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SPECIAL REPORT
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'How can it be so cold if there's Global Warming?'



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'India on way to becoming 5th largest economy in the world'

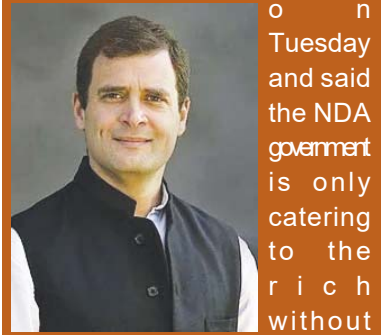
(SAI Bureau)- Speaking at the India-South Africa Business Summit in New Delhi, Indian PM Narendra Modi India is the world's fastest-growing major economy and the government is committed to reforms that will further propel it.



At USD 2.6 trillion, the Indian economy is currently ranked sixth in the world behind the US, China, Japan, Germany and the UK. Modi listed out government's initiatives including the push for boosting domestic manufacturing through Make in India and digitising the economy through Digital India.

"Guaranteed Minimum Income for Poor in India"

(News Agencies)- 'Congress president Rahul Gandhi continued with his attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi



on Tuesday and said the NDA government is only catering to the rich without paying any heed to the needs of the poor. "Modi gives maximum income guarantee to the rich, we give minimum income guarantee to the poor," Gandhi said during a public rally in Kerala's Kochi.

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ICE set up a fake university

Hundreds enrolled, not realizing it was a sting operation

(News Agencies)-On its website, the University of Farmington advertised an innovative STEM curriculum that would prepare students to compete in the global economy, and flexible class schedules that would allow them to enroll without disrupting their careers. The Michigan-based school touted the



number of languages spoken by its president (four) and the number of classes taught by teaching assistants (zero.) Photos of the campus showed students lounging around with books on a grassy quad or engaged in rapt conversation in its brightly lit modern library.

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John Kapoor, India-born billionaire on trial for bribing doctors

Accused of "masterminding illegal marketing tactics" that contributed to an epidemic of "addiction and death."



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Insurance

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Indian-origin British retailer brothers among UK's top 50 taxpayers

According to the report, the 50 top taxpayer entries paid nearly 2 billion pounds in UK tax last year. Tax paid overseas was not included in calculations of tax liability and the debut top 50 tax list includes 28 of the 145 billionaires and 18 of the 855 millionaires on last year's 'Sunday Times Rich List'.

(Insider Bureau)- Indian-origin retail brothers -- Simon, Bobby and Robin Arora -- have been ranked Britain's 24th highest taxpayers, according to a new top 50 list compiled by 'The Sunday Times'.

The Arora family, behind the B&M chain of discount stores, paid 25.6 million pounds towards their 2017-18 tax bill against wealth estimated at 2,300 million pounds.

The UK's highest taxpayer was named as sportswear businessman Stephen Rubin, who paid 181.6 million pounds in tax in 2017-18 against a wealth estimate of 2,820 million pounds. "These are the taxman's best friends - those who make the inaugural 'Sunday Times Tax List' based on the taxes due on their

business profits, share sales, dividend income, house purchases and, where known, personal income through their salaries," the newspaper noted. "The super-rich are often castigated for not paying their fair share of tax, for deploying all tax avoidance measures at their disposal, yet the top 1 per cent of earners are expected to yield 28 per cent of all income tax receipts for 2017-18," it noted.

Based on Merseyside in north-west England, B&M paid 143.2 million pounds in corporation tax, customs duties, stamp duty and other taxes in 2017-18, with 63 million pounds in dividends. The Arora brothers, who built the business, own just under 15 per cent of it, with 49-year-old Simon its chief executive.

"We ascribe to them a share of the business and dividend taxes on this basis, together with tax due on the GBP 1.3 million pay package of chief executive Simon Arora," the report noted.

Known for its annual 'Rich List' of the UK's wealthiest people, the newspaper released its first-ever list ranking top 50 tax contributions as the UK's January 31 income tax return filing deadline nears. Gambling giants behind Bet365 - Denise, John and Peter Coates - and vacuum-clean entrepreneur Sir James Dyson make up the country's top three taxpayers at GBP 156 million and 127.8 pounds million respectively.

Just two of the top taxpayers also appear in the newspaper's top 10

Rich List, which is based on their overall wealth while the tax calculations are based on income.

Also on the list are the owner of Home Bargains, Tom Morris and his family (39.2 million pounds); Sports Direct owner Mike Ashley (30.4 million pounds); well-known bakers the Warburton family (14.5 million pounds); and footballer David and wife Victoria

Beckham in the 49th place (12.7 million pounds).

According to the report, the 50 top taxpayer entries paid nearly 2 billion pounds in UK tax last year. Tax paid overseas was not included in calculations of tax liability and the debut top 50 tax list includes 28 of the 145 billionaires and 18 of the 855 millionaires on last year's 'Sunday Times Rich List'.



In the UK, super-rich individuals and companies are liable for different tax brackets including Corporation Tax, which is paid at a rate of 19 per cent on all company profits. The amount ascribed to individuals by the newspaper is in proportion to their stake in the business. Dividend Tax is paid at a rate of 38.1 per cent for additional rate taxpayers (those earning more than 150,000 pounds a year on overall value of dividends received). Capital Gains Tax is due at 10 per cent on sales of businesses or parts of businesses for those qualifying for Entrepreneurs' Relief and Income Tax is paid at 45 per cent on earnings above GBP 150,000.

Canadian citizenship for Indians rise by 50%

The only other country to top India is Philippines. Around 15,642 Filipinos became Canadian citizens in that period.



(Agencies)-As the Trump administration continues to tighten the H-1B visa rules, there has been a 50% rise in

citizenship granted to Indians in the period of 10 months ending October 2018. Several thousands of Indians have

opted for the Canadian citizenship after spending the specified duration for permanent residence. Nearly

15,000 Indians obtained citizenship during that period, which is a significant rise of 50% from last year.

Responding to queries by Times of India, Canadian authorities said that India has the second-highest number of citizenship applications. The only other country to top India is Philippines. Around 15,642 Filipinos became Canadian citizens in that period, a rise of 11% from last year's 14,058.

On the other hand, 9,992 Indians were granted citizenship in the same period last year, which rose to 15,016 in the period till October this year. According to the data shared with TOI, 1.39 lakh permanent residents became citizens in this period, out of which nearly 11% are Indians. These are, however, preliminary figures and the official figures are estimated to be much higher.

This rise in number is also the result of the reduction

of the time period a permanent resident must be present in Canada to receive citizenship. Earlier a permanent resident was required to complete 4 years of residency out of 6 years, which has now been reduced to 3 years out of 5 years.

Citizenship has much more value as compared to permanent residency. A citizen can vote and work in the government sector among various other facilities.

India also offers the highest number of permanent residents. In 2017, 51,000 Indians were granted permanent residency, as mentioned in the annual report submitted to the Canadian Parliament. It toppled Philippines that received 40,857 permanent residencies, followed by China with 30,270.

The Canada Immigration Levels Plan for 2019 to 2021 shows that the country will admit more than a million immigrants in three years.

Earlier we had 2G, now we have Priyanka G: Amit Shah's dig at Congress

Referring to the 2G scam that dogged the Congress-led UPA-2 regime, Amit Shah said the Congress wants to indulge in more corruption now with the induction of the "third G - Priyanka G" after the "two Gs - Sonia G and Rahul G".

(Agencies)-BJP president Amit Shah mocked the appointment of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as Congress general secretary on Tuesday and said a government run by a dynasty could not serve the people, but only provide a "majboor" (helpless) government.

The Congress had brought the "third G" into the fray after the "two Gs - Sonia G and Rahul G" to indulge in more corruption, he told a public rally at Contai in East Midnapore district of West Bengal.

Referring to the 2G scam that dogged the Congress-led UPA-2 regime, Shah said the opposition party wanted to indulge in more corruption now with the induction of the "third G - Priyanka G".

"I am here to tell you that during the 10 years of UPA rule under (then prime minister) Manmohan Singh, there were only two Gs - Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. We had then witnessed the 2G scam of Rs 12 lakh crore. Now, if the third G joins the 2Gs, what will be the amount of the scam? "The Congress has made a long-term plan of indulging in corruption by joining the 2Gs and the third G," he said.

Shah's comments came in the backdrop of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra being appointed All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary for east Uttar Pradesh by her brother and Congress president Rahul Gandhi last week.

Stating that the Congress and the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal were

both sides of the same coin as both parties were run by dynasties, the BJP chief said like Rahul Gandhi was there to take over his party's reins from his mother Sonia Gandhi, in West Bengal, chief minister Mamata Banerjee had her nephew Abhishek Banerjee to take charge of the TMC after her.

"Dynasties cannot serve the country well. The dynasts say the country needs a majboor (helpless) government, but the BJP says it needs a majboot (strong) government. Only Narendra Modi and the BJP can provide a majboot government at the Centre," he said.

Asking the people whether the country needed a "leader" or a "dealer", Shah said only the saffron party could provide



a government headed by a leader and the Opposition wanted to throw up a government led by "dealers and brokers". Launching his party's Lok Sabha poll campaign in West Bengal, Shah had held a rally in Malda last week, where he had scoffed at the efforts of the

opposition parties to forge a grand alliance. He had said the proposed grand alliance, the leaders of which had recently attended a public rally convened by the TMC in Kolkata, was driven by the "greed for power" with nine potential prime ministerial candidates in its ranks.

"Time to tell our story": Journalist Priya Ramani on court summons in MJ Akbar defamation case

MJ Akbar, who resigned as Union minister on October 17 last year, filed a private criminal defamation complaint against Ramani after his name cropped up on social media in the #MeToo campaign.



(By Our Staff Reporter)- A Delhi court today summoned journalist Priya Ramani to appear on February 25 in a defamation case filed against her by former Union minister M J Akbar on her allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Samar Vishal issued the direction on Akbar's plea, reported PTI news agency. In response, Ramani tweeted:

"Time to tell our side of the story." Akbar, who resigned as minister of state for external affairs on October 17 last year, filed a private criminal defamation complaint against Ramani after his name cropped up on social media as the #MeToo campaign raged on in India.

Ramani had accused Akbar of sexual misconduct around 20 years ago, but he had denied the allegations.

India should reconsider its proposed regulation of online content

(By Our Staff Reporter)-Flowing from the Information Technology (IT) Act, India's current intermediary liability regime roughly adheres to the "safe harbour" principle, i.e. intermediaries (online platforms and service providers) are not liable for the content they host or transmit if they act as mere conduits in the network, don't abet illegal activity, and comply with requests from authorised government bodies and the judiciary. This paradigm allows intermediaries that primarily transmit user-generated content to provide their services without constant paranoia, and can be partly credited for the proliferation of online content. The law and IT minister shared the intent to change the rules this July when discussing concerns of online platforms being used "to spread incorrect facts projected as news and designed to instigate people to commit crime".

On December 24, the government published and invited comments to the draft intermediary liability rules. The draft rules significantly expand

"due diligence" intermediaries must observe to qualify as safe harbours: they mandate enabling "tracing" of the originator of information, taking down content in response to government and court orders within 24 hours, and responding to information requests and assisting investigations within 72 hours. Most problematically, the draft rules go much further than the stated intentions: draft Rule 3(9) mandates intermediaries to deploy automated tools for "proactively identifying and removing [...] unlawful information or content".

The first glaring problem is that "unlawful information or content" is not defined. A conservative reading of the draft rules will presume that the phrase means restrictions on free speech permissible under Article 19(2) of the Constitution, including that relate to national integrity, "defamation" and "incitement to an offence".

Ambiguity aside, is mandating intermediaries to monitor for "unlawful content" a valid requirement under "due diligence"? To qualify as a safe

harbour, if an intermediary must monitor for all unlawful content, then is it substantively different from an intermediary that has active control over its content and not a safe harbour? Clearly, the requirement of monitoring for all "unlawful content" is so onerous that it is contrary to the philosophy of safe harbours envisioned by the law.

By mandating automated detection and removal of unlawful content, the proposed rules shift the burden of appraising legality of content from the state to private entities. The rule may run afoul of the Supreme Court's reasoning in *Shreya Singhal v Union of India* wherein it read down a similar provision because, among other reasons, it required an intermediary to "apply [...] its own mind to whether information should or should not be blocked". "Actual knowledge" of illegal content, since then, has held to accrue to the intermediary only when it receives a court or government order.

News website Cobrapost accuses DHFL of siphoning off Rs 31,000 crore public money

News website Cobrapost on Tuesday alleged that promoters of DHFL, a listed housing finance company, donated Rs 19.5 crore to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) between 2014 and 17 in violation of existing laws

(By Our Staff Reporter)- News website Cobrapost on Tuesday alleged that promoters of DHFL, a listed housing finance company, donated Rs 19.5 crore to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) between 2014 and 17 in violation of existing laws. It also alleged that promoters siphoned off over Rs 31,000 crore through loans to shell and associate companies. "An interesting part of the scam is that donations of Rs 19.5 crore have been given to the BJP between the financial years 2014-15 and 2016-17 by RKW Developers Pvt. Ltd., Skill Realtors Pvt. Ltd. and Darshan Developers Pvt. Ltd., respectively, although they were not entitled to do so. All these donors are linked to the

Wadhawans [the promoters]," a statement issued by the news website after a press conference said.

DHFL called the expose a "mischievous misadventure" and expressed its intent to take legal recourse.

"DHFL and its group companies are confident of meeting any scrutiny on any aspect of our operations and



will pursue these frivolous allegations to its logical conclusion," the company said in a statement. Legal experts declined to comment on the allegations without knowing the full facts, saying that the matter appeared defamatory. The BJP offered no comments and the Election Commission could not be reached for comment.

India at risk of communal violence, terror attacks by Pak-based groups: US intelligence report

The report, an annual exercise, was tabled in US Congress Tuesday by Director of US intelligence Daniel Coats, who also deposed before the senate intelligence committee, accompanied by heads of the CIA, the FBI and the NSA, Gina Haspel, Christopher Wray and Paul Nakasone respectively.

(Insider Bureau)- US intelligence's latest edition of worldwide threat assessment report has warned of a spike in communal violence during the parliamentary polls in India if the BJP stresses "Hindu nationalist themes" and continued to complain of Pakistan's "recalcitrance" on support for terrorists based on its soil.

"The challenges facing South Asian states will grow in 2019 because of Afghanistan's presidential election in mid-July and the Taliban's large-scale attacks, Pakistan's recalcitrance in dealing with militant groups, and Indian elections that risk communal violence," said the new report.

The report also said Iran is not undertaking any new activity to develop a nuclear weapon and North Korea is unlikely to give up its nuclear programme. And it contradicted President Donald Trump's claim that the Islamic State is finished, saying it still "commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria".

The report, an annual exercise, was tabled in US congress Tuesday by Director of US intelligence Daniel Coats, who also deposed before the senate intelligence committee, accompanied by heads of the CIA, the FBI and the NSA, Gina Haspel, Christopher Wray and Paul

Nakasone respectively. On India, the report warned of an increase in the possibility of communal violence if the BJP "stresses Hindu nationalist themes" and went on to say that the ruling party's policies in the first term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi "have deepened communal tensions in some BJP-governed states, and Hindu nationalist state leaders might view a Hindu-nationalist campaign as a signal to incite low-level violence to animate their supporters". The report goes on to warn that

an increase in communal clashes "could alienate Indian Muslims and allow Islamist terrorist groups in India to expand their influence".

India on its own had not figured much in the 2018 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US intelligence, but only for challenges emanating from tensions in ties with Pakistan and China.

On Pakistan, the report warned, in a para headlined "Pakistan's recalcitrance", that militant groups supported by Islamabad



"will continue to take advantage of their safe haven" there to "plan and conduct attacks in India and Afghanistan, including against US interests".

And the report said, reprising a long-standing US complaint, that Islamabad's "narrow approach to counter-terrorism cooperation" - of using some groups as policy too while going after those that

directly threaten Pakistan - will "almost certainly will frustrate US counter-terrorism efforts against the Taliban."

And on Afghanistan the US intelligence assessment is that neither the Government nor the Taliban "will be able to gain a strategic military advantage in the Afghan war in the coming year if coalition support remains at current levels".

Ram temple trust welcomes Centre's petition on Ayodhya in Supreme Court

(By Our Staff Reporter)- The Centre gets back the land, the Centre's application to the Supreme Court for return of undisputed land to its original owners in Ayodhya has evoked mixed reaction in the temple town. The Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas has welcomed the move and one Muslim litigant too said he had no objection to the step. However, another Muslim litigant questioned the timing of the petition.

Mahant Nriya Gopal Das, head of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, said in Ayodhya on Tuesday, "If the

Centre gets back the land, the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas will request the government to hand over the land to us so that we start construction of Ram Mandir." The Nyas had spearheaded the Ram temple movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Pointing out that the step had come before VHP's Dharma Sansad in Prayagraj on January 31 and February 1, some seers said it appeared to be aimed at pacifying the agitated saints who wanted the Centre to bring an ordinance in Parliament for construction of Ram Mandir. Iqbal Ansari, Muslim litigant in the Ayodhya title suit dispute in Supreme Court, said, "I do not have any objection. The dispute was over the land on which mosque had existed. The Centre is free to take back the remaining 67-acre land. But till the dispute is resolved in the Supreme Court, Ram Mandir cannot be constructed."

Iqbal Ansari's father Hashim Ansari was the oldest litigant in the case before his death in

July 2016. After Hashim Ansari's death, Iqbal Ansari became a party in the case. Haji Mehboob, another Muslim litigant in the Ram Janmabhoomi -Babri Masjid dispute, questioned the timing of the petition and accused the BJP of using the Ram Mandir issue for gaining political mileage before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

"What is the need of this petition? When the entire land (2.77 acre and 67 acre) has been acquired, then let the court decide its fate," said Mehboob.

Anna Hazare to launch hunger strike from Wednesday over Lokpal appointment delay

Apart from the appointment of Lokpal at the national level and Lokayukta in states, Hazare has been demanding implementation of the Swaminathan Commission recommendations and some electoral reforms.



(Insider Bureau)-Social activist Anna Hazare has announced that he would launch a hunger strike from Wednesday over the "non-fulfillment" of assurances by the Centre and the Maharashtra government on the appointment of Lokpal and passage of Lokayukta Act in the state respectively. In his letter to chief minister Devendra Fadnavis, dated January 28, Hazare said he would launch the agitation in his village Ralegan Siddhi in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. Meanwhile, the Fadnavis Cabinet Tuesday decided to bring the office of Maharashtra Chief Minister under the jurisdiction of Lokayukta.

