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Priyanka Chopra pens introspective post



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Brexit is Finally Happening

Next comes an extended period of negotiations to determine the U.K.'s future ties with the bloc. After years of uncertainty and missed deadlines, the U.K. is finally leaving the EU. But the Brexit drama may not be over as the U.K. enters a new phase of negotiations with its trading partners.



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Trade deal, better relations on top US envoy Taranjit Singh Sandhu's agenda

Among the key tasks, Taranjit Singh Sandhu will have to take on, after assuming his new position include coordinating US President Donald Trump's expected visit to India in February.



(News Agencies)-Taranjit Singh Sandhu, who was on Tuesday named India's new envoy to the US, is a career diplomat with more than 30 years of experience and has had two earlier stints in the Indian mission in Washington.

Among the key tasks he will have to take on after assuming his new position is coordinating US President Donald Trump's expected visit to India in February and guiding the talks for a trade deal between the two countries that is aimed at addressing

irritants and differences that have emerged in recent years.

Sandhu, currently the high commissioner to Sri Lanka, was deputy chief of mission in Washington from 2013 to 2017. He also served as the first secretary at the embassy in Washington responsible for liaising with the US Congress between 1997 and 2000.

The post of ambassador to the US fell vacant when the previous incumbent, Harsh Shringla, was named the next foreign secretary. Shringla is set to take

up his new assignment on January 29.

HT reported on January 15 that Sandhu was set to get the top US assignment.

Sandhu, who joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1988, was appointed as the envoy to Sri Lanka in January 2017 after his second Washington stint. He has also served as India's consul general in Frankfurt from 2011 to 2013 and in the external affairs ministry between New Delhi 2009 and 201, first as joint secretary (United Nations) and later as joint secretary (Administration).

He also served at India's permanent mission to the UN in New York during 2005-09 and as head of the political wing in the high commission in Colombo during 2000-04. Sandhu has also had stints in the erstwhile Soviet Union. His wife Reenat Sandhu is the ambassador to Italy.

Indian man wanted for murder of ex-wife found dead in Canada within days



(News Agencies)-An Indian man was found dead in Canada days after local police named him as the prime suspect in the murder of his ex-wife, also an Indian. The man -- 36-year-old Rakesh Patel -- was found dead last Friday and his identity was confirmed by local police Monday. In a statement, local police said Rakesh Patel's body was found in the city of Toronto. The police didn't reveal much about the circumstances of his death but said that "his death is not being pursued as a criminal investigation". Rakesh Patel was found dead on January 17, less than a week after police issued a nationwide warrant for his arrest. The warrant was issued

for the "1st Degree Murder" of 28-year-old Heeral Patel, whose body was discovered on January 13. (Under Canadian law, 1st degree murder is planned and deliberate.) Heeral Patel was found dead in the city of Brampton, which is located around 45 kms away from the city of Toronto. Police established that Heeral Patel was the victim of a murder. While police didn't reveal the cause of her death, local media has reported that she was strangled. Both Heeral and Rakesh Patel were found dead in similar circumstances -- according to local reports, both were found by dog walkers who informed the police. Rakesh was the only suspect in Heeral's death.

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Indian-American couple killed in volcanic eruption in New Zealand, 3 children orphaned

(News Agencies)-An Indian-American businessman has become the latest victim of a massive volcanic eruption in New Zealand after he succumbed to his burn injuries, over a month after his wife died in the same tragedy, leaving their three children orphaned. Pratap Singh and his wife Mayuari were visiting the popular White Island in New Zealand when the volcano erupted on December 9. Mayuari died on December 22, Atlanta Journal-

Constitution media reported. Police in New Zealand on Wednesday confirmed that another victim died of his injuries in Middlemore Hospital. Singh also known as Paul had suffered burns to more than half of his body and had remained in the hospital in New Zealand's Auckland, where he died this week, New Zealand Herald reported. The Stone Mountain couple's three children and Mayuari's mother stayed on the ship and



13 initially and leaving more than two dozen hospitalised with severe burns. Twenty-one people have now died as a result of the eruption. Singh was the Atlanta branch president of Sewa International, a not-for-profit organisation "inspired by the noble tradition

of service before self" which also promoted philanthropy, the report said. The family said in a statement, "With an incredibly heavy heart, I disclose that my Uncle Pratap Singh (nicknamed "Paul") is the latest victim who did not survive from the Whakaari White Island incident. He had suffered 55 per cent burns in the volcano eruption that occurred on December 9, 2019. "He was transferred from Whakatane Hospital on December 10th to the Critical Care Unit in Middlemore

Hospital. Throughout his surgeries and treatment process, he fought bravely and battled hard for 50 days - the doctors described him as a "fighter". "We all should be proud of the way he fought. He was on the Island with his wife Mayuari Singh (nicknamed "Mary"), who was also admitted into the Middlemore ICU with 72 per cent body burns. She battled for 13 days before passing away on December 22, 2019," the statement said.



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The BJP and Indian democracy

How can it be 'undemocratic' for an elected government to fulfil its poll promises?

Since its victory in May 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has set about vigorously enacting long-articulated Hindu nationalist policies. This development has led to the charge that the BJP is "undermining" India's democracy. The allegation raises an important question: How can it be "undemocratic" for a democratically-elected government to fulfil the promises in its manifesto?

A political system is democratic when the government is chosen by, and its policies broadly reflect, the will of the majority (or at least the plurality) of voters. Since governments can act inconsiderately, democracies advisedly establish checks and balances. Countervailing power is found in civil society where interest groups, including media organisations, scrutinise government policy and shape public opinion. Because public opinion can be ambiguous or factionalised, political power is also constrained through institutional design. Thus, the separation of powers introduces judicial review, which compels

decision-makers to attend to legal procedures and precedents. At the same time, federalism disperses political power thematically and geographically, obliging decision-makers to secure backing across broad swathes of the country.

A democratic system of the kind outlined above is intended to frustrate radical change. But it is not meant to prevent change altogether. Checks and balances are designed to counter "temporary delusions" - that is, decisions that are hasty or lack deep and wide support. Checks and balances are not, however, meant to thwart the sustained will of the voters. How could they when popular sovereignty demands that citizens be the final arbiter? Thus, the threshold may be high, but once a sizable number have set their mind to something, there is nothing that they cannot eventually and lawfully obtain. Through advocacy, elections, appointments, and laws, citizens can gradually make political institutions abide by their will. Not even the courts can hold out



indefinitely, because judges who reason differently from their predecessors will conclude differently. This is why in the United States, for example, abortion rights expand and contract as rival ideologies mobilise and enter high office. Now consider what happens when this slow-motion revolution unfolds. As the old order is eased out by the new - by amendment rather than by gunfire - the scene grows increasingly unpleasant. As institutions adopt new stances, the cry goes out that the "pillars of democracy" are being "subverted". Denunciations are plentiful. The Press is "bought", the courts are "cowed", the police and military are

'politicised', the people are "misled", business people are "servile", universities are "decimated", civil servants are "lackeys", regulators are "corrupted", and so on. All is woe, apparently. In these disorienting circumstances, there are two criteria by which observers can ascertain whether the government is acting democratically or not. The first is whether the government continues to receive electoral support. A democratic system is founded on elections because this procedure draws a line under substantive disagreements that would otherwise stretch on interminably. A single election result may be ambiguous, but

broad trajectories are unmistakable. To the case in point: It takes a leap of imagination to believe that those who vote for the BJP, a number that has grown steadily over the past three decades, are unaware of or even opposed to its manifesto. Conversely, there is reason to doubt that political formations that perform poorly at the ballot box are "true" representatives of the people. A constitutional democracy is about more than elections, however. Norms matter greatly, especially the notion of fair play. Thus, for example, selective enforcement of the law, which sees rioters but not vigilantes punished, is objectionable.

The quest to sell Air India

The government makes the right move. Will buyers bite?



The government has yet again announced an attempt to privatise Air India. This is a good idea; it always was; a government has no business running an airline. Worse, running a loss-making airline

that is loaded with debt (around Rs 60,000 crore) definitely falls in the category of a moral hazard. Can the State then, in all conscionability, allow a private airline to go bust?

The deal, this time, is sweeter -

which isn't surprising because there were no takers last time. In summary, the government will sell its entire stake, not just 76% like it planned to last time, and also all of its budget airline subsidiary, Air India Express, and 50% of a ground handling unit; transfer about Rs 23,000 crore of debt (a full Rs 10,000 crore lower than what it wanted to transfer last time); allow sale-and-lease back of aircraft; and require bidders to have a net worth of only Rs 3,500 crore (down from Rs 5,000 crore). Most of these are welcome changes. No one wants to be in a joint venture with the government in a business like aviation (and definitely not in Air

India with all its unions). It is unfair to expect buyers to take on too much debt from the airline. Allowing sale-and-lease back opens up a financing option that most airlines use for capital. And a lower net worth threshold will expand the universe of potential buyers. Sure, buyers may not want to buy part of the ground handling subsidiary, but what's on offer this time is all of a proper airline. Better still, Indian airlines that are bidding will not have to meet the net worth criterion. Foreign airlines can bid as long as their bids are in keeping with India's rules governing foreign investment in airlines (though that was the case the last time

too). Will this get investors to bite? That depends on what the buyer is looking for, and its ability to fund and manage a turnover. Air India, along with Air India Express, has 146 aircraft, of which it owns 82, but its fleet isn't contemporary. It has slots, although it has given away many on key routes to foreign airlines. It has a brand, but one that needs to be refurbished. It is also unclear whether the buyer will have the freedom to prune the number of employees, although the airline now has only 14,000-15,000 employees. The sweeter deal signals the government's intent. But it now needs a buyer with the intent to close.

India and the US must take bolder steps on China

The recent decision of China to raise the issue of Kashmir in the United Nations Security Council has triggered a debate over India's China policy. The Indian diplomats have even hesitated to call out China for repeatedly raising the Kashmir issue to embarrass India on the international stage.

China has received special treatment in this regard. For instance, India has decided to cut palm oil imports from Malaysia for the latter's criticism of India's Kashmir policy. Similarly, there are plans to curb imports from Turkey as its president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been vocal in criticizing India on Kashmir. Indeed, there are good reasons for India's caution when it comes to China. China is a neighbour with which India shares one of the world's largest land boundaries. The demarcation of the border between the two countries is also subject to dispute, which contributed to a war in 1962. China is a much stronger power than India - in fact, now it is emerging as the challenger to the United States (US), the world's sole superpower. The annual trade between India and China is close to \$100 billion. The former depends on the latter for a range of cheap consumer goods. These factors make the crafting of foreign policy very difficult for the Indian diplomatic establishment.

China does not hesitate from taking positions adversarial to India. Beijing knows well that Kashmir is defined as a core issue of national interest by New Delhi and yet it does not think twice before raising it in the Security Council. With its five times larger economy and three-and-a half times bigger defence budget, China believes that it can get away with needling India even on its core issues. India clearly lacks any leverage over China. In light of these constraints, India's China policy has been what can be characterised as part balancing and part appeasement. No doubt, India is much more prepared with military deployments on the China border. However, the war that India is most prepared for is the war it lost back in 1962. Following the shock defeat in 1962, India undertook a huge overhaul of its defence readiness.

It undertook a massive arms build-up and doubled the size of the army within a decade. Today India's preparation, therefore, depends on two assumptions: the fight will be the old style contest of numerical advantage; and China will find it difficult to switch its resources deployed on other fronts to confront India if required.

With shortage of weapons, equipment and a poor technology base, India may be found wanting if China decides to escalate a conflict beyond a simple

man-to-man fight on the mountainous border. Moreover, it won't be difficult to move some assets meant for contingencies in the Taiwan Strait for operations on the India border. According to a RAND study covering the years 1996-2017, China has achieved parity with the US on air superiority in the Taiwan Strait. If even some of these assets are diverted to the south, it could spell trouble for the Indian defence forces. China's ability to precisely target Indian army and air force bases can further cripple New Delhi's plans. Of course, India's nuclear weapons do provide the ultimate security blanket. In any case, it is clear that India needs to undertake a number of defence reforms to tackle the China threat. This forms part of the internal balancing of China.

At a little over 2% of gross domestic product (GDP), India's defence budget is scraping the bottom of the barrel. A case can definitely be made for increasing the defence budget. However, India being a lower middle income country, there are multiple demands on its scarce capital. There are hard limits to how much the defence budget can increase. Therefore, defence reforms must be about reducing the size of the army so that the expenditure of salaries and pensions can be redirected to weapon purchases. An economic growth rate of 7% and more is a must for keeping some sort of pace with China. These efforts need to be supported with external balancing. The only power capable of partnering with India to balance China is the US. India should indeed partner other powers like Japan, Australia and France, but only the US provides the decisive power capabilities to swing the military balance. Besides, as China is threatening the US hegemony, Washington has the requisite motivation to halt China's ascent. India's partnership with the US is already progressing but both New Delhi and Washington must now pursue bolder steps. The emphasis should be on developing greater military interoperability. India should not hesitate in exploring joint command and control in military exercises and HADR (humanitarian assistance and disaster relief) operations. They should develop a joint understanding of contingencies in the Indo-Pacific region and develop joint crisis management plans. The Quad engagement (between India, the US, Japan and Australia) must be elevated to include military exercises.

These steps do indeed appear bold and out of character given India's past practices. However, the gulf between the capabilities of India and China has never been wider. These times, therefore, call for bolder measures.

Coronavirus has reached the heartland

Five cases of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus(2019-nCoV) have been confirmed in four states here at home. All are linked to recent travel from the endemic area of China. A sixth possible case - in my home state of Kansas - heightens serious concerns about the impact of this international outbreak of a potentially deadly virus, now in the middle of America.

There are more than 100 other individuals across 27 states currently being monitored by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to determine whether they have been infected with the coronavirus. U.S. health officials remain on high alert and are adapting to the minute-by-minute updates from around the world. There are an additional 86 confirmed cases of coronavirus in 17 countries outside of China. The coronavirus outbreak that originated in Wuhan, China has spread to more than 6,000 people across that country with over 130 confirmed deaths. While these reports come from Chinese officials, health experts worldwide estimate the actual figures to be much larger. The Chinese government has quarantined more than 50 million citizens in more than 15 cities and villages as the number of reported cases continue to rise by the hour. And finally, the virus infection may not peak until April. Despite the Chinese government's efforts to downplay the severity of the outbreak, U.S. and world health officials must continue to insist on our public health officials gaining full access to the infected areas and all relevant

information. In the meantime, the U.S. must continue to closely monitor and guard our ports of entry, citizens, and travelers returning from abroad. To control the possible spread of the outbreak domestically, the CDC has set up preventive screening measures in 18 major U.S. airports and multiple other ports of entry around the country.

I encourage all Americans to follow recommendations from their doctor and adhere to the CDC's warning against travel to China. While the CDC recommends Americans avoiding non-essential travel to the country, I would strongly urge folks to delay any travel to China until we have more information and the situation is under control. It simply doesn't make sense to put yourself and other Americans at risk. As a physician, I understand the uncertainty and fear of infectious disease outbreaks can cause here at home. Thankfully, the Trump administration is responding in coordination with other nations around the world as well as our state and local officials to minimize any domestic transmissions of the virus. The CDC has been hard at work investigating these cases to make sure patients who may have coronavirus receive the appropriate testing and care. Currently testing for the virus can only be done by the CDC, but officials are hopeful a commercially available test will be available in the coming weeks. This test will help countries around the world further contain and monitor the coronavirus.

By Rep. Roger Marshall



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Is there a way to counter fake news on WhatsApp?



A new research suggests that corrective messages may need to be frequent rather than sourced or sophisticated

If you were on WhatsApp in the 2018, second only to China. months leading up to the 2019 general election in India, you are likely came across a story claiming that cow urine cures cancer. Or perhaps you were forwarded a photo of electronic voting machines (EVMs), with a message stating they were being hacked. If you are a regular WhatsApp user, you have almost certainly borne witness to a seemingly unending barrage of misinformation. And this misinformation is abundant. India is now one of the largest and fastest-growing markets for digital consumers, with 560 million Internet subscribers in

2018, second only to China. However, the Internet - and WhatsApp in particular - are fruitful environments for the massive diffusion of unverified information and rumours. Survey data measured online with a sample of over 5,000 Facebook users shows that belief in misinformation and rumours can be fairly high. More than 75% of the sample said that polygamy is very common in the Muslim population (this is inaccurate). A similar proportion stated that they believed drinking gaumutra (cow urine) can help build one's immune system (also not true). Survey data measured

in-person with a sample of 1,200 paints a similar picture. About 48% of the sample believed in the power of gaumutra to cure terminal illnesses, while about 45% of the sample believed India hasn't experienced a single terror attack since 2014 (you guessed it - not true).

To combat misinformation disseminated through the platform, WhatsApp has encouraged user-driven fact checking. WhatsApp bought full-page advertisements in multiple Indian dailies ahead of the 2019 elections, exhorting users to fact-check fake news. To what extent should we expect such a strategy

- so far the only known strategy to correct misinformation on encrypted discussion apps - to be effective?

