

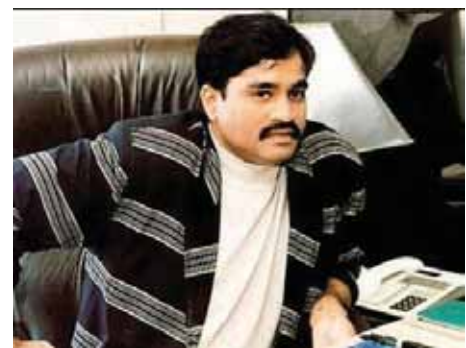


STORY ON page 23

Our Very Own Nadir Shahs

For the corrupt rich, India is hell to live but heaven to loot. They flee after the crime, seldom get dubbed anti-nationals.

Dawood keen to return to India



(News Agencies) New Delhi: A well-known criminal lawyer recently said fugitive mafia don Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar is reportedly "keen to return to India" but with certain preconditions which are not acceptable to the Indian government.

(Contd on page 23)

Tax officials raid properties linked to wealthy Gupta family

(News Agencies) New Delhi : Indian tax inspectors raided on Tuesday premises of the Gupta family at the centre of a corruption scandal involving South Africa's former president, Jacob Zuma, on suspicion they were bringing money into their native country, an official said. South Africa's anti-graft watchdog has accused the India-born Gupta brothers of using their friendship with Zuma to influence policy and amass wealth. Zuma and the Gupta brothers deny any wrongdoing.

Amrendra Kumar, a senior income tax official in Uttar Pradesh, told Reuters that the Gupta brothers were suspected of finding ways to bring "illicit money" they had earned abroad into India. "We want to look into blocking that way," Kumar said by telephone, adding that he was involved in ongoing raids.

(Contd on page 23)

Collect passport details of big borrowers in 45 days, finance ministry tells banks

(News Agencies) New Delhi : The Finance Ministry has directed state-owned banks to obtain passport details of all borrowers, who have taken loans in excess of Rs 50 crore, within 45 days with a view to preventing alleged fraudsters like Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya from fleeing the country, sources said. In case the borrower does not have a passport, the bank should obtain a certificate in the form of declaration that the person does not have the passport, sources said quoting the Finance Ministry's advisory to banks. It further said that the loan application form should be suitably modified to incorporate passport details of borrowers. Passport details will help banks to take timely action and inform the relevant authorities to prevent fraudsters from fleeing the country, sources said.

(Contd on page 23)



Trump's Singular Survival Skill

When his back is against the wall, Trump has a knack for making his problem someone else's.



STORY ON page 22

Pune tea seller sets benchmark by making Rs 12 lakh per month

(News Agencies) Pune : A tea seller in Maharashtra's Pune city has set a benchmark for his competitor by making Rs 12 lakh per month. Yewle Tea house has become one of the famous stalls in the city. Navnath Yewle, co-founder of Yewle Tea house, says he is going to make it an international brand very soon. "Unlike 'pakora' business, this tea selling business is also creating employment for Indians. This business is growing fast and I'm happy," Navnath told ANI. Currently, Yewle Tea House has got three centers in the city and every center has about 12 employees working in it.

More than 3 lakh Indians visited Australia in 2017

MUMBAI: Number of Indians travelling to Australia grew by 15.2 per cent in 2017 to 302,200 mainly driven by a focused strategy of strengthening the country's position as a preferred long haul destination. In 2016, 259,900 Indians travelled to Australia, according to data by Tourism Australia.

About 70 per cent of Indian

visitors travelled to Australia for leisure (2,11,500) in 2017. About 39,000 visitors travelled for business, 19,800 for employment, 18,100 for education and 14,100 for other purposes. Among travellers under leisure, 75,900 visitors were on holiday and 1,35,600 were visiting friends and relatives. "As a part of the strategy, a key goal was defined to

achieve 3,00,000 Indian arrivals into Australia by the end of this decade (2020), a milestone that has been achieved three years ahead of the defined target date," Tourism Australia country manager, India and Gulf, Nishant Kashikar said. Tourism Australia will continue to intensify its efforts, with an aim to be within the top five inbound markets for the

country by 2025, he added. Currently, India is the eighth largest inbound market for arrivals for Australia. Meanwhile, in mid-2017 the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection extended online lodgment of visitor visa applications to all Indian nationals, which is likely to be a strong catalyst for boosting tourist arrivals from India.

IALI Celebrates Rang Birangi Holi – the festival of colors in traditional style



(By Indu Gajwani) India Ms. Rizwana Malik, Mrs Rachna Association of Long Island (IALI) Shahdadpuri and Mrs. Ravi Kanta celebrated Holi at Cotillion Dutta. Holi is the festival of Restaurant recently. This Holi Colors, It signifies the victory of function was organized by the good over evil, the arrival of spring IALI's Women's Forum group with Spring Crops, end of winter, which is chaired by Mrs. Veena and for many a festive day to Lamba, Co-Chaired by Mrs. Lalita meet others, play and laugh, Mansukhani and Mrs. Shalini forget and forgive, and repair Pawa and Committee members broken relationships.

Dr. Urmilesh Arya Inaugurated as AIA National President



(By Indu Gajwani) 50- year old Association of Indians in America organized Inauguration ceremony for National President Dr. Urmilesh Arya on February 25th, 2018 at Auntuns by Minar in Hicksville. The AIA has plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of AIA October 20,

2018. The Committee for 2018-2019 was introduced by Elected President Dr Urmilesh Arya, Vice Presidents Dr. Naresh Bhasin (FL) Nalini Shah (NJ), Ram Khanna (NY) Dr. Sunil Mehra (NY), Treasurer Mrs. Neelam Modi (NY), Gen. Secretary Nilima Madan (NY), Members at Large,

Hansa Ashar (CA), Dr. Farita Ahmed (FL), Nishi Mallik (FL), Dr. Shobha Gupta (FL), Mr. Akshay Patel (IL), Ashish Sen (IL), Lucy Pandey (IL), Salil Mishra (IL), Santosh Pandey (IL), Dr. Suresh Gupta (MD), Ravi Mehrotra (NJ), Roopam Jain (NJ), Arish Sahani (NY), Dr. Asha Nayak

(NY), Dr. Babu Jasty (NY), Dr. Bal Gilja (NY), Dr. Deepak Nandi (NY), Dr. Himanshu Patel (NY), Indu Jaiswal (NY), Ravi Bhooplapur(NY), Dr. Sai Veeracmachani (NY), Sunil Modi (NY), Sushma Kotahwala (NY), Dr. Usha Bhansal (NY) , Kamlesh Saini (WI), Indu Gajwani (NY).

AAPI to donate funds towards Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of America Manushi Chillar Miss World 2017 to be AAPI's Brand Ambassador for Campaign Against Leukemia & Lymphoma



(By Ajay Ghosh) Chicago, IL: March 6th, 2018: "American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI), the most dynamic and ethnic organization representing more than 100,000 physicians of Indian origin, while officially launching a campaign against Leukemia and Lymphomas, is donating a large sum of money to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of America on March 10th during the annual AAPI Spring Governing Body meeting at the Freemont Marriott Silicon Valley, Fremont, CA," declared Dr. Gautam Samadder, President of AAPI.

"Continuing with supporting noble causes, AAPI, the largest ethnic

association representing the physicians of Indian origin in the USA, has taken on yet another cause to promote through its active support in educating people about the deadly disease around the world," Dr. Vinod Shah, a past president of AAPI, and a well known philanthropist, said. Dr. Shah has agreed to match the money being provided by AAPI, thus doubling the donation through AAPI at this special event.

"Manushi Chillar Miss World 2017, will be present at the ceremony, during which AAPI will hand over the check to representatives from the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of America," Dr.

Naresh Parikh, President-Elect of AAPI, said. "Manushi, hailing from a family of doctors and scientists, an aspiring gynecologist and cardiac surgeon Manushi Chillar has agreed to be the Brand Ambassador of AAPI for creating awareness about the deadly diseases, Leukemia and Lymphoma."

The beauty queen believes that being brought up in Delhi, has given her the confidence and power to fight all odds and win the competition. "I am blessed to have got this opportunity, and I want to give my best. I have decided to take a year's break from my medical studies and my college is very supportive," says Chillar.



As we complete 15 Years

“Words cannot express the monumental journey that each and every person reading this has crossed through. The South Asian Insider has completed fifteen year journey, that has brought a wave of information and has amassed everyone together in this community. Few people can claim to have been a part of a tireless effort to soar through the top of the skies of the newspaper industries and be able to remark on it, 15 years later. We believe an order of gratitude is granted to all of you. To everyone who has stayed with The South Asian Insider through our path, thank you.

If it was not for each and every one of you today who have supported our endeavours to become a reliable source of information, we would not have been able to voice our appreciation today. We as a family will continue to move forward with every article printed, with every word typed and with every voice incorporated into the publication that has stood to uphold the value of information and knowledge. Because with each idea shared, we as a community continue to move forward. And to all, thank you for sharing this achievement with all of us here today, working towards a new tomorrow.”

**-Sharanjit Singh Thind
Editor In Chief & Publisher**

Why have ties between India and Maldives plummeted to an all-time low?

As Beijing pours in millions of dollars for big ticket projects, New Delhi, once the protector of the archipelago, has been rendered a virtual non-entity

Rezaul Hasan Laskar

In 1988, when a group of mercenaries attempted to take over the Maldives, the first country that President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom turned to was India. Within hours, India mounted Operation Cactus, which is still regarded as one of the most successful military interventions by New Delhi on foreign soil, and foiled the coup.

Fast forward nearly three decades, and the autocratic regime of President Abdulla Yameen has ignored repeated nudges and even a rare warning from India not to extend a state of emergency that he imposed after a showdown with the judiciary last month. Government ministers went a step further and said all outside powers, including India, shouldn't interfere in the honeymoon islands' internal matters.

What has led to ties between India and the key Indian Ocean archipelago plummeting to an all-time low? Commentators and Maldives watchers think one of the key reasons Yameen has ignored the world community's calls to roll back the emergency is

because he strongly believes Beijing has his back, thanks to the burgeoning growth in ties and investments from China.

The latest trouble in the island nation began on February 1, when the Supreme Court quashed the conviction of former President Mohamed Nasheed and eight other opposition politicians on various charges, including terrorism. Yameen responded by imposing emergency and detaining Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed, another judge and several politicians, including Gayoom.

The three remaining judges of the Supreme Court overturned the ruling ordering the release of the nine politicians and Abdulla Yameen's regime rammed a 30-day extension of the state of emergency through the Majlis of Parliament on February 20 despite complaints from the opposition about a lack of quorum in the House.

India has been concerned about developments in the Maldives long before the current political crisis.

In February 2012, Nasheed, the Maldives' first democratically elected

president, was forced to resign by rogue police and army officers in what he said amounted to a coup. Nasheed's ouster followed protests against his order to arrest a top judge.

A year later, Nasheed sought refuge in the Indian high commission for 11 days to avoid arrest in connection with a court case. Following his conviction on terror charges in 2015, Nasheed went into self-exile the following year when he was allowed to travel to the United Kingdom for medical treatment.

Yameen, the half-brother of Gayoom who came to power in late 2013, has cracked down on the opposition and free speech while taking steps to tighten his grip on power. Among these measures was a gradual tilt towards China, which too, was keen to expand its strategic footprint in the Indian Ocean with its "string of pearls" policy.

Just six years after Beijing opened its embassy in Male in November 2011, Yameen signed the Maldives' first bilateral free trade agreement with China after the Parliament



ratified the pact during an "emergency" session that was attended by only 30 members of the 85-strong Majlis. The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party said it was "deeply concerned" over the rushed free trade agreement with China, "without any disclosure of details to the public or to the MPs".

China had already secured the Maldives' backing for its Maritime Silk Route, which aims to connect the Chinese coast with Europe via the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, during President Xi Jinping's visit to Male in the year 2014.

Beijing has also poured in millions of dollars for big ticket projects, including a bridge linking the capital and the main airport, called the "China-Maldives friendship bridge". Yameen responded by amending the Constitution in 2015 to allow

foreign ownership of land in projects with investments of more than \$1 billion for which 70 per cent of the land is reclaimed from the ocean.

The expansion of China's role has also coincided with India's GMR Infrastructure being unceremoniously thrown out of a project to develop the Male international airport in 2012. Former president Mohamed Nasheed's government signed the contract with GMR in 2011 but the deal was terminated by his successor Mohamed Waheed Hassan. At the time, the \$511 million concession agreement represented the largest foreign direct investment in the Maldives' history.

Nasheed has accused China of being involved in a "land grab" while exposing the Maldives to a debt trap through its loans for mega projects.

(Contd on page 23)

Congress needs to stop behaving like a deer caught in the headlights



The BJP seems to have internalised the advice of the great Prussian military thinker and strategist, Carl von Clausewitz: "The backbone of surprise is fusing speed with secrecy." It catches its opponents off guard in every election, however small, with Clausewitzian cunning. This explains why the Congress has been left high and dry in

Meghalaya despite emerging as the single largest party. Instead of making a spirited bid to form the government, its leaders folded up their tents and came back to Delhi while the Conrad Sangma-led National People's Party is all set to assume office with the BJP as a partner.

This habit of being always the bridesmaid, never the bride, is now becoming the signature

The Congress must form a coherent economic or social strategy, and also have the agility to form alliances failing which, it will not be in a good position for the general elections in 2019

style of the Congress. We saw it in Manipur where, with 28 seats, it was the single largest party but gave way tamely as an agile BJP stitched up a coalition before the Congress even got off the starting blocks. Again, in the Goa assembly elections, it was the single largest party with 17 seats to the BJP's 13, only to be outwitted by the latter. Here the Congress dithered over who should be the leader to form the government even as the BJP rushed past it to stake its claim.

In an era in which canny alliance-making is the key to forming governments, the Congress needs to stop

behaving like a deer caught in the headlights. The BJP manages to anticipate the winning formula with military precision. The Congress simply seems unable to cash in on its advantages, losing its grip in state after state.

It should be a matter of even more concern that several state chieftains are forming their own alliances without including the Congress. It cannot hope to outmanoeuvre the BJP or, indeed, regional parties if it does not have a coherent economic or social strategy, and the agility to form alliances.

At the moment, it seems to be content to notch up small

victories in bypolls without seemingly preparing for the big fight ahead in 2019. The Congress was the country's original pan-India party. It has to think big, cash in on its brand recognition and revitalise its extensive rank and file. It has to get used to the fact that it is no longer primus inter pares; it has to be a team player with those with whom it may not necessarily share a common ideology. As Clausewitz said, "It is better to act quickly and err than to hesitate until the time of action is past." The BJP, so far, has acted quickly and without erring.

From the Northeast, the quest for deeper integration

Young people across the three states look wistfully at the pace of change and the scale of opportunities in the bigger cities - Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune. Many had studied here; some had worked here; many more aspired to move to these centres. And all of it was because they felt their own states did not have the same opportunities.

It is always difficult to interpret the meaning of an election outcome. Did a party win because of resentment against the incumbent? Did it win because of its own appeal? Did it win because of leadership or candidates? Did it win because it got the arithmetic right? This is particularly true when it comes to understanding the Northeast. The term 'Northeast' itself does no justice to the deeply heterogeneous nature of the region. And each state that went to polls - Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya - is diverse in its own right. Each state has also thrown up different results. The BJP has swept Tripura, winning a two-thirds majority with an ally. The BJP is all set to form the government in Nagaland, but only with a regional party and a strong regional leader, Neiphiu Rio as the senior partner. In Meghalaya, the verdict is complex. The Congress does not have a majority, but the BJP too has won only two seats. The key lies in the hands of National People's Party - which the Meghalaya electorate knew would ally with the BJP after the elections - and a range of smaller forces. But if a broad pattern has to be drawn, it is the rise of the BJP and the fact that it could be in power in all three states.

There is little doubt that these results show the party's strategic outlook and tactical brilliance. Its position as the ruling party at the Centre; its adaptability; its alliance-building skills; its openness to import leaders from other parties to make up for organisational deficit; the work of the Sangh; the failure of Congress and the Left; a propaganda blitz have all aided the growth. It also shows smarter candidate selection in a context where personalities matter more than ideological platforms and party symbols, and abundant resources. The BJP is indeed India's greatest election machine. But there could well be another reading of this set of elections, beyond the party's tactical genius. It is to look at what the voters of the region are saying. What do the results tell us about what citizens want?

There is no doubt that identity remains a key determinant of voting preferences. The tribal voter in Tripura felt cheated by the CPM; the tribes and clans of Nagaland voted for their own community representatives as did the Garos and Khasis in Meghalaya; the Naga political issue and quest for recognition of the Naga identity remains alive.

The fact that BJP had to constantly reassure Christians in both Nagaland and Meghalaya that it had no desire to impose a certain cultural agenda showed that citizens in the Northeast - rightly - remain particular about their distinct culture, identity, food habits, and will maintain it. But this does not tell the whole story.

Across travels in the three states, there was a common thread among young people. They looked wistfully at the pace of change and the scale of opportunities in the bigger cities - Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune. Many had studied in those places, some had worked there; many more aspired to move to these centres. And all of it was because they felt their own states did not have the same opportunities.

The BJP tapped into this and promised 'vikas'. Narendra Modi personified it. In specific terms, this meant more connectivity with the 'mainland'; it meant bringing the opportunities of the 'mainland' to the Northeast; it meant bringing the finest educational institutions here; it meant more investment in the states; it meant urbanisation and jobs; it meant 'modernity'. And by paying so much attention, at the highest levels, the BJP pushed this message out while giving a sense of dignity and respect to the people. This promise - of integrating a region that has been neglected, where connectivity is poor, where people have had to move out, where there is a strong sense of alienation - resonated. The key message from this election is actually the Northeast's quest for deeper integration with the Indian development trajectory - while retaining their distinct cultural practices.

It could not have been a better opportunity for a party which sees its role as promoting 'nationalism'. The onus lies on the BJP to deliver.

