

Chronology of Major Terror Attacks on security forces in Jammu & Kashmir



40 CRPF Personnel killed in worst terror attack in Kashmir

(Insider Bureru)-At least 40 Central Reserve Police Force jawans were killed and more than 20 others injured in a blast in Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday. The blast was triggered by militants to target two vehicles carrying the CRPF jawans. At least 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans were killed and more than 20 others injured in a blast in Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday, news agency ANI reports. The blast was triggered by militants to target two vehicles carrying the CRPF jawans. "Death toll in the Pulwama attack is around 40," K Vijay Kumar, advisor to the Jammu and Kashmir Governor, told ANI. The blast ripped through one of the buses the jawans were travelling in. The death toll is likely to go up. A Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into the bus they were travelling in, media report said. The bus which came under the main impact of the blast belonged to 76 battalion of the CRPF. As per commuters list, there were 39 personnel travelling in the bus.

Continued on Page 19

From Divorce to Blackface A Short History of Political Taboos in US



(Insider Bureru)-What bars someone from holding high political office? Just when we think we know the rules, they change. Certain transgressions have always been career-killers. Few politicians have withstood revelations of egregious corruption, violent crime or child pornography. Continued on Page 19

From a prized jewel to a fallen star The collapse of Reliance Communications

(Insider Bureru)- The collapse of Reliance Communications (RCom) marks a complete fall in flamboyant Anil Ambani's fortune as the 'prized family jewel' - that he inherited as part of a family settlement with elder brother Mukesh - comes to haunt him nearly 15 years after the Ambanis' mega expansion into the telecom business.

While Anil always viewed the telecom business as the next frontier for growth, after losing the lucrative oil and gas operations in the family settlement, heavy investments and stiff competition made it an uphill task for him to realise his dreams. And with debts mounting by the day - it is estimated at nearly Rs 47,000 crore



now - the final death knell was sounded when Mukesh made a re-entry into the telecom arena (in September 2016) with free services under the Reliance Jio banner. The debt proved too daunting even for the ambitious Anil, once touted as the financial wizard of the combined

Reliance Group. In between the family handover and the collapse, there were many failed deals that led to the unprecedented fall in Anil's fortune. As he began aggressive expansion of the business after getting RCom in 2005 and listing it on the bourses in 2006, the challenging nature of the telecom sector and its need for heavy investments started hitting home.

Rs 23k crore deal to sell telecom assets to Mukesh has failed, Anil Ambani tells SC

About thirteen months after Anil Ambani announced, on his father Dhirubhai's 85th birthday, the sale of his debt-ridden Reliance Communications' telecom

Continued on Page 19

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"Jaan Meri", composed by Ustad Khan, to be released

CAMBRIDGE, MA (By our staff reporter) - Ustad Nishat Khan, a scion of one of the oldest Gharanas of Hindustani music will be the starting performer for the MITHAS's 2019 Spring Season.

Ustad Nishat Khan is one of India's finest musicians and a virtuoso sitar player, transcending musical barriers with his provocative expression and spellbinding technical

mastery. He is the son and disciple of Ustad Imrat Khan, the nephew of the late Ustad Vilayat Khan.

Nishat draws on his own musical heritage that is the North Indian classical idiom as well as engages in other genres as diverse as Western classical music, jazz, Flamenco and Gregorian chant. He has worked with other major performers and composers such as John

McLaughlin, Philip Glass, Paco Peña and Evelyn Glennie among many others.

Ustad Khan said "I am doubly delighted to release my six compositions in "Jaan Meri," a Music Video Album at the event with the singer and producer Anuradha Palakurthi. Her unmatched versatility found a great home for the range of styles in these compositions. Over 70 musicians were involved in



FTC Completes Review of CAN-SPAM Rule

(Insider Bureau)- The Federal Trade Commission announced today that it has completed its first review of the CAN-SPAM Rule, which establishes requirements for commercial e-mail messages and gives recipients the right to opt out of receiving them. The Commission voted to keep the Rule with no changes. The Rule requires that a commercial e-mail contain accurate header and subject lines, identify itself as an advertisement, include a valid physical address, and offer recipients a way to opt out of future messages. As part of its regular, systematic review of

all its rules and guides, the FTC in June 2017 sought public comment on the Rule, including whether it is still needed, the costs and benefits of the Rule, and whether changes needed to be made to the Rule in response to technological and economic developments. The FTC also sought comment on three specific issues related to the CAN-SPAM Rule, including whether the Commission should change the categories of messages treated as "transaction or relationship messages," shorten the time period for processing opt-out requests, or specify additional

activities or practices that might be considered as aggravated violations. The FTC received 92 comments, which overwhelmingly favored keeping the Rule. After reviewing the comments, the Commission concluded that the Rule does benefit consumers and does not impose substantial economic burdens, and that no changes to the Rule were needed at this time.

The Commission voted 5-0 to approve publication of the confirmation of the Rule in the Federal Register.

It will be published in the Federal Register shortly.

recording the songs - and almost 450 people were involved in making the videos - making the album one of the most spectacular ever."

This MITHAS event replaces the earlier Bollywood concert announced by Juju Productions, featuring Anuradha Palakurthi-Juju, Mumbai-based Kamlesh Bhadkamar and his band. "Given the long delay in visa processing we are unfortunately unable to get the musicians to travel to the USA," said Manisha Jain, CEO of Juju Productions. "The event will be offered at a later date,

ensuring the absolute best in terms of musicians, lights, sound, and camera crew. We appreciate your continued support and patience in allowing Juju Productions to stay true to the excellence and integrity it is known for." Juju Productions is a Boston-based music and video production company, where artists and singers work with Anuradha Palakurthi-Juju work to produce creative, innovative musical endeavours. It creates music that attracts global audiences, transcends national and cultural boundaries while rooted in evolving Indian traditions.

FTC and FDA Send Warning Letters to Companies Selling Dietary Supplements

(Insider Bureau)- Washington DC (By our staff reporter)-As part of its ongoing efforts to ensure that dietary supplements and other health-related products are advertised truthfully, and that efficacy claims made for such products are supported by competent and reliable scientific evidence, the Federal Trade Commission has joined the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in sending three warning letters to companies based in Florida, South Carolina, and New Mexico. As detailed in the letters sent to Gold Crown Natural Products, TEK Naturals, and Pure Nootropics, LLC, the Commission has reviewed the companies' advertisements and believes they may violate the FTC Act by making false or unsubstantiated health claims.

Specifically, the FTC is warning about advertisements claiming to treat Alzheimer's and remediate or cure other serious illnesses including Parkinson's, heart disease, and cancer. For example, the letter to Gold Crown Natural Products questions claims made for its Melatonin supplements and three other supplements. Among others, the FTC questions the claim, "Many experiments have been conducted on this and it is proved that melatonin supplements are used to cure Alzheimer's disease." The letter sent to TEK Naturals identifies health claims made for five products, including Mind Ignite™, which is advertised as "[c]linically shown to help diseases of the brain such as Alzheimer's and even dementia." Other products claimed to treat or prevent some



forms of cancer, Parkinson's disease, human papilloma virus, and kidney stones, among others. The letter to Pure Nootropics, LLC warns about claims for seven supplements, including Alpha GPC, Lion's Mane, and Turkey Tail Mushroom Powder, that claim benefits for

dementia, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's, among others. The joint FTC/FDA letters instruct the companies to contact the FTC within 15 days regarding actions taken to address the agency's concerns. The FTC can bring civil enforcement actions against

companies deceptively promoting, marketing, or selling health-related products and seek monetary redress for consumers. The FDA/FTC sent the warning letters on February 5, 2019. (The staff contact is Richard Cleland, Bureau of Consumer Protection, 202-326-3088.)

New York based, Indian-origin Contemporary Artist Vikash Jha

To Display Recent Works of Abstract Expressionism

(By our staff reporter) - New York feature several of Vikash's recent works from the series 'Introspection' focusing on the emotions evoked when the artist starts to look inward. These emotions range from joy, happiness, sadness, satisfaction, hopefulness, hopelessness, openness, shyness, and to all the different shades in-between. For more information and admission, please go to: www.clioartfair.com



Princeton Review 2019 "Best Value" Designation for Queens College



(New York) By our staff reporter- For the second consecutive year and fourth time in six years, Queens College has been selected as a Best Value College by The Princeton Review. The prominent education services company featured Queens College among 200 schools in its 2019 rankings. Queens has been no stranger to the list in recent years, having previously been named a Best Value College in 2014, 2015, and 2018. In the book's profile of Queens College, The Princeton Review editors praise the school for "its first-rate education to generations of students from all different backgrounds, maintaining an incredibly affordable price tag while constantly expanding its offerings, programs, centers and institutes, and even its physical campus."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

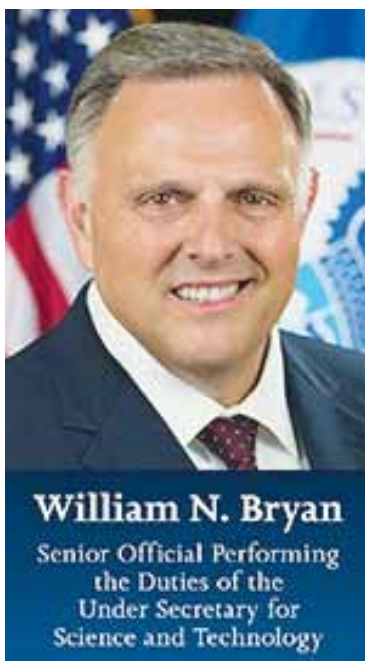
Combating Human Trafficking

Washington DC (By our staff reporter)- An often invisible crime occurs closer than we think and to more people than we realize. Its victims number an estimated 20.9 million people globally. These victims commonly eschew help, fearing reprisals from not just the perpetrators but also law enforcement. Many victims and the societies they're a part of misunderstand and fail to see the crime and, inevitably, the victims for what they truly are. What's more, despite being largely inconspicuous, this crime generates billions of dollars in annual profits, only coming

behind drug trafficking as the most profitable form of transnational crime.

So what crime could be so pervasive and profitable yet remain in the shadows and, in some cases, be socially acceptable? January was National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, and while the month has past, I want to take a moment to reaffirm our dedication to protecting victims of human trafficking and bringing their perpetrators to justice. The DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) has had a long history of developing and bringing technology to the front lines of this fight:

The Port of Entry Forensics and Investigations Program helps combat transnational crime and investigate child exploitation and human trafficking through open source



data and forensic analysis of material collected from suspicious packages and cargo. Igloo, a data analytics software program, allows law enforcement officers to scour multiple data sources and then track,

triangulate, and swiftly translate the telltale signs of criminal activity into actionable intelligence.

Rapid DNA, technology that expedites the testing of DNA, can support efforts in immigration, human trafficking prevention, reunification of family members following mass casualties, and DHS law enforcement investigations.

Today, our commitment to helping the women and men at the forefront of combatting human trafficking remains steadfast. We continue to identify technology that can be quickly deployed and to develop technology that can disrupt human trafficking on a large-scale - ensuring we use modern means to remain ahead of an ever changing criminal landscape. We are also determining what resources are already available,

understanding who the organizational players are, and accounting for both the domestic and international perspectives of this transnational crime. We are helping to set metrics and measures that can be used to enhance the coordination of resources, as well as engaging academic institutions through our Criminal Investigations and Network Analysis Center of Excellence to innovate our approach to challenges in this area.

Ultimately - in spite of all this work to enhance coordination, strategy, and technology - we must remember that putting an end to human trafficking starts with awareness and acknowledging its existence in our communities. Let's ensure we remain alert for those around us who may need help but don't ask for it or who may simply not know they are victims.

Hinduism Today Magazine launches website

(By Manu Shah) Hawaii- For the last 40 years, a small group of monks living in a monastery in Hawaii have been diligently preserving, upholding and promoting Hinduism through their publication, "Hinduism Today." The quarterly magazine is read by Hindus and non-Hindus who are spiritually or otherwise curious to explore the world's oldest tradition. It is delivered around the world as well as carried in libraries, universities and temples.

Hinduism Today's impact has been life changing for many of its readers. For Thom Drinkwater from UK who was "living with unanswered questions" it helped clear his spiritual confusion and encouraged him to meditate every day. Likewise Ganga Sivanathan, from Adelaide in Australia, found her body and soul nurtured by the magazine's content. Vijay Pallod, a subscriber for 25 years, found it "invaluable in spirited discussions about Hindu dharma with his three children." www.himalayanacademy.com/hamsa/



Gitesh Desai of Houston awarded Pravasi Bharatiya for his work in building bridges between India & US



(By Manu Shah) Houston- Gitesh Desai was presented the prestigious award by the President of India Ram Nath Kovind at a special ceremony in Varanasi on 23 rd January. He was also felicitated at his alma mater University of Baroda and in his hometown Jambusar in Gujarat.

DHS Awards Florida Company \$199K to Begin Prototype Test of Canine Wearables

(By our staff reporter) "WASHINGTON DC- The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science & Technology Directorate (S&T) has awarded \$199,540 to Orlando, Florida-based HaloLights, LLC to begin prototype testing of canine wearable technology. The award is part of DHS S&T's Silicon Valley Innovation Program (SVIP). "Canine (K9) agents are critical members of law enforcement and border protection teams, but have a high mortality risk due to environmental factors—such as extremely high or low temperatures or dangerous terrain—and injuries in the line of duty. As K9s are unable to communicate the status of their health, their handlers rely on technology to monitor and navigate working dogs' health." "To address this need, DHS S&T awarded HaloLights to further develop its C.H.A.M.P. (Canine Health Analytics Monitoring Platform) technology. This award funds beta-testing in partnership with the U.S. Border Patrol, which will be providing feedback on the tests. This feedback will enable HaloLights to further tailor its product to the real needs of potential USBP end-users." "With the potential risks Customs and Border Protection canine agents face in their daily operations, there is an expressed desire for improved health monitoring tools to ensure their safety," said Don Roberts, S&T's Detection Canine Program Manager. "In funding this project, DHS S&T is working to ensure that officer safety, human or canine, is a priority." "C.H.A.M.P., a smart wearable, continuously records and stores a working dog's real-time, critical health and activity data—such as heart rate, temperature, humidity, GPS coordinates and more—and transmits that information to monitoring operational and medical staff.

Overseas Indian Establishes Sustainability Center at IIT Gandhinagar

(Agencies) Gandhinagar, India- Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar aims to become the principal resource center for sustainable development in India with the launch of Dr Kiran C Patel Center for Sustainable Development, which will advance local and global solutions through cutting-edge interdisciplinary research. It has been set up with a generous endowment from overseas Indian philanthropist Dr Kiran C Patel,



a distinguished cardiologist built and sold two billion dollar based in Florida, USA. Over the Medicaid managed care past three decades Dr Patel has companies.

FTC Announces New Date for Workshop Examining Online Event Ticket Sales

(By our staff reporter) "Washington DC - The Federal Trade Commission has announced it is pushing back until June 11, 2019, the date of a workshop aimed at examining consumer protection issues related to the online event ticket marketplace." "The workshop, first announced in October, was originally set to take place in March, but has been delayed until June due to the extended government shutdown. The event will feature opening remarks by Commissioner Rebecca Kelly Slaughter and will bring together a variety of stakeholders, including industry representatives, consumer advocates, trade associations, academics, and government officials, to discuss problematic practices in the online event ticket marketplace.

FTC to Send Refund Checks to Consumers who Lost Money to Tech Support Scam

(By our staff reporter) "Washington DC -"The Federal Trade Commission is sending refund checks to people deceived by the operators of an alleged tech support scheme. The refunds stem from a settlement the FTC and the State of Alabama reached last year with Troth Solutions over allegations that the defendants tricked people into believing their computers were infected with viruses and malware, and then charged them hundreds of dollars for unnecessary repairs. According to the complaint, the defendants used phone calls and online ads resembling security alerts from major technology companies to trick people into contacting the defendants and providing access to the consumers' computers. The defendants then claimed consumers' computers were infected with viruses, hacked, or experiencing other problems. The scheme's operators used high-pressure tactics to persuade consumers to pay hundreds of dollars for unnecessary computer repair services, service plans, anti-virus protection or software, and other products and services." "As part of the settlement, the FTC is mailing checks averaging \$380 and totaling more than \$26,000 to 70 consumers. Recipients should deposit or cash checks within 60 days, as indicated on the check." "The FTC never requires people to pay money or provide account information to cash a refund check. If recipients have questions about the refunds, they should contact the FTC's refund administrator, Rust Consulting, Inc., at 1-877-874-7557.

Mamata Banerjee lands in Delhi on mission to turn a threat into opportunity

It was a difficult process that Mamata Banerjee launched on the evening of February 3, a couple of hours after a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) team went to the official residence of Kolkata Police commissioner Rajeev Kumar.



(Insider Bureau)- As Mamata Banerjee landed in Delhi Tuesday evening to join the protest by opposition leaders in the Capital, she will be handling a challenge of turning a threat into an opportunity. It was a difficult process that she launched on the evening of February 3, a couple of hours after a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) team went to the official residence of Kolkata Police commissioner Rajeev Kumar. As police personnel were locked in a widely televised jostle with a CBI team trying to enter the red brick building at 2 Loudon Street, tongues began to wag in Bengal that the Trinamool Congress chief will now have face the heat as the federal agency could now crack down on those close to her in the Ponzi scam cases just before the Lok Sabha elections. But hardly could her rivals predict that the 64-year-old would park herself on a chair on the pavement at a busy intersection in the

business district of Kolkata close to 8:45pm and announce a 'satyagraha' against the Narendra Modi government, alleging the Centre is bent of destroying the Constitution, the federal structure of the country, the police force and democracy itself. From the extremely awkward situation that the rivals began conjuring up for her in early evening, Mamata Banerjee began a counter-offensive by late evening that brought a few leaders of opposition parties to her platform over the next two days, catapulted her to the headlines and prompted more than a dozen of other leaders to issue statements supporting her stand and criticising the Union government. It seemed that Mamata Banerjee picked up from where she left during the rally on January 19 when almost two dozen leaders of parties opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party gathered at her unity show in Kolkata's Brigade Parade ground pledging to keep their differences aside and continue a united fight against the Modi government.

