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Pakistan Must Stop Terror Before Talks, PM Modi Tells China's Xi Jinping



China is a strategic ally of Pakistan and is investing considerably in its infrastructure projects. President Xi is expected to meet Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is also attending the SCO summit.

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The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Melville, New York recently hosted a special assembly which was attended by Town Supervisor Chad Lupinacci and more than 1200 guests, which included South Asian community leaders and residents of Nassau, Suffolk, and Queens County.

Beauty Pageant organized



Caption: (From Left) Dr. Sheetal Desai, Bollywood Actress Shamita Shetty, Winner, Rashmi Bedi, Janak Bedi, Guest of Honor Dillip Chauhan, Aric Daiamaini

(By our staff reporter) New York- Bollywood Actress SHAMITA SHETTY served as a Special Guest with Guest of Honor Dillip Chauhan, former Deputy Comptroller of Nassau County during a Beauty Pageant recently organized by Dr Sheetal Desai in New York Dilip Chauhan addressing the crowd said "If you do not exercise your right you have no right to complaint, so you all should register to vote, and as a women you have to encourage your family to go out and vote during the

election. Also there are number of government resources available to women business owners, make sure you register your business with respective government agencies and chances are there you will get government contract under the program of MWBE". Alisha Merchant was declared Miss Bharat New York 2019, while Chahat Singh was winner of Teen Bharat New York 2019 and Chaitanya Sairam was winner of Mrs Bharat New York 2019 Category.

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Trump's Mother of All Truth Bombs

(SAI Bureau) President Donald Trump unloaded a baffling cargo of words Wednesday after George Stephanopoulos asked him whether his son Donald Jr. should have contacted the FBI in June 2016 when a gang of Russians offered him "dirt" on Hillary Clinton.

Not necessarily, Trump implied in his first answer. Asked about his own FBI director's assertion that of course a campaign should contact the FBI, Trump went full-tilt adamant. The FBI director is wrong," Trump said. The exchange detonated on cable news and Twitter like the mother of all truth bombs. Trump kept hedging and twisting around-implying you might both take the dirt and call the FBI-flummoxing normally voluble critics like former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. "I've run out of adjectives," he said. "'Unfit to be President' is a gross understatement," tweeted former CIA Director John Brennan in equal exasperation. The leading Democratic candidates for president-Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren,

Kamala Harris, and even the undercard candidates-torched him as a danger to the electoral process.

What was he thinking? Was he thinking? In a normal politician, the moment might have been what used to be politely called a "gaffe," and more accurately called a career-ending self-own. With Trump, though, it's better to understand it as the perfect melding of all the preoccupations and instincts and political acumen that got him where he is. If he'd held back, it might have been more prudent, but it would have been positively un-Trumpian. First off, of course, the question was about Russia-Trump's great bugbear. The whole subject of Russian interference grates on an easily bruised ego, intensifying his insecurities about his squeaker victory over Clinton. He'll be relitigating the

investigation all the way through November 2020.

Second, the issue remains a terrific media draw for Trump. Trump's responses weren't a surprise to anyone who's been following his presidency, but they slurped up a day's worth of TV chyrons, keeping him the center of attention at a moment when people might be focusing on his thin claims of a deal with Mexico, or his grim 2020 poll numbers. Instead, they're focused on a sexy but meaningless round of new pro-and-con shouting about the president himself. And there's



He and his son did something

a third factor: His kids. From everything we know about the Trump family, he lives in a universe in which either you're family or you're nobody, and in this case that "nobody" includes the entire nation he's governing. Don Jr. is the weakest link in this whole operation-he's the one who didn't call the FBI, after all-and one way to see the interview was as a media smokescreen cast to shield his namesake from deeper scrutiny after his appearance before the Senate Intelligence Committee on Wednesday. In a closed hearing, Junior claimed never to have lied to Congress-"despite claims by former Trump aides to the contrary," the New York Times reported. Trump's interview can be understood, in the simplest way, as offering cover to his son: Of course he didn't call the FBI. Nobody would. "Life doesn't work that way," said the president.

Had Trump answered the hypothetical about taking campaign information from the Russians in 2020 in any other way than he did, it would have been read as a confession that

wrong in 2016, and Trump almost never admits to having been wrong-or to anyone in his family being at fault.

Trump must have realized from grazing the Fox News Channel on Thursday morning that he didn't stick the landing in his Stephanopoulos interview, so he did what he always does when he flubs: He took the fight to the enemy-his critics and political adversaries. In his Thursday morning Twitter thread, Trump showered Democrats with bogus "whatabout" accusations, damning their behavior as scandalous and illegal and slamming Robert Mueller.

Contradicting his FBI director, defending his son for playing footsie with the Russian, and using a network TV interview to all but solicit political dirt from foreign powers was for Trump just another delightful round in the octagon. The only way for him to know for sure that he's breathing is when he's fighting. So fight he must, reigniting whatever cooling embers he spots.

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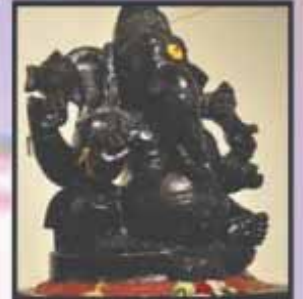
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Why Hong Kong protesters are outraged by extradition bill

On June 9, 2019, organizers say that more than 1 million protesters in Hong Kong -- which would be nearly one in seven people in the city -- voiced their opposition to an extradition bill that would allow fugitives to be transferred to mainland China. Speaking to the Hong Kong Free Press, demonstrator and retired civil servant HK Lau said that the passage of the bill would mean the end of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle under which the city had been governed since the resumption of Chinese rule in 1997. But speaking after the demonstration, Chief Executive Carrie Lam pledged to continue with the bill, asserting that it would improve the legal system. However, describing a bill that would permit renditions to China -- a country whose leader, Xi Jinping, has categorically rejected judicial independence -- as strengthening the rule of law is not merely cynical doublespeak. Rather, Lam's statement reflects her government's strategy of abusing the city's judiciary to do its dirty work. Hong Kong's government frequently touts the territory's rule of law, with a particular focus on the judiciary's international reputation for independence. In contrast, the Umbrella Movement and subsequent repression of the territory's pro-democracy movement have underscored the extent to which the executive and legislative branches are beholden to Beijing. As a result, the Hong Kong and Beijing governments have increasingly tried to hide their repression behind Hong Kong's judges. In 2014, police cleared Umbrella Movement protesters from Mong Kok district not by exercising public order powers, but by enforcing a civil injunction obtained by private actors like minibus and taxi companies. The lawyer representing one bus company that obtained an injunction was part of a pro-Beijing political party in Hong Kong and attended a closed-door meeting with President Xi Jinping, along with a group of Hong Kong's elite -- raising questions that the injunctions amounted to the legal equivalent of "astroturfing," or disguising the true sponsors of a political message to make it resemble a grassroots initiative. The fact that then-Secretary for Justice Rimsky Yuen had met with the "plaintiffs" in connection with what was supposedly a civil action brought by minibus and taxi operators strongly suggests that Yuen was using the suit as a fig leaf to conceal the suppression of peaceful protest. (Yuen has publicly disputed these allegations.) More abuses of judicial process followed. In 2016, after pro-democracy and localist politicians -- the latter advocate for the preservation of the city's autonomy -- made major gains in

legislative elections despite pre-emptive disqualifications, the Hong Kong government took to the courts to demand the expulsion of localists Yau Wai-ching and Baggio Leung. Before the Hong Kong court could issue a ruling, an "interpretation" of the Basic Law -- the territory's constitutional document -- by the National People's Congress Standing Committee in Beijing effectively dictated the outcome of the case, by declaring that oaths of office must be made "sincerely and solemnly." The "interpretation" became the basis for four further expulsions in 2017. Further, the Department of Justice has abused its prosecutorial discretion to serve partisan political purposes by prosecuting pro-democracy activists and by demanding harsher sentences for them, while turning a blind eye to abuses by police officers during the Umbrella Movement. Although Lam has denied that her government engages in political persecution through judicial means, this pattern of prosecutions has prompted international concern. In its 2016 Concluding Observations on Hong Kong, the United Nations' Committee Against Torture -- a body of experts tasked with monitoring compliance with the Convention Against Torture -- specifically cited concerns over "consistent reports that police resorted to violence against more than 1,300 people," as well as violence by pro-Beijing counterdemonstrators. It also called on Hong Kong authorities to duly prosecute alleged perpetrators of such violence.

Seen in light of this pattern of conduct by Hong Kong's government, the extradition bill is nothing new. As the Hong Kong Bar Association explained in a guide to the bill, the Hong Kong courts' function in dealing with an extradition application is merely to see that the formalities have been satisfied and that there are no grounds for refusing surrender. It may not conduct a hearing into whether the suspect is guilty of the alleged offense. Nor may it inquire into the "quality of justice" they will receive once surrendered. The bill, therefore, leaves no meaningful scope for the Hong Kong judiciary to protect the rights of anyone whom the mainland authorities seek to extradite. Instead, it would compel Hong Kong judges to rubber-stamp extradition requests from Beijing, even if potentially based on cooked-up charges. Hong Kong's judges, like their counterparts in Britain and the commonwealth, have historically remained discreet on political issues. However, the developments described above have prompted some of them to speak out.

This is the key to a Trump win in 2020

The 2020 election is heating up, fueled by anti-Trump Democrats. However misguided, numerous Democratic candidates have now called for President Trump's impeachment, signaling a dogfight to come on the campaign trail. As an incumbent presiding over a booming economy, President Trump still has the advantage, but this is no time to rest on one's laurels. Recent surveys reveal Democrats polling strongly in battleground states like Michigan, which the president must win again to retain control of the White House. The key to a Trump win is simple: Voter registration. We've seen the rabid enthusiasm of the left since Inauguration Day, and it's not going away in 2019. Anti-Trump Democrats are motivated to make their #Resistance agenda complete and end the Trump presidency. For Republicans, the left's energy is a wake-up call. Bombarded on a daily basis by entrenched anti-Trump political and media elites, the "silent majority" that rose up to support President Trump in 2016 must rise up once again. Getting that silent majority out to the polls is the secret weapon for President Trump and his allies. And, to that end, there are promising signs: The president's approval rating hovers around 90 percent among Republicans. Most Americans are satisfied with the U.S. economy and don't see a recession coming anytime soon. More specifically, Americans are satisfied with President Trump's

handling of the economy, with nearly 60 percent calling it a "good job." In fact, over twice as many Americans credit President Trump for our economic prosperity compared to those who credit President Obama.