Oscars 2018: Time is up, not just for harassment, but also for exclusion

The Oscars night is by no means an apolitical event. Unlike film award ceremonies in India, for Hollywood stars and film makers who gather for the ceremony are not averse to expressing their opinions on controversial subjects

The Oscar awards transcend cinema. They are not just about the arts and sciences that the Academy of Motion Pictures celebrates, they are the one night in show business when dreamers and dream merchants remark in unison about the problems of the day and the dominant issues of the time. The Oscars is by no means an apolitical event. Unlike film award ceremonies in India, Hollywood stars and film makers who gather for the ceremony are not averse to expressing their opinions on controversial subjects.

This year, the big theme at the Oscars was expected to be sexual harassment at the workplace — in the backdrop of the giant shadow that producer Harvey Weinstein has cast over the film industry. It was meant to be an occasion when, like the Golden Globe awards in January, #MeToo and #TimesUp would be the dominant themes. While that issue was addressed on Sunday, the Oscars picked up a different, not entirely unvisited topic with renewed vigour. Inclusivity emerged as the theme of the night, both in actions and words. A Chilean film, *Una Mujer Fantastica* (A Fantastic Woman), inspired by and starring transgender icon Daniela Vega, won the best foreign language film award. Vega also came on stage as a presenter; she was the first transgender person invited to do this in the 90-year history of the Academy Awards. But it was Frances McDormand, the best actress in a leading role for Martin McDonagh's sparkling *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, who drilled the point home with a typically 'rad' acceptance speech. "I'm hyperventilating... If I fall over, pick me up because I've got something to say!" she started, before asking every single woman nominee in the audience to stand up, and pointing at them, said: "Look around, ladies and gentlemen, because we all have stories to tell and projects that need to be financed."

McDormand, who won her second best actress Oscar after *Fargo* (1996), finished her speech by saying, "I have two words for you: inclusion rider." An inclusion rider is a clause in film contracts that allows A-list actors to insist that the cast and crew of their film meets a certain level of diversity. With those "two words", the message was clear. Time is up, Hollywood was saying, not just for harassment, but also for exclusion.



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In Uttar Pradesh, the SP-BSP combine will have to contend with a new BJP

The BJP of today is no longer the BJP of the early 90s. From being a formation of primarily upper-castes, it is today, arguably, an inclusive Hindu party.

Prashant Jha

As the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) extended support to Samajwadi Party (SP) candidates in two Lok Sabha bypolls in Uttar Pradesh, workers and well-wishers of the two parties evoked memories of the early 90s. The BJP had seemed invincible after the Babri Masjid demolition. But it was short of a majority in the UP state assembly in the 1993 elections. The SP-BSP came together to form the government. And the BJP could only return to power once the two split. The alliance succeeded in projecting the BJP as a Hindu upper-caste party. And the SP-BSP came across as representative of the subaltern within the Hindu fold — the OBCs and Dalits — with the Muslims providing the additional numbers. It is this formula that the two parties would like to replicate in the Gorakhpur and Phulpur bypolls, and possibly, in 2019.

But they will face a

challenge. This is because the BJP of today is no longer the BJP of the early 90s. From being a formation of primarily upper-castes, it is today, arguably, an inclusive Hindu party.

This is best reflected in the non-Nehru-Gandhi pantheon that the BJP has sought to construct in recent years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often invoked three figures: Deendayal Upadhyaya, Ram Manohar Lohia and BR Ambedkar. In February, President Ram Nath Kovind delivered the Lohia Memorial Lecture in Gwalior and referenced the same three leaders. The political messaging is obvious, for the three represent the three distinct strands the BJP would like to weave within the party. Upadhyaya is an obvious choice. He was a Jan Sangh pioneer. He represents the Sangh's core Hindu upper-caste constituency. The renaming of public sites, the inclusion in school textbooks, the repeated

references in speeches of all BJP ministers and chief ministers, the branding of welfare schemes in his name constitute a concerted effort to give to the BJP's original supporters a sense of pride. The fact that Upadhyaya's Antodaya vision can be interpreted as a welfarist project helps the party expand his acceptability. Electorally, Upadhyaya helps consolidate the core Hindutva vote.

But this existed even in the 90s. A key addition in the pantheon is Lohia. Lohia may have been open to an anti-Congress alliance with the Jan Sangh in 1967. But as his seminal 'Hindu banam Hindu' (Hindu versus Hindu) essay shows, Lohia believed there was a core contradiction between the liberal and orthodox/conservative strands of Hinduism. He placed himself firmly in the former category. His protégés have been the foremost challengers to the BJP in UP and Bihar, and



ensured that OBCs in particular stayed away from the project of Hindu unity. By appropriating Lohia, Modi has sought to appropriate the 'social justice' platform and backward social groups. Electorally, this has translated into the non-Yadav OBC consolidation behind the party in UP.

Finally, the BJP's audacious bid to include Ambedkar is the third element of the political strategy. It is audacious because Ambedkar rejected not just the caste system, but Hinduism itself, while the BJP's core political project is unifying and strengthening Hindu society. Investing in the five sites associated with Ambedkar's life, naming the government's digital payment app BHIM, holding a special parliamentary meet to commemorate Ambedkar's 125th birth anniversary or nominating Kovind as President are just some

steps to own the icon who Dalits across the country deify. Electorally, this has translated into support of several Dalit communities — the 'invisible' non-dominant Dalit subcastes in particular — for the party in UP.

There are major contradictions between Upadhyaya, Lohia and Ambedkar. There are ongoing conflicts between the different social groups they represent. The BJP itself struggles to reconcile its core and traditional upper caste orientation with assertive backward and Dalit politics.

Yet, there is a new BJP, which is, through these three men, positioning itself as both accommodative of all Hindu social communities and sensitive to the poor. In UP, the BSP and SP, which had a monopoly over Ambedkar and Lohia respectively in the 90s, will have to battle this new BJP.

For the differently abled, India is still inaccessible

14 months after the passing of the Right of Persons with Disabilities Bill, most states are yet to frame the draft rights

Aasheesh Sharma

The death of the disability activist, Javed Abidi, may be an appropriate time to assess whether the ground reality is improving for the millions of physically challenged in the country. A wheelchair user, Abidi was a champion of employment and accessibility for disabled people and one of the moving forces behind the enactment of the Right of Persons with Disabilities Bill in 2016. Approved by the Parliament in December, 2016, the Bill provided for imprisonment up to two years, along with a fine between Rs 10,000 and Rs 5 lakh for discriminating against the differently abled. It also increased the number of recognised disabilities from 7 to 21, including, for the first time, disability due to acid attacks and Parkinson's.

The World Bank estimates that 15% of the world's population is affected by one disability or another. According to the 2011 Census, the number of disabled in India stands at 2.68 crore, or

2.21% of the population.

At the time it was approved, the disability law was hailed as a progressive piece of legislation. It gave hope to those suffering from conditions like thalassemia, haemophilia, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis and learning disabilities, says disability rights advocate Nipun Malhotra. "Apart from making the disabled in these categories eligible for State benefits and employment, it gave the community the belief that they now had legal backing to make their voices heard." But more than a year after it was passed, the benefits of the Act haven't begun to affect people's lives, yet. Most states — barring Delhi, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal — haven't even framed draft rights yet.

Still, the legislation appears to be giving the disabled the confidence to take on the odds, in case they are discriminated against. In Jharkhand, for instance, when a three-year-old girl with locomotor disability was refused admission

by a school, her parents went to the media. They alleged that the principal had made fun of the family and turned them away. It took the intervention of chief minister Raghubar Das and a campaign on social media to make the authorities admit the girl to Dhanbad's De Nobili School. Thalassaemia patient Sruichi Rathore of Chhattisgarh wasn't as fortunate. When she was denied admission to a medical college in August 2017, the Supreme Court had to step in: "It is the duty of every institution to extend a helping hand to disabled persons," ruled a bench comprising Justices Dipak Misra and A M Khanwilkar, as it asked the medical board to assess whether her disability qualified for the seat.

Delhi-based disabled rights activist Satendra Singh says one commendable provision of the new Act is mandatory training of judges and lawyers regarding disability. Also, unlike in the past, when matters related to the physically challenged had to be heard by a disability



commissioner at the state or central level, there is a provision for the constitution of a bench in every district to exclusively listen to cases pertaining to the Disability Act.

Still, despite the government's plans to make at least 50% of government buildings and at least 25% of public transport disabled-friendly as part of the Accessible India Campaign, our buildings and transport continue to be oblivious to the needs of disabled people. So inaccessible are India's sports venues that a makeshift wooden ramp had to be created at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium to ensure Sachin Tendulkar's wheelchair-bound mother could watch him play in his farewell Test. Bus stops and traffic crossings, even in big cities, are no better. In 2017, Nipun Malhotra

was compelled to file a PIL against the Delhi government's plan to order 2,000 standard floor buses, unlike the low-floor buses which are easier to board for the elderly and the disabled. Even as accessibility is a built-in feature for the metro, most passenger trains continue to remain inaccessible. On March 6, disability activists from across the country are converging in New Delhi and marching to the Parliament to protest the inaccessibility of our railways. If he were alive, his friends and colleagues would have expected Javed Abidi to be leading the march. His death has left a void. Unfortunately, even the causes that Abidi fought for in his lifetime — lack of access and jobs for the disabled — are far from being realised.



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A confident India needs an ethical business environment which will be better served by a different banking structure, where PSBs are unconstrained and can perform

Janmejaya Sinha

In past decades, especially between 1970-2000, our public sector banking system was required to help fund the development of a robust democracy in a poor country. But today, an emerging India needs a banking system that can meet the financial needs of its people as well as support a clean business environment in India. Our public sector banks (PSBs) are failing us in this. Let me explain what I mean.

Depositors' money, collected through the government guarantee that PSBs provided, allowed the establishment of democracy under perilous conditions. Nationalising banks in 1969 with the rapid branch roll out thereafter helped garner the money needed to support a "full adult franchise democracy" to survive. In 1970, India was a basket case with low per capita, little access to external commercial borrowing, low tax revenues, and a poor and highly dependent populace needing government support. Bank deposits were the only substantial revenue source for plan expenditure, appeasing

interest groups and funding elections.

Plan outlays were supported by government borrowing through statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) and cash reserve ratio (CRR) at over 50% of net demand and time liabilities.

Political constituencies (farmers, SMEs, unemployed, etc) were funded through priority sector lending at 40%. Universal adult suffrage required higher social spending compared to other countries at similar levels of development. The remaining credit was rationed through a credit authorisation scheme. This industrial credit allocation supported industry but was also used for election funding as bank deposits, routed as loans to industry, also funded political parties. Government ownership avoided any bank runs.

Governments understood that bank survival was the golden goose that could not be killed and so there was a cycle of pillage and recapitalisation which had an eight-to-12 year cycle. The crisis in 1998 was cleaned up by 2006 and the pillage starting thereafter got recapitalised in 2017. Can we change this paradigm today? I

believe we can.

An India with a \$107 per capita in 1969, needed bank deposits in a way that it does not at a per capita of \$1,710 with all its accompanying changes in terms of tax revenues, FDI attractiveness, liquid capital market, stronger and larger private sector banks. Over the last 17 years, India quintupled its economy to \$2.2 trillion. It is the highest recipient of FDI last year; with GST, its tax base is broader; CRR and SLR are much lower; and political funding can be done directly by electoral bonds.

India's share of global GDP has risen in the last four years from 2.4 to 3.1%, and India's growth added 21% to the global growth rate. In this positive overall story the one thing that affects India adversely is the twin balance sheet problem that arose due to bad loans and the charge of poor ethics in business. The recent Nirav Modi fraud reminds us that the Rs 2.11 trillion recapitalisation has not solved the problems afflicting PSBs. These scandals affect India's image globally and when they happen they choke credit to industry due to caution and



adversely affect growth. The time has come where a new confident India needs an ethical business environment which will be better served by a different banking structure.

The pathologies in PSBs have been well documented. They suffer from poor governance (ownership and direction from government, weak boards, poor CEO appointments and interference) inhibiting oversight (from CVC and CBI) and constrained HR rules. The moot question is: do we still need 20 majority-owned government banks today?

I believe the State Bank of India can remain majority government-owned because of its size and importance, but it should be provided even more autonomy and freedom. For all other PSBs, the government should comply with the RBI regulations for private bank promoters and bring down its stake to 15% (required of private promoters in 12 years), with no other investor being allowed to own more than 5% stake (this will not dilute any

depositor confidence in the bank but will relax the constraints in governance, oversight and HR policies that currently inhibit performance). As a concession, the RBI may even allow the government to hold 26% in PSBs but the government should consider whether it wants 20 or, say, four banks, and divest its stake in the others. In all of this I don't have problems with mandated government interventions in the entire banking sector, but disapprove of discretionary interference, easy with individual PSBs.

India does not need depositor money to sustain its democracy today. What it needs much more is to root out the last vestiges of unethical capitalism which plagues its business environment. A banking sector, in which PSBs (with government as their largest owner) are unconstrained and can perform, will take us on the path of a clean and dynamic \$5 trillion economy faster. The time has come to do it.

Assembly elections 2018: What results mean for BJP, Congress and the Left

In Northeast election results, BJP won two-thirds in Tripura defeating the Left, In Nagaland, BJP-NDPP alliance failed to secure a majority but looks to form govt with backing of allies, while Congress was the single largest party in Meghalaya.

Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya may be small states, but in the larger scheme of Indian politics, Saturday's results will have a role in shaping the narrative around key national and regional issues. Here is what it means for the dramatis personae:

Narendra Modi

The PM has, once again, shown that he lets the ballot box do the talking. Sections of Delhi were speculating that his popularity has faded after a few tight electoral contests or the recent bank fraud. But Narendra Modi has shown that he remains India's most popular leader, spanning regions and communities. The man who could win Gujarat for the sixth time for his party has also shown he can wrest away Tripura from

the BJP's foremost ideological adversary, the Left Front. No PM has invested as much in the north-east politically.

By campaigning in all three states, Modi showed how each election matters to him. The verdict will boost his political capital even further.

Rahul Gandhi

The Congress president should be worried. The party gave up the fight in two of the three states -Nagaland and Tripura - even before the contest. Ceding the political space in this manner left supporters disenchanted, weakened the party organisation, and opened the doors for rivals. Gandhi will draw solace from the Meghalaya verdict, where Congress is the single largest party. But even here, power is not guaranteed. For him, winning

Karnataka is now absolutely essential for the party to gain any momentum in the run-up to 2019.

Amit Shah

Shah's relentless quest for electoral success has led to the BJP becoming the country's most dominant, almost hegemonic, political force. Modi praised Shah as the architect of the party's victory march. In the last four decades, no party has enjoyed the kind of power the BJP does today, running the government in 20 states. In 15 of those, the chief ministers are the BJP's own. Under Shah, the BJP has decisively shed the tag of being a north Indian, Hindi heartland party. The only disappointment - he was hoping for a better performance in Meghalaya.

Manik Sarkar



The long-serving chief minister of Tripura, and one of the tallest leaders of the Indian Left, lost power. And he lost to the party communists see as the greatest threat: the BJP. Sarkar played a key role in bringing peace to Tripura, but an inability to deliver development and jobs cost the Left. Sarkar's defeat is devastating news for the CPI(M). It is now confined to Kerala. Winning back West Bengal seems like a distant dream and its national profile will only fade further. It is, in all likelihood,

curtains for this tall figure of Indian politics.

Mukul Sangma

Irrespective of whether he is able to form the government, the Meghalaya CM was able to deliver Congress the highest number of seats in the state. This shows, yet again, the importance of regional leaders for the party to revive. But the fact that the Congress was considerably less than a majority mark also revealed Sangma's limitations.

(Contd on page 23)

MPs fixing salaries themselves a moral, ethical issue: Supreme Court

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that parliamentarians determining their salary and perks themselves was an "moral" and "ethical issue" and sought for data on how much amount was spent on pension and other facilities provided to former lawmakers.

The apex court observed this while hearing a petition which has raised several questions including how MPs could themselves determine their salaries and perks and also sought scrapping of pension to them.

Attorney General K K Venugopal told a bench comprising justices J Chelameswar and Sanjay

Kishan Kaul that the Finance Bill 2018 contained provisions regarding salary and pension of MPs and also about revision of their allowances after every five years starting from 1 April 2023 on the basis of cost inflation index.

Venugopal also referred to a judgement by a five-judge constitution bench of the apex court and said that the issues raised in the petitions were already being dealt with by the larger bench.

Regarding the court's query on setting up of an independent mechanism for determination of salaries and allowances of the MPs, the Attorney General said that elaborate procedure was

already being followed for fixing the salary.

During the hearing, when an advocate representing one of the petitioners raised the issue of "burden on the exchequer" due to payment of pension and entitlement of several other facilities to former MPs, the bench asked, "Do you have any data of how much amount has been spent on it?"

The lawyer said that they would place the data in this regard before the apex court.

The counsel also contended that even after death of an MP, his or her family members were entitled to pension for life.

When the issue of MPs



determining their salaries themselves was raked up, the bench said, "it is a moral, ethical issue. The second is propriety issue that they fix it (salary) themselves".

The bench also dealt with the arguments advanced by

the petitioners that pension was given to a MP even if he or she was elected to the House only for a day. It observed that several MPs have got successive tenures in the Parliament and they have dedicated their "whole life".

Statues of foreign leaders have no place in India: MoS Ahir



NEW DELHI: The government condemns all kinds of violence but statues of foreign leaders have no place in India, Union Minister of State for Home Hansraj Gangaram Ahir said today.

Ahir's comment comes after a statue of Communist icon Lenin was demolished in South Tripura's Belonia town by suspected BJP workers.

The violence followed the BJP's victory in the recently concluded Assembly elections in the northeast state, where a 25-year Communist government was ousted. "We condemn all kinds of violence and the state government is handling the situation. But I want to make it clear that statues of foreign leaders are not required in India. I don't want to take anyone's name but I want to say that we have no place for them," Ahir told PTI in response to a question about Lenin's statue being pulled down.

He added that the country had produced enough icons and ideologues, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, B R Ambedkar, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya and Ram Manohar Lohia, for people to eulogise. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh has called up Tripura Governor Tathagata Roy and DGP A K Shukla and asked them to ensure peace and check violence till a new government is installed in the state.