In June 2019, we ran a study to test whether user-driven corrections work to counteract fake news on WhatsApp. Participants in our study saw different versions of a fictitious, but realistic, WhatsApp group chat screenshots. In it, a first user posts a rumour, which a second user subsequently corrects. The corrections in different versions varied in their level of sophistication. In some cases, the user cited a source and referred to an investigation by that source to correct the first user. In addition, these sources were varied too. The "correcting" user may, for instance, refer to an authoritative source, such as the Election Commission of India, to refute a claim about EVM hacking. Alternatively, they may have cited a fact checking service, such as Alt News. In other cases, the attempt to correct was extremely minimal, with the second user merely stating a phrase such as "I don't think that's true, bro", and providing no evidence as to why. Importantly, everyone in the group that received a correction was compared to a group of people where the second user did not attempt to

correct the first user's information.

Results from the study show that participants who were exposed to a correction of any kind were significantly less likely to believe the false information posted by the first user, relative to those who do not receive a correction. But interestingly, the results also demonstrate that the degree of sophistication of the correction made no difference. Simply put, unsourced corrections such as "I don't think that's true, bro" achieved an effect comparable to that of corrections based on fact-checking by credible sources. These findings have important implications. They suggest that corrective messages may need to be frequent rather than sourced or sophisticated, and that merely signalling a problem with the credibility of a claim (regardless of how detailed this signalling is) may go a long way in reducing overall rates of misinformation. For users, these results imply that expressing doubts in a group chat setting should be encouraged; for encrypted chat apps such as WhatsApp, they imply that creating a simple option to express doubt may be a complementary, cost-effective way to limit rates of belief in rumours.

NRC, NPR and who is an alien?

Even before the final schedule of questions in the NPR has been notified, states have objected. Kerala and West Bengal have already put the process on a "temporary hold", Rajasthan, Maharashtra among others have objected to the inclusion of these questions and also to NPR.

The inclusion of three questions - when and where your parents were born, your mother tongue and where were you living in the past - in the National Population Register (NPR), a biometric database, has left many wondering and states are suspicious about the intent of Centre. The NPR will be plinth for building a National Register of Citizens (NRC). The apprehension is as wide as it is deep. Even before the final schedule of questions in the NPR has been notified, states have objected. Kerala and West Bengal have already put the process on a "temporary hold", Rajasthan, Maharashtra among others have objected to the inclusion of these questions and also to NPR. The government has said that updating the NPR database is

necessary for better policy framing, preventing leakages and ensuring those who need help are easier to identify. NPR indeed has been used by the states who today are opposing NPR. How valid are the objections raised by the states? Language data is collected in the census. Language data of Census 2011 was released recently. The house-listing phase of Census 2021 - the first of the two-phase process - and NPR is being conducted together. Census data is, however, protected and cannot be shared, unlike the NPR data. The census data that is released is aggregated to the block and "tehsil" level. Including language in the NPR would allow the government to know exactly who or how many are speaking what languages in particular area. Does the government have

other plans? For instance, target a particular language-speaking community, for instance, the Bangla or Urdu or Gujarati speaking people? The government's counter; language data will help in framing curriculums in schools doesn't wash. The census language data is enough for such initiatives. Similarly, for the question of where you were living in the past? Census also comes up with migration data. And, importantly how is where you were living in the past going to help policy initiatives or frame developmental schemes better? And likewise, how can when and where your parents were born going to change policy intended to make your life easier? Drafting better developmental policy, therefore, isn't the sole purpose of updating the NPR in 2020. The inclusion



of these questions clearly indicates that groundwork is being laid for building an NRC. The NPR database was built in 2010 and updated in 2015. The Manmohan Singh-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) stopped short of weeding out citizens from illegal migrants - building an NCR - because a pilot conducted showed women, landless labourers and the elderly had very poor documentation base and were likely to suffer the most. This government, however, thinks

differently. And it has openly said as much. Amit Shah, the current Union home minister, in the run-up to the 2019 general elections called "illegal immigrants" "termites" and promised to "throw them into the Bay of Bengal." An NRC database was built in Assam as per the commitment in the 1985 Assam accord. About 1.9 million were prima-facie rendered non-citizens or aliens. Those left out, however, can challenge the decision before a tribunal and then before the court.

Crack down on hate speech



On Monday, Union minister of state for finance and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, Anurag Thakur, addressing a rally in the run-up to the Delhi assembly polls (and also the Union Budget, which should have preoccupied him), encouraged the crowd to chant a slogan. He said, "Desh ke gaddaron ko", as the rally's participants

cheered on by saying, "goli maaron saalon ko". A rough translation would be - shoot the nation's traitors. The slogan has been heard in recent weeks in two different contexts - in processions taken out in support of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, and in front of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on the night a violent mob was attacking students and

faculty members inside the university. On Tuesday, another BJP leader and Member of Parliament, Pravesh Verma, speaking of the ongoing anti-CAA protest in Shaheen Bagh, said: "Lakhs of people gather there [Shaheen Bagh]. People of Delhi will have to think and take a decision. They'll enter your houses, rape your sisters and daughters, kill them. There's time

The Election Commission must act. And the BJP must discipline its leaders

today, [Narendra] Modi ji & Amit Shah won't come to save you tomorrow."

The slogan deployed by Mr Thakur is deeply disturbing. First, it identifies an amorphous group as the "enemies" of the nation. This need not be only those who seek to challenge the integrity of the State, but could end up including all those who have chosen to dissent against the government. It could include political rivals, civil society critics, journalists seen as adversarial, and, the signal is unmistakable, the country's minorities. This is in line with an attempt to paint all opposition to the BJP as "anti-national". This is plainly undemocratic. Second, the slogan is an open incitement to violence. It has no patience for either peaceful political contestation or due process. Instead, it encourages vigilantism to get rid of all those seen as adversarial. For a

minister to have chanted such a slogan is outright unconstitutional, and can be read as an attempt to incite outright murder. Equally unedifying (and perhaps unconstitutional) is an MP indulging in communal scaremongering and hate speech, for it is clear that he was referring to minorities who are at the forefront of the Shaheen Bagh protest.

Both leaders must be condemned in the strongest terms possible. The Election Commission has done well to note the remarks, and must immediately act against Messrs Thakur and Verma. And the BJP must act too, censuring not just the two leaders but all those within its fold who have used such rhetoric. It is incumbent on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose duty it is to uphold the rule of law, to make it clear that this kind of rhetoric has no place in a civilised democracy.

Decoding the risks of the coronavirus outbreak

Don't panic. India's best defence is to improve public health and infection control within hospitals

Ever feared the common cold? The coronavirus is the underlying cause, but from time to time, these viruses mutate into something far more deadly. This was the case with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002/03, and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), also known as camel flu. Neither of these recent coronavirus outbreaks spread beyond a few countries. But the situation seems to be quite different with the latest coronavirus outbreak reported from the city of Wuhan in Hubei province in China. This particular strain appears to be more contagious than previous ones, but less severe than had been seen with SARS. To date, close to 9,000 cases and over 100 deaths have been reported in over 18 countries. It took more than two months for SARS to infect 500 patients but the Wuhan coronavirus has reached that number in just a couple of weeks.

Already, the stock prices of companies with exposure to China have dropped. Starbucks has closed more than half of its roughly 4,300 Chinese stores, and its stock price has dropped more than 3.5%. The stock markets in India have moved lower ostensibly because of the coronavirus, but fears of economic damage are probably overblown unless the virus mutates into something far more virulent. The current case fatality is low - fewer than four in every 100 cases result in death. Even this is likely an overestimate, since the number of cases in China are probably at least an order of magnitude greater than those reported by the authorities and mild cases may not be diagnosed. In fact, many of those who died of the Wuhan coronavirus did not report having a fever. Therefore, getting a case of the coronavirus is by no means a death sentence. Moreover,

India is relatively less affected because of the more limited trade and people-to-people interaction with China. The Chinese government has been far more forthcoming with information this time, compared to the situation with SARS. Further, it has taken active measures to quarantine affected populations, putting entire cities under lockdown. But the real damage to the economy comes from the uncertainty we all face in determining our individual risk associated with this outbreak. This determines whether we are willing to get on a plane or expose ourselves to risk for either business or tourism. With less travel and business contact, the economy suffers. In reality, the risk of getting infected to the average Indian because of a domestic flight or an international flight somewhere other than China is likely to be quite minimal. Coronaviruses are only a small fraction of the large



number of viruses circulating. And to put things in perspective, it is likely that about seven in every million Chinese is infected. That is a very small number. This is why screening every person from China to find the proverbial needle in a haystack makes little sense, forget about screening every airline passenger. But should there be a coronavirus case admitted to a hospital in India, and without adequate knowledge of the infection status of the patient, there is likely to be rapid transmission and greater risk of fatalities because of our poor infection

control and the large of patients who are already sick. The nature of damage of pandemics has changed over time. In the 20th century, disease outbreaks, notably the flu pandemic of 1918 which killed over 50 million people, HIV/AIDS which has claimed over 40 million lives to date, and the 1968 Asian flu pandemic of Influenza A of the H2N2 subtype which was responsible for close to 2 million deaths, spread quickly because information did not travel fast to enable countries and individuals to protect themselves.

ICJ, finally, acts on the Rohingyas of Myanmar

The inability of international law to effectively address situations of mass human rights atrocities, in particular genocide, within States has been the source of much consternation for international lawyers. The term genocide, deriving from the Greek prefix *genos* meaning race or tribe and the Latin suffix *cide* meaning killing, was coined by Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944, in the aftermath of the Holocaust. It was soon codified as an independent crime under the 1948 United Nations Convention, acceded to by around 152 states. However, in over 70 years of operation of the Convention, the record of establishing State responsibility for the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide has been unsatisfactory, illustrated by well-documented failures in Cambodia, Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

However, in a significant ruling on the Rohingya issue, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) took tentative steps towards remedying its otherwise unenviable record of adjudicating allegations of genocide. In its preliminary judgment, the ICJ unanimously granted provisional measures, at the request of Gambia, directing Myanmar to take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts, including by any persons subject to its direction, control or influence, which constitute genocide under the convention in relation to the Rohingya people in its territory; and take all measures to prevent

the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to the allegation of genocide. More strikingly, the ICJ sought to oversee the implementation of its provisional measures, directing Myanmar to submit a report to the court on all measures taken to give effect to the order, within four months from the date of the order, and thereafter every six months until the final decision.

The case before the ICJ concerned allegations made by Gambia that, from October 2016, Myanmar security forces began a widespread and systemic "cleansing operation" against the

Rohingya people, during which they committed mass murder, rape and other atrocities, including setting fire to villages, and which, from August 2017 onwards assumed genocidal proportions.

The Rohingyas are a largely Muslim ethnic group belonging to the Rakhine region, who were rendered stateless under a controversial 1982 citizenship law and have been the subject of persecution since.

In recent years, the attempts of the Rohingya to flee Myanmar by sea or land have captured international media attention. During the proceedings, Gambia

relied on the report published by the Independent Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar established by the UN Human Rights Council to support its case.

However, it is important to reiterate that the ICJ did not find Myanmar guilty of genocide and only found that Gambia had established a prima facie basis of jurisdiction, a plausible case on merits, a real and imminent risk of irreversible prejudice, and a link between the measures sought and the rights claimed. Nevertheless the decision of the ICJ is legally significant for a number of reasons. First, it

The order has implications for India. It will have to carefully consider their case for temporary protection

reiterated that the international community had a "common interest" in the prevention and punishment of genocide, and consequently obligations under the convention were not owed to any particular State, but to the international community as a whole. The ICJ accordingly rejected Myanmar's contention that Gambia, geographically distant from Myanmar, and an alleged proxy for the Organisation of Islamic States, was not "specially affected" by the subject matter of the application. Second, the ICJ, while recognising that provisional measures create legally binding obligations, however aware of the difficulty in procuring their compliance through enforcement action, sought to remain seized of the matter, by prescribing timely reporting obligations for Myanmar. Third, despite the reluctance of Myanmar to even use the word Rohingyas during the proceedings, the ICJ expressly recognised the Rohingyas as a "protected group" within the meaning of the convention.

India needs to restore its image as a pluralist democracy

It cannot play up foreign points of view when favourable (remember it invited MEPs to Kashmir), and dismiss them as irrelevant when unfavourable. India needs to restore its image as a healthy democracy, committed to pluralism. Fix the product, and the messaging.

The European Union (EU) Parliament is set to debate a clutch of resolutions on various policies of the Narendra Modi government, ranging from the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) to the changes to Article 370. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government's ideological push has generated domestic challenges, be it in the form of sullen anger among locals in Kashmir or the protests against the CAA. But it has also generated a major international challenge, with criticism about the weakening of



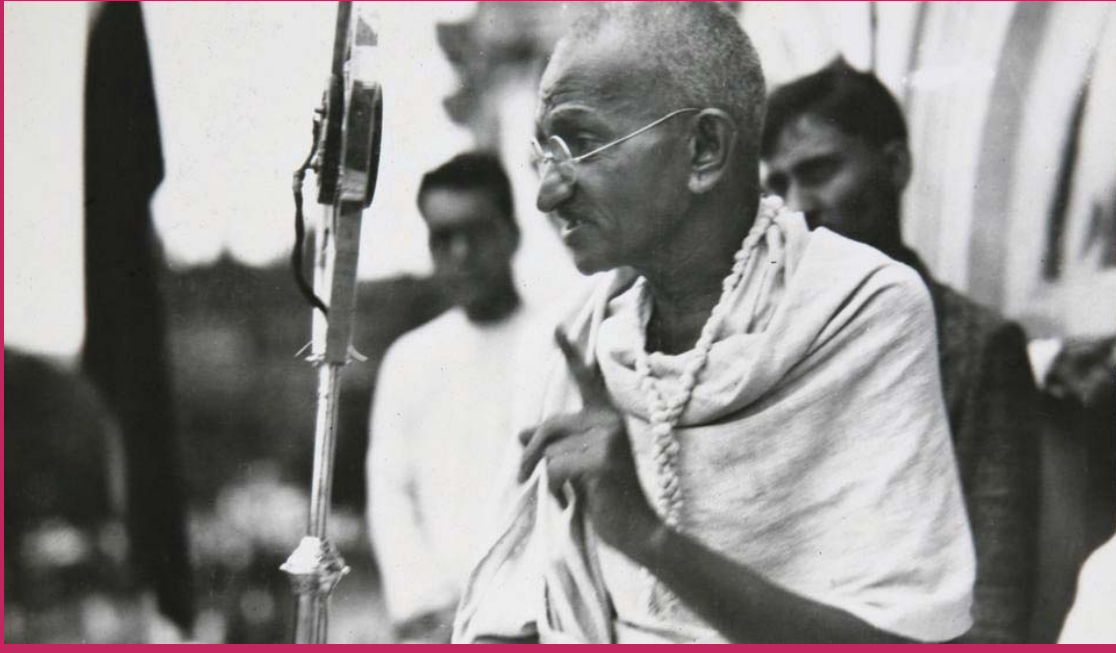
democracy in India. To be sure, the EU Parliament does not reflect the will of the independent, sovereign governments that make up the Union.

Additionally, the resolutions and statements by Members of the European Parliament lack any binding authority. It is also true that India's external

adversaries, and ideologically driven groups, have often pushed exaggerated propaganda. And there can be no arguing that the issues that are discussed are India's business. But the onus rests on Delhi to allay apprehensions. It cannot play up foreign points of view when favourable (remember it invited MEPs to Kashmir), and dismiss them as irrelevant when unfavourable. India needs to restore its image as a healthy democracy, committed to pluralism. Fix the product, and the messaging.

Rebuild trust between State, citizens

Gandhi would have been disturbed by the India of today. Politicians must now course correct



We have just celebrated Republic Day, and now we are shortly going to commemorate Martyr's Day, when the Mahatma laid down his life. This is a moment of introspection, especially at a time when our democracy is grappling with difficult questions. Are social divisions deepening? Is the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) really against a particular section? Will it really put India's federal polity at risk?

Be it Delhi's Shaheen Bagh, or any dharna site in Lucknow or Mumbai, at every demonstration,

there is a common vocabulary. Among those invoked are Mahatma Gandhi and BR Ambedkar; the text hailed is the Constitution of India; the terms used are peace, non-violence and brotherhood.

After the violence in Uttar Pradesh and Mangalore, the agitators have now adopted a new tactic. They are putting young people and women at the forefront of the demonstrations, as they know that it is not easy to remove them forcibly. In the current age of rapid information flows, coercion cannot be

hidden. It can, instead, be counter-productive for those who deploy force. The objective of protesters is clear - continue the movement as long as possible in a peaceful manner.

The Tricolour, revolutionary poems, Gandhi and Ambedkar's photographs have been used successfully so far to animate the atmosphere at these protest sites. But the incidents in Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh are worrisome. In Lohardaga, Jharkhand, violence spread when stones were pelted on a procession in support of the

new citizenship law, leading to curfew being imposed. Similarly, stones were pelted in Beniya Bagh of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, when the police tried to disperse the protesters. In Maharashtra, workers of the Vanchit Aghadi were accused of violence during the bandh. Needless to say, social harmony will be threatened if this is repeated in other places as well.