Assuming that economic growth remains robust and job creation keeps trending up, the majority of America will have no problem re-electing President Trump. Americans are primarily concerned with their career prospects, wage earnings, and 401(k) plans, not allegations of Russian collusion and the liberal media's "outrage of the day." When Americans are provided with financial security and their economic outlook is bright - as it is today - the left's daily outrage falls on deaf ears. Now it's up to Republicans to fill that void and keep the left at bay. According to recent polling, over three-quarters of Republicans are pledging to vote for President Trump or at least considering it. Strong majorities of religious, suburban, and rural voters are eyeing a Trump vote. That enthusiasm must be sustained and expanded. Likewise, Republicans must go after unregistered voters who support President Trump's "America First" agenda. Rest assured, there are millions of them. In any given election cycle, one-fifth of America's voting-eligible population is not registered to vote. Over 60 percent of those Americans are never even asked to register, presenting an opportunity for the Republican Party to state its case.

Ted Harvey



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How China's Sputnik moment can be India's big break

The US-China trade war could be an extraordinary opportunity for India; many American firms and potentially even European and Japanese companies will be looking for new countries and new suppliers to source from

The Donald Trump administration's decision to blacklist Huawei and cut off access to western software and chip technologies has been called China's Sputnik moment. It will now galvanise China to develop its own independent technology infrastructure and capabilities. Commentator Fareed Zakaria has suggested that this may be America's Sputnik moment too, finally spurring it to wean itself off Chinese suppliers and outcompete China. This rupture of trust and relationships is no ordinary trade spat over cars or soybeans. It could result in a new Cold War, a bipolar tech world with two hermetically walled-off technology ecosystems. This would have seismic consequences for companies and countries everywhere. Already companies are scrambling to rethink their supply chains, their procurement strategies, and potentially relocate manufacturing. This rupture is starting with

electronic hardware but could spread across many more products. Depending on how it plays out, this trade war could be an extraordinary opportunity for India and its new government. Many American firms and potentially even European and Japanese companies will be looking for new countries and new suppliers to source from. They will also need to find new markets since they may no longer be welcome in China. Equally Chinese companies will need to find new markets to reduce their reliance on America. With our size and capabilities, India is a natural prize for both sets of firms. We are already seeing this in tech. India is the largest market outside China for smartphone vendors like Xiaomi, OnePlus and Lenovo. It is also a must-win market for US tech companies like Google, Facebook and Amazon which find themselves shut out of China. Chinese firms Alibaba, Tencent,

Bytedance, etc. are some of the biggest investors in Indian internet start-ups like Ola, PayTM, Swiggy and Bigbasket. The fight is not just for market and revenue share but also for data-share in a world where data may be the new oil. India must have a strategy to benefit from all this interest rather than unwittingly become a battleground and victim of the proxy-war between these tech titans. Currently we do not nor do we have many significant Indian firms beyond Reliance Jio in the game, which is a grave risk. The trade war can also breathe new life into Indian manufacturing. No large country has become prosperous without a substantial manufacturing sector and without exporting its way to prosperity. This has been a major challenge for India. Many experts have concluded that the window of opportunity for export-led growth has closed for India making it impossible for us to replicate the success of



Japan, South Korea and China. President Trump may have just flung the windows wide open again. However, opportunity is one thing, speed and execution are an entirely different matter. The fact is that despite substantial progress on our Ease of Doing Business ranking, and the Make in India initiative, India may be losing ground on manufacturing competitiveness to an array of countries including Mexico, Vietnam (electronics, footwear, machinery) and Bangladesh (textiles and garments) whose exports have soared even as ours have shrunk. India has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to

accomplish amazing things when there is a clear mission, political will, strong leadership and effective partnership between policy makers and industry. The emergence of India IT and pharma firms as globally competitive players, and more recent progress in areas such as Aadhaar, digital payments, data connectivity show that nothing is impossible. Political will and leadership must breathe new life into Make In India. This time, Make in India is not just Make for India, but for the world. The idea of industrial policy is sometimes viewed with suspicion because it can translate into protectionism and poor outcomes for customers and country but we will need a robust industrial policy. Such a policy will focus on enhancing our competitiveness sector by sector especially in labour-intensive industries like garments and footwear, where India's competitiveness has been declining. Many experts have been pushing the idea of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) where ease of doing business - acquiring land, obtaining environmental clearances, good infrastructure - is made dramatically friction-free. Such zones may be used as sandboxes to experiment with reforms such as flexible labour laws before they are rolled out nationally.

'Reach office on time, avoid working from home': PM Modi to council of ministers

In the first meeting of the council of ministers after the Modi-led dispensation assumed charge last month, the prime minister also asked senior ministers to hand-hold the new incumbents, sources said after the meeting.

Reach office on time and avoid working from home to set an example for others -- these were some of the instructions Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave to the council of ministers on Wednesday. In the first meeting of the council of ministers after the Modi-led dispensation assumed charge last month, the prime minister also asked senior ministers to hand-hold the new incumbents, sources said after the meeting. Seeking to give more role to ministers of state, he said important files should be shared with them by the cabinet ministers. This, he said, would enhance productivity. For ensuring faster approval on files,

Modi said both the cabinet minister and his junior colleague can sit together to clear proposals, the sources said. Emphasising on punctuality, Modi said all the ministers should reach office on time and spend a few minutes discussing latest developments in the ministry with the officials. He further said ministers should come to office on a regular basis and avoid working from home. At the same time they should keep meeting party MPs and general public on a regular basis and can start by meeting parliamentarians from their respective states, while suggesting that there is not much difference between a minister and

an MP. Modi also talked about the five-year agenda which every ministry has to formulate and an impactful decision needs to be taken in the first 100 days of the government. During the meeting, Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar made a presentation on optimal utilisation of the Parliament session beginning Monday. Tomar was the parliamentary affairs minister in the previous government. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made a presentation on inviting inputs for the Union Budget which will be presented on July 5. Railway minister Piyush Goyal made a presentation on five year vision



document for each Union ministry, the sources said. The meeting of council of ministers was a regular feature in the previous tenure of the Modi government. He used to brief them about the government's various welfare schemes and how to make people aware about them. Modi used to review the performances of key ministries

and sectors. The Union Cabinet will also meet on Wednesday ahead of the council of ministers' meeting. With the Parliament session beginning next week, the ministers of state will have a key role as in most of the ministries they are responsible to handle parliamentary questions which are tabled on the floor of the House.

Kathua rape case verdict: A commendable job by police, judiciary

A fast-track court on Monday convicted six people for the rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district last year. Three have been sentenced to life in jail. The other three have got five years for destroying evidence to shield the rapists. A seventh accused was acquitted by the court which gave him the "benefit of doubt". The girl, who belonged to a Muslim nomadic community (the Bakarwals), had been sedated and raped repeatedly for four days, and later strangled and bludgeoned to make sure she was dead. The rape-and-murder strategy was probably planned and

deliberate, part of a larger plan to drive out the minority nomadic community from their land. The tension between the Bakarwals and Rasana Hindus was so strong that the latter opposed the burial of the girl in the locality, saying the property never belonged to the nomadic family and that they had been burying their dead illegally there all these years. The Kathua rape case also drove a wedge between the then BJP-Peoples' Democratic Party alliance in Jammu and Kashmir after two BJP leaders participated in a rally organised in support of the accused. Realising that there might be a miscarriage of justice in such a charged atmosphere, the

Supreme Court correctly shifted the case from Kathua to Pathankot in Punjab, thereby assuring the parents of the girl and other citizens concerned that no matter what the economic and social standing of girl's parents is, the legal system will stand by the truth and justice will be delivered. The Special Investigation Team of the Jammu and Kashmir Police too did a commendable job: they conducted a thoroughly professional investigation and presented a detailed charge-sheet to the court. This was not easy because the local police had been bribed by one of the convicts to tamper with evidence; they had even washed the young



victim's clothes to destroy material evidence. In the last few weeks, there has been a spate of heinous crimes, especially rapes, with the victims being minor girls from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The Kathua case

should be a template for these cases: solid investigation and the delivery of justice within a specific time-frame are critical; it is equally important for political parties to desist from politicising such cases.

What the Kargil War teaches India about its national security

Twenty years ago, on May 3, 1999, local shepherds reported seeing some Pakistani intruders on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) in the Kargil district of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). On July 26, 1999, the Pakistan army was pushed back by the Indian Army from the last of the heights it had surreptitiously occupied. With that well-earned victory, Operation Vijay came to an end. The Pakistan army's offensive was an ill-conceived military adventure. By infiltrating its regular soldiers in civilian clothes across the LoC and physically occupying ground on the Indian side, the Pakistan army had added a new dimension to its 10-year old proxy war

against India. Pakistan's provocative action compelled India to launch a firm but measured and restrained military operation to clear the intruders. Operation Vijay was finely calibrated to limit military action to the Indian side of the LoC and included air strikes from fighter-ground attack (FGA) aircraft and attack helicopters of the Indian Air Force. Artillery firepower played a key role in paving the way for India's brave infantrymen to take back the occupied heights inch-by-bloody inch. Why did Pakistan undertake a military operation that was foredoomed to failure? Clearly, the Pakistani military establishment had become

frustrated with India's success in containing the militancy in J&K to within manageable limits and could not bear to see its strategy of 'bleeding India through a thousand cuts' evaporating into thin air. Though it was not stated in the Lahore Declaration of February 1999, acceptance of the concept of the LoC as a permanent border between India and Pakistan had begun to gain currency. In an act more out of desperation than strategic planning, the Pakistan army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate decided to launch an organised intrusion into the militarily vacant remote areas of Kargil district to once again ignite the spark of

militancy and gain moral ascendancy over the Indian security forces. The strategic aim of the Pakistan army in engineering these intrusions under the facade of Kashmiri militancy was to provide a fresh impetus to the flagging militancy -- wrongly called jihad -- and again attempt to focus international attention on the Kashmir dispute. In the Dras, Mushko Valley and Kaksar sectors the military aim was to sever the Srinagar-Leh National Highway 1A to isolate Kargil district and cut India's lifeline to Leh, with a view to eventually choking supplies and reinforcements to Indian troops holding the Salto Ridge west

of the Siachen Glacier. Another aim was to open up a new route for infiltration over the Amarnath Mountains into the Kashmir Valley and the Doda region south of the Pir Panjal range. In the Batalik and Turtok Valley area, which adjoins the Siachen glacial belt, Pakistan attempted to establish a firm base with a view to eventually advancing along the Shyok River Valley to cut the only road link to India's Siachen Brigade. The Pakistani army had also hoped to physically occupy some territory on the Indian side of the LoC to use as a bargaining counter subsequently, particularly to seek an Indian withdrawal from the Siachen Glacier conflict zone.