Ayodhya row: Sri Sri renews appeal to AIMPLB to consider out of court settlement

BENGALURU: Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar on Tuesday renewed his appeal to the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) to consider an out-of-court settlement to the Ram Janmabhoomi row, saying he feared a "large-scale" communal flare up if the case was settled by a court or through legislation.

In an open letter to the AIMPLB members, he said going through the court was a loss for both Hindus and Muslims and an out-of-court settlement would be a "win-win situation" for both the communities.

"I urge the leaders of both faiths to take this action seriously. Otherwise, we are pushing our country to the brink of a civil war," said Ravi Shankar, who has been making persistent mediation

efforts, meeting Muslim and Hindu leaders, to find a solution to the dispute.



He gave four possible situations -- the court giving away the land to the Muslims, awarding the land to the Hindus, upholding the Allahabad High Court order that says there should be a mosque built on one acre whilst the remaining 60 acres be utilised to build

the temple and Parliament passing a legislation.

"In all the four options, either through the court or through the government, the result will be devastating for the nation in general and the Muslim community in particular," he said.

Ravi Shankar said the best solution would be an out-of-court settlement, in which the Muslim bodies come forward and gift one acre of land to the Hindus, who, in turn, would gift five acres of land

nearby to the Muslims to build a bigger mosque.

He also told the AIMPLB leaders that Islam permitted the shifting of the mosque to another location and that cleric Maulana Salman Nadvi and many other Muslim scholars had endorsed it.

Biplab Kumar Deb to be next Tripura chief minister

NEW DELHI: The BJP's Biplab Kumar Deb has been named the new chief minister of Tripura, announced Union minister Nitin Gadkari today.

Deb was unanimously elected leader of the BJP legislature party in the state, and will stake claim to form government in Tripura before Governor Tathagata Roy.

"The swearing-in ceremony will be on March 9 at 10.30am. We have sent an invitation to the Prime Minister and to all chief ministers of BJP governments. I hope PM accepts the invitation," said Deb.

"Jishnu Deb Burman will work with me as the deputy CM of Tripura," he shared after the announcement.

The decision comes even as the BJP's poll ally, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, has demanded that the chief minister be from the tribal community.

In Assembly election results announced Saturday, the BJP routed the CPM, which had been in power in Tripura for as long as 25 years.



Tripura has been on the boil though, as violence continues in several parts of the state following the shock upset of the CPM in Assembly election results + announced Saturday. Section 144 has been imposed in many parts of the state, which means an assembly of more than four people in one

place has been declared unlawful.

The CPM alleged that "widespread attacks are being reported on our comrades and party offices" since Saturday, while the BJP alleged that CPM activists, too, "assaulted" 49 of its party supporters, 17 of whom had to be hospitalized.

A statue of Communist revolutionary hero Lenin was yesterday razed by a group pf people, many of them wearing saffron shirts and chanting "Bharat mata ki jai".

So grave is the situation that Union home minister Rajnath Singh this morning phoned governor Tathagata Roy and top police officials asking what steps are being taken to control the violence. Rajnath asked them to ensure peace until the new government assumes office.

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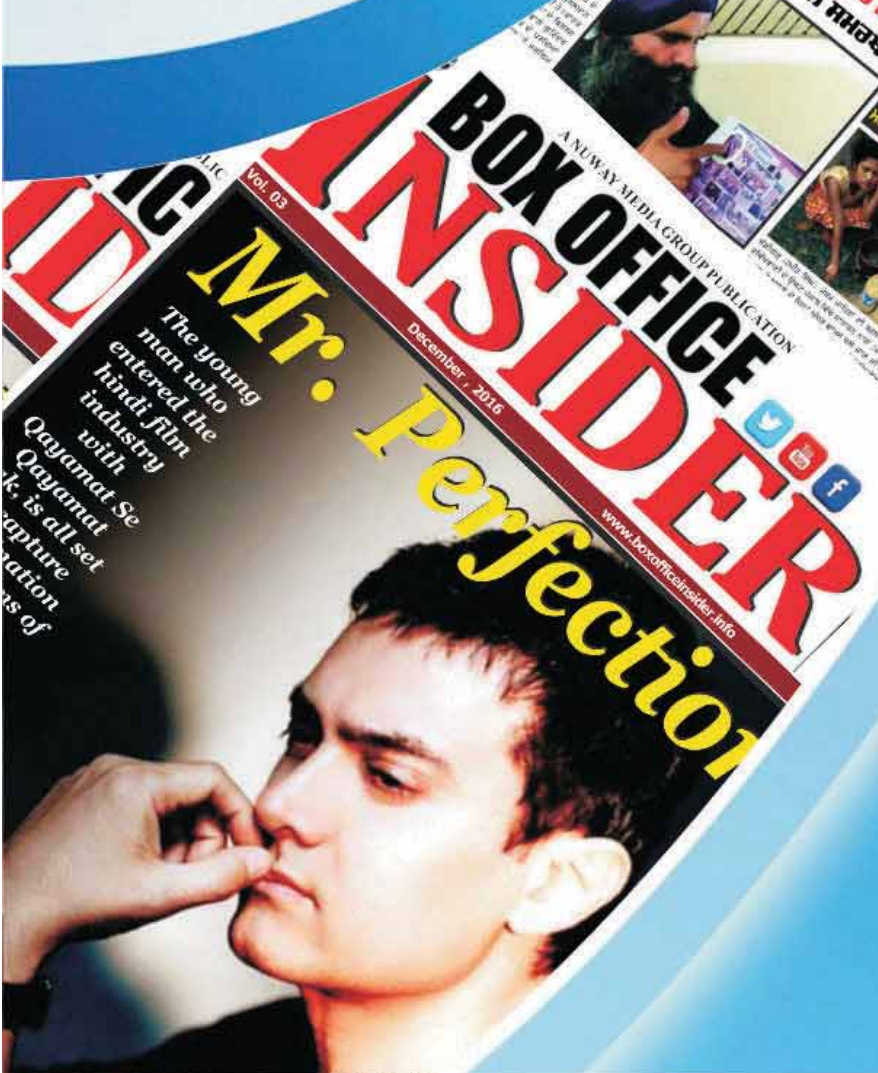
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'This dadagiri has to stop': SC puts Delhi Master Plan 2021 changes on hold

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA), which works under the union government and is the city's land developer, had suggested the changes to protect traders from a sealing drive in the Capital.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed proposed changes to Delhi's Master Plan for 2021 that gave relief to commercial establishments by increasing floor area ratio (FAR).

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA), which works under the union government and is the city's land developer, had suggested the changes to protect traders from a sealing drive in the Capital.

"This dadagiri has to stop. You can't tell this court that you keep passing orders but we will

do what we want to. Is this rule of law?" the court said.

The court was upset as the DDA failed to respond to its query on whether it had undertaken a study to assess the environmental impact of the changes in the plan. During the last hearing, the court had slammed DDA for refusing to learn from past tragedies, and labelled it the "Delhi Destruction Authority". A bench headed by justice Madan B Lokur had said the DDA was buckling under pressure to bring in the proposed

changes, and not looking at the interests of a larger section of Delhi's residents.

Uniform FAR of 350 for shop-cum-residential plots, use of basements to run businesses and rationalisation of conversion charges are among the proposed changes. The DDA also proposed that outlets serving alcohol in residential localities would have to shift and pubs would be given six months to shift from such areas. The sealing, being carried out under the supervision of an SC monitoring



committee, is being conducted or where extra floors have been built and balcony and basement mixed-land use is not permitted were being used illegally.

Hardeep Singh Puri takes dig at AAP, says he is 'cautious' about mediating with Delhi govt

NEW DELHI: Union housing and urban affairs minister Hardeep Singh Puri took a dig at Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal over the alleged assault on chief secretary Anshu Prakash by AAP MLAs, saying he is "cautious" about mediating with the Delhi government over issues relating to the capital.

In the course of a media interaction, Puri termed any effort to mediate as a "challenge" for him in the context of projects that are under discussion between the AAP government and the Centre. Responding to a question whether he has achieved any success in negotiating with the Delhi government, Puri said, "Believe me this is a challenge and the question is what will be utility? There has not been any success because there have been some instances in between... Let the temperature come down. When I become hopeful then something else happens like the treatment (meted out) to the chief secretary. What do I do?"

Taking a potshot at AAP government, the minister said, "If this is the attitude, then I have to be very careful. If I call a mediation meeting and then some mis-happening takes place, then what do I do? There is no security in my room. I adopt a cautious approach," he told reporters here.

The Delhi government and the housing and urban affairs ministry have been at loggerheads over various issues including the Metro fare hike and the ongoing sealing drive. Participating in a debate in Rajya Sabha last month, Puri had said, "In the four decades of my public life, I faced many challenges. I have tried to negotiate with terrorists, etc. This (dealing with Kejriwal) is going to be a difficult one but I will accept your challenge and try and negotiate." He was responding to deputy chairman P J Kurien's suggestion to mediate between Delhi government and the LG.

Fake degree racket busted, two Haryana men in police net

NEW DELHI: Delhi Police's crime branch has arrested two men who allegedly ran a racket of selling fake marksheets and certificates of various universities across the country. The gang operated in the garb of an education trust.

The arrested men, Sandeep Chahal and Balraj, were both graduates and belonged to Jind in Haryana. Sandeep ran a coaching centre earlier, where a number of students approached him for help in getting their degrees. This made Sandeep hatch a plan to make quick money.

According to joint commissioner (crime) Alok Kumar, the inter-state cell had received a tip-off about the gang's activities. "Enquiries revealed that apart from giving fake degrees, the gang also provided forged documents of various universities. A team led by DCP Rajesh Deo and ACP Jasbir Singh conducted a raid near Mundka metro station and arrested the suspects," Kumar said.

The accused had formed an education trust by the name of Satyam Education registered in Haryana. They would contact various coaching centres to lure students and



offer them degrees for a fee.

"The students were enrolled in an open/distance learning university. They would not go to the college as the question paper and answer-sheet were sent to their homes. The accused would then get their answers submitted at the college and provide a fake degree to the student," Kumar added. The gang would also provide a back-dated degree after conniving with officials of various open universities. In order to legitimise their act, the student was asked to write answers of the subject for which the

fake degree was to be issued. Later, an entry in the desired date was made in university records, police said. The latter attracted high fee and the gang would charge anywhere between Rs 5,000 – Rs 20,000 per document.

Cops have seized a number of fake degrees, marksheets, migration certificates, identity cards and stamps, apart from a Macbook and three pen drives from the accused's possession. They are also trying to prove the role of one Harender, who had introduced the duo to officials of various colleges and universities.

PNB Scam: Mehul Choksi finally breaks silence over the scam

Gitanjali Gems owner Mehul Choksi, an accused in the Rs 12,000 crore PNB fraud, on Thursday said he cannot travel to India for his trial as his passport has been revoked without any explanation. Choksi in a reply to CBI said that his passport was suspended citing that he is a "threat to security" of India. He further said that the Region Passport Office (RPO) in Mumbai did not give any explanation as to how he was a security threat to the country.

The accused diamond trader explained that he is not in a

position to travel for at least a period of four to six months due to persisting health problems. "I had a cardiac procedure which was conducted in the first week of February, and there is still pending work to be done on the same," said the relative of celebrated jeweler Nirav Modi, the prime accused in Punjab National Bank (PNB) case.

PNB scam mehul choksi silence consumers

Choksi further said, "On February 28, I sent an e-mail to the Regional Passport Office, Mumbai, requesting them to

revoke the suspension of my Passport, however, I have not received any reply from the office." The accused, who left India in January, also expressed apprehension and concern for his and his family's safety. "I am being threatened by individuals with whom I have a business relationship. There has been a complete and sudden closure of the business, and my employees, customers, creditors etc have started to show their animosity towards me." PNB scam mehul choksi silence consumers

Eminent jurist in panel for selecting Lokpal to be appointed soon: Centre to SC



NEW DELHI: The Centre on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that the selection committee for appointing a Lokpal met on

bench comprising Justices Ranjan Gogoi and R Banumathi that the vacancy of an eminent jurist in the committee, which also includes the prime minister, would be done at the earliest.

Senior advocate P P Rao was appointed as an eminent jurist in the panel but the post became vacant after he passed away last year. The bench today posted the matter for further hearing on April 17. On February 23, the Centre told the apex court that the process for appointing the anti-graft ombudsman Lokpal was going on. The court had asked

the secretary of the Department of Personnel and Training to file an affidavit about the "steps taken and proposed".

The bench was hearing a contempt petition filed by the NGO Common Cause, which has raised the issue of non-appointment of a Lokpal despite the apex court's verdict of April 27 last year.

The top court, in its last year's verdict, said there was no justification to keep the enforcement of Lokpal Act suspended till the proposed amendments, including on the

issue of the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, were cleared by the Parliament.

It said the Act was an eminently workable piece of legislation and "does not create any bar to the enforcement of the provisions". It said the amendments proposed to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013, and the views of the Parliamentary Standing Committee, were attempts to streamline the working of the Act and does not constitute legal hindrances or bar its enforcement.

Saudi Arabia gives Air India overflight rights for its Israel routes: Netanyahu

WASHINGTON: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that Saudi Arabia had granted Air India

permission to fly over its territory on its new routes to and from Tel Aviv. There was no immediate confirmation from either Saudi

officials or Air India. Netanyahu made the announcement during a briefing in Washington to Israeli reporters after he had met US President + Donald Trump.

Saudi Arabia does not recognise Israel and lifting the 70-year-old airspace ban would reflect what appears to be thawing ties between Israel and

the kingdom, both US allies with a shared concern over Iranian influence in the region. Last month, Air India announced the planned thrice-weekly flights to Tel Aviv + over Saudi soil, but the General Authority of Civil Aviation in Riyadh said at the time it had not granted such permission to the carrier.

El Al Israel Airlines, the country's flag carrier, flies four weekly flights to Mumbai. These take seven hours as they fly south toward Ethiopia and then east to India, avoiding Saudi airspace. Israel media have said that Saudi overflight routes could reduce travel time by more than two hours.

Delhi's IGIA adjudged best airport in the world

NEW DELHI: Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) has been adjudged as the best airport in the world according to the latest Airport Service Quality (ASQ) 2017 rankings released by the Airports Council International, helping it overtake Incheon in South Korea which was ranked number one last year. The airport has been ranked number one in the world in the highest category – over 40 million passengers per annum (MPPA). The Delhi airport was ranked number two in the world in the same category last year, however it was the number one ranked airport in the world in

2015 when it was in the smaller category of 25-40 MPPA. The airport also handled over 60 MPPA in 2017 with a total of 63.5 million passengers flying through the airport – surpassing the likes of Changi, Incheon and Bangkok airports in terms of passenger growth. Officials said this now makes Delhi airport the 7th busiest airport in Asia and puts it among the top 20 busiest airports across the world in terms of passenger traffic. "It is profoundly gratifying to win this year's ACI-ASQ award for the coveted World No. 1 rank in the highest category of over 40 million passenger per year.

BJP's victory in Northeast changed perception: Rajnath Singh

SHILLONG: The BJP's victory in the Northeast has changed the perception that only the Congress can survive there, home minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday.

Singh, along with BJP president Amit Shah, have attended the swearing-in ceremony of Conrad Sangma-led coalition government in Meghalaya, where the BJP is also part. There was a perception that only the Congress can survive in the Northeast. But now that perception has changed with the BJP's victory in the Northeast," he told reporters here.

In the recently held Assembly elections, the Congress was ousted from power in Meghalaya while the party could not win a



single seat in Tripura and Nagaland. The BJP got absolutely majority and two-third majority along with its ally IPFT in Tripura, it won 12 seats in Nagaland and will be part of the coalition government along with Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) there. In Meghalaya, the BJP won two seats and is now part of the Sangma government.

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North Korea Signals Willingness to 'Denuclearize,' South Says



SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, has told South Korean envoys he is willing to negotiate with the United States on abandoning his country's nuclear weapons, officials from the South said Tuesday. Mr. Kim also said he would suspend all nuclear and missile tests while such talks were underway, they said. President Trump reacted with guarded optimism to the news, which potentially represented a major defusing of one of the world's tensest confrontations. During the envoys' two-day visit to Pyongyang, the North's capital, which ended on Tuesday, the two Koreas also agreed to hold a summit meeting between Mr. Kim and President Moon Jae-in of South Korea on the countries' border in late April, Mr.

Moon's office said in a statement. "The North Korean side clearly stated its willingness to denuclearize," the statement said. "It made it clear that it would have no reason to keep nuclear weapons if the military threat to the North was eliminated and its security guaranteed." If the statement is corroborated by North Korea, it would be the first time Mr. Kim has indicated that his government is willing to discuss relinquishing nuclear weapons in return for security guarantees from the United States. Until now, North Korea has said its nuclear weapons were not for bargaining away. "The North expressed its willingness to hold a heartfelt dialogue with the United States on the issues of denuclearization and normalizing relations with the United States," the statement said. "It made it clear that while dialogue is continuing, it will not attempt any strategic provocations, such as nuclear and ballistic missile tests." On Twitter, Mr. Trump, who has veered from bellicose threats against Mr. Kim to offers to sit down with him, welcomed what he called "possible progress" with the North. "For the first time in many years, a serious effort is being made by all parties concerned," Mr. Trump said. "The World is watching and waiting! May be false hope, but the U.S. is ready to go hard in either direction!" Mr. Trump expounded on his reaction later to reporters during an Oval Office meeting with Prime Minister Stefan Lofven of Sweden. "We have come certainly a long way, at least rhetorically, with North Korea," Mr. Trump said. "The statements coming out of South Korea and North Korea have been very positive. That would be a great thing for the world." Asked if he would meet with Mr. Kim, Mr. Trump said, "We'll see what happens."

