects, and that addiction and abuse are not a problem". Long after the epidemic took hold, and the death toll rose into the hundreds of thousands in the US, Portenoy admitted that there was little basis for this claim and that he had been more interested in changing attitudes to opioids among doctors than in scientific rigour. "In essence, this was education to destigmatise and because the primary goal was to destigmatise, we often left evidence behind," he admitted years later as the scale of the epidemic unfolded.

Likewise, Haddox's theory of pseudo-addiction was based on the study of a single cancer patient. At the time, though, the new thinking was a liberation for primary care doctors frustrated at the limited help they could offer patients begging to get a few hours' sleep. Ballantyne was as enthusiastic as anyone and began teaching the gospel of pain relief at Harvard, and embracing opioids to treat her patients.

"Our message was a message of hope," she said. "We were teaching that we shouldn't withhold opiates from people suffering from chronic pain and that the risks of addiction were pretty low because that was the teaching we'd received."

But then Ballantyne began to see signs in her patients that experience wasn't matching theory. Doctors were told they could repeatedly ratchet up the dosage of narcotics and switch to a new and powerful drug, OxyContin, without endangering the patient, because the pain, in effect, cancelled out the risk of addiction. To her dismay, Ballantyne saw that many of her patients were not better off when taking the drugs and were

showing signs of dependence. Among those patients on high doses over months and years, Ballantyne heard from one after another that the more drugs they took, the worse their pain became. But if they tried to stop or cut back on the pills, their pain also worsened. They were trapped.

"You had never seen people in such agony as these people on high doses of opiates," she told me. "And we thought it's not just because of the underlying pain; it's to do with the medication." As Ballantyne listened to relatives of her patients talk about how much the drugs had changed their loved ones, her misgivings grew. Husbands spoke of wives as if a part of them were lost. Mothers complained that children had become sullen and distant, their judgment gone, their personality warped, their character altered. None of this should have been happening. Pain relief was supposed to free the patients, not imprison them. It was all very far from the promise of a magic bullet. As the evidence that opioids were not delivering as promised piled up, the Harvard specialist began to record her findings. By then, though, there were other powerful forces with a big financial stake in the wider prescribing of painkilling drugs. Pharmaceutical companies are not slow to spot an opportunity and the push for wider prescribing of opioids had not gone unnoticed by the drug-makers, including the manufacturer of OxyContin, Purdue Pharma, which rapidly came to play a central role in the epidemic. As the influence of the opioid evangelists grew, and restraints on prescribing loosened, the pharmaceutical industry moved to the fore with a push to make opioids the default treatment for pain, and to take advantage of the huge profits to be made from mass prescribing of a drug that was cheap to



produce. The American Pain Society, a body partially funded by pharmaceutical companies, was pushing the concept of pain as the "fifth vital sign", alongside other measures of health such as heart rate and blood pressure. "Vital signs are taken seriously," said its president, James Campbell, in a 1996 speech to the society. "If pain were assessed with the same zeal as other vital signs are, it would have a much better chance of being treated properly. We need to train doctors and nurses to treat pain as a vital sign."

The APS wanted the practice of checking pain as a vital sign as a matter of routine adopted in American hospitals. The key was to win over the Joint Commission for Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, which certifies about 20,000 hospitals and clinics in the US. Its stamp of approval is the gateway for medical facilities to tap into the huge pot of federal money paying for healthcare for older, disabled and poor people. Hospitals are careful not to get on the wrong side of the joint commission's "best practices" or to fail its regular performance reviews.

In response to what it called "the national outcry about the widespread problem of undertreatment" – an outcry in good part generated by drug manufacturers – the commission issued new standards for pain care in 2001. Hospital administrators picked over the document to ensure they understood exactly what was required. Every patient was to be asked about their pain levels, no matter what the reason they were seeing a doctor. Hospitals adopted a system of colour-coded smiley faces, to represent

a rising scale of pain from 0-10. The commission ruled that anybody identifying as a five – a yellow neutral face described as "very distressing" – or above was to be referred for a pain consultation. The commission told hospitals they would be expected to meet the new standards for pain management at their next accreditation survey. Purdue Pharma was ready. The company offered to distribute materials to educate doctors in pain management for free. This amounted to exclusive rights to indoctrinate medical staff. A training video asserted that there is "no evidence that addiction is a significant issue when persons are given opioids for pain control", and claimed that some clinicians had "inaccurate and exaggerated concerns about addiction, tolerance and risk of death". Neither claim was true.

Some doctors questioned the value of patient self-assessment, but the commission's regulations soon came to be viewed as a rigid standard. In time, pain as the fifth vital sign worked its way into hospital culture. New generations of nurses, steeped in the opioid orthodoxy, sometimes came to see pain as more important than other health indicators. Dr Roger Chou, a pain specialist at Oregon Health and Science University who has made long-term studies of the effectiveness of opioid painkillers and helped shape the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's policy on the epidemic, said the focus on pain caused patients to give it greater weight than made sense. "When you start asking people: 'How much pain are you having?' every time they come into the hospital, then people start thinking: 'Well, maybe I shouldn't be having this little ache I've been having. Maybe there's something wrong.' You're medicalising what's a normal part of life," he said. One consequence was that people with relatively minor pain were increasingly directed toward medicinal treatment while consideration of safer or more effective alternatives, such as physiotherapy, were marginalised. Another, said Chou, was the increased expectation that pain can be eliminated.