Before getting into the nuances of the current situation, I would like to draw your attention to the members of the Constituent Assembly (CA). They set the foundations to guide India's diverse society in the right direction. In this Assembly, there were Gandhians such as Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Maulana Azad; there were socialists and leftists such as JB Kripalani and Somnath Lahiri; there were leaders such as Shyama Prasad Mookherji, who went on to establish the Bharatiya Jan Sangh. Begum Aizaz Rasool of Muslim League too was a member of this Constituent Assembly. While MG Ranga was the leader of the farmers, Baldev Singh represented the Sikhs. The CA represented every section of India in the true sense of the word and that is why it was able to frame a Constitution which transcends

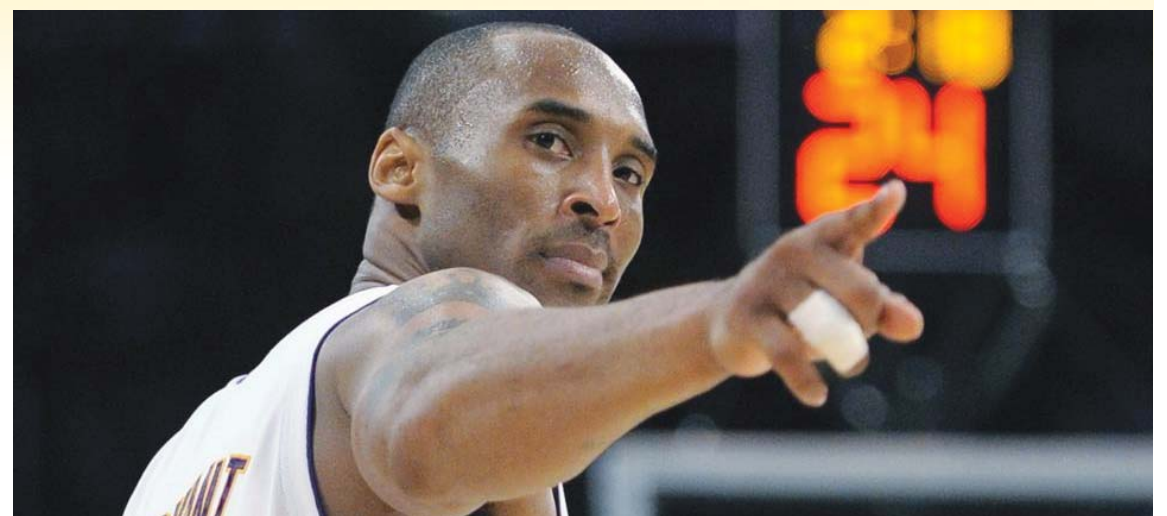
religion or creed. Needless to say, that this Assembly had Mahatma Gandhi's approval and blessings. Even today, representatives of every section are there both in Parliament and in assemblies, but the chasm of mistrust among them is widening. They know that the solution to the problems we face lies in mutual discussion and dialogue. But the government's obdurate attitude, and needless posturing by the Opposition, are blocking positive solutions. The government says that the Opposition parties are spreading confusion over the CAA. The top leaders of the ruling party are challenging the Opposition for a public debate over the issue. In response to this, Opposition parties argue that the government is doing this to divert attention from its economic mismanagement. They allege that democracy in India is in danger. India's drop in rankings in the Democracy Index, brought out by the Economist Intelligence Unit, lends credence to this criticism. Amid all this, another dangerous trend seems to be emerging. Many states have refused to implement the new law. Those who govern these states, well aware of the division of power within the constitutional framework, are aware this is not legally tenable.

The life and legacy of Kobe Bryant

He will live on, as long as there is basketball and sporting superstardom

When Kobe Bryant arrived in the National Basketball Association (NBA) as a draft pick in 1996, he already seemed like a mammoth figure: The 17-year-old son of former player Joe "Jellybean" Bryant; inducted into world's biggest basketball league straight from high school; brought to the iconic Los Angeles Lakers through the personal intervention of its legendary general manager Jerry West. The young Kobe talked a big game - he wanted to be bigger than Michael Jordan, score more points than Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, win more titles than Bill Russell. Over the next two decades, he may not have achieved all that he promised as a teenager, but he did enough to join that pantheon of legends. In his 20-year career, Bryant won five championship rings, got 18

All-Star selections, led the league in scoring twice, was the regular season's most valuable player (MVP) in 2008, the Finals MVP twice, and notched up 33,643 regular season points to finish third in the all-time list (behind Abdul-Jabbar and Karl Malone). With Shaquille O'Neal, he built, arguably, the most lethal two-man attack force team sport has ever seen as they won three back-to-back titles from 2000 to 2002. More than cumulative numbers, it was his ability to completely take over games that made him so formidable. Bryant scored more than 60 points five times in his career - including, incredibly, in his farewell NBA game in April 2016. And, in a show of loyalty so rare in pro sport, he never left the Lakers, sticking with them through thick and thin. Both



jersey numbers he wore over his career, 8 and 24, have been retired by the team as a mark of respect; no Laker will ever wear those shirts again.

On Sunday, Bryant died in a helicopter crash just north of Los Angeles. His daughter, 13-year-old Gianna, also died in the accident. Bryant was 41. Almost

as suddenly as he had burst on the global stage, he was gone. But his legacy will live on, as long as there is basketball and sporting superstardom.

'Dirty pictures' emerge in DSP Davinder Singh case

Forensics have found a huge amount of obscene content and sleazy pictures on DSP Davinder Singh's phone.

(News Agencies)- The anti-terror probe agency National Investigation Agency (NIA), which sent Jammu and Kashmir Police (JKP) DSP Davinder Singh's phone to forensics, found a huge amount of obscene content and sleazy pictures on disgraced cop's phone, besides a list of 3,500 contacts. Director-General YC Modi on Tuesday had reviewed the investigations in Jammu. Sources said that the NIA has put together a crack team, comprising IG Anil Shukla, DIG Sonia Narang, two SPs - Arvind Negi and Rakesh Balwal. The team has been camping in Jammu since NIA has taken over. Besides the team, language experts including Kashmiri cops from NIA have been kept in the team to interrogate Davinder.

A top source in the NIA said, "Davinder is a Kashmiri Sikh from Ovarigund Tral and is more articulate in Kashmiri than in Hindi or English. Hence we have

included cops familiar with the language and terrain."

Sources said that the NIA was exploring angles probing if there were other men in uniform aiding Davinder, but so far has found that the DSP was working on his own, to earn quick money.

Sources said, "DSP did not seem to have any regret and seems to be under impression that he will getaway." But the NIA has little doubt over his criminal antecedents. "DSP is not just a disgraced officer, he is a hardcore criminal. A rogue cop," said an officer.

Sources said when DG YC Modi asked DSP on his terror links Davinder said, "I have done great things for the country, I have got militant commanders killed, this is a small thing."

Speaking rather arrogantly, Davinder said that a mountain was being made out of a molehill. He said to have told top officers, the team interrogating him are 'kids'. Officials say that Davinder was hardcore and required sustained

grilling. Davinder is being kept in Jammu for time being since he makes several references of locations that need to be immediately checked on the ground. "Only when the work in Jammu is complete, we will get him to Delhi," a senior official told India Today TV.

Sources said when a relative came to meet Davinder for few minutes in the NIA office in Jammu. The DSP nonchalantly told his relative not to worry, "I will be out in a few days." Sources said that Naveed Babu, who was arrested along with DSP Davinder Singh, lawyer Irfan Ahmed and another Hizbul Mujahideen operative on January 11 in Jammu, is also a hardcore terrorist. He is also spilling beans but has constantly denied any role in plotting a terror attack in Punjab or Delhi.

Sources said that lawyer Irfan Ahmed is also being interrogated. Sources said that



the NIA is checking whether Irfan is a bonafide lawyer with a degree or not. Irfan is allegedly a key "terror link". A Shopian resident, Irfan's father Shafi Mir was a Hizb commander in the 1990s during the peak of militancy, and the current Hizb chief Syed Salahuddin was his bodyguard. Irfan has traveled to Pakistan three to four times on a valid Indian passport. A top officer, on basis of anonymity, said that despite the political noise around the case, no link of DSP or module has so far been found to Pulwama

attack of 2019. The Pulwama attack, which is also being probed by NIA, has clear Jaish imprint. Sources said, "However since several of terror modules work in hybrid groups, we have questioned the accused in the matter." After the case was handed over to the NIA, the agency booked J&K Police DSP Davinder Singh under the Arms Act and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Politicians to meet PM Modi, Amit Shah on Jammu and Kashmir statehood

Around two dozen politicians met on Wednesday in Srinagar and decided to seek the appointments for the mitigation of the problems people have been facing since the erstwhile state was stripped of the special status that prevented non-residents from buying land and getting jobs there.

(News Agencies)-A group of politicians, including former ministers, from Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) will seek appointments to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah to discuss restoration of the region's statehood and to raise concerns regarding government jobs and land ownership, according to people aware of the matter. If it materialises, it will be the first such meeting since the nullification of the Constitution's Article 370 that stripped the region of its special status in August.

Around two dozen politicians, including Altaf Bukhari, met on Wednesday in Srinagar and decided to seek the appointments for the mitigation of the problems people have been facing since the erstwhile

state was stripped of the special status that prevented non-residents from buying land and getting jobs there.

Three former chief ministers Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti and Farooq Abdullah were among hundreds of people detained to prevent protests against the nullification and the division of J&K into two Union territories.

A lockdown and a communication blackout were also imposed ahead of the nullification in August. Most of the restrictions have since been eased but the three chief ministers remain under detention.

The people cited above said a team will be constituted before the appointments with the two are sought.

They added it was decided at the meeting held at former minister and Democratic Party Nationalist

leader Ghulam Hassan Mir's residence on Wednesday. Bukhari as well as rebel Congress leaders Shoaib Lone, Usman Majeed and Hilal Shah also attended the meeting.

The development comes in the backdrop of the Centre's attempts to rope in Bukhari and another former minister Muzaffar Hussain Baig to restart political activity in J&K, according to officials in Delhi. The Centre last week conferred upon Baig the Padma Bhushan.

"Bukhari does not have political baggage unlike others and, therefore, is more acceptable to the people and New Delhi," said an official in Delhi on condition of anonymity.

Officials said the government



is working on a plan to allow political activity in the state and offer concessions like restrictions on the land sale. The officials indicated Bukhari is likely to take the leadership of this initiative. He has had several rounds of meetings with government functionaries, the officials said. The government's move to back Bukhari comes after offers to other political leaders, including those in detention, failed to make any progress. It feels political activity around statehood and promises of jobs, land rights have minimal chance of being "hijacked by Pakistan-backed moves".

Bukhari and Baig have stressed on the need to look beyond Article 370 and advocate for the restoration of statehood and domicile laws that will protect employment and land rights. "Parliament and the Supreme Court are supreme. Once the court decides on the pleas on Article 370, we have to see how best to address the apprehensions of the people of J&K. Like the protection available to several northeastern states, we will also request the government for similar provisions," Baig said.

Nitish Kumar expels Prashant Kishor, Pavan K Varma from party after showdown

(News Agencies)- Janata Dal United boss Nitish Kumar expelled election strategist Prashant Kishor and former diplomat Pavan K Varma from the party on Wednesday. The Bihar chief minister's decision comes weeks after the two leaders had raised questions about Nitish Kumar in their public remarks. Kumar had yesterday indicated that the two leaders were free to exit the party and speculated that their remarks had something to do with their future plans outside the JDU. Prashant Kishor had responded with a barb, his sharpest so far that also raised questions about Nitish Kumar's courage to stand up for what was right. It was a sentiment that Pavan K Varma had also expressed in his open letter to the chief minister on the JDU's pact with the BJP to fight the Delhi elections together. Prashant Kishor's tweet, a JDU leader suggested, may have been the tipping point for Nitish Kumar.

The JDU said the two leaders had been expelled for what was described as "anti-party activities". The two leaders, derisively referred to as intellectuals by Nitish Kumar yesterday, had been outspoken in their criticism of the NDA government's amendment to the Citizenship Act. The new law, lets the Centre fast-track citizenship of religious minorities from three Muslim-majority neighbours, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, has led to massive protests in parts of the country. Prashant Kishor and Pavan K Varma were among the first in the ruling NDA to voice their concerns about the citizenship law and its possible misuse to harass people when seen in context of the proposed National Register of Citizens. Prashant Kishor, who was the party's vice president, was seen to signal his discomfort in the party after he recently amended his Twitter bio to drop a reference to the party and his designation.



Pavan Varma, on the other hand, had underscored that he would decide on his next step after he gets a response to his letter to Nitish Kumar. He had defended his decision to go public with the letter, pointing that his earlier letter to the chief minister had gone ignored. Varma, who first joined the Nitish Kumar government as a

culture adviser after resigning from the Indian Foreign Service, was later elected to the Rajya Sabha. Prashant Kishor teamed up with Nitish Kumar ahead of the 2015 state elections when the JDU formed a grand alliance with Lalu Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Congress. The alliance defeated the BJP and Nitish Kumar returned as the

chief minister. Nitish Kumar's somersault of 2017 when he exited the grand alliance and teamed up with the BJP had upset Prashant Kishor. But he stayed put and formally joined the JDU the next year. Prashant Kishor's debut in active politics, however, did not go according to plan and soon enough, he found himself with little to do.

ਪੰਜਾਬ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀਅਤ ਦਾ ਤਰਜਮਾਨ

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

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ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

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ਮੋਦੀ ਕਾ ਏਲਾਨ-ਏ-ਜੰਗ

ਬੂੰਦ-ਬੂੰਦ ਕੀ ਰਸੇਗਾ ਪਾਕ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਮੋਦੀ ਕਾ ਏਲਾਨ-ਏ-ਜੰਗ ਬੂੰਦ-ਬੂੰਦ ਕੀ ਰਸੇਗਾ ਪਾਕ। ਮੋਦੀ ਕਾ ਏਲਾਨ-ਏ-ਜੰਗ ਬੂੰਦ-ਬੂੰਦ ਕੀ ਰਸੇਗਾ ਪਾਕ।

ਭਾਰਤੀ-ਅਮੇਰਿਕਨ ਕਮਿਊਨਿਟੀ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਖੋਲ੍ਹੇ ਗਏ ਸੈਮਿਨਾਰ

ਭਾਰਤੀ-ਅਮੇਰਿਕਨ ਕਮਿਊਨਿਟੀ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਖੋਲ੍ਹੇ ਗਏ ਸੈਮਿਨਾਰ। ਭਾਰਤੀ-ਅਮੇਰਿਕਨ ਕਮਿਊਨਿਟੀ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਖੋਲ੍ਹੇ ਗਏ ਸੈਮਿਨਾਰ।

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Delhi court sends Sharjeel Imam to 5-day police custody in sedition case

Sharjeel Imam was arrested three days after a case of sedition was registered against him in Delhi for his allegedly "inflammatory and instigating" speech.

(News Agencies)- A Delhi court on Wednesday sent Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student Sharjeel Imam, arrested on sedition charges, to five days of police custody. Imam was arrested from his village in Bihar's Jehanabad by a joint team of Delhi and Bihar police on Tuesday, three days after a case of sedition was registered against him in Delhi for his allegedly "inflammatory and instigating" speech. Police in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur had filed FIRs after a video of his purported speech outside the Jamia Millia Islamia during an anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protest on December 13, 2019, calling to "cut off the Northeast" surfaced. Following his arrest, the Delhi Police had said they will also probe his role in the three cases of violence and vandalism at Jamia Millia University and New Friends Colony on December 13 and 15.

He has been booked under sections 124A (sedition), 153A (promoting enmity between religious groups) and 505 (statements conducing to public mischief) of the Indian Penal Code. Former JNU Students Union (JNUSU) president Kanhaiya Kumar who also faces a sedition charge said there are enough laws to arrest someone for an offensive speech. "If someone gives an instigating speech then FIR can be registered against him under



various sections...But if sedition laws are misused then it is not right for the unity and security of our country," ANI quoted him as saying. The JNU Teachers Association has also criticized the sedition charge against Imam.

Petition in SC dismissed, Mukesh Singh out of legal remedies against Feb 1 execution

A three-judge bench led by Justice R Banumathi ruled that Mukesh Singh's argument that the government did not produce all relevant records before the President did not hold water.



(News Agencies)-A petition filed by 2012 Delhi gang rape convict Mukesh Singh against the presidential order rejecting his mercy plea has been rejected by the Supreme Court on Wednesday. A three-judge bench led by Justice R Banumathi ruled that Mukesh Singh's argument that the government did not produce all relevant records before the President did not hold water.

The bench also brushed aside Mukesh Singh's references to the suffering and humiliation that he claimed to have faced in prison. "Suffering in the prison cannot be ground for challenging mercy powers exercised by the President," the bench, also comprising justices Ashok Bhushan and AS Bopanna, said. A third argument centered around the speed at which the

mercy petition was decided was also turned down. Between the Delhi government and the Home Ministry, the government had completed all the procedures relating to the rejection of Mukesh Singh within four days. It was a record, the fastest rejection of a mercy petition ever. Rebutting Mukesh Singh's in the top court on Tuesday, the government's second most-senior law officer Tushar Mehta had pointed to the many judgments that had criticised delays in decisions on mercy petitions. It is the delay that has a dehumanising effect, Mehta said. Mukesh Singh and his three

other accomplices, who were convicted for the gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old paramedic student in a moving bus in Delhi in 2012, have been sentenced to death. A Delhi court has ordered the four of them to be executed on February 1. Was his last legal remedy Mukesh Singh's plea challenging the rejection of his mercy plea was the last legal remedy available to him to put off his execution on February 1. Before approaching the President to seek mercy, Mukesh Singh had filed a curative petition in the Supreme Court which was also rejected.

But it does not imply that he will be hanged at 6 am on February 1, just 70 hours away. Since the four convicts were sentenced by a common verdict, the court had issued a single death warrant to execute all four. This means that the four will only be hanged once all of them exhaust their legal options. Hours before Wednesday's verdict in Mukesh Singh's case, another convict Akshay Thakur had filed a curative petition in the top court faulting the Supreme Court's verdict that could lead to their execution. Once this petition is decided, all three of them are entitled to move mercy petitions before the President.