Trump Reaffirms Commitment to Tariffs but Opens Door to Compromise



WASHINGTON — President Trump, facing an angry chorus of protests from leaders of his own party, including the House speaker, Paul D. Ryan, insisted on Monday that he would not back down from his plan to impose across-the-board tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. But the White House was devising ways to potentially soften the impact of the measures on major trading partners. The intense maneuvering, which began before Mr. Trump's unexpected announcement of the tariffs last Thursday, is likely to delay any formal rollout of the measures until next week, according to several officials who have been briefed on the deliberations. On Monday, Mr. Ryan, the most powerful Republican in the House, broke with the president, declaring through a spokeswoman, "We are extremely worried about the consequences of a trade war and are urging the White House to not advance with this plan." The tariffs, Mr. Ryan's spokeswoman said, would "jeopardize" the economic gains from the recent Republican tax cuts. Mr. Trump appeared little moved by the pushback. One of his all-important barometers — the stock market — rebounded on Monday after falling sharply immediately after the announcement of the tariffs last week as the Republican dissent fueled optimism that Mr. Trump would ultimately reverse course. Opponents of tariffs, including many economists, warn they could damage economic growth by igniting a ruinous trade war, a prospect that Mr. Trump has alternately welcomed or dismissed as unlikely. But a person close to the White House said that the president was itching to impose tariffs, and that Monday's stock market rebound had reassured Mr. Trump that he was in the right. "We're not backing down," the president said at the White House on Monday, as he reeled off a familiar litany about trade deals that he said had driven out factories and deprived American workers of jobs. But Mr. Trump did open the door to a compromise, at least with Canada and Mexico, which are in negotiations with the United States to revise the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Russian military plane crash in Syria kills dozens



The An-26 plane crashed during landing at Hmeimim airbase, near the coastal city of Latakia, the ministry is quoted as saying by Russian media. It says all 39 military personnel on board died, not 32 as earlier reported. The plane was not fired upon, the ministry says, and preliminary data suggests a technical malfunction could have caused the crash. An investigation is now under way. Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed condolences to the victims' relatives. Meanwhile, medics in the rebel-held Eastern Ghouta area of Syria say they have been treating people with breathing problems after a suspected chlorine attack. The reports follow government air strikes and shelling just hours after the last UN aid envoy left the enclave following a supposed five-hour development, UN war crimes investigators say air strikes in Syria by both Russia and the US-led coalition killed large numbers of civilians last year. The Russian defence ministry says the An-26 crashed at about 15:00 Moscow Time (12:00 GMT). It says the plane went down about 500m (1640ft) from the runway. A special commission is to be set up to investigate the crash. On 7 January, Russian forces said they had foiled a drone attack on Hmeimim. This was just a week after Russian warplanes were damaged at the airbase in a rebel mortar attack. The attack targeted the town of Hammoria and led to the evacuation of dozens of civilians, according to the Syrian Civil Defence, whose volunteer rescue workers are widely known as the White Helmets.

Arctic permafrost is no longer protected from global warming and may unleash carbon trapped under its ice 'within decades', Nasa claims

Permafrost in the northern tip of the Arctic contains tonnes of trapped carbon which will be released in the next few decades, Nasa has warned. Rising temperatures are causing the region to warm and the ice is slowly melting, releasing greenhouse gases trapped beneath it.



According to the model, as the southern Arctic grows warmer, increased photosynthesis will balance increased permafrost emissions until the late 2100s.

Nasa's predictions also found that northern permafrost lost about five times more carbon per century than southern permafrost.

Permafrost is a permanently frozen layer below the Earth's surface typically found in Arctic regions such as Alaska, Siberia and Canada.

It contains a variety of things, including carbon-rich organic material, such as leaves, that froze without decaying.

As rising Arctic air temperatures cause permafrost to thaw, the organic material decomposes and releases its carbon to the atmosphere in the form of the greenhouse gases carbon dioxide and methane.

Experts had thought that the coldest regions of the northern Arctic would be shielded from global warming by its extreme environment. Researchers say it will thaw enough to become a permanent source of carbon to the atmosphere in this century, with the peak transition occurring in 40 to 60 years.

A team of researchers led by the Nasa Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, California, studied the melting patterns of the Arctic permafrost. They found that the ice is split into two regions, the very North and then the southerly

band that surrounds it.

Researchers were surprised to discover that the northern region will melt before the area further south. 'Permafrost in southern Alaska and southern Siberia is already thawing, so it's obviously more vulnerable,' lead author of the study, Dr Nicholas Parazoo said in a statement.

'Some of the very cold, stable permafrost in the highest latitudes in Alaska and Siberia appeared to be sheltered from extreme climate change, and we

didn't expect much impact over the next couple hundred years.' Researchers also found that as thawing continues, by the year 2300, total carbon emissions from this region will be ten times as much as all human-produced fossil fuel emissions in 2016.

To make the finding, Data on soil temperatures from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, was combined with a numerical model from the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado.

They found that although the north was colder, it is more likely to melt than the southern region as other factors will delay melting in the southern Arctic.

This region is slower to melt in the model simulations, Dr Parazoo said, because plant growth increased much faster than expected in the south.

Plants remove carbon dioxide from the air through photosynthesis, so increased plant growth means less carbon in the atmosphere.

Sexual favors, gym bags stuffed with cash, drunken romps

A senior Army official was caught on tape kissing and fondling a female contractor who was competing for a \$4 billion federal advertising bid that he was supervising, according to videos obtained by DailyMail.com.

The footage comes on the heels of an internal audit that found the Army has wasted nearly \$1 billion on ineffective marketing campaigns since 2013.

Army insiders claim the video is evidence of an improper relationship between the Army and McCann Worldgroup, the branch's top marketing contractor.

Records obtained by DailyMail.com also show that multiple complaints have been filed against Army marketing leadership by employees who say they were threatened or harassed after they raised concerns about waste and abuse in the McCann contract.

The video shows married Army official James Ortiz, 62, embracing

woozily and kissing McCann Worldgroup executive Molly Berkeley, 48, on a dance floor at the Birchmere, a bar in Alexandria, Virginia, on October 4, 2017. The two were then filmed leaving the bar together with their arms around each other.

Ortiz was director of marketing at the Army since 2013, where he oversaw the agency's marketing plan and supervised the program managers who signed off on McCann's invoices. Berkeley, who helped lead McCann's Army account, left her job at McCann abruptly in November, shortly after the video was taken.

In an internal email, the company said Berkeley 'made the difficult decision to leave the team to pursue other opportunities.' Ortiz and McCann declined to comment. McCann did not return DailyMail.com's request for comment. A spokesperson for the Army told DailyMail.com that Ortiz's relationship with Berkeley is currently under investigation. She said Ortiz has been reassigned and now serves as an advisor to the marketing

department.

'When Army Marketing and Research Group (AMRG) leadership became aware of allegations of possible inappropriate conduct between a member of the AMRG staff and a defense contractor in December 2017, the employee was removed from the Director of Marketing position, all duties associated with our advertising contract and contractor, and reassigned within the organization,' said Army spokesperson Alison Bettencourt. Sources familiar with the Army marketing department provided calendar entries to DailyMail.com indicating that Ortiz continues to meet regularly with Army marketing leadership. He organized a meeting on February 20 with top officials to discuss the department's marketing strategy and operations for the upcoming fiscal year. McCann, which has handled the Army's marketing strategy for the past decade and is behind the 'Army Strong' campaign, is currently competing for an extension of its contract worth an



estimated \$4 billion. The company's current contract with the Army is set to expire in September. Contractors often work closely with government officials. However, federal rules prohibit relationships that can give the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Strikes hit Syria's battered Ghouta as death toll rises to 800

Heavy air strikes and clashes shook the Syrian rebel enclave of Eastern Ghouta on Tuesday, as France and Britain called for an emergency UN Security Council meeting on the escalating violence. Eight hundred civilians -- including at least 177 children -- have been killed since Russia-backed regime forces launched an assault on the besieged enclave outside Damascus on February 18, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in its latest death toll. Russia suffered its own heavy losses on Tuesday as the defence ministry said

a Russian transport plane crashlanded at an airbase in western Syria, killing all 32 people on board.

Bombardment and clashes in Eastern Ghouta, the last major rebel stronghold near Damascus have persisted despite a month-long ceasefire demanded by the Security Council more than a week ago. At least 19 civilians were killed on Tuesday, according to the Syrian Observatory, a Britain-based monitor. The relentless attacks prompted France and Britain to request an emergency meeting of the top UN body, expected to gather on

Wednesday, to discuss the ceasefire's failure to take hold.

Government troops have advanced rapidly across farmland in Eastern Ghouta in the past week and had wrested control of 40 percent of the enclave as of early Tuesday. In the enclave's main town of Douma, air strikes have reduced homes to piles of rubble on both sides of the road, an AFP correspondent reported. Exhausted civil defence workers on Tuesday took advantage of a few hours of calm to dislodge the body of a resident, killed in bombardment several days ago, from

a collapsed building. Rebels fire mortars. Other civilians used the lull in air strikes to venture out from cellars to gather a few necessities from what was left of their homes. Some gathered the pieces of furniture smashed in the raids to use as fuel or sell to their neighbours. An AFP reporter in Hammuriyeh said air strikes were continuing to pummel the town on Tuesday. The raids came after around 18 people suffered breathing difficulties in the town following a strike there late Monday, the Observatory reported. It had no firm word on the cause.



Valentine Day Celebration by Community on Island turned out to be a huge success
Bollywood's beautiful & Talented celebrity Samita Shetty graced the event

Rubalya Devi Sridhar, Sardarni Bhupinder Kaur , Dr. Jaweria Khan, Tina Shah, Raj Uppal & Simarjeev Singh Jolly honored for their achievements, dedication & commitment to community

(By our Staff Reporter) Garden City , Long Island- Recently, the elite of South Asian Community turned out in huge numbers to Celebrate "Box Office Insider Presents Spirit of Valentine" ; an event organized by Indian American Victory Forum under the

leadership and vision it's National Chairman Sharanjit Singh Thind. to celebrate harmony, love and sharing. Leading entertainment site Box Office Insider www.boxofficeinsider.info (A Media Partners Capital Inc. company) was the main sponsor of the event

that was managed by Nishi Bahl of Panache Entertainment. Bharat Goradia of V International Inc. managed the star attraction of evening, Shamita Shetty, beautiful Bollywood actor. Long Island's Mint Restaurant and Banquet Hall served as the venue for this highly

successful event. Event was made lively with Stand Up Comedy act by Roubin Thind, dance performances, live singing. Organizers commented that they are looking forward to organize many of these events for community in the coming times.



SAPAC (South Asian American Political Action Committee); under the able leadership and vision of their Chairman Zahid Syed , recently organized a Networking Brunch in Hicksville Long Island. Event turned out to be hugely popular and was attended by an elite crowd of the South Asian Community. Sapac brunch was organized at SAPAC's new headquarter in Hicksville. High Ranking Elected, appointed officials, Community leaders and businessmen from County and Town attended the event.



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By rewriting history, Hindu nationalists aim to assert their dominance over India

During the first week of January last year, a group of Indian scholars gathered in a white bungalow on a leafy boulevard in central New Delhi. The focus of their discussion: how to rewrite the history of the nation.

The government of Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi had quietly appointed the committee of scholars about six months earlier. Details of its existence are reported here for the first time.

Minutes of the meeting, reviewed by Reuters, and interviews with committee members set out its aims: to use evidence such as archaeological finds and DNA to prove that today's Hindus are directly descended from the land's first inhabitants many thousands of years ago, and make the case that ancient Hindu scriptures are fact not myth.

Interviews with members of the 14-person committee and ministers in Modi's government suggest the ambitions of Hindu nationalists extend beyond holding political power in this nation of 1.3 billion people - a kaleidoscope of religions. They want ultimately to shape the national identity to match their religious views, that India is a nation of and for Hindus.

In doing so, they are challenging a more multicultural narrative that has dominated since the time of British rule, that modern-day India is a tapestry born of migrations, invasions and conversions. That view is rooted in demographic fact. While the majority of Indians are Hindus, Muslims and people of other faiths account for some 240 million, or a fifth, of the populace.

The committee's chairman, K.N. Dikshit, told Reuters, "I have been asked to present a report that will help the government rewrite certain aspects of ancient history." The committee's creator, Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma, confirmed in an interview that the group's work was part of larger plans to revise India's history.

For India's Muslims, who have pointed to incidents of religious violence and discrimination since Modi took office in 2014, the development is ominous. The head of



Muslim party All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, Asaduddin Owaisi, said his people had "never felt so marginalised in the independent history of India."

"The government," he said, "wants Muslims to live in India as second-class citizens."

Modi did not respond to a request for comment for this article.

Helping to drive the debate over Indian history is an ideological, nationalist Hindu group called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It helped sweep Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party to power in 2014 and now counts among its members the ministers in charge of agriculture, highways and internal security.

The RSS asserts that ancestors of all people of Indian origin - including 172 million Muslims - were Hindu and that they must accept their common ancestry as part of Bharat Mata, or Mother India. Modi has been a member of the RSS since childhood. An official biography of Culture Minister Sharma says he too has been a "dedicated follower" of the RSS for many years.

Referring to the emblematic colour of the Hindu nationalist movement, RSS spokesman Manmohan Vaidya told Reuters that "the true colour of Indian history is saffron and to bring about cultural changes we have to rewrite history."

Balmukund Pandey, the head of the historical research wing of the RSS, said he meets regularly with Culture Minister Sharma. "The time is now," Pandey said, to restore India's past glory by establishing that ancient Hindu texts are fact not myth.

Sharma told Reuters he expects the conclusions of the

committee to find their way into school textbooks and academic research. The panel is referred to in government documents as the committee for "holistic study of origin and evolution of Indian culture since 12,000 years before present and its interface with other cultures of the world."

Sharma said this "Hindu first" version of Indian history will be added to a school curriculum which has long taught that people from central Asia arrived in India much more recently, some 3,000 to 4,000 years ago, and transformed the population.

Hindu nationalists and senior figures in Modi's party reject the idea that India was forged from a mass migration. They believe that today's Hindu population is directly descended from the land's first inhabitants. Historian Romila Thapar said the question of who first stood on the soil was important to nationalists because "if the Hindus are to have primacy as citizens in a Hindu Rashtra (kingdom), their foundational religion cannot be an imported one." To assert that primacy, nationalists need to claim descent from ancestors and a religion that were indigenous, said Thapar, 86, who taught at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi for decades and has authored books on ancient Indian history.

The theory of an influx of people from central Asia 3,000 to 4,000 years ago was embraced during British rule.

India's first post-independence leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, who promoted a secular state and tolerance of India's Muslims, said it was "entirely misleading to refer to Indian

culture as Hindu culture." That outlook informed the way India was governed by Nehru and then by his Congress party for more than half a century. The rights of minorities - including the prohibition of discrimination based on religion - are enshrined in India's constitution, of which Nehru was a signatory in 1950.

Shashi Tharoor, a prominent member of the Congress party, said right wing Hindus are "leading a political campaign over Indian history that seeks to reinvent the idea of India itself."

"For seven decades after independence, Indianness rested on faith in the country's pluralism," Tharoor said, but the rise of Hindu nationalism had brought with it a "sense of cultural superiority."

The history committee met in the offices of the director general of the Archaeological Survey of India, a federal body that oversees archaeological research. Among the committee's 14 members are bureaucrats and academics. The chairman, Dikshit, is a former senior official with the Archaeological Survey.

Culture Minister Sharma told Reuters he will present the committee's final report to parliament and lobby the nation's Ministry of Human Resource Development to write the findings into school textbooks. That ministry, which is responsible for education and literacy programmes, is also headed by an adherent of the RSS, Prakash Javadekar.

"We will take every recommendation made by the Culture Ministry seriously," Javadekar said. "Our government is the first government to have the

courage to even question the existing version of history that is being taught in schools and colleges."

According to the minutes of the history committee's first meeting, Dikshit, the chairman, said it was "essential to establish a correlation" between ancient Hindu scriptures and evidence that Indian civilization stretches back many thousands of years. Doing so would help bolster both conclusions the committee wants to reach: that events described in Hindu texts are real, and today's Hindus are descendants of those times.

The minutes and interviews with committee members lay out a comprehensive campaign to achieve this, including the dating of archaeological sites and DNA testing of human remains.

Culture Minister Sharma told Reuters he wants to establish that Hindu scriptures are factual accounts. Speaking of the Ramayana, the epic that follows the journey of a Hindu deity in human form, Sharma said: "I worship Ramayana and I think it is a historical document. People who think it is fiction are absolutely wrong." The epic tells how the god Rama rescues his wife from a demon king. It still informs many Indians' sense of gender roles and duty.

Sharma said it was a priority to prove through archaeological research the existence of a mystical river, the Saraswati, that is mentioned in another ancient scripture, the Vedas. Other projects include examining artifacts from locations in scriptures, mapping the dates of astrological events mentioned in these texts and excavating the sites of battles in another epic, the Mahabharata, according to Sharma and minutes of the committee's meeting.

In much the same way that some Christians point to evidence of an ancient flood substantiating the Biblical tale of Noah and his ark, if the settings and features of the ancient scriptures in India can be verified, the thinking goes, then the stories are true. "If the Koran and Bible are considered as part of history, then what is the problem in accepting our Hindu religious texts as the history of India?" said Sharma.

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Emboldened by Modi's ascent, India's cow vigilantes deny Muslims their livelihood



BEHROR, India – The beating that ended Pehlu Khan's life was televised nationwide. Cell phone video captured a group of men punching and slinging Khan around the middle of a road in north India, stomping on him and then slamming the 55-year-old farmer down on concrete as he begged for mercy.

Khan had been stopped by the lynch mob of right-wing Hindus as he rode home from a market in April with two cows and two calves in the back of a truck. The crowd was furious at the sight of a Muslim transporting animals held sacred by Hindus, according to the accounts of his sons and two fellow villagers who were also attacked. Before the men beat Khan so badly that he later died, breaking his ribs in multiple places, they screamed that he was planning to slaughter the cattle for beef.

Outside the frame of the video, something else was happening: Pehlu Khan's cows were seized. They were hauled off to a nearby Hindu-run shelter that takes in cattle snatched from Muslims and sells them.

Assaults meted out in broad daylight against India's Muslim population, some 14 percent of the country's 1.3 billion people, have sparked concern about the direction the country is taking under Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi. There has been another, less noted dimension to the violence: The theft from Muslims and redistribution to Hindus of cows

that provide crucial income in the Indian countryside.

Such scenes clash with India's image as an investor darling in Asia and the pro-business message Modi broadcasts to foreign investors. But three and a half years after his electoral victory, the cow seizures illustrate how the nation's right-wing Hindu factions that propelled Modi to power are now shaping India and stirring religious upheaval.