Does Goddess Kali Really Demand Human Sacrifice to Slay Demons?

Bali, or sacrifice, is central to the worship of goddess Kali. From goats and roosters to sugarcane and pumpkin, a variety of eatables are offered as bali to the goddess on Kali Puja, which falls on the new moon day of the Hindu-calendar month of Kartik. Tuesday, 6 November, happens to be that day, this year.

The Yajna Paribhasa Sutras for instance, clearly identify “vegetal oblations” and “animal oblations” including blood, as two types of offerings for the goddess.

But does Kali also demand the blood of humans? Many of our ancestors thought so, and human sacrifice was widely prevalent in many parts of the country. Human Sacrifice: Widely Prevalent But Under-Reported Several famous temples have hoary histories of nara-bali or human sacrifice behind them. In some places, like the Kamakhya temple in Assam, human sacrifice continued well into the 19th century, and there are intermittent demands to reinstate the practice every now and then. Human sacrifice was also part of ritual worship in several cults focused on the practice of Tantra. In fact, bali continues to be prescribed by several self-styled tantriks today as a means to

appease the goddess, overturn bad fortune, or bring in good fortune. Activists stress that this number is a gross under-representation of the actual number of cases. Hamid Dabholkar, part of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (Committee for the Eradication of Superstitious Beliefs Maharashtra, or MANS), for instance, says that while NCRB has recorded only two human sacrifice cases in Maharashtra during the period in question, MANS’ data shows there were at least seven such cases. In fact, Dabholkar was one of the authors of a bill aimed at banning and penalising human sacrifice, black magic and other superstitious practices. The Maharashtra Assembly adopted this bill, after suitably modifying it, in 2013, thus becoming the first state in the country to have such an anti-superstition law.

Although cases of human sacrifice are common in Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh—evidenced in reports in vernacular newspapers — there is no law similar to that in Maharashtra in these states. Manas Halder, a practitioner of Tantra who lives in Kolkata, says human sacrifice is prevalent in parts of West Bengal

too. “There are many frauds who call themselves tantriks and prescribe human sacrifice as the cure to all ills,” Halder tells The Quint. “But such activities are carried out in extreme secrecy.”

A Distortion of Tantra
Scholars on Hindu goddesses, their cults and practices stress that deities like Kali are much like humans who worship them. Like the latter, they could be demonic: these goddesses could fly into a rage, be unreasonable, vengeful, and egotistic, in turn affecting the well-being of their devotees. Kinsley also claims in his book that, villagers help Kali in this struggle by offering sacrifices, including that of animal blood, so as to “invigorate her in contest with demons”.

Often, especially in Tantrik practices, animal blood is interpreted as human blood, and human sacrifice is seen as a necessary part of worship, meant to empower the goddess in her fight with her demons. Some Tantrik texts even provide scriptural grounding for such practices. “Kalika-purana, a Tantric text of from the 12th century, has an entire chapter on the procedure of human sacrifice, and it states that the sacrifice of a man would keep the goddess



Kali pleased for a thousand years,” Abraham Eraly tells us in *The First Spring: The Golden Age of India*.

Both the Sacred & Profane Are Within Us

But in fact, Tantra has nothing to do with human sacrifice, say religious studies scholars. Deepak Sarma, professor of religious studies at Case Western Reserve University, says contemporary tantriks who perpetrate human sacrifices, are “antinomian elements” who have misinterpreted the tantric tradition. Halder, who teaches in a law college in Kolkata and has

been learning Tantra for the past several years from a guru, agrees. “Tantra sadhana (path of self-realisation) involves going beyond the sacred / profane binary,” he says. “We do this not by turning away from all that is considered dirty and morbid, like faeces, urine and dead bodies, but by eating them, and thus acknowledging that the sacred and profane reside within us.”

“But nowhere, at any level of sadhana, is human sacrifice part of Tantra,” stresses Halder. “Those who advocate and prescribe it are clearly misled and misinformed!”

How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port

HAMBANTOTA, Sri Lanka — Every time Sri Lanka’s president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, turned to his Chinese allies for loans and assistance with an ambitious port project, the answer was yes.

Yes, though feasibility studies said the port wouldn’t work. Yes, though other frequent lenders like India had refused. Yes, though Sri Lanka’s debt was ballooning rapidly under Mr. Rajapaksa.

Over years of construction and renegotiation with China Harbor Engineering Company, one of Beijing’s largest state-owned enterprises, the Hambantota Port Development Project distinguished itself mostly by failing, as predicted. With tens of thousands of ships passing by along one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes, the port drew only 34 ships in 2012.

And then the port became China’s.

Mr. Rajapaksa was voted out of office in 2015, but Sri Lanka’s new government struggled to make payments on the debt he had taken on. Under heavy pressure and after months of negotiations with the Chinese, the government handed over the port and 15,000 acres of land around it for 99 years in December. The case is one of



the most vivid examples of China’s ambitious use of loans and aid to gain influence around the world — and of its willingness to play hardball to collect.

The debt deal also intensified some of the harshest accusations about President Xi Jinping’s signature Belt and Road Initiative: that the global investment and lending program amounts to a debt trap for vulnerable countries around the world, fueling corruption and autocratic behavior in struggling democracies.