India's future prosperity depends on extending opportunities to farmers

Over the last decade, India has experienced sustained economic growth, bringing opportunities and prosperity to millions. The World Bank estimates that extreme poverty in the country has dropped from 46% to 13.4% over the two decades before 2015. Yet, there is also recognition that these gains have not accrued equally to all. This is particularly true for those who rely on agriculture for their livelihood. While India's overall GDP growth rates have ranged between 7-8%, agriculture has grown between 2-3%. Over 20% of our farmers live below the poverty line.

Evidence suggests that the speed with which the agriculture sector reduces rural poverty is at least twice of what the rest of the economy and when growth in agriculture is rejuvenated, poverty decline became faster. This paradox means that Indians employed in agriculture have not fully participated in benefits of this growth, either because they are not equipped to do so, or because opportunities provided by growth have not reached them.

One way to approach this is by viewing the farmer and others engaged in the agri-economy as rural entrepreneurs. Since an enterprise can grow if it has

some degree of predictability, policy makers will have to focus on interventions that create an enabling ecosystem for the farmer entrepreneurs to achieve profitability, and higher incomes. Take the crucial role of credit. Credit enables growth, investment in business, the leverage to tide over tough times, and the power to negotiate with buyers. Studies show that farmers get better prices when they receive credit because they can avoid harvest pressure and access better markets. Yet, lack of formal financial resources has long hampered production budgets of farmers, their risk-taking capacity, their technology



adoption, diversification and their overall capacity to generate income. One percentage increase in credit supply from public banks leads to approximately 0.82% increase in price realisation of crop, barring

paddy. Further, the maximum gain is felt by small holders. Thus, policy makers need to think of enabling financial mechanisms and credit offerings that respond to the needs of small farmers.

India must see Bimstec as a step towards global prominence

(Agencies)- By both word and deed, the new Narendra Modi government has signalled its determination to double down on its neighbourhood policy. The prime minister invited the heads of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) for his inauguration along with the president of Mauritius. Modi has kicked off his second-term foreign policy with visits to the Maldives and Sri Lanka while External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has gone to Bhutan. The foreign minister also outlined a regional policy that would operate on several layers. New Delhi would seek to promote Bimstec as the primary multilateral body for South Asia, escaping the Pakistan bottleneck that has crippled the



South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc). With his trip to the Maldives, the prime minister will have made a full state visit to all of India's smaller neighbours. More practically, India must build connectivity among these neighbours to put flesh on the bones of its regional cooperation. A stable neighbourhood has been at the top of India's foreign policy goals since independence. But it is a policy that has struggled. The Pakistan problem has repeatedly sucked the oxygen out of the policy, with minimal rewards. New Delhi has been perceived with suspicion by many of the other countries, fuelled in part by its occasionally short-sighted interventions in their affairs.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation holds out benefit for India

(Agencies)- The first multilateral summit Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend in his second term will be the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) get-together in Kyrgyzstan. The SCO is among a set of strategic bodies that India has signed up to as a geopolitical hedge rather than because it is clear how membership will further long-term strategic interests. That the media interest is more about the possibility of Mr Modi's meeting Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and his face-to-face with China's Xi Jinping is not without reason. Nonetheless, it is important that India continues to invest in SCO. The body has shown slow but steady development as a counterterrorism body and could potentially become the basis of a trading arrangement in the region. But India's struggle to engage Central Asia and the Eurasian heartland is severely hampered by geography. The lack of a common border with Central Asia, the cordon created



by Pakistan and China, the complexity of setting up a land-sea connection via Iran and Afghanistan severely constrains India's economic footprint. Central Asia's trade with India is about a fiftieth of the region's trade with China. The possibility of a United States withdrawal from Afghanistan will only increase the difficulties India already faces. India's original entry was promoted by Russia to counter the influence of China in the region. Since then,

Moscow has aligned itself with Beijing. The primary supporters of an active Indian role are the Central Asian countries themselves, desirous of geopolitical options beyond the two giants to their north and east. China's overweening position is so evident that India had to agree not to directly criticise Pakistan in Bishkek. But many SCO members are pleased to join in poking Pakistan through more general statements about terrorism.



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5 CRPF personnel killed in Anantnag's terror attack 1 terrorist gunned down

Two CRPF personnel died and five others injured, they said, adding the firing is still going on.

(Agencies)- Motorcycle-borne militants gunned down five Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in an audacious daylight attack on one of the busiest roads in south Kashmir's Anantnag town on Wednesday - the first major terrorist strike since the killing of 40 soldiers by a suicide bomber in Pulwama in February that brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war. The station house officer (SHO) of Anantnag, three CRPF personnel and a civilian woman were also injured in the attack that occurred on the bustling Khanbal Pahalgam (KP) Road that is also frequented by pilgrims on the Amarnath Yatra, which begins in roughly three weeks. Police said two motorcycle-borne militants drove down KP Road and opened fire at 4.50pm at a contingent of CRPF personnel belonging to the

161 Battalion that was deployed at the spot. The CRPF personnel were on law-and-order duty and part of the Road Opening Party. Additional forces led by Anantnag SHO Arshad Khan and a Quick Reaction Team (QRT) rushed to the spot, only to face a volley of bullets from the militants, who also hurled grenades at the forces. In the ensuing gunbattle, one militant was killed and he is believed to be a foreigner, said a CRPF spokesperson. An AK-47 rifle was recovered from the militant. A health department official said on condition of anonymity that Khan, who suffered a gunshot wound in his chest, was in a critical condition. He and three paramilitary personnel are being treated at the army's 92 Base hospital. A police spokesman termed the strike as a "stand-off firing attack". "In this terror

incident, five CRPF personnel were killed while repulsing the terror attack. Three security force personnel, including SHO Anantnag inspector Arshad Khan, sustained gunshot injuries. In the retaliatory action, the terrorist was gunned down on the spot. From the materials recovered, it is found that the dead terrorist was a foreigner," the spokesperson added.

Minutes later, Al-Umar Mujahideen, a militant outfit led by Mushtaq Zager, who is currently based in Pakistan, claimed responsibility for the attack. The CRPF personnel killed in the attack were identified as assistant sub-inspector (ASI) Ramesh Kumar of Jhajjar, Haryana; ASI Nirod Sarma of Nalbari, Assam; and constables Satendra Kumar of Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar, Mahesh Kushwaha of Gazipur,



UP, and Sandeep Yadav of Madhya Pradesh.

This is the first major strike on security forces since the February 14 suicide strike that killed 40 soldiers in what was the worst attack in Kashmir's history. After the Pulwama strike - which occurred on a highway roughly 35km from the spot where Wednesday's firing took place - the army and other forces tightened security across the Valley, especially in the militant

hotbed of south Kashmir.

"It is too premature to connect today's attack to the Amarnath Yatra. Over 100 terrorists have been eliminated in the first six months (of 2019) - which is much higher than the previous years. Terror organisations such as the JeM [Jaish-e-Mohammed], HM [Hizbul Mujahideen], etc, are under pressure," a senior official of the home ministry said on condition of anonymity.

The problems of regulating digital markets

Modern competition policies are poorly equipped to deal with the unique nature of digital markets.

(Agencies)- In his recent call to break up Facebook, co-founder Chris Hughes argued that Mark Zuckerberg couldn't fix the company, but the government can. He is part of a growing chorus. Big tech's long honeymoon period is winding down. The European Union (EU) has been less than sanguine about tech giants' market dominance and practices for some years now. The US Federal Trade Commission and Justice Department, markedly more forgiving than their European counterparts, are also divvying up competition investigations into the tech giants. Calibrating competition policy to regulate digital markets will be a tricky business. But there are opportunities here, particularly for India, where such policy is still a relatively greenfield area.

US judge Robert Bork's 1978 work, *The Antitrust Paradox*, redefined competition regulation. He argued for economic efficiency: regulators should protect competition and the consumer, not competitors. Focusing on the latter can prevent companies from achieving economies of scale and benefiting consumers via lower prices. This made intuitive sense. It had the added attraction of bringing



economic rigour to the delicate business of regulating markets. Bork influenced multiple jurisdictions, not just the US. The EU had its own imperatives - market integration, for one - but the consumer welfare standard is foregrounded in India's Competition Act, 2002. As the Supreme Court put it in *Excel Crop Care vs. CCI*, "The ultimate goal of competition policy is to enhance consumer well-being." But something is lost in translation when applying the consumer welfare standard to digital markets. Products like Google's search engine or Facebook operate in zero-price markets. The user benefits are immense and obvious. And in the

absence of a price, there is no quantifiable user harm by the lights of conventional competition logic. Focusing on price, however, ignores what law professor, Daniel Solove, has dubbed "architectural harms" - long term, non-monetary drops in consumer well-being in markets where they surrender excessive data and attention in return for a free product. A small but growing body of jurisprudence and regulatory action is beginning to recognise these costs. The Competition Commission of India, for instance, has noted that users pay an "implicit price in form of personal data" when accessing online platforms.