While the possibility of a CBI crackdown on those who benefitted from Saradha and other scams still looms, Mamata Banerjee has succeeded, at least initially, to partially divert attention towards something that might benefit her politically and salvage her from a gloomy situation. It is with this objective of taking the attack right into the rival camp that the Bengal chief minister will be visiting Delhi to participate in another dharna. Her critics admit it's a high-risk game and unlike any other that she has undertaken in her long political career. The dharna in Kolkata has committed her to a position where she will be held guilty of trying to shield police officers if they are found guilty of wrongdoing, something that opponents pointed out she did not carry out even when senior Trinamool leaders such as Sudip Bandyopadhyay were arrested in connection with the Rose Valley scam. The

dharna has done two things for the Trinamool Congress chief. While it has made her one of the most prominent anti-BJP faces in the country, it has also brought her into a sharp attack by senior BJP leaders. Since Mamata Banerjee's Kolkata gambit, both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party president Amit Shah have made it a point to highlight her in election rallies across the country as "the first chief minister in the country to stage a dharna in support of persons accused in the Ponzi scams." Most political observers feel the special mention of Didi helps improve her position as a leader of the emerging anti-BJP front, it also indicates that she is moving farther and farther beyond the point of no return. There are a few other apprehensions too. Many feel that over the years Mamata Banerjee has failed to build a trusted circle of her own in the nation's capital that is crucial to be recognised as a leader

leading a platform of opposition parties. "Building this acceptability is crucial for a bigger political role in Delhi," said a senior bureaucrat, who has watched her long as both as an opposition leader and as an administrator. Political observers also point out that the Bengal chief minister also has to fix her relationship with India's oldest political party. The Congress is still the country's only opposition party that has a countrywide footprint and after the victory in the assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh it is more upbeat than it has ever been in the recent years. Mamata Banerjee's relation with the Congress, and especially its president Rahul Gandhi, has been cold at best. She did not even congratulate him after the assembly election results and though Sonia Gandhi and her son warmed up to her before the January 19 rally in Kolkata by sending personal letters and senior leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Abhishek Manu Singhvi to the programme, Mamata Banerjee's party continues to aggressively wean away Congress leaders away to her outfit. Since she came in power in May 2011, as many as 29 MLAs and one MP from Congress have joined the Trinamool Congress that has led state Congress leaders to allege that she is bent on obliterating the party from West Bengal. Over the past one year, Mamata Banerjee has been purveying the theory that if in each state the party that is the strongest takes on the BJP (and the rest of the opposition rally behind it), the ruling party at the Centre will be roundly defeated in the Lok Sabha elections. But many have questioned the theory, wondering whether the rather simplistic theory would work on the ground in the absence of a cementing force either in the form of a wave or an individual.

India signs deal to get 72,400 assault rifles from US firm 'within 1 year'

(Insider Bureau)- India has signed the contract for Sig Sauer Assault Rifles with the US under fast track procurement (FTP). India has signed a contract with a US firm for 72,400 assault rifles at a cost of around Rs 700 crore, defence ministry officials said Tuesday. The rifles, being used by US forces as well as several other European countries, are being bought under the fast-track procurement procedure. India has signed the contract for Sig Sauer Assault Rifles with the US under fast track procurement (FTP) and as part of the agreement, India will get around 72,400 7.62mm rifles from US firm SiG Sauer in one year from

this day, the officials said. These new assault rifles will come at a cost of around Rs 700 crore, they said. The Indian Armed Forces are currently equipped with 5.56x45 mm INSAS Rifle. There is an urgent requirement of replacing the in-service 5.56X45 mm INSAS Rifle with a 7.62X51mm Assault Rifle which is compact, robust, modern in technology and simple to maintain in field conditions, the officials said. Defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman had earlier this month approved the procurement of the Sig Sauer rifles, which will be used by troops deployed along the nearly 3,600-km border with China. In October, 2017, the Army



began the process to acquire around 7 lakh rifles, 44,000 light machine guns (LMGs) and nearly 44,600 carbines. Around 18 months ago, the Army had rejected an assault

rifle built by the state-run Rifle Factory, Ishapore, after the guns miserably failed the firing tests. Following this, the Army started scouting for rifles from the global market.

On Brexit, the EU isn't strong enough to be weak right now

When Donald Tusk, President of the EU Council, tweeted on Wednesday that there was a "special place in hell" for those who promoted Brexit without a plan, the reaction from certain corners of London was furious. Throughout the Brexit process, many in the UK have been apoplectic at the European Union's perceived arrogance and disrespect. But few have tried to appreciate why the EU has taken such a firm line.

It may be a cliché to say that Brexit presents an existential crisis for the EU as well as the UK. But, so the cliché goes, all clichés exist for a reason. The EU wants to get Brexit out the way so it can deal with the other problems currently facing the bloc -- and there are quite a few, not least the European parliamentary elections in May. Europe has endured a near-unprecedented migration crisis. The euro area is still recovering from the aftermath of the global financial crisis -- which hit Greece so hard it needed the largest bailout in history. It is coping with populist movements becoming increasingly powerful in national elections, forcing mainstream politicians to ape once-fringe political ideas. It has among its ranks countries like Poland and Hungary openly undermining the rule of law. And it is looking at Rome, wondering if -- maybe when -- Italy's sovereign debt mountain will collapse its economy, making Greece look like a walk in the park. With all that going on, it's little wonder the Brexit turmoil is frustrating European officials. So why won't Brussels give in to UK Prime Minister Theresa May's demands, reopen negotiations and get Brexit over with? In the narrow terms of Brexit, the EU has to stand up for the interests of its members -- a position it has more or less stuck to since day one. But more broadly, the EU is not strong enough to be weak right now.

'Fake deadline'

Few understand this paradox better than former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis. "What the UK has failed to understand is the weakness of the union and the single market, but also the enormous political will to keep it all together," he told me earlier this week. "Only when you put the two together can you begin to understand the harshness the EU has demonstrated to London." He went on to describe the EU's signature tactic: the finite deadline. When Varoufakis was negotiating Greece's debt and austerity program in 2015, he had a mandate to push for a debt restructure. The EU did not want to negotiate on this, so imposed a deadline. "I was told if I missed the deadline, then Greek banks would close. Article 50 has created a fake deadline. Agree a deal by March 29,

or leave with nothing. We all know we are going to die, but if we know the date, we will live every day up till that point in panic." That March 29 deadline is central to the Brexit debate in the UK. Despite the UK agreeing to this deadline, as per the terms of the Treaty of the European Union, many believe it will inevitably need to be delayed to avoid no deal. But this is far from Brussels' preferred option and, unfortunately for the UK, it is a matter entirely for the EU.

Why doesn't the EU want to extend the deadline? A few reasons.

First, there is not much appetite in Brussels to talk to a brick wall. Recent events in the UK parliament have led to a total erosion of trust. Despite the EU now seeing that offering some concession on the so-called "backstop" might see the UK parliament approve the deal, to tweak it would require reopening negotiations -- a huge climbdown -- and defying the wishes of EU member Ireland. And it's still not 100% clear this would be enough. Then there are those upcoming EU elections. The EU parliament is currently dominated by groups that hail from across the political spectrum, but are largely pro-EU. While this is not expected to change, current projections from Europe Elects point to the three largest groups losing seats. And that could have complicated consequences. "Populists won't take over the new parliament, just smaller parties across the political spectrum will do better," Agata Gostyńska-Jakubowska, a senior research fellow at the Centre For European Reform think tank told me. "But the European elections will create space for a populist movement to create pressure and gain more influence within the EU." What's that got to do with delaying Brexit? When asked what the biggest fear for the elections was, a source inside the EU Parliament replied: "The Brits still being there."

Should Article 50 be delayed beyond the date of the elections, then the UK could still have MEPs sitting in parliament. Some EU officials are concerned at the prospect of far-right figures like Tommy Robinson, standing, winning and building some form of "anti-EU, populist supergroup," the source explained.

The other issue with delaying article 50 is that it might cause fights over money between the remaining 27 EU nations. If the UK stays, it stands to reason that its budget contributions would have to increase from the current £39 billion to insert your own number. And negotiations over the EU's long-term budgets, as Gostyńska-Jakubowska explained, "can cause serious rows between the member states that are net contributors and those that are net recipients."

Why Americans are flocking to Asia

Asia is sexy. From K-Pop sensation BTS topping the Billboard charts to "Crazy Rich Asians" owning the summer box office, Americans can't get enough of Asian film, music, and of course, ramen noodles. It's all a sign of the Asianization of the world -- and it's not just Asia coming West. Americans are flocking across the Pacific in record numbers as well to study, travel, work and even settle down permanently. The past two generations witnessed millions of Asian-Americans adopting the American way of life. Now we are witnessing a new generation of "American-Asians" going the other way. Why? Asia has the world's lowest taxes. Despite having some of the world's largest economies such as China, Japan, and India, tax revenues are just one-fifth of GDP compared to one-half in Europe. Legendary investor Jim Rogers, Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin, and dozens of others have decamped to Asia's squeaky-clean hub of Singapore to invest their millions in high-growth Asian companies rather than being saddled with America's ballooning debt.

Ni hao ma, anyone?

Chinese language teaching has been booming in America for over a decade, with bilingual preschools opening up from San Francisco to Denver to Manhattan. The results can be seen in the 400,000 Americans today studying Mandarin. But Mandarin's not very useful for ordering General Tso's chicken in Chicago. Americans in China are getting snapped up on the streets to act in movies, model for billboards and teach

English to 400 million Chinese students. How's that for perspective?

Have degree, will travel

Some say the US labor market is roaring back, with record-low unemployment. But wages remain stubbornly low and many millennials are saddled with staggering student debt. One solution: Go study in Asia -- at an American university, no less! From Georgetown in Doha and NYU in Abu Dhabi to Yale in Singapore and Duke in Beijing, dozens of American and British colleges now have full four-year undergrad programs in Asia that are massively subsidized by the host governments, meaning Western pedigree at Eastern prices.

What's more: The centuries-old silos of their ivy-covered parent campuses have been ditched in favor of up-to-the-minute and interdisciplinary curricula focused on running sustainable cities and social impact investment. Plus: you're already in Asia, networking in the world's largest emerging markets.

Location, location, location

Want sunny weather, lower street crime, and affordable food and rent? HSBC's Expat Monitor ranks Asian cities from Tokyo and Taipei to Singapore and Sydney as offering the best mix of quality of life and dynamic professional environments. Bangkok and Jakarta have long been low-key backpacker hangouts, but now they are booming with e-commerce and ride-sharing startups like Go-Jek, while a new crop of thriving megacities such as Ho Chi Minh City and Yangon are being hailed as the "next tigers."



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Come clean when things go wrong

The controversies involving Jeff Bezos and Ralph Northam show why building trust is important

Two notable Americans faced firestorms of criticism last week: A governor whose medical school yearbook page showed a racist image and a billionaire whose infidelity was exposed by a tabloid. The politician - Virginia governor Ralph Northam - handled the PR crisis in the worst way possible by deflecting and denying, which led to calls for his resignation. The reclusive billionaire, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, turned crisis into opportunity by disclosing embarrassing information and positioning himself as a superhero, telling everyone that he was standing up to a bully on their behalf.

One thing we can learn from all of this is to come clean when things go wrong. It doesn't matter whether you are a CEO, government official, or school teacher: The best way out of a business or personal crisis

is to admit you made a mistake. We are humans, and no one expects us to be perfect. Even though you may get some criticism or negative press, it won't be anything like the alternative. As well, you will build a level of trust that pays long-term dividends. I learned this the hard way long ago, when I was a fledgling entrepreneur.

In my first company, Seer Technologies, where I was chief technology officer, we shied away from the media. We watched every word and were guarded in front of journalists. The only times we granted interviews were when we had good news - deal closures and product announcements. If something went wrong or the press asked about customer problems, we went silent. When Seer filed for its IPO in 1995,

the North Carolina press was eager to cover us because we were a rare local success. But, rather than establish relationships, our management team decided to take the advice of our investment bankers and refused all interviews. We even refused a cover story for a national technology magazine - after the editor had travelled to interview us. As a result, after the IPO, the only news that the local business journal reported was about our salaries, which it suggested were excessive. And when the company got into trouble, it made front-page news. The coverage was negative all the way. In my second company, Relativity Technologies, of which I was CEO, I took a different tack. We opted for openness and full disclosure - of the good and the bad. We were always in the news about



our successes. And the coverage was sympathetic when things went wrong. Just after we had completed a round of venture financing, my president and chief operating officer received an offer to join the hottest company in the region. I expected that we would get slammed by the press for losing a senior executive and that there would be rumours and questions about our viability. I decided to call up local journalists and brief them in advance about the press release. I explained that this was a big loss, but that

we would survive. Instead of questioning the viability of the company, the coverage focused on how Relativity had become a recruiting ground for hot companies - how much in demand our people were. The Wall Street Journal ran a front page article on how loyalty meant nothing in the tech industry. It focused on what a difficult decision it was for an executive to leave such a successful company, because our stock could be worth millions. The same happened when my company got into trouble two years later and I had to lay off employees. I

invited the local press to come and meet my employees - including the people I had laid off. The next morning, I was surprised to see myself in a full-page article on the front page of the business section of The News and Observer. It was titled "Viva Vivek" and lauded the company for the way it treated its employees. It showed how, even in hard times, employees were showing loyalty, quoting some who had been laid off as saying they planned to show up for work-without pay-until they found new jobs.

India must step in to prevent trade conflicts

India and the United States are squaring up for an exchange of blows on trade issues as space for a negotiated agreement is running out. The United States Trade Representative's Office (USTR) has run out of patience over a two-year dispute on medical device price controls, not least because New Delhi suddenly walked away from a negotiated settlement. The USTR now wants zero-tariff privileges for Indian textiles and other imports, under the World Trade Organization's (WTO) generalised system of preferences, be revoked. The most obvious Indian retaliation would be to impose tariffs on US steel and aluminium imports, something it has delayed despite the unilateral imposition of similar tariffs on India.

Neither of these actions will have significant economic impact. The real danger would be for this tit-for-tat to trigger an escalatory series of actions. Of concern would be the formal dispute spreading to incorporate a whole set of new sources of trade friction such as data localisation norms or the rules governing e-commerce investment. Neither side is faultless in the present economic fracas. Much of India's problems arise from arbitrary decisions by domestic regulators who have little understanding of India's multilateral trade obligations, complicated by a political unwillingness to override these decisions no matter how foolish they may be. Washington seems blind to the fact that in the run-

up to a tightly contested national elections, New Delhi would find it politically more expedient to exchange blows than come to a settlement that could be criticised by the opposition.

Trade disputes are hardly new in Indo-US relations and are common between any two nations that have a substantial economic relationship. The environment today is different for two reasons. One is that the Trump administration divorces strategic and trade issues. It sees no contradiction in having friendly strategic relations and a confrontational trade policy with the same country. The US is also running two separate trade policies. President Donald Trump's revolves around trade deficits and temporary



obsessions like Harley-Davidson motorcycles. The USTR remains concerned about policy shifts that undermine US corporate interests. Two, India is struggling with a whole set of new norms regarding the

digital economy, ranging from data privacy to payments structures, that it has yet to settle at home. The Modi government had mooted the idea of putting all these issues into one

basket and working on a US-India trade pact. It is perhaps time to dust off this idea and begin a process designed to prevent potential trade conflicts, most of which are easily predictable.

Biases are creeping into the Internet's AI systems

Twitter is under the cosh these days from a section of concerned citizens, who feel that the social media platform is biased towards the communist ideology

There have been concerns raised about the bias of other social media platforms in the last few years by people cutting across the ideological spectrum.

The standard reply of the social media platform administrators to their detractors, whenever such accusations of bias are made, is that there is no manual intervention and an algorithm based Artificial Intelligence (AI) runs these platforms. So there is no question of bias.

But is it really true? No, it is not. The fact of the matter is that there is ample evidence of the existence of various kinds of bias in the AI and the

algorithms are not as neutral as they are projected to be. In fact, the world over, the major challenge for all major players in the field of AI is how to make it bias-free and they haven't been successful in this so far.

The absence of bias is based on the concept of fairness which has to be defined in a particular social context. These so called unbiased algorithms do not take into account the social context. According to a recent research paper, Fairness and Abstraction in Sociotechnical Systems (Proceedings of the Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, Pages 59-68 Atlanta, GA, USA - January 29 - 31, 2019), there are many ways when the absence of the social context could lead to severe bias in the way AI would operate and make decisions. It further says that abstraction is one of the bedrock concepts of computer

science and there are five failure modes of this abstraction error: the Framing Trap; Portability Trap; Formalism Trap; Ripple Effect Trap; and Solutionism Trap. Each of these traps arise from failing to consider how social context is interlaced with technology in different forms, and thus the remedies also require a deeper understanding of "the social to resolve problems," says this research paper.

A recent essay in MIT Technology Review by Karen Hao puts it more clearly. It is "documented now that how the vast majority of AI applications today are based on the category of algorithms known as deep learning, and how deep-learning algorithms find patterns in data". Hao says, "We've also covered how these technologies affect people's lives: how they can perpetuate injustice in hiring, retail, and security and may

already be doing so in the criminal legal system."

The bias, according to researchers, can creep in any time. It can be there during data collection for the algorithm or even during the testing of the same.