Months of interviews with Sri Lankan, Indian, Chinese and Western officials and analysis of

documents and agreements stemming from the port project present a stark illustration of how China and the companies under its control ensured their interests in a small country hungry for financing. • During the 2015 Sri Lankan elections, large payments from the Chinese port construction fund flowed directly to campaign aides and activities for Mr. Rajapaksa, who had agreed to Chinese terms at every turn and was seen as an important ally in China’s efforts to tilt influence away from India in South Asia. The payments were confirmed by documents and cash checks detailed in a government investigation seen by

The New York Times.

• Though Chinese officials and analysts have insisted that China’s interest in the Hambantota port is purely commercial, Sri Lankan officials said that from the start, the intelligence and strategic possibilities of the port’s location were part of the negotiations.

• Initially moderate terms for lending on the port project became more onerous as Sri Lankan officials asked to renegotiate the timeline and add more financing. And as Sri Lankan officials became desperate to get the debt off their books in recent years, the Chinese demands centered on handing over equity in the port rather than allowing any easing of terms. Though the deal erased roughly \$1 billion in debt for the port project, Sri Lanka is now in more debt to China than ever, as other loans have continued and rates remain much higher than from other international lenders. Mr. Rajapaksa and his aides did not respond to multiple requests for comment, made over several months, for this article. Officials for China Harbor also would not comment. Estimates by the Sri Lankan Finance Ministry paint a

bleak picture: This year, the government is expected to generate \$14.8 billion in revenue, but its scheduled debt repayments, to an array of lenders around the world, come to \$12.3 billion.

“John Adams said infamously that a way to subjugate a country is through either the sword or debt. China has chosen the latter,” said Brahma Chellaney, an analyst who often advises the Indian government and is affiliated with the Center for Policy Research, a think tank in New Delhi.

Indian officials, in particular, fear that Sri Lanka is struggling so much that the Chinese government may be able to dangle debt relief in exchange for its military’s use of assets like the Hambantota port — though the final lease agreement forbids military activity there without Sri Lanka’s invitation. “The only way to justify the investment in Hambantota is from a national security standpoint — that they will bring the People’s Liberation Army in,” said Shivshankar Menon, who served as India’s foreign secretary and then its national security adviser as the Hambantota port was being built.

Union finance minister Arun Jaitley says Mastercard, Visa losing out to UPI, RuPay in India

(Insider Bureau) Union finance minister Arun Jaitley, Mastercard, Visa Union finance minister Arun Jaitley said on Thursday that Mastercard and Visa were losing market share to domestic payments networks. (REUTERS) Union finance minister said on Thursday that Mastercard and Visa were losing market share to domestic payments networks, months after Mastercard complained to the US government that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was using nationalism to promote a local rival. Finance minister Arun Jaitley spoke about the surging growth of RuPay and Unified Payment Interface (UPI), which allows swift inter-bank fund transfers, on the second anniversary of Modi's shock decision to replace high-value bank notes in a bid to flush out untaxed wealth. Modi has said when Indians use RuPay they were serving the country as its transaction fees stay within India and could help build roads, schools and hospitals, an endorsement that has worried Purchase, New York-based Mastercard, which is the world's second-largest payments processor. "Today Visa and Mastercard are losing market share in India to indigenously developed payment

system of UPI and RUPAY Card, whose share have reached 65 percent of the payments done through debit and credit cards," Jaitley said in a Facebook post about the various results of the note scrapping exercise, known as demonetisation. Visa declined to comment. Mastercard did not respond to an email seeking comment. RuPay process payments between banks and merchants for purchases made with credit or debit cards, while UPI instantly transfers funds linked to mobile phones. Social media backlash Jaitley was referring to the volume of transactions, not the value. Though RuPay, owned by many Indian and foreign banks, accounts for more than half of India's 1 billion debit and credit cards, industry sources say Visa and Mastercard still process the vast majority of the value of payments transactions in the country. Indian payments transactions were worth \$51 billion in August, according to central bank data. Jaitley said RuPay's total transactions had leapt to 84.3 billion rupees (\$1.16 billion) as of September, from 11 billion rupees before demonetisation. Total transactions done using UPI had

jumped to 598 billion rupees (\$8.26 billion) from 500 million rupees in October 2016, around the time it was launched. Reuters reported last week that Mastercard complained to the Office of the United States Trade Representative on June 21 that Modi "associated the use of RuPay cards with nationalism, claiming it serves as 'kind of national service'." The Mastercard note said that while Modi's digital payments push was "commendable", the Indian government had adopted "a series of protectionist measures" to the detriment of global companies. The story sparked a backlash on social media against Mastercard in India, one of the world's biggest payments growth markets. Several people said on Twitter they had asked their banks to replace their Mastercard with RuPay, with some using the hashtag #BoycottMastercard to voice their concerns. Ashwani Mahajan, who heads an economic group, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, which is linked to the ideological parent of Modi's party, said on Thursday that companies such as Mastercard should be "competing with RuPay, not complaining to the U.S. government".