West Bengal has put Mamata on notice

(Agencies)- The election of 2019 threw up many dramatic outcomes - the decimation of the mahagathbandhan in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the total failure of the Congress in the three states it had won barely six months earlier and, of course, the defeat of Rahul Gandhi in Amethi. However, apart from Smriti Irani's spectacular feat, the other triumphs were repeats of the 2014 election. The real surprise of this election was the outcome in West Bengal - a state where the campaign was exceptionally bitter and marred by violence and even vote rigging. In the end, the BJP - hitherto

a fringe player - won 18 of the 42 seats and polled 40% of the popular vote - a sharp 23% increase from 2014; the Trinamool Congress won 22



seats with 43% of the popular vote. The West Bengal outcome was a big setback to Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) chief Mamata Banerjee. Having positioned herself as a player in national politics - even a possible prime minister in the event of Modi losing his majority - Banerjee found herself on the backfoot in her home turf. The disaggregated results showed the BJP in the lead in 120 of the state's 294 Assembly segments - a big leap forward from the seven Assembly seats it won in 2016. The CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey suggested that the TMC secured the support of only 32% of Hindu voters - down from 40% in 2014? - against 57% for the BJP. The TMC managed to salvage its reputation by winning 70% of the Muslim vote. The 2019 outcome demolished many myths about West Bengal's political behaviour.

Congress can't have 'absentee' General ahead of state polls

The onus to discipline, or resolve differences, in the state units is on the party's "high command", which is a commonly used euphemism for the Gandhi family.



(Agencies)- In the absence of the centrifugal force that is the party presidency, the Congress's state units are spinning out of control. The leadership, if it keeps sitting on its hands, could be left wringing them, and the Telangana efflux could find varied manifestations in other states.

If not promptly doused, the bushfires in Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab and Karnataka could spread within, and to other Congress habitats.

The crisis is akin to a joint family turning nuclear in the absence of a "karta" (provider) - or the karta playing the stepparent to a section in the family.

The undivided family analogy isn't far-fetched. Remember the way the cookie crumbled in West Bengal with Mamata

Banerjee's defection or Jagan Mohan Reddy's rebellion in Andhra Pradesh after his father YS Rajasekhara Reddy's death in an air accident. They are both chief ministers now and the Congress a pathetic presence in the two states.

The internal crisis is a throwback of sorts to the Congress meltdown in the aftermath of the 1996 Lok Sabha defeat. It was in 1997 that Mamata Banerjee formed the Trinamool Congress with the cadre that defected en bloc with her in West Bengal. The Congress seems on the brink of an encore, with the running feuds between its senior leaders in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

The onus to discipline, or resolve differences, in the state units is on the party's "high command", which is a

commonly used euphemism for the Gandhi family. In the absence of a functional presidency, officebearers who operate as the party chief's plenipotentiaries are in no position to broker peace.

That's more so when entente has to be enforced between such heavyweights as Punjab's Amarinder Singh and Navjot Sidhu, Rajasthan's Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot, and Haryana's Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Ashok Tanwar.

In each of these cases, the younger leaders view themselves as successors of the seniors they are faction-battling.

The gravity of the internecine discord could be gauged from the hasty retreat Ghulam Nabi Azad had to make from a meeting to discuss

reorganization of the party's Haryana unit, which drew a blank in the recent Lok Sabha elections.

The local leadership's ugly blame game happened at a time it should've reunited for the assembly polls.

Rival Congress factions washing dirty linen in public has become routine even in Punjab, Rajasthan, and Karnataka, where the party is in a coalition with HD Deve Gowda's Janata Dal (Secular). The Azad episode is a reminder that nobody recognises or is deferential to derived power when the fountainhead of power is itself

in dispute.

In real-time terms, Rahul Gandhi's presidency is in suspended animation; the incumbent disinclined to accept the Congress Working Committee's edict for his continuation in the post. The status quo hasn't altered, nor does it exist.

Even while the Congress mulls and mourns the Lok Sabha debacle, its ideological rival, the Bharatiya Janata Party, is gearing up already for not-too-distant assembly battles. The sooner the Congress emerges from the conundrum the better.



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'Make Priyanka CM candidate for 2022 UP polls,' Cong workers tell party



separate closed-door meetings with candidates, district and city unit office bearers and coordinators, did not comment on the demand. But the party leaders were hopeful that she would accept their demand. While a weak organisation was considered to be main reason for the party's poor performance in the 2019 polls by candidates, the organisation leaders blamed weak candidates on some seats as the reason for the debacle. Emphasis was also laid on delay in selection of candidates as there was uncertainty over an alliance before the polls. The party leaders urged Priyanka to ensure that the candidates are selected well in time to ensure that the party's message reached people everywhere. "We need to revamp and rebuild the organisation to ensure the party's presence at all levels and strongly fight the bye-election to 12 assembly seats," said Mishra.

(Agencies)- Congress workers on Wednesday demanded that the party declare its general secretary for east UP, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as its chief ministerial candidate for the 2022 assembly election in Uttar Pradesh. They made the demand at a meeting with Priyanka held here to review the Lok Sabha poll performance and seek feedback to draw a road map for the future. The Congress won only one Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh - Rae Bareilly from where Sonia Gandhi contested. The party workers also suggested that the Congress should stay away from any alliance for the 2022 polls and strongly fight the bye-elections to 12 assembly seats. These seats have fallen vacant following the election of 11 MLAs as MPs and disqualification of BJP MLA from Hamirpur Ashok Chandel. "Yes, we have requested Priyankaji to be chief ministerial candidate and the Congress will have its own government in the state in 2022," said senior party leader and former Varanasi MP Rajesh Mishra. Priyanka, who held

Two sisters gang-raped at gunpoint in UP's Muzaffarnagar



(Agencies)- Two minor sisters were allegedly raped by four men at gunpoint on Tuesday evening, police said. According to a complaint, the sisters aged 13 and 15 years were gang-raped at Kaserwa village by the four men while they went to look for their mother near a sugarcane field, Superintendent of Police (Rural) Alok Sharma said Wednesday. The four men allegedly

threatened to shoot the girls if they cried for help or revealed the incident. They have been booked and efforts are underway to nab the accused, Sharma said. A number of incidents of rape of minors have been reported in Uttar Pradesh in recent weeks, prompting Chief Minister Adityanath to issue a slew of directions including asking the police to intensify foot patrolling in rural areas.

Trump rushes into damage control after saying he'd accept foreign help in 2020

taken out of context, insisting the reporting about his ABC News interview lacked nuance. "My full answer is rarely played by the Fake News Media," Trump said on Twitter without offering evidence to support his claim. "They purposely leave out the part that matters." Later Thursday, White House spokesman Hogan Gidley echoed Trump's assertion. "Look, I wish the media would take the time to look at the full clip. I was standing just feet away from the president in is exchange with George Stephanopoulos. It was very clear the president said if there was wrongdoing, of course he'd turn it over to the F.B.I," he said during an interview with Fox News. However, the president's full statement shows he was equivocal about whether he'd alert the FBI if he was presented with damaging information about his political opponents. ABC News later released a full transcript of the interview, which shows the network accurately represented the president's comments. Trump scoffed when asked by ABC's George Stephanopoulos whether his son should have alerted federal authorities when he found out about a 2016 meeting with Russian nationals who claimed to have damaging information about Democratic candidate Hillary

Clinton. "I've seen a lot of things over my life. I don't think in my whole life I've ever called the FBI. In my whole life. You don't call the FBI," he said, adding later, "Give me a break. Life doesn't work that way." He also said FBI Director Christopher Wray was "wrong" for saying that candidates should report to the agency efforts by foreign agents to interfere in an election. Later, Stephanopoulos asked if he would call the FBI if Russia, China or other foreign entities offered negative information about an opponent. Trump said, "I think, maybe, you do both. I think you might want to listen. There's nothing wrong with listening." Trump's team has repeatedly been pressed about how to handle foreign offers of campaign help after it became public that his son, son-in-law and campaign manager met in June 2016 with a Kremlin-linked Russian lawyer who claimed to have information about Clinton. Trump's team has said nothing came of the meeting. While special counsel Robert Mueller found that Moscow interfered in the 2016 election to help the president, he did not find enough evidence to conclude Trump's campaign colluded with Russians in that effort. Trump's comments triggered a barrage of criticism.



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#MeToo has a long way to go before changing gender equations

Women, especially those who are empowered, cannot have it both ways. They cannot be victims, however hurtful it may be to realise that the men they invested in are cads

(Agencies)- The #MeToo movement has lost some of its steam but a singular positive development has been that across offices and other places of employment, men think twice before making jocular remarks about the looks or other attributes of women colleagues, think long and hard before making untoward advances and are careful about putting out insensitive messages on social media. But at the same time, it has also thrown up some facets that need to be taken into account, and that is the number of men who have been wrongly accused of sexual harassment. It is a positive thing that women have been emboldened to come out with their stories and are receiving a great deal of public sympathy. For many women, this was a time to put out in the open their long-pending grievances. At the same time, many are guilty of exploiting the new social acceptance.

It would appear that many women have either deliberately or otherwise made allegations of sexual harassment on premises which do not qualify as such. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), in 2016 a total of 38,947 rape cases were reported. Of these, 10,068 cases were by women who claimed that they were raped on false promises of marriage. In these cases, the relationships were consensual. Some cases were filed by parents trying to cover for their daughters. For many parents, the idea that their daughters would enter into consensual relationships is not acceptable; the fact that there is an element of coercion makes it more acceptable, strange though this may seem. No one in a consensual relationship has the right to assume the future course of this. It is perhaps ungentlemanly to refuse to marry a woman after promising to do so, but it is not a criminal offence. If

a man opts out of his promise, he cannot be accused of rape. Unfortunately, by the time the court dismisses such cases, or even cases made to settle scores, the man has suffered a huge loss of reputation, perhaps even his livelihood. It is true that a patriarchal society refuses to accept that an unmarried woman can be sexually active unless there was an element of coercion. But at the same time, the answer to this cannot be to make false accusations against the man concerned. Women, especially those who are empowered, cannot have it both ways. They cannot be victims, however hurtful it may be to realise that the men they invested in are cads. There is no remedy in the law for a woman who feels that she has been led up the garden path, which probably explains why some of them resort to filing



rape charges. What happens is that the more flimsy rape charges there are, the more genuine cases fall by the wayside. Similarly, several charges in the #MeToo movement also tend to infantilise women, making it seem that they are incapable of looking after themselves. Of course, ugly jokes and advances are unacceptable but women who are capable of retaliation should do so and not be content to be victims. Many of them, especially in the West, who have come out are powerful women who would not have lacked for backing if they should have needed it. However, It is a great precedent that they have set

in opening up this debate and removing taboos around the subject. But the struggle has to go deeper down to the women who are in positions in which they cannot help themselves or do not have any support structures. In this, I would include the vast number of Indian women who work in the unorganised sector, who are more or less at the mercy of their employers and, in some cases, male co-workers. Unfortunately, the #MeToo movement has got focused on some high profile cases in India and genuine change in gender equations is still nowhere within reach.