"The introduction of bias isn't always obvious during a model's construction because you may not realize the downstream impacts of your data and choices until much later. Once you do, it's hard to retroactively identify where that bias came from and then figure out how to get rid of it. In Amazon's case, when the engineers initially discovered that its tool was penalizing female candidates, they reprogrammed it to ignore explicitly gendered words like 'women's'. They soon discovered that the revised system was still picking up on implicitly gendered words - verbs

that were highly correlated with men over women, such as 'executed' and 'captured'-and using that to make its decisions," says the MIT essay. One of the challenges is that there has been a complete lack of transparency about how the algorithms developed and were deployed by all the major digital players, including Google, Facebook, Twitter etc.

After all, these algorithms are created by the individuals. And their biases are bound to find a place in whatever they have created. Their conscious preferences may not reflect but their unconscious preferences are bound to creep in through these algorithms in the whole system. The IBM Research clearly mentions on its website, "Within 5 years, the number of biased AI systems and algorithms will increase."

Why Gurugram should not be a model for other cities

In a move that could affect the Aravallis and other forest areas in the state, the Haryana government has decided to amend the Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA). This proposed amendment is misguided. It will only encourage real estate developers and the Haryana Urban Development Authority by allowing untrammelled construction in areas where it was previously banned due to the enforcement of PLPA. This could adversely affect the catchments of Badhkal, Surajkund and Damadama lakes in the state, which is struggling with water

challenges. The groundwater level in Haryana has dropped by more than 50% in the past four decades, show government figures.

Many states aspire to be like Haryana, and have, as the jewel in its crown, a city such as Gurugram. In 2018, Haryana chief minister, Manohar Lal Khattar had told this newspaper about how 200 Fortune 500 companies have set up their offices in Gurugram, and it was incumbent on his government to burnish the city's image. Gurugram generates around 60% of the total revenue of the state. According to a PRS analysis of

the state's budget (2018-19), the Gross State Domestic Product of Haryana has been growing in the range of 7% to 9% between 2012-13 and 2016-17.

But behind those numbers, and behind the chrome and glass towers and malls and golf courses that are Gurugram's signature, lies a troubling portrait of myopia and rapaciousness that could sit well in a dystopian JG?Ballard novel. The glass-fronted buildings devour electricity; the diesel powered malls are just what the environment does not need; and the golf courses guzzle water in a

state that is already stretched in terms of that particular resource.

There is a lot more that is far from rosy. Haryana has the lowest forest cover in the country (3.59%). According to the 2011 Census, Haryana's child sex ratio is (0-6 years) is 834 females for every 1000 males; India's is 933 females for every 1000 males 2011 Census. The Gurugram district's record is poorer at 830 females for every 1000 males. The state claims the sex ratio has improved to 924 in 2018, according to figures released by the state government

in January. In the recently released Niti Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals Index, Haryana is at number 18 among 26 states. All seven Union Territories rank above it.

In the development versus environment debate, Haryana chose, years ago, which side to be on. The state has made a Faustian pact with development. This latest decision of the government is of a piece with that. Notwithstanding what Gordon Gecko said in Oliver Stone's film, Wall Street, greed is not good. In the medium and long term, citizens will pay the price for the state's greed.

An income redistribution plan will not end poverty

The BJP and the Congress have announced separate income redistribution plans ahead of the general election. While the Congress has promised a Minimum Income Guarantee Scheme (MIGS), the BJP announced a basic income plan for farmers - Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PMKSN) - in the interim budget.

While both schemes may address certain aspects of inequality by ensuring a basic income, they will not eradicate poverty. Poverty is measured as

deficits in income or consumption, but the underlying causes of these shortages are linked to human capabilities and access to resources. As poverty is rooted in deficient capabilities, any income support scheme can at best be a welcome addition. It is not sufficient to deal with structural conditions, which lead to inter-generational poverty in diverse social groups. Under the PMKSN scheme, farmers (who have below two hectares of land) will receive Rs 6,000 per year. But this amount is insufficient even to buy basic farm inputs. In

fact, the Telangana and Odisha governments have initiated far more comprehensive income support plans for farmers.

Under Odisha's proposed KALIA scheme, all farmers, including sharecroppers and landless households, have been promised Rs 10,000 per family as assistance for five cropping seasons between 2018-19 and 2021-22. The Rythu-Bandhu scheme in Telangana is paying eligible farmers Rs 4,000 per acre for the kharif season of 2018.

Several studies have shown that a cash transfer scheme such as

MIGS or PMKSN cannot be substituted for subsidies and other institutional support systems such as the National Food Security Act-powered public distribution system. In fact, such cash transfer schemes could be counterproductive and may lead to more distress. Moreover, experiences from the implementation logjam of other welfare schemes raise the concern of exclusion errors and leakages. Uncertainties in receiving uniform and periodic cash payment would reduce the

validity of the scheme as income. Targeting errors are also likely. We must also keep in mind that the banking system often fails to reach farmers in remote locations. As some of the states roll out such schemes, the complexities of beneficiary identification and delivery challenges in diverse local contexts are already evident. There is no substantive evidence to say that cash transfers have remedied leakage in the implementation of existing welfare programmes.

CBI's Nageswara Rao fined for SC contempt, to sit in corner of courtroom

CJI Gogoi asked Attorney General KK Venugopal, who appeared for Rao, "would heavens have fallen" if the transfer order was not issued.

(By a Staff Reporter) - M Nageswara Rao, the CBI's ex-interim director who apologized to the Supreme Court for transferring a CBI officer AK Sharma probing the Bihar shelter home, committed contempt of court, a bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi ruled on Tuesday, rejecting the apology sent by two senior CBI officials.

The top court ordered Rao and the CBI legal adviser to pay Rs 1 lakh fine within a week and sentenced them till the rising of the court. This means, they have to sit in a corner of the Chief Justice's court until the end of the court proceedings for the day. As CBI's interim chief earlier, Rao had signed off on the transfer orders of CBI AK Sharma who was supervising the investigation into the abuse of inmates at Bihar's shelter homes. Chief Justice Gogoi said there were explicit orders by the top court not to move out officers leading the Bihar probe without its permission.

But the government transferred several officers last month, some of them out of the agency after cutting short their tenure in view of the clash between two top CBI officers, ex-CBI director Alok Verma and his deputy Rakesh Asthana. AK Sharma was one of them.

Last week, a bench of Chief Justice Gogoi and justices L Nageswara Rao and Sanjiv

Khanna had asked Nageswara Rao to explain if he informed the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet that AK Sharma could not be transferred without the top court's approval.

Nageswara Rao, staring at contempt of court punishment, had filed an affidavit in his response. He apologized profusely, insisting that he could not even dream of disobeying the court order.

Attorney General KK Venugopal asked the judges to accept his apology and let him off the hook. But Chief Justice Gogoi would have none of it.

The judge, who looked at the files, pointed to the sequence of events and the file notings that pointed that Nageswara Rao, who was holding interim charge as CBI director, and the legal adviser did agree that they should take the Supreme Court into confidence before implementing the transfer. But when the file eventually came to him again, the legal adviser opined that they could skip this step. And the interim CBI director played along.

"Would heavens have fallen" if the transfer order was issued a day later, the CJI asked the government's top officer.

Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi said that in his 20 years as a judge, he had not compromised on the dignity and honour of the court.

KK Venugopal told the judges that the former CBI interim chief did not "do it willfully and throws

himself to the mercy of the court. "Holding him guilty of contempt would result in his career being ruined," the government's top law officer pleaded.

An angry CJI Gogoi said, "Mr Attorney General, let us be very clear. I don't think any of us ever had the occasion to invoke a contempt power. But it has to be the first time. Speaking for myself, I believe dignity and majesty of court should be maintained and this is blatant." AK?Sharma, a joint director in the CBI, was the senior-most supervising officer in the Bihar shelter home case and the



court, in two orders dated October 31 and November 28, said he should not be transferred. After his transfer, Sharma was appointed the additional director general in the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Records placed before the court indicated that agency's acting director of prosecution S Bhasuran had

given an opinion favouring the transfer. Bhasuran had also apologised to the top court.

A report by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) had highlighted that dozens of girls lodged at a government funded-shelter home in Muzaffarpur were allegedly being sexually assaulted.

'Brother not married, so sister has come': Amit Shah on Congress 'dynasty'

(By a Staff Reporter) - Targeting the Gandhi family, BJP president Amit Shah Tuesday claimed the prime minister's seat is reserved "by birth" in the Congress, wondering if a worker from that party could ever think of occupying the top post. As the "brother" (Rahul Gandhi) has not married, so now the "sister" (Priyanka Gandhi) has come (in the political arena), Shah said.

Shah claimed that in the BJP, a common booth worker



like him could rise to the rank of party president and a 'chaiwala' (Modi) could become the prime minister. "I was a booth worker of the BJP. I rose to be the party president. The chaiwala has become the prime minister of the country, rising through the ranks," Shah said, addressing

party workers here. "Can any party worker from Congress ever think of becoming the prime minister? In that party that seat is reserved by birth," he said.

A BJP worker need not take birth in a specific family to occupy high posts, he added.

Priyanka Gandhi was last month appointed AICC general secretary and in-charge of Uttar Pradesh East by Congress president Rahul Gandhi, ahead of the ensuing Lok Sabha polls

Is BJP so afraid of SP-BSP alliance, asks Mayawati after Akhilesh stopped at Lucknow airport

Hours after SP chief Akhilesh Yadav claimed that he was stopped at Lucknow airport on Tuesday while on his way to Allahabad, BSP supremo Mayawati said it was extremely condemnable and asked whether the ruling BJP was afraid of their alliance.

(By a Staff Reporter) - Hours after Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav claimed that he was stopped at Lucknow airport on Tuesday while on his way to Allahabad, BSP supremo Mayawati said it was extremely condemnable and asked whether the ruling BJP was afraid of their alliance because of which it is "resorting to anti-democratic

methods".

Mayawati described the episode as "an example of total dictatorship of BJP government". "This is very unfortunate and this undemocratic step will be fought at all levels," she said.

"Is the BJP government at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh so afraid of BSP-SP alliance that it is resorting to anti-democratic methods to curb our political

activities," she asked.

The SP and the BSP recently forged an alliance for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Akhilesh claimed he was stopped at Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport in a bid to prevent him from visiting Allahabad to attend an oath-taking ceremony at Allahabad University.

"The government is afraid of oath



ceremony of a student leader and is stopping me at the airport to prevent me from visiting Allahabad," Yadav claimed. He also posted photographs on

his official Twitter handle in which he was seen talking to police officers inside the airport.

The matter rocked the Uttar Pradesh legislature.

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Curfew in Imphal, Mizoram thumbs nose at Centre as anti-Citizenship Bill protests rage

(Agencies) - Authorities in Imphal clamped curfew after sporadic violence erupted in Manipur on Tuesday amid a state-wide shutdown called by civil society groups as protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill continued while in Mizoram several organizations observed a 'black day' with agitators came out on the streets with placards saying 'Hello Independent Republic of Mizoram'.

The proposed amendment which would relax citizenship eligibility criteria for Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, Jains, Christians and Buddhists who have come from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh for reasons of religious persecution could not be tabled in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday as the House was adjourned. The contentious Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha last month.

"Curfew has been imposed in Imphal area, in the twin districts of Imphal (East) and Imphal (West) and the agitation continues," said LM Khaute, Manipur's Director General of Police.

Khaute said there were some cases of violence as protestors took to the streets. Mobile

internet services, too, have been suspended in the state. The district administration of Imphal (West) issued orders prohibiting transmission of agitations and protests.

The police chief said the situation will be reviewed before further decision is taken. "We are making all efforts to ensure peace prevails," Khaute said.

In Imphal, a few protestors stripped naked in front of the state BJP office.

In Thoubal district, one of the BJP offices which runs out of premises owned by MLA Paonam Brojen Singh was ransacked by agitators, police officials said.

The state wide 36-hour shutdown called by People's Alliance Manipur (PAM) which was to end at 5 pm on Tuesday has been extended by 24 hours.

"As the bill was not tabled today, it has been decided to extend it," said Bhushan Longjam, General Secretary, Socialist Students Union of Manipur, a part of PAM. Last month, the BJP-led government in Manipur had urged the Centre to exempt the state from the jurisdiction of the Bill.

Meanwhile, in Mizoram, the

powerful civil society groups under the umbrella of NGO coordination committee, observed a black day. Agitators including former chief minister Lalthanhawla were seen with black flags and placards reading 'Hello Independent Republic of Mizoram.'

"The Bill is not in the interests of the people of northeast," he said.

"If the Centre continues like this without listening to the people we may be driven to the extreme," he said. "Why would they want to drive us to that extreme?" he asked referring to the placards. Earlier, agitators had come out with placards reading 'Hello China'.

"It signifies our demands and feeling are not been heard by the Government of India," said Lalmachhuana, secretary of the NGO coordination committee which comprises of organisations including the Central Young Mizo Association. "Under the GoI, the sentiments of Mizos are not being heard. We need a separate government," he said. Protests have roiled much of the Northeast since the government made its intentions clear of going ahead with the Citizenship Bill.

In BJP-ruled Assam, the saffron



party's coalition partner Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) recently quit the government in protest. On Monday, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu changed his stance on the Citizenship Bill and asked Union home minister Rajnath Singh not to table the bill in the Rajya Sabha.

Last week, Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma said his National People's Party would quit the NDA if the Bill is not scrapped.

In a meeting on January 29, ten regional outfits including allies of the BJP, the National Peoples' Party (NPP), in Meghalaya, the Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) in Nagaland, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) among others had passed a resolution opposing the bill.

The Nagaland cabinet has also rejected the Bill following pressure from various tribal organisations and students bodies.

Woman gang-raped, clobbered to death, boyfriend critical in Amravati



she left home immediately. He received another call from an unidentified person on Tuesday morning saying his sister was found dead

(Agencies)-A pharmacist was gang-raped and murdered at Navuluru in Andhra Pradesh's new capital Amaravati while she was out with her boyfriend late Monday night, police said. The woman was found in a pool of blood and police suspect a blood stained iron rod found at the site of the crime may have been used to kill her and attack her friend. The police said the crime took place in an isolated place behind a cricket stadium. Empty beer bottles were also strewn around, the police said. The victim's boyfriend is battling for life in a hospital at Mangalagiri with critical head injuries. In a statement to the police, he said he was attacked by a gang when he went to her rescue. The 22-year-old victim completed her Masters degree in pharmacy from a college in Guntur this year. Her brother said she had received a phone call from a woman on Monday morning asking her to collect her certificates from the college and

near the cricket stadium. "They were in love for over three years. I even warned him to leave her," the brother said. He also suspects the survivor's involvement in the crime. P. Ramakrishna, deputy superintendent of police in Mangalagiri said police could not pursue the case on the allegations of the victim's brother alone as the woman's friend was also badly injured in the attack.

"A manhunt has been launched and we will probe the case from all angles," the DSP said. The rape and murder has sent shock waves in the new capital. K. Sridevi, a spokesman of All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), said the murder and gang rape indicated the fact that Amaravati is not safe for women. "The policing is limited to the areas inhabited by VIPs and the locations where the government offices are situated. There is a need to step up patrolling covering all the vulnerable areas, particularly suburbs," Sridevi said.

Tik Tok causing cultural degeneration': Tamil Nadu minister calls for ban on Chinese video app

(Agencies)- 'The Tamil Nadu government will take appropriate steps to get the Chinese mobile app 'Tik Tok' banned. The app is mostly used by youth to create and share short videos, state minister for information technology M



Manikandan told the state assembly on Monday. The minister was responding to a plea by Thameemun Ansari of Manithaneyya Jananayaga Katchi (MJK), who claimed that the younger generation is hooked to the Tik Tok app and is getting pushed on the path of cultural degeneration. He also drew attention to the unfettered spread of sexually explicit content and morphing of innocent people's faces, especially women, through the app. Sharing the member's concern, the minister said the state would take up the issue with the Centre for necessary action.

Also read: As TikTok videos take

hold with teens, parents scramble to keep up Tik Tok, which emerged as a popular app among the youth, has also turned out to be a veritable trap for unsuspecting school and college going girls as well as housewives. Recently, the Chennai police busted a flesh trade racket which used morphed pictures of women downloaded from Tik Tok to lure customers. In Salem city in the state, police issued advisories to schools and parents to guard against students logging on to the app. This followed large-scale complaints from parents that pictures of schoolgirls on Tik Tok were morphed with erotic

content and circulated on the internet. Police have suggested counselling sessions for students at home and in the schools. Last week, a few students of the Salem Government Arts College were suspended for uploading a

video that caricatured their Tamil lecturer on the lines of noted Tamil film comedian Vadivelu. Last month, some youths were booked by the police in Sivakasi for creating a video that made fun of cops at the police station itself. This, they had done, emulating their film hero in one of his recent movies. In a tragic instance, a youth who tried to act as if he was committing suicide by slitting his throat for a Tik Tok video, lost his life. Though there is a bar on those below the age of 12 years from using this app, children are addicted to it. Most of the content released on this is singing and dancing to popular numbers with stimulating body movements.