Having stoked Hindu nationalist passions in his bid for the highest office, it's unclear to what extent Modi can now control them. The bands of right-wing Hindus who seize the cows are operating essentially as private militias. They are undeterred by the prime minister's public calls on them to end the violence. States governed by Modi's party have seen a marked increase in cow theft from Muslims as well as funding for cow shelters that in many cases take in the stolen cattle.

Interviews with nationalist Hindu leaders and militia members across the country reveal an impatience for Muslims to demonstrate obeisance to the Hindu majority.

There are no official statistics for how many cows have been stolen from Muslims in incidents involving such groups since Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to national power in 2014. Reuters' reporting across India, though, puts actual

numbers on the extent of the cow theft. It also provides the first in-depth look at how the actions of cow vigilantes are leading to further economic marginalization of the country's Muslim minority.

In northern India, the leadership of just two of the main organizations of "gau rakshaks" – right-wing Hindu cow vigilantes, or literally "cow protectors" – said they have taken about 190,000 cows since the year of Modi's election, some in the presence of police and almost every single one of them from Muslims, the reporting shows.

Separately, Reuters surveyed 110 cow shelters or farms, known as "gaushalas," across six Indian states that were led by BJP chief ministers from before or just after Modi's 2014 election win. The survey found an increase of 50 percent in their cattle holdings – from about 84,000 head before Modi came to power in 2014 to more than 126,000 today.

The survey, conducted by phone and in person, covered a fraction of the thousands of cow sheds nationwide.

It was not possible to determine how much of the 50 percent increase was due to cow vigilantes, because record-keeping in many cases is non-existent. But of the 110 cattle facilities surveyed, all but 14 said they receive cows from the Hindu vigilante groups. About a third said they sell or give cows away, nearly all to Hindu farmers and households.

In a separate survey, Reuters

found that only three of 24 cow facilities in four states not ruled by a BJP chief minister said they sold or gave away cattle – mainly to Hindus – after receiving them. While cattle stock has risen about 40 percent in these gaushalas since Modi took office, only a small part of the increase was due to vigilantes. In many of the cases, cows were donated to the shelters for religious reasons or purchased from cattle markets for fear they would be slaughtered.

It is hard to put a value on the seized cattle because the price of cows ranges from zero for animals near death to 25,000 rupees (about \$385), if not more, at cattle markets for healthy milk cows. But taking the average of those two points, just the 190,000 cows captured by the two vigilante groups in northern India would be worth more than \$36 million. That is a significant amount of money in India, where some 270 million people live on less than \$1.90 a day. In rural areas, home to about 70 percent of the nation's population, a family's milk cow is often its most valuable possession.

Cow slaughter is illegal in most of India, while committing cruelty to cattle by transporting them crammed into small spaces is outlawed across the country. Slaughtering buffalo, an animal not considered holy, is allowed, fueling a multi-billion dollar meat export industry that is dominated by Muslims. Penalties for killing a cow differ

from state to state, with most ranging from six months to five years in prison.

The fatal assault on Pehlu Khan unfolded among the rolling hills of India's northwestern Rajasthan state. Travelling with his two adult sons in a rented truck, Khan was headed home to the village of Jaisinghpur in the neighboring state of Haryana. He'd borrowed 40,000 rupees (about \$620) to add to cash he'd cobbled together to buy the cows.

His four animals were among 32 other cattle seized on April 1 at makeshift roadblocks near the town of Behror. A day after the attack on Khan and his two sons, police began an investigation against them under a state law barring cow slaughter. On April 3, Khan died.

In its April 18 order following a bail hearing for the sons, a local court noted that the Khan family, found lying injured on the ground, was unable to produce a waybill showing they'd legally purchased the animals. Also, the cows were bound together at the mouth and, the judge noted, "our society does not allow animals to be treated in an inhumane way."

Khan's elder son, Irshad, told Reuters that the cows had not been tied together. The receipt they got at the cattle fair where they bought the animals, he said, was snatched by the mob at the start of the violence. The family handed Reuters a copy of the bill that they later retrieved.

Trump's Singular Survival Skill

When his back is against the wall, Trump has a knack for making his problem someone else's.

Even for a president who basks in chaos, the run of bad news in recent days—resignations of trusted aides, public feuds with his own Cabinet members, indictments and guilty pleas of key campaign officials, security clearance demotions, communications meltdowns, head-scratching policy pivots and the first salvo in a potential trade war—is truly wild. So wild, in fact, that there's a growing sense that Donald Trump may be engulfed in an administration-threatening crisis of his own making.

But this is not his first disaster. There have been many, and Trump has survived them all. As I found when I wrote a book about Donald, his father and his grandfather, this is a family that has prospered for more than a century by adhering to one simple formula: Sell marks what they dream about. Donald's restaurateur grandfather, Friedrich, provided Yukon gold miners with their heart's desire, namely food,

**Assembly elections
2018: What results
mean for BJP,
Congress and the Left**

If the Congress is able to stitch alliances - and prevent a Goa or Manipur-type situation - Sangma will emerge powerful. Otherwise, he has a long battle ahead in reviving the party.

Neiphiu Rio

The man who was Nagaland's chief minister between 2003 and 2014 took a gamble in the last Lok Sabha polls. In the hope of being a Union minister, he moved to Delhi as an MP. The BJP did not pick him, and ever since, Rio was, unsuccessfully, trying to get back to the state. He finally formed a new party, NDPP, and allied with the BJP. Elected unopposed as an MLA, it was both a sign of his confidence, and a desire to return to the state that he quit his Lok Sabha seat even before the results. Rio - with the support of some smaller parties and independents - is almost certain to become Nagaland's CM. The veteran returns to the seat of power in Kohima.

liquor and female companionship, and put together what would be the initial Trump family nest egg. His son, Fred, a real estate developer, offered sturdy, government-backed brick homes to eager first-time buyers, exploited loopholes in the regulations, and earned hundreds of millions. Donald targeted a different market, luxury-aspiring urbanites whom he lured with towers of glass and gleaming brass, and turned himself into a celebrity brand by acquiring a football team, an airline, Mar-a-Lago, the world's sixth-largest yacht, three Atlantic City casinos, the Plaza Hotel and an exceptionally comely mistress.

He also produced a debt of equally epic proportions, nearly a billion dollars. By 1990, when his investments cratered and his loans were due, it seemed he would certainly be driven into career-ending financial disgrace. But during corporate bankruptcy proceedings, Trump lasered in on a different set of marks: the bankers to whom he owed this huge sum. As he met in all-day sessions to restructure his debt, the man who had crowed about his new playthings to anyone who would listen presented himself as a serious-minded professional, ready and willing to work out the problem.

What he was doing, however, was turning the tables on his adversaries, turning what appeared to be his problem alone into someone else's. It was a variation on his basic distraction play, not unlike the one he had used in the early '70s when he had responded to a Department of Justice housing discrimination lawsuit by lodging a \$100 million countersuit and

railing about federal overreach. It worked like a charm. In what would be his first headlines, Trump came across as an unstoppable go-getter, and by signing a settlement that allowed him to avoid admitting any culpability and imposed only toothless penalties, he was even able to claim victory.

The truth was, the bankers had little appetite for foreclosing on large commercial buildings that would be stripped of their most distinguishing feature, the Trump name. They had even less appetite for taking over casinos, which involved arduous licensing and strict oversight. In short, if they buried him financially, they'd be left with his debt; if they let him live, they'd at least have a chance of getting some of it back. And at least as important, there would be no need for them to admit how they'd been snookered—how they had willingly made unsecured, under-collateralized loans because Trump had served up their high-roller dreams in the form of parties on the yacht, receptions at the Plaza and the chance to be in the same room and on a first-name basis with a man who had sold himself as the country's preeminent deal maker.

Instead of undergoing public humiliation, Trump emerged with a settlement filled with bank concessions. They agreed to loan him more money and take a haircut on interest rates, if he would appoint a chief financial officer and keep to a monthly allowance. But having a CFO, which was standard industry practice, was not all that burdensome, and the stipend was a princely \$450,000. Most important of all, he would not

have to surrender a single asset.

For Trump, there was an obvious life lesson: No matter what he did, he could escape accountability so long as he had built-in accomplices who had as much or more at stake. He has played this card in every crisis since then, and to date, it has never failed. He took his casinos public and made his shareholders bear the risk for his ill-advised expansion. His ego-driven need for headlines has created a ratings and readers bonanza for news outlets, but, in exchange, the mainstream media have had to endure Trump-style delegitimization—that is, being denounced as fake news—whenever they carry a story he dislikes. He even neutralized the apparently crippling blow of the Access Hollywood tape by turning it into a referendum on coverage of Bill Clinton's womanizing and Hillary's complicity.

Now, as Trump hunkers inside the White House, the windstorm of never-ending crises raging around him, observers once again speculate that this will be the moment of his undoing. The evidence, I would argue from long observation, suggests otherwise. Trump might well be fuming at the negative headlines as so many news accounts over the past several days have claimed, but my guess is that he is not overly worried about his future. Once again, he has an accomplice with as much to lose as he does: his own party.

Even if special counsel Robert Mueller were to indict Trump before the midterm elections, he wouldn't be held truly accountable unless a

Republican-controlled House voted for impeachment, and a Republican-controlled Senate found him guilty. That's when what has arguably been a Trump problem would turn into a wholly Republican problem. And once again, Trump would have the Republicans, the very people charged with deciding his fate, over a barrel. Take down Trump and the party goes with him. Just like the bankers, who ignored financial safeguards because they were snowed by Trump's rich-guy trophies and his celebrity aura, the Republicans in Congress ignored his lifelong track record of stiffing anyone he could because he was promising them their dream—an opportunity to toss out the Obama legacy and replace it with their own long-stalled agenda. Like the bankers, the Republicans in Congress will not be willing to face up to what they've done. If I'm right about Trump, he's counting on it.

**Tax officials raid
properties linked to
wealthy Gupta family**

"They make all kind of illegal money there outside, these are the allegations which we want to look into," he said.

The three Gupta brothers, Atul, Ajay and Rajesh, went to South Africa in the early 1990s and built a commercial empire stretching from computers to mining and media. Last month, South African police raided Gupta properties there as part of an investigation into their dealings. South Africa's chief prosecutor declared Ajay Gupta a "fugitive from justice" after he failed to report to police investigators.

On Tuesday, officials conducted raids at residences of the Guptas in the town of Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh and the nearby town of Dehradun, as well as one of their offices in the capital, New Delhi, Kumar said.

A top judge in South Africa will investigate whether the Guptas sought to influence the appointment of cabinet ministers there and were unlawfully awarded state tenders.

South Africa's new president, Cyril Ramaphosa, has made fighting corruption a top priority

**Dawood keen to return to India,
government spurns 'preconditions'**

Speaking to the media outside the Thane Court, where he represented Iqbal Ibrahim Kaskar (the absconder don's brother) in an extortion case, the lawyer said among the conditions Dawood has stipulated are that he should be lodged only in the high-secure precincts of Arthur Road Central Jail (ARCJ) in Mumbai. "He had also conveyed his intentions through (former union minister and eminent lawyer) Ram Jethmalani a few years ago but the Indian government has not entertained any of his preconditions to return," Keswani said. The ARCJ is the same prison where the Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab was lodged for nearly four years till his hanging for his role in the 2008

Mumbai terror attack. Keswani's statement on Dawood's desire to return came more than six months after Maharashtra Navnirman Sena President Raj Thackeray made a similar revelation in Mumbai. In his explosive remarks, Thackeray had claimed that not only was Dawood keen to come back, but he was reportedly negotiating a 'settlement' with the Modi government. The MNS chief further said Dawood was very sick and wanted to breathe his last in India. In a related development, Iqbal was sent to police custody till Friday by a special court here on Tuesday in a land-grab and extortion case filed against him by the Thane Anti-Extortion Cell (AEC).

Collect passport details of big borrowers in 45 days, finance ministry tells banks

In absence of passport details, banks were hamstrung in taking timely action to prevent defaulters especially wilful one from fleeing the country.

Several big defaulters like Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, Vijay Mallya and Jatin Mehta have fled the country putting recovery mechanism in quandary.

Last week, the Cabinet approved the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, though it was announced in the Budget for 2017-18, has been hastened after Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi allegedly

defrauded state-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) of Rs 12,700 crore and left the country and are refusing to cooperate with law enforcement agencies.

The Bill provides for confiscating all assets of absconding fraudsters and loan defaulters to recover dues in a bid to tighten noose around fugitives like diamond merchant Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya.

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi also approved setting up of a National Financial

Reporting Authority (NFRA) as an independent regulator for the auditors.

The proposed fugitive law aims to impound and sell assets of Nirav Modi-type escapees with a view to quickly recover dues. It also will apply to defaulters who have an outstanding of Rs 100 crore or more and have escaped from the country. As part of drive to clean the banking system, the Finance Ministry last week had directed public sector banks (PSBs) to probe all NPA accounts of over Rs 50 crore for possible fraud and

accordingly report the cases to CBI.

PSB MDs directed to detect bank frauds & consequential wilful default in time & refer cases to CBI. To examine all NPA accounts > Rs 50Cr for possible fraud," Financial Services Secretary had said in the tweet.

Besides, the ministry had asked banks to monitor loans above Rs 250 crore and red flags whenever the original covenants of the loans are violated. This was spelt out as part of 6-point-reform measures announced for PSBs in January.

Why have ties between India and Maldives plummeted to an all-time low?

Elizabeth O Colton, a retired US Foreign Service officer whose PhD research at the London School of Economics was on the Maldives' political system, said, "President Yameen, like his predecessors, has made decisions such as extending the emergency based on internal calculations – he wanted more time to show he's in charge, to keep detainees imprisoned, and to wait till the 'street noise' dies and the crowds dissipate. Yameen may have hoped for Chinese support, but part of that support, he would know, depends on his debt to China."

Colton, who was also the first

foreign correspondent based in the Maldives, added, "In the late 1970s, the superpowers in the Indian Ocean were the USSR and the US. Both China and India were watching and openly concerned about any moves in or around the Maldives.

"Now, though, China has certainly been developing ties and relationships throughout South Asia and the Indian Ocean region over the past decade, India has shown little sign of countering such Chinese inroads. India has been building internally and on the other hand, China has been expanding externally in terms of influence and funding throughout

the region."

In response to questions on the impact of the emergency on India-Maldives ties and New Delhi's concerns about the Chinese presence in the island nation, a spokesperson for the President's Office said: "There's continuous engagement between the two countries as always.

"Representatives from both countries exchange views and are engaged in discussions. Diplomatic engagement between the nations remains strong."

There are other reasons for the foreign policy mandarins in New Delhi to be concerned. The

Maldives is located just 700 km from the strategic Lakshadweep island chain and 1,200 km from the Indian mainland, and the growing Chinese presence in the archipelago could have serious security implications.

A Maldives affected by political chaos and uncertainty could prove a fertile breeding ground for extremism and religious fundamentalism, smuggling and drug trafficking.

Opposition Maldivian leaders have said that some 200 people have gone to Syria and Iraq to fight with the Islamic State and the Lashkar-e-Taiba, through its front organisation Idara Khidmat-

eKhalq, is believed to have established a foothold in southern Maldives under the garb of the post-2004 tsunami relief operations.

Despite the strong measures adopted by Yameen, the united opposition is fighting back and the political uncertainty is unlikely to be resolved soon.

"The united opposition has coalesced and grown since the imposition of emergency. It is growing bigger every day and is made up of many former enemies," Colton said. India, with limited options, may have little to do but wait and watch for the current crisis to play out.

Our Very Own Nadir Shahs

For the corrupt rich, India is hell to live but heaven to loot. They flee after the crime, seldom get dubbed anti-nationals.

Eighteen decades ago, in or around 1840, Calcutta saw the subcontinent's first bank scam. It was by a duo—one of them businessman Raj Kishore Datta, who, interestingly, had himself founded the bank, he plundered along with his son-in-law Dwarka Nath Mitra. Author Shib Chunder Bose documented the pioneering loot in his 1881 study, *The Hindoos As They Are*. He was, however, ashamed to furnish the full list of the glowing accomplices and accomplices in the crime. Bose, of course, hinted that a combination was formed among a few influential natives, whose names "I am ashamed to mention and a well concocted system of fraud was organized". To highlight his social class, noted he, Datta was "a very respectable Hindoo gentleman" of Calcutta. This alluring coat of social respectability protected certain class against exposures of disgraceful crimes committed by them. A privilege not many enjoy! Today, the feat has been repeated by another duo: Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi. Only that they targeted the country's nationalised banks—perhaps considering them a safer target,

given the vulnerability. If Datta and Mitra had no safety valve in place during the colonial era, it's one advantage their 21st-century manifestations do enjoy—covertly, if not overtly. They have everything in place: for protection, and rescue in case of intervention from the administration, legislature or the judiciary. They have rubbed shoulders with the high and mighty in public on camera. So, their closeness off the camera with the powers-that-be is better left to imagination. As for the Datta-Mitra bank scam, Raj Kishore was "a great devotee" of Kali. His "greatness" was exhibited in his liberal spending on the puja of the goddess. Every month, on the last of the dark night of the moon (amavasya), Datta used to install an image of this goddess, costing no less than Rs 1,000. His other expenses on the occasion ranged between Rs 6,000 and 7,000—not a small amount those days. That was for gold and silver ornaments, which, of course, went to benefit "the officiating priests".

Then there was an annual puja—in the month of Kartik. On that occasion, Datta would give "the goddess a gold tongue and

decorate her four arms with diverse gold ornaments" to the cost of about Rs 3,000. Datta was a very calculative and sleek operator with perfect worldly wisdom. To allay any suspicion around him and also remain impenetrable for the public, he continued to exhibit his devotion for Kali in "magnificent style". Datta's veneration became "more intensified as his wealth increased". In truth, his display of wealth and riches reached high levels of vulgarity around the Kali puja.

So, what was the tacit intention behind showing off his opulence? Datta's India Bank circulated, according to a cryptic account recorded by Bose, "notes of its own to a considerable amount". Thus, a combination was formed among a few influential natives (whose names Bose won't mention). "Through one Dwarkey Nath Mitter, a son-in-law of Raj Kishore, company's paper or government securities to the amount of about twenty lakhs of rupees were forged and passed off as genuine on the public."