Maharashtra minister Girish Mahajan, who has been acting as an emissary between the government and the activist, urged Hazare to cancel the agitation, claiming that almost all the demands made by the activist have been fulfilled. Hazare, however, said he would not call off the agitation till the Lokayukta Act becomes a reality. Apart from the appointment of Lokpal at the national level and Lokayukta in states, Hazare has been demanding implementation of the Swaminathan Commission recommendations and some electoral reforms. "It has been five years since the Lokpal Act was passed.

Yet the Narendra Modi government has not appointed Lokpal...Lokayukta Act has not been passed in Maharashtra for four years," Hazare observed in his letter dated January 28. The activist said the chief minister had mediated when he had launched the agitation at Ramlila Maidan in Delhi in March last year. Hazare said he had withdrawn that agitation after the central government had assured in writing that it would fulfil the demands. "Nine months have passed, yet the demands have not been fulfilled. Hence, I will be on hunger strike in my village Ralegan Siddhi on

January 30," Hazare said in the letter. Mahajan urged Hazare not to go ahead with the agitation saying almost all the demands he had raised were fulfilled. "His first demand was implementing Swaminathan Commission recommendations, that farmers should get 1.5 times MSP. I think that demand has been fulfilled," Mahajan told reporters here. Speaking in Ahmednagar, Hazare welcomed the government's decision to set rolling the process to appoint Lokayukta. "I thank them on behalf the people for taking the decision

to appointment of Lokayukta through Constitutional process. But that does not mean I will not stage hunger strike tomorrow. The agitation will go on until the act is in place," Hazare added. In Delhi, an eight-member search panel formed to select members of anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal Tuesday held its first meeting, nearly four months after it was set up by the Modi government. The committee, headed by former Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, is understood to have discussed modalities related to the appointments of the chief and members of Lokpal.

UAE keen on reviewing air services agreement with India

The ambassador also outlined the role being played by his country in facilitating contacts between the US and the Afghan Taliban. He made it clear the UAE's decision to provide \$3 billion to Pakistan wouldn't in any way affect the country's relations with India.

(Agencies)- The United Arab Emirates is keen on reviewing its air services agreement with India as occupancy on carriers of both sides has exceeded the figure stipulated in the pact, UAE envoy Ahmed Al Banna said on Tuesday. The ambassador also outlined the role being played by his country in facilitating contacts between the US and the Afghan Taliban. He made it clear the UAE's decision to provide \$3 billion to Pakistan wouldn't in any way affect the country's relations with India. The India-UAE air routes are among the world's most lucrative, but moves to increase capacity have been the subject of heated debates as Indian carriers believe the current deal offers greater benefits to airlines from the Gulf.

"The agreement stipulates that if occupancy has reached 85% and above, then it is time to review the agreement. The UAE carriers have reached 100% occupancy, while Indian carriers have reached over 90% occupancy," Al Banna said, referring to the air services agreement and four separate MoUs covering the airports at Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah. The UAE has taken up the issue with India's external affairs and civil aviation ministries and with civil aviation minister Suresh Prabhu, he said. He added there was an understanding when external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj visited the UAE in December on a new round of negotiations and "that will happen very soon".



Al Banna noted 55% of Indians going out of the country travel via the airports of the UAE, mainly Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Though there are more than 1,068 flights a week with over 168,000 seats between Indian and the UAE, the number of Indians travelling to the UAE is "increasing incredibly", he said. Taliban talks Referring to the UAE's role in facilitating talks with the Taliban, Al Banna said his country has a vision of

ensuring peace and stability in the region. "We like to do our utmost to help in the process of eliminating those terrorist groups or reaching with them a solution that will ease (the situation) in the whole region," he said. However, he criticised Qatar's role in the process, saying Doha - which has hosted several rounds of talks between the Taliban and the US - was "hosting terrorists and exporting terrorists". Aid to Pakistan Al Banna said there was an

agreement between the UAE and Pakistan for aid worth \$3 billion. "It is not a loan, it was just a deposit made in the central bank of Pakistan," he said. "Our relationship with India is not determined by our relationship with anybody else and India's relationship with the UAE is not determined by their relationship with anyone else. We evaluate our relationship according to our dealings with (India) only, it has nothing to do with third parties," he added.

Kamala Harris' big challenge

Kamala Harris has a theory of the case about the Democratic presidential nominating process. If she's right, she could well be standing on a debate platform with Donald Trump in 2020. Plainly, her announcement and effective rollout on Martin Luther King Jr. Day wasn't a casual scheduling decision. Nor was her decision to visit South Carolina even before her highly produced kickoff rally Sunday in Oakland, California. While not explicitly capitalizing on her status as the only woman of color in the race, the symbolic timing of her declaration and the nature of these events were impossible to ignore. Too little attention has been paid to the way the nominating process unfolds, first in mostly white Iowa and New Hampshire but then moving quickly to more diverse states where African-Americans play a much larger role. Hillary Clinton was able to shake off Bernie Sanders in 2016 primarily because of her advantage among black voters. That same edge helped Barack Obama prevail over Clinton in 2008. African-American voters are a strong part of the Democratic base. And under party rules, congressional districts with overwhelming Democratic performance receive additional delegates, multiplying the value of black support. Harris' challenge is to be a top finisher in the early states that traditionally narrow the field, to get to those contests that start with the crucial South Carolina primary, where she may have a decided advantage. She'll be in Iowa tonight for a CNN Town Hall hosted by

here are many reasons to believe Harris could break through. The daughter of Jamaican and Indian immigrants, an economist and a medical researcher, she is a smart, charismatic and contemporary candidate with broad and diverse appeal. The power of women on the ballot was manifest in 2018. In a race that may require more than \$100 million just to do well in the early states, Harris has a solid fundraising base in California and through social media. She raised an impressive \$1.5 million online in just the first 24 hours after announcing her candidacy. Her California supporters have built in an additional advantage, moving the date of the state's presidential primary from June to March, with early voting beginning the day of the Iowa caucuses. The nation's largest state will send 11 percent of the delegates to next year's Democratic National Convention.

Harris' profile, as a potentially barrier-breaking candidate, has drawn comparisons to another first-term senator who went on to win the presidency. But glib comparisons to Obama mostly miss

the mark. Blessed with prodigious political skills still unproven in Harris, Obama stood apart from all the Washington-based candidates as an early opponent of the war in Iraq. His distinctive message was a clear challenge to both parties and the conventional, divisive small-bore politics that many Americans felt had failed the country. Though born in Hawaii, Obama was rooted in the middle of the country. His home and political base was Illinois. His family's ties to Kansas were woven into the fabric of his story. In the small towns and rural communities of Iowa, he felt very much at home. Harris' base is the Bay Area, not a natural fit for the heartland. California campaigns, which play out mostly on TV, are not the best training for the intimate campaigning required in the early primary states.

Voters there expect genuine interaction, which is why some locals may view it as a bit peculiar that Harris' first major candidate event in Iowa is a nationally televised town hall. (The campaign added a stop in anticipation of that blowback.) Harris and the cavalcade of Democratic contenders will learn that voters judge on a different scale in a presidential race than any other. They want to know who you truly are, and punish the cautious or unrevealing. This, too, could pose a challenge for the sometimes guarded Californian. There are other dynamic women in the race, and it very likely will include another prominent candidate of color, US Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey. If Beto O'Rourke runs, the former Texas congressman would enter with a galvanized following among the young. Former Vice President Joe Biden would begin as the front-runner.

he best campaigns are tactically sound and strategically clear. They share a coherent and compelling narrative about the candidate, campaign and the country.

Harris' nascent message lacks the crystal clarity of, say, US Sen. Elizabeth Warren's. Why is Harris running? What is her vision for a rapidly changing world? Her announcement speech was powerfully delivered but laden with anodyne Democratic applause lines any candidate might offer. Her provocative slogan, "Kamala Harris, For the People," derives from her career as a state and local prosecutor and speaks to her toughness and advocacy. But her record is a double-edged sword, providing potential fodder for opponents in an era and a party in which criminal justice reform has emerged as a central issue. Still, Harris brings enormous assets to the race that make her an instant top-tier candidate.

Roger Stone raid shows that CNN is no longer covering Robert Mueller.

Longtime Trump adviser Roger Stone was arrested on Friday by federal agents and charged with seven felonies, none of which had anything to do with Russian collusion or election meddling. But you'd never know that from the penalties he faces.

If convicted, Stone could die in prison. Nobody in Washington seems to find that punishment excessive. Many have cheered it. Officially, Stone was charged with lying, something most of our political elite engage in every day. But his real crime was flamboyance. Stone has spent the last 40 years giving the finger to the people in charge. In the end, they got him - they always do.

Stone's arrest is already fading from the headlines, replaced by the latest political crisis of the moment, or some new skirmish in the ongoing culture wars. Soon, we'll forget it ever happened. But before we do, it is worth taking just a moment to consider a few basic questions about it, if only because nobody else is going to.

First, why did the Justice Department stage what was, in effect, a military assault on Roger Stone's house? Stone himself asked that question on ABC over the weekend, but anchor George Stephanopoulos dismissed the DOJ tactic as "pretty standard."

"Pretty standard, as you know." But is it "pretty standard" to send dozens of federal agents with rifles to arrest an unarmed 66-year-old man who has been charged with a nonviolent crime? No. It is not standard. It is shocking. And any honest person who pays attention could

tell you that.

Roger Stone, who was there, says there were 29 agents on the scene, along with 17 vehicles, two of them armored, and a helicopter overhead. If that's an accurate accounting, it means the feds sent more armed men to Roger Stone's house in Fort Lauderdale than they did to Usama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan -- just for some perspective on this.

So, what was the justification for doing that? Prosecutors knew perfectly well that Stone wasn't a flight risk. He's broke. He doesn't even have a valid passport. They could have simply called his lawyer and told him to surrender. That's the actual "standard" in cases like this. But they didn't do that. Instead, they went in with guns drawn. Who decided to do that? How much did it cost taxpayers?

We've spent the last two days trying to answer those questions. It tells you a lot about contemporary America that we couldn't - we still have no idea. The Justice Department wouldn't answer us. The White House, which supposedly oversees the Justice Department, didn't even respond. Maybe they don't know the answer to those questions. It's possible. They don't control Special Counsel Robert Mueller. Nobody controls Robert Mueller.

Mueller can send armed men to your home to roust you from bed at gunpoint just because he feels like it, and there's nothing you, or anyone else, can do about it. Mueller has an unlimited budget and no timetable. He doesn't have to answer questions.



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The limits of single-party majorities

The Opposition's mahagathbandhan can only be a viable proposition if it offers an alternative politics.



(Insider Bureau)- The coming together of India's motley crew of opposition leaders at the "united India rally" in Kolkata on January 19 was an important step in the direction of building a viable electoral alliance. But even as the opposition leaders sought to craft a common platform, the rally exposed the mahagathbandhan's greatest vulnerability: stability and leadership. As May 2019 approaches, stability and strong leadership are emerging as the Bharatiya Janata Party's primary electoral trump card. The PM was quick to play this card in his response to the rally. The mahagathbandhan, he warned, is an alliance of corruption, negativity and instability. From the BJP's perspective, the battleline for 2019 is stability and a

strong leader vs a leaderless coalition riddled with contradictions or, as Arun Jaitley put it, Modi vs Chaos. But the relationship between stability through single-party majority rule led by strong leaders and effective governance isn't as clear-cut as the BJP is arguing. In fact these last four years raise important questions about the effectiveness of national governments where power is concentrated in the hands of a centralised leader with a single party majority, particularly when it comes to their ability to effectively represent India's diverse regional needs. The importance of the electoral appeal of strong leadership needs to be understood against the

backdrop of the 2014 election. Stymied by corruption scandals, incompetence and the charge of policy paralysis, the Congress in the United Progressive Alliance years repeatedly sought refuge in the argument that coalitions were the impediment. In his first official press conference after the 2G scam broke in 2012, Manmohan Singh was quick to point to the "limitations of coalitions" to defend government inaction. By the end of its tenure, the difficulties of managing Centre-state relations in coalitions became the common refrain to justify the UPA's policy paralysis. During the 2014 campaign, the BJP and its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi were deft at using this narrative to their advantage,

promising the Indian voter strong, decisive leadership and a new framework for negotiating Centre-state relations to smoothen decision making. This promise was an important part of Modi's electoral appeal. Rather than fulfill this promise, four years later, the Modi government offers important lessons on the limits of single-party majorities and strong leadership. First, a decisive parliamentary majority is neither necessary nor sufficient for radical reform. Far from capitalizing on its mandate to initiate long awaited radical change, on key issues of the economy, this government has been remarkably status quoist, disappointing many early supporters. On social policy, an area that I track closely, the

approach has been conservative. Despite early posturing around building a new "empowerment" focused welfare framework and dismantling clunky and corrupt UPA schemes, the government has stayed the course with tried-and-tested schemes, renaming them along the way and tweaking budgets to reflect political priorities like sanitation. It is instructive that in the last few months, many interlocutors in the national media have begun arguing that decisive shifts in India's economic trajectory have in fact taken place under coalition and not single-party majority governments: the 1991 reforms, P Chidambaram's 1997 dream budget, UPA-1's rights legislation were all

pushed through in coalition governments. This raises an important question worth debate: do coalitions, because of their inherent deliberative nature, create rather than reduce opportunities for radical reforms? Second, single-party dominance in a centralised party structure risks undermining India's federal balance and the checks and balances this imposes on the predatory instincts of strong national governments. Since the 1990s, as regional parties gained relevance, internal political party structures of national parties, both the BJP and the Congress, became increasingly centralised, making them far less attuned to and therefore capable of representing diverse, regional perspectives.

Budget 2019: The government will have it tough

One possibility is that the budget announces policies such as direct income transfers to farmers and abolition of income taxes for those in the lowest tax-bracket. The other possibility is that the budget gives a cyclical boost to pump up the distress-ridden sectors of the economy before the elections.

(Insider Bureau)- The current government will present its last budget on February 1. While this will not be a full-fledged budget, it is unlikely to be a mere formality of placing accounts on the floor of the parliament. After all, it is the last big stage for the government to make big-ticket announcements before the 2019 elections. There is speculation about the budget containing a big package for farmers, income tax payers in the lowest income bracket and other small non-farm businesses. To be sure, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has already announced sops for small businesses in its previous meeting. There is no point in joining the

speculative game on what the budget will or will not do. But there is some merit in dwelling on two possible policy directions, as indicated by the political economy strategy of the government. One is that the budget announces policies such as direct income transfers to farmers and abolition of income taxes for those in the lowest tax bracket. These are moves which might not bring major, tangible benefits to the intended beneficiaries before the next elections, but make for strong optics vis-à-vis the long term policy direction of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But such policies

also carry a risk. Any significant direct income transfer scheme in agriculture, at the given level of fiscal legroom, will signal the beginning of winding down of existing producer-subsidy government support in the farm sector. Any significant concession in direct taxes has the potential of encouraging fragmentation of firms and businesses which can be counterproductive to both tax collection and productivity enhancement. Once implemented, these policies will be difficult to withdraw. Ideally, such policies should not be implemented without a comprehensive analysis of



all related factors. The other is that the budget gives a cyclical boost to pump-prime distress-ridden sectors of the economy before the elections. This could include a significant move to pump liquidity in

the rural economy, increase rural infrastructure spending with aggressive front loading of expenditure etc. through a moderate but discernible slippage on the fiscal front to give some boost to the overall level of economic

activity. Such moves can provide an important short-term stimulus before the polls, but they could spook financial markets and multilateral agencies. The government, of course, could choose to do neither, either, or both.

Will the 'behen' be the Congress's counter to 'Behenji' in UP ?

The Priyanka Gandhi-Jyotiraditya Scindia project is about the long-term revival of the party in a state that has voted for three Congress prime ministers of the Nehru-Gandhi family. A respectable performance in UP, which can constrict the rise of non-BJP parties, will give the Congress the pivot position in any negotiation by opposition parties over who should be the next PM.

Priyanka Gandhi's dramatic, front-foot entry into politics has galvanised Congress cadres and thrown the BJP into sheer confusion. There is a certain audacity and boldness to her debut as general secretary of Uttar Pradesh, East, the political stomping ground of chief minister Yogi Adityanath and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But now that Rahul Gandhi has decided to appoint his behen (sister) to this critical post, what will be the Congress's strategy to manage Behenji (as Mayawati is often called)? Is there a danger of the Priyanka announcement creating friction between the Congress and the Mayawati-Akhilesh gathbandhan

(alliance)? Can the Gandhis bhai-behen jodi (brother-sister duo) work in tandem with the bua-bhatija (aunt-nephew) duo, or will they be at odds with each other? While Rahul Gandhi was careful to underline that he had the deepest respect for both Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav and insisted that the Congress was ready to cooperate wherever possible, sources confirm that the siblings have a better relationship with the Samajwadi Party (SP) chief than with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader. In fact, the Congress believes that it is Mayawati who insisted on edging it out of the alliance in Uttar Pradesh, leaving only a token offer of two seats:

Amethi and Raebareli. As one senior Congress leader told me: "If she shuts us out, we can't roll over and play dead, can we?" Even if ticket distribution and candidate selection is done in tactical communication with the SP-BSP, Priyanka Gandhi's entry could well eat into the Muslim-Dalit vote of the gathbandhan and not just the Brahmin/upper caste base of the BJP. While pundits dub this as a three-cornered contest that will suit the BJP, there is another way of looking at it. While the main aim of the Congress would naturally be to dislodge Narendra Modi - and it knows the route to Delhi is via Uttar Pradesh - what if the strategy is also to simultaneously contain the rise of Mayawati? This certainly

appears to be the hand the Congress is playing. Mayawati has also been scathing about the Congress in public, arguing that the Congress is unable to transfer its votes to allies, while benefiting from them. The Congress' tacticians wargaming UP would hope for a result closer to its 2009 performance when the party won 21 seats in the state. In the absence of an organisational cadre on the ground and now down to just two Lok Sabha seats (its worst ever tally), this is still a tall order at the moment. But if the buzz around Priyanka Gandhi succeeds in transcending constituency-wise caste calculations and she picks up some votes across categories, among upper caste Hindus, women, Muslims, Dalits, non-Yadav OBCs, the party will aspire to 10-15 seats. Seats that fall within the eastern Uttar Pradesh

area allotted by the party to Priyanka Gandhi include the family pocket boroughs of Amethi and Raebareli as well as constituencies such as Phulpur that have in the past voted for Jawaharlal Nehru and his sister, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. Though the Congress has not won a seat here since 1984, and the SP candidate won in the recent bypoll, the party believes that Priyanka Gandhi's presence in what was once Nehru territory could trigger nostalgia and sentiment. Her managing the campaign in at least 40 Lok Sabha seats also frees her brother, the Congress president, to travel elsewhere and focus on other states. The party is also calculating that once she is at the helm, there will be a spillover impact on the politics of Bihar, which borders eastern UP.