People trust Modi to make things better

Farmers suffering distress or the unemployed young chose to consciously overlook their difficulties in the belief that Modi, if given a second chance, would take care of their problems

(Agencies)- Last week, in a surprise decision, the prime minister created two new cabinet committees: one to tackle investment and growth; and the other to handle employment and skill development. Both will be headed by him. This is the first official acknowledgement that the economy faces serious problems. Others were aware of this, but during the elections, the government, at least, would not admit it.

As I reflected on this announcement, I was struck by an inexplicable anomaly. Why did falling growth, rural distress and unemployment not affect the way we voted? The opposition repeatedly said it would but the BJP's huge majority leaves no doubt it didn't. Yet these problems have existed for a long while and people have suffered. The facts make this clear.

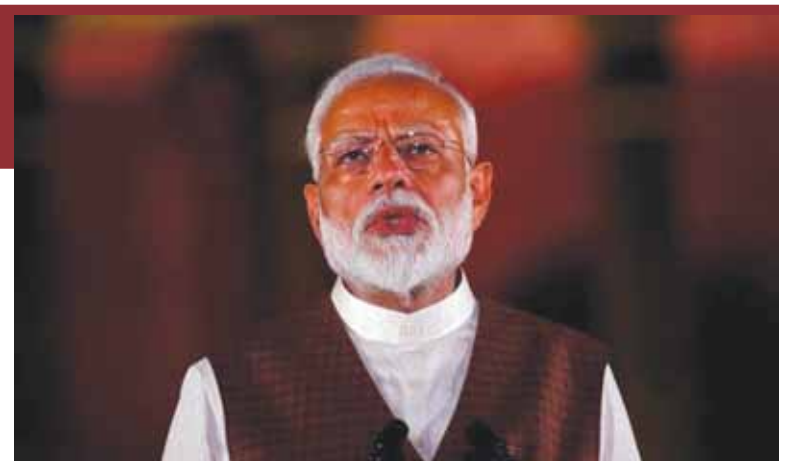
First, growth. In the fourth quarter of last year, it fell to 5.8%, the

lowest in 20 quarters. As a result, for last year as a whole, GDP growth was just 6.8%. And the Finance Secretary has admitted it could fall further in the first half of this year. So the environment in which we voted should have been one of concern with the government's performance.

Now, rural distress. From the first year of the last Modi government to the third, farmer suicides increased by 42%. before the National Crime Records Bureau stopped releasing figures. During the five years of the Fadnavis government in Maharashtra, farmer suicides almost doubled compared to the previous five years, according to a response from the revenue department of the Maharashtra government to an RTI petition. One explanation for this emerges from Labour Bureau data. They show rural wages only grew 0.5% annually during the first Modi government, and for two of those five years,

inflation was greater. Worse, the terms of trade turned significantly against farmers. Whilst the price of what they sold dropped sharply, the cost of things they had to purchase rose steadily. Farmers were getting poorer or, at least, feeling poorer. They should have been unhappy with the government.

Finally, unemployment. For a start, the government no longer denies the unemployment rate rose to 6.1% by 2017-18, the highest in 45 years. The situation confronting the young is considerably worse. The same National Sample Survey Office report says youth unemployment more than doubled between 2011-12 and 2017-18. This happened in both rural and urban India. And the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy says unemployment has risen further. This May it averaged 7%. So the



unemployed should have turned their backs on the BJP.

Now can you understand why I'm perplexed? Given these stark facts falling growth, rural distress and unemployment should have been key determinants of the way we voted. This is what the opposition expected. The fact they weren't has turned all received wisdom on its head. So why didn't the economic situation matter? I have a simple answer: Narendra Modi. Trust in him influenced the vote. Farmers suffering distress or the unemployed young chose to consciously overlook their difficulties in the belief that Modi,

if given a second chance, would take care of their problems. I can only guess at how they explained this to themselves. Perhaps they felt if he's given them toilets and electricity, cooking gas and village roads he will, in a second term, do more. And though the toilets may not have water or they cannot replace their gas cylinders, a credible start has nonetheless been made. It's definitely more than they had before. Seen this way, it is not hard to understand why they came to the conclusion that, given a second term, Modi would deliver again. This is nothing but faith in the man..

Mike Pompeo to push India for more US access to local markets

Pompeo's remarks at the US-India Business Council refer to a decision by US President Donald Trump to end preferential trade treatment for India.



(By our staff reporter) - preferential trade treatment for The United States is open to dialogue to resolve trade differences with India by allowing American companies more access to Indian markets, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday ahead of a visit to New Delhi later this month. Pompeo's remarks at the US-India Business Council refer to a decision by US President Donald Trump to end

India from June 5 over the trade barriers. "We remain open to dialogue, and we hope that our friends in India will drop their trade barriers and trust in the competitiveness" of their own companies, Pompeo said ahead of his June 24-30 travels to India, Sri Lanka, Japan and South Korea. "We'll also push for the free flow of data across borders - not just to help American companies - but to

protect data and ensure consumer privacy. He added: "And speaking of privacy, we are eager to help India establish secure communications networks - including 5G networks." The privileges come under the General System of Preferences, or GSP, which had been allowing preferential duty-free imports of up to \$5.6 billion a year into the United States from the South Asian nations. India is the biggest beneficiary of the GSP program. Washington has been particularly annoyed by India's tightening of regulations that have undermined major US companies but favoured domestic entities in the past year. In particular, tighter e-commerce rules that came in earlier this year hurt Amazon.com Inc and Walmart Inc, which last year bought Indian online retailer Flipkart for \$16 billion.

'Modi hai to mumkin hai': Mike Pompeo in policy speech ahead of India visit

(News Agencies)- Citing the popular election slogan "Modi hai to mumkin hai", US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has sought to take the bilateral relationship with India to the next level and said the Trump and Modi Administrations have a "unique opportunity" to make it happen. "As Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi said in his latest campaign, 'Modi hai to mumkin hai,' or 'Modi makes it possible', I'm looking forward to exploring what's possible between our people," Pompeo said in his major India policy speech at the India Ideas Summit of US-India Business Council on Wednesday. Very much looking forward to his trip to New Delhi later this month, and meeting Modi, and his new counterpart, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Pompeo listed out some of the "big ideas and big opportunities" that

can take the bilateral relationship to a new level. Giving a sneak preview of his India mission, he said he truly believes the two nations have a unique opportunity to move forward together for the good of their peoples, the Indo-Pacific region, and the world. Pompeo will travel to India, Sri Lanka, Japan and South Korea from June 24 to 30. His four-nation is aimed at deepening US partnerships in the strategic Indo-Pacific region. Pompeo said under President Donald Trump, the US has taken defence cooperation to newer heights, solidified their common vision for the Indo-Pacific and taken a far tougher stand on Pakistan's unacceptable support for terrorism. Now the Trump and Modi Administrations have a "unique opportunity to take this special partnership even further", Pompeo said

he has a strong partner in his new counterpart, Jaishankar - a former ambassador to the United States. "He said in a speech in April that he's ready to cultivate warmer relations with America - and the feeling is mutual. We want to move ahead," he said and enumerated how that can be done. First, the two countries have to build ever-stronger relationships, he said. "Forging strong ties means formalizing these individual friendships. Last year, we kicked off the '2+2 dialogue' alongside the Department of Defence. We've also reinvigorated the Quad Dialogue among India, the United States, Japan, and Australia - all like-minded democracies in the Indo-Pacific. These are all good steps," he said. India and the US, he said, must embrace the strategic framework that works for both the nations.

Terrain, weather slows down IAF rescue team looking for AN-32 survivors

(By our staff reporter) - Bad weather and harsh terrain on Wednesday prevented a search and rescue operations from reaching the site of the crash of an AN-32 aircraft of the Indian Air force in Arunachal Pradesh's West Siang district, the IAF said.

"Today #IAF mobilised 15 personnel for rescue operations of #An32 crash. The rescuers are expected to reach the crash site by tonight. The terrain weather & thick vegetation is slowing down the progress of rescue team. IAF is making every effort possible to reach the site," the IAF tweeted in the evening. Earlier in the day, it had said in a statement that the first rescuers had reached the site of the crash of an AN-32 transport aircraft to look for survivors. The IAF launched a major search and rescue operation for survivors after the



wreckage of the aircraft which crashed on June 3 with 13 people on board was spotted on Tuesday. On Tuesday, the IAF said the wreckage was located at a height of 12,000 feet near a small village called Lipo. The flight which was bound for an advanced landing ground at Mechuka in Arunachal Pradesh went missing around 1 pm on June 3 after it took off from Jorhat in Assam. The terrain and bad weather had earlier hampered search operations for the aircraft. The first aerial image of the crash site shows debris from the aircraft and charred trees, indicating a big fire after the plane went down.