Abortions to be allowed at 24 weeks, cabinet okays changes to law



(News Agencies)-The Union Cabinet on Wednesday raised the upper limit for allowing

abortion from the present 20 weeks to 24 weeks and will be introducing a bill in Parliament for

the same. The Cabinet approved the Medical Termination of

Union Minister Prakash Javadekar also said that this will ensure safe termination of pregnancies and also give women reproductive rights over their bodies.

Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971. Union Minister Prakash Javadekar, addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting, said the upper limit for permitting abortions has been extended to ensure safe termination of pregnancies and also give women reproductive rights over their bodies. The extension to 24 weeks will also help victims of rape, girls with disabilities as well as minors, who may not realise

they are pregnant until later, he said. "In a progressive reform and giving reproductive rights to women the limit of 20 weeks of medical termination of pregnancy has been increased to 24 weeks. This is important because in the first 5 months there are cases where the girl concerned doesn't realise and has to go to court. This was discussed with various stakeholders. "This will reduce maternal mortality," he said.

'Can I walk': Kunal Kamra's barb as 4 airlines ban him from flying

GoAir is the fourth airline to bar the comedian from flying after Kunal Kamra tweeted a 111-second video that showed him calling television journalist Arnab Goswami a "coward" and questioning his work ethic and journalism. In another tweet, Kamra said Goswami called him "mentally unstable".

(News Agencies)- Air carriers GoAir and SpiceJet on Wednesday banned standup comedian Kunal Kamra from flying with the airline "till further notice" after he allegedly heckled journalist Arnab Goswami abroad on an IndiGo flight.

GoAir is the fourth airline to bar the comedian from flying after Kunal Kamra tweeted a 111-second video that showed him calling television journalist Arnab Goswami a "coward" and questioning his work ethic and journalism. In another tweet,

Kamra said Goswami called him "mentally unstable".

IndiGo had responded to the tweet with a six-month ban on Kamra for what it termed as "unacceptable behaviour" during its flight. It announced the ban in a post on Twitter, tagging the civil aviation ministry and aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri.

Hardeep Singh Puri responded with advice to other airlines to impose similar restrictions on Kamra. "Offensive behaviour designed to provoke & create disturbance inside an aircraft is

absolutely unacceptable & endangers safety of air travellers," the minister said.

Kunal Kamra made light of the ban but signalled his disappointment when state-run airline Air India also barred him. Another airline Vistara hasn't taken a decision yet. An airline spokesperson told news agency PTI that it was firm with its zero-tolerance policy against any behaviour that compromises the safety and underlined that the airline "will follow due process".



Kamra responded to news of his ban from flying SpiceJet too with a barb that targeted the government.

"Modiji can I walk yaan uspe bhi baan hai (Can I walk or is that too banned)...," Kamra tweeted.

He had, earlier in the day, claimed to have bumped into Arnab Goswami on a flight from Lucknow this morning and sought an "honest discussion". But Goswami, according to Kamra, asked him to move away. He complied this time.

UP minister says anti-nationals will die dog's death, threatens to change AMU's name



(News Agencies)- A fortnight after threatening to "bury alive" those raising slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, UP's labour minister Raghuraj Singh stoked another controversy after a video surfaced on Wednesday where he is purportedly says that "anti nationals will die a dog's death".

He went on to threaten that the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) would be renamed Hindustan University.

Raghuraj Singh's comments came at a function for the arrival of Ganga Yatra at Atrauli town in Aligarh.

'Kutte ki maut mare jayenge ye log jo deshdrohi ka kaam karte hain (Anti-nationals working against the country will die a

Earlier in January, Uttar Pradesh Labour Minister Raghuraj Singh had threatened to "bury alive" those raising slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath.

dog's death)" Singh said. He went on to say that the "police have been directed to shoot such anti-national in encounters."

He then turned his attention to AMU, accusing the university encouraging hooliganism of its students and threatened to change the varsity's name. "Enough of their 'goondagardi' and I want to tell the 'goonda' of Aligarh Muslim University that we will change the name of Aligarh Muslim University to Hindustan University on the day we wish to do so because we want universities

to produce Hindustanis and not Pakistanis," the minister said. "If they want to live in Hindustan then they have to live as Hindustanis and cannot live here as Pakistanis. One cannot live in India and continue opposing it," asserted the minister who recently complained of receiving threats for his earlier statement of burying alive opponents and had sought police protection. When contacted on phone, Singh owned up his statements at Atrauli but insisted that they were for the "anti nationals" but remained unrepentant about his treat to bury alive opponents.

"I still stand by my statement in Aligarh on January 13 when I said that those raising slogans against PM Narendra Modi and CM Yogi Aditya Nath would be buried alive and we will not fail in this," said Raghuraj Singh.

An AMU official who did not wish to be named said the university usually avoided reacting to comments of politicians.

Former president of AMU students' union M Salman Imtiaz said it reflected mindset of the BJP which wanted to enter the AMU campus and interfere in it.

Murder, attempt to murder charges against 26 anti-CAA protestors withdrawn in Uttar Pradesh

(News Agencies)- The Rampur district administration in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday dropped charges of murder and attempt to murder against 26 out of 34 people arrested during the protest against Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and National Register for Citizens (NRC) on December 21 last year. This comes days after a sessions court in Bijnor dropped charges of rioting and attempt to murder, and granted bail to the two accused arrested last month. In an application moved before the court here on

Tuesday, the investigating officer, Amar Singh said no case under section 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder) of IPC could be made out against 26 out of the 34 arrested for the December 21 anti-CAA protest in the district in which one person was killed. In a separate application, however, Singh added that proceedings under remaining sections which include rioting, assault and damage to public property against the offenders would continue. "I had already assured that while no innocent would be booked, we will not

spare the guilty at any cost," said District Magistrate Aunjaneya Kumar Singh, adding that the entire investigation was done on the basis of evidence. "Most of those arrested for the violence, were so far relying on police assurances that they would be released soon if they were found innocent," said the lawyer for the accused, Syed Amir Ali Miyan. Amir said he would move the bail application for at least six accused within a day or two. One protester, Faiz Khan, was killed during the anti-CAA protests on December 21

while 34 persons were arrested by the police for violence that erupted near Haathi Khana Crossing in the district headquarters of Rampur town. Twenty-four protestors were arrested under the Kotwali police station and they were charged under sections 147 (rioting), 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapons), 149 (unlawful assembly), 307 (attempt to murder), 302 (murder), 333 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt to deter public servant), 353 (assault or criminal force) and sections 3 and 4 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984. Section 7 of the CLAA

(Criminal Law Amendment Act) was also invoked against the protestors. Another 10 protestors were sent to jail by the Kotwali police station, under charges of rioting, assault on public servants and attempt to murder. The court, while allowed bail to the two accused arrested last month, had said that the police failed to provide any evidence to show that accused possessed weapons and indulged in firing and arson, or that police personnel sustained any bullet injury during the protests to substantiate the attempt to murder charge.

As execution nears, 2 rape convicts rush to Supreme Court, President



the top court has commuted the death sentence.

Akshay also questioned why the alternative of life imprisonment without parole until the end of natural life was foreclosed in his case.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court dismissed a petition filed by Mukesh Singh on Saturday against the presidential order rejecting his mercy plea.

A three-judge bench led by Justice R Banumathi ruled that Mukesh Singh's argument that the government did not produce all relevant records before the President did not hold water.

The four men were convicted and sentenced to death by the trial court in 2013. The conviction and sentence were confirmed by the Delhi high court in 2014 and the Supreme Court in May 2017.

The executions were initially scheduled for January 22, but a Delhi judge set a new date for February 1 after Mukesh filed his mercy petition before the President.

(News Agencies)- The Supreme Court on Thursday will hear the curative petition of Akshay Thakur (31), one of the four death row convicts in the 2012 Delhi gang rape and murder case who claimed that his death sentence "barely masked need to justify vengeance and retribution" while another convict Vinay Kumar Sharma filed a plea for presidential pardon on Wednesday. A five-judge bench headed by Justice NV Ramana will take up the curative petition -- the last legal remedy available to a convict in a court of law. The four convicts are scheduled to be hanged on February 1. The top court has already

dismissed curative petitions filed by two other convicts in the case - Vinay Kumar Sharma and Mukesh Kumar Singh. On Wednesday, Vinay's lawyer AP Singh said he has filed his mercy petition before President Ram Nath Kovind, according to ANI. Akshay in his plea said, "The hollow claim that the death penalty creates a special kind of deterrence which is not caused by life imprisonment and that life imprisonment amounts to 'forgiving' the criminal is backed by nothing more than a barely masked need to justify vengeance and retribution." He also contended that in 17 cases involving rape and murder,

Ignore fatwa, Islamic texts permit entry of women to mosques: Muslim board to SC



(News Agencies)- Islamic texts do not prohibit entry of women into mosques and all fatwas that contradict this tenet should be ignored, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board has told the Supreme Court in an affidavit.

The Muslim Personal Law Board said Muslim women were free to enter a mosque for prayers but underlined that it was not obligatory on women, unlike men, to offer Friday prayers in congregation. The Board's affidavit came on a petition filed by a Maharashtra-based Muslim couple who asked the top court

to declare prohibition on entry of women into mosques as illegal and unconstitutional.

".. such practices are not only repugnant to the basic dignity of a woman as an individual but is also violative of the fundamental rights," the petition had said.

The petition argued that women could only offer prayers at mosques of the Jamaat-e-Islami and Mujahid denominations but were barred from mosques under the predominant Sunni denomination. And even if they are allowed, there are separate entrances and enclosures for them to worship.

Badminton star Saina Nehwal joins BJP



(News Agencies)- Badminton star Saina Nehwal is going on Wednesday joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Haryana-born Nehwal joined the BJP in the presence of party's National General Secretary Arun Singh. Nehwal, 29, has won more than 24 major international titles so far. She married fellow shuttler Parupalli Kashyap in 2018 in Hyderabad. Nehwal was last seen playing in the Thailand Masters tournament, where she

was knocked in the very first round. Last year, a number of sportspersons including cricketer Gautam Gambhir and wrestlers Yogeshwar Dutt and Babita Phogat had joined the BJP. While Dutt had joined the BJP on September 26, along with Former captain of India hockey team Sandeep Singh, Phogat, also a fellow Olympic medallist, had joined the party on August 12 last year.

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After Years of Political Turbulence, Brexit Is Finally Happening

(SAI Bureau) London : The U.K. is set to formally quit the European Union late Friday, closing the chapter on nearly half a century of integration with its European neighbors as it looks to chart a new but uncertain course in the world. The day, which follows four years of nearly unprecedented political chaos triggered by the 2016 Brexit referendum, marks a watershed moment for both the U.K. and the EU. The bloc is losing its second-largest economy and a major military force. Britain is leaving the umbrella of a major trading power and will begin a process to forge a new place on the global stage. "The most important thing to say tonight is that this is not an end but a beginning," Prime Minister Boris Johnson is due to tell the nation Friday evening, according to prereleased remarks.

"This is the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act." What that act will look like is still unknown. As of 11 p.m. U.K. time, Britain will quit the club of 28 European nations and enter a transition period of at least 11 months as it negotiates future relations with the bloc. During that time, the U.K. will legally be outside the EU but nothing will be different for citizens on either side. Only once the transition ends does the start of a unique experiment in de-globalization truly begin, illustrating what happens when a country erects new barriers to trade with its largest commercial partner. "We are about to run a series of unparalleled experiments," said Anand Menon, professor of politics at King's College London. "We are about to make trade harder."

Across Britain, the day is being marked by muted celebration and protest. A political crisis that cost the jobs of two British prime ministers and sparked two elections has taken its toll. After years of Brexit debate, many Britons simply want to move on. Mr. Johnson traveled to Sunderland, northern England, to hold a symbolic cabinet meeting. In 2016, the city voted strongly in favor of Brexit, and it is the site of a Nissan Motor Co. car factory, whose business is likely to be affected by increased trade barriers. Later, Mr. Johnson will

address the nation. Brexit supporters are expected to mass outside Parliament, with an adjacent square having been adorned with British flags for a street party. A few roads away in Westminster, pro-EU supporters are set to hold a march protesting Brexit.

The government's post-Brexit vision remains blurry. Once outside the EU's rules and regulations, Mr. Johnson says he intends to strike trade deals across the world with countries including the U.S. But much depends on trade negotiations with the EU. In the coming months, haggling will start over how much access the U.K. will have to the bloc.

"Every choice has a consequence," the EU's three top leaders said Friday. In a bid to accelerate talks, Mr. Johnson has already ruled out extending negotiations beyond 2020. He also says that Britain won't remain in lockstep with EU regulation. That suggests that the U.K. will sign a bare-bones trade deal, similar to the one the EU signed with Canada in 2016. That would make it more expensive for British manufacturing businesses to trade with Europe, analysts say. Still, once outside the EU, the British government will have a freer hand to bail out or subsidize businesses, for example. Other challenges loom. Scotland, which overwhelmingly voted to stay in the EU during the 2016 referendum, is pushing to hold a referendum on its membership of the U.K. A Brexit supporter shows a Union Jack in front of a statue of Winston Churchill by the Houses of Parliament in London on Friday.

"A new independence referendum will put the decision about the best path for Scotland into our own hands," Scottish National Party leader Nicola Sturgeon said in a speech Friday. So far, Mr. Johnson has said no. For the first time since 2015, an opinion poll showed a majority of Scots favor independence. It will be left to historians to explain how a relatively small cluster of British euroskeptics engineered a nationwide debate that resulted in a reshaping of the world's largest trading bloc. "This is about how the hell a niche interest of a couple

of retired people in a pub in the 1970s turned into this," said Gawain Towler, a longtime ally of Brexit architect Nigel Farage. Britain was always an awkward member of the European club, but few predicted Brexit. Originally, the U.K. wasn't allowed to join the European project, with France vetoing its membership application twice in the 1960s.

In the end, the U.K. became part of the EU in 1973, hoping to benefit from an economic revival that saw EU growth outstrip its own. Despite endorsing membership during a U.K. referendum in 1975, the country chafed as the club gradually evolved from an economic trading unit into a political union. In 1992, a treaty to create a more integrated union sparked a rebellion in Britain's Conservative Party. The U.K. agreed to the treaty but with caveats, including opting out of the common currency. Still, few imagined the U.K. would eventually quit the bloc. Britain's services-dominated economy had benefited from seamless access to the EU, which turned the country into a global gateway to the European market.

Unwinding decades of integration was seen by many

economists as economically destructive. In the end it was the ructions within the Conservative Party that forced then Prime Minister David Cameron to call a referendum on Britain's EU membership. He saw it as a way to calm infighting in his party, but the referendum quickly spun out of his control. It laid bare a central problem with Britain's membership: Pro-EU

campaigners struggled to make a compelling argument for the project beyond its economic benefits. The loss of sovereign control, especially over the free movement of EU migrants into the country, was successfully leveraged by pro-Brexit campaigners, with Mr. Johnson at the helm. In June 2016, Britain voted 52% to 48% to leave the EU. Four years of political chaos ensued as different factions called for different departure terms. It was left to Prime Minister Theresa May to interpret how to unravel the partnership. She attempted a compromise that would keep Britain out of the EU but in the trade bloc's legal orbit. Neither pro- nor anti-

Brexit factions were impressed. A rolling parliamentary rebellion ensued. Her Brexit divorce deal was rejected by three times by lawmakers. Mrs. May was ousted by her own party.

Mr. Johnson didn't make the same mistake. Instead he pushed for a more abrupt break with the EU. He then called an election to clear out lawmakers who didn't back his deal. The high-stakes move paid off. Brexit supporters ditched traditional party allegiances to rally to Mr. Johnson. In late 2019, the Conservative Party won its biggest majority since the 1980s on a wave of blue-collar support.

Now Mr. Johnson pledges to both promote a free-market agenda while also protecting this new electorate from global competition. How this balancing act will play out will define the success of Brexit.

"This is the dawn of a new era in which we no longer accept that your life chances-your family's life chances-should depend on which part of the country you grow up in," Mr. Johnson is set to tell the country Friday evening.

Brexit Day: Britain to leave EU, marking end to years-long fight to deliver on 2016 vote

Britain on Friday will formally leave the European Union, ending an intense nearly four years of political fighting over Brexit since Brits voted to leave the bloc that has consumed British politics and saw the ouster of two prime ministers. Britain will formally leave at 11 p.m. U.K. time (6 p.m. ET) and Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to address the public about an hour before the departure time. Elsewhere throughout the country, the day will be marked by celebrations and some mourning from those opposed to the move. But in typically British fashion, the celebrations are expected to be muted. Some of those celebrations have already occurred. MEP Nigel Farage and fellow members of the Brexit Party waved British flags on Wednesday in the E.U. Parliament chamber, while pro-Remain MEPs were seen mourning the coming departure. The 2016 vote to leave the E.U. in a one-off referendum sent shockwaves throughout the globe and is frequently cited as a groundbreaking populist moment that previewed President Trump's victory months later in the U.S. general election. But while Trump took the White House at the beginning of 2017, "Leave" voters hoping to see their votes put into action were to be made to wait a lot longer for the result to be delivered. On the morning after the historic vote, then-Prime Minister David Cameron announced he

would step down. He was replaced by fellow Tory Theresa May. May struggled throughout 2017 and early 2018 as Brexit ate up the political oxygen for months and lawmakers mulled over what form Brexit should take. The heart of the matter then became about how to leave. May's team started negotiating a formal withdrawal agreement with E.U. leaders. But she was faced with pushback both from E.U. leaders, who wanted as "soft" a Brexit as possible, as well as members of her own party who wanted a harder Brexit, possibly by leaving with no deal at all. She eventually hashed out a deal with E.U. leaders, but it was extremely unpopular at home, including with many in her own party. The key issue was the backstop -- a mechanism designed to stop a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. While intended as a safety net in which the U.K. would remain in a customs union until a trade deal was secured, Brexiteers pointed to the lack of a unilateral exit mechanism as evidence that it could lead to Britain never leaving at all.