By Barkha Dutt

India and Pakistan prefer different kinds of war

In a press release on Thursday, Pakistan announced a successful "training launch" of the short range, nuclear-capable Nasr missile. A surface-to-surface missile, Nasr's range is a mere 60 kilometres. But, it is no surprise that this launch follows so closely on the heels of Indian Army chief Bipin Rawat's announcement on reviving the idea of integrated battle groups (IBGs) to launch a quick, conventional assault on Pakistan. IBGs are closely associated with the Indian Army's Cold Start doctrine that came about in the aftermath of the failure of Operation Parakram

(2001-02). Essentially the tussle between India and Pakistan is about fighting their favourite wars. India is conventionally superior and wants to confine its war with Pakistan within the conventional realm. Pakistan wants to keep the conflict either in the sub-conventional realm (read terrorism) where it enjoys the monopoly in this dyad, or escalate it to the nuclear realm - where it has parity with India - bypassing a conventional war entirely. The Indian Army evolved the Cold Start doctrine of a limited conventional war because it realised that Pakistan's nuclear weapons would not allow for a

full-scale, conventional war. The doctrine was never endorsed by the Government of India but it provided Pakistan with an excuse to build short range, nuclear-capable missiles, like Nasr, to target Indian formations undertaking conventional strikes. India's non-response to 26/11 showed that either the Cold Start had not been operationalised or the army wasn't confident of pulling off such strikes in a crisis situation. General Rawat has now brought the idea up front and centre. He is saying the IBGs will be war-gamed and physically tested by May. This undoubtedly enhances the credibility of the



Cold Start doctrine. Playing exactly to the script, Pakistan is now flaunting Nasr. The use of Nasr carries a number of risks like early use by on-field commanders. Moreover, its use doesn't guarantee that a large

number of Indian Army personnel can be taken out. However, deterrence is often in the adversary's mind. As long as Indian leaders continue to be deterred by Nasr, it will continue to be effective.

India needs to fight the syndemic on a war footing

It comes as no surprise that the Lancet Commission authors believe that India is suffering from a "global syndemic" of obesity, undernutrition and climate change and that each condition is going to exacerbate the other in future. Here is why: most Indian cities are reeling under heat stress. The India Meteorological Department (IMD), in its 'Statement on Climate of India 2018,' said the annual mean temperature has been recording a perceptible spike since 2000. Eleven out of the 15 warmest years that have

been recorded occurred between 2004 and 2018. The authors of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC's) 'Global Warming of 1.5 degrees' report said Indian cities are going to experience severe heat wave and air pollution levels with a 1.5 degree Celsius rise in average mean temperature.

"Without considering adaptation options, such as cooling from more reflective roofs, and overall characteristics of urban agglomerations in terms of land use, zoning and building codes, at 2°C warming, Karachi and

Kolkata could expect annual conditions equivalent to the deadly 2015 heat waves," said a chapter in the 1.5 degree report. The Lancet Commission report states that heat stress is going to affect physical activity outdoors. Increased temperature and freak weather events will also reduce nutritional value of crops and reduce agricultural productivity. An Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) study said one-fifth of Indian districts are already susceptible to climate change impacts. The Forest Survey of India (FSI) data

shows Indian cities have an abysmally low per capita green cover. In Delhi, for example, the per capita tree availability is 0.3 - less than one tree per person. Besides, the air pollution is severe. Health experts recommend against strenuous physical activity outdoors during periods in which air pollution spikes. These conditions assessed together certainly reflect why climate change may be fuelling obesity. Solutions as recommended by the Lancet Commission lie in tackling the three pandemics together.

The Lancet Commission has also highlighted how big food corporations are selling energy-dense but nutrient-poor food with cheap ingredients like refined sugar, flour and oil. This is particularly true for low- and middle-income (LMICs) countries like India. For example, the Lancet report states that policies that offer a "counterweight to the enormous commercial investments focused on promoting sales of obesogenic products and opposing public policies for healthier food environments," is needed in countries like India.

Transferred CBI SP accuses interim chief Nageswara Rao of 'abusing' his office

The controversies at the CBI refuse to go away with a superintendent of police accusing interim director Nageswara Rao of acting with "malice and prejudice" for transferring him after he complained about his alleged misconduct to then agency chief Alok Verma in March last

(By Our Staff Reporter)-The controversies at the Central Bureau of Investigation refuse to go away with a CBI superintendent of police (SP) accusing the agency's interim director M Nageswara Rao of abusing his official position and acting with "personal malice and prejudice" for transferring him on January 21 after he complained about Rao's alleged misconduct to then agency chief Alok Verma in March last year.

Rajah Balaji accused Rao of "not being a man of any honour". Rao did not respond to phone calls and text messages seeking comment. A CBI spokesman said the representation, "mentioned in the media reports", of Rajah Balaji has not yet been received in the office of the director. "As and when it is received through proper channel, appropriate action as

per rules will be taken. It may further be mentioned that Shri Rajah Balaji has been transferred to Ghaziabad which part of NCR (national capital region) only," added the spokesman.

HT has seen a copy of Balaji's representation. Balaji also questioned "mass transfers" in the agency by Rao, since he is only "director-in-charge". Under Rao, the agency has seen almost three dozen transfers since he took over again as the interim director on January 11 following the ouster of Alok Verma.

Rao holds the rank of additional director in the agency but by virtue of being senior most officer in the agency, he was given interim charge on January 11 for the second time. The first time he was made interim director was after Verma and then special director Rakesh Asthana were divested of their respective

responsibilities on October 23.

SP T Rajah Balaji has also moved the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) against his transfer which was ordered along with that of 19 other officials on the directions of Rao.

Rajah Balaji first wrote a strongly worded representation against his transfer from the agency's Anti-Corruption Branch in Delhi to its training academy in Ghaziabad, his fourth transfer within two years, and then went on to file the petition in the CAT, which is slated to come up for hearing soon.

Balaji said he was given a posting in New Delhi by then director Alok Verma on humanitarian grounds on August 1, 2018 as his mother-in-law, a cancer patient, was undergoing treatment at All India Institute of Medical



Sciences. He was also allotted a residence in East Kidwai Nagar, which is close to AIIMS, after his request to Union minister of urban development and housing affairs Hardeep Puri.

Balaji said at a time when selection committee for appointing new agency chief was meeting, Rao should refrain from mass transfers as a matter of propriety. "It was incumbent and necessary in your capacity

as only Director-in-charge not to go on a spree of mass transfers of various officers from the level of Joint Directors to Additional Superintendents of Police, and resort to any necessary transfer only on rational grounds that merit such a course in public interest," said Balaji.

In his CAT petition, Balaji has also accused Rao of victimising him when he was incumbent and serving in Chennai and Rao was his joint director.

Probe into Rs 7,000 crore scam closed, Congress accuses Modi govt of shielding CVC



(Agencies)-Accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of protecting chief vigilance commissioner (CVC) KV Chowdary, the Congress on Tuesday said that the Centre's refusal to act against him for allegedly closing a probe into a Rs 7,000-crore scam is an attempt to "cover up corruption". "The government selectively and discriminatorily expresses helplessness in taking action," said Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi. "It is citing flimsy grounds for not acting against the chief vigilance commissioner who is not just a collaborator of the government in violating the Constitution but a colossal veil to cover up corruption," Singhvi said. "His transgression and undue interference in (CBI chief Alok) Verma's removal is well

known," he said.

Singhvi was referring to a central government reply to a query filed under the Right to Information Act, citing absence of guidelines to handle complaints of corruption and other misconduct against the chief vigilance commissioner.

Pointing to Section 6 of the chief vigilance commissioner Act, which empowers the Centre to take action, Singhvi said, "The Central Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules also provide for suspension and penalties on officers for their actions which involve removal, termination and forced retirement." Calling the government's refusal to be "untenable", Singhvi said under the CVC Act, action can be taken against Chowdary.

"Guaranteed Minimum Income for 'Poor in India'"

The Congress president had on Monday said his party would guarantee minimum income for all the poor of the country if it formed the government at the Centre after the 2019 polls.

Gandhi, who met Goa chief minister Manohar Parrikar earlier in the day, said the former defence minister told him he had nothing to do with the new Rafale deal. Parrikar has been unwell for the past several months.

Rahul Gandhi's meeting with Parrikar came less than 24 hours after the Congress chief targeted PM Modi over Rafale deal with a jibe that the Goa CM has "secrets" that "give him power over the PM".

In a reference to the violence in Kerala over the entry of women in Sabarimala temple, Gandhi targeted both the BJP and the Left front government in Kerala. "The Congress respects the rights of the women and



traditions of the state but doesn't agree with the cycle of violence unleashed by the CPM and BJP," he said. During his visit to Kerala this week, PM Modi had attacked the Left front government for attacking the cultural ethos of the state with its stand on the entry of women in Sabarimala.

"Cultural ethos of Kerala are under attack from the party in power. People can see the manner in which the communist government is disrespecting all aspects of state's culture. I don't

understand why they are targeting our culture which has stood the test of time," he added.

The PM had said that nothing separates the Congress-led UDF from the Left in Kerala. "LDF and UDF are the same. The Congress says one thing in Delhi and one in Kerala," Modi said. Kerala has witnessed protests since the Supreme Court order to open the doors of the Sabarimala shrine to women of all ages, overturning a traditional ban on women of childbearing age from entering the temple.

Female devotees aged between 10 and 50 had for decades been barred from the shrine on grounds that the presiding deity is a celibate, and the court ruling enraged traditionalists in Kerala. The LDF government of chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said it was determined to uphold the court verdict.

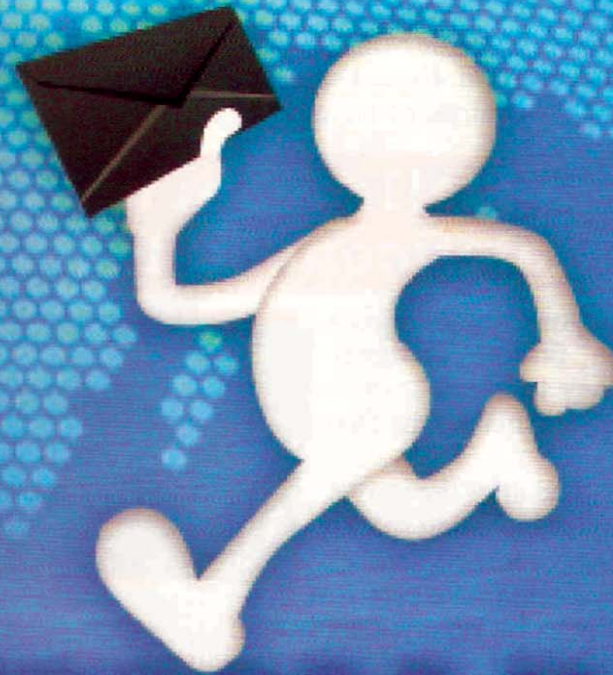
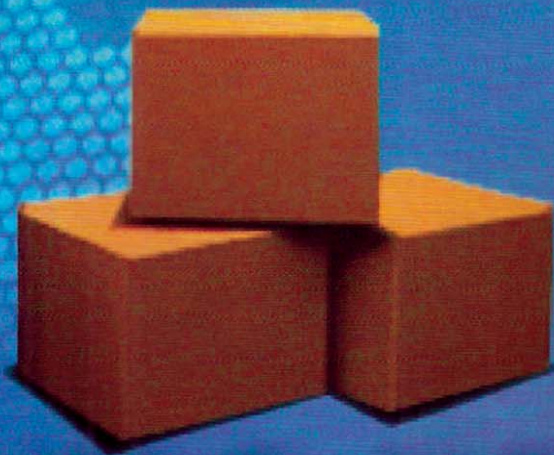
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For federal contractors, the shutdown isn't quite over

(Insider Bureau)- Furloughed federal employees began returning to work today after the longest government shutdown in history.

But for contractors, it wasn't so simple. Some waited anxiously for approval from federal agencies to resume their work, while others had to reapply for funding. It may still be days before some get paid, with federal contract officers buried under a backlog of invoices.

Unlike people who work directly for the government, contractors face more bureaucratic hurdles before their work can resume, experts say.

"To get out of the mess, you have

to unravel it on a contract by contract basis," said David Berteau, president of the Professional Services Council, a trade group that represents a variety of federal contractors. "What can only take five minutes to stop can take days to start again."

Some of the damage can't be undone. In a report published Monday, the Congressional Budget Office concluded that private businesses faced some of the "largest and most direct negative effects" of the shutdown. In addition to contractors, CBO wrote, other businesses suffered from not being able to obtain federal

permits and loans.

"Some of those private-sector entities," CBO wrote, "will never recoup that lost income."

Timothy Roe, 57, who works on drone integration for the Federal Aviation Administration, waited idly Monday morning for a government officer to reboot his company's project agreement. It was several hours late.

"I know other companies got theirs this morning, but we just haven't," Roe said.

Unlike federal workers, contractors won't receive back pay. CBO noted that workers who took out loans "will see an increase in expense as they pay interest on that debt." The



contractors include some of the lowest-wage workers, such as janitors and security guards.

Roe was one of the lucky ones - his employer was able to reassign him to private work

during the 35-day shutdown.

"The shutdown ended at just the right time for us," Roe said. "We definitely would have been furloughed come the end of the week."

Kamala Harris under fire after calling for abolition of private health care plans: 'That's not American'

(Insider Bureau)- Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., came under fire on Tuesday for calling for private health care plans to be abolished -- the latest plank is what is becoming an increasingly left-wing platform from the California Democrat.

Harris, who announced her 2020 bid for the White House last week, was asked by CNN host Jake Tapper on Monday night if people could keep their current health care plan under her "Medicare-for-All" plan. She indicated that they couldn't, suggesting she wants to move toward a single-payer system rather than a mere expansion of Medicare.

"Well, listen, the idea is that everyone gets access to medical care. And you don't have to go through the process of going through an insurance company, having them give you approval, going through the paperwork, all of the delay that may require," Harris told Tapper.

Democrats are increasingly calling for Medicare-for-All plans, and it is unclear what room would be left in those plans for private insurance. Some single-payer systems in other countries, such as Britain's National Health Service, allow for optional private health care insurance. It is unclear if Harris would seek to abolish that option in the U.S., or if she merely seeks to make them unnecessary.

The announcement was met with

immediate criticism by political opponents. Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, who is mulling a 2020 run as an independent, declared that abolishing private insurance is "not American."

"That's not correct. That's not American," Schultz said in an interview with CBS News' "This Morning," adding: "What's next? What industry are we going to abolish next? The coffee industry?"

"Who among us has not had that situation?" she continued. "Where you got to wait for approval, and the doctor says, 'Well I don't know if your insurance company is going to cover this.' Let's eliminate all of that. Let's move on."

The claim is a significant shift from the famous promise by former President Barack Obama who, in promoting the Affordable Care Act (known to many as ObamaCare) pledged: "If you like your health care plan, you can keep it." That promise came back to haunt him when Americans started losing their plans.

Harris appears to have abandoned that notion completely, in a move that would have enormous implications for the health care industry and the 217 million Americans the 2017 census says have private plans. Republicans and conservatives, meanwhile, were quick to spread the clip of Harris online without commentary, apparently feeling

it was a "gotcha" moment. The Republican National Committee shared the clip, and also said that her plan would cost \$32.6 trillion, eliminate private plans, "devastate" Medicare and "double your income taxes." "California liberal Kamala Harris just showed American voters how radical and out of step she is. Her full embrace of socialized medicine would completely eliminate your private health care plan, even if you like it," RNC spokesman Steve Guest told Fox



News. California Republicans also took aim at Harris over the comments. "Kamala Harris declares all Americans to lose their health insurance policy even if they like it, forced into government system... Once again these people are for

anything so long as it's mandatory, former California GOP party leader Ron Nehring tweeted. Whoops! We couldn't access this Tweet. The embrace of "Medicare-for-All" plans is the latest in an apparent shift to the left within the Democratic Party.

Stacey Abrams chosen to give Democratic response to Trump's State of the Union

(Insider Bureau)- Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia gubernatorial candidate and a rising star among Democrats, will deliver her party's response to President Trump's State of the Union address next week, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., confirmed Tuesday. Abrams, who hoped to make history as the first black governor of Georgia and first female black governor of any state, lost November's gubernatorial election to Georgia's Republican Secretary of State Brian Kemp, but her stock within the Democratic Party has remained high.

"Stacey Abrams is offers a welcome, stark contrast to

President Trump's politics of division and lack of leadership as American families are still feeling the impacts of his self-imposed shutdown," Schumer said in a statement. "Stacey Abrams is a present and future leader in this country. She is a dynamic, moral leader; she delivered results on the issues that matter most to Americans; and she tirelessly pursues fairness and justice for everyone in her state."

An attorney, Abrams was the first black leader in the Georgia state House, having previously served as the minority leader. She is also an award-winning romance novelist, penning eight books under the nom de plume Selena Montgomery. "I am honored to be delivering the Democratic State

of the Union response," Abrams said in a statement. I plan to deliver a vision for prosperity and equality, where everyone in our nation has a voice and where each of those voices is heard." Along with Abrams, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra will deliver the Democrats' Spanish-language response to the president's State of the Union speech.

The news of Abrams' response comes a day after Trump accepted House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's invitation to deliver his State of the Union speech on Feb. 5, a week later than originally scheduled because of the partial government shutdown.

Theresa May forced to reopen Brexit negotiations with Europe

(Agencies)- Britain is heading for a new showdown with the European Union after Theresa May bowed to pressure from UK lawmakers who demanded she renegotiate her hard-fought Brexit deal.

In a sharp reversal of policy, the British Prime Minister agreed to return to Brussels and reopen Brexit talks, even though she previously said the idea was a non-starter and the EU has repeatedly insisted the deal is locked down.

Lawmakers voted 317 to 301 to order May to seek new terms with the EU over the Irish border, a totemic issue for hardline Brexiteers that has dogged May for months. May had earlier told the

House of Commons she would support the initiative, in an effort to persuade a majority of MPs to back some kind of Brexit plan.

After the vote, the EU said there was no chance of reopening the Withdrawal Agreement -- signed by May in November but comprehensively rejected by the House of Commons a month later. In a series of votes on Tuesday, lawmakers also rejected a no-deal Brexit, by 318 votes to 310. But the measure is not legally binding, and lawmakers failed to pass any plan that would have prevented the UK crashing out of the EU without a deal on March 29.