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CBI raids 21 places, including houses of ex-UP minister's kin



(By our staff reporter) - The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Wednesday conducted searches at 21 locations in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh in connection with alleged illegal mining activity being undertaken in Hamirpur district between 2012 and 2016, agency officials said. Two properties owned by a relative of former minister in the Samajwadi Party government, Gayatri Prajapati, were also raided in his home town Amethi, the officials said on the condition

during the relevant period would also be probed. Former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav held additional charge of the mining department from March 2012 to July 2013, while Gayatri Prajapati was in-charge of the department for the remaining period between 2013 and 2016. One of the CBI officials cited above said it was alleged in the FIR that public servants in collusion with other accused allowed illegal mining of minor minerals, including sand, in Hamirpur. The official said that the probe also hinted that some other people were allowed to excavate minor minerals illegally, to commit theft of the minor minerals and to extort money from the lease holders as well as from the drivers of the vehicles transporting minor minerals. On January 5, CBI teams had raided 12 places across Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, including the residences of IAS officer B Chandrakala in Lucknow and Samajwadi Party MLC Ramesh Kumar Mishra in Kanpur and Jalaun in this connection.

of anonymity. Prajapati is currently in judicial custody in a rape case. Several incriminating documents related to the case have also been recovered during the raids, the officials claimed. The CBI's Delhi unit had registered a first information report (FIR) on January 2 against 11 people, including 2008 batch Indian Administrative Officer B Chandrakala and Samajwadi Party MLC Ramesh Kumar Mishra in connection with alleged illegal mining case. The FIR mentioned that the role of the mining ministers concerned

Piyush Goyal appointed BJP deputy leader in Rajya Sabha

(By our staff reporter) - Railways minister Piyush Goyal will be the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s new deputy leader in Parliament's upper House or the Rajya Sabha, the party announced on Wednesday. Goyal will replace law and information technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who is now a member of Lok Sabha. Defence minister Rajnath Singh will continue to be the BJP's deputy leader in Lok Sabha. Goyal, 54, is a second term Rajya Sabha member and son of former Union minister Vedprakash Goyal. He was inducted into Prime Minister Narendra Modi's previous government as a junior minister with independent charge of coal and power. He was promoted to the cabinet rank in September 2017 and also given the charge of railways. Goyal also held the finance portfolio in Modi's previous government when Arun Jaitley took a leave for treatment. He is also a former BJP treasurer. The BJP on Tuesday appointed

social justice minister Thawarchanda Gehlot as the party's leader in Rajya Sabha. He has replaced Jaitley, who opted out of the Union council of ministers over health reasons. Gehlot, a four-time Lok Sabha member, is serving his second term in Rajya Sabha. The BJP has appointed Sanjay Jaiswal as its Lok Sabha chief whip. It also appointed three women Parliament members as its whips for the first time. Besides these three women whips, 15 other whips for Lok Sabha have also been appointed for parliamentarians from different states. In Lok Sabha, the BJP's strength has increased to 303. Kailash Vijayvargiya has been reappointed as in-charge of the party's parliamentary office and Balasubrahmanyam Kumarsu as its secretary. Modi will be the leader of the BJP's parliamentary party executive, which also includes party president Amit Shah among others.

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Pakistan is on a path of its own

Downturns in relations with India often have their origins in the internal civil-military equations in Pakistan and this is a factor which we have no real policy instrument to deal with

(By our staff reporter)- A new government with a massive mandate beckons us forward, enables us to be ambitious. After all, nothing ventured, nothing gained. This applies to the entire spectrum of foreign policy and, in particular, to areas where policy formulation is most critical and challenging: our neighbourhood. Being forward looking is both a virtue and a necessity. However, with regard to our relations with Pakistan in particular, this principle has to be moderated and tempered by another. To borrow from William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It is not even past." So the new government will face the twin pulls of crafting policy through these two opposing polarities and principles each of which is internally and wholly consistent. A flashback over the past five years presents a snapshot of India-Pakistan relations as a whole. The invitation to the then Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to attend the swearing-in of the new government in May 2014 seemed a real leapfrog into

the future because, as is said, a canyon needs an instinctive single leap of faith since two are not possible. Similarly, December 2015 suggested a tipping point when meetings first between national security advisers (NSAs), and then foreign ministers, were capped by a brief visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Lahore. The details are less important than the political statement that emerged: that the prime minister of India was prepared to invest enormous political capital in the India-Pakistan relationship. Terrorist attacks at our forces in Pathankot, Uri, Pulwama and others encapsulate the other side of the story and underpin all the difficulties of framing policy on the basis of forward looking first principles howsoever valuable they may be in themselves. Looking ahead, two issues seem central. The first is internal change in Pakistan as it entered a long crisis from 2006-2007. In retrospect it would appear that many of the difficulties of crafting and then sustaining a Pakistan



policy by India emerged from that crisis. So while a policy could be made, and it appeared sensible enough, its implementation was subject to forces not in our control because they were internal to Pakistan. Some aspects of that crisis have receded and Pakistan's internal security situation has certainly improved in the second half of the current decade as compared to the first. Yet, new fronts have opened up. The flux in Afghanistan offers to Pakistan numerous tactical gains but the outlook in any medium or longer term is going to be more sombre. The economic situation in Pakistan remains dire. But it is in the realm of politics that the bigger problems lie. Here, notwithstanding his personal charisma and the fact that he

built the ruling party up from scratch, Prime Minister Imran Khan seems strangely diminished. One example of this was in the removal of the finance minister in the midst of a protracted negotiation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Managing the fallout of the IMF loan conditionality will test and strain PM Khan given the welfare state promises he was elected on. And then there is the long shadow of the military despite the cacophony of "all is well" and "all on the same page". It is not necessary to look for shadows everywhere but as political and social conflict sharpen, usually the impact of civil-military issues become more visible. This equation is of enormous importance where relations with India are concerned

yet there is a fundamental unpredictability to it. The army chief's tenure ends in November and the run up to that period will see the maturing of other fermenting issues: in Afghanistan, in relations with the United States and, most all, in Pakistan itself as coping with the economic symptoms of a structural crisis will take its toll. It is useful to recall that the origins of India-Pakistan downturns often - not always, but often - have their origins in the internal civil-military equations in Pakistan and this is a factor which we have no real policy instrument to deal with. The second issue is to reflect on the nature of Indian policy itself. Dialogue, normalisation, stabilisation, peace process and conflict resolution have often coalesced.

India must focus on rebuilding trust with Lanka

But this will not happen overnight. There was a time when New Delhi thought it could be first friend of all interest groups in Sri Lanka. India should continue to strive for that goal but accept it will be a long and winding path

(By our staff reporter)- India should help heal the divided island of Sri Lanka. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's short visit to the island was designed to show solidarity with Sri Lanka after its recent terrorism trauma. But he also sought to urge Sri Lankans, a country unusually crisscrossed by faultlines given its small size, to avoid the path that led them earlier to civil war. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Sirisena took some of this to heart when he announced his country needed to avoid creating a "Muslim Prabhakaran" - a reference to the late Tamil separatist leader. Such statements have been rare since

the Islamic State-inspired attacks, in part because some Sri Lankan politicians supported reprisals against the Muslim minority. New Delhi must walk a tightrope when it tries to influence Sri Lanka. India's blundering interventions and Sinhalese unwillingness to admit its own mistakes in the civil war has meant there is much resentment of New Delhi. This residual suspicion has geopolitical repercussions. It encouraged the last Sri Lankan regime to embrace Beijing so tightly that the island economy is now the textbook example of a Chinese debt trap. The lack of trust seems

to have also been one reason the Sri Lankan leadership ignored Indian intelligence warnings about the terror attacks. Rebuilding a degree of trust at the highest levels is important for India. But this will not happen overnight. In its own strange way, the terror attacks have given India an opportunity to repair some of the past damage. Modi took pains to meet all the heads of the three warring Sri Lankan political parties: President Sirisena, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the opposition leader Mahendra Rajapaksa. He also met the chief ministers of all the provinces and



the Tamil minority parties. The Indo-Japanese contract to build a new port terminal in Colombo was also finalised, helping remind Sri Lankans of the economic benefits of a rising India. There

was a time when New Delhi thought it could be first friend of all interest groups in Sri Lanka. India should continue to strive for that goal but accept it will be a long and winding path.

In Sarbananda Sonowal wish list for PM Modi, a hard push on plans for 2 Bangladesh ports



help expedite the construction of the Asian Trilateral Highway from Thailand's Mae Sot to Manipur's Moreh via Myanmar. Sonowal said that it will go a long way in restoring trade links between the Northeast states and ASEAN countries and will also give a strong push to the Centre's Act East Policy. During their meeting, the

(Agencies)-Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Wednesday asked PM Narendra Modi to expedite the bilateral agreement with Bangladesh which will grant the Northeastern states access to Chittagong and Mongla ports in the neighbouring country to boost trade in the seven states. Talks to open up these ports to trade from the Northeastern states have been ongoing for a while, and subsequently the Bangladesh Cabinet passed a resolution to grant access in

September last year. However, a pact is yet to be inked between the two governments. The Northeastern states have been asking the Centre to expedite talks with Dhaka as it will bring down transportation costs drastically. This will also help trade from the region reach out to other parts of India. Apart from Assam, in Tripura, too, India is building a 15-km long railway line connecting Agartala and Bangladesh's Akhaura near Chittagong port. Sonowal also asked PM Modi to

first after Modi took over as PM for the second time, Sonowal also urged the revival of the flood management programme (FMP) and to include 'river erosion' is not included in the guidelines of the National and State Disaster Response Forces (NDRF/SDRF). "Sonowal also made it clear that Assam is one of the most disaster-prone states in India. Apart from flood being a major problem, river bank erosion also poses serious damage to the socio-economic scenario of the State," a release from the office of the chief minister stated.

Bombay high court to hear Pragya Thakur's discharge plea on July 29



(Agencies)- The Bombay high court on Wednesday fixed the final hearing for the discharge applications of Pragya Singh Thakur and two other accused in 2008 Malegaon blasts case as July 29. Besides Pragya, the Bhopal MP, the other accused who have filed discharge applications are Lt Col Prasad Purohit and Sameer Kulkarni. The charges include sections 16 (committing terrorist act) and 18 (conspiring to commit terrorist

act) of the UAPA and sections 120 (b) (criminal conspiracy), 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder), 324 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 153 (a) (promoting enmity between two religious groups) of the IPC. Besides, they have been charged under relevant sections of the Explosive Substances Act. On September 29, 2016, six people were killed and a dozen others were injured when a bomb placed on a motorcycle exploded in Maharashtra's Malegaon city.