In addition, a growing coalition of moderate Tories and left-wing politicians began to increase their calls for a second referendum (which they said was not a do-over, but would be a vote on whatever deal came from Brussels).

Britain Is Finally Leaving the EU. That's Where the Debate Begins.

In 2016, Britain voted for Brexit. On Friday-four years, three prime ministers and two general elections later-the country will leave the European Union. Officially stepping out into the world is a major moment for a country that has driven itself mad on the tortuous path to the exit door. And yet, even the buildup to this historic event typified the silliest aspects of the years between the "leave" vote and the actual leaving. Two quarrels about how Britain would mark the occasion broke out in recent weeks, one about a bell, the other about a coin. First came the fuss about

whether Big Ben would ring out to mark the moment of independence. This Brexiteer wish was complicated by the fact that the bell, and the tower that houses it, are undergoing renovations, meaning a single bong would come with a \$700,000 price tag. After Parliament refused to fund the move, and an online fundraising campaign failed to fill the gap, there will be no Big Ben bongs. "If Big Ben doesn't bong, the world will see us as a joke," lamented Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage. A second brouhaha broke out over a commemorative 50 pence coin issued to

mark the occasion. The coins, which read, "Peace, prosperity and friendship with all nations," soon drew the ire of disbelieving Remainers. Otherwise serious and self-respecting members of the British establishment said they would refuse to use the coins or would deface any that came into their possession. (The novelist Philip Pullman also complained that the coin "is missing an Oxford comma and should be boycotted by all literate people.") Britain's talent for turning these trivial rows into front-page stories illustrates how much the Brexit

debate has become a negative-sum culture war, with Leavers and Remainers each compelled to take a side. Yet these dust-ups also obscure some of the more interesting, and important, divides over what Britain does with its newfound freedom. So far, much of the conversation has been backward looking, focused on whether the country would give effect to the 2016 vote with a viable version of Brexit, or whether that vote should be ignored. As Britain leaves the EU, and finally casts an eye forward, there are as many disputes as ever, with global

implications, and the fault lines are more complicated than just Leave vs. Remain.

When Prime Minister Boris Johnson triumphed in last month's election with a promise to "get Brexit done," his opponents argued that after the sun rises on February 1, Britain's future relationship with the EU, and a host of related questions, would remain unresolved. In a narrow sense, that claim is irrefutable. But it also misses the bigger picture. The case for Brexit was built on possibilities. Among other things, exiting the EU allows Britain to decide for itself

what trade relationships it should pursue with the rest of the world, the criteria it should set for its immigration system and how to regulate a host of areas that have been the competence of the EU for decades. These are big, difficult decisions in and of themselves. They aren't part of a Brexit process that will ever be finished. Britain will not one day declare mission accomplished and no longer give any thought to, for example, trade policy-something that, as Americans will know, is an ongoing consideration in the politics of sovereign countries.

'Full steam ahead after Brexit': Boris Johnson gathers Cabinet in Leave-backing Sunderland as clock ticks down to quitting the EU at 11pm TONIGHT - with PM appealing for the country to unite after years of bitter infighting

Boris Johnson insisted it will be 'full steam ahead' after Brexit today as he gathered his Cabinet in Leave-backing Sunderland hours before the historic moment. After three-and-a-half years of turmoil, the UK's legal membership of the EU will come to an end on the stroke of 11pm - opening a new era for the country. Mr Johnson took his senior team to the city in the north east this afternoon in a symbol of his desire to 'level up' every part of the country. He told the meeting the UK is starting a 'new chapter' and

he would be 'going full steam ahead to bring the nation together', according to Downing Street. The premier will use an address to the nation later to try to draw a line under the bitter war between Brexiteers and Remainers, insisting that cutting ties with the EU is 'not an end but a beginning'. Ministers seemed in high spirits as they posed for pictures at the meeting this afternoon - although the government is desperately trying to avoid appearing triumphalist. No10 and other government buildings

in Whitehall will be lit up for the crucial change later and there will be a party in Parliament Square, but the celebrations are deliberately low-key. Mr Johnson himself is hosting a reception in Downing Street, where he is expected to mark the occasion with girlfriend Carrie and aides by drinking sparkling English wine. While Britain will be legally out of the bloc from 11pm tonight, Brussels rules will still apply for another 11 months under 'transition' arrangements. Meanwhile, EU leaders

have delivered a parting shot at the UK swiping that 'strength does not lie in splendid isolation' and David Cameron insisted the Britain 'can make a success' of Brexit. Mr Johnson arrived in Sunderland this morning and conducted an official visit to The Industry Centre at University of Sunderland where he met staff and was given a tour of the technological projects being developed there. Speaking to the Cabinet later, Mr Johnson urged them to redouble their efforts after Brexit is

formalised. He said the government would 'begin immediately - providing better healthcare and education, tackling violent crime and homelessness and delivering great new infrastructure'. He also laid down the gauntlet to the EU over trade negotiations, saying the UK will seek a loose 'Canada-style' deal. He also made clear the government will look to strike deals with other countries outside the bloc at the same time. A No10 spokesman said he told the Cabinet that "from

tomorrow, the UK will also be free to begin trade negotiations with countries around the world - with the aim to have 80 per cent of our trade covered by FTAs within three years'. Tonight the PM will stress his belief that the referendum was a vote not just to leave the EU, but also for lasting change in neglected areas of the country. Mr Johnson will describe Brexit as 'the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act'. He will add: 'It is a moment of real national renewal and change.'

Boris Johnson to host Downing Street party to celebrate Brexit

Boris Johnson will host a party in No 10 for cabinet ministers and pro-Brexit advisers at which guests will toast the UK's departure from the EU with British-sourced food washed down with English sparkling wine. Canapés will include savoury shortbread topped with Shropshire blue cheese, filet of lamb, a ploughman's of cheddar and pickle, roast chicken skewers - probably not chlorinated - and roast beef and Yorkshire pudding with a horseradish sauce. Downing Street officials have been keen to ensure

there is little triumphalism amid enthusiastic celebrations from a core of leavers. Johnson met his cabinet in the pro-Brexit town of Sunderland on Friday morning. At 10pm, he is scheduled to deliver a televised address to the country calling Brexit not an end but a beginning and will describe it as "a moment of real national renewal and change". "This is the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act," Johnson will say, according to snippets

released in advance by Downing Street. "This is the dawn of a new era in which we no longer accept that your life chances - your family's life chances - should depend on which part of the country you grow up in." It is not yet clear whether former prime minister Theresa May will be invited to the No 10 party, which will begin at 9pm. Downing Street itself will be illuminated by a red and blue light show, along with the Treasury, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice, HMRC, and the Cabinet Office, plus the

offices of Scotland and Wales. The Northern Ireland office, possibly due to community sensitivities over the colours of the union jack, has not been included. A digital clock will also appear in Downing Street to count down the final hour of the UK's EU membership. No 10 has admitted trade with the European Union will not be "frictionless" after Brexit. "You can only have fully frictionless [trade] if you accept all their rules. We have been clear that we will not be doing so, the prime

minister's spokesman said. This will not affect travellers or businesses on Friday but is expected to be introduced next January. In another sign of Downing Street's desire to keep control of the narrative, Johnson's message has been filmed by an in-house TV crew rather than the BBC or another TV station for pooled footage. No 10 said the message would be made available to all those who wanted it. Friday night will bring very little in the way of tangible change, as the UK will move straight into a

transition period involving continued EU rules to the end of 2020. On Thursday, Downing Street reiterated the message that UK firms would then face extra paperwork and checks on goods at cross-channel borders under Johnson's plans to diverge from EU standards. This will be seen as a significant starting point for trade talks with the EU, which has consistently demanded alignment on regulations in exchange for zero tariffs and quotas - a so-called "level playing field".

France to ban mass shredding of live chicks

"We want to move forward, there's no going back. The government is committed to it," he said at a press conference.

"The aim is to oblige firms to do this by the end of 2021. We need to find a method that works on a large scale."

He also said France would ban the practice of castrating young, male pigs without anesthetic.

"The ministry is going to

publish regulatory texts in the next few weeks to move towards the banning of painful practices in farming husbandry," he added.

In reaction to the news, Maxime Chaumet, general secretary of the poultry trade body Comité National pour la Promotion de l'Oeuf, told CNN more research was needed to find an alternative method to shredding.

"We understand and take note of what the minister of agriculture said. However, we currently have no other method available. We have no solution to date.

"So at the end of 2021 we hope that we will have a solution," he told CNN.

"Machines will be needed," he added. "A two-year time period is quite short, but the minister is well aware of

this. They need to accelerate the research process because at the moment it's looking like a complicated ban."

In 2015, Germany was the first country to announce a ban on the mass killing of chicks, but last year a German court ruled the controversial practice would remain legal until farmers could access technology to determine the sex of a chick while still

an embryo, which would enable them to destroy unwanted eggs before hatching.

The German government told CNN it had invested €5 million (\$5.5 million) in ovo sex determination technology -- also called "Seleggt technology" -- to enable farmers to do this. It said the technology would be available this year, at which point the mass killing of chicks would

become illegal.

British animal rights organization The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has previously said that while the idea of maceration and killing of chicks by gas can be "distressing," both methods "can offer humane methods of euthanasia, as long as they are carried out correctly by trained, competent staff."

USCIS revises processing norms for investor visa, this may result in delays for Indians

bag for rich Indians, who typically opt for this quicker route.

It will impact not only new applicants, but also those who are in queue for processing of their visa applications and could result in some delays in obtaining the coveted green card. US Citizenship and Immigration Services, on January 29, has announced a process change for Form I-526 (the application for an EB5 visa), from a first-in, first-out basis to a visa availability approach. This could result in some delays for Indian investors in obtaining a green card. Non-backlogged countries (those other than China, Vietnam and India), will see a faster processing of their visa applications.

"It would lengthen the timeline that an Indian applicant would have to wait to get their Form I-526 application adjudicated thereby increasing anxiety

and subjecting the application to future 'unofficial' changes in the way applications are adjudicated," Mitchell Wexler, California-based partner, at Fragomen, a global immigration law firm told TOI. On the flip side, immigration experts, point out that the age of the child freezes while the application is pending. Thus, even if a child has crossed the biological age of 21, he or she could be covered under the investor visa with the family. "Families with older children, actually want their petitions to pend for a longer period of time," said Wexler.

The time for a Form I-526 to be processed is the same for anyone from any country - USCIS had posted that it takes between 32.5 to 49.5 months. "Upon filing the I-526 a priority date is given which establishes your place in line. In other

words, after the initial EB5 application is approved, the priority date must become current (your number must come up on the waiting list), for you to continue with the process of obtaining a green card," explains Snehal Batra, managing attorney at NPZ law group.

Pankaj Joshi, Managing Director at Nysa Global, an immigration advisory outfit, illustrated with a processing time wait of four years (48 months) and a scenario of an immediate approval of the green card vis-à-vis an approval in three years.

If a child is 19 years at the time of filing, if the green card approval is immediate, the child will age out (be 23 years old) when the visa is available. On the other hand, if the green card approval takes three years, the child will be (23 years minus three years, which is 20 years) and will be covered, explained Joshi.

USCIS Deputy Director Mark Koumans said, "This new approach increases fairness, allowing qualified EB-5 petitioners from traditionally underrepresented countries to have their petitions approved in a more timely fashion to receive consideration for a visa."

Only 10,000 EB-5 visas

are issued annually, with a 7% per country cap, India is estimated to have touched this limit. If a country doesn't meet the cap, the unused visa quota is redistributed to other countries. After holding a conditional green card for 21 months, the investor, his or her spouse and children (below 21 years)

obtain a permanent

residency, provided all conditions relating to investments, including job creation have been met.

In May last year, at a conference, Charlie Oppenheim, chief of the Visa Controls Office at US State Department had estimated a wait time of 8.4 years for a green card for Indian nationals.

Delhi polls: Avoid divisive rhetoric

in the wake of protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the violence in Seelampur, the sit-in at Shaheen Bagh, and the police violence in Jamia. Mr Kejriwal, for most part, decided to stay away from the anti-CAA protests, wary that it could alienate some of his voters along communal lines. But given the centrality of the issue, his party eventually backed the people protesting in Shaheen Bagh. This was

perhaps also with an eye on the Muslim vote - it is in competition to win the support of Muslims with the Congress, whose leaders have been visiting the site. But the BJP was quick to pick on this. The party's leaders, in the campaign, appear to suggest that the entire opposition to the CAA is led by Muslims; frame those supporting these protests as "anti-national"; and have alluded that the election is a test of whether you were for

India or against India. BJP candidate Kapil Mishra's tweet, which declared that the electoral contest, was one between India and Pakistan, was a reflection of their strategy. The Election Commission did well in ordering Mr Mishra to delete his tweet, and to ban him from campaigning for 48 hours. All candidates and campaigners would be well advised to refrain from introducing the communal dimension in the Delhi elections.

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Donald Trump defence team's last word: President can do anything he wants

line reasoning that inflamed democratic and liberal circles, even as Republican lawmakers continued to stand solidly behind the President.

The argument had echoes of President Richard Nixon's defence ahead of the Watergate scandal in 1972 that eventually led to his resignation: "When the President does it, it means it is not illegal," Nixon had said.

While tapes and evidence of Nixon's wrongdoing that eventually became public eventually led to his resignation ahead of an impeachment, Trump supporters are ensuring that there will be no witness testimony or new evidence in the ongoing Senate trial, as they shut down proceedings on the basis of a 53-47 majority, with Democrats not finding the four GOP Senators they need to prolong the trial.

Trump's defence team has warned that if the Senate votes for evidence from John Bolton, the former national security advisor, they would demand that Joe Biden's son Hunter Biden, the whistleblower who first called out the President on Ukraine, and many others, be called to testify, tying the Senate up for months.

Many Democrats leaders and Senators will not agree to that, not only because they believe it is extraneous and distracting, but also because some of them want to get back to campaigning in the Presidential election rather than being tied up in Senate.

On Wednesday, it was revealed that the White House blocked Bolton from publishing his bombshell memoir in its current form, ruling that his disclosures

about dealings with Ukraine contained 'top secret material'.

In a letter dated January 23, the White House said some of the information in the draft of the memoir was classified at the "top secret" level, meaning it "reasonably could be expected to cause exceptionally grave harm to the national security."

It was also reported that Bolton had been ratting on Trump even as he exited the administration, telling Republican donors in a meeting that he believes Trump is "mentally unstable" and worries that the President could pull the United States completely out of Nato if he wins a second term. SEE ALL COMMENTS ADD COMMENT

However, none of this moved the phalanx of GOP Senators massed behind the President, even as the Trump defence

argument that the President can do anything he wants to, based on his own understanding of public interest, sparked a backlash in Democratic circles with its implications for heralding an imperial President. One commentator wondered if that meant the President could simply lock up his political opponents because he believes it is in public interest.

Meanwhile, the President and his former national security advisor fought a shadow social media war, with Trump posting videos of Bolton supporting him on Ukraine and liberals posting multiple videos of Trump lavishing praise on Bolton.

"There is a significant back log impacting EB 5 visa availability, for Indians. However, despite these delays, if successful, EB5

still remains a faster way to get a green card as compared to an employment based green card where the waiting period can run into a few decades," sums up Batra.

This change, follows close on the heels of the hike in investment limits, which came into effect from November 2019. Now, an EB5 program requires an investment of \$ 1.8 million (as opposed to \$ 1 million earlier). This limit drops to \$ 900,000 (earlier \$ 500,000) for investments in areas of high unemployment. The objective is to create at least ten permanent jobs. Most Indians prefer to invest via regional centres who in turn invest in commercial projects (construction projects seem to be the most popular, even as investments have also been made in restaurant chains).

Hindus from Pakistan 'visiting' Punjab worry agencies

surprise. The families started arriving in groups on visitor visas in mid-December, sources at the border told TOI. Visitor visas are generally issued to foreigners who wish to enter India to meet relatives or people known to them.

The families have remained "absolutely tight-lipped", sources

said. "Their silence is suspicious but it is too early to suspect that they will jump their visas and apply for Indian citizenship," said another source.

Sources added there was apprehension that these families were being sent into India in a systematic manner.

The agencies suspect these people started applying for visas as soon as talk of CAA began.

"For now, we can't say anything about whether they are genuine tourists or have some other plans.

This will be known only once their visas expire and they stay back or apply for Indian citizenship," they added.

What seems bizarre is that most of these "visitors" were arriving on foot and carrying huge bundles of luggage wrapped in sheets and tied with strings, appearing to carry everything they owned. "Their belongings were not kept in travel bags or suitcases but they had wrapped them in sheets tied with ropes

or strings, which is not normal for tourists," explained the sources.