The secret of the pioneering bank fraud was, incidentally, leaked by a notorious dacoit, Raghu, in

course of his confession before investigators. "But as fraud succeeds for a short while, the gig-antic scheme was soon discovered and the delinquent was tried, convicted and sentenced to transportation for life to one of the Penal Settlements of the East India Company where he lived for several years to rue the consequences of his iniquitous conduct." The British did not spare Datta, but are we sure the same fate will befall his successors in this bank scam now?

Bose rightly concludes the story by stating that Datta's "flagitious career commenced by blind devotion to his guardian deity, culminated in a gigantic forgery, and closed with transportation and infamy." Stories of supernatural power of deities to bestow benediction of grotesque dimension on people in hours of grim emergencies owe to scheming priests who defraud and exploit unsuspecting numberless people. This has repeatedly been proved. The Modis, Choksis and the Mallyas have, on the contrary, discovered that instead of deities, the political strongmen are more effective in giving them much-needed relief if they paid the

requisite price.

The Indian banking industry has suffered a tsunami engineered by the Nirav-Mehul pair. But the clever men knew that it was not a fictitious deity, but political supermen who were capable of providing them an escape route as and when in need. A brewery owner and airline operator frequented Tirupati and donated gold bricks and huge currencies to the Venka-teswara temple there. His empire of business crashed out, nonetheless.

A fertile land of dishonest rich, India is also a country of honest poor. We have recently known that one per cent of the country's population holds 73 per cent of its wealth. These rich people are ones who have also exploited the country's wealth with financial institutions at their beck and call. And the governments routinely wrote off their bad debts in tens of thousands of crores of rupees. A few days ago, a leading wire agency in the country told us that India is more corrupt than China. But, yes, Transparency International has cheered the rulers by informing that Indians were "less corrupt than Pakistanis".

India's PNB bank fraud likely to swell beyond \$2 billion mark



MUMBAI (Reuters) - The extent of the unraveling fraud at India's state-run Punjab National Bank (PNBK.NS) could rise beyond the nearly \$2 billion mark so far outlined by the lender, according to a source involved in the probe and court documents reviewed by Reuters. The source, who asked not to be named, said investigators had not yet recovered all the papers and loan guarantees allegedly issued by rogue employees of the bank, and consequently believed the bank's exposure could be greater than revealed so far.

In what has been dubbed the biggest fraud in India's banking history, Punjab National Bank (PNB) and police have accused

two jewelry groups - one controlled by diamond tycoon Nirav Modi and the other by his uncle Mehul Choksi - of colluding with bank employees to get credit from overseas banks using fraudulent guarantees.

Both Choksi and Modi have denied the allegations and lawyers for the two key accused PNB employees in the case have also said they are innocent.

According to court filings, the exposure to three companies controlled by Modi has been estimated at 64.98 billion rupees (\$1 billion), while firms controlled by Choksi have been accused of defrauding the bank of 61.38 billion rupees.

India's federal police, the

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), has told a Mumbai court that the amount involving Modi's companies was likely to go up, according to the source and court filings, copies of which have been reviewed by Reuters.

The CBI told the court that its investigation had found that the fraudulent issuance of letters of undertaking (LoUs), or guarantees, through a Mumbai branch of the bank had been going on since 2010.

In papers filed on Monday, the CBI also said PNB did not have all the documents related to the LoUs, since those were returned to the borrower.

"Most of these documents are not yet recovered. The size of the fraud has now gone (up)...and the same is likely to go even higher," the CBI said in the court filing.

PNB did not respond to requests on Tuesday seeking comment on the risk of its exposure rising further.

The bank initially reported to authorities on Jan. 29 that the jewelry groups had defrauded it of 2.8 billion rupees, or about \$44 million. On Feb. 14 it said the

fraud sum had reached \$1.77 billion after a detailed investigation.

It raised the amount further to nearly \$2 billion last week, saying it had discovered some \$200 million more in fraudulent letters of credit, another form of credit guarantee, issued to Choksi's Gitanjali (GTGM.NS) group. Investigators widened their probe on Tuesday with the government's Serious Fraud Investigation Office beginning to call senior executives from Gitanjali's creditor banks for questioning over their loan exposure, separate sources with direct knowledge of the probe said. Police also arrested on Tuesday Vipul Chitalia, a vice president at Gitanjali, taking the total number of people arrested so far in the case to 19. Chitalia, who police say was the authorized signatory for Gitanjali for the allegedly fraudulent transactions, was detained by Indian immigration authorities on his arrival from Bangkok. Jeweler Modi along with his family left India in January before PNB filed a police complaint, according to

police, who also say Choksi is out of India. Their whereabouts are not known. PNB shares fell 2.3 percent on Tuesday in a Mumbai market .NSEI that slipped 1.1 percent. The stock has lost almost 40 percent of its market value since disclosing the fraud on Feb. 14. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley told parliament on Tuesday that PNB had "sound fundamentals and strong growth potential" with its high share of low-cost current and savings accounts deposits, stabilizing bad loans and scope to raise funds by selling non-core assets.

Axis Bank (AXBK.NS), a private sector lender, said in a stock exchange filing the Serious Fraud Investigation Office had sought information from it on the accounts of Nirav Modi and Gitanjali groups of companies, adding its exposure to both groups was about 2 billion rupees. Reporting by Abhirup Roy and Devidutta Tripathy; Additional reporting by Nigam Prusty in New Delhi; Editing by Euan Rocha and Alex Richardson

Indian banks are among the most vulnerable in the G-20 economies today. Here's why



When the Indian economy and its banking sector emerged relatively unscathed after the global financial crash of 2008, India's financial system became the envy of the world. That seems a distant memory today as the banking sector of the country reels under one of the worst crises it has faced in a long time. A mounting pile of bad loans, poor accounting standards and growing evidence of lax supervision and banking fraud—unearthed over the past few weeks by several government agencies—highlight the deep rot at the core of India's financial system.

The broad numbers also tell the same story. In 2009, India had among the lowest ratio of non-performing assets among the largest economies of the world, which form the elite G-20

club. Eight years later, it has among the highest ratio of such assets, as the chart shows.

To be sure, the chart understates the extent of the problem in India's banking sector in 2009, when a combination of regulatory forbearance and poor accounting standards may have served to hide the real extent of the bad loan problem. The fact that India's bad loan ratio looks grim today has a lot to do with the fact that India's central bank has been prodding banks to recognize such toxic assets over the past few years—after long years of quiet forbearance. Be that as it may, the rise in bad loans and the lack of adequate provisions has put Indian banks in a tight spot now.

India's banking sector lags those of most other large

A mounting pile of bad loans, poor accounting standards and growing evidence of lax supervision and banking fraud highlight the deep rot at the core of India's financial system.

economies in terms of capital adequacy. Capital adequacy refers to the ability of a bank to withstand significant losses on its risky assets. India fares poorly in this regard despite a relatively conservative loan-to-deposit ratio. What makes matters worse is that the actual capital adequacy in Indian banks might be much worse than reported. To illustrate, if we assume the entire fraud amount

of Rs12,700 crore as loss for the Punjab National Bank (PNB) then its capital adequacy ratio (CAR) in December 2017 would have stood at 9% instead of the reported figure of 11.6%. The RBI has set 9% as the minimum threshold for total CAR. Total CAR refers to total equity and reserves of a bank, expressed as a percentage of its risk-weighted assets.

Also, there are reasons to

believe that all of India's bad loans may not have been accounted for yet. The latest quarterly results of the country's largest lender, the State Bank of India, in which the bank posted surprise losses on account of higher-than-anticipated bad loans, shows that the bad loan saga may not be over yet. SBI officials have, of course, claimed that the worst is over.

PNB fraud case: ICICI Bank's Chanda Kochhar, Axis Bank's Shikha Sharma summoned

MUMBAI: ICICI Bank chief Chanda Kochhar and Axis Bank's Shikha Sharma have been summoned by an anti-fraud agency in the multi-crore PNB scam + case involving jeweller Nirav Modi and his partner and uncle Mehul Choksi. Kochhar and Sharma will appear before the Serious Fraud Investigation Office in Mumbai

on Tuesday afternoon, sources in the agency



said. The sources said the two top bank officials were summoned for giving loan facility to

and would be questioned. ICICI Bank is believed to have extended a loan of Rs 1,000 crore and Axis Bank Rs 700 crore last year to Gitanjali Gems of Choksi. According to another source, officials of country's largest lender State Bank of India have been called for questioning. Both Nirav Modi and Choksi are alleged to have defrauded the state-run Punjab National Bank with Rs 12,600 crore. They have since fled from country.

Disney to Donate \$1 Million of 'Black Panther' Proceeds to Youth STEM Programs



The blockbuster film is set in Wakanda, a country whose surplus of the fictional metal vibranium has enriched it tremendously. Many of the technologies in the film are invented or controlled by Shuri, the sister of T'Challa, the Black Panther and Wakanda's king.

Disney said Monday it would donate \$1 million of the proceeds from "Black Panther" to STEM programs at the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, in a nod to one of the movie's key themes: how technology can empower young people from marginalized communities.

how much the technology in the film had excited young audiences. "It's fitting that we show our appreciation by helping advance STEM programs for youth, especially in underserved areas of the country, to give them the knowledge and tools to build the future they want," he said. The \$1 million pledged by Disney is only a fraction of the money that the film has brought in. In less than two weeks in theaters, "Black Panther" made more than \$700 million worldwide, making it one of the fastest grossing films ever. In a Twitter thread on Tuesday, the journalist Gene

Demby, who writes and hosts a podcast about race for NPR, was dismissive of Disney's contribution, calling it a "rounding error." He wrote about how Disney has benefited from enthusiasm about the merits of "Black Panther" and its representation of black people. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America, a federated organization with independent clubs in cities around the country, said the money would be used to create new STEM innovation centers in 12 cities. (The acronym stands for science, technology, engineering

and math.) Those cities include Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, Memphis, Washington and Oakland, Calif., where the director of "Black Panther," Ryan Coogler, was born and where some of the film takes place. Chrissy Booth, the senior director of youth development programs for the organization, said the cities were target markets for Disney. The organization plans to evaluate critical need in those markets, as well as individual clubs' willingness to participate, before deciding which clubs in each city will receive the centers.

Artificial Intelligence's 'Black Box' Is Nothing to Fear

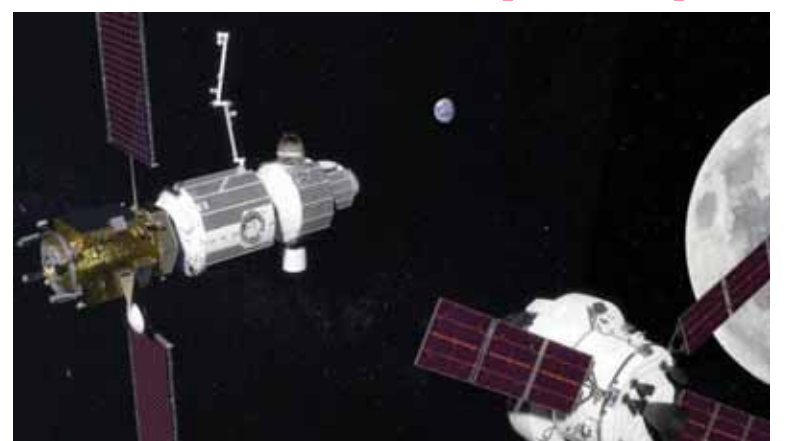


Alongside the excitement and hype about our growing reliance on artificial intelligence, there's fear about the way the technology works. A recent MIT Technology Review article titled "The Dark Secret at the Heart of AI" warned: "No one really knows how the most advanced algorithms do what they do. That could be a problem." Thanks to this uncertainty and lack of accountability, a report by the AI Now Institute recommended that public agencies responsible for criminal justice, health care, welfare and education shouldn't use such technology. Given these types of concerns, the unseeable space between where data goes in and answers come out is often referred to as a "black box" — seemingly a reference to the hardy (and in fact orange, not black) data recorders mandated on aircraft and often examined after accidents. In the context of A.I., the term more broadly suggests an image of being in the "dark" about how the technology works: We put in and

provide the data and models and architectures, and then computers provide us answers while continuing to learn on their own, in a way that's seemingly impossible — and certainly too complicated — for us to understand. There's particular concern about this in health care, where A.I. is used to classify which skin lesions are cancerous, to identify very early-stage cancer from blood, to predict heart disease, to determine what compounds in people and animals could extend healthy life spans and more. But these fears about the implications of black box are misplaced. A.I. is no less transparent than the way in which doctors have always worked — and in many cases it represents an improvement, augmenting what hospitals can do for patients and the entire health care system. After all, the black box in A.I. isn't a new problem due to new tech: Human intelligence itself is — and always has been — a black box.

NASA sees strong international interest in lunar exploration plans

WASHINGTON — There is significant interest in NASA's new lunar exploration plans from potential international partners but the country can't take its position of leadership for granted, an agency official said March 5. In a talk at a Space Transportation Association luncheon here, Bill Gerstenmaier, NASA associate administrator for human exploration and operations, said both current International Space Station partners and emerging space nations showed an interest in cooperating with NASA on those plans during discussions at the Second International Space Exploration Forum (ISEF2) last week in Tokyo.



"It's clear the U.S. is a leader throughout the international space community. That really came through our work with the space station," he said. "As we look forward and do things around the moon, we're going to have to keep a strong international presence." Countries are interested in

cooperating on NASA's lunar exploration plans in a variety of ways, Gerstenmaier said. Those plans are centered around development of the Lunar Orbital Platform – Gateway, a human-tended facility in cislunar space, as well as a series of lander missions that would culminate with human missions to the lunar surface in the late 2020s.

One area of cooperation, he said, is in development of life support systems for the Gateway, citing interest from the European Space Agency and the Japanese space agency JAXA.

NASA, he added, also has plans to develop life support systems, "so we'll figure out some way there" for cooperation among agencies. Another area of interest, he said, is in developing lunar lander capabilities. NASA has plans in the near term to partner with companies developing small commercial landers, and ultimately develop larger landers. But there are few details about how NASA, working with commercial or international partners, might develop those larger landers in the 2020s.

Scientist says he's found fossilized alien footprints on Mars, blames NASA for cover-up

NASA has been exploring the surface of Mars for years now, driving rovers for miles over the dusty landscape and making some pretty neat discoveries along the way. Unfortunately, there's been no concrete evidence of life ever having existed on the Red Planet — that is, if you believe the official version of things. Barry DiGregorio, a researcher with the University of Buckingham, doesn't buy it, and he says he's already discovered clues to Mars' past in the form of fossilized alien tracks. Now, he's trying to get others on board with his theory and blow the top off of an alleged

NASA cover-up in the process. DiGregorio, an author who has published books on Mars and its potential to host life, believes previously-released NASA imagery from the planet offers clear evidence of Martian tracks. He believes photos showing small indentations in rock are actually long-fossilized footprints of some type of alien life. "Put it this way, these images, these figures, have not been seen on Mars to date," DiGregorio told the Daily Star. "One of the things that grabbed me immediately was the expediency that NASA left the area of such a mission."



Practice meditation to beat rising stress levels. Here's how to get started

Various past studies have shown that the high stress levels could lead to array of health issues, including high blood pressure and various other cardiovascular diseases.

increasing for the first time in ten years, reports NBC News. Further, there are numerous studies suggesting that meditation could help in relieving anxiety and reducing stress levels, further reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

"Real people living busy lives can meditate successfully on their seven-year-old couch, in bed alone or next to their snoring partner, in the passenger seat of their car, at work, at the kitchen

table, in the backseat during a road trip, in a bus or a plane seat," said researcher Light Watkins. "And that's as it should be, because if you are waiting to find yourself atop a cliff-side or in a white, sparsely furnished room in order to feel like you can meditate, you're only going to meditate sporadically, and you're going to mistakenly conclude that what little benefit you are able to derive from your practically is magically linked to your serene

environment which couldn't be further from the truth", he added. Further Emily Fletcher founder of New York-based Ziva Meditation center highlighted the benefits and ease of practicing meditation. "It feels just as delicious to drop into a meditation when you are feeling blissed out on a pillow with soft lighting as it does sitting at your desk at 2 pm right as your morning coffee wear off," said Emily Fletcher.

Gone are the days when you could get away with the excuse of a hectic day at work to avoid meditation. A team of two scientists have provided some handy tips to help the people to regularly do meditation in order to beat the stress levels. Various past studies have shown

that the high stress levels could lead to array of health issues, including high blood pressure and various other cardiovascular diseases.

The American Psychological Association study suggested that the stress levels among the American natives have been

Diet matters: Eating healthy may not prevent effects of high salt intake

No matter how healthy the overall diet is, people eating higher amount of salt had higher blood pressure - a major risk factor for heart attacks and stroke, a new study has revealed.

If you tend to consume a healthy diet just to thwart the effects of high salt intake, think twice. A diet rich in fruits, whole grains and green leafy vegetables, might not balance out the risks caused by foods with higher salt content, researchers have warned. Previous studies considered a diet with adequate proportion of nutrients essential for the proper functioning of the body as well as effective in counteracting the effect of high salt on blood pressure. However, while these foods do tend to lower blood pressure, the new research suggests they do not counteract the adverse

influence of salt intake. No matter how healthy the overall diet is, people eating higher amount of salt had higher blood pressure - a major risk factor for heart attacks and stroke, the study showed. "We currently have a global epidemic of high salt intake and high blood pressure. This research shows there are no cheats when it comes to reducing blood pressure," said Queenie Chan, research student at the Imperial College in London. People need to monitor their salt intake, and food manufacturers should lower the salt content in their products, the scientists recommended. "Having a low



salt diet is key - even if your diet is otherwise healthy and balanced," Chan said. For the study, published in the journal Hypertension, the research team noted the diets of 4,680 people, aged 40-59, for four days. The researchers assessed sodium and potassium concentration in urine samples to check the amount of salt intake per person.