Speaking immediately after the votes, May said she

would go back to the EU but admitted renegotiation with Brussels would be tough. "There is limited appetite for such a change in the EU and negotiating it will not be easy," May told Parliament. "But in contrast to a fortnight ago, this House has made clear what it needs to agree a deal."

To succeed, May must secure concessions within weeks on issues that have been raked over for months.

The EU showed no sign of giving in to the UK on Tuesday. A spokesman for Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, insisted that the Brexit deal "is not open for renegotiation."

"The Withdrawal Agreement is and

remains the best and only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union," the spokesman told CNN.

Dublin also rejected any attempt to re-open the Brexit deal. "The Withdrawal Agreement is not open for renegotiation," the Irish government said in a statement.

"The agreement is a carefully negotiated compromise, which balances the UK position on customs and the single market with avoiding a hard border and protecting the integrity of the EU customs union and single market," Ireland said.

What now for May? Despite saying in



December that her Brexit deal was locked down, May told MPs earlier Tuesday that she now wanted a mandate to reopen it. She argued that it would give her a chance to resolve the issue of the Northern Ireland backstop -- an insurance policy to prevent the return of a border infrastructure in Ireland - despised by many Brexiteers.

But, with just 59 days to go until Britain leaves the EU on March 29, it could be too little too late. EU officials have repeatedly insisted that the withdrawal deal cannot be reopened.

One EU diplomat told CNN earlier on Tuesday: "London has negotiated with itself more than the EU. The negotiation with the EU is over."

There are signs of deep frustration in Brussels. Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's Brexit coordinator, told CNN that the Parliament would "not give its consent to a watered-down Withdrawal Agreement."

"The deal we have is fair and cannot be renegotiated. The backstop is needed because of UK red lines and the EU to secure the Good Friday Agreement," Verhofstadt added.

U.S. intelligence chief breaks with Trump on North Korea, Iran, ISIS

Dan Coats says North Korea is not likely to give up its nukes and that ISIS is far from defeated.

(Agencies)- America's top intelligence official on Tuesday publicly broke with President Donald Trump on several critical foreign policy fronts, saying North Korea is not likely to give up its nuclear weapons, Iran is not yet seeking a nuclear weapon and the Islamic State terrorist group remains a forceful presence in Iraq and Syria.

The remarks by Dan Coats, the U.S. director of national intelligence, underscored how out of step Trump's pronouncements on major national security issues often are with the rest of the government he leads, including intelligence agencies that he has long scorned.

The divergence on Tuesday was perhaps most notable in the case of North Korea, which Trump has said no longer poses a nuclear threat to the United States. "We currently assess that North Korea will seek to

retain its [weapons of mass destruction] capabilities and is unlikely to completely give up its nuclear weapons and production capabilities because its leaders ultimately view nuclear weapons as critical to regime survival," Coats said during a hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Trump is due to hold a second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in late February. Just last week, the president maintained that the two sides are making progress in efforts to fully denuclearize the Korean peninsula, tweeting that "this is more than has ever been accomplished with North Korea" and that he expects "much progress" when the two leaders next meet.

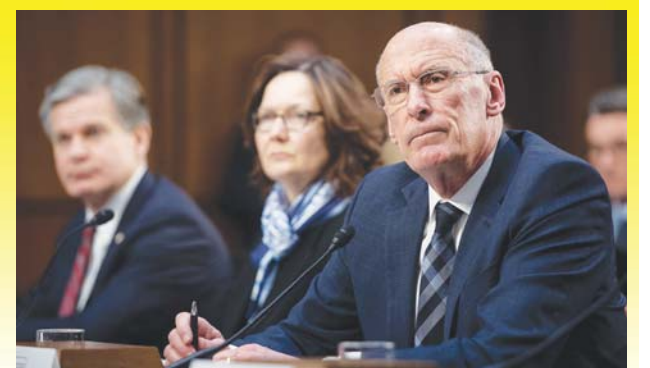
But analysts and former U.S. officials have long cast doubt on Trump's optimistic assessments. A report from a think tank, Beyond

Parallel, released last week revealed another undeclared North Korean missile site. Coats also offered views on Iran's nuclear capabilities that appeared at odds with the president.

Trump and his top aides have taken a hard line on Iran, implying that the Islamist-led country still poses a nuclear threat despite its adherence to a 2015 accord that put curbs on its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. Trump withdrew the U.S. from that nuclear deal, and has reimposed sanctions, although other international allies have stayed committed to the pact. During the hearing, Coats said Iran isn't taking any steps to make a nuclear weapon. "We do not believe Iran is currently undertaking the key activities we judge necessary to produce a nuclear device," he said. CIA Director Gina Haspel,

who also spoke at the hearing, said Tehran, "at the moment, technically they're in compliance" with the deal. But Coats also noted that Iranian officials have "publicly threatened to push the boundaries" of the nuclear deal if it did not see any benefits from it. He also alleged that Iran has sponsored terrorism in both Europe and the Middle East, while also backing proxy militias such as the Houthis in Yemen and Shiite armed groups in Iraq. Coats' remarks on the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, were also glaringly out of sync with some of Trump's claims about the status of the terrorist group. Late last year, Trump announced that he was going to pull U.S. troops from Syria because the U.S. had "won against ISIS" and that "we have beaten them and we have beaten them badly."

The president and some in his administration have



since said that the troop withdrawal process won't be immediate, but they've continued to insist that the group has been defeated on the ground. Critics, while acknowledging the Islamic State's near-total territorial losses, warn that the group still lives as an insurgent force, and that withdrawing American troops will give them a vacuum to regain land.

Coats appeared to agree with those critics. He told senators that the Islamic State "very likely will continue to pursue external attacks from Iraq and Syria against regional and Western adversaries, including the United States." "ISIS is intent on resurging and still commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria," Coats said, adding that the terror group "will seek to exploit Sunni grievances, societal instability, and stretched security forces to regain territory in Iraq and

Syria in the long term." Separately on Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced that he would propose legislation that acknowledges "the plain fact that Al Qaeda, ISIS, and their affiliates in Syria and Afghanistan continue to pose a serious threat to our nation" and which would "recognize the danger of a precipitous withdrawal from either conflict." Coats' comments on Tuesday aren't entirely surprising given publicly available information and analyses by non-government organizations about the status of the situation everywhere from North Korea to Syria. But his dissonance with Trump could, nonetheless, annoy the president, who has at times dismissed the intelligence community's assessments, including its conclusion that Russia interfered in the 2016 election.

Trump Is Right About Venezuela

(Insider Bureau)- Last Wednesday, when hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans took the streets to back the opposition's risky bid to return the country to democracy, the Trump administration was first in line to offer support. Just moments after opposition leader Juan Guaidó, the head of Venezuela's Legislature, declared himself interim president, urging strongman Nicolás Maduro to step down, the Trump administration recognized Guaidó as the country's legitimate leader.



For many Americans with more knowledge of Donald Trump than of Venezuela, the initial reaction, understandably, was to doubt the wisdom of Washington's position. But very quickly other democracies in Latin America and elsewhere in the world joined in backing Guaidó, suggesting that perhaps this time Trump got it right. In the U.S., top Democratic leaders generally supported Trump's approach, calling for a restoration of democracy in a country where

the Maduro regime has steadily been dismantled, creating unspicable hardship for the population through corruption and mismanagement and turning one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America into a wasteland of hunger, scarcity and crime. Democracy is dead there and Venezuela is now a land of despair, with most people going

hungry and nearly 90 percent of the population living in poverty even though the country has the world's largest oil reserves. Most salaries there are worthless, with inflation exploding to an incredible 10 million percent.

The president's critics on the left are replaying the Cold War. But that's not what's happening in Caracas.

For some, however, particularly among America's leftists, the reaction was a categorical rejection of Trump's support for the Venezuelan opposition. Leftist academic Noam Chomsky and three like-minded allies published an open letter within 24 hours of Trump's announcement denouncing the president's "reckless course" in Venezuela while ignoring Maduro's transgressions. The Nation urged America's social democrats to take a more forceful stand against the policy. Ilhan Omar, a freshman member of Congress, tweeted against "Trump's efforts to install a far-right opposition," revealing her profound misunderstanding of the basic facts of Venezuela's situation. Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), more circumspect, retweeted a call by Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) urging the U.S. to "not anoint the leader of the opposition" and instead support negotiations.

There are two main reasons why, blinded by its opposition to

Trump, the left is getting the Venezuelan crisis all wrong. First, American leftists clearly see Venezuela as a Cold War-style, left vs. right struggle in which they must support the left. But this is very much a 21st-century contest between populist authoritarianism and liberal democracy-and Maduro's the authoritarian. Sure, he leads a "socialist" party, but his regime has obliterated Venezuela's democracy since he came to power in 2013. The opposition overwhelmingly won legislative elections in 2015, taking control of the Assembly, Venezuela's top legislative body. In response, Maduro's acolytes in the Supreme Court first stripped the Assembly of all its powers, and then Maduro crafted a rubber-stamp constituent assembly of his backers to take over legislative duties. Maduro imprisoned opposition leaders and held a sham election in 2018 to give himself a second term. After Maduro took the oath of office, the opposition said it considered him an illegitimate president and launched the current campaign.



Michael Cohen to testify before House Intel panel next week

(Insider Bureau)- Last week, Cohen backed out of his planned public testimony in front of the House Oversight Committee - initially scheduled for Feb. 7 - citing fears for his family's safety after Trump and his attorney, Rudy Giuliani, publicly harangued Cohen and his father-in-law. "As I've previously stated with my colleagues, Chairmen Elijah Cummings and Jerrold Nadler, efforts to intimidate witnesses, scare their family members, or prevent them from testifying before Congress are tactics we expect from organized crime, not the White House," Schiff said in a statement announcing Cohen's testimony. "These attacks on Mr. Cohen's family must stop. Federal law prohibits efforts to discourage, intimidate, or otherwise pressure a witness not to provide testimony to Congress." Top Democrats on the Oversight panel

have suggested that Cohen could be subpoenaed to appear before lawmakers in public, but no decision has been made. Cohen's attorneys have already indicated that their client would not be able to publicly discuss matters related to ongoing federal probes - most notably, those being conducted by special counsel Robert Mueller and prosecutors in the U.S District Court for the Southern District of New York. Top Republicans on the Oversight committee said last week that Lanny Davis, Cohen's lawyer and spokesman, told GOP staffers that Cohen would be able to share only "anecdotes" about his time working for Trump. The Republicans also claimed Davis told them he pushed Cohen to testify in public; in turn, they accused Davis of orchestrating a "media stunt" aimed at scoring political points against the president.

Second, the left wrongly assumes Trump is supporting his usual authoritarian allies on the right, and therefore is drawing the wrong conclusions about what's at stake in Venezuela and whom the opposition there really represents. To call the opposition, as Omar did, "far right," is absurd. True, American presidents in the past have supported rightist autocrats in Latin America, from Augusto Pinochet in Chile to the military regime in Brazil. But Guaidó is a socialist, and the opposition encompasses every part of Venezuelan society except the narrow base that still supports Maduro. History is not repeating itself in Caracas. As for Trump, it's true that he has a record of buttering up authoritarian leaders, from Russia's Vladimir Putin to China's Xi Jinping to North Korea's Kim Jong Un. But in this case, the president is siding with those advocating liberal democracy.

Shutdown cost the U.S. \$3 billion that won't be recovered, CBO says

(By Our Staff Reporter)- The five-week partial government shutdown cost the U.S. economy about \$3 billion in forgone economic activity that won't be recovered, the Congressional Budget Office said in a new report Monday.

Because the IRS was among the agencies unfunded during the shutdown, it had to slow down some compliance work. For that reason, CBO estimates tax revenue will be about \$2 billion lower in fiscal 2019 and that "much of the lost revenue ... will not be recouped."

In addition, these CBO estimates did not include indirect effects. As the shutdown dragged on - breaking the record for the longest funding lapse in U.S. history - the "risks to the economy were becoming increasingly significant," including the blow to businesses that could not get federal permits, government-backed loans or grants, the budget scorekeeper said.

Since that impact was more difficult to quantify, CBO explained, those effects were not factored into the cost estimate "but were probably becoming more significant" as the shutdown continued.

The agency projected that an overall \$11 billion in losses due to the shutdown over President Donald Trump's border wall will be offset by a projected \$8 billion boost for the GDP through the remainder of the year.

"Underlying those effects on the overall economy are much more significant effects on individual businesses and workers," the agency says. "Among those who experienced the largest and most direct negative effects are federal workers who faced delayed compensation and private-sector entities that lost business. Some of those private-sector entities will never recoup that lost income."

The shutdown, which ended on Friday, reduced GDP in the fourth quarter

of 2018 by \$3 billion, in addition to \$8 billion in the first quarter of 2019.

Although funding is now flowing to the departments that were shuttered for more than a month, they are guaranteed funding for only three weeks under the stopgap spending bill, Trump signed Friday. If the president and congressional leaders don't reach a compromise on border security spending in that time, the same nine departments and dozens of agencies are likely to be shut down again come midnight Feb. 15.

The shutdown also delayed about \$18 billion in federal discretionary spending by sidelining salaries and suspending federal services. CBO estimates that federal spending on goods and services was about \$9 billion lower during the shutdown than it would have been otherwise.

The good news for government contractors and vendors is that the budget office predicts federal agencies will spend

about \$3 billion extra in each of the first, second and third quarters of this year, completely making up for that spending gap by next winter. But CBO predicts agencies will probably purchase a different mix of goods and services than they had initially planned. Workers at nine of 15 federal departments were not paid during the shutdown. So the lapse will complicate tax withholding over the next few months, resulting in a temporary revenue bump for the IRS and short-term losses for the workers, who are receiving back pay in a lump sum, with more withheld. The agency cautioned that the shutdown's estimated effect on the economy is "subject to considerable uncertainty." For example, CBO said it wasn't sure how federal employees and contractors adjusted their spending while not getting paid, or how agencies will adjust their spending and goods and services now that the shutdown is over.



CBO's shutdown report was released alongside the agency's annual report detailing the nation's economic outlook for the next decade. That annual economic outlook report doesn't include the effects of the shutdown. The agency estimated that the U.S. federal budget deficit will hit about \$900 billion this year and exceed \$1 trillion every year beginning in 2022 - two years later than what CBO estimated last year. CBO's projection of the federal deficit for 2019 is about \$75 billion less than what it was last spring, namely due to a decrease in emergency spending. Two years into Trump's tenure, the national debt is expected to soar, to almost \$29 trillion in 10 years. That debt held by the public would be the largest percentage since 1947 and

more than twice the average of the past 50 years. Real GDP is expected to grow 2.3 percent in 2019, down from 3.1 percent in 2018, as the initial effect of the GOP tax bill, wanes, in terms of growth in business spending. Import tariffs the Trump administration has proposed, and their subsequent effect on trading partners, will reduce real GDP by about 0.1 percent by 2022.

"Those changes in trade policy increase policy uncertainty among investors, which may further reduce U.S. output," CBO says. "If investors lose confidence in stable international trade and economic relationships, then that increased uncertainty may delay investments or discourage them entirely, leading to less economic activity both in the United States and abroad."

'They should go back to school', Trump says about 'naive' intel chiefs

(By Our Staff Reporter)- US president Donald Trump defended his policies on Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and North Korea in a string of tweets and went after his own intelligence community leaders calling them "naive" and "passive" on Iran, and suggesting they need to go back to school.

The president has facing increasing public criticism and pushback - branded "rebuke" and "repudiation" by observers - on his key foreign policy initiatives in recent days from close party allies, including Mitch McConnell, the leader of the Republican-controlled senate, and US intelligence chiefs.

They have disputed the

president's claims that Iran was developing nuclear weapons, that North Korea was willing to give up its nuclear weapons programme, that the Islamic State was decimated and it was time to bring home American troops deployed in Syria and Afghanistan.

McConnell, a close ally whose wife serves in the Trump cabinet, broke with the president in a rare move Tuesday and introduced a legislative measure opposing the "precipitous withdrawal" of US troops from Syria and Afghanistan and arguing "al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their affiliates in Syria and Afghanistan continue to pose a serious threat to our nation."

President Trump has

focussed his return fire on his intelligence chief for now.

"The Intelligence people seem to be extremely passive and naive when it comes to the dangers of Iran," he wrote in one of the posts in which he had defended his position on Syria, North Korea and Afghanistan. He contended Iran was still testing "Rockets" and, added, "Be careful of Iran. Perhaps Intelligence should go back to school!"

On Afghanistan, developments regarding which are closely followed by New Delhi, Trump wrote, "Negotiating are proceeding well in Afghanistan after 18 years of fighting ... We will soon see if talks will be successful?"

Who wants Trump to be president? God does, says White House

"I think God calls all of us to fill different roles at different times and I think that he wanted Donald Trump to become president," Sarah Sanders says in an interview to be aired by the Christian Broadcasting Network.



(By Our Staff Reporter)- President Donald Trump has plenty of detractors, but for spokeswoman Sarah Sanders, he has support from above.

"I think God calls all of us to fill different roles at different times and I think that he wanted Donald Trump to become president," Sanders says in an interview to be aired by the

Christian Broadcasting Network. CBN journalist David Brody tweeted Sanders' claim after the interview was taped.

Trump, a Republican, has strong backing from the politically influential US evangelical movement, which early on decided to overlook multiple lurid reports regarding his private life.