subscribers to come from India



Netflix is betting big on India for its global expansion. The company aims to add about 100 million subscribers from India alone as it aims to tap the Asian market with original content and affordable subscription rates. Netflix has over 50 million users in the US and roughly 137 million subscribers globally. "If you think about the opportunity, there's about 450 million internet users in India and about half of them are watching video on YouTube and services like that, which makes for a very interesting, addressable market," said Netflix's chief content officer Ted Sarandos told CNBC on Thursday. The company, however, faces a strong competition from the likes of Amazon which has also big plans for India. Amazon already offers Prime Video and Prime Music services along with a wide range of Alexa-powered Echo devices. The hardware catalogue includes Fire TV stick that supports popular streaming applications like Sony Liv and even Netflix. Netflix is also competing with the local players like Hotstar and AltBalaji which have already

gained popularity in the budding online streaming space. The success of these players including Amazon is mainly driven by affordable subscription plans and cross-platform licensing deals. This has forced Netflix to contemplate new pricing models for India. Sarandos said that Netflix is also focusing on bringing in more original content. The company on Thursday announced plans to launch 17 more original productions in Asia including Thai and Chinese language shows. ALSO?READ: At half a million subscribers, Netflix still a 'premium' service in India Hotstar led the Indian OTT video content market in 2017 (Counterpoint) According to a recent PricewaterhouseCoopers report, revenue from OTT platforms YouTube, Netflix and others had crossed Rs 20 billion in 2017. In the next couple of years, the revenues are expected to more than double with India being one of the top 10 markets for OTT services. ALSO?READ: Netflix and Amazon leave little room for streaming video latecomers

India plans to export two million tonnes of sugar to China from next year, says government

India is the largest producer of sugar in the world with 32 million tonnes production in 2018.



(Insider Bureau) India plans to export two million tonnes of raw sugar to China from next year, the trade ministry said on Thursday,

as part of efforts to trim bulging stocks of the sweetener and bridge a widening trade deficit. Producers' body Indian Sugar

Mills Association and China's state trader COFCO have already signed an initial deal for 15,000 tonnes of sugar, the ministry said in a statement. Last month, the ministry said India was keen to sell more rice and sugar to China to help cut the widening trade deficit. India's export to China in 2017-18 amounted to \$ 33 billion, while imports stood at \$ 76.2 billion. India is the largest producer of sugar in the world with 32 million tonnes production in 2018. It produces sugar of all three grades- raw, refined and white. "Indian sugar is also of a high quality and is Dextran free because of the minimum time taken from cut to crush. India is in a position to become a regular and dependable exporter of high quality sugar in significant volumes to China," the ministry added.

These are the best ways to cut down on sugar during the festive season

There are several options available in the market today - sugar free, gluten free, organic, dry fruit and more. You can pick up these desserts which are based on natural sweeteners like stevia or use stevia to make your favourite desserts at home - it gives your desserts a 100% sweetness without the calories.

Just because something is low fat, doesn't mean that it is low calorie. A sweet is a sweet and should be treated as such, unless it is sweetened with healthier alternative sweeteners. (Shutterstock)

High calorie food in the festive season may be unavoidable, but you can outsmart the temptation by indulging your sweet tooth with a different and healthier form of sugar, suggest experts.

Celebrity nutritionist Pooja Makhija gives some shortcuts:

Sugar, not fat: Not all sweets are born equal. Some, like rasgullah, are high on sugar while others like gulab jamun are high in sugar and fat. While it's best to control sweets of all kinds, if you must, indulge in only-sweet-based desserts like dark chocolate, plain sandesh, mishti doi, rasgullah, jellies and custards to reduce the impact on your health post season. There are several options available in

the market today - sugar free, gluten free, organic, dry fruit and more. You can pick up these desserts which are based on natural sweeteners like stevia or use stevia to make your favourite desserts at home - it gives your desserts a 100% sweetness without the calories.

Low fat does not mean low calorie: Just because something is low fat, doesn't mean that it is low calorie. A sweet is a sweet and should be treated as such, unless it is sweetened with healthier alternative sweeteners.

Dry fruit bears fruit: If you have the option, choose the offered dry fruit instead - although try and give cashews a miss entirely if you can. Moderate amounts of dry fruit (say, a small handful a day) contains loads of good fats and are good for you.

Exercise: Step up the workouts this season, because your body will thank you for it in the New Year. Fight the instinct to stay curled up in the comfort of your inertia.

Hydrate: With water, that is. And lots of it (about 2-3 litre per day). Your hunger and thirst centres are set very close together and sometimes we eat because we're thirsty. And while we're here, don't forget that alcohol adds tons of



liquid calories, so a glass of wine once or twice a week is really the healthiest way to drink your calories.

If drinking water straight up gets a bit boring, you could alternatively make some infused water by adding some fruit to it like strawberry or orange with a pinch of a natural sugar substitute.

Get your eight hours of sleep: Best for health and weight management, don't underestimate the power of a good sleep. It has proven benefits for weight loss and health management. In other words, you can snooze to lose.

Govindrajan, Head, Research and Development, Sugar-Free, says

controlling your own environment is vital.

"If you're having guests over, you can do healthy versions of your favourite desserts. Use dates to sweeten your sweets instead of sugar or use a natural sugar substitutes," he says.

Govindrajan suggests the following ways of eating healthy:

Try loading them with a lot of dry and natural fruits. Roast your dish rather than deep frying it. Use natural sweeteners. Also, you don't have to eat everything you've been gifted. Donate, and sweeten someone else's life.

How eating veggies, fish can keep your heart healthy, lower heart disease risk

Your diet should be high in fresh vegetables, fish, and seafood in order to keep your heart at its healthiest.