They found a correlation between high blood pressure and higher salt intake, even in people who were eating a high amount of potassium and other nutrients. "As a large amount of the salt in our diet comes from processed food, we are urging food manufacturers to take steps to reduce salt in their products," Chan said.

Myth busted: Fish oil supplements do not improve kids' memory

Fish oil or Omega-3 fatty acids are widely regarded as beneficial. However, the evidence on benefits for children's learning and behaviour is clearly not as strong as previously thought, say experts.



Fish oil -- rich in omega 3 -- does not improve memory function in small children, finds a study contradicting the popular health benefits related to fatty acids supplements. Previous studies have shown a relationship between omega-3s, the fatty acids in many types of fish, and improved intelligence.

However, the new study found that omega-3 supplements do not have any beneficial effect on the reading abilities and working memory of school children, especially with learning needs

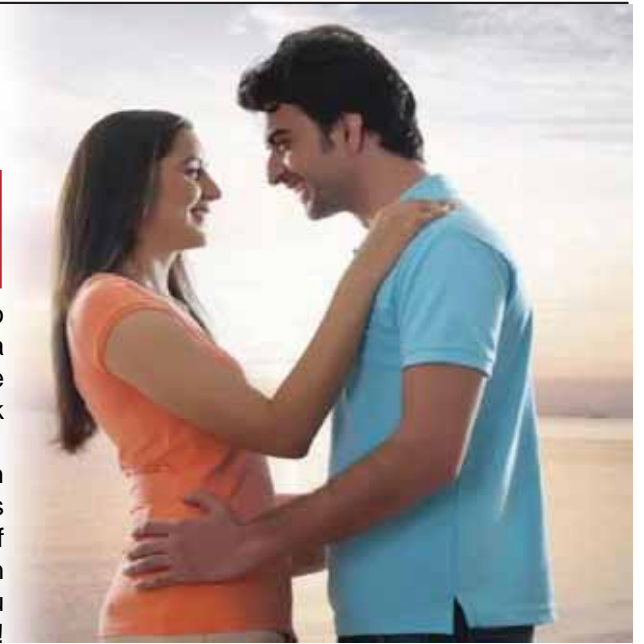
such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). "Fish oil or Omega-3 fatty acids are widely regarded as beneficial. However, the evidence on benefits for children's learning and behaviour is clearly not as strong as previously thought," said Thees Spreckelsen, researcher at University of Oxford in England.

For the study, published in the journal Plos One, the team tested 376 children between seven to nine years of age, who ranked academically low. Half of the children took a daily omega-3 fish

oil supplement and the remaining children took a placebo for 16 weeks. Their reading and working memories were tested before and after by their parents at home and teachers in school. The results confirmed that fish oil supplements did not have either any effect or had very little effect on the children's reading ability or working memory and behaviours. However, omega-3 fatty acids from fish has been shown to prevent cancer, asthma and rhinitis risk.

Forget marriage anniversaries. Celebrate these 10 relationship milestones instead

Sure, your wedding was a pretty important day in your life. But these other, smaller occasions also deserve to be celebrated.



Every relationship has its cute moments. And sometimes, in the monotony of daily life, we often forget to stop and cherish the smaller acts of love and kindness that define your equation. And not every celebration needs to be an over-the-top, grand gesture. Here's to treasuring every little milestone:

- 1) Do you remember when you first realised you were in love? When you finally understood why your heart raced when you were around a certain someone? That's a day you need to commemorate! Try to recapture that feeling with your partner by your side.
- 2) The first time you say 'I love you' to your partner is important. It signifies the beginning of something beautiful! Mark this day with your significant other in your own special way. A quiet dinner, a trip to an amusement park, or a long walk – whatever works for you!
- 3) The first time you two shared a kiss. The memory brings a smile to your face,

doesn't it? Shared intimacy certainly deserves to be celebrated.

- 4) Every couple has gone out on a movie date at some point. The first such date is usually full of awkward moments where you may not know whether it's okay to hold hands, or put your arm around the other person. But that's what makes looking back at it so sweet! So, go ahead and recreate it by watching the same movie at home.
- 5) When you introduce your partner to your parents, it means you're pretty serious about the relationship. Whether it was at a family dinner or a private occasion that you invited your partner to, it shows how much you had matured together. You could throw a small, cozy house party with your partner and relatives to celebrate your love.
- 6) It may feel natural now to hang out with your spouse and your squad together, but it wasn't always so. Your friends are an important part of your life

and asking your partner to join the inner circle is a special occasion. Get the gang in one place and mark this definite milestone!

- 7) The first trip you take with your special person is memorable for a multitude of reasons. It leaves you with a lifetime of moments you can always look back to! Take off on a second honeymoon or a small weekend getaway and have fun!
- 8) In the initial phase of any relationship, both the people put their best foot forward. But when you finally relax around your partner and completely are yourself, that's an important milestone. Celebrate the time you stopped bothering to pile on make-up before meeting your partner, or double-checking whether you smell great.
- 9) Trust is the foundation of a stable relationship. When you decide you can

share your phone, email or social media passwords with your partner without any hesitation, it means you two have come a long way. So, the first time you gave out your password is a milestone that deserves to be valued.

10) Not all milestones need to be lovey-dovey. Proudly celebrate your first fight because it means you also made up and didn't leave each other at the first sign of trouble. You survived choppy waters. That's something to hold on to, isn't it?

Price to pay: How Bitcoin bitterness is making messy divorces even worse

Rising popularity of Bitcoin means more separations involve the currency, which is difficult to trace and hard to value.



high-stakes divorces, because judges generally order a 50-50 split of assets, giving equal weight to the work of a wealth creator and a partner. "It's creating another layer of distrust that we haven't had to deal with before," Jo Carr-West, a partner at Hunters, said in an interview. "The public perception that there is a lack of a paper trail causes the anxiety." Cryptocurrencies traded using an online exchange or bought with funds from a bank account can be easier to trace and value. But if a cryptocurrency is moved offline -- for example, if someone transfers their digital wallet onto a USB -- then it becomes more difficult. In this case, a digital forensics expert can be brought in to search through the spouse's email to determine what transactions have taken place. This is a slow process that can cost thousands of pounds -- sometimes more than the currency itself is worth. "Cryptocurrencies make things complex if you have a spouse who's determined to hold on to their money, same as if they were hiding assets overseas," Victoria Clarke, a solicitor at Stowe Family Law, said in an interview.

Divorces are messy, and cryptocurrencies are helping to make them a whole lot more so. Virtual currencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum are a new challenge for UK lawyers, plagued with volatility and secrecy that is extending the already painful process of dividing a couple's assets. The rising popularity of Bitcoin--and for a while at least, its rising value--means more separations involve the currency, which is difficult to trace and hard to value. Although parties have a duty to provide full disclosure of their assets in a divorce, the anonymous nature of cryptocurrencies potentially make them a safe haven for spouses wishing to hide their money from a warring partner.

"Often in a divorce one spouse is looking for a pot of gold that doesn't exist. But with cryptocurrencies, it's possible the pot does exist," Toby Yerburch, head of Family Law at Collyer Bristow, said in an interview. Yerburch said he started to get cases where partners are concerned about hidden Bitcoins since the currency became better known last year. If one party decides not to disclose or provide evidence of their holdings, the divorce process becomes more expensive and time-consuming, and could result in the partner failing to get a fair share of assets. This can amount to a lot of money in the U.K., which has a reputation of being a more sympathetic place to play out

Supportive relationships may reverse health effects of childhood abuse



Having supportive relationships in the journal Nature Human mid-life can counteract some Behaviour. adverse health risks - including "We were curious as to whether premature death - caused by social support during this childhood abuse, a study has 'incubation' period or interim found. "This is one of the first studies to provide evidence suggesting that experiences long after exposure to abuse can mitigate the mortality risks associated with early abuse," said Jessica Chiang, a postdoctoral fellow at Northwestern University in the US. Given the serious health consequences of childhood abuse later in life, such as heart disease, stroke and some cancers, researchers wanted to examine whether there's anything that can be done to compensate or reverse these effects. "Many of the diseases associated with childhood abuse typically emerge in middle and later stages of adulthood - decades after the abuse actually occurred," said Chiang, lead author of the study published in

Behaviour. "We were curious as to whether social support during this 'incubation' period or interim could offset health risks associated with much earlier experiences of abuse," she said. Using a sample of more than 6,000 adults in the US, the researchers examined whether adults self-reported social support decreased mortality risk associated with self-reported exposure to three types of childhood abuse: severe physical abuse, modest physical abuse and emotional abuse. Social support was associated with a lower mortality risk, which the researchers expected given prior research. "The magnitude of the reduction in mortality risk associated with mid-life social support differed between the individuals who reported childhood abuse and those who reported minimal or no childhood abuse," Chiang said.



Paris Fashion Week 2018: No-fur Stella McCartney fuses men's, women's styles

Guests including actresses Kristin Scott Thomas and Isabelle Huppert were served up green juices with spirulina before McCartney's beautifully uplifting leather-and-fur-free collection inside the ornate Paris Opera.

In a fall-winter season that's featured a fair share of fur on the runway in spite of growing resistance, Stella McCartney's show was the ecological antidote at Paris Fashion Week.

Guests including actresses Kristin Scott Thomas and Isabelle Huppert were served up green juices with spirulina before McCartney's beautifully uplifting leather-and-fur-free collection inside the ornate Paris Opera.

Here are some highlights of Monday's

shows, including Giambattista Valli and Alexander McQueen. There's so much to feel good about in a Stella McCartney show. Monday's ever-imaginative styles used artful deconstruction to produce a fresh fusion of menswear and womenswear styles.

A man's suit was turned inside out and turned into a fluid dress with bare seams. Suit pants were cut at the knee as if they'd been guillotined. And a minimalist gray waistcoat featured a chic couture-like

peplum silhouette. Statement knitwear was a key theme. Traditional Aran sweaters - in big cable knit - hit a surreal note in multicolor with huge sleeves that made the arms completely disappear. McCartney, a famed vegan, thus proved you don't need fur to be glamorous and stay warm in winter.

The 46 styles were served up with an uplifting, foot-tapping soundtrack that provoked a moment of humor.

"Where the hell's my phone?" it boomed

out. "You're holding it."

iPhone-addicted influencers smiled in a moment of self-reflection. Stella McCartney joined the legion of fashion houses — such as Givenchy and Saint Laurent — which are now showcasing designs for men during the womenswear week. The merging styles maximize the commercial impact for each season, but they also serve to blur gender lines and encourage the world to not see gender (and dressing) as so binary.

Oscars red carpet: It was a riot of colours with whites, reds and electric blues leading the pack

From classic white to fire engine red, with shades of teal, fuchsia, powder blue and lavender mixed in, here are some highlights of the style parade on Tinseltown's biggest night.

After a Hollywood awards season of statement red carpets including "blackouts" at the Golden Globes and Baftas, the movie industry's finest embraced a rainbow of colour Sunday at the Oscars. From classic white to fire engine red, with shades of teal, fuchsia, powder blue and lavender mixed in, here are some highlights of the style parade on Tinseltown's biggest night:

- White-hot -

White is associated with the suffragette movement, and on Sunday, many of Hollywood's top stars embraced it. "Get Out" star Allison Williams was one of the first stars on the red carpet and her look was killer -

- a cream beaded Armani princess gown with sheer cap

sleeves that earned raves in the Twitterverse.

Jane Fonda also embraced the ice princess look, looking fabulous at age 80 -- !! -- in a sculpted white Balmain gown with a geometric neckline. Laura Dern -- who joined the "Star Wars" family last year in "The Last Jedi" and will present an award on Sunday with her co-stars -- wowed red carpet watchers in a Calvin Klein gown with a large tie draped over one shoulder.

And Mary J Blige -- the first person to be nominated for acting and song writing for the same film, "Mudbound" -- wore a white gown with a glittering bodice and an asymmetrical neckline. She will perform during the gala.

- Ladies in Red -

Allison Janney -- seen as the

favourite to take home the Oscar for best supporting actress for her searing portrayal of figure skater Tonya Harding's mom LaVona in the biopic "I, Tonya" -- looked ready for her close-up. The statuesque actress was red-hot in a show-stopping fire engine red Reem Acra gown with flowing sleeves, a plunging neckline -- and plenty of diamonds to fill the gap.

"This is my first time at the Oscars," she told E! television.

"It's pretty overwhelming." Three-time winner Meryl Streep also wore red -- a simple gown with a deep-V neckline and three-quarter-length sleeves. She is again a nominee this year, for Pentagon Papers drama "The Post."

- US Olympic medalists kick



back -

Some of America's top Olympians graced the red carpet, including bronze medalist figure skaters Mirai

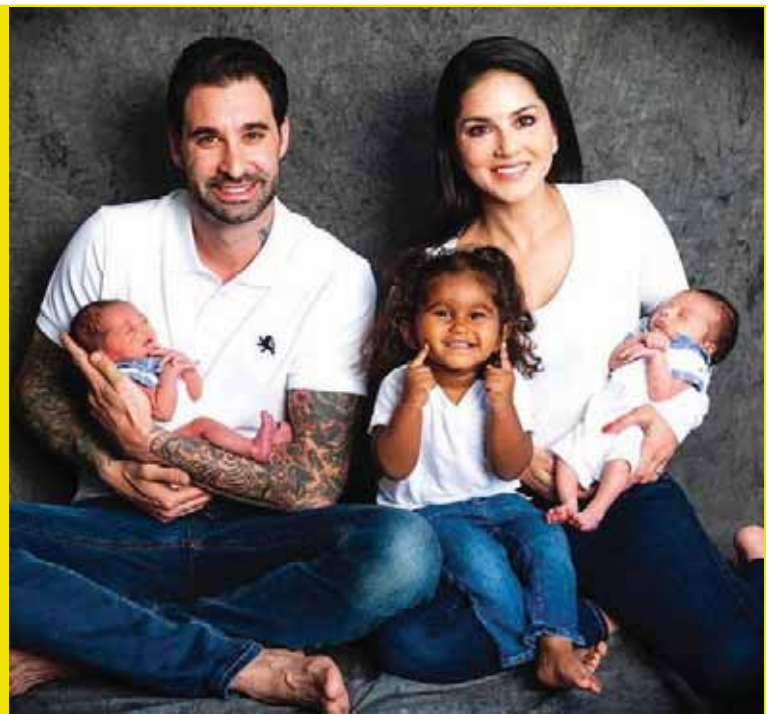
Nagasu -- in an ethereal powder blue Tadashi Shoji gown -- and Adam Rippon, sporting a curious black bondage-inspired harness jacket.

Sunny Leone and husband Daniel Weber are now parents to two baby boys.

Sunny Leone shared an amazing, happy news with her fans on Monday morning. The actor revealed that she and her husband, Daniel Weber became parents to two baby boys 'a few weeks ago.'

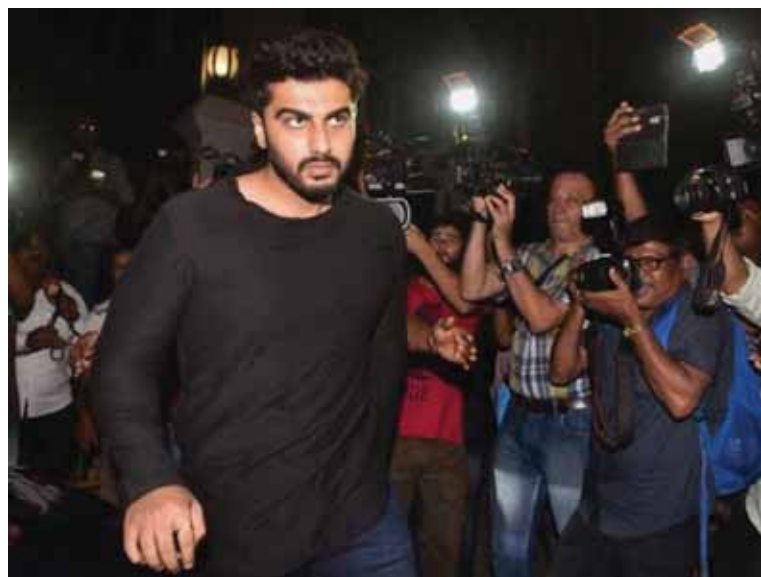
Sunny called it 'God's plan' in an Instagram post. "God's Plan!! June 21st, 2017 was the day @dirrty99 and I found out that we might possibly be having 3 children within a short amount of time. We planned and tried to have a family and after so many years, our family is now complete with Asher Singh Weber, Noah Singh Weber and Nisha Kaur Weber. Our boys were born a few weeks ago but were alive in our hearts and eyes for many years. God planned

something so special for us and gave us a large family. We are both the proud parents of three beautiful children. Surprise everyone!," she wrote in the post. "Say Hello to Noah and Asher Weber !!! #family @sunnyleone @dirrty99 :))))). The next chapter of life !!! Karen, Nisha , Noah , Asher and Me !!!!! Proud!!!!," Daniel wrote on Instagram. Nisha, whom the couple adopted in July 2017 from Latur, Maharashtra, looks happy and excited about her brothers' arrival in the photo.



Arjun Kapoor breaks silence after Sridevi death, hopes to recover 'one day at a time'

After cousin Sonam Kapoor, half-sister Janhvi, uncle Anil and father Boney, Arjun Kapoor broke his social media silence after Sridevi's death.



Taking the lead from his family members, cousin Sonam Kapoor, half-sister Janhvi Kapoor, uncle Anil Kapoor and father Boney Kapoor, Arjun Kapoor has broken his social media silence after the sudden death of Sridevi. The Bollywood icon died in Dubai due to accidental drowning. She was Boney Kapoor's second wife and the mother of two of his daughters.

On Monday, Arjun posted a quote by writer RM Drake - "You're brave because life gives you every reason to want to give up and still, you rise, you pick yourself up and carry on" - along with the caption, "One day at a time..."

Arjun was frequently seen at his family's side immediately after Sridevi's

death. He travelled to Dubai to ensure all procedures were completed on time and the family could claim Sridevi's mortal remains to bring back to India.

On March 1, Sonam posted the first statement on the family's behalf, in which she requested for privacy as they grieved. In the statement, the family noted that the priority would be the well being of Sridevi's two young daughters, Janhvi and Khushi. This was echoed in a separate statement by Boney Kapoor. Sonam also posted a message on Janhvi's 21st birthday.