After Parliament passed the new citizenship law, Hindus and Sikhs living in Afghanistan and Pakistan are hopeful of obtaining Indian citizenship despite the cutoff date to qualify being December 31, 2014.

2 Kolkata businessman who recorded 182 sex clips of women arrested by police

The videos were shot since 2013 and the women befriended by both Aditya Aggarwal and Anish Loharuka were taken to spots where cameras were pre-installed.

(News Agencies)- Two Kolkata businessmen, Aditya Aggarwal and Anish Loharuka, along with one of their employees were arrested on Tuesday by the Detective Department of the Kolkata Police on charges of extorting money from numerous women by threatening to make videos of their intimate moments with the two businessmen public. A city court on Wednesday remanded them in police custody for a week.

Joint commissioner of police (crime) Murli Dhar Sharma said the cyber cell of the detective department arrested both businessmen.

In the laptops seized during the

arrest police found 182 videos which were shot since 2013. An officer on condition of anonymity said that the investigation into the case was on since November 2019.

According to a senior officer, the woman, on whose complaint the probe started in November, paid Rs 5 lakh but decided to approach the police when she was pressured to pay Rs 10 lakh more.

Police first arrested Anish Loharuka's cook Kailash Yadav based on the complaint of the woman whom Yadav had called to extort money. Following his arrest, Yadav informed the police about Agarwal and Loharuka.

"It was WhatsApp messages from different women sent to the cook's phone that led us to believe it was one of the biggest cases of extortion," said a senior police officer.

An officer on condition of anonymity said that Yadav was used as a cover so that no suspicions would arise against the businessmen.

"Initially, they used to only record intimate moments but since 2018 they started using these videos to extort money," the officer further added.

Aggarwal and Loharuka had allegedly videoed these women whom they had befriended since 2013. In all the cases they had taken these women to



locations where cameras were installed in advance.

Aditya Aggarwal's family runs ethnic wear stores while Anish Loharuka owns hotels. The accused were arrested under several sections of the IT Act

and Indian Penal Code.

"Aggarwal and Loharuka were arrested on Tuesday night and produced before a city court on Wednesday and remanded in police custody", said public prosecutor Snehanshu Ghosh.

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PM Modi set to visit Bangladesh on March 17 to bolster ties



(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be the chief guest at an event to kick-start the year-long centenary celebrations for "Bangabandhu" Sheikh Mujibur Rehman in Dhaka on March 17 in a move that signals the robust bilateral relations between India and its eastern neighbour.

Officials familiar with the developments told HT that Modi is expected to reach Dhaka the day before the function, and will be the main speaker for 100th birth anniversary of Mujibur Rehman, the founder of Bangladesh. Mujibur Rehman was also the father of incumbent Bangladesh Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina.

Modi's visit will come at a time when relations appeared frayed over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, a new legislation that eases the path to naturalisation for religious minorities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who came to India before 2015. The

Officials familiar with the developments told HT that Modi is expected to reach Dhaka the day before the function, and will be the main speaker for 100th birth anniversary of Mujibur Rehman, the founder of Bangladesh.

move, along with the 2019 National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, was linked to illegal infiltration from Bangladesh in several northeastern states.

Three Bangladesh ministers called off trips to India for different reasons since the CAA was passed by the Indian Parliament on December 11, 2019. But Prime Minister Hasina, in an interview to Gulf News on January 20, said that while CAA was "not necessary" it was India's "internal matter". India, in his annual Republic Day honours list this year, conferred the country's third-highest civilian award, the Padma Bhushan, to two Bangladeshi nationals - the late Syed Muazzem Ali, a 1971 war veteran and previous High Commissioner to India, and renowned academic and museologist Enamul Haq. Experts said that Modi's visit suggests the relationship

between the two countries remains strong despite CAA and NRC.

During Hasina's tenure, India has breathed at ease on its eastern front, with the Bangladesh government taking strong action against pan-Islamic terrorists and radical groups such as the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh. Both the countries closely cooperate on the border with annual interactions and regular information exchanges between the Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).

While India encourages close defence cooperation and fulfils the energy needs of Dhaka, the Hasina government is working towards allowing New Delhi the use of its Chittagong and Mongla sea ports for the transportation of goods to and from the land-locked north-eastern states.

Chinese trawlers sighted in Indian Ocean: Official

The Chinese distant water fishing fleet was not in the Indian exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and was believed to be sailing towards Morocco on the western coast of Africa, said the first official cited above.

(News Agencies)- The Indian Navy sighted large Chinese fishing trawlers, escorted by People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships, in the western Indian Ocean in early January, two senior officials said on Tuesday asking not to be named.

The Chinese distant water fishing fleet was not in the Indian exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and was believed to be sailing towards Morocco on the western coast of Africa, said the first official cited above.

"The North African country and China have intensified cooperation in the fisheries sector, with Morocco giving more access rights to Chinese vessels," said the second official, adding that the navy was closely monitoring China's footprint in the Indian Ocean region.

In September 2019, a Chinese vessel that had intruded into Indian waters near the

Andaman & Nicobar islands was driven away because it was not supposed to be there. The Chinese research vessel, Shi Yan 1, was spotted near Port Blair and was suspected to be carrying out an ocean survey in India's EEZ. Every coastal country's EEZ extends to 200 nautical miles (about 370 km) from its shores and it has exclusive rights to all resources in those waters including oil, natural gas and fish.

Amid growing sightings of Chinese naval assets in the Indian Ocean region, the Indian Navy in 2017 recalibrated its deployment to position mission-ready warships and aircraft along critical sea lanes of communications and choke points.

India has also upgraded its capabilities to keep a watch on the strategically important Indian Ocean Region and deliver an offensive option swiftly, if

necessary, with the Indian Air Force basing its front-line Sukhoi-30 fighters in southern India for the first time. The IAF raised a new squadron of Su-30 MKI fighter jets at the Thanjavur air force station in Tamil Nadu on January 20.



Consider US peace plan, India tells Israel and Palestine

(News Agencies)- India on Wednesday called on Israel and Palestine to consider the US peace plan for the Middle East in possible negotiations in future for a two-state solution.

New Delhi's position on the Israel-Palestinian issue was outlined by external affairs ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar while responding to a question on US President Donald Trump's peace plan.

The proposal, which envisages Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital and a potential Palestinian state with restrictions while also recognising Israeli

settlements on occupied Palestinian territory, has already been rejected by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as a "conspiracy". Kumar said



India has been "consistently supportive of the Palestinian cause" and called for a "two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue".

He added, "We reiterate our view that the final status issues should be resolved through direct negotiations between the two parties. We urge the parties to engage with each other, including

on the recent proposals put forward by the US, and find an acceptable two-state solution."

Americans evacuated from China amid coronavirus scare will not be quarantined in California, officials say



(News Agencies)-US health officials will not institute a blanket quarantine for about 200 Americans who landed at a California military base Wednesday after being evacuated from Wuhan, the epicenter of the deadly coronavirus outbreak in China. Several passengers said they would stay at the base volutarily, said Dr. Chris Braden, deputy director for the National Center

for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Want to track the virus in real time?

"They wanted to know their own status. They wanted to know the status of their children. They wanted to protect their family, They wanted to protect others," he said.

The plan is to hold the

passengers for three days, monitoring them for fever and other symptoms at least twice daily, Braden said.

Then if health officials determine they don't pose a danger, they can go home but will need to be monitored by local officials for the 14-day incubation period, he said. The patients staying at March Air Reserve Base near Riverside, California, might also choose to remain there for the 14 days.

Should anyone demand to go home before they're cleared, an individual quarantine is an option, Braden said.

"If anyone demands to leave right now, that is where all of the partners ... would come together and talk about what needs to be done," said Dr. Nancy Knight, the CDC's director of the division of global health protection,

noting that US marshals are on hand to ensure everyone's safety. Touching down in California

- The flight -- operated by Kalitta Air out of Ypsilanti Township, Michigan -- landed shortly after 8 a.m. (11 a.m. ET). Several law enforcement vehicles greeted it on the tarmac, their lights flashing. Chartered by the US State Department, the plane left Wuhan and touched down late Tuesday night at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport in Alaska. After refueling and passenger screenings, it left for the March Air Reserve Base. There, local officials began working with the CDC to thoroughly screen each passenger, who already underwent screenings by American and Chinese health officials in Wuhan.

The CDC cleared all passengers,

most of whom are American diplomatic corps or their families, to continue on to California, Alaska officials said. Passengers were screened in an isolated area of the Anchorage airport's north terminal, which handles international flights, and had no impact on general travel, airport manager Jim Szczesniak said. The CDC will work with airport officials to clean the terminal, and there are no international flights scheduled at the airport until May, he said. The US Defense Department and US Department of Health and Human Services, which includes the CDC, arranged housing at the military base, Defense Department spokeswoman Alyssa Fara said. If any of the passengers fall ill, they will be treated at a local civilian hospital, she said.

'The whole plane erupted'

Most wanted female terrorist lives in freedom in Jordan despite extradition request for bombing that killed Americans

(News Agencies)- Ahlam Ahmad al-Tamimi is the most wanted woman in the world, with a \$5 million bounty for information that leads to her arrest or conviction. Tamimi is accused by U.S. officials of conspiring to use--and using--a weapon of mass destruction, and masterminding a brazen Hamas terrorist attack that killed 15 - including eight children and two Americans, one of whom was pregnant. Despite being on the run from American authorities, Tamimi has been hiding in plain sight for years-- under the eye of

one of the United States' longest and closest allies in the Middle East: Jordan. Despite requests from Washington, the Kingdom has been publicly steadfast in its refusal to extradite Tamimi, who at just 20 years old masterminded the suicide bombing on the Sbarro pizza restaurant in Jerusalem three weeks before planes struck the U.S on Sept. 11, 2001.

The attack claimed the lives of two Americans, 15-year-old Malki Roth, and Shoshana Yehudit Greenbaum, who was five months pregnant with her first child at the

time. In addition to the two murdered Americans and the unborn infant, four more U.S. nationals were among the some 122 injured. At least one of the victims remains in a vegetative state. For Roth's parents, the fight for some semblance of justice has already been a long one - and the bumpy road stretches on.

"We are in touch with members of Congress and U.S. government officials. The situation is fluid, and there are some indications of meaningful progress," Malki's father, Arnold



Roth, told Fox News from Jerusalem. "Our sense is that the law and enforcement parts of the U.S. government have done everything that needs to be done to set the stage. What is preventing extradition is the

political will to see the Sbarro bomber brought to justice." Two years after the Jerusalem attack, Tamimi pled guilty in an Israeli court for her pivotal role and received 16 life sentences and an additional 250 years behind bars.

Global fears spread over coronavirus



(News Agencies)- The World Health Organization has declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern, after an emergency meeting on Thursday. The decision came after cases

of human-to-human transmissions were confirmed outside China, where the outbreak started. A first such case was confirmed in the United States on Thursday, following a case in Germany earlier this week. The number of cases of

the virus, which has killed at least 213 people, shot up to more than 8,100 in mainland China alone by Thursday evening. That is a higher number of infected people than the number who caught SARS worldwide during the 2002-2003 epidemic. However, the current case fatality rate for Wuhan virus is around 2% -- significantly smaller than SARS' 9.6% mortality rate.

While the virus originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December, there are now more than 100 cases in 20 other countries and territories spanning Asia, North America, Europe and the Middle East. India and the Philippines were

the latest to confirm the virus had reached their shores.

Thousands of people were held on a cruise ship in Italy on Thursday and Russia closed off its borders with China as global fears continued to grow over the rapidly spreading Wuhan coronavirus.

On Thursday, 7,000 people, including 1,000 crew, were confined to a cruise ship in a port near Rome as a couple was being tested for the virus. A spokesperson for Costa Cruises told CNN that a 54-year-old woman aboard the cruise ship was suffering from a fever and that she and her husband were both being tested. Italian news agency ANSA and public broadcaster

RAI reported that the woman and her husband were from Hong Kong and were being kept separately in solitary confinement in the hospital section of the cruiseliner. The Costa Smeralda cruise ship is now docked at Civitavecchia port, a coastal town northwest of Rome. It had arrived from Palma de Majorca, Spain, as part of its tour of the western Mediterranean. The test came back negative, the Italian Ministry of Health said Thursday night, but it was unclear when the passengers will be allowed to disembark. Border closures - Several countries are repatriating their citizens from China and multiple air carriers have suspended flights to the country.

Air India and IndiGo suspend flights to China as coronavirus toll rises



Air India and IndiGo on Wednesday announced suspension of their flights from India to China in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak that has killed over 130 people in that country. Air India will not operate flights to China from January 31 to February 14 while IndiGo's flights will remain suspended from February 1 to February 20. "We have seen a high number of cancellations from China on our Delhi-Chengdu route and vice-versa. Therefore, we are suspending our flights between Delhi and Chengdu from February 01, 2020 until February 20, 2020. We are also suspending our Bengaluru-Hong Kong flight effective February 01, 2020," IndiGo said in a statement. IndiGo's spokesperson said, "These are purely temporary and

precautionary measures. We will be refunding full amount to the impacted passengers and are in close touch with the relevant government authorities." The airline, however, has not cancelled its flight from Kolkata to Guangzhou. "We will continue to operate our Kolkata-Guangzhou flight, which we are monitoring on a daily basis. And for our operating crew, we are ensuring that they return to India on the inbound flights without any layover in China," the spokesperson said. Air India too cancelled its Delhi-Shanghai flight (AI 349). The flights will be cancelled from January 31 to February 14. The carrier also said it was waiving cancellation charges for travel to/from Shanghai and Hong Kong with

immediate effect till further notice. International airlines that operate services from India to China, including Air China, are yet to announce any changes in the schedules. A total of 3756 passengers have been screened for coronavirus at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) in the last nine days. Passengers arriving from China are being screened at the arrival areas. Apart from Mumbai, thermal screening is being carried out at Delhi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Chennai and Kochi airports. While no case has been detected so far, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan on Tuesday announced the extension of thermal screening to 20 more airports of the country.

'Be ready for 14-day seclusion': Indian embassy makes evacuation plan from Wuhan

The Indian embassy on Wednesday sent out registration and consent notes to be filled up by Indians who are stuck in the Coronavirus-hit central Chinese province of Hubei as part of the process to evacuate them and asked them to be ready for a 14-day quarantine period once in India.

The Indians are expected to be flown out of Wuhan in a special aircraft to India.

The Indians who decide to take up the offer will be screened before boarding the vehicle that will take them out of Wuhan. Their application will be rejected if found with the symptoms of the disease.

The consent note with all required information has to be emailed

back to the Indian embassy by 1600 hours (China time) on Wednesday. The email ID is: helpdesk.beijing@mea.gov.in The US and Japan have evacuated the first group of their citizens from Wuhan since last night. South Korea is expected to do so as well.

More than 300 Indians mostly students and working individuals are currently stranded in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, which is said to be the origin of the novel Coronavirus that has killed 136 and infected upwards of 6000 people in China and globally.

In a message circulated among Indians who are in Hubei, the Indian embassy said it was working on finalising the date and

the logistics of the evacuation.

"As informed earlier, Embassy is working on finalising date and logistics of the evacuation of Indian nationals from Hubei Province. In the meantime, those intending to avail of the option for evacuation are requested to confirm their willingness in writing to the Embassy," the Indian embassy said in message circulated via the social media platform of WeChat.

The embassy added that once the consent note - along with all required information - is received, the individual will be issued a unique token number as individual identification.

"Individuals will be directly informed about the date and logistics of the evacuation," the



message added.

The Indians who would take up the option to evacuate from Hubei will have to consent to be put in quarantine for two weeks once in India.

"I am aware that availing this option, I will have to undergo a mandatory 14 days quarantine on arrival in India," the consent

not from the Embassy said.

The note also said that the individual would have to agree that she or he could be "rejected for evacuation" on the basis of medical checks preceding the evacuation.

They could also be quarantined in China if symptoms show up during the medical check.

'Running out of food and water': Indian students' desperate appeal to govt from coronavirus-hit Wuhan

A group of Indian students in Wuhan have appealed to Indian government to make all possible efforts to rescue them at the earliest as they were running short of food and water in their dormitory due to the continued shutdown in the city. "Due to the coronavirus outbreak in the city, we have been advised to stay indoors. Hence we are stuck in our dormitory (on the campus). We are being allowed to go out for only two hours a day to buy essentials but there is a lockdown in the city. All the shops and transport systems

are closed. There is a shortage of essentials and we will soon run out of food and water," an Indian student Gaurav Nath told news agency ANI on Tuesday. The 22-year-old is among the group of eight students who have pleaded the Indian government for help. He is pursuing Material Science and Engineering from the Wuhan University of Science and Technology.

"The Indian embassy in China is in constant touch with us for the rescue. We appeal to the Indian government to rescue us at the earliest," Nath, who is from Assam, further told ANI.

The stranded students belong to Assam, Delhi, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir.

Apart from these students, a group of 58 Indians on a training programme in Wuhan have also appealed to the Indian government and to the Indian embassy in Beijing to evacuate them from Wuhan.

The group has been in Wuhan since August, 2019, to attend a training programme organised by a reputed Chinese electronics company based in Shenzhen in the province of Guangdong in China. One of the trainees from

Andhra Pradesh told HT that they were supposed to return to India in the third week of February but now want to advance the departure because of the outbreak.