Heart disease, Blood Pressure, Heart failure

Diets rich in fresh veggies are full of a compound called trimethylamine N-oxide, which has been proven to help reduce heart disease risk. (Shutterstock)

If you are suffering from high blood pressure, consuming fish, seafood and a primarily vegetarian diet may help reduce hypertension-related heart disease symptoms, a study suggests.

Intake of fish, seafood and vegetarian food increases levels of a compound called trimethylamine N-oxide (TMAO), known to boost heart health, said researchers from the Medical University of Warsaw in Poland. The study showed that low-dose treatment with TMAO reduced heart thickening (cardiac fibrosis) and



markers of heart failure in an animal model of hypertension. "Our study provides new evidence for a potential beneficial effect of a moderate increase in plasma TMAO on pressure-overloaded heart," the researchers said.

For the study, published in the American Journal of Circulatory Physiology,

researchers analysed the effect of TMAO on rats, which have a genetic tendency to develop high blood pressure. One group of hypertensive rats were given low-dose TMAO supplements in their drinking water, and another group received plain water. They were given the TMAO therapy for either 12 weeks or 56 weeks and were assessed for heart and kidney damage as

well as high blood pressure. It seems that a fish-rich and vegetarian diet, is associated with a significantly higher plasma TMAO (trimethylamine N-oxide) than red meat-and egg-rich diets, considered to increase the cardiovascular risk. (Shutterstock)

The results showed that TMAO treatment did not affect the development of high blood pressure in any of

the spontaneously hypertensive rats. However, condition of the animals given the compound was better than expected, even after more than a year of low-dose TMAO treatment. In addition, four- to five-fold increase in plasma TMAO does not exert negative effects on the circulatory system. This is in contrast to the previous research that showed TMAO blood plasma levels -- and heart disease risk -- rise after the consumption of red meat and eggs, the researchers said.

"It seems that a fish-rich and vegetarian diet, is associated with a significantly higher plasma TMAO than red meat-and egg-rich diets, considered to increase the cardiovascular risk," the researchers noted.

"However, further study is needed to assess the effect of TMAO and TMA on the circulatory system."

Kareena Kapoor, Shilpa Shetty, Alia Bhatt: 10 most stunning Diwali 2018 looks in pics

Kareena Kapoor Khan and Alia Bhatt to Priyanka Chopra and Shilpa Shetty Kundra, we combed through hundreds of celebrity photos to bring you some of our favourite Diwali 2018 looks.

FASHION AND TRENDS

Updated: Nov 08, 2018 17:38 IST

Sanya Panwar

Sanya Panwar

Hindustan Times

Kareena Kapoor, Diwali, Shilpa Shetty

Thanks to Kareena Kapoor Khan, Alia Bhatt and others, we saw a lot of festive looks in black



this Diwali. (Instagram)

We loved looking at videos and photos of celebrities from all the Diwali get-togethers and dinners in Mumbai. The jaw-dropping decor at Shah Rukh Khan's Diwali party and the oh-so-special moments between celebrity couples -- such as, Malaika Arora-Arjun Kapoor, Anushka Sharma-Virat Kohli, among others -- made us swoon; but nothing took our breath away quite like the stunning festive celebrity looks.

There were stars, like, actor

Kareena Kapoor Khan, who went the regal route in opulent lehengas, and others, like, actor Priyanka Chopra, who kept things simple and elegant in standout anarkalis. Actor Shilpa Shetty Kundra wowed as always in a perfect-for-a-wedding metallic saree, while Alia Bhatt won our hearts in a mesmerising, statement black lehenga choli. Meanwhile, Miss World Manushi Chhillar and actor Kriti Sanon chose refreshing greens, and Sonam Kapoor's cousin, Shanaya Kapoor, glittered in gold from head to toe.



Pretty Little Thing promotes body positivity by showing models of two sizes, gets praised

Pretty Little Thing isn't the first brand to promote body positivity (other names include ASOS, Madewell and more), its #EveryBODYinPLT campaign is gaining popularity because of its sensitivity and inclusivity.

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11:38 IST

Saumya Sharma

Saumya Sharma

Hindustan Times, Delhi

Body positive, body positive power, body positive yoga
Pretty Little Thing's latest campaign features two models of different sizes standing alongside one another, wearing the same silver bodycon dress. (Pretty Little Thing/Twitter)

British fashion company Pretty Little Thing is gaining accolades from all over for their new and rather progressive campaign called #EveryBODYinPLT. This is a big step forward for a fashion brand as it shows inclusivity and spreads the important message of body positivity. The picture that's gone viral features



two models of different sizes standing alongside one another, wearing the same silver bodycon dress.

The dress belongs to the brand's latest partywear collection, modelled by Hailey Baldwin on the site.

Twitter saw a wave of support for the brand's promotion of body positivity. The fashion industry in recent years has become a tad more inclusive of different body types.

While Pretty Little Thing isn't the first brand to promote body positivity (other names include ASOS, Madewell and more), the campaign is gaining popularity because of its sensitivity while showcasing the bodycon dress. The descriptor only states the size the petite model is wearing and refrains from mentioning the size the plus-size model is wearing.

The Nutcracker movie review

Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle to globally release on Netflix on December 7. Watch new trailer

Andy Serkis' Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle will release on Netflix and select theatres on December 7. The film features voices of Benedict Cumberbatch, Christian Bale, Cate Blanchett and more. HOLLYWOOD Updated: Nov 08, 2018 20:38 IST

Press Trust of India

Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle, Mowgli, Netflix

Andy Serkis' Mowgli will release on Netflix.