Vadra questioned by ED for 9 hours in Jaipur, summoned again Wednesday

(By Our Staff Reporter)- This was Vadra's first appearance before the ED in Jaipur in connection with charges of money laundering through land deals made by a company linked to him. Robert Vadra, Congress president Rahul Gandhi's brother-in-law, was interrogated for nine hours Tuesday by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with an alleged land scam in Rajasthan's Bikaner district. The questioning will resume at 10.30 am Wednesday, his lawyers said. His mother Maureen was also questioned for some time, but Vadra remained at the ED's zonal office till about 8.30 pm,

except for a lunch break during which he was allowed to leave the premises for an hour. AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra dropped Vadra and his mother off at the ED office, taking time off from her four-day Uttar Pradesh trip in a show of solidarity with her husband. Congress workers shouted slogans when Vadra arrived for the questioning and when he left for his hotel at night. "The interrogation lasted for nearly nine hours. He has given answers to the questions from the ED officers. He will once again appear before the ED

zonal office in Jaipur at 10.30 am," Vadra's lawyer Suman Jyoti Khaitan told reporters. Vadra's lawyers said his mother has not been called for questioning as she is not keeping well. She has, however, assured full cooperation in the probe, they said. On Facebook, Vadra accused the Narendra Modi government of being vindictive ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, and putting his mother through harassment. This was Vadra's first appearance before the ED in Jaipur in connection with charges of money laundering through land deals made by a



company linked to him. Vadra was asked by the Rajasthan High Court to cooperate with the agency. His Jaipur appearance follows soon after he faced ED questioning for three

days in Delhi on a different set of charges relating to property allegedly purchased in London. Vadra is also facing accusations of irregular land deals in Haryana's

Gurugram district. Vadra and his mother reached the ED's zonal office at Bhawani Singh Road, amid tight security. Near the ED office, some Congress workers shouted slogans in support of Priyanka Gandhi, and also repeated the slogan given by her brother Rahul Gandhi, calling Modi a "thief".

Delhi hotel blaze kills 17 as rules flouted

(By Our Staff Reporter)- A fire suspected to have been triggered by an electrical short circuit engulfed a budget hotel in New Delhi's dense Karol Bagh neighbourhood on Tuesday, killing at least 17 people, including a guest and the chef who tried to escape from the blaze by jumping off the five-storey building, the police said. A fire suspected to have been triggered by an electrical short circuit engulfed a budget hotel in New Delhi's dense Karol Bagh neighbourhood on Tuesday, killing at least 17 people, including a guest and the chef who tried to escape from the blaze by jumping

off the five-storey building, the police said. Three people were injured, including a woman from Myanmar who too jumped to escape the fire. The fire department, which received a call for help at 4.35am, said the fire had broken out an hour earlier and the delay in alerting the authorities led to the large number of deaths. Another delay took place when the firefighting unit that first responded to the alert carried a manual ladder, which was not long enough to reach the top floor of the hotel, an official said. A hydraulic skylift was later used to rescue the trapped guests and staff.

Sixteen guests and the chef died. Three of those killed in the fire at the hotel, Arpit Palace, were members of a family from Kerala that was in Delhi to attend a wedding. Delhi home minister Satyendar Jain, who visited the site, said most deaths were the result of suffocation. Dozens of guests and hotel staffers were trapped inside the building once the blaze began, even as at least three of them - an Indian Revenue Service officer, the Myanmar tourist and the chef - jumped from the top floor and the roof of the building. Only the tourist survived, the police said.

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NASA announces demise of Opportunity rover

(Insider Bureau)- During 14 years of intrepid exploration across Mars, it advanced human knowledge by confirming that water once flowed on the red planet -- but NASA's Opportunity rover has analyzed its last soil sample.

The robot has been missing since the US space agency lost contact during a dust storm in June last year and was declared officially dead Wednesday, ending one of the most fruitful missions in the history of space exploration.

Unable to recharge its batteries, Opportunity left hundreds of messages from Earth unanswered over the months, and NASA said it made its last attempt at contact Tuesday evening.

"I declare the Opportunity mission as complete," Thomas Zurbuchen, associate administrator of NASA's Science Mission Directorate told a news conference at mission headquarters in Pasadena, California.

The community of researchers and engineers involved in the program were in mourning over the passing of the rover, known affectionately as Oppy.

"It is a hard day," said John Callas, manager of the Mars Exploration Rover project. "Even though it is a machine and we're saying goodbye, it's very hard and it's very poignant."

"Don't be sad it's over, be proud it taught us so much," former president Barack Obama tweeted later on Thursday.

"Congrats to all the men and women of @NASA on a @MarsRovers mission that beat all expectations, inspired a new generation of Americans, and demands we keep investing in science that pushes the boundaries of human knowledge."

The nostalgia extended across the generations of scientists who have handled the plucky little adventurer.

"Godspeed, Opportunity," tweeted Keri Bean, who had the "privilege" of sending the final

message to the robot.

"Hail to the Queen of Mars," added Mike Seibert, Opportunity's former flight director and rover driver in another tweet, while Frank Hartman, who piloted Oppy, told AFP he felt "greatly honored to have been a small part of it."

"Engulfed by a giant planet-encircling dust storm: Is there a more fitting end for a mission as perfect and courageous from start to finish as Opportunity?" he said. The program has had an extraordinary record of success: 28.1 miles (45.2 kilometers) traversed, more than the Soviet Union's Lunokhod 2 moon rover during the 1970s and more than the rover that US astronauts took to the moon on the Apollo 17 mission in 1972.

"It is because of trailblazing missions such as Opportunity that there will come a day when our brave astronauts walk on the surface of Mars," NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said in a statement.

Opportunity sent back 217,594



images from Mars, all of which were made available on the internet.

Human-like perspective

"For the public, the big change was that Mars became a dynamic place, and it was a place that you could explore every day," Emily Lakdawalla, an expert on space exploration and senior editor at The Planetary Society. "The fact that this rover was so mobile, it seemed like an animate creature," she said. "Plus it has this perspective on the Martian surface that's very human-like." "It really felt like an avatar for humanity traveling across the surface," she added.

Opportunity landed on an immense plain and spent half its life there, traversing flat expanses and once getting stuck in a sand dune for several weeks. It was there, using geological instruments, that it confirmed that liquid water was

once present on Mars. During the second part of its life on Mars, Opportunity climbed to the edge of the crater Endeavour, taking spectacular panoramic images - and discovering veins of gypsum, additional proof that water once flowed among the Martian rocks. Opportunity's twin, Spirit, landed three weeks ahead of it, and was active until it expired in 2010. The two far exceeded the goals of their creators: In theory, their missions were supposed to last 90 days. Today, only a single rover is still active on Mars, Curiosity, which arrived in 2012. It is powered not by the sun, but by a small nuclear reactor. In 2021, the recently named Rosalind Franklin robot, part of the European-Russian ExoMars mission, is slated to land on a different part of the planet, raising the population of active rovers to two.

India-US defence sales at an all-time high: Pentagon

(Agencies)- Admiral Philips Davidson said the inaugural 2+2 Ministerial in New Delhi last September and signing of the COMCASA in 2018 were pivotal moments in the bilateral relationship.

Defence sales between India and the US are at an all-time high and bilateral strategic partnership continues to advance at a historic pace, a top Pentagon commander has said.

Admiral Philips Davidson, Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, during a Congressional hearing said the inaugural 2+2 Ministerial in New Delhi last September and signing of the COMCASA in 2018 were pivotal moments in the bilateral relationship. Last year, India and the US signed the COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) to

facilitate interoperability between the two militaries and sale of high end technology.

"The US-India strategic partnership continues to advance at a historic pace as we continue to increase our interoperability and information-sharing capabilities," he said.

The USINDOPACOM expects this trajectory to continue and that 2019 will be a significant year in bilateral relations, he said and asserted that the two largest democracies of the world are natural partners on a range of political, economic and security issues.

"With a mutual desire for global stability, support for the rules-based international order, and a Free-and-Open Indo-Pacific region, the United States and India have an increased agreement on interests, including maritime security and maritime domain awareness, counter-piracy, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, and coordinated responses to natural

disasters and transnational threats," Davidson said.

Over the past year, the United States and Indian militaries participated in five major exercises, executed more than fifty other military exchanges, and further operationalized the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), he informed the lawmakers. "The LEMOA enables the US Navy to replenish supplies from Indian navy logistics platforms," he said. Davidson said that the US Indo Pacific Command is working with the Indian military to operationalise the COMCASA.

"Defence sales are at an all-time high, with India operating US sourced platforms such as P-8s, C-130Js, C-17s, AH-64s, CH-47s, and M777 howitzers," the top American admiral said. "Additionally, India recently agreed to a \$2.1-billion purchase of MH-60R multi-role sea-based helicopters and is considering a number of additional US systems



for purchase," Davidson said.

The US Indo Pacific Command fully supports the purchase of US systems, F-16 and F/A-18E aircraft, a reorder of 12-15 P-8Is, and a potential purchase of Sea Guardian UASs, he told members of the US Pacific Command.

Observing that the goal of the US Indo Pacific Command in South Asia is to create and seize opportunities to broaden critical partnerships to ensure shared domains remain open to all, he

said in conjunction with India's contributions to regional security, these actions will prevent adversaries from establishing an effective military presence in the Indian Ocean that threaten the security of vital commerce and continued economic growth and development.

"As a result, the regional states will be able to reduce internal conflicts, respond to regional security challenges, and resist adversaries' military and economic coercion," he said.



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Oxford study finds 7 moral rules common across cultures

(Agencies)- The largest and most comprehensive survey of morals across 60 societies - including Indian - by researchers at the University of Oxford has concluded that there are seven rules common to all, reflecting commonality across cultures. The seven rules are: 'help you family, help your group, return favours, be brave, defer to superiors, divide resources fairly, and respect others' property', says the study titled 'Is It Good to Cooperate? Testing the Theory of Morality-as-Cooperation in 60 Societies'.

Previous studies have looked at some of these rules in some places - but at all in a large representative sample of societies. The study by experts at Oxford's Institute of Cognitive & Evolutionary Anthropology has been published in 'Current Anthropology'. The team analysed ethnographic accounts of ethics from 60 societies, comprising over 600,000 words from over 600 sources, a statement from the university said. Oliver Scott Curry, lead author, said: "The debate between moral universalists and moral relativists has raged for centuries, but now we have some answers. People everywhere face a similar set of social problems, and use a similar set of moral rules to solve them".

New York City Police Detective Killed By Apparent 'Friendly Fire'

(By our staff Reporter)- In a grim rite, officers from across the New York City Police Department stood and saluted Tuesday night outside Jamaica Hospital Medical Center in a cold drizzle as the remains of a detective, believed to have been caught in the crosshairs of fellow law enforcement, were driven past in an ambulance.

Detective Brian Simonsen, 42, was killed earlier in the evening while responding to a report of an armed robbery at a T-Mobile store in Queens, Police Commissioner James O'Neill said at a news conference from the hospital Tuesday. "This appears to be an absolute tragic case of friendly fire," said O'Neill, who added that the assessment is subject to change pending an investigation. Around 6 p.m. a caller told 911 that store employees had been forced at gunpoint to the back of the store. Simonsen and his partner, who were in the area working another case, responded.



They entered the store and shot at the suspect, who was "pointing at them what appeared to be a handgun," O'Neill said, later adding that "an imitation firearm" had been recovered at the scene. The officers retreated from the store and "that was when Simonsen was shot." At the time, "multiple officers" were firing "multiple rounds," O'Neill said. A sergeant also was shot once in the leg. He was transported to the hospital by a good Samaritan, O'Neill said, and is listed in stable condition. "His bravery was so clear, but his pain to have lost his colleague was clear as well," New York City Mayor Bill de

Blasio said at the news conference. Simonsen, a 19-year veteran on the force, was not supposed to have been at work Tuesday, said Detectives' Endowment Association President Michael Palladino.

Simonsen, who served in the 102nd Precinct in Queens, was elected squad delegate to the labor union. Palladino said because the delegates' meeting took place Tuesday morning, Simonsen "was actually excused from duty ... (but) he felt compelled to go to the delegates' meeting, ignore the excusal and go to work." "He was the kind of fellow who led by example," Palladino said. In 2010, a New York state task force concluded that fatal friendly fire incidents among police, also known as "blue-on-blue" shootings, "are rare." "Since 1981, some 26 police officers across the United States have been shot and killed by fellow police officers who have mistaken them for dangerous criminals," the report said.

East New York pilot program will create livable basement apartments

(Agencies)- The city will launch a pilot program aimed at creating safe, legal basement apartments in East New York amidst the five boroughs' dire affordable housing crisis. The New York City Council voted to create a pilot program in Brooklyn's Community Board 5 Wednesday that would help landlords transform certain illegal basement apartments into habitable, affordable units. Council member Brad Lander introduced the legislation, which is backed by Mayor Bill de Blasio and co-sponsored by nine other Council members, as a case study to eventually expand the program across the city. "Converting basement units is an important way to address New York City's affordability crisis," Lander said during Wednesday's stated City Council hearing. "It will also enable us to learn useful lessons that I hope will make it possible to smartly expand this program to neighborhoods in the future." The new policy would modify the city's building and fire codes to allow qualified basement units to be made habitable and legal. An interagency group including the Department of



Buildings, Department of Housing Preservation, and Development and Department of City Planning will determine how and whether a basement or cellar can be converted into a legal apartment.

The program will also kick in \$12 million in low-interest loans and grants, which will be overseen by the Department of Housing Preservation (HPD), to low- and moderate-income homeowners for improvements so they may comply with the new regulations, according to Lander's office. For several decades, basement and cellars have been illegal and considered uninhabitable largely for public health reasons, according to HPD. Such units typically lack light and air and usually

retain moisture, which can lead to unsafe living conditions such as mold. There are plenty of legal, below ground apartments, but tenants who live in illegal units typically have no lease and limited rights. This makes complaining about conditions a non-starter because when an illegal apartment is brought to the Department of Building's (DOB) attention an inspector typically visits the property, issues a violation, and orders the illicit unit vacated, according to DOB. "We all know that those basements are unsafe because of the fact that the city fails to recognize them," said Council member Rafael Espinal, who is a co-sponsor of the bill. "It's finally time that we take a look at this conversation." The Basement Apartments Safe for Everyone (BASE) coalition, made up of community and housing advocates, has been working toward the creation of a program to legalize basement units for some 10 years and praised the council's move toward protecting tenants and tapping into the underground units as an affordable housing resource.

Cities shunned by Amazon revive hopes for HQ given New York opposition

(By our staff Reporter)- Cities that were shunned in Amazon.com Inc's search for a secondary corporate headquarters are revisiting their bids in case one of the actual winners, New York City, rejects the corporate giant due to opposition from local politicians. Chicago, Miami and Newark are among the passed-over finalists that have expressed interest in another chance to become the home of an Amazon project that could bring 25,000 jobs. Nashville, Tennessee, which was awarded a 5,000-person center, also said it was open to taking on a bigger role should New York withdraw from consideration. Newark, New Jersey, some 15 miles (24 km) to the west of New York City, is willing to share the headquarters in the event its larger neighbor would be satisfied with a scaled-down project, said Aisha Glover, chief executive of Newark Alliance, the group leading that city's effort.

"We're definitely interested in reactivating our bid," Glover said, stressing the importance of keeping Amazon in the New York metropolitan area. Amazon in November announced New York City and Arlington, Virginia, which borders Washington, D.C., would share the so-called HQ2 project, splitting some 50,000 jobs between the two places as the Seattle-based company looked to expand elsewhere.

Pretty in Pink!

Melania Trump talks drug policy and Be Best over lunch in red room with Colombian first lady Maria Juliana Ruiz Sandoval

(Agencies)- Melania Trump talked drug policy and her signature Be Best campaign over lunch Wednesday with her Colombian counterpart, Maria Juliana Ruiz Sandoval. Wearing a pretty pink and white checked Fendi coat with a pink belt and pink mink fur on the cuffs, the first lady joined her husband in welcoming the president and first lady of Colombia to the White House.

After a photo spray in the Oval Office - where President Donald Trump bumped into his wife while the couples were getting settled - the ladies split off from the men for separate lunches. Last week the first lady, who has made anti-opioid work a central tenant of her Be Best campaign, said she would speak to Sandoval when they met. 'I will have a plan to talk to her about the crisis of opioids,' Melania Trump said

during a briefing with officials at the Office of National Drug Policy. The two first ladies discussed the opioid crisis, particularly its impact globally on children and young mothers, according to the East Wing. Melania Trump also discussed the drug addiction problems among the young she is working to combat as part of her Be Best initiative. 'Last week I met with experts at the Office of National Drug Control Policy to learn more about the harmful effects of substance abuse and the steps we are taking to address this problem,' the first lady said in a statement. 'We must continue raising awareness so parents and communities can understand fully the harm that opioids are having on our children. My conversation with the First Lady of Colombia today further encouraged a global mission to

fighting the addiction crisis and issues facing children domestically and all around the world. 'Colombia sees large quantities of heroin produced and then trafficked to the United States. At a town hall meeting in Virginia in November, the first lady talked about why she incorporated anti-drug work into her campaign. 'When I took on opioid abuse as one of the pillars of my initiative 'Be Best,' I did it with the goal of helping children of all ages. I have visited several hospitals and facilities that are dedicated to helping all who have been affected by this disease -- including people who are addicted, babies born addicted and families coping with addiction of a loved one,' she said. Every day, more than 130 people in the United States die after overdosing on opioids, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Last



week Melania Trump held her first official events since the government shutdown ended and focused on an anti-drug, anti-opioid message that makes up her Be Best campaign. She began her Thursday morning rallying youth who work to keep drugs out of their communities and then received a briefing from government officials on the efforts being made to combat drug trafficking and programs to help counter addiction. The first lady kept a low profile during the 35-day government shutdown that was the longest in history. She had half her office staff furloughed

during the time the government was closed, including her advance teams and support staff that planned events. She did join the president on his visit to U.S. troops in Iraq on the day after Christmas and she watched his State of the Union address from the first lady's box on Tuesday night. She was active on social media during the shutdown and had a heavy schedule in December with holiday receptions at the White House, visits to troops in the Washington D.C. area, a visit to the National Children's Hospital, and helping Marines with their Toys for Tots campaign.