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Pakistan Must Stop Terror Before Talks, PM Modi Tells China's Xi Jinping

(Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reiterated India's stand that Pakistan should take concrete action against terror before talks can resume. New Delhi's views on talks and terror not going hand in hand has gained strength after the terror attack in Pulwama and the foreign ministry said PM Modi referred to the matter during his bilateral meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit on Thursday. "Pakistan needs to create an atmosphere free of terror, but at this stage we do not see it happening. We expect Islamabad to take concrete action" to resume talks, foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale quoted the Prime Minister as telling President Xi. China is a strategic ally of Pakistan and is investing considerably in its infrastructure projects. President Xi is expected to meet Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is also attending the SCO summit. Ahead of the summit, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi had written separate letters to their Indian counterparts, pushing for resumption of bilateral talks. After assuming office too, Imran Khan had written to PM Modi, seeking dialogue on all issues, including Kashmir. But no bilateral meeting was scheduled between PM Modi and Imran Khan during the summit, where the two are expected to meet for the first time since the cricketer-turned politician took over as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. India's pressure on Pakistan to take action on terrorists acting from its soil spiked after the February 14 terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama, in which 40 soldiers died. In a huge diplomatic win for India, China also lifted its technical hold on listing Pakistan-based terrorist Masood Azhar as a global terrorist by the UN. Beijing said it took the decision after it found no objection from the US, UK and France. During their meeting on Thursday, Xi Jinping told PM Modi that India and China "do not pose threats" to each other as he expressed Beijing's willingness to join New Delhi in pushing forward a closer development partnership between the two sides. "China is ready to work with India to continuously advance the closer development partnership between the two countries," Xi Jinping said. On Wednesday evening, after the ministry said PM Modi won't fly over Pakistan on his way to Kyrgyzstan -- a move seen as a snub -- Islamabad said its airspace was open for the VVIP flight. Pakistan had closed its airspace in February after the Balakot air strikes. On Thursday, the Prime Minister's flight took a different route to Bishkek.

U.S. says Iran removed unexploded mine from oil tanker

The black-and-white footage, as well as still photographs released by the U.S. military's Central Command, appeared to show the limpet mine on the Kokuka Courageous. A Revolutionary Guard patrol boat pulled alongside the ship and removed the mine, Central Command spokesman Capt. Bill Urban said. "The U.S. and the international community stand ready to defend our interests, including the freedom of navigation," Urban said. "The United States has no interest in engaging in a new conflict in the Middle East. However, we will defend our interests." Iran earlier denied involvement via a statement from its mission to the United Nations. "The U.S. economic war and terrorism against the Iranian people as well as its massive military presence in the region have been and continue to be the main sources of insecurity and instability in the wider Persian Gulf region and the most significant threat to its peace and security," the statement said. The suspected attacks occurred at dawn Thursday about 25 miles off the southern coast of Iran. The Front Altair, loaded with the flammable hydrocarbon mixture naphtha from the United Arab Emirates, radioed for help as it caught fire. A short time later, the Kokuka Courageous, loaded with methanol from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, also called for help. The U.S. Navy sent a destroyer, the USS Bainbridge, to assist, said Cmdr. Joshua Frey, a 5th Fleet spokesman. He described the ships as being hit in a "reported attack," without elaborating. Thursday's attack resembled that of an attack in May targeting four oil tankers off the nearby Emirati port of Fujairah. U.S. officials similarly accused Iran of targeting the ships with limpet mines, which are magnetic and attach to the hulls of a ship. The mines disable, but don't sink, a vessel.

Thank you PM Modi, tweets Netanyahu on India's rare vote for Israel at UN

thank you India, for your support and for standing with Israel at the UN," Netanyahu said in a tweet on Wednesday, almost a week after the June 6 vote. It is the first time that India has voted on a resolution at the UN that is being perceived as pro-Israel. India's position on the Middle East Peace Process has been consistent and clear. India supports a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and relevant UNSC Resolutions. India has also always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora. New Delhi had abstained during a voting at the UNHRC in 2015 on a resolution related to violence in Gaza which was seen as a "significant move" in Israel and attributed by many to the "emerging strong chemistry between Modi and Netanyahu". India had then explained to the Palestinian Authority the reasons for its stand and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had "accepted and understood" why New Delhi abstained then. The ECOSOC vote, which took place at the UN, saw countries such as the US, France, Germany, India, Japan, the UK, South Korea and Canada polling in favour of Israel, while China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and others voted against it. The proposal made by the Palestinian NGO 'Shahed' to obtain observer status in the UN was rejected by a 28-14 vote. Maya Kadosh, deputy chief of mission at the Israel embassy in India, on Tuesday in a Tweet thanked New Delhi "for standing with @IsraelinUN and rejecting the request of terrorist organization 'Shahed' to obtain the status of an observer in #UN.

'If both govts decide, Kashmir issue can be solved', says Pak PM Imran Khan

Tensions flared between India and Pakistan in February after suicide attack by Jaish-e-Mohammed at Pulwama in Kashmir killed 40 CRPF troops. Khan and Modi exchanged tweets after the elections and the Pakistani leader sent a message congratulating the Indian premier. However, there are no signs of a resumption of contacts between the two sides. "And so our emphasis should be peace, resolving our differences through dialogue. And our main difference with India is Kashmir. And if the heads of two countries resolve, if two governments decide, this issue can be resolved," Khan said. "But, unfortunately, we have not had much success from India so far. But we hope now that the current prime minister has one big mandate, we hope that he will use this mandate to develop better relationship and bring peace in the subcontinent." Khan said Pakistan had tried to improve relations even before India's polls in April-May but had not made headway during the electoral campaign. "We actually tried before the elections, but unfortunately we felt that before the elections, Prime Minister Modi's party was building up this hysteria, unfortunately, anti-Pakistan feeling among its people, appealing to its right-wing Hindu nationalists, and so there was no chance of peace before the elections," he said. With the elections over, Pakistan is hoping the Indian leadership will "avail this opportunity that Pakistan is offering - that let's resolve all our differences through dialogue", he added. Khan said the two nuclear-armed countries cannot think of resolving differences through military means. "It is madness. So we hope that now we can progress, use dialogue to resolve our differences," he said. Asked if Russia could mediate between India and Pakistan, Khan replied: "Pakistan is looking for any kind of mediation because Pakistan believes that progress comes with peace. And when you have tensions with your neighbours, it detracts from resources that could be spent on human beings. They end up getting spent on unproductive things like arms. And so we believe in peace with all the neighbours, especially with India." Khan described the Kartarpur corridor linking India to a gudwara where Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, spent his last years as "a great initiative from Pakistan" and said he hoped "India will respond positively to these initiatives to further people-to-people contact".

Ponty Chadha's son held for 'cheating homebuyers

brokers of Uppal Chadha Hi-Tech Developers Pvt Ltd started approaching the public for booking plots in the proposed township projects. "The alleged company allured buyers by showing them layout plan for the proposed townships spread over 1,500 acres. The possession of plots was to be given in eight months from the date of allotment letters. All the 29 victims who have approached the police so far had booked plots between 2005 and 2006 and paid about R 4.5 crores," Choudhary said.

Why Trump's migration deal with Mexico could fail

Neither the U.S. nor Mexico has offered a detailed plan for how the counter-migration strategy will be implemented.

(News Agencies)- President Donald Trump's deal with Mexico faces such huge logistical hurdles that neither country may be able to carry out its promises. One key part of the deal is Mexico's agreement to deploy its newly formed national guard to intercept and possibly deport migrants who cross its southern border. But Mexico may not have that force trained and ready to deal with a population of asylum seekers. The deal will also expand the Trump administration's policy of keeping migrants

waiting in Mexico while their asylum applications are processed in the U.S. But Mexico is already struggling to handle more than 11,000 migrants who the U.S. has dumped back into that country since Trump rolled out the program in January. Neither the U.S. nor Mexico has offered a detailed plan for how the counter-migration strategy will be implemented, even as both countries face a tight timeline to produce results. Officials from the two countries are expected to meet in 45 days to evaluate the effect on

migrant flows, and the U.S. will monitor results daily. But border watchers say they have no idea how Mexico will handle the joint demands, particularly as the massive case backloads in U.S. immigration courts could keep migrants waiting south of the U.S. border for months or even years. "To try to imagine how they're going to double or even triple those numbers over the next few months is kind of mind boggling," said Chris Wilson, deputy director of the Wilson Center's Mexico

Institute. "I just literally don't know where all those people are going to go."

Here's a closer look at obstacles to implementing the agreement:

1. Mexico's capacity to absorb migrants
The most immediate pressure point will be on Mexican border communities. As part of the deal reached Friday, the U.S. vowed unilaterally to expand its "remain in Mexico" program - formally known as the Migrant Protection Protocols - from targeted areas to the entire southwest border. More than 11,000 migrants have been forced to wait in Mexico under the



program since its launch in January, according to the Mexican government. But that's just with it operating in Border Patrol's San Diego and El Centro sectors in California, and its El Paso sector in Texas and New Mexico. That number is poised to skyrocket in the coming weeks, even as U.S. immigration courts

already face a massive case backlog that has worsened in recent years. The Hope Border Institute, a pro-migrant group operating around El Paso, Texas, and across the border in Ciudad Juárez, has encountered migrants sent to Juárez with U.S. court hearings scheduled for April 2020 - nearly one year ahead.

Kamala Harris: Justice Dept. has 'no choice' but to charge Trump if he loses in 2020

(News Agencies)-Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) said the Justice Department would have "no choice" but to charge President Donald Trump with obstruction of justice if he finished his term without being impeached. Speaking with NPR's Scott Detrow in an interview published Wednesday, Harris said special counsel Robert Mueller essentially set the stage for criminal charges against Trump with his investigation into the 2016 election.

Longstanding Justice Department policy says that a sitting president cannot be indicted, and Harris said that was essentially the only reason Mueller did not charge Trump. All that would change in 2021 if the Democratic presidential hopeful were in the White House and the Justice Department were under her watch, she said. "I believe that they would have no choice, and that they should," Harris said of the Justice Department's charging

Trump with obstruction. "I believe there should be accountability. Everyone should be held accountable. And the president is not above the law." Harris has openly called for Trump's impeachment following the release of the Mueller report, which did not absolve the president of obstructing FBI efforts to look into his 2016 campaign. During his first public statement since the release of his report, Mueller said that if his team had had

"confidence that the president clearly did not commit a crime, we would have said so." Several other Democratic candidates for 2020 have also called for Trump's impeachment, including Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Cory Booker of New Jersey and Kirsten Gillibrand of New York. Harris told Detrow "the facts and the evidence will take the process where it leads," and didn't explicitly say whether the president had committed a crime.



But she did advocate for justice under law," said Harris, a former California attorney general. "It doesn't say Trump's office. On the side of Supreme Court is written "equal There you go."