Arjun Kapoor was shooting for Namaste England with Parineeti Chopra in Amritsar when he was called to Mumbai. The actors have since returned to work.

Janhvi Kapoor's heartfelt note to Sridevi: There's a gnawing hollowness in my chest

Janhvi Kapoor thanks her mother for protecting her from 'sadness and pain' and requests all to love their parents unconditionally.

Sridevi's sudden passing away has left a nation in shock. Sridevi's family had asked for solitude to mourn for the late actor. Now, Sridevi's first born Janhvi has written a heartfelt note on her mother.

The very first line will pull at your heartstrings -- she begins by saying that there is '... gnawing hollowness in my chest that I know I have to learn to live with'.

Janhvi goes on to describe what her mother meant to her, how she was 'perpetually happy' because of her mother, how 'no problem was big enough' and how 'nothing anybody said mattered'. She thanked her mother for all of it.

She adds how her mother protected her 'from sadness and pain' and how Sridevi wasn't meant for this world. She writes, "You were too good, too pure, too full of love."

Sharing the post on Instagram, Janhvi captioned it with another long note, requesting all to love and care for their parents. Janhvi writes: "On my birthday, the only thing I ask of all of you is that you love your parents."

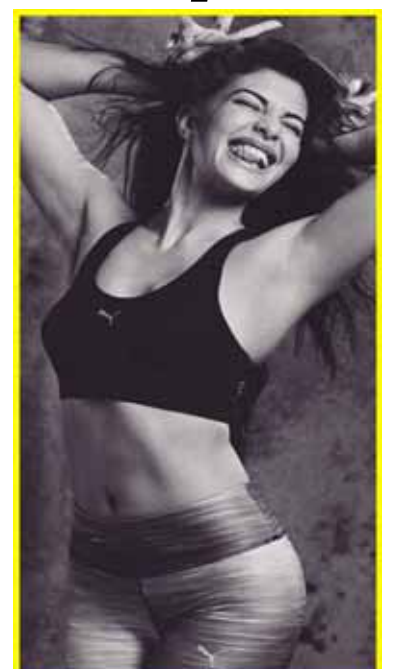


Entered Bollywood by chance: Jacqueline

Jacqueline Fernandez, who hails from Sri Lanka, says she always wanted to be an entertainer but didn't plan getting into Bollywood. The actress an investor as well as "believer" for Raw Pressery has penned down her thoughts about her journey in blog, which went live on International Women's Day on Thursday. "Since a very young age, I've always dreamt of being an entertainer. Wanting to tell stories, make everyone around me laugh. For me it was never about the films but the pure joy that comes with being an entertainer. That dream, that joy is something that had me drawn towards it," Jacqueline said. "Entering Bollywood pretty

much happened by chance. In Bollywood, it's not just about entertaining, but also an artistic form of expression through dance, acting and dialogue that has the potential to stir thousands of emotions. Entered Bollywood by chance: Jacqueline "Your audience relates to you. Lives the character through you."

All the strength to live up to my dream of being an entertainer has come from constantly growing as a performer and to focus on my strengths. It might sound a little too good to be true as you read, but believe me, once you start living by it, you'll feel the difference yourself," she added.





Mukesh Ambani's son Akash to wed Shloka Mehta this year?

The Ambanis and Mehtas know each other well, and Akash and Shloka studied together at Dhirubhai Ambani International School.

Is Shloka Mehta, the youngest daughter of diamondaire Russell Mehta, the girl Akash Ambani, the son of India's richest man Mukesh Ambani, slated to marry later this year? The answer is yes, if people familiar with the matter are to be believed.

While the two families have refused to comment on the wedding, these people say an announcement of the engagement could be made in the next few weeks, with the wedding being planned for early December.

Akash, 27, is the eldest son of India's richest man Mukesh Ambani, and Shloka Mehta is the daughter of Russell Mehta, who heads Rosy Blue Diamonds, formerly known as B. Arunkumar & Co. The family lives in south Mumbai.

Russell is the son of Arunkumar Ramniklal M., one of the co-founders of B. Arunkumar & Co., way back in 1960 in Opera House, Mumbai's diamond trade

hub. She is the youngest of three children of Russell and Mona Mehta.

The Ambanis and Mehtas know each other well and Akash and Shloka studied together at Dhirubhai Ambani International School.

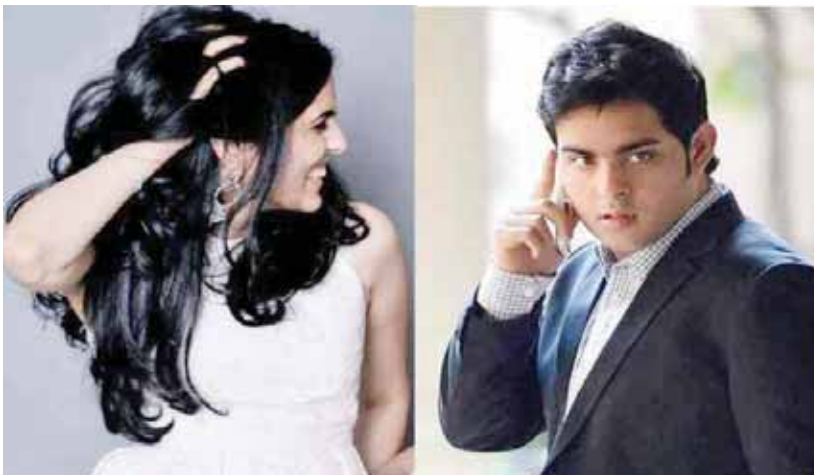
While emails and reminders sent to spokespersons of the Ambani family and Reliance Industries remained unanswered, a person close to the family said, "No dates of either the wedding or engagement of

Akash Ambani have been finalised".

As and when any good news is to be shared, the family will be delighted to share with everyone," the source said.

This person discounted talk of March 24 being set as the engagement date. Emails sent to a Rosy Blue spokesperson too remain unanswered. Akash and twin sister Isha are the eldest of the three children of Mukesh and Nita Ambani. He is on the board of Reliance Jio, the group's fast growing telecom venture.

Shloka, who after finishing schooling at Dhirubhai Ambani International School in 2009 went on to study Anthropology at Princeton University and masters in Law at The London School of Economics and Political Science, is a director at the Rosy Blue Foundation since July 2014. She is also a co-founder of ConnectFor, which matches volunteers with NGOs that need them.



Mute movie review

The worst thing to happen to Justin Theroux this week

Despite the blazing talent involved - director Duncan Jones, Alexander Skarsgard, Paul Rudd - it's another let-down from Netflix. And poor Justin Theroux is having the worst week.



Mute

Director: ?Duncan Jones

Cast: Alexander Skarsgård, Paul Rudd, Justin Theroux

Rating: 1.5/5

While promoting Star Trek Beyond - a movie for which he served as co-writer, in addition to his role as Scotty - Simon Pegg offered his approach to the material. The idea, he said, was to write a genre picture - say, a detective thriller or a war

epic - and populate it with characters from the franchise. It's a trick best used to tackle those big Marvel movies, which are mostly written by people not intimately familiar with dense comic book lore. This was also what Duncan Jones did with his last movie, Warcraft, which was almost a Western, but with fantasy creatures, of course.

This hack never works with

smaller films - it shouldn't - because it is those movies that Marvel is trying to emulate. So when Captain America: The Winter Soldier is called a '70s conspiracy thriller, people are drawing comparisons to All the President's Men or Three Days of the Condor. The trouble with Mute, Jones' new movie, is that not only does it try to appropriate the textures and tones of Blade Runner, it creates an almost identical world, within the same genre. Mute isn't the first movie to make its affections for Ridley Scott's classic known. The list is too long to reproduce here. But only last year, we saw Ghost in the Shell and Denis Villeneuve's sequel. And just last month, we were delivered Altered Carbon - again, by Netflix - and were expected to watch all ten episodes of its derivative drivel. In one of the series of unfortunate events to have befallen Mute, the only real points it

manages to score with regard to Blade Runner Scott's sci-fi masterpiece, it mostly ignores its most potent theme: immigration. In Mute, Alexander Skarsgard plays Leo, a bartender in a future Berlin teeming with a multi-cultural population of fluid sexuality. People dress like they're out of a Philip K Dick story, with plastics and glitter obscuring faces lit by blazing neon. Most of them, continuing the trend that we have seen in these stories, have had some sort of cybernetic enhancement made to their physical bodies. Except Leo. When he was a child in America, Leo Beiler was involved in an accident that took away a part of his neck, and his voice. His Amish mother refused to let doctors fix him, leaving his fate in the hands of her God. A few years later, Leo, along with thousands of Amish, returned

to Germany, their motherland. Leo grew up in the seedy underbelly of a large metropolis, the rain-soaked, crime-ridden flipside to the progressive futuristic landscape above.

When his girlfriend - whom he loves dearly, the movie tells us, and expects us to get on boards - goes missing, Leo embarks on a quest to find her, which sends him on a collision course with Cactus Bill and Duke Teddington, two Americans played by Paul Rudd and Justin Theroux.

With characters named Cactus and Duke, and with Duncan Jones at the helm, directing a movie in a genre with which he is most familiar, and certainly most adept, expectations were understandably high. Jones had even said that Mute was a spiritual sequel to his first film, the modern sci-fi masterpiece, Moon. He'd spent years trying to get it made, and finally, Netflix had put up the money.

Pari movie review

Anushka Sharma's film is jumbled, chaotic and bland

Anushka Sharma's film Pari is a confusing tell of ghosts, ghouls, djinns and forced legitimacy



Pari
Cast: Anushka Sharma, Parambrata Chatterjee, Rajat Kapoor
Director: Prosit Roy
Rating: 1/5
Spread his blood, spread his bloodline.

A car is moving through the jungles when a loud thud brings it to a screeching halt. A heavy downpour restricts the vision, but it's obvious that the vehicle has

hit a human. The driver doesn't come out, but a fellow passenger does. Turns out, they have hit a gypsy woman who might have a past beyond their imagination. There are spoilers ahead, so proceed at your own will. The greenery, the drenched roads, unsuspecting characters and an eerie surrounding suggest you might have landed at the right place after a series of screamers, read teasers, that show most of

the important scenes of Pari, with a tagline 'not a fairytale'.

Alas, that feeling doesn't last as Anushka Sharma's film soon becomes a confusing tale of ghosts, ghouls, djinns and forced legitimacy.

Let's give credit where it is due. Pari begins on a promising note. It spreads its canvas from Kolkata to Barackpur to Dhaka effortlessly. You're told about Ifrit, the most powerful djinn, and how it wants to propagate its bloodline. You meet a cult with a desire to curb this menace, and an Anushka Sharma who looks volatile, vulnerable and ready to explode.

Slowly, Pari starts using the same tactics as Vikram Bhatt. You'll enter a silent space and something will cross the frame behind you. You turn and find it right behind you — now these are shots we have been watching for years, and listening to loud background score that accompanies it. Nothing wrong till it thrills, but intrigue factor

begins to diminish.

What takes over the screen instead is Professor's (Rajat Kapoor) wood-cutter wielding men and a theory about Ifrit's blood-thirsty daughter, Peri or Pari. Anushka Sharma's Rukhsana is an attempt to humanise the idea of the Satan living inside all of us. Her enthusiasm makes it bearable. You're willing to give her the benefit of doubt, but a messed-up screenplay snatches away her chance to rise and shine.

Though they resort to explaining all the major plot points in the second half, but it's too late by then. You have already heard a monstrous voice a la Creature 3D, or have seen people's heads getting twisted like Ram Gopal Varma's *Bhoot*.

Apart from one or two scenes meant for the shock value, most of it fails to restore our faith in this story of shape shifting, Voldemort-inspired, time travelling, technology-friendly disturbed souls. What begins as

a captivating mystery around a chained woman slips into a tale of disturbed TV signals and flickering lights. Jishnu Bhattacharjee's innovative cinematography tries to cover-up, but he can't rescue a film that fails to explain its lead's sudden change of character. How she becomes so powerful all of a sudden when all the resources she later used were available to it all through. Or, maybe anger drives the ghosts crazy as well. From a bit of chainsaw to a dose of slasher drama, Pari throws enough blood at you. Apart from the initial scenes, the police are conspicuously absent and people, right in the middle of a metropolitan, get trimmed and slashed. There is a side-track involving Parambrata and debutant Ritabhari Chakraborty to provide legitimacy to the idea of inner demons, but even their most passionate conversations fail to ignite the spark that Pari loses within 15 minutes of the film.

Veerey Ki Wedding

Pulkit Samrat, Kriti Kharbanda's archaic and tiresome affair

The film boasts of good production values and is colour and glamour in every frame but mind-numbing nonetheless.



Veerey ki Wedding
Cast: Pulkit Samrat, Kriti Kharbanda, Jimmy Shergill, Satish Kaushik
Director: Ashu Trikha
Rating: 1/5
Director Ashu Trikha's Veerey Ki Wedding, is purportedly a frothy romcom which severely challenges your intelligence quotient. Veer Arora (Pulkit Samrat) is the son of a rich businessman

Prabhu Arora (Mickey Makhija) and is known to be the quintessential humanitarian with muscle power always ready to help. Not serious about life, his parents are keen that he settles down. Omnipresent in Delhi trying to save damsels from eve-teasers, preventing bank robberies and donating his father's hard-earned money to the poor and the needy, Veer

is just a phone call away when anyone is in trouble.

In love with Geet Bhalla (Kriti Kharbanda), Veer is keen to marry her but her father Gopi Bhalla (Satish Kaushik) disapproves of the match as he is a firm believer of Ahimsa or non-violence and thinks Veer is a hooligan who indulges in violence.

How Veer proves his goodness to his would-be father-in-law and wins him over thus getting his daughter's hand, forms the crux of this two hour plus film. The screenplay by Dilip Shukla and the treatment by Director Ashu Trikha, is mindless and hopelessly outdated. The writing is amateurish and the humour absurd and trite. Each scene is senseless and insular with no bearing on the next. The film appears to be a patchwork of several poorly directed scenes sewn together. The plot is wafer-thin and the poor treatment does not help. The inflated comedy,

hackneyed dialogues, caricature characters, make for tedious viewing. Vijay Raaz's voice as the sutradhar does not salvage the film either. Pulkit Samrat as always, portrays himself as an extension of Salman Khan - right from his dialogue delivery to his action scenes, albeit minus the Khan charisma. He appears comfortable displaying his brawn and swag but emotes poorly, making no impact at all.

Kriti Kharbanda as Geet is effervescent and pretty, but sadly is limited by a badly written script. She delivers what is expected of her. Jimmy Shergill is miscast as a young and suave Balli, Veer's older cousin who is heartbroken and perpetually unlucky in love. He effortlessly walks through most scenes being a good actor, but is thoroughly wasted. Satish Kaushik as Geet's possessive father and the

owner of Bhalla sweets, is his usual loud self, oozing Punjabiness in every breath, including his rustic dialogue delivery and unpolished mannerisms. But again the fault lies with the poorly etched characters. Abhishek Duhan as the potential suitor for Geet, displays confidence and talent in several scenes and stands out among other actors. Yuvika Chaudhary as police inspector Rani Chaudhry in her inane Haryanvi accent is an eyesore. The rest of the ensemble cast gets a fair amount of screen time but fail to leave an impression as the plot is a mindless riot. The music replete with Punjabi flavours, does not make you hum a single number and the songs seem forced. The film boasts of good production values and is colour and glamour in every frame but mind-numbing nonetheless. Overall, Veerey ki Wedding is a shaadi you might not like to attend.

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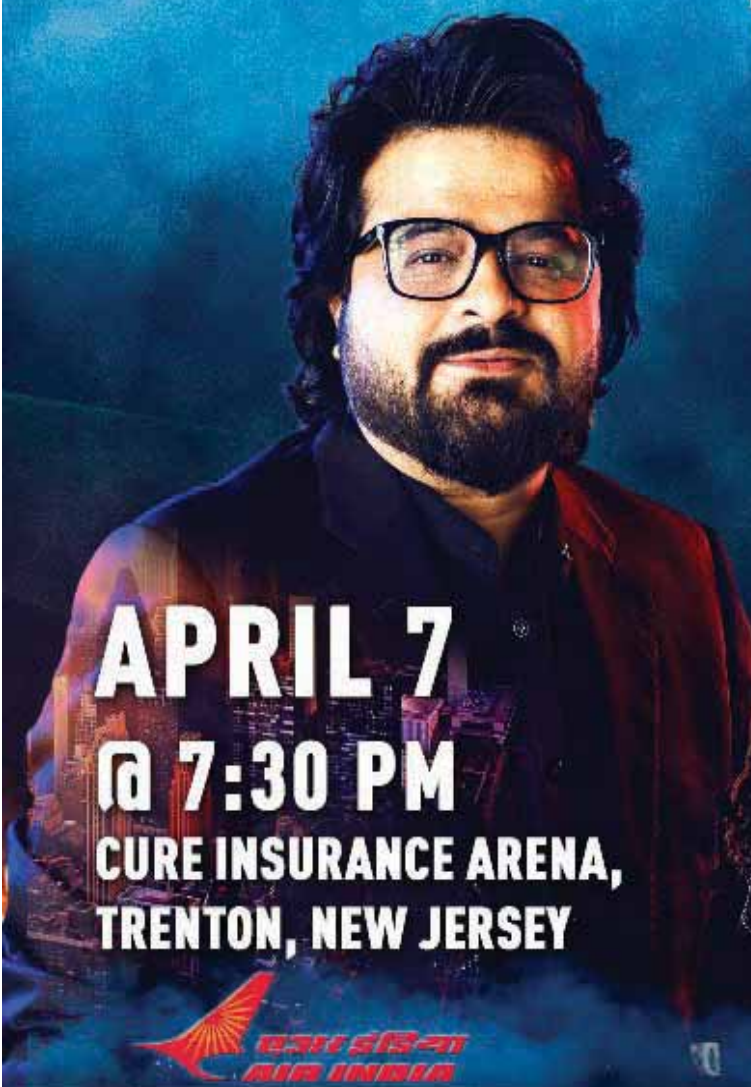
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