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Chronology of major terror attacks on security forces in J&K since 1999

Chronological list of all major terror attacks on security forces in Jammu and Kashmir in the last two decades:

* 26 August 2017 -- Three Jaish terrorists storm District Police Lines Pulwama, killing eight security force personnel, before the assailants were shot dead. * 29 November 2016 -- Three terrorists storm Army artillery camp at Nagrota in Jammu, killing seven soldiers, before the assailants were eliminated. * 18 September 2016 -- Four Pakistani terrorists storm an

Army camp at Uri in Baramulla district, killing 18 soldiers, most of them were in sleep. The assailants were also killed. The incident led to reprisal surgical strikes inside the Pakistan occupied Kashmir by Indian Army. * 25 June 2016 -- Terrorists open indiscriminate firing on a CRPF bus, killing eight jawans at Pampore on Srinagar-Jammu National Highway. * 3 June 2016 -- Terrorists target a CRPF bus at Pampore, killing two personnel before taking refuge in a government building. Two-day

encounter ends with killing of three soldiers including two officers and the two assailants. One civilian was also killed.

* 5 December 2014 -- Six heavily-armed terrorists storm an Army camp at Mohra in Uri. Ten soldiers were killed in the gun battle with the intruders, who were all shot dead. * 24 June 2013 -- Terrorists ambush a bus carrying unarmed Army personnel at Hyderpora in Srinagar. Eight soldiers were killed in the attack.

* 19 July 2008 -- Ten soldiers

were killed when terrorists triggered an IED planted by the roadside at Narbal on Srinagar-Baramulla highway on the outskirts of the city. * 2 November 2005 -- A suicide bomber blew up his car at Nowgam, near the private residence of then Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, killing three cops and six civilians. * 20 July 2005 -- A suicide car bomber blew his vehicle by ramming it into a vehicle of security forces. Three security force personnel and two civilians were killed. * 24

June 2005 -- Nine army soldiers were killed in a car bomb triggered by terrorists on the outskirts of Srinagar.

* 4 August 2004 -- Nine CRPF jawans were killed in a terrorist attack on their camp at Rajbagh in Srinagar. One terrorist was also killed in retaliatory action. * 8 April 2004 -- 11 persons were killed in a grenade attack by terrorists on a PDP rally at Uri in Baramulla district. The PDP was demanding opening of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Road.

From Divorce to Blackface: A Short History of Political Taboos

although voters, it should be added, have proved surprisingly forgiving toward their favorite representatives. More than a few over the decades have even won reelection from prison.

But if some serious misdeeds can be counted on to inflict serious damage, the significance we've placed on others has varied widely. Taboos on divorce and homosexuality in the 1950s gave way by the 1980s to moral policing over drug use, infidelity and draft-dodging, and today-as the political turmoil in Virginia and elsewhere is showing-a new set of inviolable behaviors is emerging, from sexual harassment to wearing blackface years ago to other forms of racial

offense. And the speed with which the offenses have become sacrosanct suggests that they're sure to generate many more scandals in the months and years ahead. To see how quickly political morality can change, recall that within the lifetimes of many living Americans, great shame attached simply to getting divorced. Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956, was the first major-party nominee to have been divorced-a fact that caused muttering and disapproval and probably hurt his already-low chances against Dwight D. Eisenhower. A few years later, when New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller divorced his wife for

a younger woman, Republicans denied him his party's nod in 1964-though his liberalism on civil rights probably hurt him more. If divorce carried a whiff of disrepute, being openly gay in politics was unheard of. There surely were a handful (or more) of gay officeholders, but no one dared test the taboo until the 1980s, so there's no way to know. Occasionally, however, high-level appointed officials were publicly outed under embarrassing circumstances, like State Department official Sumner Welles, who in 1940 was caught propositioning a Pullman car porter, or Lyndon B. Johnson's aide Walter Jenkins-arrested in 1964 in a YMCA men's room.

40 CRPF jawans killed in worst terror attack in Kashmir

The IED blast reduced the bus to a mangled heap of iron and body parts could be seen strewn around the area, the agency reported. "There were 70 vehicles in the convoy and one of the vehicles came under attack. The convoy was on its way from Jammu to Srinagar," said CRPF (Operations) Inspector General Zulfiqar Hassan adding that the Jammu and Kashmir police have taken over the investigation into the terror attack. "There were about 2500 personnel in the convoy," news agency media quoted CRPF Director General RR Bhatnagar as saying on Pulwama attack.

Militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad claimed responsibility for the blast and said it was a fidayeen attack carried out by a local youth. Police identified the terrorist as Adil Ahmad from Kakapora in

Pulwama. He joined the Jaish-Mohammed in 2018, media ?quoted officials as saying. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condemned the terror attack on the CRPF convoy. "Attack on CRPF personnel in Pulwama is despicable. I strongly condemn this dastardly attack. Sacrifices of our brave security personnel shall not go in vain. The entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with the families of the brave martyrs. May the injured recover quickly," PM Modi was quoted as saying by media reports. PM Modi spoke to Home Minister Rajnath Singh and other top officials regarding the situation in the wake of the attack in Pulwama, the agency said. Singh, who spoke to Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satyapal Malik and CRPF's Bhatnagar over Pulwama attack, will be visiting Srinagar on Friday.

Ilhan Omar apologizes after Pelosi denounces tweet as anti-Semitic

Democrats moved quickly after the freshman lawmaker suggested support for Israel stemmed from campaign donations.

Rep. Ilhan Omar apologized for anti-Semitic comments Monday after coming under pressure from Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other top Democrats.

The Minnesota Democrat sparked a firestorm Sunday night when she implied lawmakers' support for Israel is driven by campaign donations from pro-Israel groups.

"My intention is never to offend my constituents or Jewish Americans as a whole," Omar said in a statement Monday afternoon. "We have to always be willing to step back and think through criticism, just as I expect people to hear me when others attack me for my identity.

This is why I unequivocally apologize."

Omar's statement came after Pelosi and her top lieutenants sharply condemned the freshman lawmaker's comments and called on her to immediately apologize in what was an extraordinary rebuke of a colleague within their party.

"Congresswoman Omar's use of anti-Semitic tropes and prejudicial accusations about Israel's supporters is deeply offensive," said Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn and other party leaders in a statement. "We condemn these remarks and we call upon Congresswoman Omar to immediately apologize for these hurtful comments."

This is the second time in recent weeks Omar has had to walk

back controversial comments related to Jews and Israel that were condemned by lawmakers within both parties as offensive and anti-Semitic. Democratic leaders faced growing pressure to weigh in after the freshman Democrat suggested in a tweet Sunday night that Republican support for Israel is fueled by campaign donations from pro-Israel groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Pelosi said in a tweet that Monday that she had talked with Omar and the two of them "agreed that we must use this moment to move forward as we reject anti-Semitism in all forms."

Democratic leaders also added in their statement that "legitimate criticism of Israel's policies is protected by the

From a prized jewel to a fallen star The collapse of Reliance Communications

assets to elder brother Mukesh's Reliance Jio for an estimated Rs 23,000 crore, he told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that the deal has fallen through despite its best efforts. The market was shifting from 2G voice, and then to data and internet-heavy 3G and 4G, requiring heavy investments in telecom equipment and also in spectrum purchases. In between all this, Anil also had to fight off the so-called GSM lobby that comprised the combined might of Airtel, Vodafone and Idea Cellular. The pressures of a high-pitched battle and aggressive investments started showing on the company, which eventually spun off into a debt pile-up from which he could never

manage to recover. Failed deals were surely a part of the saga, which included the collapsed Rs 50,000-crore telecom infra deal with GTL Infra in 2010. Undeterred at that time, Anil continued to make investments in 3G, under-sea cable and network expansion. Anil Ambani has money for Rafale, not for us: Ericsson Pressing on its move for contempt proceedings against Anil Ambani for Reliance Communication's default in making payment of Rs 550 crore, Swedish telecom company Ericsson rejected the industrialist's plea of fund crunch as an excuse claiming that his group had made enough profit to invest in the Rafale deal.

The Afghan Government Is Missing From Afghanistan's Peace Process



(Agencies)- Can a peace process work if it excludes the government of the country in conflict? We may be finding out.

At present, there are two distinct efforts under way to bring peace in Afghanistan: In one, Zalmay Khalilzad, the State Department's special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation, has held several discussions with Taliban leaders. In the other, a meeting in Moscow this month brought together influential Afghans, including former President Hamid Karzai, and Taliban leaders. Conspicuously missing from both? The Afghan government.

The absence of President Ashraf Ghani's democratically elected, internationally recognized administration in a process that could decide the future of his country raises questions about who is deciding what about Afghanistan's fate; whether the United States' policy of maintaining troops in Afghanistan until the conditions are right for withdrawal can outlive the wishes of President Donald Trump, who wants to pull out; and whether the Taliban can be trusted to keep any promises it makes.

(Patrick Shanahan, the acting defense secretary, was in Afghanistan on Monday on a surprise visit and met

with Ghani. He denied he had orders to "step down our forces in Afghanistan.") For now, these peace negotiations' prospects of success are far from clear: American forces are still carrying out targeted strikes and aerial bombardment of Taliban positions; key regional players (notably Pakistan) will have a role to play in any final settlement; and while the Taliban, in an

effort to secure the withdrawal of American troops, has reportedly pledged to ensure that Afghanistan will not be a base for international terrorist groups, how the United States will enforce that agreement is an open question. Still, efforts to resolve similar conflicts typically involve both the government and the main rebel group—even if, at first, the two sides are talking

through an intermediary. That is not happening in this case. Kabul's absence in this process is remarkable. It would be akin to George Mitchell negotiating directly with Irish republicans while cutting the British government out of the process that resulted in peace in Northern Ireland. And whatever its final result, Ghani is worried that the U.S.-led effort,

Two sets of negotiations with the Taliban are under way in Afghanistan. Neither includes the country's democratically elected, internationally recognized administration.

especially, is being rushed; that Washington is cutting him out; and that the result will be a premature withdrawal of American troops. There is good reason for his concern. The Taliban might be making assurances to Khalilzad and to its interlocutors in Moscow, but it is unclear whether those guarantees are acceptable to the Afghan government. "We sense a lot of anxiety in the [presidential] palace," Borhan Osman, an Afghanistan-based senior analyst for the International Crisis Group, a think tank, said in an email.

President Trump told CBS this month that he wanted "to bring our great troops home" after more than 18 years of fighting, but in both Kabul and Washington, there is concern that a precipitous withdrawal will send Afghanistan into a tailspin. The president's

State of the Union speech last week in which he left open the possibility that a small portion of the 11,000 American soldiers currently in Afghanistan would remain there to focus on counterterrorism—should assuage that concern somewhat, but it won't do much for Ghani's feeling of being cut out. In his speech, Trump specifically named the Taliban as a group the United States was talking with, while referring to Washington's other interlocutors, presumably including the government, as "a number of Afghan groups." (Roya Rahmani, the Afghan envoy to the United States, said at an event at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington last week that Kabul wasn't interpreting the speech as official U.S. policy, but as a platform for Trump to discuss his plans.

Would send people to Haj for free if country didn't have so many debts: PM Khan

(Insider Bureau)- Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday called out those who criticised the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf-led government for withdrawing the subsidy on Haj for this year. Addressing a ceremony after inaugurating the Railway Live Tracking System and the Thal Express service in Islamabad, the premier - apparently referring to opposition parties - said "these people" ask why the government did not provide a Haj subsidy or make performing the Islamic ritual more affordable. "If you hadn't left the country in this condition [and] if we didn't have so many debts, then we would certainly send pilgrims [to Haj] for free," Khan said, addressing his critics from the previous governments. His statement comes on the back

of a cabinet-approved 63 per cent increase in the cost of Haj which was met with backlash from opposition lawmakers. On January 31, the federal cabinet had announced the Haj Policy 2019 under which the cost of performing the ritual under the government scheme has been fixed at Rs456,426 (with qurbani), against last year's expense of Rs280,000 per person. Every individual would now have to pay an additional Rs176,426. Following this, opposition parties in the Senate had rejected the increase in Haj costs. Prime Minister Khan today said the government would have fully helped people "who saved money all their lives to go for the pilgrimage" but was constrained in its support due to soaring debts.

He maintained that, on one hand, the government is taking loans to

repay the instalments of loans that previous governments had taken and on the other hand, members of the same past administrations were criticising the withdrawal of the Haj subsidy. The premier suggested that if the government was to spend money on subsidies, it could provide the same to cancer and hepatitis patients, or out-of-school children, instead of pilgrims. "When a man is in debt he thinks about what he can spend his money on," he analogised. The prime minister once again attributed the country's economic troubles to corruption, saying in the past people had no fear of being corrupt. "No one had any fear in the past ten years because after NRO (National Reconciliation Ordinance)-one and NRO-two, everyone's fear went away," he said, adding that people

did not think they would be caught in Pakistan. He noted that the country's debt had gone up from Rs6,000 billion to Rs30,000bn over the past ten years. He said the country was going through difficult times while paying Rs6bn in daily interest on the debt that previous governments had accumulated. The premier also asked Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid to look into the alleged corruption and theft that had taken place in the railways and refer the cases to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). He said the government was looking into the levels of corruption that had taken place in every area and explained that it was important to share this information with NAB "so that people become fearful and scared of committing corruption".

Dallas banking executive paid \$110,000 to hunt down rare mountain goat in Pakistan

(Insider Bureau)- A Dallas-area mortgage banking executive paid \$110,000 to kill a rare mountain goat in Pakistan as part of a conservation program used to reduce poaching of the once-endangered animals.

A YouTube video shows Bryan Harlan kneeling behind the dead screw-horn goat, with a backdrop of the snow-capped mountains of the northern Himalayan region of Gilgit-Baltistan.

"It is an honor and privilege to be back in Pakistan," said Harlan, according to a Pakistani TV station. "This is the third time I am in Pakistan. I have hunted almost all animals here.

"I saved the markhors for the last."

Hunting wild Astore markhors is illegal in Pakistan but the government allows trophy hunting of the animals for a fee. The government grants a permit to kill one markhor.

Most of the money - 80 percent - is given to the local community and the remainder goes to the Pakistani wildlife agencies, authorities say.

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Harlan could not immediately be reached for comment Tuesday. Harlan is a founding partner of Plano-based Benchmark Mortgage.

He earned an MBA in finance from Dallas Baptist University in 2004, according to LinkedIn. He graduated from Texas Christian

University in 1997 with a degree in finance and psychology.

In the past month, Harlan and two other Americans paid to kill three markhor goats in northern Pakistan. The kills prompted anger on social media, but Pakistani officials and conservation groups say the hunts have saved the species from possible extinction, The Washington Post reported.

Although local hunting of the animals is banned in Pakistan, foreign hunters can shoot 12 male goats each season. That has allowed hunters to bring the horns into the country.

In 2011, there were only 2,500 markhors left. The goats are native to the Himalayas in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. Their numbers have dwindled because of deforestation, military actions, poaching for food and hunters seeking their horns,



which can grow up to 5 feet long. Efforts to save them led to the designation of five sanctuaries in India, and their numbers increased by 2015, The Post reported. The U.S. now classifies the markhor as threatened instead of endangered. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature now classifies the mountain goat as "near-threatened."

The conservation group Green Global Travel said the markhor's progress is "one of the world's little-known conversation success stories."

Tabarak Ullah, a Pakistani hunter who guided Harlan and other Americans, told The Post that the hunts promote conservation and the money is used for improving local health and education. The hunts are also good for tourism, he said.

"This is not just about hunting," Ullah said. "The number of animals is increasing, and these foreign hunters are millionaires who go back and tell the world that Pakistan is safe."

In the YouTube video, Harlan calls Pakistan a beautiful country and says more people should visit.

"You're missing out," he said.

Bangladesh sets sights on recruitment brokers to curb abuse, trafficking

(Agencies)- Bangladesh is planning to sideline unscrupulous recruitment brokers who dupe or exploit workers they send abroad by compiling a list of certified agents as record numbers of its citizens spend large sums of money to secure jobs overseas. The scheme could lower the cost of going abroad for work - which can cost thousands of dollars in fees - and curb the abuse and trafficking of Bangladeshi migrant workers, said the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (EWOE). More than 7.5 million Bangladeshis live outside the country, and at least 1 million secured jobs abroad in 2017 - the highest number ever recorded - according to official data.

"The plan is to ask the recruiting agencies to provide us with the details of the brokers who are unofficially working for them," said Raunaq Jahan, a senior civil servant with the EWOE.

"After that we will spread these names and make people aware of the certified brokers," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "This move can

prevent human trafficking."

The vast majority of Bangladesh's migrants depend on brokers to find work overseas, and about half experience some form of fraud or harassment, according to the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) - a migrant rights organisation.

About 3,800 Bangladeshis died while working abroad last year - the highest annual toll since 2005 - raising concerns among campaigners about the poor treatment of many migrant workers.

The government proposal was hailed by migrant rights groups who said it would help would-be migrants in rural areas to avoid being exploited, and cheated workers to pursue justice in court.

Bangladesh has more than 1,200 licensed recruitment agencies but most are located in cities and out-of-reach of a huge chunk of the population, said Shakirul Islam, chairman of Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP), a migrants rights organisation.

"That's why the job seekers are

dependent on the middlemen to reach these agencies and go abroad," he said.

"At the same time, the agencies, which lack the capacity, also depend upon the informal networks," Islam added.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

Bangladesh is one of the most expensive nations in the world for those seeking to migrate, with some migrant workers paying fees of up to \$8,500 to go abroad, the United Nations says.

Yet much of this spending is not documented, making it tough for workers who return home after being swindled to take exploitative brokers to court, said Marina Sultana of the RMMRU.

"The only document likely to exist is the government fee receipt," the director said. "No-one is taking responsibility for the big amount of money in the middle ... so there is no real way to prove as to where all the money goes at the moment."