Witness tried to steer contract to family business

(As Reported by Newsday)- Long Island- A defense attorney for former Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano tried to show Tuesday at the federal retrial of the GOP politician and his wife that a county worker may have tried to steer an emergency food contract to a restaurateur with ties to his own family's business. Mangano stands accused of giving his approval for the same \$238,000 contract to restaurateur Harendra Singh in the wake of superstorm Sandy in 2012 as a quid pro quo for gifts the Bethpage businessman allegedly lavished on Mangano and his wife, Linda. But the defense brought out during a cross-examination of John Maguire, who had been the county's emergency operations manager at a post-Sandy government operation hub, that Maguire's family had a company that did business for The Dover Group — the company he tried to hire for the same food contract. Maguire testified Monday that he picked The Dover Group, owned by Butch Yamali, off a list of three "approved vendors" that a county purchasing official gave him. But later, Mangano's former executive assistant told him in a heated exchange that "Butch gets enough," Maguire had

testified. Singh then landed the contract to supply food to emergency operations center workers, who initially were fed by a jail-based food operation that a state health official testified Monday exposed workers to unsanitary conditions. But Kevin Keating, Mangano's attorney, attempted to impugn Maguire's credibility Tuesday by suggesting that the witness had decided to reach out to Yamali because of business ties between his family and Yamali. Maguire agreed that in 1992 he started a public adjusting business, which negotiates settlements with insurance companies after property damage, with his two brothers. But the government witness denied knowing Yamali had hired his family's company immediately after Sandy. The witness also said he didn't tell prosecutors about his role with the family business until last week. "They didn't ask," Maguire told Keating. Maguire also testified that he belonged to Freeport Republican Club and was familiar with Yamali through his relationship with Angie Cullin, the club's leader and a former Town of Hempstead councilwoman. The club often had events at

Yamali's restaurants and his company sometimes catered events for the political club, Maguire said Tuesday. The witness told Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher Caffarone during more questioning that he left his family's public adjusting business in the early 2000s and had no financial stake in it. Maguire said he worked on and off for the business, but not on Yamali's account. He also repeated that he didn't know Yamali's company was a client of the family business, Maguire and Maguire. The emergency food contract is one of three alleged schemes that federal prosecutors say Edward Mangano, 56, perpetrated in order to aid Singh. The former county executive faces seven felony counts, charges of federal program bribery, honest services wire fraud, extortion and conspiracy. The same indictment accuses Linda Mangano, 55, of five felony counts that include making false statements to the FBI about what the government claims was a "no-show job" Singh gave her. The government says the former county executive steered lucrative county contracts to Singh, and also used his influence so the



restaurateur would get Town of Oyster Bay-backed loans. They say Edward Mangano did so in exchange for bribes that also included wood flooring for the Manganos' bedroom, free meals and vacations, two expensive chairs and a \$7,300 wristwatch for one of their sons. Also Tuesday, Heather McNeill, another former county Emergency Operations worker, testified that a state safety officer told her he'd spotted jail personnel washing utensils for the Sandy food operation in a restroom and "was threatening to shut the place down." She said she told Maguire and Craig Craft, the Office of Emergency Management commissioner, and Craft called a meeting she didn't attend. But McNeill testified Maguire looked "miffed" on his way out, and Laura Munafo, Mangano's former executive assistant, walked out and announced: "We're going with

H." McNeill said that was a reference to restaurateur Harendra Singh, and also testified she believed Munafo had been speaking on behalf of the county executive at the time. The witness also testified that Edward Mangano ultimately was in charge of the post-Sandy operational hub, saying "nothing ... was ever done at that level without the knowledge of the county executive's office." McNeill added that later while processing Singh's bills — totaling more than \$230,000 for the meals over 16 days — she brought up the cost to Craft. One dinner for 400 people at the emergency operations center, which included salad, penne ala vodka, a vegetable medley and cheesecake and brownies, came to \$10,800, the witness said. McNeill said Craft just told her to proceed. "He said 'Just process it. This is what the boss wants.'" H.



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(See Full Page Advt. on Page 32)



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ICE set up a fake university Hundreds enrolled, not realizing it was a sting operation

Tuition was relatively reasonable - \$8,500 a year for undergraduates and \$11,000 a year for graduate students. "Located in the heart of the automotive and advanced manufacturing center of Southeast Michigan, the University of Farmington provides students from throughout the world a unique educational experience," the site informed prospective applicants. But there were no classes taking place at the university, which employed no instructors or professors. In court filings that were unsealed Wednesday, federal prosecutors revealed that the school was being run by undercover agents working for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The fake university had been set up in 2015 as part of an elaborate sting operation aimed at ensnaring foreign nationals who had initially come to the United States on student visas. Its "campus" consisted of a small office in a corporate park in the northwestern Detroit suburb of Farmington Hills, Mich., with no quad or library in sight. The phony university was

"being used by foreign citizens as a 'pay to play' scheme," prosecutors allege. After forking over thousands of dollars, students would provide immigration authorities with evidence that they were enrolled in a full-time educational program. They could then continue to live and work in the United States under a student visa. But since the University of Farmington didn't exist, they didn't have the hassle of writing papers, taking tests or showing up to class. Students knew that the scheme was illegal "and that discretion should be used when discussing the program with others," prosecutors wrote in their indictment, which was filed Jan. 15 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. According to the Detroit News, which first reported on the undercover operation, dozens of University of Farmington students were arrested on Wednesday as part of a massive nationwide sweep and are now potentially facing deportation. In

addition, eight people who allegedly worked as "recruiters" for the school and collectively helped at least 600 students to remain in the country under false pretenses now face federal conspiracy charges. ICE could not be reached for comment late Wednesday night. It's unclear how many past or present students could be facing deportation as a result of the sting. The Department of Homeland Security's list of certified schools where international students can enroll includes the University of Farmington. And the school made some pretense of being a legitimate institution. Before Wednesday night, when the school's Facebook and Twitter accounts were abruptly deleted, posts on social media notified students about school cancellations because of an ice storm, and advertised an upcoming admissions fair. It had a Latin motto - "Scientia et Labor," meaning "Knowledge and Work" - and a handful of positive online reviews from people claiming to be satisfied alumni. But no one enrolled at

the university was making progress toward a degree, the indictment said. The "unique educational experience" promoted on the school's website apparently consisted of not going to school at all. There were clues that not everything was aboveboard. The school's

website never said how many enrolled students it had, though it claimed that they came from all 50 states and 47 countries. It didn't name the university's president or the year when the school was founded. As the Detroit News's Robert Snell noted on Twitter, a group of students deep in concentration came from Shutterstock. The university claimed to be accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges but did not appear in an online directory of accredited institutions on the organization's website.



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Here's your answer when someone asks 'How can it be so cold if there's Global warming

It happens every winter.

The first significant cold snap of the season hits and somebody, like, um, the President of the United States, wonders what happened to global warming.

"In the beautiful Midwest, windchill temperatures are reaching minus 60 degrees, the coldest ever recorded. In coming days, expected to get even colder," the President wrote Monday night. "People can't last outside even for minutes. What the hell is going on with Global Warming? Please come back fast, we need you!" Parts of the US are indeed facing some of the coldest temperatures the country's seen in a generation. But, as cold as it is, all this talk of global warming is not

overblown.

To understand why, you have to first know the difference between weather and climate. There's a difference between weather and climate. Weather is what happens today. Climate is what happens over the long run.

Here's how NASA explains it: Weather is the condition in the atmosphere over a short period of time. Climate is how the atmosphere behaves over relatively long periods of time.

CNN meteorologist Chad Myers clarified the same point when Trump made a similar quip last year, doubting climate change because of cold weather.

"Climate isn't a day, climate is long term," Myers said, as he also pointed out that the pre-

Thanksgiving cold snap that the President was tweeting about at the time was mainly concentrated on just one part of North America and not over the whole world.

"There's one real spot of blue and that just happens to be over New York City, over Washington DC, over Boston, over Ottawa and that's the big cold mass," Myers said, pointing at a temperature map of the world. "Just because we have one cold area with the rest of the area being red and well above normal, I don't think that one little (blue) blob says anything at all."

Climate skeptics have done this for years, i.e. point to cold winter weather as proof that global warming is a hoax. "People also

tend to confuse what is happening where they live as an indication of what is happening globally," says Marshall Shepherd, director of the Atmospheric Sciences Program at the University of Georgia and a former president of the American Meteorological Society.

"It is not 'Where You Live Warming,' it is 'Global Warming,'" Shepherd told CNN.

While portions of the US might be mired in a deep freeze, many other parts of the planet are seeing record-breaking heat waves (like Australia last week). When you average these out over the planet, the hotter temps are tipping the scale. That's why the hottest 5 years on record for our

planet have all occurred since 2014. There is global warming and it's dire. The Earth's temperature has changed drastically in its 4.5 billion-year history, from the Huronian Ice Age that covered vast portions of the planet in ice for nearly 300 million years, to a period about 50 million years ago, when scientists believe that palm trees and crocodiles were native above the Arctic Circle. Today, climate change is commonly used as a term to describe the effects of global warming that have occurred as a result of human activity following the industrial revolution in the 18th century. So that's why global warming is still a thing, even when it seems like the winter

India-born billionaire on trial for bribing doctors with cash, strip clubs

The first prosecution of a pharmaceutical company chief executive tied to opioid overdoses begins next week, when Insys Therapeutics Inc.'s John Kapoor goes on trial. The fallout may jolt an industry facing steep penalties for its own role in the crisis. Kapoor, 75, is accused of masterminding illegal marketing tactics that contributed to an epidemic of addiction and death. A onetime billionaire who rose from modest means in India, he's on trial for using speakers' fees, dinners and cash to lure doctors into prescribing a highly addictive opioid painkiller meant solely for cancer patients. The case will be heard in Boston, but the verdict may echo in the boardrooms of the nation's pharmaceutical companies. More than 1,500 local governments have sued opioid makers and distributors to recoup the billions of dollars spent fighting the crisis. The clash could serve as a test-drive for how jurors weigh claims of industry wrongdoing. "It's a real advantage for the local governments' lawyers to get jury feedback on the Insys marketing evidence," said Richard Ausness, an expert on mass-tort law at the University of Kentucky College of Law. "It will help them build their conspiracy cases against all the companies involved in the opioid litigation." A conviction could turn Kapoor into the face of the opioid crisis.

The first person in his family to

attend college, he became a health-care entrepreneur after earning a doctorate in medicinal chemistry at the University of Buffalo in 1972. He worked as a drugmaker's plant manager and later became CEO of a hospital-products company. After forming a venture-capital firm that invested in health-care companies, he merged closely held Insys with NeoPharm Inc. in 2010 to get access to technology to develop pain drugs for cancer patients. He

remains Insys's majority shareholder, controlling about 60 percent of its shares, according to company filings. They've fallen by about one-third since his October 2017 indictment. A conviction on federal fraud, racketeering and kickback charges could send Kapoor and four other ex-Insys managers to prison for as long as 25 years. They're accused of bribing doctors to prescribe Subsys, an opioid painkiller approved in 2012 for late-stage cancer patients. Prosecutors say Kapoor oversaw a scheme in which doctors got sham speaker's fees in return for issuing more prescriptions and subordinates lied to insurers about the type of patients receiving the fentanyl-based drug, they said. Doctors were allegedly seduced with jobs for relatives, lavish meals and, in one case, a \$1,000 private champagne-room

session at a strip club. As the bribes generated Subsys sales, Kapoor pumped more money into speakers' fees, with spending



jumping to \$10.5 million in 2014 from \$550,000 two years earlier, prosecutors say. "We will have testimony from doctors who said, 'I would not have prescribed this if I wasn't being bribed or paid,'" Assistant U.S. Attorney Fred Wyshak said in court this month. Also on trial is Sunrise Lee, a former stripper who, as an Insys sales manager, enticed physicians into writing more prescriptions, prosecutors said. "Doctors really enjoyed spending time with her and found Sunrise to be a great listener," another manager, Alec Burlakoff, told colleagues, according to court filings. Burlakoff is among at least half-dozen current and former employees who may testify for the government. Former CEO Michael Babich pleaded guilty this month and agreed to cooperate in a bid for leniency. The other

defendants are former vice president Michael Gurry, ex-national sales director Richard Simon and former regional sales director Joseph Rowan. The accused deny wrongdoing. Wyshak, who helped send Boston gangster James "Whitey" Bulger to prison, will be squaring off in court against defense lawyer Beth Wilkinson, whose clients have included Pfizer Inc. and Microsoft Corp. She may cast blame on Babich and Burlakoff, saying they oversaw the speaker's program central to the alleged plot, said Robert Mintz, a defense attorney with McCarter & English who's not involved in the case.

"Financial Interests" "She could very well argue the wrongdoing was committed by these lower-level executives, who had their own financial interests in pushing sales of the drug," said Mintz, a former prosecutor. "She may tell the jury they are now throwing their former boss under the bus to save themselves." Wilkinson might also blame other Insys directors, said Larry Hamermesh, executive director of the Institute of Law and Economics at the University of Pennsylvania and an expert on corporate law. "The defense may argue that Kapoor's fellow board members

knew about wrongdoing and didn't make any effort to stop it," he said. The trial, which could last three months, may be the year's most dramatic case involving the opioid epidemic, but it won't be the only one. In May, the Oklahoma Attorney General's suit against opioid makers including Purdue Pharma LP and Johnson & Johnson is set for trial. Three dozen other states have also sued the companies. And in September, a federal judge in Cleveland will hear the first cases brought by U.S. cities and counties, which accuse opioid makers and distributors of conspiring to understate the risks of prescription opioids and overstate their benefits, and of failing to halt suspiciously large shipments to pharmacies. Lawyers for the municipalities may highlight the marketing tactics revealed at Kapoor's trial as part of their conspiracy claims, said Carl Tobias, a University of Richmond law professor. Joe Rice, one of the lawyers in the case, declined to comment.

"It's rare for plaintiffs' lawyers to get a kind of dress rehearsal for their evidence in a case, but it looks like they may get one here," Tobias said. "It could provide a road map for how to present this material." The case is U.S. v. Kapoor, 16-cr-10343, U.S. District Court, District of Massachusetts (Boston).

India-China relations expected to remain tense: US spymaster



Relations between India and China is expected to remain tense this year, despite the efforts of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping to improve ties between the two nations, a top American spymaster told lawmakers on Tuesday.

(Agencies)- Relations between India and China is expected to remain tense this year, despite the efforts of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping to improve ties between the two nations, a top American spymaster told lawmakers on Tuesday. National Intelligence

Director Dan Coats said though Modi and Xi held an informal summit in April 2018 to defuse tension and normalise relations between the two nation post the 2017 military standoff at Doklam, they did not address border issues. "Misperception of military movements or construction might result in tensions escalating into

armed conflict," he warned. "We expect relations between India and China to remain tense, despite efforts on both sides to manage tensions since the border standoff in 2017, elevating the risk of unintentional escalation," Coats told members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence during a Congressional hearing on

World Wide Threat assessment of the US intelligence community. Coats said Chinese leaders will try to extend the country's global economic, political and military reach, while using China's military capabilities and overseas infrastructure and energy investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to

diminish the US' influence. "However, Beijing is likely to face political pushback from host governments in many locations...", he said. India has been severely critical of the BRI as the USD 50 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is part of the BRI, passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). India says

it cannot accept a project that ignores its core concern on sovereignty and territorial integrity. India was the only country in the eight-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation on June 10 last year which refused to endorse the ambitious BRI for which Beijing has signed pacts with nearly 80 countries and international organisations.

India's soft Power is very effective in Afghanistan

From an Afghan perspective, India's soft power is effective in Afghanistan and the Indian government doesn't need to have direct military involvement in the country. There are three reasons for these conclusions - historic India-Afghanistan links, a feeling of kinship due to Bollywood's popularity, and India's support to rebuild Afghanistan.



(Agencies)- US President Donald Trump recently mocked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has promoted soft power policies in Afghanistan that benefit India and the US, about building a "library" and not doing enough to help stabilise the war-torn country. Some believe Trump mistook the Afghan

parliament for a library, but whatever the intention, the perception was not welcomed by Afghans, Indians and US citizens. From an Afghan perspective, India's soft power is effective in Afghanistan and the Indian government doesn't need to have direct military involvement in the country. There are three reasons for

these conclusions: historic India-Afghanistan links; a feeling of kinship due to Bollywood's popularity; and India's support to rebuild Afghanistan. The historic links form the bedrock of friendly relations. Afghan vice-president Mohammad Sarwar Danish highlighted this during the 70th Indian Independence Day celebrations at the Indian

embassy in Kabul by saying, "Afghanistan and India have 1,000 years of historic relations...As a result, both countries' history is nested together and cannot be divided." According to a study, there are countless Afghanistan-related monuments and historic and cultural items across India. Similarly, there are more than a dozen sites in Afghanistan with Indian artwork. India's film industry has nurtured a feeling of friendship among Afghans. My own experiences helped me understand Bollywood's influence on Afghans. I was four months old when I left Afghanistan with my uncle's family in 1984 to settle in Peshawar, Pakistan, because of the Soviet invasion. I was 12

years old when I watched the Indian movie Saajan. Watching Indian films was a family tradition and men and women gathered to watch them every Friday night. In the 1990s, we returned home when the mujahidin took power in Kabul. Every Friday night, Afghan national television beamed Indian movies. In those days, the mujahidin forces, who defeated the Soviets with the help of the US and Pakistan, were fighting each other for power. Despite bombings and gunfire from every direction, almost everyone waited for the little joy of Friday nights. Thanks to limited electrical power in Kabul, some nights in Kabul were dark. I still recall collective prayers by my family for the power to not go off before the movie ended. Like me, I am pretty sure most Afghans who speak Hindi have learned it by watching Indian movies. In the past 17 years of the US

involvement in Afghanistan, most TV and radio stations play Indian songs as part of their routine programming. Indian support to the Afghan government is vital due to its soft power and influence on the population. India has influenced Afghans and gained their trust and respect for two reasons: India has helped economically to rebuild Afghanistan; and both countries face a shared threat from Pakistan. India is the largest regional donor to Afghanistan, having provided \$3 billion. The new parliament building, Salma dam in Herat province, and a highway to Iran's Chabahar port, are a few prominent projects backed by India. Chabahar is of immense importance to Afghanistan because it provides access to the oceans and reduces dependence on Pakistan.

India is rather too cautious on the Quad



Respecting China's sensitivities is a one-way street. Beijing doesn't respect New Delhi's sensitivities in return

(Agencies)- India has once again decided to reject Australia's participation in the Malabar naval exercises. Japan became a permanent member of these exercises in 2015. After the resumption of the quadrilateral dialogue, or the Quad, between India, the US, Japan and Australia in 2017, most analysts had assumed that Australia would be allowed in the Malabar exercises too. But Canberra has found it tough to woo New Delhi despite Tokyo and Washington backing Australia's entry. India has

also rebuffed suggestions from the US to elevate the Quad dialogue to foreign secretary level from the current setup of joint secretary level talks. Curiously, India sees the Malabar exercises separately from the Quad. It also draws a clear line between the Quad and the Indo-Pacific strategy. It is no surprise that India is now increasingly being considered the weakest link in the Quad. Ironically, one of the reasons India has been refusing Australia's participation in the Malabar exercises has to

do with its own perception of Australia-China relations. New Delhi is not sure that the current tensions between Australia and China will outlast the stint of a Labor government in Canberra. It was, after all, Kevin Rudd, a Labor prime minister, who had pulled Australia out of the Quad in 2008. It is also believed that India fears that quadrilateral naval exercises will invite reprisals from China. As a country which shares a long and disputed border with China, India would be most vulnerable to such hostilities.

However, it has been proven time and again that respecting China's sensitivities is a one-way street; Beijing doesn't respect New Delhi's sensitivities in return.