The 58 Indians comprising 47 men and 11 women have been stuck in their dormitory in the Hongshan district to Wuhan, which is at the epicentre of the novel Coronavirus outbreak.

"We have not been able to step out of our dorm since the lockdown of Wuhan last week. We are not allowed to go out," said the trainee.

The trainee said that they have

send their details to the Indian embassy in Beijing but yet to hear back.

The stranded group has read about the planned evacuation of Indians from Wuhan but aren't aware of when or how it will be done.

"We want to leave," the trainee told HT over phone from Wuhan. Facing the unprecedented crisis, the residents of Wuhan have asked fellow residents to be strong. The residents are exchanging a message on popular app WeChat to do their collective bit to lift sagging spirits.

Republic at 70: Story of the lions that form India's national emblem



January 26, 1950 is celebrated as the day the Constitution came into force across the country, replacing the Government of India Act, 1935. On the same day, the emblem of India was also adopted. The national emblem, which has strict laws to guide its usage, was the visual representation of the famous Lion Capital from 250 BC. It was originally discovered in Sarnath -- a small Uttar Pradesh town where Gautam Buddha taught the dharma to his disciples for the first time -- and in the original

form, it was set atop the famous Ashoka Column.

The original Lion Capital, a fine sculpture, had four lions looking at four directions. But in the two-dimensional representation for the original copy of Indian Constitution, the fourth lion was left out. In 2005, the government came up with The State Emblem of India (Prohibition of Improper Use) Act to prohibit the improper use of the emblem for professional and commercial purposes. Indian police officers also wear the state emblem on their caps. The emblem is the graphic representation of the Lion Capital that originally graced the top of the Ashoka Stambh or Ashoka Pillar at Sarnath. It has the national motto, Satyameva Jayate (truth alone triumphs),

written below it. In the daily functioning of the government, the national emblem is considered as the symbol of authority of the government and all official communications have the state emblem on them. The Members of Parliament can also use the national emblem on their letterheads and visiting cards. The law stipulates that no one can use the emblem for the purpose of any trade, business, calling or profession or in the title of any patent, or in any trade mark or design. Violations may attract imprisonment of up to two years and a fine of Rs 5,000.

It is widely believed that the three lions symbolise justice, peace and tolerance. The story of the emblem would remain

incomplete with the mention of Dinanath Bhargava, a 21-year-old artist who worked along with legendary painter Nandalal Bose for illustrating the first Constitution in Santiniketan, because the political leadership of the country wanted the blue cover of the Indian Constitution to be adorned with reliefs and the image of the Lion Capital.

While Bose and his select disciples were busy illustrating all pages of the original Constitution, Bhargava was entrusted to make a two-dimensional or pictorial representation of the Lion Capital and the motto of Satyameva Jayate. Bhargava even came down to the Alipore Zoo in Kolkata to see a lion before sketching one on paper.

Republic at 70: The unique goals and challenges of Indian secularism

Virtually all commentators agree that India is secular - which seems unarguable given the word's inclusion in the Preamble. The truth, of course, is that secularism did not appear in the version of the Constitution whose anniversary we are now celebrating.

The 70th anniversary of the Republic is turning out to be an especially fraught moment for one of its founding values: the equal participation and protection of individuals belonging to all faiths. This value is often called Indian secularism. But those labels do not do justice to the uniquely creative and challenging task that the Constitution's framers took upon themselves with respect to religion. Nor do they adequately capture the efforts-

more or less successful, as the case may be - of courts, legislators, citizens, and scholars to realize and improve upon those ideals, as with the Essential Practices Doctrine. As we pause to celebrate the longevity of India's remarkable experiment with democracy, we ought also to ask ourselves some hard questions about the relationship between labels and values, ideals and realities, so that we may more honestly and confidently approach the next seventy years of the Republic.

Disputes over the nature of the relationship between religion and the Indian state have reached a kind of a stasis among academics and lawyers. Most commonly, "Indian secularism" is understood to mean something like the equal treatment of all religions. There are particular variants on this theme, of course: Bhargava (2005) calls it a "principled distance," Jha (2002) calls it "equal respect," and Dhavan (2001) defines secularism using a conceptual trio of religious freedom, celebratory neutrality, and reformatory



justice. However, virtually all commentators agree that India is secular - which seems unarguable given the word's inclusion in the Preamble - and that Indian secularism means something decidedly different from the American-inspired notion of a "wall of separation" between religion and state.

The truth, of course, is that secularism did not appear in the version of the Constitution whose anniversary we are now celebrating. Even though Indians have never been obsessed with this kind of "original" meaning in the way that Americans increasingly are, this original exclusion is worth remembering.

Our privacy doomsday could come sooner than we think

PRIVACY DOOMSAYERS have always said the failure to regulate surveillance technology would result in the end of anonymity. But we didn't realize doom might come this soon. The New York Times reports on a facial recognition tool that hasn't made the news before - because it's not from a Silicon Valley luminary with a big public footprint, such as Amazon or Google, but rather a tiny and secretive start-up called Clearview AI whose impact is as high as its profile is low. More

than 600 law enforcement agencies use the company's tool, which depends on a database of more than 3 billion images gathered from millions of websites, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. The facial recognition searches that authorities conduct today are usually restricted to mug shots or driver's license photos, and there are serious concerns even about those. Now, that database has expanded exponentially, and it could envelop any American whose

face has ever appeared publicly on the Internet. Clearview's results return not only names but also phone numbers, addresses and more. The risks are familiar but amplified many times over. There's the possibility of false matches, especially because Clearview's algorithm has never been tested by an outside authority. There's the risk of a hack exposing a trove of human beings converted into identifiable lines of code. And, of course, there's the

risk of abuse - police at a protest, for example, training the tool on every participant, or a private buyer using it to stalk an ex-lover. Clearview has pitched its product to entities with less credibility than law enforcement, including a professed "pro-white" Republican congressional candidate for "extreme opposition research." The company can even monitor clients' searches, and evidently it does: How else did Clearview know to flag the Times reporter's face and display no matches

after she asked officers to run her through the app? (A "software bug," the founder replied.) The case underscores with greater vigor than ever the need for restrictions on facial recognition technology. But putting limits on what the police or private businesses can do with a tool such as Clearview's won't stop bad actors from breaking them. There also need to be limits on whether a tool such as Clearview's can exist in this country in the first place.

UK will allow Huawei to help build its 5G network despite US pressure

The British government said Tuesday that it will allow China's Huawei to help build the country's next generation of super-fast wireless networks, a decision that could undermine trade and intelligence ties with the United States.

The announcement follows months of public debate in the United Kingdom over how to respond to concerns raised by the US government about potential national security risks posed by Huawei components and the threat of Chinese cyber attacks.

UK mobile operators will be able to use Huawei equipment in their 5G networks but the company will be excluded from "security critical" core areas, according to a statement from the

government.

The Trump administration had been pressing for a total ban on Huawei products, alleging that Beijing could use the equipment for snooping. It had warned that US-UK intelligence sharing could be put at risk.

Under Chinese law, Chinese companies can be ordered to act under the direction of Beijing. Huawei has consistently denied that it would help the Chinese government to spy.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has come under intense pressure, including from within his party, to agree to the US demands on Huawei. He discussed the issue with President Donald Trump in a phone call on Friday. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

tweeted Sunday that Britain faced a "momentous" decision on 5G.

Huawei already has a significant presence in UK wireless networks, and has been operating under supervision by government security agencies since 2003.

"We've always treated them as a 'high risk vendor' and have worked to limit their use in the UK and put extra mitigations around their equipment and services," Ian Levy, technical director of the National Cyber Security Centre, said in a blog post.

In a statement, the company said it was "reassured" that it would be able to continue working with its UK customers on 5G, albeit in a restricted role.



"We agree a diverse vendor market and fair competition are essential for network reliability and innovation, as well as ensuring consumers have access to the best possible technology," said Victor Zhang, a vice president at Huawei.

The issue demonstrates how a conflict between the United States and China over the future

of technology is forcing other countries to take sides, especially when it comes to advancements that could affect national security.

5G allows greater and faster data processing, and is seen as an integral component of new interconnected technologies such as automated vehicles and smart appliances.

India, France discuss co-production of films, set up joint working group

French Culture Minister Franck Riester had on Monday met producers from the film industry to promote France as a destination to shoot movies and explore the future of joint ventures between the two countries.

India and France on Tuesday discussed ways and means to co-produce films and collaborate on audio visual exchanges. The two countries also agreed to set up a joint working group towards implementation of these objectives after wide-ranging discussions between Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar and French Culture Minister Franck Riester in New Delhi. "India and France discussed

on ways and means on co-production of films and also collaborate in audio visual exchanges. We agreed to have a joint working group towards implementation of these objectives," Javadekar tweeted after the meeting. Riester had on Monday met producers from the film industry to promote France as a destination to shoot movies and explore the future of joint ventures between the two countries.



Travel, tourism stocks dive on coronavirus woes as Hong Kong resumes trading

The crisis comes just as the city was trying to recover from the impact of the China-US trade war and months of sometimes violent protests that drained confidence in the local economy.



Travel, tourism and property stocks tumbled in Hong Kong on Wednesday as panicked investors fretted over the economic impact of the virus in China that has now killed at least 132 and infected more people than SARS on the mainland. Dealers returned to trading floors for the first time after the Lunar New Year break and instantly began to sell, joining a global retreat that has wiped more than a trillion dollars off

valuations.

The crisis comes just as the city was trying to recover from the impact of the China-US trade war and months of sometimes violent protests that drained confidence in the local economy.

At the end of the morning session, the Hang Seng Index was down more than two percent, though that was an improvement on the first few minutes -- which saw it lose more than three percent -- as traders took heart

from a strong lead by Wall Street and Europe. The outbreak carries echoes of the SARS crisis of 17 years ago, which paralysed regional travel and battered local economies. Chinese tourist numbers then fell by around a third. The latest outbreak is expected to deal a massive blow to China's already-fragile economy, coming during the Lunar New Year holidays when millions criss-cross the country and spend billions of dollars. It also comes just as data indicated some sort of stability in the economy after a long-running slowdown. Firms linked to travel and tourism took a beating as big-spending Chinese tourists stayed at home with Beijing

clamping down on people's movement. Macau casino operators, which derive most of their cash from mainland gamblers, tanked. Sands China dropped almost six percent, while Wynn Macau and Galaxy Entertainment dropped almost five percent apiece. Among property firms, New World Development retreated almost four percent and Henderson Land was more than two percent lower. Cathay Pacific Airways, which has its main hub at Hong Kong International Airport, lost close to three percent. The carrier has said it would be "progressively reducing" flights to and from mainland China by at least half from January 30 to the end of

March. Air China was also off three percent.

Chinese conglomerate Fosun, which has interests in global travel firms including France's Club Med, lost more than five percent. "The unpredictability part is the key source of stress in the market," Tommy Xie, at Oversea-Chinese Banking Corp, said: "The next few days to early February will be critical. If we are able to keep cases outside Hubei province low, this means the city lockdown works and may help alleviate the concern." Energy firms were sharply lower on a drop in oil prices caused by worries that the virus could hit demand in the world's biggest crude consumer.

Snake venom can now be made in a lab and that could save many lives



If you're unlucky enough to have a poisonous snake sink its fangs into you, your best hope is an antivenom, which has been made in the same way since Victorian times. It involves milking snake venom by hand and injecting it into horses or other animals in small doses to evoke an immune response. The animal's blood is drawn and purified to obtain antibodies that act against the venom. Producing antivenom in this way can get messy, not to mention dangerous. The process is error prone, laborious and the finished serum can result in serious side

effects. Experts have long called for better ways to treat snake bites, which kill some 200 people a day. Now -- finally -- scientists are applying stem cell research and genome mapping to this long-ignored field of research. They hope it will bring antivenom production into the 21st Century and ultimately save thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of lives each year. Researchers in the Netherlands have created venom-producing glands from the Cape Coral Snake and eight other snake species in the lab, using stem cells. The toxins produced

by the miniature 3-D replicas of snake glands are all but identical to the snake's venom, the team announced Thursday. In a parallel breakthrough, scientists in India have sequenced the genome of the Indian cobra, one of the country's "big four" snakes that are responsible for most of the 50,000 snakebite deaths India sees a year. "They've really moved the game on," said Nick Cammack, head of the snakebite team at UK medical research charity Wellcome. "These are massive developments because it's bringing 2020 science into a

field that's been neglected." From cancer to snake venom Hans Clevers, the principal investigator at the Hubrecht Institute for Developmental Biology and Stem Cell Research in Utrecht, never expected to be using his lab to make snake venom. A decade ago, he invented the technique to make human organoids -- miniature organs made from the stem cells of individual patients. They've allowed doctors to test the specific effects of drugs safely outside the body, something that has revolutionized and

personalized areas such as cancer treatment.

So why did he decide to culture a snake venom gland?

Clevers said it was essentially a whim of three PhD students working in his lab who'd grown bored of reproducing mouse and human kidneys, livers and guts. "I think they sat down and asked themselves what is the most iconic animal we can culture? Not human or mouse. They said it's got to be the snake. The snake venom gland." "They assumed that snakes would have stem cells the same way mice and humans have stem cells but nobody had ever investigated this," said Clevers.

After sourcing some fertilized snake eggs from a dealer, the researchers found they were able to take a tiny chunk of snake tissue, containing stem cells, and nurture it in a dish with the same growth factor they used for human organoids -- albeit at a lower temperature -- to create the venom glands.

Spitzer Space Telescope gazes at old friend the Tarantula Nebula

It's fitting that one of the first targets for NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope is also one of its last, as the mission draws to an end this week. The Tarantula Nebula was one of the first things that Spitzer studied in the infrared, and it's returned to gaze at the nebula many times over the years.

The latest image from Spitzer is the result of follow-up observations that occurred in 2019, which created a beautiful, new and high-resolution view. The mission officially ends on Thursday.

"I think we chose the Tarantula Nebula as one of our first targets because we knew it would demonstrate the breadth of Spitzer's capabilities," said Michael Werner, Spitzer's project scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. "That region has a lot of interesting dust structures and a lot of star formation happening, and those are both areas where infrared observatories can see a lot of things that you can't see in other wavelengths."

Spitzer has been NASA's infrared detective for 16 years. It's used this capability to study what our eyes can't see in visible light,

especially baby stars and those that are still forming and enrobed in thick gas and dust clouds.

The Tarantula Nebula is in the Large Magellanic Cloud, a neighboring dwarf galaxy to our own Milky Way.

Spitzer was the ideal telescope to image the nebula because it's full of star formation. In particular, the R136 region of the nebula is known as a "starburst" region. Here, massive stars form incredibly close together and the rate of formation is much higher here than anywhere else in the

galaxy. To put that in perspective, the region is packed with more than 40 massive stars that each contain 50 times the mass of our sun. And the region is just one light-year across.

The starburst region can be seen as the white gaseous spot near the center of the image.

And up towards the top of the image is 1987A, a supernova spotted in the year it's named for that has been well-studied. According to NASA, this supernova burned bright for months, showcasing the power



of 100 million suns.

The shockwaves from the supernova continue to expand outward and Spitzer has kept an

eye on them, noting the silicate-filled dust and the way the shockwave influences its environment as it moves.

The Pacific Ocean is so acidic that it's dissolving Dungeness crabs' shells

The Pacific Ocean is becoming more acidic, and the cash-crabs that live in its coastal waters are some of its first inhabitants to feel its effects. The Dungeness crab is vital to commercial fisheries in the Pacific Northwest, but lower pH levels in its habitat are dissolving parts of its shell and damaging its sensory organs, a new study found. Their injuries could impact coastal economies and forebode the obstacles in a changing sea. And while the results aren't unexpected, the study's authors said the damage to the crabs is premature: The acidity wasn't predicted to damage the crabs this quickly.

"If the crabs are affected already, we really need to make sure we pay much more attention to various components of the food chain before it is too late," said study lead author Nina Bednarek, a senior scientist with the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project. The findings were published this month in the

journal *Science of the Total Environment* and funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The agency studies ocean acidification and how changing pH levels are

impacting coasts. Ocean acidification changes the coasts, releasing excess nutrient that can create algae blooms and increasing sea temperatures and salinity, according to NOAA.

But for crustaceans and coral that rely on carbonate ions, which are less abundant in more acidic waters, to build their shells and coral skeletons, it becomes more difficult to build strong



shells.

It's not just crabs, either: Oysters, clams and plankton all rely on the same carbonate ions to strengthen themselves. And humans and sea creatures alike rely on them -- some for food, others for economic security.

Street Dancer 3D movie review

Varun Dhawan-Shraddha Kapoor film has thinner plot than a dance reality show

Street Dancer 3D movie review: Watch Varun Dhawan and Shraddha Kapoor's film only if you're a diehard fan of dancing and love watching dance shows.

Street Dancer 3D

Director - Rema D'Souza

Cast - Varun Dhawan, Shraddha Kapoor, Prabhudeva

A hardcore dance film, which has rubber-limbed dancers putting up an excellent show? We say, bring it on. The trouble begins when you try to make this light-on-its-feet film multi-task by giving it a ham-fisted story and a heavy moral angle to boot. Street Dancer 3D suffers when put through the wringer in order to make it more than what it is - an out-and-out dance film. Starring Varun Dhawan and Shraddha Kapoor as passionate dancers, this is the third iteration in Remo D'Souza's series after ABCD and its sequel. And you do wonder why it was not simply called ABCD 3 because Street Dancer has little to do with the

film or its story.