Mohammad Parvez, a broker who works for three recruitment agencies on a part-time basis, said providing middlemen with official documents could help cut



out cheating and exploitation. "If they make us official and give us a monthly salary that will be good for everyone," he said. "The amount of cheating will decrease because everyone will be answerable."

However the secretary general of the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies said regulating recruitment middlemen would not improve the system or result in lower fees.

"If you want to reduce the migration fee, you can't add more stakeholders to the system," said Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman. "Who is going to pay the brokers when they become

official?"

Yet such a scheme could help countless migrants from facing the same fate as Mohammad Mahbub, a plumber from eastern Bangladesh who has twice been conned by brokers in recent years into paying for false work permits and taking on a huge debt.

A few months ago, the broker who duped Mahbub phoned him and asked if he wanted to cough up more cash to move to Malaysia.

"I said no," Mahbub said. "I had enough. I have no money left. I was fooled twice and I knew he wasn't saying the truth."

US-China problems run deeper than any trade deal can fix

(Agencies)- Andrew Coflan works for Eurasia Group's Asia team, focusing primarily on China's domestic economy and financial system. The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own. After months of posturing and rising tensions, US and Chinese trade negotiators are finally at the table attempting to deescalate the trade war.

President Donald Trump's overwhelming concern is with the bilateral trade deficit, which has led China to offer significant purchases of US liquid natural gas and agricultural products. Some in the administration have far greater ambitions for these negotiations, including increased market access, better intellectual property protections for foreign firms operating in China, and reductions in state subsidies for Chinese firms.

On Thursday, Trump tweeted, "China's representatives and I are trying to do a complete deal, leaving NOTHING unresolved on the table. All of the many problems are being discussed and will be hopefully resolved."

The stakes are high. Trump has vowed to increase tariffs from 10% to 25% on March 1 if a deal isn't done, harming US businesses and introducing significant volatility into markets.

How likely is it that an agreement in the next month will resolve those deeper tensions? Not very.

A deal on the tough issues would take years to implement, even assuming diligent efforts by Chinese officials, and would require comprehensive benchmarks and enforcement mechanisms. As a result, the most likely outcome of a meeting between Trump and Xi would be a framework agreement that lays out a comprehensive timeline to address the long-standing structural issues, and pairs Chinese purchases with a US pledge not to escalate tariffs.

To be sure, the likely best-case scenario, a comprehensive framework agreement, would go a significant way toward reducing bilateral tensions between the two countries. It would have an immediate benefit for American farmers, whose crops have been

left unpurchased by traditional Chinese buyers. It would also improve the political environment for US firms operating in China. But even the most optimistic scenario for trade negotiations will not be able to address deeper issues that threaten to challenge bilateral relations for years to come.

First is the increasing overlap between technology and national security. Case in point is the tensions over Huawei, one of China's largest telecommunications companies and a global leader in advanced 5G technologies. It is one of the few companies in the world able to provide the equipment necessary to upgrade national telecommunications backbones. But the United States has long pushed back against allies that allow the use of Huawei equipment in their networks, citing concerns that China may be able to use the technology for intelligence gathering. This campaign against Huawei took on a new dimension when the company's CFO, Meng Wanzhou, was arrested in



Canada at the United States' request due to her role in violating Iran sanctions.

The United States has been increasingly willing to use a broad range of tools to protect what it sees as vital interests in next-generation technologies - semiconductors, artificial intelligence, genetic sciences and advanced materials, among others. In 2018, the United States strengthened its investment review body - the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States - which sharply reduced Chinese companies' ability to acquire US firms in key sectors. China, for its part, is not sitting still either. Despite the attention on industrial policy as a key irritant in US-China relations,

Beijing continues to deploy its resources through "Made in China 2025" to subsidize the development of advanced semiconductors, aerospace technologies and other advanced industries, chipping away at American and European dominance. It has undertaken a concerted policy of important substitution, developing domestic companies that manufacture key industrial inputs, such as semiconductors as advanced machinery to reduce reliance on foreign firms. And it has reacted aggressively to the arrest of Huawei's CFO, detaining two Canadian citizens, including a former high-ranking diplomat, on weak legal grounds.

Why Kamala Harris is glad people are asking if she's black enough

The candidate is looking to head off a problem that dogged Barack Obama.

(Agencies)- Kamala Harris keeps getting asked if she's black enough.

And the California Democrat - whose presidential campaign is closely monitoring questions around her candidacy shared among African Americans and young people - has been more than happy to answer.

Harris' decision to sit for extended radio interviews with black hosts at the outset of her run is part of a broader strategy for the half-Jamaican, half-Indian former prosecutor. It's designed to give her the chance to directly confront the uncomfortable and offensive internet memes about her personal life before they can metastasize among voters, three advisers to Harris said.

In recent days, Harris has parried skepticism over everything from claims to her black heritage to her decision to marry a white man - bluntly putting down markers on nuanced topics to help inoculate her from false critiques with answers that also illuminate how she views her own identity.

"Nothing that she is saying is newly found or newly acquired," said Danny

J. Bakewell, Sr., executive publisher of the Los Angeles Sentinel, the oldest and largest black-owned newspaper on the West Coast, who has known Harris for years. But Bakewell argued she's been smart - "not to mention honest" - to take the difficult questions early on rather than ignoring the memes.

"That fuels fire. They can make something out of that," he added of her critics. "When you hit them square in the eye, and say, 'Yep, this is what it is' ... That cannot go wrong."

A Harris strategist told POLITICO that the campaign has been watching the early impressions of her play out online - and looking for the best places where she could address and rebut them.

"We know the memes that are out there," the aide said. Using one of the senator's catch-phrases to explain the choice of venues, the adviser added: "She's meeting people where they are."

Harris sat for a wide-ranging chat with "The Breakfast Club" that aired Monday. The radio show's hosts, DJ Envy and Charlamagne Tha God, are both black. She answered doubts about her African-

American heritage because her father emigrated from Jamaica and her mother came from India - and because Harris spent time in Canada as a student.

Harris recounted how she was born in Oakland and raised in California, aside from the time she went to high school in Montreal. She compared the treatment to persistent questions asked of Barack Obama and his surrogates - including Harris herself - while he was a candidate in 2007 and 2008, and stretching into his presidency.

"Look, this is the same thing they did to Barack. This is not new to us and so I think that we know what they are trying to do," Harris said. "They are trying to do what has been happening over the last two years, which is powerful voices trying to sow hate and division among us, and so we need to recognize when we're being played."

The hosts asked how she responds to questions about the "legitimacy of your blackness."

"I think they don't understand who black people are," Harris responded. "Because if you do, if you walked on Hampton's

campus, or Howard's campus, or Morehouse or Spelman or Fisk, you would have a much better appreciation for the diaspora, for the diversity, for the beauty in the diversity of who we are as black people," she said, referring to historically black universities.

"I'm not going to spend my time trying to educate people about who black people are," Harris concluded, contending she was focused on her tax-credit bill. "We know that we will lift 60 percent of black households with this initiative."

Still, she later sought to put the race question to rest.

"I am black and I am proud of it," she said bluntly. "I was born black and I'll die black and I am proud of it. And I am not gonna make any excuses for it, for anybody, because they don't understand." The source of the memes isn't always clear, though Harris supporters have generally attributed much of the mysterious content that's not derived or spread by Russian bots to Trump backers or supporters aligned with other Democrats.

Superstar freshman Dems replace Pelosi as GOP targets

The strategy risks backlash for a party struggling to attract support from women and people of color.

(Agencies)- The Republican Party has a new trio of Democratic villains: Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The House GOP midterm strategy largely centered on trying to tie every Democrat to now-Speaker Nancy Pelosi - and it failed spectacularly. So now GOP leaders and the National Republican Congressional Committee are turning to the superstars of the House Democrats' freshman class as their newest targets.

It's a move born, in part, out of desperation. House Democrats already have their ultimate nemesis in President Donald Trump, who's proven to be one of the best political and fundraising foils in U.S. history. House Republicans, who now find themselves in the minority after eight years in power, badly need something else to rally around. Thus the focus on the three high-profile Democratic lawmakers, who have gotten more national media attention in the past three months than many members get in their whole careers.

The NRCC has sent out thousands of emails trying to tie vulnerable Democrats to Ocasio-Cortez, Tlaib and Omar. And the committee's website makes it appear as if these backbench members are running the House. While the NRCC still regularly bashes Pelosi, GOP lawmakers and aides privately acknowledge that the freshman trio are their main focus now.

The GOP strategy risks a backlash - a party that has problems with women and minorities continues to focus its attacks on women of color - even as the freshmen say they're not surprised by it.

Tlaib told POLITICO she's become a lightning rod for conservatives because her profile isn't one that has historically been seen in the halls of Congress.

"The fact that somebody like myself, who's a woman of color, is now an equal to many of them - people are very fearful of that," said the Michigan Democrat.

But the progressive firebrands are causing headaches for Pelosi and other Democratic leaders with a series of controversial

remarks and actions that Republicans hope will help them rebound from the November disaster.

On Monday, Omar apologized after Pelosi and a dozen Democrats slammed her for anti-Semitic remarks she tweeted the previous evening. Omar - the first Somali-American elected to Congress - suggested GOP support for Israel is driven by campaign donations from a prominent pro-Israel group, a remark that played into ugly stereotypes about Jewish donors.

"My intention is never to offend my constituents or Jewish Americans as a whole," the Minnesota Democrat said in a statement. "We have to always be willing to step back and think through criticism, just as I expect people to hear me when others attack me for my identity. This is why I unequivocally apologize."

The firestorm, coming after Omar recently apologized for a 2012 tweet criticizing Israel, gave Republicans what they consider another piece of useful ammo as they try to paint the broader



House Democratic Caucus as too radical for everyday Americans.

NRCC officials spent the day blasting out emails attacking Omar, saying Pelosi and Democratic leaders had "put an anti-Semite" on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "Ilhan Omar is the anti-Semite we thought she was," read another post on the NRCC website.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) - who himself deleted a Twitter post last fall that Democrats said was anti-Semitic for targeting billionaire George Soros - suggested Republicans weren't ready to let the issue go since Democrats didn't punish Omar. "In the face of

that abdication of leadership, Republicans will take action this week to ensure the House speaks out against this hatred and stands with Israel and the Jewish people," McCarthy said in a statement. The Omar controversy came as Democrats are locked in a bitter battle with Trump over his push for a border wall, with members eager to train their fire on the president. Instead, House Democrats spent Monday denouncing one of their own colleagues, which dominated the media coverage and sucked up much of the oxygen on Capitol Hill. It's the latest misstep by the freshman trio, who have become celebrities on the left because of their historic election victories and their skilled use of social media.

What Trump Gets Right-and Wrong-About Defeating ISIS

The president's decision to pull out of Syria so abruptly was a mistake. Here's how to manage the scary aftermath.

(Agencies)- he two of us spent years working on terrorism at the highest levels of government, under presidents of both parties. We've seen everything from al Qaeda's surge to global prominence in the wake of 9/11 to terrorists' increasingly sophisticated use of the Internet to recruit and radicalize followers-Chris as a military intelligence officer and then Defense Department civilian, Joshua as a Justice Department official and then National Security Council lawyer, and both as senior directors for counterterrorism at the National Security Council.

Never before have we been more (cautiously) optimistic about the battle against the latest and most dangerous terrorist group, the Islamic State or ISIS. Forged in the

ashes of post-war Iraq and revolutionary Syria, ISIS quickly swept across vast swathes of the Middle East, establishing a so-called caliphate that took enormous amounts of U.S. military power and diplomatic ingenuity to disrupt and degrade. At the height of its power, ISIS boasted some 100,000 fighters in arms and controlled a territory of 41,000 square miles in Iraq and Syria, while developing a dangerous terrorist network that could strike in the heart of Europe and beyond.

So on December 19, 2018, when President Trump declared victory against ISIS and set in motion an abrupt withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria, and when he subsequently claimed in his 2019 State of the Union

address that virtually all ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq had been liberated, in a sense he wasn't entirely wrong. Even though ISIS remains lethal in Syria, and even though the job there is still unfinished in crucial ways, the group has been substantially degraded and no longer boasts the vast safe haven it once enjoyed. Moreover, it's simply too late to continue to quarrel with the president's unfortunate approach to withdrawal; America's attention must turn to devising a long-term counterterrorism strategy for ISIS-with or, as it increasingly seems, without a robust U.S. presence on the ground in Syria. Beyond terrorism, there's the broader future of the region to consider. The tectonic plates seem to be shifting in the Middle East, and some fear



the U.S. exit from Syria marks the beginning of a post-American era in the Middle East. An emergent Arab bloc, potentially spearheaded by Saudi Arabia despite concerns over its commitment to human rights, is stepping into a vacuum left by America's apparent disengagement. Russia and Iran are asserting themselves. Israel is, at times, taking matters into its own hands. The void left by a retreating United States will have vast repercussions for the fight

against terrorism, and not all of them can be foreseen. ISIS, moreover, may be largely beaten, but it's not gone-and many of the conditions that led to its rise remain, from an absence of political legitimacy to a failure of governance. The group's continuing campaign of violence means that the United States must plan for the nearby presence of U.S. Special Operations Forces to address any post-caliphate ISIS resurgence.

The problem isn't Meghan Markle It's the British monarchy

(Agencies)- Did you read the story about Meghan Markle demanding synthetic air freshener in a 14th century royal chapel? Or the one about her making Kate Middleton cry? Maybe you saw the tabloid report that she gave out weed at her first wedding or even enjoyed the unsourced conspiracy theories on social media that claim she's the latest celebrity to fake a pregnancy?

The barrage of unproven criticism and, in the case of that last claim, outright slander aimed at the newest member of the British royal family has been appalling. Her supporters have finally begun to call it out: Five of Meghan's friends took the unusual step of speaking anonymously to People magazine this week about their admiration for the Meghan they know, who "personifies elegance, grace, philanthropy." And, in an excellent Washington Post article this week, the author Yomi Adegoke breaks down the ways structural racism lies behind many of the attacks on the first biracial woman to marry into the House of Windsor.

As Britain awaits the birth of Meghan's first child with Prince Harry, it seems clear that the reality of a royal child with a black grandmother has brought to the fore prejudices that were more generally veiled around the announcement of her marriage. But while racism clearly plays a strong role in the demonization of Meghan by parts of the British press, there's more going on here. Meghan has married Prince Harry because she loves him -- anyone who watched them listen to "Stand By Me" at that beautiful wedding can see that -- but that means marrying a man whose life and political responsibilities are defined from birth. It means joining a world where having a personality is a liability, expressing a political opinion in public is forbidden and the maintenance of public loyalty depends on a mythos of likeability and mystical aloofness.

The problem isn't Meghan Markle. It's that royalty is an unsustainable institution in the 21st century.

American fans, some of them devotees since her "Suits" days, have a very different relationship with Meghan than even her most supportive British fans. By definition: It's a different legal relationship. Our taxes pay for her life. When we meet her, we're obliged to curtsy to her. And her brother-in-law will presumably become our king, with the theoretical power to veto our laws. After all, we aren't citizens in this country; we're subjects. Even before Meghan, American interest in the royals has always been frenetic. It can seem amazing to Brits that Americans, who proudly celebrate their republican founding values, contribute in such an outsized fashion to the international fandom that sustains our monarchy.

Fixation on Meghan's body and its reproductive functions -- horrific as it is, and very clearly amplified by misogynoir (misogyny directed at black women) -- stems in part from the fact that her child could become our king. From Anne Boleyn to

Mary of Modena, British subjects have fantasized about faked pregnancies and surrogate children smuggled in bedpans.

Royal women no longer have to give birth in public -- the tradition of the home secretary attending the birth was only abolished in 1948 -- but each time Catherine Middleton produces a child, it's expected to primp up her hair and face and parade for photographers in heels. If Meghan scraps this barbaric tradition, the world should applaud her.

The real problem is that much of this scrutiny is reasonable -- but only within the tortured logic of a royal family's very existence. Consider a Telegraph article, ridiculed in the United States but popular in Britain, that suggested Meghan should wear more British designers. In normal circumstances, only a monster would seek to tell a young woman which designers she should and shouldn't wear.

But Meghan isn't a celebrity spending only her own money



any more; she is supported by the Sovereign Grant, a system built on British tax money, and by the Duchy of Cornwall. (Though it's to her credit that she's one of very few royal wives in recent years to have earned proper money herself.) Of course, Meghan should be championing the fashion industry of the nation that sustains her new role. As for that story about her giving out marijuana in Jamaica: There is plenty of hypocrisy around race and weed, but if the head of state's granddaughter-in-law may have broken the law in a Commonwealth nation, it is a

constitutional issue. (Even when it's a bad law.)

At the heart of this problem is the fact that Meghan has a personality and a prior public footprint, neither of which royals should have. Traditionally, royal strategists have decreed that royals should cultivate as much distance as possible from the public. The constitutionalist Walter Bagehot wrote that "we must not let in daylight upon magic" -- that the British people can't have faith in the monarch as national unifier or neutral arbiter of politics if they don't revere her as something of an inhuman god.

Virginia, a Dignified Disaster

The scandals roiling America's most self-important state bear familiar echoes

(By our Staff Reporter)- At several moments this week, the unfolding fiasco in Virginia succeeded in being simultaneously the top news story in The New York Times, Washington Post, the cable networks and, come to think of it, POLITICO.

As a former state capital reporter in Richmond, I confess to a twinge of perverse pride in seeing my old haunts back in the spotlight, a quarter-century or more after I was there.

The circumstances--by last count four top state officials embroiled in controversy of a racial or sexual nature--are sickening. They are also, let's face it, mesmerizing, in a way that politics can be when the plot hurtles wildly between drama and farce and the politicians are stripped of their customary veneers of respectability.