Indeed, a quadrilateral exercise will send out a political message to China. But it will also send a much needed message to other countries in Southeast Asia which are afraid to confront China on their own. Moreover, these exercises aren't merely about messaging. They are about building joint procedures to

work together in crisis situations. A crisis need not be triggered only by China's activities but could well be the result of a tinpot dictator in the region or due to some natural disaster in the shared maritime space. The idea of Quad, one should recall, owes itself to the 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean. It is high time India stopped dragging its feet on Australian participation in the Malabar exercises. Elevating the level of engagement in the Quad should be the next logical step.

Asia Bibi free after Pakistan Supreme Court upholds acquittal of Islamist blasphemy charges

(Agencies)- Asia Bibi, a 47-year-old farm worker, was convicted of blasphemy against Islam in 2010, after an argument over whether she could share the same water glass as her Muslim co-workers.

She was sentenced to death by hanging, but the Supreme Court acquitted her on appeal in October last year. The court's decision prompted nationwide protests from Islamist hardliners. The protests led to schools being shut in some areas and a major highway from Islamabad to Lahore was blockaded by angry mobs. Ms Bibi and her children were kept in hiding amid calls for her beheading.

The case garnered international attention, and in 2018 Tony Abbott said she would be welcome to seek asylum in Australia.

A deal struck between the



Bibi's acquittal, clearing the last legal hurdle to her freedom. There have long been concerns Pakistan's blasphemy laws have been used to persecute religious minorities, including the Muslim Ahmadi sect.

Blasphemy is punishable by death in the Muslim-majority country.

Ms Bibi's family have always maintained her innocence. Before her acquittal, two Pakistani officials were murdered after speaking out in her defence. Pakistani extremists urged the death of the Supreme Court judges, calling on their cooks and servants to murder them.

Islamabad's Supreme Court was ringed with tight security and the city was on high alert ahead of the latest ruling, amid fears fresh protests could erupt.

Pakistani Government and Islamist leaders in a bid to quell unrest after her acquittal allowed for her to be stopped from leaving the country and for further appeals to be heard.

The UK resisted suggestions she could seek safe haven there, amid fears British consulate staff in Pakistan could be targeted in retaliation.

She is now expected to seek asylum in Canada, and it has been reported that two of her children are already there.

The Supreme Court has now rejected an appeal against Ms

'Growth of nuke programmes of India, Pakistan increase risk of security incident in South Asia': US spymaster

(Agencies)- The continued growth of the atomic weapon programmes of Pakistan and India increases the risk of a "nuclear security incident" in South Asia, America's top spymaster has warned. The remarks of National Intelligence Director Daniel Coats is part of US intelligence community's assessment of worldwide threats in the year 2019. While Pakistan continues to develop new types of nuclear weapons, including short-range tactical weapons, sea-based cruise missiles, air-launched cruise missiles, and longer range ballistic missiles, India this year has conducted its first deployment of a nuclear-powered submarine armed with nuclear missiles, he told lawmakers on Tuesday. "The continued growth and development of Pakistan and India's nuclear weapons programmes increase the risk of a nuclear security incident in South Asia, and the new types of nuclear weapons will

introduce new risks for escalation dynamics and security in the region," Coats said in his opening statement running into over 40 pages. Coats and heads of other top American intelligence agencies appeared before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on their worldwide threat assessment. Prominent among them included CIA Director Gina Haspel, who has just returned from a trip to India; FBI Director Christopher Wray and Defence Intelligence Agency Director Robert Ashley. Coats said the US intelligence committee expect the overall threat from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to continue to grow during 2019 and Russia will remain the most capable WMD adversary, developing new strategic and non-strategic weapons systems. He said China will also continue to expand and diversify its WMD capabilities.

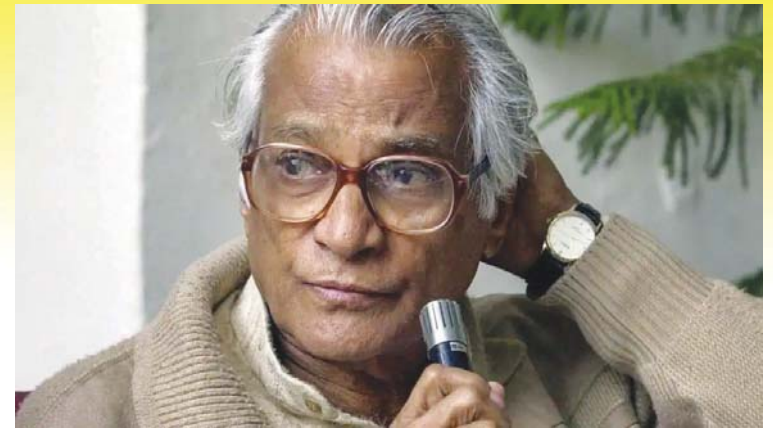
George Fernandes: The man who kept the NDA together

One of the iconic images of Emergency is of George Fernandes in shackles, his arms raised high in protest.

(By Our Staff Reporter)- By 1974, George Fernandes was already a popular and powerful Union leader and politician - in the 1967 elections, he defeated Congress strongman SK Patil from South Bombay, earning the sobriquet George the giant killer - but that year, he almost brought India to a halt. At his call, the All India Railwaymen's Federation went on strike, bringing to a halt an already distressed economy. The protest lasted a little over a fortnight before it was crushed by the Congress, but many believe it left the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi insecure and became a catalyst for the declaration of Emergency a year later, on June 25, 1975. One of the iconic images of Emergency is of Fernandes in shackles, his arms raised high in protest. Named after George V - the two share a birthday - Fernandes was a man of many parts, or contradictions. He supported the

Janata Dal's politics of Mandal but ended up by the side of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Kamandal (a euphemism for politics of Hindutva) in the twilight of his active political life. A fiery speaker and a polyglot, his oratorical skills in Hindi were no less than that of the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He spoke extemporaneously and with equal flair in English, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada. He hailed from Kadur, Karnataka, but as a trade unionist and a practising politician worked across India, especially in Mumbai (then Bombay) and Bihar. The railway strike bore testimony to Fernandes' standing as a trade unionist. As a working class leader, he cut his teeth in Bombay in the 1950s and 1960s, inspired by Mangalorean trade union leader Placid D'Mello. It was for that reason that the maximum city - then known as the city of dreams - also became his launching pad to Parliament.

In his teens, Fernandes, from an orthodox Mangalore Roman Catholic family, spent time in a seminary to be trained as a Roman Catholic priest. That brush with religious learning didn't last and he said in a television interview many years later that the gap between precept and practice in the church disillusioned him. He fled to Mumbai. Among the many elections he won, his post-Emergency victory in Bihar's Muzaffarpur in 1977 marked the peak of his career spanning over four decades. His continued incarceration while other Opposition leaders were freed made global headlines. His associates in the Socialist International (a global grouping of socialist parties) organised protests across Europe. The Bihar seat was chosen for its tradition of electing socialist stalwarts from outside, such as Archarya Kriplani and Ashok Mehta. The electorate there kept



the trend, returning Fernandes with a thumping margin merely on the strength of his cutouts in shackles (that iconic photograph again) and support from Jayaprakash Narayan. Kept in jail in the Baroda Dynamite case (where he and others were accused of procuring dynamite to blow up railway tracks and government establishments to protest Emergency), he had no personal connect with Muzaffarpur. His socialist colleagues later joked: the Fernandes name sounded "alien" to voters who didn't mind electing a "foreigner" to defeat the Congress.

Such was his charisma and

connect with the middle classes and the youth at the time that many saw in him a potential prime minister. "He forever was on the move; half of his life spent in trains and planes," said one of his proteges, Loktantrik Janata Dal leader Sharad Yadav (Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar is another protege). "In planes, he'd always take the back seat and busy himself with a book or some writing work. That embarrassed us as he was our leader but we sat upfront." Fernandes' spartan lifestyle was reflected in his mouldy glasses, dishevelled hair, crumpled kurtas, and a pair of inexpensive slippers.

Governance in India is a relic of its colonial past

Preserving the status quo: As seen in the World Economic Forum, the economic system which has allowed the rich to grow richer leaving those of us less fortunate further and further behind. India's governance is a part of that problem

(By Our Staff Reporter)- This has been Davos week, the week when the good and the great have gathered in the Swiss ski resort to make changes which will put the world right, but have they actually met, as some believe, to preserve the status quo? By status quo, I mean an economic system which has allowed the rich to grow richer leaving those of us less fortunate further and further behind. In this Davos week, the British daily, The Guardian, published an extract from the American writer Anand Giridharadas's new book *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. He quotes the World Inequality Report, which reveals that since 1980, the top 1% of the world's population have captured 27% of the new wealth, while the bottom half, more than 3 billion people, had to share just 12% among themselves. The average pretax

income of the top 10% of Americans has doubled, and 0.001% have found themselves, or made themselves, seven times richer. Fifty per cent of Americans have remained "almost precisely where they were". Giridharadas maintains that delegates at conferences of the world's rich, like the World Economic Forum in Davos, try to control anger about the status quo by promoting "thought leaders who are willing to confine their thinking to improving lives within the faulty system rather than tackling the faults". This amounts to the very people and institutions who have benefitted from the faults in the system, which have enabled them to prosper so spectacularly, promoting themselves as leaders in the attempt to create a more equal world. They only propose tinkering with the present

system, thus avoiding any threat to their self interest. Giridharadas also argues that much of the philanthropy of plutocrats and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of big corporations only serves to disguise the impact of the inequality by bringing about some improvements without taking measures to solve the problem. He quotes the example of a slave trader who made much of treating his slaves well to take attention away from the basic evil of slavery. It would be wrong to deny the value of philanthropy like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's contribution to reducing inequities in health, but who can deny that the prime purpose of corporate social responsibility is all too often softening the harsh image corporations have acquired? Does CSR not present the private sector as dedicated to



the public interest when in fact it's dedicated to growth and profits? Neither philanthropy nor CSR is tackling the faults in the faulty system. There is a parallel here with governance in India. It's generally agreed that we are governed by a system which is faulty. It's a system which is a relic of a colonial government with government employees behaving as though they were still ruling India rather than serving Indians. The government's so-called servants collude with politicians to share power and steal money from the poor rather than ensuring they get what is their due. When addressing the National Development Council as prime

minister in 1999, Atal Bihari Vajpayee said: "People often perceive the bureaucracy as an agent of exploitation rather than a provider of service. Corruption has become a low risk and high reward activity." He went on to tell his fellow politicians: "While expecting discipline and diligence from the administration, the political executive should review its own performance." No such review has taken place because politicians are the beneficiaries of the present system. This government has attempted to improve governance by delivering money to beneficiaries of its schemes electronically.

Howard Schultz's Venti-Size Disaster

(Agencies)- What, exactly, explains why a billionaire former CEO of a coffee chain thinks he can launch an independent run for president in 2020?

Let me float three reasons behind Howard Schultz's long-shot bid, which he announced in a 60 Minutes interview on Sunday evening, followed by an introductory tweet that met with widespread derision from political insiders.

Reason No. 1 is the notion, at least a century old, that a successful business career suggests presidential timber. It's why Henry Ford was at one time a leading contender for the White House (he won the 1916 Michigan Republican primary). It's why Mitt Romney based his 2012 presidential campaign on the strength of his business successes, rather than his record as governor of Massachusetts. And it's why the fictional portrait of Donald Trump as a firm, decisive business leader on *The Apprentice* was the key to his political credibility in 2016.

The second development is the now-limitless ability of very wealthy people to spend as much as they want in the pursuit of office. It's not that wealthy politicians always win—they often don't. But big money now provides direct access to the playing field. It offers an ability to become a serious candidate with no other asset, such as the potency of your ideas, or a track record of public service, or the support of a significant constituency.

And the third is the powerful draw of "independence," the idea that an alienated majority is waiting for an alternative to the two major parties.

All three of these notions are either wrongheaded or deplorable. Combining them into one candidacy would not only increase the odds of a second term for President Trump, but it would also encourage other rich people to follow Schultz's lead. Instead of one Trump, we may be about to see dozens of Trumps.

It's not that success in business can't lead to success in politics. Our current president is evidence that one can lead to the other, at least if you define success by winning elections. And Trump's career of running enterprises into bankruptcy while lying about nearly everything turned out to be an excellent guide to his presidency. Still, the skills to build a successful business tell us little about an ordinary CEO's ability to work in Washington, with its competing power centers and ideologies. At the least, aspiring tycoons-turned-presidents should test their political skills by running for a lesser office, as Michael Bloomberg, Romney and many others did. Seeking the presidency first suggests, at the least, an excess of self-esteem.

As for the role of money, it's true that before the 1970s, politicians like the Kennedys and Nelson Rockefeller could dip into their family coffers with impunity. But post-Watergate reforms tried to put sharp limits on the practice.

A triple-shot of horrible developments in American politics have been poured into one 2020 presidential candidate.



Sadly, barely two years after President Gerald Ford signed these reforms into law, the Supreme Court began to erode them.

In the 1976 decision *Buckley v. Valeo*, the court held that any limit on what a candidate could spend in pursuit of office violated the First Amendment. Only two justices—Byron White and Thurgood Marshall—dissented. In his dissent, White wrote that "limiting the importance of personal wealth" would "assure that only individuals with a modicum of support from others will be viable candidates." It would also "discourage any notion that the outcome of elections is primarily a function of money" and would "equalize access to the political arena, encouraging the less wealthy, unable to bankroll their own campaigns, to run for office." Now, four decades later, candidates and supporters alike can put limitless amounts into campaigns through super PACs and

independent expenditures. White's words seem hopelessly quaint. Under the "money is speech" philosophy begun by *Buckley v. Valeo*, we can expect the court to one day declare that the offer of a \$100,000 bribe in return for a congressional vote or a presidential order is simply an act of extraordinary eloquence. And lastly, every election year, polls show that a majority of Americans say they would like to see a third party or independent candidate—and then they never vote for one. The fantasy of a Democratic-Republican unity ticket looks appealing until it runs up against the brick wall of policy. Schultz's initial ventures into specifics are less than encouraging. Asked what he thought the corporate tax rate should be, he said, "I don't want to talk in the hypothetical about what I would do if I was president." Memo to Howard: That's called "running for president."

In Schultz's candidacy, these

three troubling developments in American politics—the businessman daydream, the elimination of all limits on money, the independent fantasy—have intermingled to persuade the former Starbucks baron that he does not need to submit to the ordinary rigors of political primaries.

Bloomberg's decision to run as a Democrat is much more appealing. Yes, Bloomberg used his wealth to win and keep the mayor's office in New York. (He spent more than \$250 million in his three bids.) But he has seemingly concluded that an independent not only can't win, but also that he needs to convince a major political party of the virtue of his ideas if he wants to be president. That's what Trump did, after all.

By contrast, an independent run by Schultz would simply mean that his money was enough to put him on the ballot in the fall, regardless of whether the public was eager for his candidacy.

Zee stake sale: Lenders give Subhash Chandra 3 months to find buyer

(Agencies)- In a major relief to debt-ridden Subhash Chandra's Essel Group, lenders and creditors of the company have given them a three-month time till April to find a buyer to repay dues. Promoter and Chairman of the Essel Group, Subhash Chandra, got 90 days breather from lenders and creditors to find a buyer for half his stake in the flagship Zee Entertainment Enterprises, an Economic Times report said. According to the data available with exchange, ZEE promoters hold 41.62 per cent in the company, of which 59.37 per cent are pledged with lenders. The development came after Essel Group on Sunday issued

a statement that it has successfully arrived at an understanding with lenders, which are having pledge on shares held by the promoters.

"In view of the sensitive situation triggered due to the steep fall of the stock price of ZEE Entertainment Enterprises and Dish TV, a detailed meeting of the Essel Group promoters with the lending entities comprising of Mutual Funds, NBFCs and Banks was conducted," it said. In the meeting, lenders drew comfort from reiteration by the promoters for a speedy resolution through a strategic sale in a time bound

manner, the multi-faceted business conglomerate said. Commenting on the development, Chandra, said: "I am very positive, that we will continue to take such positive steps in rising up from the current challenging times, with support of all stakeholders." "I am very glad with the outcome of the meeting, which enabled us to arrive at a consensus, in the interest of all stakeholders," said A Balasubramanian, CEO, Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC. Boosted by the development, the shares of Zee Entertainment Enterprises rose 14.29 per cent to Rs 365 apiece in early trade compared to its previous



close of Rs 319.35 on the BSE. The stock tumbled over 26 per cent on Friday after it was reported that the company was in a financial

mess due to the aggressive bets on infra, which had gone out of control since the IL&FS crisis, and also the acquisition of Videocon's D2H business.

Sri Lanka, Deep in Debt

Turns Increasingly to China for Loans

(Agencies)- With bills falling due as island nation's economy falters, government sees Beijing's rates as attractive. Sri Lanka's recent political turbulence has forced it to borrow more from China as it scrambles to raise enough foreign currency to meet its first-quarter debt payments.

The South Asian nation has more debt due this year than in any previous one, and close to half of it has to be paid in the first quarter, even as its economy has slowed and its borrowing costs have jumped thanks to political uncertainty.

The strategically located country, whose relationship with China has come under international scrutiny, was already borrowing heavily over the last decade when a battle erupted late last year between its prime minister and president. At one point two men were claiming to be prime minister after one was fired by the president but refused to step down. The other, a former president who had cultivated growing ties with China during

his time in office, ultimately dropped his claim after courts ruled against his appointment, resolving the immediate crisis. But deep political tensions remain.

Largely as a result, the Sri Lankan rupee has tumbled against the dollar, credit-rating firms have downgraded the country's debt and tourism took a hit during the peak year-end holiday season. Growth of the island nation's gross domestic product averaged 3.36% in the first three quarters of last year. If it slips below 3.1% for the full year, that would be its lowest level in more than 15 years.

The government and government-owned companies have close to \$6 billion in external debt payments due in 2019—a hangover left from a borrowing binge to build infrastructure—but the country has become less able to pay.

Around \$2.6 billion of the country's debt is due in the first three months of the year. To cover the shortfall in foreign currency it has turned to loans from China

and short-term swap agreements with India. Indrajit Coomaraswamy, governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, said earlier this month the government was planning to borrow \$1.5 billion from Chinese banks at "attractive" rates and raise more than \$1.4 billion through a short-term emergency swap agreement with India's central bank.

"We want to try and get all these transactions done in the first quarter of this year," he told reporters. "We don't know what political tsunami might come next so we have to plan and get the money in as fast as possible." Sri Lanka's discussions for further loans from the International Monetary Fund were put on hold last year amid the political turmoil. The country doesn't plan to raise money through international sovereign bonds—its biggest source of foreign debt—until it is getting a better rate on them, central bankers said, adding that would likely not happen until IMF loans are back on track in the coming



months.