Streaming giant Netflix will release Andy Serkis' Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle on the platform on December 7 worldwide. The CGI live-action film, featuring Rohan Chand as the titular beloved man cub, is based on The Jungle Book

stories of Rudyard Kipling.

The film will have exclusive limited theatrical engagements, starting November 29 in Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and London, Netflix said in a statement.

Mowgli will have an expanded theatrical release in additional theatres in the US and UK.

The film voice stars Christian Bale as panther Bagheera, Cate Blanchett as snake Kaa, Benedict Cumberbatch as tiger Shere Khan, Freida Pinto as village woman Messua, Tom Hollander as hyena Tabaqui, Peter Mullan as alpha wolf Akela, Naomie Harris as wolf mother Raksha, and Matthew Rhys as hunter John Lockwood.



Thugs Of Hindostan review

Aamir Khan, Amitabh Bachchan's film inspires shrugs of Hindustan. 1 star

Thugs Of Hindostan review: Aamir Khan and Amitabh Bachchan's film is Pirates Of The Caribbean without pirates or Caribbean. It is a film so dull and unoriginal that it can only inspire the shrugs of Hindustan. Full of slow-motions sequences, director Vijay Krishna Acharya amps up the frames per second to disguise the lack of storytelling craft. Aamir's character in the film is one of his most unremarkable characters, a rogue free of charisma or cleverness, with barely a line worth remembering.

BOLLYWOOD Updated: Nov 09, 2018 16:13 IST

Raja Sen

Raja Sen

Hindustan Times

Thugs Of Hindostan, Aamir Khan, Amitabh Bachchan
Thugs Of Hindostan review: Aamir Khan's film is feeble, formulaic and entirely forgettable.

Thugs of Hindostan

Director - Vijay Krishna Acharya

Cast - Aamir Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Katrina Kaif, Fatima Sana Shaikh

Rating - 1/5

It takes a lot to make pirates boring. Without a

doubt, Thugs Of Hindostan is a whole lot of movie - the biggest budget Yash Raj production of all time, the first film to star both Amitabh Bachchan and Aamir Khan — and yet this giant period epic turns out to be feeble, formulaic and entirely forgettable. Directed by Dhoom 3's Vijay Krishna Acharya, here is a film so dull and unoriginal that it can only inspire the shrugs of Hindustan.

This is Pirates Of The Caribbean without a pirate or Caribbean, a knockoff to suit prejudiced audiences like cricketer Virat Kohli who prefer to exclusively admire the locally made. In this 1810-set adventure, Aamir borrows the Jack Sparrow eyeliner, while Amitabh is literally given the bird, his entrances on screen preceded by a noisy hawk. Bachchan plays a rebel, a freedom fighter rallying troops against the colonisers, while Khan is a two-faced rogue on the Company payroll sent to infiltrate Bachchan's squad and bring him down. The plot is so childish I fear the Yash Raj writing room may be an illegal sweatshop. This film,



alongside Ashutosh Gowariker's painful Mohenjo Daro, may - alarmingly enough - make a strong case for leaving historical Hindi hysterics to Sanjay Leela Bhansali, who understands scale and pageantry. Acharya shoots far too much action in slow-motion, from swordsmen swinging on conveniently placed vines to collapsing mothers, amping up the frames per second to disguise the lack of storytelling craft. Nearly three hours long, Thugs Of Hindostan is a film hardly ever larger, but certainly slower than life. A word, now, about Jack Sparrow. Think what you will of Johnny Depp today — and it is true nobody remembers the last Pirates installment — but when he brought Sparrow alive in 2003, it was an audaciously original act. It rightly earned the actor an Oscar nomination (one he should have won) for the way he created a wholly unprecedented protagonist. That fey swagger, that air of constant bewilderment... We never saw a kohl-eyed, rum-fetishising hero like Captain Jack. Khan, who told the press he wants people to forget Sparrow after seeing his character, Firangi, may have taken his own advice to heart too soon and forgotten the majesty of Depp. Firangi is one of Khan's most unremarkable characters, a rogue free of charisma or cleverness, with barely a line worth remembering. This is principally why Thugs Of Hindostan sinks. It prioritises size

over smarts, set-pieces over the script. The size, too, is unimpressive, with cardboard-y visual effects, poor rope-physics, haphazard continuity and decks of ships that look too small, but all that could have been forgiven - a \$41 million budget wouldn't go far in Hollywood - if the film gave us characters worth caring about or laughing with. Set-pieces matter, but adventure films become special because of the lines we end up quoting and the protagonists we cheer. Instead we have Khan-in-kajal, alongside a gruff and grizzly Bachchan, weighed down by armour and cliché, crying himself hoarse about azaadi. The girls have it worse. Fatima Sana Shaikh, who was so good in Dangal, plays a princess who doesn't have a line for the first hour, but is a fierce combatant - just, mind you, not fierce enough. She's a warrior who repeatedly needs to be rescued, but hey, at least she makes excellent sandcastles. Shaikh doesn't bring much to the part, and when she does speak, she does it flatly

enough to justify her lack of lines. Also, there is an upside-down stick figure tattooed on her chin, like someone played Hangman on her face while she was sleeping. In the other corner, dancing whenever you look, is Katrina Kaif. She's a sassy girl who says the word 'bekhauf' correctly, and makes an unsubtle dirty joke - she says it twice, in case the audience had successfully ignored it - and while she slaps Khan and seems in charge of their dynamic, there are frequent lapses. From time to time, she looks suddenly and improbably aroused, like Khan'd been momentarily swapped out for a bottle of mango juice. Kaif, who presumably did crunches instead of acting classes in preparation for her role, shakes her abs with gusto, but the songs are odd. I can't quite get over a scene where Sheikh, without warning, breaks into a sad song that goes "Baba, Baa-baa," to which Kaif reacts by pirouetting aggressively in sequined silver shorts, as if channelling a black sheep.