Virginia is a state that for historical reasons has always imagined its political institutions and leaders as possessed of special virtue. Now, they are known for uncommon vice. With widespread demands for the resignations of both Gov. Ralph Northam, embroiled in controversy over a racist blackface photograph, and Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, an African-American politician facing on-the-record allegations from two women accusing him of violent sexual assault, Virginia state government is facing a comprehensive meltdown.

In part because the state bars governors from serving consecutive terms, and in part because Virginia politicians in recent decades have played a prominent role in national politics, Northam is the first governor out of the nine elected

since 1981 that I do not know personally. Fairfax was still in high school when I left Richmond. Time marches on.

But the cascade of headlines this week reminds me that it marches slowly, at least in the Old Dominion. There are echoes between this week's uproars involving Northam, Fairfax and Attorney General Mark Herring and uproars back in my day involving outside characters like Charles S. Robb, the former governor and U.S. senator who many once perceived as a future president, and L. Douglas Wilder, the nation's first elected black governor. The surface details are quite different (and, in the present case, much more disturbing); the torrent of accusations flying against a backdrop of sexual hypocrisy and tortured racial history is quite familiar.

The current spectacle in

Richmond, in fact, is the latest incarnation of one of the great themes of Virginia politics: the gap between myth and reality. That gap, of course, in some sense is a feature of politics in all places at all times. But the contradiction has special significance in Virginia, where the tension between heroic reputations and ignoble behavior often touches on race, and where many of the most important Founding Fathers wrote the charter documents of American liberty while invariably owning and sometimes sleeping with slaves.

Let's not take this too far. I can't with a straight face make more than the most glancing connection between Ralph Northam and Thomas Jefferson (who following independence served as Virginia's second governor, after Patrick Henry).

India to continue growing at fastest pace could be second-largest economy by 2030: PM

"Leading agencies such as IMF and World Bank project the same trend to continue in the coming years. In an uncertain global economic environment, India has shown tremendous resilience as an anchor of the world economy," Modi said addressing inaugural address of Petrotech 2019 here.

(Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi exuded confidence on Monday that India would continue to be the fastest-growing large economy, and could be the second-largest economy in the world by 2030.

"Leading agencies such as IMF and World Bank project the same trend to continue in the coming years. In an uncertain global economic environment, India has shown tremendous resilience as an anchor of the world economy," Modi said addressing inaugural address of Petrotech 2019 here.

Modi said, currently, India is fastest-growing large economy in the world... and it "recently became the sixth-largest economy in the world. According to a recent report, by 2030 India could be the second-largest world economy." As per a Standard Chartered report, India is likely to pip the United States to become the world's second-

largest economy by 2030. China will on the top spot surpassing US, which will be at the third place, the report said.

On the roller coaster movement of crude oil and pricing of petroleum, he said, "We need to move to responsible pricing which balances interests of both producers and consumers. We also need to move toward transparent and flexible market for both oil and gas, only then we can serve energy needs of humanity in optimal manner." He also said that India has made rapid strides in achieving COP21 targets and are on way to achieve those.

He said, "India has the fourth-largest refining capacity in the world. This will further grow up by about 200 million metric tonnes by 2030. Our national bio fuel policy has enacted last year... research on second and third generation bio fuel is being promoted. 12-second generation

bio refineries are being set up in 11 states." Talking about energy policy of India he said, "We have adopted an integrated approach in energy planning. During the last Petrotech Conference in 2016, I mentioned four pillars for India's future - energy access, efficiency, sustainability and security." He was of the view that energy justice is also key objective for him and a top priority for India.

"Toward this end, we have developed and implemented many policies. The results of these efforts are now evident. Electricity has reached all our rural areas. This year, we aim to achieve 100 per cent electrification of households in India through a targeted programme called Saubhagya. As we raise production, we also aim to reduce losses in transmission and distribution," he added.

He also mentioned that under



our UDAY scheme, the connections have been give to government is working towards over 64 million or 6.4 crore this objective. India's World Bank households." Petrotech 2019, ease of electricity ranking the 13th international oil and gas conference and exhibition, being improved from 111 in 2014 to 29 in 2018. Lauding energy organised under the aegis of the efficiency programmes, he said Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The three-day event, from the country under UJALA February 10 to 12, will scheme have resulted in an showcase the recent market annual savings of Rs 17,000 and investor friendly crore or nearly USD 2.5 billion. developments in India's oil and He also said, "Access to clean gas sector. Over 95 energy cooking fuel provide major Ministers from partner benefits, especially to women countries and 7,000 delegates and children from exposure to from around 70 countries are smoke pollution. LPG expected to be part the event.

Amazon changes business structure in India after new e-commerce rules: Report

(Agencies)- One of the biggest sellers on Amazon.com Inc's India website has returned after the online retail giant changed its business structures to comply with new federal e-commerce curbs that took effect last week, two sources told Reuters.

India's modified foreign direct investment rules that kicked in on February 1, prevent companies such as Amazon from selling products from vendors where they, or their group companies, have equity holdings.

Amazon was forced to remove hundreds of thousands of items sold by top vendors Cloudtail and Appario as it indirectly held 49 percent equity stakes in both firms.

But on Thursday Cloudtail had returned with more than 300,000 products listed on Amazon, after the US e-commerce firm cut its indirect holding to 24 percent,

one of the sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters. The stake was bought by the majority holders, Catamaran Ventures, the source said.

"We have no equity participation in any seller company on our marketplace," Amazon said in a statement, without sharing details of the changes in its indirect holding of Cloudtail.

Catamaran, an investment firm launched by Infosys founder NR Narayana Murthy, said it had made "required changes" to comply with the rules, but did not elaborate.

Amazon is working on a similar restructuring for the other big seller, Appario, a second source said. The sources declined to be named as they were not authorized to discuss the same with media.

The new rules were introduced after complaints from small Indian traders who said Amazon

and Walmart-owned online retailer Flipkart used their control over inventory from affiliated vendors to unfairly offer discounts.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), which has pushed for tougher scrutiny of e-commerce players, on Thursday alleged Amazon's latest move was a circumvention of the new rules.

The group would ask India's industries department to clarify that online retailers should not hold direct or indirect stakes in their vendors, CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal told Reuters.

The industries department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Amazon and Walmart Inc had unsuccessfully lobbied against the latest rules and pushed for a delay in their implementation. While product listings on



Amazon have been disrupted, working with its partners to Flipkart has been less impacted ensure they complied with new as it had no equity holdings in norms when they sold new its vendors. inventory on the platform, a Flipkart's sellers were exhausting person with direct knowledge of inventory from before the rules the matter said. Flipkart declined kicked in, and the company was to comment.

Valentine's Day 2019

Sara Ali Khan, Alia Bhatt's stunning looks show how to wear red the cool way

With Valentine's Day here, chances are you've thought at least once about what you're going to wear. Let Sara Ali Khan, Alia Bhatt and other chic stars offer style inspiration on how to add a pop of red to practically any V-Day outfit you choose.

Sara Ali Khan and Deepika Padukone have shown that there's something about the combination of a red dress and red shoes that just works. If we had to guess what colour most women plan to wear on February 14, we'd go with red for obvious reasons. But you don't need to dress in a head-to-toe red to embrace the Valentine's Day spirit. We also found Alia Bhatt, Shilpa Shetty and many more celebrities, who used red hues on their bags, heels, tops, and even lips to add panache and

amp up their looks. These celebrity ensembles prove red accessories are an easy add with a huge impact.

Below, we've outlined a handful of easy-to-re-create outfit formulas with a pop of red (or a lot of red) that have worked for some of the most stylish celebs in Bollywood. From red mini dresses and fancy skirt ensembles to simple tops and bags, these looks run the gamut, but they all have one thing in common: They'll look great on you. Inspired by Sara Ali Khan's red mini by fashion designer Nikhil Thampi that was paired with a pair of matching heels to Shilpa Shetty venturing into some unexpected colour play by teaming a metallic fringed skirt by designer Shweta Kapur with a red Zara top and Alia

Bhatt's giving her blue Prabal Gurung dress an eclectic-chic finish with a monogrammed red mini bag by designer label, Klick by RG Official. With each of these Valentine's Day-worthy ensembles, you'll be able to spend February 14 in style, no matter what your plans may be. So, save yourself the stress, and read on for eight fresh Valentine's Day outfit ideas that are celebrity-approved.

It might seem excessive to wear the same colour head-to-toe, especially when it's something as bold as red; but it's easier than you'd think. Sara Ali Khan, Deepika Padukone, Malaika Arora, Esha Gupta and Tamannaah Bhatia show how you can wear head-to-toe red like a boss lady:



Katy Perry's fashion line under fire

Perry and Global Brands Group issued the statement saying they did not have any intention to inflict any pain.

Singer Katy Perry was slammed on social media for designing shoes which resembled 'blackface' imagery.

The shoes in question were black 'Rue Face Slip On Loafers' and 'Ora Face Block Heel Sandals' that have cut-out faces, red lips, big blue eyes and a triangular nose on the top, **r e p o r t s** hollywoodreporter.com.Social

media users have compared the shoes to "blackface make-up". One user even cited that "ignorance is never a fashion statement".

Following the backlash, the shoes were pulled out from the stores. Perry and Global Brands Group issued the statement saying they did not have any intention to inflict any pain. "The Rue and The Ora were part of a collection that was released last summer in 9

different colorways (black, blue, gold, graphite, lead, nude, pink, red, silver) and envisioned as a nod to modern art and surrealism.

"I was saddened when it was brought to my attention that it was being compared to painful images reminiscent of blackface. Our intention was never to inflict any pain. We have immediately removed them from Katy Perry Collections," it read.



CHILDREN CHOOSE TECH OVER PARENTS

KIDS are spending twice as much time staring at their smartphones than talking to their own parents, a survey has revealed. Startling figures reveal the average child now spends almost an entire day (23 hours) a week looking at their device but less than two hours a day talking to family.

A UK-wide survey of 2,000 people unearthed the disturbing statistics. The survey was conducted by CensusWide on behalf of music streaming company ROXI and discovered more than half (54 per cent) of all parents are growing concerned about the amount of time their children pour into the phones, tablets and games consoles. Children are now spending an average of three hours eighteen minutes a day on personal devices and only one hour 43 minutes a day chatting with their guardians. Two-thirds of all parents say they wish they had more family time but two in five confessed to providing children with devices to keep them occupied.



Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer for England, warns that doctors are worried that the time children spend online is 'detrimental to their physical and mental health'. In her official advice to parents and carers, she says phones should be left 'outside the bedroom' at night and recommends 'screen-free meal times' so families interact 'face-to-face'. Dame Sally proposes the first-time limits for screentime, advising that kids should have a break every two hours. She stresses that parents themselves need to act responsibly on the Internet — and should not publish their children's photographs on social media.

Dame Sally also takes aim at the web giants, demanding that they fulfil a 'duty of care' towards children and stop making social media platforms addictive to young users.

Daily Mail

A new browser tool lets you know if your login details are leaked online or exposed to hackers

GOOGLE has launched a new tool that tells users when their login information has been exposed to hackers. Users of Google Chrome can download the extension, called 'Password Checkup', which monitors their various website logins. The site notifies you when you log in with a username and password that has been compromised and triggers a warning to update your password. The company can cross-check the logins against a database of more than four billion username and password entries.

Privacy protecting techniques were developed with the help of cryptography researchers at both Google and Stanford University.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai tweeted, 'Today, we're introducing two new updates that will help keep your data secure: Password Checkup, a Chrome extension that helps protect your accounts from third party data breaches, and a new feature called Cross Account Protection.' The second tool Cross

Privacy protecting techniques were developed with the help of cryptography researchers



WAYS TO CHOOSE A SECURE PASSWORD

Here are some important tips and tricks to keep in mind when creating a new password online.

DO

- Use a combination of numbers, symbols, uppercase and lowercase letters
- Ensure that the password is at least eight characters long
- Use abbreviated phrases for passwords
- Change your passwords regularly
- Log out of websites and devices after you have finished using them

DO NOT

- Choose a commonly used password like '123456', 'password', 'qwerty' or '11111'
- Use a solitary word.
- Use a derivative of your name, family member's name, pet's name, phone number, address or birthday
- Write your password down, share it or let anyone else use your login details
- Answer 'yes' when asked to save your password to a computer browser

Account Protection extends the Google ecosystem's account hijacking and breach notices to apps that utilise Google Sign In. To install, search the Password Checkup icon in your browser bar and download.

After that, Google claims that every time you sign into a site, Google will check your login credentials to see if they are still safe to use. The database is regularly updated and gets the information from sources such as password dumps, when a web site's security has been exposed and the contents of the website are dumped on the web. These contents are from hackers responsible for data breaches on sites like Yahoo or LinkedIn who sometimes post large databases of people's usernames and pass-

Is your password safe?

words online.

Because many people use the same passwords across sites, criminals could try to use the information to gain access to other accounts. Google says that its new browser extension has been built so that "no one, including Google, can learn your account details". They say users' passwords and user-

names will be "strongly hashed and encrypted" so the company will not be able to see them itself. Although some users were sceptical about the new extension: One wrote in a forum on Hexus, a technology site, 'yes please Google, have all of my passwords, thanks x'

Another said, 'Lol, I dont think so.' *Daily Mail*

New Launches

5-INCH SCREEN FOR JIOPHONE 3

JIO executive reportedly told a tech news website that the JioPhone 3 will be launched in June 2019. It is rumoured that JioPhone 3 will be an all-touchscreen affair, more powerful and be pricier. According to a report in GSMarena, the JioPhone 3 will come with a 5-inch screen. This will mark a radical change compared to the JioPhone and JioPhone 2 that have a physical keyboard, even in the JioPhone 2 looks like a BlackBerry smartphone. JioPhone 3 will also reportedly get more powerful hardware.



VIVO V15 PRO'S POP-UP CAMERA

THE upcoming V series phone from Vivo, the Vivo V15 Pro will launch in India on February 20. The teaser picture reveals that unlike the Vivo NEX, the Vivo V15 Pro will include the pop-up camera on the left side of the phone. The pop-up camera on the Vivo NEX was placed on the right. The teaser further reveals that the V15 Pro will include very minimal bezels and there will be just one front camera. The upcoming V series phone from Vivo has been subjected to several leaks and rumours in the last few days. The leaked pictures reveal that the V15 Pro will come with three cameras on the rear panel.

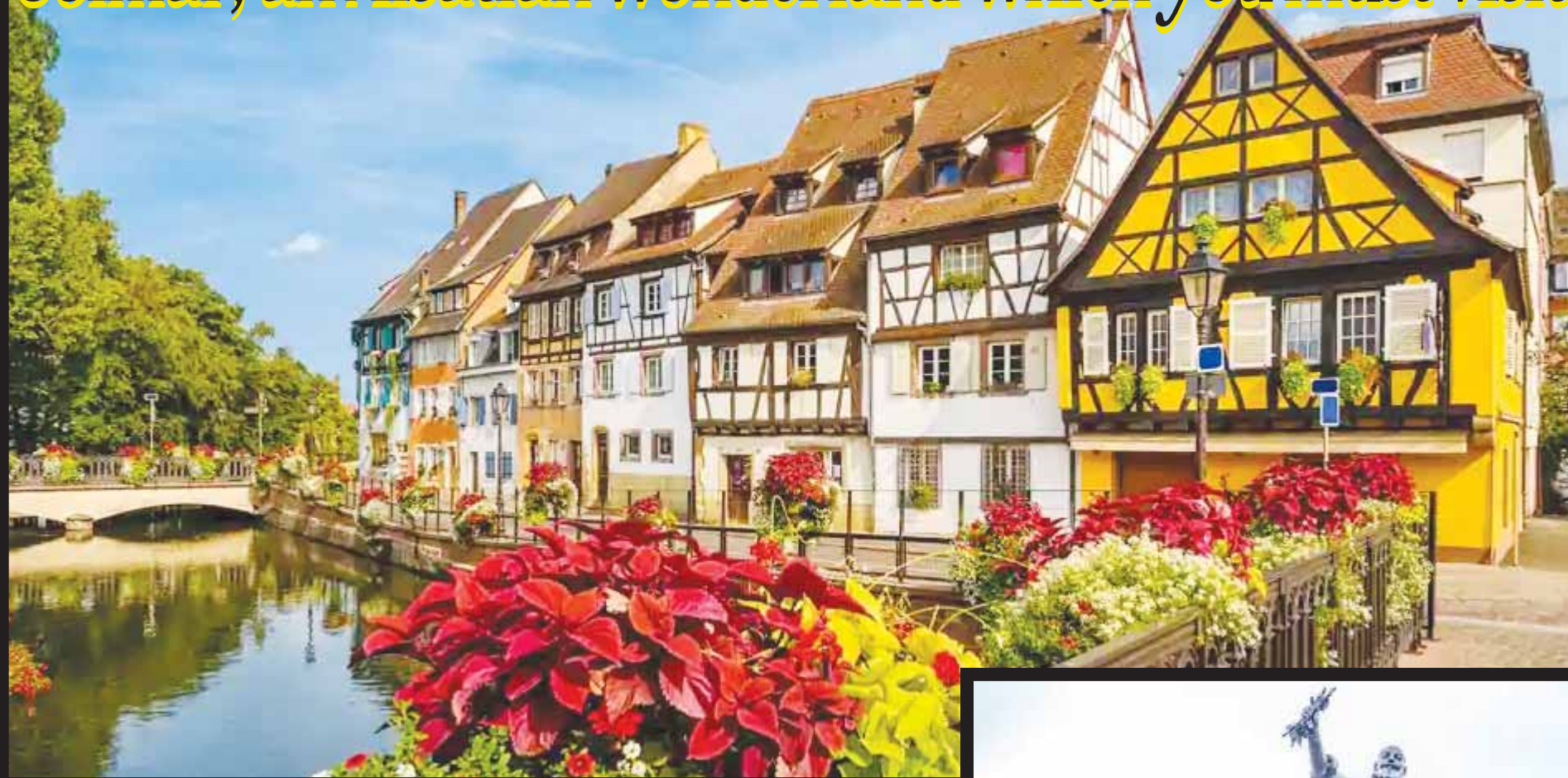


XIAOMI REDMI NOTE 7

RUMOURS suggest that the Xiaomi Redmi Note 7 will launch in India on February 12, but sources close to India Today Tech have revealed that it may not be the case and the launch may take some time. But the India launch of Redmi Note 7 may happen in the second week of February. Alongside the Note 7, some information of the Redmi Go India variants has also been revealed. Besides the 3GB RAM and 4GB RAM model there could be a 6GB RAM and 64GB storage model of the phone coming to India as well.