China currently accounts for around 15% of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt, up from less than 5% a decade ago, and that ratio could grow further, said Subhashini Abeysinghe, research director at Verité Research, a Colombo-based think tank. "Eventually this all leads back to China," she said. "China seems a reasonably cheap, low-cost option compared to having to go to international markets."

Sri Lanka, an island nation in the middle of the important shipping lanes just south of India, has been a big beneficiary of China's Belt and Road Initiative to build

ports, roads, railways and pipelines across Asia. Some U.S. officials have said China is using the program to trap countries in debt to give it greater sway and advance its military aims.

In one often cited example, Sri Lanka's government was unable to repay a Chinese loan for a southern port China helped build. To settle the loan, it granted a Chinese state company a 99-year lease on the facility. Part of the proceeds from that lease was used for debt payments this month, central bankers said.

Beijing denies any ulterior motive and says the projects promote development and benefit all sides. While Sri Lanka's borrowing from the Chinese government and other Chinese lenders has been surging in recent years, less than 10% of the money due in 2019 is to China. Sri Lanka will be asking the IMF, China, Japan, India and Middle East lenders for the best possible deals it can get as the market rates on bonds has jumped since the political crisis and downgrades. But the country still expects to get the largest part of the billions needed this year through sovereign bonds, central bankers said. Meanwhile economists and officials at the central bank said they wouldn't be too concerned about any incremental exposure to China. Japan has been one of the country's largest lenders for years and that hasn't given Japan any extra say on how Sri Lanka acts, they said. "Bilateral borrowing from China and other countries may be a better option [than bonds] but ultimately they will have to inevitably go back to markets," said Trisha Peries, product head at Colombo-based Frontier Research.

Government must save Basai 'wetland' to keep Gurugram liveable, save ecosystem

(News Agencies)- In my last column I wrote of Gurugram being blessed with birdlife. What I want to bring to the reader's notice today is how we are destroying their natural habitat and how the government has failed miserably to protect wetlands, either dismissing them as 'wastelands', or by denying their existence. To explain further, let me talk to you of Basai.

I first visited Basai about 12 years ago, when the outer reaches of Gurugram still had the touch of the rural. Basai was one such village—a mosaic of fields (paddy, millets, pulses, wheat), pastoral lands, tiny pockets of scrub forests, a network of six ponds, and a wetland, about 260 hectares in size, dotted with floating vegetation, reeds, making this marshy swampland home to a

variety of frogs, turtles, fish, insects and other aquatic life. Basai offers refuge to an astonishing variety of migratory birds that fly in from as far as Siberia and Europe—ducks, geese, songbirds, snipes, godwits, stints, plovers, harriers, eagles, cranes; along with permanent residents like egrets, herons, kingfishers, spoonbills, etc. In monsoons, this lush wetland brims with life with regional visitors—the purple swamphen, also called 'Lipstick' for its blood red beak, the pheasant-tailed jacana, a gorgeous bird which makes its nest on floating vegetation, colourful bee-eaters, rare bitterns and the sarus crane, India's tallest flying bird and a symbol of marital fidelity in folklore. The cranes also make a gorgeous dancing couple. Come summer, the wetland shrinks; even so, it

teems with life thanks to the herons, moorhens, munias, francolins and cormorants (you might have seen them, sitting on dry branches, sunning themselves with wings spread), which breed here.

Many of the species found here are endangered and threatened, such as the steppe eagle, imperial eagle, egyptian vulture, black-bellied tern, lesser flamingo, sarus crane, black-necked stork, painted stork, alexandrine parakeet, ferruginous duck, to name just a few. Basai is home to no less than 20,000 birds of over 280 species, and has been recognised globally as an Important Bird Area. It has other wildlife here too, both aquatic and terrestrial—turtles, mongoose, jungle cats, golden jackals.

Yet, the Haryana government fails to acknowledge this as a

wetland.

With rapid development and urbanisation, village fields have been 'plotted', morphed into apartment blocks, and five of the six ponds have been paved over.

In May 2017, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) delivered a death blow to Basai, when it started constructing a waste-processing plant, repurposing the land for non-wetland purposes. The Delhi Bird Foundation has taken the matter to the National Green Tribunal (NGT), but the MCG claims that Basai is just a "piece of barren land where a few birds occasionally roost... there will be no loss of flora or fauna by setting up the plant there." The NGT has asked the petitioners to approach the Haryana government to declare Basai as a wetland.

Impeachment cries cloud Democrats' vow to leave Mueller alone

The possible clashes will be on display Tuesday morning when the new Democratic House caucus meets for the first time this year to discuss Mueller's investigation.

(By Our Staff Reporter)- Before taking power, House Democrats vowed to give special counsel Robert Mueller the space needed to finish his work. Just four weeks in, however, sticking to that pledge is proving difficult.

The possible clashes will be on display Tuesday morning when the new House Democratic Caucus meets for the first time to discuss Mueller's investigation into President Donald Trump's ties to Russia, a probe with no clear end in sight and ever-expanding subplots.

For Speaker Nancy Pelosi and her committee chairs, the uncertainty surrounding the special counsel's work presents a major challenge for keeping their liberal, rabble-rousing members in check - not to mention a hungry party base that believes Trump should have been impeached the day after his inauguration.

For now, the Democrats say they are proceeding on two tracks: Letting Mueller pursue criminal charges like the ones unsealed Friday against longtime Trump associate Roger Stone; while

lawmakers get to work examining whether anything the president has done rises to "high crimes and misdemeanors" definition for impeachment. But inside the party ranks, some lawmakers antsy for action are suggesting those lines should be blurred.

"Congress has the duty to make sure the American people know about violations that this administration or the president may have committed," said Rep. Ro Khanna, a progressive from California who won a seat this year on the House Oversight Committee. "I don't think Mueller is a substitute for the checks and balances the Constitution requires. Congress can't abdicate our responsibility to Mueller."

Publicly, the committee chairs have said repeatedly that their staffs are constantly coordinating with the special counsel's office to prevent congressional interference in the ongoing criminal probes and to determine what topics are fair game for House investigators.

But privately, lawmakers and aides alike have grown frustrated with the deconfliction process,

three sources familiar with the matter told Politico. When Trump's former attorney Michael Cohen was slated to testify before the House Oversight Committee on Feb. 7, for example, lawmakers were bewildered about what exactly they could ask Cohen, given the ongoing Russia probe. Democrats on other panels mused that the whole hearing might be a "dud."

Those "guardrails," as aides and members refer to them, are still very unclear. And Democrats are privately placing at least some of the blame on Stephen Kelly, Mueller's congressional liaison. Kelly, who once served as the FBI's legislative affairs chief, has long had a reputation for being stringent and difficult to work with, and lawmakers and aides alike have grown concerned that Kelly isn't sharing enough guidance with the Hill.

One congressional aide speculated that Kelly fears that any information shared with lawmakers will leak. Rep. Val Demings (D-Fla.), a former detective and police chief who



just won spots on the Judiciary and Intelligence committees, acknowledged the issues with Kelly but defended his approach. "Just like we have an obligation to be methodical and strategic, I'm sure Mr. Kelly feels the obligation to be methodical and strategic," she said. "While it might be frustrating, we want the special counsel to do his work, and both entities respect it."

Democrats have faced other challenges in extracting information from Mueller's team and his Justice Department supervisors. House Judiciary Chairman Jerry Nadler (D-N.Y.) had to relay questions through his Senate counterpart to get an answer from Trump's attorney general nominee, William Barr, during his

confirmation hearing about whether he would commit to publicly releasing Mueller's findings.

A spokesman for Mueller declined to comment.

The House Democrats' oversight ambitions appear to be a signal that they aren't going to hold back - even with Mueller still on the clock. Stone's indictment Friday sets up the prospect of a criminal trial in Washington, later this year that means one of the most closely watched investigations in U.S. history could easily slip into 2020. Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker caught many by surprise late Monday when he said that Mueller's investigation was "I think, close to being completed," without offering any specifics.

No one elected Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg to referee free speech

(News Agencies)- Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., took over as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee this month, which has jurisdiction over federal antitrust law. How will he handle social media giants like Facebook, Google and Twitter, which have become the new restrictive, oppressive robber barons of today? The problem today is not monopolies charging high prices for essential goods and services like oil and gas. Facebook, Twitter and Google are free. But they are also three of the biggest, richest companies in world history - and, as a result, three of the most powerful.

Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg inadvertently revealed today's problem in a Wall Street Journal editorial published last week, which he mistakenly thought would address the issues. He wrote: "Another question is whether we leave harmful or divisive content up

because it drives engagement. We don't. People consistently tell us they don't want to see this content. Advertisers don't want their brands anywhere near it. The only reason bad content remains is because the people and artificial intelligence system we use to review it are not perfect - not because we have an incentive to ignore it." "Harmful or divisive" content is awfully vague and broad for Mark Zuckerberg to have the power to prohibit in public discourse. To a Protestant, a Catholic sermon can be divisive, if not outright harmful, and vice versa. A standard Muslim sermon can similarly be considered divisive, if not harmful and threatening, to both. A vigorous defense of the right to keep and bear arms can sound divisive, harmful and threatening to a pacifist. These days, a standard Republican argument for an across the board tax cut can sound divisive to a

Democrat. Ditto for a speech calling for a 70 percent tax rate in the ears of a free market Republican. Same for a "wealth" tax. Who elected Mark Zuckerberg to referee these issues? Nobody. The wisdom of the ages gave us freedom of speech, embodied in the First Amendment, to deal with these issues. If you disagree with something you hear, your proper response is to exercise your right to explain your viewpoint, not to ban whatever has offended you. As part of the modern public square, Facebook should allow its users to have these debates rather than shut them down.

I am sure Facebook has lots of market research where users tell them they don't want to see "harmful or divisive" speech. And advertisers I am sure tell them all the time that they don't want their ads anywhere near such speech. Then again, Facebook's artificial intelligence once



removed an extensive passage of the Declaration of Independence as hate speech. Everyone should agree that this labeling should be considered a mischaracterization, but everyone should also recognize that these misfires happen on the regular when big tech is in full control. Some might argue that Facebook is a private company free to do what it wants with speech on its platform, just like any newspaper can refuse any op-ed from anyone whose speech it does not want to support. That is where properly

understood antitrust policy comes in. Breaking up a big company is not the only remedy under antitrust. If a company has accumulated too much market power, as Facebook has, it can be found guilty of violating antitrust law. The remedy can be a binding federal agreement, known as a consent decree, requiring the company to follow the policy of viewpoint neutrality - that is, to protect the First Amendment by prohibiting the singling out or freezing of one set of opinions and perspectives.

Vidya Balan's new magazine cover is one you cannot ignore.

Vidya Balan's style in a new magazine cover is fresh and feminine. See Vidya channel serious retro vibes with her eclectic ensemble featuring exaggerated fringe and metallics. See Vidya Balan's magazine cover here.

Vidya Balan graces the new cover of Fimfare magazine in a dramatic look. The actor is dressed in a statement-making lilac ensemble. Vidya's magazine cover

embraces the playfulness of fringe to the max. The actor wore her fringed look with a sheer dress with subtle metallic accents. Although an outfit like Vidya's can feel overwhelming,

and a bit "out there," it still looks exciting. The lilac fringe details surely look fun to play with, if you're the fidgeting type. Take a look at Vidya Balan's new magazine cover, where lilac steals the show. While the fringed leather jacket or the fringed dress never go out of style, Vidya Balan's unexpected look will make you rethink the fringe trend. You could make fringe the focal point of your look by wearing a bold single piece, then pair it with minimalistic accessories. Throw on a bold red lip and you're set. Or like Vidya Balan, you could style fringe with other statement clothing and accessories for a party-ready look. When you've got a piece of clothing that makes a strong statement, your options are to complement or coordinate, and Vidya Balan did the latter. Her make-up artist used shades in the purple family, but of different depths. Vidya's eye shadow is a pretty lilac that's a lightened, shimmery version of her lilac ensemble. Her lips were not ignore either. Notice how Vidya's lip gloss has a subtle lilac tinge?



You can buy Parineeti Chopra's designer lehenga, saree from Priyanka Chopra wedding for this much

Parineeti Chopra's outfits from the Nick Jonas, Priyanka Chopra wedding are perfect for every budget and any festive occasion. Find out the exact cost of Parineeti's boho-chic saree and stunning lehenga.

Parineeti Chopra attended her sister Priyanka Chopra's wedding in Jodhpur and she had the honour of being one of the bridesmaids, along with Game of Thrones actor Sophie Turner and Isha Ambani, the only daughter of India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani. While we got a glimpse of their bridesmaid looks in many group wedding photos from Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas' Christian wedding ceremony on December 1, Parineeti Chopra has now shared photos of her designer lehenga and saree looks from the Hindu wedding ceremony, sangeet, mehendi and other wedding festivities in Jodhpur.

We won't try to convince you that Parineeti Chopra's wedding looks were stunning. When you see the photos ahead of her ravishing ensembles by

Sabyasachi, Falguni Shane Peacock and many more designer labels, you'll simply swoon. And then, like us, you'll instantly want to know where you can get Parineeti Chopra's outfits. However, not everyone has the same luxury of time or resources as Parineeti, or maybe you simply want to shop for your wedding outfit in the comfort of your own home. Either way, we get it. That's why we took the time to find out where you can buy Parineeti Chopra's completely stunning saree and lehenga from sister Priyanka Chopra's wedding celebration in Jodhpur. At one of the pre-wedding functions, Parineeti Chopra wore pre-draped saree by designer label, Sukriti & Aakriti. The white saree featuring a floral print border and pallu is embellished with tikli work on the border of the sleeves and the fall.

Parineeti's designer saree ensemble sells online at Rs 29,000. Nothing beats this price. At Nick Jonas and Priyanka Chopra's sangeet function, Parineeti Chopra wore a Falguni and Shane Peacock lehenga worth Rs 3,95,000. The metallic and pink lehenga was no doubt breathtaking, especially with its bold colours and extravagant details. The lehenga was glitzed-up in all-over crystal embroidery and dramatic floral appliques. Edgy and elegant. But that's not all... You'll adore the array of on-trend hues and the variety of playful silhouettes (a bright yellow cape, anyone?) that Parineeti Chopra sported at Nick Jonas and Priyanka Chopra's wedding celebrations. At the mehendi function, Parineeti made an airy cape ensemble look cool.



Obesity, malnutrition 2 sides of climate change

India is among those worst-affected by climate change with extreme weather events, such as heat stress and floods, on the rise. According to a recent World Bank report, 148 million Indians will be living in severe climate change hotspots by 2050.

Three major problems confronting the world - climate change, obesity and malnutrition - are connected with each other and together form a "global syndemic" that poses the greatest threat to human and planetary health, particularly in low- and middle-income countries including India, according to a new report by The Lancet.

A syndemic, or a combination of pandemics, is defined as "the presence of two or more disease states that adversely interact with each other".

The report - The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition and Climate Change: The Lancet Commission Report - which discusses how the issues are inter-related and often exacerbate the prevalence of each, was prepared by 43 health and climate experts from 14

countries, and was released on Monday by the Lancet Commission on Obesity.

The main and common drivers for the "global syndemic", according to the authors, are food and agriculture policies, transportation, urban design, and land use systems in general, and policies that incentivise large food corporations and the fossil fuel industry in particular. "The fossil fuel and food industries that are responsible for driving the Global Syndemic receive more than \$5 trillion in annual subsidies from governments," the report said.

"Until now, undernutrition and obesity have been seen as polar opposites of either too few or too many calories. In reality, they are both driven by the same unhealthy, inequitable food systems, underpinned by the same political economy that is single-focused on economic

growth, and ignores the negative health and equity outcomes. Climate change has the same story of profits and power ignoring the environmental damage caused by current food systems, transportation, urban design and land use," said the Lancet commission's co-chair, professor Boyd Swinburn of the University of Auckland.

The report points out that climate change can drive obesity because rising temperatures in some parts of the world is restricting physical activity outdoors. It says that undernutrition and obesity also interact - undernutrition in early life is a predictor for later obesity in many countries.

In India, 38% children under five years old are stunted (too short for their age); 21% are wasted (too thin for their height); 36% are underweight, and 58% are



anaemic, according to National Family Health Survey data put together by Shifalika Goenka, one of the co-authors of The Lancet report and a professor at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). "Radical changes are required in the country's laws pertaining built- environments, roads and transport systems including public transport, support structures for active living and physical activity in daily living, green spaces; land use, urban design, agriculture, and food and economic and commercial policies to prevent further carnage and damage in the years and generations to come," said Goenka. India is among those worst-affected by climate change with extreme weather events, such as heat stress and floods, on the rise. According to a recent World Bank report, 148 million Indians will be living in severe climate

change hotspots by 2050, and the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has acknowledged that there is a perceptible rise in extreme weather events in recent decades and documented a gradual, significant rise in the annual mean temperature from 2000 onward.

These factors together show that India, too, is suffering from the global syndemic.

As a fallout of the syndemic, the prevalence of diabetes increased in every Indian state between 1990 to 2016, till when the data was last available. Across India, the number of people with diabetes increased from 26 million in 1990 to 65 million in 2016, with 36% of these cases attributed to obesity. The prevalence of overweight adults in India increased from 9% in 1990 to 20.4% in 2016. The Lancet report highlights other subtle links between the prevalence of the three pandemics. For example, global meat production has increased four to five times from 71 million tonne annually in 1961 to 318 million tonne in 2014, and is projected to increase to 455 million tonne in 2050. The report states that livestock production is a major contributor to climate change (19% of all greenhouse gasses, or GHGs), it is also a major driver of deforestation and takes up about 70% of agricultural land. The link between rising meat consumption with obesity and cardiovascular disease is already documented. Similarly, ultra-processed food products made with cheap ingredients such as sugars, flours and oils are energy-dense and nutrient-poor and cause both undernutrition and obesity by displacing whole foods. They also contribute to GHG emissions. The study says that in Australia, ultra-processed food consumption is estimated to contribute more than a third of the total diet-related environmental effects; 35% of water use, 39% of energy use, 33% of carbon dioxide equivalents, and 35% of land use.

When using a virus to fight a superbug is the best approach

Reckless overuse of antibiotics has led to several disease-causing bacteria - like Mycobacterium tuberculosis that causes TB - developing resistance to medicines.

In the summer of 2016 as Delhi sweltered, Pranav Johri was feeling the chills. The 33-year-old businessman had felt a pulling pain in his groin region a few weeks ago that only grew worse, coupled with a low fever and persistent aches. He was soon diagnosed with Chronic Bacterial Prostatitis along with Chronic Epididymitis - an inflammation of the prostate gland and the epididymis, caused by a bacterial infection. He was prescribed a 10-day course of antibiotics, and, when it didn't show visible results, a four-week course of a second antibiotic.