Sehej (Varun) and Inayat (Shraddha) are arch rivals and captains of their respective dance troupes - Street Dancers and Rule Breakers; and how they passionately support cricket teams of their respective countries - India and Pakistan. Even though they share an innate passion for dance, there's a constant desire to outdo each other in the world's biggest dance battle, Ground Zero. How their rivalry takes a backseat and they find a bigger reason to dance their hearts out to 'express, not to impress' forms the crux of the story, whatever little is there.

There's an underlying patriotic feel -- pitting India and Pakistan against each other -- and also the Tricolor play in the climactic dance battle is enough to give

you an adrenaline rush. Clearly it was a clever move on the makers' part to make it fit for a Republic Day release.

The film is a visual spectacle, no doubt. Be it lighting, sound design, ace dance performances or the VFX that is served to you in 3D -- it all makes for an exhilarating watch. There are some jaw-dropping moves and flips, and world class dance performances and it's commendable to see the variety of dance forms, the director has explored in one film. For lead actors Varun and Shraddha, it would have taken some crazy hours of practice to get those moves right. And if not stand out, they do match up to the professional dancers standing next to them.

Talking of performances, Varun's



emotional and balanced Sehej connects with you as the dancer in him wins over the actor in him. Unlike the comedies he has done in the past, he doesn't go overboard with his character or acting in Street Dancer. Shraddha, on the other hand, looks beautiful and has cracked some of the toughest dance moves and flips. Though there's not much for her to do in terms of acting, she gets your attention when she's there on screen. What I particularly loved is how Remo puts the spotlight on

professional dancers from all the dance reality shows he has judged so far. There's Punit Pathak, Dharmesh Yelande, Sushant Pujari, Salman Yusuff Khan, Raghav Juyal and some of the best dancers from world over; each one of them is intrinsic to the story. And the one who truly shines is Nora Fatehi - such a clever casting call. The sass and ease she has in her dancing allows Remo to up his game. And the Garma track is indeed one of the best from her so far.

Panga movie review

Kangana Ranaut touches your heart in this emotional roller-coaster

Panga movie review: Kangana Ranaut excels as a kabaddi player on a comeback trail in this slice-of-life drama that puts focus on a mother's aspirations.



Cast: Kangana Ranaut, Jassie Gill, Richa Chadha, Yagya Bhasin

Director: Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari

You could blame the universe for conspiring to name a film starring Kangana Ranaut as Panga; or perhaps it was a conscious decision taken by the makers once the actor came on board. Whatever may be the case, Panga is an honest, relatable film that will stay with you long after you leave the theatre.

A sincere ode to motherhood and those countless sacrifices that a woman - as a mother and a wife -- makes for her family, director Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari's

Panga presents the minutiae of our daily lives as compelling cinema. It is also the story of hope and how dreams don't come with an expiry date. Kangana's dialogue, "Maa ko sapne dekhne ka haq nahi hota. Agar main fir bhi dekhti hoon to main selfish hoon. I'm a cruel mother," resonates with you.

This slice-of-life drama is an immersive experience with its simplicity and endearing narrative. And to top it all, you are treated to some great performances right from the word go.

Jaya Nigam (Kangana Ranaut), a middle-class woman working in

Northern Railways, is a former kabaddi champion and captain of India's women kabaddi team. While she continued playing the sport after her marriage to Prashant (Jassie Gill), she leaves her dream midway after she becomes a mother. Seven years later, when her son Adi (Yagya Bhasin) gets to know 'all that his mom could do but didn't' because she chose her family over her passion, he decides to push her to make a comeback, at the age of 32.

What begins as Jaya's efforts to please her son soon reignites something deeper within her. She decides to earn a spot in the national kabaddi team, and her struggle to compete with young girls, regain her fitness, learn the tricks of the sport all over again and and make her family proud keep you invested for the next two hours.

After Nil Battey Sannata and Bareilly Ki Barfi, Ashwiny has

once again made a film that leaves an impact without being too heavy on your heart or mind. It's the subtlety with which she has narrated Panga that deserves applause. And the local flavor - be it Bhopal, Mumbai, Kolkata or Delhi - that she blends in the script and characters are something you can't miss.

I quite like how Ashwiny pays attention to the smallest of details that subtly yet evidently hint at Jaya's undying love for the sport she abandoned. For instance, the fact that she has a habit of kicking her husband in her sleep or when her son wants to participate in a 100m race in his school, Prashant tells her 'isme bhi apni maa ki tarah sports ka keeda hai'.

The story is ably backed by some superlative performances. Kangana is in her element and once again proves why she's a star who doesn't belong to any league of actors, but has a niche

of her own. She lets you connect with Jaya in whatever she does - the way she speaks, dresses, cries, laughs, goes to work, takes care of her family and amid all this, wants to be happy for herself.

Richa Chadha as Meenu, Jaya's best friend and a kabaddi coach, gives a nuanced performance while staying true to her boisterous and badass character. She brings in moments of laughter too with her Bihari accent. Neena Gupta as Jaya's mother shines in the limited screen time she gets, especially in the scene when she's telling her daughter to not forget what her mother did for her.

Jassie Gill is good and grabs your attention whenever he's there but you don't miss him in his absence. Although he's shown to have a great comfort and chemistry with Kangana, his expressions don't say much.

Priyanka Chopra pens introspective post about love and hate after Grammys navel-baring dress uproar

Actor Priyanka Chopra in a reflective Instagram post has written about the eventful 'beginning of the year' she has had. Hinting at the love and hate she has received in January itself, the actor wrote that it has been 'crazy'.

She wrote in the caption of the post, "I seem to be thinking what a crazy beginning of the year it's been, and we are only in January. Love the ones you love. Live the life you want to live...with all the troubles in this world at the moment, be kind to yourself and everyone around you. I'm so grateful for the kindness I have received, and even when I have not...I somehow have. Be kind to the ones around you. It matters. Life is a gift."

Several people reacted to Priyanka's post with positive comments. "Ur one of the kindest, most giving, most loving



souls I've ever known," one person wrote. Several others left heart emojis in the comments section. Priyanka added a portrait of herself to go along with the post. In January, Priyanka has already made a splashy appearance at the 2020 Grammys, where her husband, Nick Jonas, performed with the Jonas Brothers. Priyanka's navel-baring dress was quite the talking point after the ceremony, with fans and haters duking it out online. Priyanka also made a trip to India, where she wrapped the filming of her upcoming Netflix film, *The White Tiger*, directed by Ramin Bahrani and co-starring Rajkummar Rao.

Ganesh Acharya to file defamation case against Saroj Khan, says 'they used to earn money sitting at home illegally'

Dancer and choreographer Ganesh Acharya on Wednesday alleged senior dancer Saroj Khan is conspiring against him and harbouring corruption in the industry. The statement came a day after a 33-year-old woman accused Acharya, who is also the General Secretary of Indian Film and Television Choreographers Association (IFTCA), of depriving her of work and demanding commission for getting her projects.

"This is the conspiracy against me to malign my image, there are people like Saroj Khan and her colleagues who



are doing corruption in the industry. Their business has flopped as I have entered the association," said Acharya. "I will file a defamation case against Saroj Khan and her team who are defaming me and stooping so low to do that, they are doing this because their business has gone in vain they used to earn money sitting at home illegally and I am against it so will put all my efforts to fight against them," he added.



Taapsee Pannu recalls what she did when molester tried to touch her

Taapsee Pannu has recounted an incident when a man tried to touch her from behind. Taapsee told the story while having a conversation with Kareena Kapoor Khan on the show *What Women Want 2*. She said, "We used to go to the Gurudwara during Gurburab and I remember there used to be stalls next to it that served food to people outside. The place used to be crowded in such a way that people would always end up bumping into each other. I had awkward experiences before this incident as well. But this time, I had an intuition that something like this would happen

Actor Taapsee Pannu said on Kareena Kapoor Khan's show that she was once molested in a crowded place during Gurburab.

as I am going into that kind of crowd. I was mentally prepared for it until I felt a man trying to touch my backside. That's when I realised that this has happened again." Taapsee was brave enough to defend herself and she give that man a hard lesson. "This was followed by an instant reaction. I grabbed his finger twisted it and moved fast from that area," she added. On Wednesday, the actor shared the first look as cricketer Mithali Raj in the upcoming biopic, *Shabaash Mithu*.

Karan Johar says he will call Kangana Ranaut if he has a film for her, sister Rangoli says 'best you leave her alone'

Filmmaker Karan Johar has said that he feels honoured to have been awarded the Padma Shri alongside colleagues Kangana Ranaut, producer Ekta Kapoor and singer Adnan Sami. He told *Mumbai Mirror* in an interview that he was too old and wise to hold any malice in his heart for anybody.

Karan was quoted in the publication as saying, "So much has been said about Kangana, me and some kind of rivalry or simmering tension. But at every public event we've met, we've

greeted each other graciously. whatever may have been said or insinuated in print, I think I'm too old and wise to hold any kind of malice in my heart for anybody. As a filmmaker, I respect Kangana's talent, craft and what she brings to the table. She is an actor who has proved her mettle and is deserving of the honour. Besides Ekta and Adnan Sami, I am honoured to receive the Padma Shri alongside Kangana." He was further asked if the two can collaborate on a project together.



Josie Canseco dons pink bikini while sunning herself aboard Miami mogul David Grutman's 82ft yacht

Next Management Model Josie Canseco showcased her slim 5ft9in figure in a hot-pink bikini while vacationing in Miami on Thursday. The half-Cuban 23-year-old - who relies on stylist Andrew Gelwicks - sunned her self in a tiny two-piece consisting of a bandeau top and high-waisted Brazilian-cut bottoms. Josie just so happened to be cruising along in South Beach mogul David Grutman's luxurious 82ft yacht affectionately called 'GROOT.' Canseco - who boasts 621K Instagram/Twitter followers - Insta-storied her view from inside



the Grutman vessel littered with plates of cheese and fruit where the 45-year-old restaurateur was glued to his phone. The Florida-born blonde also Insta-storied plenty of sun-kissed selfies as she enjoyed living large with the unofficial 'Mayor of Miami' and his entourage. Josie even sported a white baseball hat emblazoned with GROOT,

which was prominently featured in the Will Smith and Martin Lawrence newly-released threequel *Bad Boys for Life*. Canseco showcased her pert

derrière in one selfie captioned: 'Much needed!' Career-wise, the Blackbear video vixen has modeled for Victoria's Secret, Frankies Bikinis, and Playboy. Josie recently made headlines for ending her two-month fling with *The Hills: New Beginnings* star Brody Jenner in late October. Missing from Canseco's side on the boat was her rumored

boyfriend since January 15 - controversial YouTuber Logan Paul - whom she donned matching red Jake Paul jackets with on Wednesday. The SummerBreak 2 alum and the Ohio-born 24-year-old are in Florida to attend the boxing match between his 23-year-old brother Jake Paul and AnEsonGib at the nearby Meridian. On Tuesday, the Flat Earth filmmaker posed shirtless with models Katie Bell, Julia Rose, Riley Reid, and Daisy Keech for a bizarre snap captioned: 'F**k the corona virus.' If Josie's name sounds familiar it's because she's the nepotistically-privileged daughter of two-time World Series champ Jose Canseco and model Jessica Sekely. The 55-year-old retired baseball pro last made headlines in March when he accused his former teammate Alex Rodriguez of cheating on his pop star fiancée Jennifer Lopez with his ex-wife Jessica as well as Playboy model Zoe Gregory.



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Saif Ali Khan reveals Taimur's reaction when someone said no to him:

'I don't like you, I will kick you, I will head bang you'



Actor Saif Ali Khan will be seen next in his home production, *Jawaani Jaaneman*, co-starring Tabu and newcomer Alaya F. In an interview with *East?India Comedy*, Saif spoke about parenting Taimur and the little fellow wasn't ready to take a no for answer. On the question what kind of a parent he was and whether he was cool or a strict parent, he said, "I think it is good to be a little strict, I have given up. This time round, like my third child and my wife's first (cracks a joke on himself and says 'that sounds weird'), so she kind of spoils him slightly and I know this is not gonna end properly. I know where

this is going. And now he is bully everyone at home. I don't want to go to school, so all that's happening." On the issue of whether he emotionally blackmails, Saif added, "He is very sweet, I love you and my family. Then recently someone said 'no' to him for the first time and he like 'I don't like you, I will kick you, I will head bang you'." Saif plays a role, which he has mastered over the years, in *Jawaani Jaaneman*. He plays a recklessly wild man, well into his later adulthood, who suddenly gets to know that not only is he father of a daughter, she is also pregnant with the child of her boyfriend.

Rajinikanth suffered no injuries during 'Man vs Wild' shooting: Bandipur Tiger Reserve director

Tamil superstar Rajinikanth suffered no injuries during the shoot of Discovery Channel's popular programme 'Man vs Wild' in Bandipur Tiger Reserve, an official said on Tuesday.

"It is all false. As per the screenplay, there was a shot in which Rajinikanth had to fall, so while getting down from the rope, he just fell down and everybody rushed. It was all in the screenplay," T. Balachandra, the reserve's director and conservator of forests, told IANS.

Later, Rajinikanth got up, completed the shoot and left for Chennai, said Balachandra.

According to the Bandipur Tiger Reserve director, the Tamil superstar was fine and did not suffer any injury.

"He was fine. That shot was from the Mysuru airport," Balachandra said, referring to a video which went viral, showing Rajinikanth walking to the airport in Mysuru. Balachandra dismissed the news of Rajinikanth's injury as fake news.

Earlier on Tuesday, Rajinikanth visited Karnataka's Bandipur Tiger Reserve to shoot an episode of 'Man vs Wild' with host Bear Grylls.

"We gave permission for 6-8 hours to Discovery Channel to shoot in Bandipur Tiger Reserve," said Balachandra.

He said the one-day shoot began at 11 am on Tuesday and ended by 4 pm.

"They paid as per the norms. Per day they have to pay documentary fee, vehicle fee and others. For four days, they paid Rs 10 lakh," Balachandra said.

Balachandra said Rajinikanth spent five hours in the forest and will not return as his shoot was only for one day.

Bandipur Tiger Reserve, an 874 sq km national park, was formed by integrating most of the forest areas of erstwhile Venugopala Wildlife Park established in 1941, and later enlarged to its current state in Chamarajanagar district, about 220 km southwest of Bengaluru.

The tiger reserve lists 28 species of mammals to be present in the forest, including royal Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, common leopard, bonnet macaque, Indian pipestrelle and barking deer, among others.





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Rajinikanth suffered no injuries during 'Man vs Wild' shooting



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Delhi polls Avoid divisive rhetoric

Focus on development; don't polarise on religious lines



responsibility for it largely lies with the BJP. Go back to what appeared to be the original contours of the campaign. The Aam Aadmi Party promised to singularly focus on improvement in education and health facilities, cheaper and more extensive supply of electricity and water. The BJP appeared to plan its campaign around how Mr Kejriwal's confrontational nature had cost Delhi in terms of development and having a "triple-engine" government, led by the BJP, both at the Centre, the municipal corporations, and in Delhi. The BJP saw its decision to grant ownership papers to residents of unauthorised colonies as a key measure that would help win it the votes of millions of residents.

But the script changed almost entirely

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(News Agencies)- At the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit last December, Delhi's chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, said that in the city's elections, each party - including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - had to contest on the basis

of development issues. Identity - be it caste or religion - was not the issue in Delhi. As polls approach, it is clear that this is not necessarily true. The discourse in the Delhi election is starting to increasingly centre along divisive national issues, and the

France to ban mass shredding of live chicks



(News Agencies)- France is to ban the controversial practice of shredding live male chicks by the end of 2021, agriculture minister Didier Guillaume announced in Paris on Tuesday. Billions of male chicks are culled around the world by industrial farmers as they are considered redundant by both egg and poultry producers. Egg producers use cockerels only for insemination while poultry producers favor hens for meat, as they grow faster.

As a result, male chicks are routinely culled by being thrown, live, into shredders -- though some farmers suffocate them in bags or gas them to death. Announcing the ban, Guillaume said "nothing will be like it was before" in poultry farming after the end of 2021.

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Hindus from Pakistan 'visiting' Punjab worry agencies



(News Agencies)- The arrival of over 200 Hindu families on foot from Pakistan, "with almost all their belongings", via the Attari border after the new citizenship law was passed has taken security agencies by

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Donald Trump defence team's last word: President can do anything he wants

(News Agencies)- Donald Trump's defence team made the audacious argument on Wednesday that anything the US President does to get re-elected is legal if he believes it is in public interest, as the impeachment trial drew to a close with a Republican-majority driven acquittal on the cards on Friday.

Fresh from victory that will virtually make him an imperial President, Trump is expected



to embark February 23rd on a celebratory three-day visit to India, where a rousing reception is planned in Gujarat to salve his sore spirits tested by a brutal political season at home.

On the penultimate day of the impeachment trial, Trump's defence team made the jaw-dropping argument that critics warned was a blueprint for a banana republic.

"If a president does something which he believes will help him get elected in the public interest, that cannot be the kind of quid pro quo that results in impeachment," Trump's defence lawyer Alan Dershowitz maintained in a

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USCIS revises processing norms for investor visa, this may result in delays for Indians



(News Agencies)- A new announcement by the immigration agency of the US government, relating to processing of applications for the EB5 visa - also known as cash for green card, is a mixed

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