Colmar, an Alsatian wonderland which you must visit



I have an acute weakness for towns or cities with canals - Amsterdam (Netherlands), Venice (Italy), Copenhagen (Denmark). But one of my all-time favourites is Colmar in France's Alsace region. This quaint town is perched on the edge of the Rhine river. This is where France meets Germany and these two distinct cultures intertwine to create a unique experience that is Colmar. History buffs might have heard the name Alsace Lorraine as the disputed region, which switched hands between Germany and France repeatedly and also partly contributed to both the World Wars. For those who haven't, let me elaborate. After several years of the Swedish rule in the 17th century, Colmar joined the Kingdom of France. But, after 1871 (with the defeat of Napoleon III), the city returned to Germany until World War I. It was then reoccupied by the Germans during World War II. It was the last town in France to be liberated at the end of the war and it's been French ever since. Owing to its swinging past, the locals switch between German and French languages effortlessly. It is no surprise that one will notice the German influence on Colmar's architecture - overflowing with half-timbered medieval buildings and flower-lined canals.

Walking on the streets of Colmar, I could see my childhood fairytales come to life. There's a wooden bell tower just perfect for Rapunzel to have let her hair down, tiny cottages that would make the perfect home for the Gingerbread man and a candy coloured bakery that Hansel and Gretel would have frequented. Any direction you look, there are pastel waterside houses, balconies overflowing with blooms, windows with heart cutouts.

The weekend was cold and it was a bit overcast, which added to the chill. However, that didn't stop me from walking around the town as I wrapped myself in my coat. I finally reached the peak of prettiness in the area near the Quai de Poissonniers nicknamed Petit Venice. A walk along Petit Venice led me to St Peter's Bridge where the view was a picture-perfect row of half-timbered houses by the canals. Some houses even date back to the 17th century, unscathed by the wars. Also, known as the merchants' quarters, this is where the butchers, fishermen, pastry chefs, tanners (people who tan animal hides) lived back in the day.

Having stopped at a nearby cheese and sausage stall, the owner shared a very likeable fact about Petit Venice. If he is to be believed then, the variety of colours the buildings adorned has a story to tell. Back in the

day, the different colours were used to display the types of businesses - so for example, if you were a baker, your house would be pink or a fisherman would have a red house.

One cannot just come to Colmar and not take a canal tour. I decided to take one and see a different side of the town from the boat. The 30-minute boat tour slowly glided over the shallow water and passed through the residential district, the covered market and the city centre. The man who was rowing mentioned that these boats were originally used by the market gardeners to transport their vegetables to the markets.

Once, I got off the boat tour, I walked into the Colmar Cathedral. The impressive spire of St Martin's Church can be seen from many points around town, but it is definitely worth a look up close - both the ornate facade and the beautifully decorated interior. However, St Martin's Church is not a cathedral (as it is not under the control of a bishop) and is only called so due to its massive structure.

Since I passed by the covered markets on the boat, I thought why not see how it looked from the inside. Markets are my happy place. A red building on the edge of the Petit Venice, designed in 1865, is home to merchants providing the best olive oil, smelly cheese and all other perfect produce you would expect for a



French city. Another great activity you could do is to rent a bicycle and ride part of the Alsatian wine route. It is a great way to explore Colmar's countryside or another beautiful village nearby called Eguisheim. Alternatively, you could also visit the Unterlinden Museum which covers nearly 7000 years of history. From prehistoric times to contemporary works, there's not much the museum doesn't touch on. The primary area of the

museum is the one that houses the Isenheim Altarpiece dating back to 1515. It is a two-sided painting done on hinged panels that the priests could move depending on the season. Looking back, my weekend was mainly popping into street side shops, sampling some traditional Alsatian biscuits and local charcuterie. This indeed is the most picturesque setting in all of France.

High Flying Bird movie review:**Steven Soderbergh, Netflix's dazzling disruption of Hollywood**

High Flying Bird movie review: Oscar-winner Steven Soderbergh has found the perfect home in Netflix. His new film, shot on iPhone 7s, has the fearlessness of a first-timer. Rating: 4/5.

High Flying Bird

Director - Steven Soderbergh

Cast - Andre Holland, Zazie Beetz, Melvin Gregg, Sonja Sohn, Zachary Quinto, Kyle MacLachlan

Rating - 4/5

Steven Soderbergh shot most of High Flying Bird on iPhones. I wouldn't be able to write this review on one. It's his second movie 'filmed' with nifty handheld devices, following last year's psychological thriller *Unsane*. But while that film looked like it had been made with smartphones, High Flying Bird - despite its very stagey screenplay - is positively cinematic, presented in expansive wide screen and bursting with vibrant visuals. But if there was a specific reason for Soderbergh to choose this aesthetic, beyond his unrelenting hunger to always keep reinventing himself, I don't seem to have understood it.

One thing's for sure, though. After several decades spent in

the business, and having made many memorable movies, Soderbergh finally seems to have arrived at a major turning point in his career, his third - and there couldn't have been a film more fitting to have brought him here.

The first pivotal moment in Soderbergh's career came at the 1989 Sundance Film Festival, when he changed American independent filmmaking forever with *Sex, Lies and Videotape*. The second arrived when he switched to digital cameras, which afforded him the creative spontaneity that brings out the best in him. Him finding Netflix is the third. Remarkably, unlike the several other auteurs who've made the move to the streaming giant in recent months - filmmakers such as Paul Greengrass, the Coen Brothers, David Mackenzie, Dan Gilroy, Susanne Bier, Alfonso Cuarón - Soderbergh insisted that High Flying Bird be restricted to streaming and not be shown in theatres. The result is something

quite special - a film that feels like it truly belongs on the internet, directed by a filmmaker working with complete fearlessness. High Flying Bird operates within a rather inaccessible world - a sports agency populated by smooth-talking wheelers and dealers during an NBA lockdown - but Soderbergh with his trademark flashy camerawork could have made even a Lok Sabha session as exciting as one of his Ocean's movies. For the longest time, he was attached to direct *Moneyball*, the excellent Brad Pitt-Jonah Hill movie also about the 'game on top of the game' - the science and commerce that makes the world of sports go round. But days before filming was supposed to begin, the studio lost faith in his unconventional take, which involved cutting to interviews with real life players, and decided to go with Bennett Miller instead. High Flying Bird is what I imagine Soderbergh's



Moneyball would have been - dense with dialogue, funny, and interspersed with interviews. In one of them, a player wisely says, "You gotta have fun. When you stop having fun, everything goes downhill and you quit." There is truth in these words, because during the course of the movie, we see how the system can suck the soul out of players, and how vital it is for people like Ray (played by Soderbergh's *The Knick* star, Andre Holland), to help athletes navigate these waters. "What will you do?" Ray asks a young client, who has been propelled to stardom overnight, like so many others his age, with no radar to guide him.

"What I was born to do," says Erick, the uncertainty on his face saying otherwise. But Erick has been fooled into thinking that his job entails more than just playing basketball. He must figure out the worth of his likeness, he must negotiate contracts, and most tragically, he must understand that he is just as valuable as the amount of merch he is able to move off shelves. And without actual games to distract him, he finds himself veering off-track during the lockdown. It's not surprising that Soderbergh wanted to direct this film, written by Tarell Alvin McCraney, the Oscar-winning screenwriter of *Moonlight*.

Yatra movie review:**Mammootty's political drama is worth rooting for in spite of flaws**

Mammootty's docudrama is at its best when it focuses on the padayatra, devoid of any major twists and turns that usually leave you in awe.

Rating: 3/5.

Yatra

Director: Mahi Raghav

Cast: Mammootty, Sachin Khedekar, Rao Ramesh and Jagapathi Babu

Rating: 3/5

Mammootty-starrer *Yatra*, directed by Mahi Raghav, is one of those political films you wish had more to offer than merely focusing on one particular event. The idea to build a story based on a single event might sound exciting on paper but when translated on screen, it needs more heft to make the story really captivating.

As much as *Yatra* makes one root for YS Rajasekhara Reddy and the most significant moment of his political career -

the padayatra (walkathon) which changed the course of politics in Andhra Pradesh - one really wishes the film had more to offer. Nevertheless, it's an extraordinary story of one man's vision and how it made him a messiah of sorts for the poor and underprivileged. What really makes *Yatra* a solid - if not great - political film is the fact that it does not try to make YSR appear heroic, despite having a star like Mammootty essay the character. It humanizes the protagonist and makes us really understand why YSR was a powerful leader and what set him apart from his contemporaries. The walkathon segment, which really is the soul of the film, really makes us root for YSR. The film focuses on two

major issues that were addressed during the padayatra - farmer suicides and lack of good healthcare to the poor. The two populist schemes are fittingly narrated through two elaborate sequences which are easily the best stretches of the story which otherwise doesn't have much more to offer. *Yatra* is neither a full-length political drama nor a propaganda film. It is a docudrama at best when it focuses on the padayatra, devoid of any major twists and turns that usually leave you in awe.

Mahi Raghav, who has made a mark with lesser known but well-made films like *Paathshala* and *Anando Brahma*, proves that he can handle subjects that need to be told on a large scale. He



handles the story of YSR with sensitivity and could have easily played it safe. But he surprises everyone by making this story stand out.

Mammootty makes a grand return to Telugu cinema after two decades. When you walk out watching *Yatra*, Mammootty leaves one with the feeling that

he couldn't have chosen a better character for his comeback. As YSR, he almost nails every trait that makes the character memorable, including his walk and his signature hand wave. No other actor could've played this character with the kind of effortless Mammootty brings to his performance.

Is this how Salman Khan, Katrina Kaif's Bharat ends? Details from film's climax leaked



Bollywood stars Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif will be seen destroying large sets in the climax scene of their upcoming film Bharat, reports claimed Wednesday. Directed by Abbas Ali Zafar, the film also stars Sunil Grover, Disha Patani, Jackie Shroff and Tabu. A Bollywood Hungama report said Salman and Katrina will destroy sets, worth Rs 10 crore, that have been erected in Mumbai's Film City to recreate a Delhi area. While Salman will feature in a wedding song with Katrina in the film, he also has a separate song sequence with Disha. Bharat brings Salman, Zafar and Katrina together again after the 2017 blockbuster Tiger Zinda Hai. Katrina and Salman have also worked together in Ek Tha Tiger. Katrina joined the team of Bharat after Priyanka Chopra

quit the project to prepare for her wedding to Nick Jonas. Taking about it, Zafar had said, "It's bizarre, but let me share this. When we finished Tiger Zinda Hai, Katrina smiled and told me that I am going to miss her on my next film. At that time, I was quite clear that Priyanka is going to do Bharat. Katrina laughed and told me that she will find some way to be a part of the film. Now she is a part of Bharat, so maybe it was destiny." Bharat is an official adaptation of a 2014 South Korean film Ode To My Father. Produced by Atul Agnihotri and T-Series, the film is set to hit theatres on Eid 2019. The film has been shot in multiple locations including Dubai, Punjab and Delhi.



Ranveer Singh, Alia Bhatt are perfect in best film of Zoya Akhtar's career

Reactions to director Zoya Akhtar's Gully Boy are unanimously positive. After its world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival recently, a special screening of the film was for celebrities. Partially inspired by Mumbai rappers Divine and Naezy's rags-to-riches story, the film tells the story of Murad, a young Muslim rapper raised in the slums of Dharavi, and Safeena, his feisty girlfriend. Ahead of the film's release on Valentine's Day, international publications have already reviewed the film. Here's a roundup of what critics are saying about Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt's film. Writing for the Guardian, Peter Bradshaw noted that "Gully Boy runs on very traditional lines, and maybe comes too close to cliché, but is always engagingly dead set on entertainment." He wrote, "The set piece and high point of the film is the uproarious video that Murad makes on the tough streets of Dharavi itself, which naturally goes viral and makes him a star." Variety's Jay Weissberg called Gully Boy 'Zoya Akhtar's



most accomplished film to date.' "One of the joys of Gully Boy," he wrote, "is revelling in the chemistry between Singh and Bhatt, perfectly paired." The Hollywood Reporter's Deborah Young wrote, "Zoya Akhtar directs with flair and passion and, aided by explosive performances from a right-on cast, triumphs over the familiarity of the star-is-born storyline." She wrote that Zoya's 'main asset' in the film is Ranveer, who 'shows a pleasingly full emotional range that extends to drama and hip-hop.' Also singling

out Ranveer's performance, Lee Marshall of Screen Daily wrote that he 'busts rhymes with the best of them in this energetic, entertaining film that smuggles some urgent social themes.' Marshall also noted that Alia's 'sharp performance that carries most successfully the mix of wry humour, romance and social comment that Gully Boy essays.' Previously, celebrities such as Rahul Bose and Fast & Furious actor Michelle Rodriguez tweeted in praise of the film.

Kylie Jenner's Valentine's Day surprise!

Travis Scott creates walkway of love as couple start celebrations early

Thursday will be her second Valentine's Day with beau Travis Scott.

And with still another day to go, Kylie Jenner has already been gifted with love.

Taking to Instagram Stories, the 21-year-old showcased the rapper's Valentine's Day tunnel of love he had created for his girl. The tunnel was filled with various archways of both pink and red roses styled in the shape of hearts. The walkway featured a mirrored floor and was met with a variety of burning candles along the way.

While Kylie walked down the long path in the middle of her home,

sultry music played.

As the makeup mogul reached the end of the walkway of love, she was greeted with a LED lit heart on a stand.

And it's no surprise Travis has already gone all out for his baby mama and lady love.

Kylie took to social media last February 14 to share a video of her entire home including the staircase filled with fresh red roses and candles.

'hell of a way to end the night,' she captioned the clip.

While promoting her latest Valentine's Day makeup collection last month, the youngest Jenner sister revealed

what she wanted on the special day.

'Jewelry, obviously,' she said when asked if she wanted the fashionable accessory or a teddy bear.

Kylie later added that she would definitely rather receive diamonds than pearls.

The beauty and the Astroworld star celebrated their first Valentine's Day last February, just two weeks after welcoming their first born, daughter, Stormi Webster, into the world.

Kylie and Travis first started seeing each other at Coachella 2017, and fell pregnant just weeks after.



Selena Gomez Celebrating her best friend's engagement in Mexico



She's been leaning on her friends for support following her break from the spotlight to focus on her mental health.

And in new exclusive pictures obtained by DailyMail.com, Selena Gomez appears to be happy and healthier than she's been in a long time.

Spotted in Mexico over the weekend, the 26-year-old beauty stunned in a cream bikini set while smiling and laughing with some of her closest pals for her best friend's engagement celebration.

Selena, who had a kidney transplant in 2017 and also suffers from Lupus, looked relaxed and carefree as she frolicked around the sand in a two-piece set. The actress' ensemble featured a straight cut top with high-waisted bottoms of a cheeky cut design.

She accessorised her beach look with a pair of large gold hooped earrings

for the celebratory outing.

Selena styled her long brunette tresses back off of her face into a effortless low-ponytail and appeared to be makeup free.

At one point the Back To You singer was seen posing while her friend shot some photos of her with a disposable camera.

Sharing some pictures from the beach day on social media, she revealed she was in Mexico celebrating as part of an engagement party.

My best friend is getting married, so we celebrated her! Future Mrs. Lopez,' she captioned a series of happy shots.

According to onlookers, the bikini-clad former Disney star was beaming whilst with her friends and enjoyed a few drinks while relaxing abroad.

The fun day also saw Selena and her friends riding horses along the golden sand and de-stressing by a fire pit.

According to an E! insider, the group were said to be making the most of their time together whilst in Cabo.

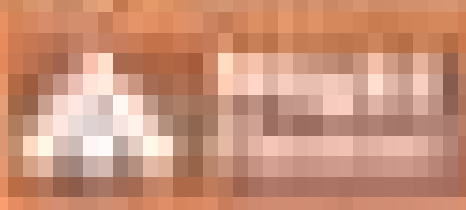
'Selena was right in the middle of her friends eating chips and guacamole and drinking from a big bottle of water. They all positioned their chairs in a big circle and spent the day on the rooftop laughing and gossiping.'

By night the group watched a private fireworks show as they dined on the beach together. Joining Selena on the trip were the group of clean-living girls who have flocked to her side since she left rehab late last year.

They were led by her longtime best friend, Courtney J Barry, ahead of her upcoming nuptials to Sam Lopez.

The bride-to-be also shared some images from the exotic trip on her social media page, as did their other friends.

During sunset, the group mounted horses for a scenic stroll on the sea shore.



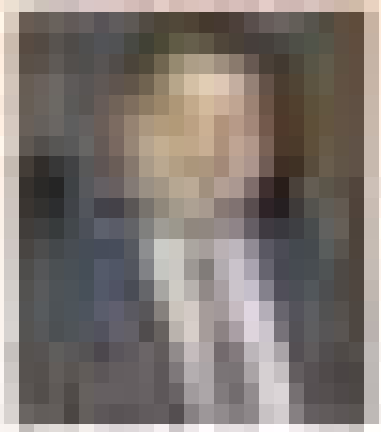
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