Nothing worked. A second doctor and urine culture later in August,

he was put on a different antibiotic regime but with little result. "Every summer, my wife and I would go mountaineering. Now, I couldn't even move normally without assistance," he said.

As October rolled around, Johri was running out of options - the pelvic pains had worsened, so he had the chills and shivers. His doctor suggested the bacterial infection was antibiotic-resistant and his best bet would be to manage symptoms. "It was like a wave hitting me, my doctor admitting that we had run out of options. I started to consult and read up on antibiotic resistance. It is then that I read about phage therapy," he said.

OLD MEDICINE, NEW BOTTLE What Johri had stumbled on was no new frontier in medical science but a 100-year-old system that pivots on naturally occurring viruses, or phages, to attack and destroy bacteria. Phage therapy is certified for human treatment only in a few European countries, primarily Georgia.

On November 14, 2016, he flew to Georgia to admit himself at the George Eliava Institute of Bacteriophage, Microbiology and Virology in Tbilisi. Johri admits he wasn't completely convinced as most doctors dismissed phage therapy as fringe. "But it was my only shot," Johri said. In Tbilisi, doctors found four

major bacterial strains in his samples and administered a phage cocktail - since each virus attacks a specific strain of bacteria, a cocktail of medicines is needed to treat a complex infection. The application was oral, rectal and topical. By the fourth day, the pain had started easing. "It felt like a miracle," Johri said.

But the fourth strain - Streptococcus Mitis - was still proving resistant, and, so doctors proposed a 'custom phage' engineered by isolating the bacterial strain and growing a phage accordingly. In two months, it worked. "We are not generally concerned of side effects, the phage itself is very safe. We were able to achieve very good results with Pranav," said Dr Naomi Hoyle of Eliava Phage Therapy Center.

Palace hopping in God's own country



A visit to the palaces in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, gives an insight into the myriad opulence of the bygone eras.



Ancient forts and palaces are often considered to be portholes for travelling back in time. Standing strong since centuries, they take us on a visual expedition through the many journeys that have shaped history. During a recent trip to Kerala, we decided to explore the lesser-known palaces of the Kingdom of Travancore. These palaces do not seem massive at first sight. However, they have several sections that spread out across acres of grounds. We get to see a cluster of smaller single or double-storeyed structures with gabled and tiled roofs. The architectural brilliance of the place, is reflected through intricate carvings and functionality of layout. Several centuries old, each palace tells

the story of the kingdom and its relations with other kingdoms within and outside India. Kuthiramalika (150+ years old) Literally meaning the horse palace, it derives its name from the 122 smiling horse heads - visible from the palace's main entrance - carved into the beams that support the roof. Built in the 1840s by the then Maharaja of Travancore, Swathi Thirunal Balarama Varma, the palace is situated near the Padmanabhaswamy Temple. Given that you have adhered to the dress code of the temple, you can club your visit to both the places. Also called Puthen Malika, the palace's architecture boasts of the use of rosewood,

teakwood, marble and granite. While visiting the interiors, you're not allowed to wear footwear. So, it is hard to miss the glossy smoothness of some sections of the floor. The reason behind it is the use of a mixture made of egg whites, charcoal, and limestone, which keeps the floor cool even on hot days. The well-trained guides here take you on a systematic journey explaining to you the many sections of the palace. It is truly a travel back in time as we see the thrones, the ivory cradles, the palanquins, the arms and other artefacts, once used by the royals. Also known as Nedumangad Valiya Koyikkal Palace, it was the royal headquarters of the Perakam

dynasty. It was built in the 16th century for Queen Umayamma of the Venad Royal Family. Currently, the Kerala State Department of Archaeology is the custodian of the palace and maintains the Folklore and Numismatic museums inside the property. The former has a huge collection of ancient artefacts that played a vital role in the day-to-day activities of common people as well as the royals. One can see the rare chandravalayam, the small percussion instrument of Lord Rama, here. The latter has an exhaustive collection of coins and is a must-visit for those who collect them. The coins on display here reflect the ancient kingdom's trade relations with the Roman and Venetian dynasties, among others. Apart from guides, there are kiosks that tell you all about palace's history. Unlike our previous visits, the trip to Kilimanoor Palace, famous for being the birthplace of Raja Ravi Varma (RRV), was filled with surprises. To begin with, we couldn't spot a single tourist, and it was eerily quiet, except for the distant sounds of someone practising Carnatic vocals. The palace was devoid of any signs or guardsmen, too. Past the imposing gate, called padippura,

we found the source of the Carnatic music - a guru and shishya with a harmonium placed at the centre. The room turned out to be the former studio of RRV. Now, it was filled with his paintings and a lamp was lit in his honour, below a massive picture of him at the farthest end. The guru introduced himself as Rama Varma Thamburan, the sixth descendant of RRV, and apologised that he won't be able to let us in for "it was private property". However, as soon as he got to know that we had come from out of state, he showed us the palace grounds and explained the architecture. It resembled most of Kerala's residential homes from that era, adhering to the 'nalukettu', meaning beyond the imposing arch or the main gate, there were clusters of small and medium-sized houses, two ponds, wells, and sacred groves (kaavu). We were denied entry to the sacred forest, but we could witness the exterior architecture - there was a blue French-inspired building, commissioned by RRV, which clearly stood out - the ancient wooden carvings, and paintings. We also got to see one of the two ponds, which in a surreal manner seemed to reflect the stillness of time.

Thackeray movie review

Nawazuddin Siddiqui's film is not a whitewash, it's a confession. 1 star

This is either an oblivious or blatantly self-aware film, a work not of propaganda as much as it is a work of pride, celebrating a legacy of violence. Rating: 1/5.

Thackeray

Director - Abhijit Panse

Cast - Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Amrita Rao

Rating - 1/5

Some films make it clear where they stand. In the case of Thackeray - written and directed by MNS leader Abhijit Panse, produced by Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut, editor of the party's periodical 'Saamna' - there is no doubt about its allegiance. I walked in primed for a film backpedalling extremism in order to justify the late Balasaheb Thackeray's actions. I expected scenes depicting the politician as a warm and misunderstood figure, and a film that essentially turns him into a hero. This is not that film.

Thackeray shockingly relishes the most controversial aspects of the polarising leader's legend. This film plays out like the origin story of a super-villain. We are shown a character who is a proud bigot, a man who indulges in hate-speech, likens himself to

Adolf Hitler, and gives orders for erasure of mosques and for the killing of communists. This is not a whitewash, it's a confession.

It is also a film made with polish - the high-contrast black and white cinematography by Sudeep Chatterjee is quite striking - that feels reminiscent of Ram Gopal Varma's older, finer work. Charting the rise of a mere cartoonist to one of the most powerful political figures in the country, Thackeray even feels like a prequel to Varma's Sarkar, a film that paid slavish tribute to the politician. Sarkar, however, had presented the leader as a man of nobility, while Thackeray presents him - exultantly - as a tyrant. See how much power he wields? See the way he threatens politicians, or reduces places of worship to rubble? See the way he gets a cricket pitch dug up? That's our Tiger.

This may be why the film's makers cast Nawazuddin Siddiqui in the main role, a man known for playing gangsters and

psychopaths. Siddiqui revels in the character's growing villainy, playing him with the irredeemable smugness of a bad guy from a 90s film. Sure, he wears the thick black glasses and sometimes gets the mannerisms right, but despite the big (and obviously fake) nose, he lacks the towering persona of the politician and never even attempts to speak with Thackeray's distinctive tones. He sounds like the Nawaz we have come to know, like Ganesh Gaitonde or Faizal or Raman Raghav, someone increasingly drunk on power and eager to kill to get more of it.

The politics of casting Siddiqui in this part are messy. It is chilling to watch this Muslim actor crow about Hindu supremacy or celebrate the destruction of a mosque, to hear him indulge in full-blown hate speech without any room given for doubt. The film starts out with courtroom whataboutery as Thackeray, adjusting his saffron



shawl and multiple rosaries, seems to be trying to explain away his behaviour, but as the film unfolds, the character boastfully owns up to all his extremism. He literally talks about himself as a second coming of Adolf Hitler, probingly at first, but later defiantly, proclaiming himself a Hitler for Maharashtra who will soon be one for the nation. As a film, the acting is decent, the lookalikes are mostly good (the man playing Thackeray's father, Keshav, is perfectly cast) and it looks crisp and well produced, with the majority of the film cleverly shot in black and white to depict another time. Despite

the slick production and efficient making, the film feels exhaustingly long, primarily because it refuses to believe its protagonist has any flaws. Still, Thackeray is competently and solidly put together, which is why - unlike the easily dismissed The Accidental Prime Minister - people may take this film and its rhetoric to heart. That is the most alarming concern. (Another cause for fear is the fact that this film ends with the words 'to be continued,' so we're in for more of the Balasaheb story, and I assume the filmmakers are already auditioning Michael Jackson lookalikes for a cameo in Thackeray II.)

Polar movie review

Mads Mikkelsen stars in one of the worst Netflix originals ever made

Polar

Director - Jonas Åkerlund

Cast - Mads Mikkelsen, Vanessa Hudgens, Kathryn Winnick, Matt Lucas

Rating - 1/5

The involvement of Swedish director Jonas Åkerlund is perhaps the only reason one might want to check out Polar, easily a top contender for one of the worst Netflix original movies ever made.

Based on a cult comic book, Polar is a film that oddly discards the very essence of its source material in favour of Åkerlund's distinct punk rock amorality. It is a situation similar to when Michael Bay smeared the Transformers with his own tainted sensibilities, and then forced the studio to essentially pry the property from his hands after running it down the drain. Åkerlund is of course operating on a much smaller scale, but

has in the past - in both his feature films and the music videos that he is more popular for - displayed a very unique visual style.

Curiously, for a comic book whose inspirations were so proudly cinematic - creator Victor Santos has cited everything from Jean-Pierre Melville's Le Samourai to the films of John Woo as influences - the actual movie adaptation feels like nothing you've ever seen before, and not in a subversive way. It would appear the John Wick movies have beaten Polar at its own game, both in terms of cinematic literacy and style. It's most obvious reference, pathetically, is to the 2007 Clive Owen-Monica Bellucci movie, Shoot 'Em Up - this should be a good indication for what you're in for. Polar tells an overly complicated story of a hitman, played by Mads

Mikkelsen, who on the brink of retirement finds himself pulled back into the game when his former employer puts a hit out on him. He is known as The Black Kaiser, a name nowhere near as instantly iconic as Keanu Reeves' Baba Yaga from the John Wick movies. But within his clandestine hitman community, he is almost as legendary. Like John Wick, Duncan Vizla - that's the Black Kaiser's real name - exists in a hyper-stylised world. It's a world in which the women have an aversion to clothes and the men speak almost exclusively in monosyllabic grunts.

Matt Lucas, who starred in Åkerlund's off-puttingly strange comedy, Small Apartments, plays the evil Mr Blut in Polar. Mr Blut is the overlord of an organisation of hitmen (and women) known as Damocles. With the threat of bankruptcy



looming over his head, Mr Blut - a man with the grotesque physical appearance of a Bond villain and the intellect of a Looney Toons character - cooks up the most hair-brained scheme imaginable. He plans on hiring employees to murder other employees, so that he can claim their life insurance for himself - essentially. If this is a statement on evil corporations duping their hard working employees out of provident funds and other dues,

and pitting competition against each other, then it is lost in a barrage of hyper-violent action and boring drama.

Polar is a disgusting piece of work. It ignores the source comic book's stark, Sin City-inspired black and white visuals and opts instead for a lurid colour palette, with jarring title cards that inform the viewer of everything from locations to character names, all with the force of a power drill to the skull.



Thugs of Hindostan star Aamir Khan has said that his son, Junaid, wants to be an actor, but would have to meet certain conditions before he is launched in films.

Kangana Ranaut's sister tells Manikarnika co-director Krish to 'calm down' and leave the actor alone



Kangana Ranaut is one of the best actors in India, director Raja Krishna Jagarlamudi said in a recent interview, remembering all those times that he was driven to applause on the sets of Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi, the period epic from which he was unceremoniously removed by the actor. "Kangana is brilliant," Krish said in an interview to Bollywood Hungama. "When I was first approached for the film, I got very excited." Calling it the best performance of Kangana's career, Krish said that he would clap on the sets of the film on some occasions. Manikarnika is based on the life of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, a prominent feminist icon of the freedom movement. But things would soon turn sour between the director and his star. Krish said that the last time he watched the film was in June, 2018, before it was taken away from him. "I was not welcomed," Krish said. "After the trailer release, it was difficult. Terms between me and Kangana

were not that good." After viewing a cut of the film, Kangana advised certain changes to be made. She ended up taking over as director, with the support of producer Kamal Jain, and Krish was removed from the picture. Initially the reason behind his departure was said to be scheduling conflicts with his next movie, but it has since been reported that his vision was not met positively by Kangana. "I didn't pursue it (the argument)," Krish said, worried that any further altercation would 'harm the film more'. "It's an enigma for me, what really happened," the filmmaker said. "I shot the film for 109 days," he said, adding that he spent over 400 days in Mumbai during the film's production. Everything was fine till June, 2018, Krish said. Things went downhill after he submitted his cut. "Four or five days of patchwork we needed to do," he said, adding that the film was cut and ready for post-production. Krish was working with his regular collaborators on Manikarnika, according to trade analyst Taran Adarsh.

Ousted Manikarnika director Raja Krishna Jagarlamudi has spoken out about his deteriorating relationship with Kangana Ranaut, and how he went from admiring her to being kicked out of the film.

Aamir Khan lays down the one condition son Junaid would have to meet before making film debut

Aamir Khan says he is looking for the right story to launch his son Junaid in films but insists that he would have to pass the screen test for it. Aamir said his 26-year-old son's taste in films is quite similar to his but he will have to prove himself worthy of a role before he is signed for a project. "We are looking for Junaid. I've seen his work and I'm quite happy with it. When we will get the right kind of story... I believe in screen tests so he has to pass the test. If he does a good test, he'll be in the film. If not, he won't be," Aamir said in a group interview. The actor said Junaid has trained in acting and has been taking part in plays. "He has trained as an actor. He did two years of training and theatre in American Academy of Dramatic Arts in LA and then he did plays for one year there. He has been in theatre for three years now." Aamir said he would like his son to play strong

characters rather than a 'hero'. "I would like to see him as a lead actor who plays characters, because I've always believed in that. You should always be playing characters and not hero. There's a difference. "I've always felt happy that whenever my films come out, people call me by my characters name. That tells me my work has really hit home," he added. The actor was in conversation with the media to promote his upcoming production, Rubaru Roshni. Directed by Svati Chakravarty Bhatkal, the film chronicles three real life story of grief and forgiveness.



SAG Awards 2019

Emily Blunt looks sensational in a dramatic pink gown as she leads the British glamour alongside Rachel Weisz and Catherine Zeta Jones

She no doubt has her hopes on one of the main awards of the evening after being nominated in the Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role category for her take on Mary Poppins.

And Emily Blunt certainly left an impression in the style stakes, as she attended the 25th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at the Shrine Auditorium in LA on Sunday evening.

The 35-year-old Mary Poppins Returns actress lead a whole host of British stars on the red carpet, including Rachel Weisz and Catherine Zeta Jones, who both looked equally stunning as they made their arrivals.

Emily, accompanied by her husband John Krasinski, opted for a statement look and showcased her slender physique in a glitzy pink gown, which featured dramatic structured satin detailing up the sides.

Her showstopping sleeveless number was adorned in sequins all over, however she added further glitz with a pair of drop earrings and a selection of chunky rings, which she wore on her manicured hands.

The star's make-up look perfectly complemented her Barbie pink gown, while opting for a soft glam look, Emily tied it all together with a pink lip.

Emily sleeked her golden locks back into a slick bun, which made the most of her pretty features and kept the attention on her eye-catching gown.

She posed for pictures alongside pal Rachel, proving that there is no animosity as they go head-to-head in the Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role category.

Emily has been nominated for her role in A Quiet Place, while Rachel hopes to win the gong for The Favourite.

And while their dresses couldn't have been more different, the women both chose to model updos for the evening, with Emily wearing her blonde hair slicked back in a low bun, while Rachel had her brunette locks coiffed into a braided chignon by Dove Celebrity Stylist Mark Townsend.

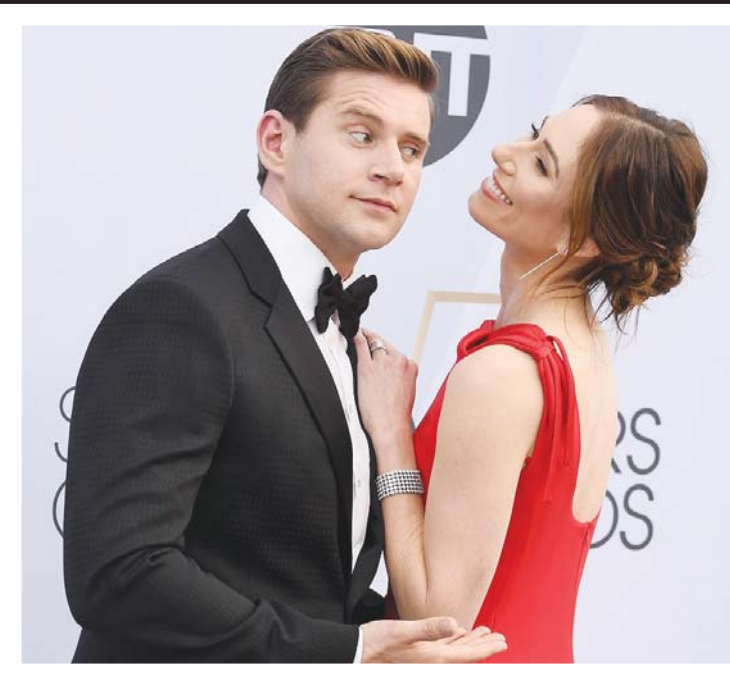
Tonight's look was inspired by the asymmetrical neckline of her velvet and feathered Givenchy gown,' Mark revealed. 'I gave her a slightly off-center part with a lot of texture to draw attention to the hair.'

To create that texture, without any unwanted frizz, Mark prepped Rachel's hair with the Dove Care Between Washes Re-Styling Milk, before

spritzing the actress's locks with the Dove Style + Care Shine Heat Protection Spray for good measure. The style was then locked into place, and given a final dose of shine, courtesy of the brand's Style + Care Compressed Micro Mist Extra Hold Hairspray.

Catherine revealed the secret to maintaining the heat in her marriage to Michael Douglas, when the couple took to the red carpet at the SAG Awards.

'He likes to watch me tap dance now and again,' said the 49-year-old of her 74-year-old husband.





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