Robin Wright to step back from acting now that House of Cards is over

House of Cards actor Robin Wright, who effectively took over as the show's lead after Kevin Spacey was fired, looks back on her six years working on the series, and her plans for the future.

TV Updated: Nov 08, 2018 17:04 IST

Rohan Naahar
Rohan Naahar

Hindustan Times,
Singapore

Robin Wright, Netflix, House of Cards

Robin Wright says she will focus on directing after House of Cards. (AFP)

Robin Wright remembers turning down director David Fincher when he first pitched House of Cards to her. "I wanted to do movies," she said. But then Fincher, ever the visionary, said the words that made her change her mind. "Don't you want to be a part of a revolution?"

The actor spent the next six years of her life working on the show, and her character, Claire Underwood, has become one of the most popular she has played. She said that she is 'shocked at how many people watch House

of Cards.'

Robin Wright in conversation with Netflix CCO Ted Sarandos. (Netflix)

Wright was speaking at event in Singapore. House of Cards, the streaming service's first original series, launched in 2013 and concluded its sixth and final season on November 9. In the five years since House of Cards premiered - Netflix chief content officer Ted Sarandos remembers being concerned that 'it wouldn't appeal to an audience outside DC' - there have been hundreds of new originals produced for online exclusive viewing, with other streaming services such as Amazon Prime Video also launching their own original content.

"Fincher educated me," Wright said about her preconceptions. She had other ideas about television and film. TV now isn't what it used to be in the '80s, Wright said. There was a difference, and films were always given more respect. But House of Cards, she said, not only



'changed television, it revolutionised how TV is viewed.'

Even though Fincher - the Academy Award nominated director behind films such as Se7evn, Fight Club and The Social Network - didn't direct an episode of the show after the first two (which he won a historical Emmy for), the cast and crew still goes to great lengths to preserve his vision. "David Fincher created a certain style," Wright said. "We couldn't use certain lenses, we couldn't use steadicams and certain colours. We couldn't use a certain

shade of the colour red." In this file photo taken on February 13, 2014, Executive producer/actor Kevin Spacey (L) and actress Robin Wright arrive at the special screening of Netflix's "House of Cards" Season 2 at the Directors Guild Of America in Los Angeles, California. (AFP)

House of Cards became the first 'television show' to win an Emmy that was never aired on TV. Wright has become one of the world's highest paid TV actors off it. She's won a Golden Globe for her performance as Claire, the wife of the

Machiavellian Frank Underwood, played by Kevin Spacey in the show. Spacey was fired after sexual misconduct allegations were made against him during the #MeToo movement that spread across Hollywood late 2017.

It's easy to imagine Spacey sitting alongside Wright just a year ago, reflecting on the show that was as important for his career as it has been for her's. But in November, 2017, with two episodes of the final season in the can and an explosive finale being written, Netflix announced that they

would be terminating the services of Spacey; the future of their flagship show was uncertain.

This image released by Netflix shows Robin Wright in a scene from the final season of House Of Cards. (AP)

Wright was instrumental in getting season six made. "I feel proud of our team for creating one of the most conniving couples on television, and proud of the crew and the fans," she said, emphasising how important it was to her for the show to end on its own terms.

She said that the House of Cards' fate has always been uncertain. Two versions of the every season finale were written because they didn't know if they'd be renewed. But Claire's arc was always mapped out. "I wont miss her clothes and her shoes," she said, but she'll miss her House of Cards family. It was like making a 'six-year-long movie'. She said that she intends on taking a step back from acting now and plans on switching focus on directing films.

2 out of 3 people who watched Sacred Games were outside of India: Netflix on spreading its content



Netflix is going to reveal nine new projects in India on Friday at its See What's Next Asia event in Singapore.

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HT Correspondent

HT Correspondent Hindustan Times
Sacred Games, Netflix, Netflix Shows

Saif Ali Khan will return as Sartaj Singh in Sacred Games.

Netflix has revealed that its first Indian original series, Sacred Games, was watched by twice as many people outside the country. The streaming giant's vice president of product, Todd Yellin, shared the figures at Netflix's See What's Next event in Singapore. "Traditionally, you made something in Bollywood, and the only place is in India. Some people would see it but very few because the distribution wasn't there. Now, two out of three of our viewers who watched Sacred Games were outside of India, and it did really work in India. But that's what we want. We

want to spread that kinda storytelling for people who love it," he said at the event.

Netflix released Sacred Games earlier this year and plans to announce nine more programs on Friday. Sacred Games was directed by Anurag Kashyap and Vikramaditya Motwane and starred Saif Ali Khan and Nawazuddin Siddiqui in lead roles. The show was a major hit among the viewers. Sacred Games is currently in production with its second season.

India has emerged as Netflix's biggest market in Asia, according to some estimates, as has



become the case for U.S. media companies such as 21st Century Fox Inc. and Viacom Inc. Highlighting the country's importance,

Netflix's Singapore event was dubbed See What's Next Asia but more than half of the shows announced hail from India.

Sarkar box office collection day 2, Vijay starrer collects Rs 100 crores, beats Baahubali and Rajinikanth

Sarkar boxoffice collection day 2: According to trade, Vijay's film directed by AR Murugadoss has collected Rs 100 crore in two days.

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HT Correspondent Hindustan Times Sarkar, Vijay, Sarkar collections

Sarkar boxoffice collection day 2: Vijay's Sarkar touches Rs 100 crore on Day 1.

Even as All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam protests Vijay's latest offering Sarkar, the film directed by AR Murugadoss is



doing wonders at the box office. According to trade experts, the film has collected Rs 100 crore in its first two days and has broken records in several

places for actor Vijay. The gross collections on first day were reportedly Rs 47.85 crore and the film has touched Rs 100 crore on the second day. The

break up of different regions on second day is yet to be released. Also, the film has set a record on the ticket booking app Book My Show by crossing the

milestone of 1 million tickets being booked online. A statement from the company also said that the advance booking of the film has increased two times when compared to Vijay's previous outing, Mersal.

In Chennai on the first day, the film collected Rs 2.37 crore in the city and is the first film to cross Rs 2 crore opening day collection in the city. Vijay is also the actor who opened the Rs 1 crore and Rs 1.5 crore club in the city with Theri in 2016 and Mersal in 2017, respectively. The film's collection was equally impressive on the second day with Rs 2.32 crores collected at the ticket window. In Tamil Nadu, the film had reportedly collected Rs 30 crore on the first day with the rest Rs 17.85 crores being earned in other centers across the world. Actor Vijay also enjoys a loyal fan base in neighbouring state Kerala where the film has made a record-breaking opening. On the first day, the film collected Rs 6.6 crore in the region, which is even higher than Baahubali 2, which had collected Rs 5.5 crore. Vijay's Sarkar is now the highest opener in the state of Kerala for any language.

Katrina Kaif shares photos from Zero sets, shows how it takes an army to get her ready for shoot

Katrina Kaif has shared pictures from the sets of her upcoming movie with Shah Rukh Khan, Zero. See them here.

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Asian News International Katrina Kaif, Katrina Kaif Pics, Zero

Katrina Kaif on the sets of Zero with her team. (Instagram)

Aanand L Rai's Zero is one of the most anticipated movies of this year and has been creating immense buzz on social media ever since the release of the



posters and trailer of the film. Katrina Kaif plays the role of an actor named Babita Kumari who is battling alcoholism in the movie. The Phantom star posted two pictures on her Instagram story from the sets of the flick. In one of the pictures posted by her, choreographer Bosco Martis is instructing her, she has captioned it as, "Zero shoot today with these legends." Katrina Kaif shared this picture from the sets of Zero. In another candid photo, the 35-

year-old actor is seen getting ready for her shot. The Tiger Zinda Hai actor looks stunning in the recently released trailer of the film and her character looks promising. The trailer was launched in a grand event organised by the makers of the film at Ghanta Ghar in Mumbai on Shah Rukh Khan's 53rd birthday on November 2. Katrina Kaif shared this picture from the sets of Zero. The trailer received love and appreciation from B-town celebrities and their fans.

Bride-to-be Priyanka Chopra returns home to celebrate Diwali with family.

Priyanka Chopra, Priyanka Chopra Diwali, Priyanka Nick Priyanka Chopra celebrated Diwali with her mother and brother in Mumbai. (Facebook)

Actor-producer Priyanka Chopra has been partying like there's no tomorrow ever since she kick-started her pre-wedding celebrations. After a high-profile bridal shower in New York, followed by a bachelorette and a pyjama party in Amsterdam, the desi girl came home to celebrate Diwali with her family. The actor was spotted with cousin sister Parineeti Chopra upon her return.

The diva shared a few pictures from her Diwali festivities along with mother Madhu Chopra and brother Siddharth Chopra. Wishing everyone on the occasion, the 'Quantico' girl



wrote on her social media account, "Happy Diwali. So happy to be home to celebrate with my loved ones. I wish for the world to be bestowed with love, light and happiness." Priyanka Chopra celebrated Diwali with her mother and

brother in Mumbai. (Facebook) Looking lovely in a traditional yellow ensemble complete with bangles and a bindi, the former Miss World proved yet again she can rock any outfit. She was joined in by her mom in a pink embroidered sari and brother in

a simple white kurta. The family kept their Diwali celebrations an intimate affair even as the former Miss World is set to tie the knot with her musician fiancé Nick Jonas on December 2 in Jodhpur. Priyanka and Nick will get married in a grand wedding

ceremony which will also include a fun-filled sangeet ceremony. While the actor is reportedly set to perform on a few of her hit dance numbers, the groom-to-be is said to be prepping to perform a medley of his hit numbers at the event. Nick had proposed to Priyanka on her birthday in London and had shut down Tiffany to choose the perfect ring for the lady. The two then took part in a traditional roka ceremony held at her residence in Mumbai in August. While Nick's parents had flown to India for the roka, Priyanka's mom had flown to New York for her bridal shower. Parineeti recently teased Nick on Instagram asking him to pay \$5 million as a shoe-hiding fee as part of a marriage ritual.

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