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Trump: 'I'm not a huge believer in polling'

(News Agencies)-President Donald Trump on Wednesday revived his attacks on the polling industry, denying reports that his own internal polling has indicated trouble ahead for his reelection bid, even as public polls show warning signs. The president pushed back on a New York Times story detailing his response to a "devastating" 17-state poll conducted by his internal pollster, and he reiterated that he believes the internal poll circulating was false but offered no evidence to back up his claim.



Trump said that the leak of "phony polls" that showed him lagging behind was "ridiculous," declaring in the Oval Office that

to the contrary, "we are winning in every single state that we've polled."

According to the Times, after being briefed on the poll, Trump asked aides to deny that he was trailing former Vice President Joe Biden in several key states. When the topline of Trump's

internal polls leaked, he reportedly then asked advisers to "say publicly that other data showed him doing well."

"These are polls that we have that nobody saw," Trump said, apparently referring to the internal polls that he said show him in good shape for next year. "We do very little polling because I'm not a huge believer in polling. I think you go out and you fight and you don't really need polls, you need ideas, more than polls. But we have some internal polling, very little, and it's unbelievably strong. The strongest I've ever been is exactly today."

In a pair of tweets earlier Wednesday, Trump cheered the power social media gives him to "fight back" against media outlets, writing that "Their new weapon of choice is Fake Polling, sometimes referred to as Suppression Polls (they suppress the numbers)."

"The Fake (Corrupt) News Media said



they had a leak into polling done by my campaign," he said, claiming that despite the flurry of investigations dogging him, his internal polls "are the best numbers WE have ever had."

"They reported Fake numbers that they made up & don't even exist. WE WILL WIN AGAIN!" he added.

Referring to his 2016 attacks on pollsters, Trump also said that a current spate of polls that have shown him losing in head-to-head matchups with any number of the top

2020 Democratic contenders "is worse" than 2016.

The latest damaging numbers came Tuesday, in a national Quinnipiac poll that showed Trump losing to six 2020 Democrats by as little as 5 points to as much as 13. In the past several weeks, polls have shown the president trailing in two other states key to his 2016 election: Michigan and Pennsylvania. One Quinnipiac poll last week even showed Biden topping Trump in the GOP stronghold of Texas.

Donald Trump says 'I'd take it' if foreigners offer dirt on 2020 rivals

(News Agencies)-President Donald Trump said he'd want to hear damaging information about a political opponent in the 2020 election even if it were provided by a foreigner - a scenario that evokes some of the controversial conduct at the heart of Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

"I think I'd take it," the president said in an interview with ABC News's George Stephanopoulos that aired Wednesday.

Asked whether he would accept information from foreigners or hand it over to the FBI, Trump said he thought that "maybe you do both."

"I think you might want to listen, there isn't anything wrong with listening," he said, adding that if someone from a country like Norway offered information on his opponent, he would "want to hear it."

Trump's comments come despite the years-long federal investigation into whether his campaign colluded with Russian agents to coordinate the release of damaging emails hacked from the Democratic National Committee and aides to former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Mueller found numerous Russian attempts to interfere in the 2016 election, but ultimately concluded there wasn't enough evidence to establish that

the president, or a member of his campaign, had conspired in those efforts.

In his report, Mueller explored whether a 2016 meeting in Trump Tower with Russians, which was arranged on the promise of dirt on Hillary Clinton, constituted an illegal act. Mueller concluded that there wasn't enough evidence to charge participants - who included his son, Donald Trump Jr., and son-in-law Jared Kushner -- with a crime.

Foreign Entity Mueller also made clear that there was good reason to be concerned about opposition research coming from foreigners.

"A foreign entity that engaged in such research and provided resulting information to a campaign could exert a greater effect on an election, and a greater tendency to ingratiate the donor to the candidate, than a gift of money or tangible things of value," Mueller wrote. The president said those believing his aides and family members who were approached with offers of damaging information about Clinton should have contacted the FBI were naïve, and said lawmakers regularly collected "opposition research" on their opponents. "Give me a break," Trump said. "Life doesn't work that way."

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Hong Kong police fire tear gas, rubber bullets at protesters

(Agencies)- Hong Kong police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters who had massed outside government headquarters Wednesday in opposition to a proposed extradition bill that has become a lightning rod for concerns over greater Chinese control and erosion of civil liberties in the territory. The afternoon violence marked a major escalation in the semi-autonomous Chinese city's biggest political crisis in years. It came after protesters earlier in the day forced the delay of a legislative debate over the bill, which would allow criminal suspects in Hong Kong to be sent for trial in mainland China. The overwhelmingly young crowd had overflowed onto a major downtown road as they overturned barriers and tussled with police outside the government building. But when some appeared to have breached the police cordon around the building, the police launched their response, which also included firing pepper spray and water hoses.

Earlier, a curt government statement said the legislative session scheduled to begin at 11 a.m. would be "changed to a later time." Officials gave no indication of when that would be and Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam canceled a scheduled news briefing. The delay appeared to have been at least a temporary victory for the bill's opponents, whose protests are the largest since pro-democracy demonstrations closed down parts of the Asian financial center for more than three months in 2014. Some businesses closed for the day, and labor strikes and class boycotts were called. The protests are a challenge to China's ruling Communist Party and President Xi Jinping, who has in the past said he would not tolerate Hong Kong being used as a base to challenge the party's authority. But they are also giving vent to young Hong Kongers alienated by a political process dominated by the territory's

economic elite.

At a brief news conference held as the chaos swirled just outside, Police Commissioner Stephen Lo Wai-chung called the demonstration a riot. That could mean long jail terms for anyone arrested, adding to concerns that Hong Kong's government is using public disturbance laws to intimidate political protesters.

"We condemn such irresponsible behavior," Lo said. "There's no need to hurt innocent people to express your opinions," he said, adding that people should not "do anything they will regret for the rest of their lives."

Protesters were seen throwing rocks, bottles, metal barricades and other projectiles at police.

Police spokesman Gong Weng Chun defended the decision to use tear gas and other non-lethal weapons, saying officers wouldn't have had to do so if they weren't facing a serious threat that could seriously injure or even kill them.

The state of the legislative



process remained unclear following the violence, which had largely ended by about 5 p.m. after police herded demonstrators across a pedestrian bridge. Traffic in one of the busiest parts of the city remained blocked, however, and several hundred protesters seemed in no hurry to leave. Earlier in the day, protesters said they hoped the blockade would persuade Lam's administration to shelve the proposed amendments. "We want

the government to just set the legislation aside and not bring it back," said a protester who gave only his first name, Marco, to avoid possible repercussions from authorities.

Another protester, who gave her name only as King, also out of fear of repercussions, said the protest was a watershed moment for Hong Kong's young generation. "We have to stand up for our rights or they will be taken away," she said.

Dressed in black T-shirts and jeans, many protesters appeared undaunted by demands to disperse from police. The demonstrators also appeared mindful of Beijing's growing use of electronic surveillance such as facial recognition technology to build dossiers on those it considers politically unreliable, with many donning surgical masks to hide their features, as well as to safeguard against tear gas.

3 Indian-origin Tory MPs back Boris Johnson as next PM

(Agencies)- As leading candidates to replace Prime Minister Theresa May set out their stalls in the leadership election, five Indian-origin Conservative MPs declared their support: three back Boris Johnson and two favour Dominic Raab. Promises by Johnson of withholding the 'divorce bill' from EU to get a better deal, or he and other candidates offering tax cuts became the subject of intense debate, as the deadline to file nominations for the contest ended at 5 pm on Monday. The declared support by Conservative MPs to the 10 contenders is being carefully monitored to indicate their level of support among the 318 party MPs, who will vote in the first phase of the two-phase election. The MPs will whittle down

the number of candidates to two through several rounds of voting that will eliminate contenders with the least number of votes. The second phase will see 1.2 lakh party members vote on the two candidates, with the result declared in week beginning July 22. The three Indian-origin MPs supporting Johnson - who also faces much opposition - are junior minister Rishi Sunak (son-in-law of Infosys founder N R Narayana Murthy), minister of state Alok Sharma, and former international development secretary Priti Patel. Raab is supported by former junior ministers Shailesh Vara and Suella Braverman. After Johnson, contenders with the most support so far are foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt and environment secretary

Michael Gove. Home secretary Sajid Javid, who has been gaining some support, is among contenders with the least support.

Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, said promises of tax cuts and spending increases coming by the candidates will horrify bureaucrats in the Treasury grappling with budget cuts and a slowing economy. The final 10 candidates are: o Environment Secretary Michael Gove o Health Secretary Matt Hancock o Former Chief Whip Mark Harper o Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt o Home Secretary Sajid Javid o Former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson o Former Leader of the House Andrea Leadsom

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Raghuram Rajan among contenders for Bank of England governor job

(Agencies)- Raghuram Rajan has delivered some uncomfortable economic truths in a career spanning the International Monetary Fund and powerful positions in his native India. The question is whether Brexit Britain is ready to hear them from another foreign Bank of England governor.

The job of stewarding the U.K.'s monetary policy and maintaining its financial stability has rarely been more political, and Rajan is the only outsider among the top contenders in the running to replace Mark Carney, according to bookmakers and economists who follow the 325-year-old institution.

Carney's tenure has been overshadowed by the convulsions over Brexit, with some hard liners in the governing Conservatives accusing the Canadian of exaggerating the economic pain and underplaying the benefits of leaving the European Union. As the party chooses a new leader following the resignation of Prime Minister Theresa May, her potential successors have vowed to deliver Brexit, and the latest deadline is Oct. 31. Rajan has made sympathetic noises toward the U.K.'s dilemma, particularly the disillusionment in parts of the country that fueled the Brexit vote. He told the Times newspaper in March, though, that success depends on the

U.K. reengaging with the world.

That would start with his appointment, according to David Blanchflower, an economics professor at Dartmouth College and a former Bank of England policy maker. The other top candidates for the job, including front-runner Andrew Bailey, already work at the bank or financial regulator.

"It's a pretty unimpressive bunch, with Rajan sitting head and shoulders above the rest of them," Blanchflower said. "The problem is, why would anybody want to put themselves in the position of having to deal with Brexit?" Rajan, 56, a professor at the Chicago

Booth School of Business, declined to comment about his potential candidacy when contacted by Bloomberg, as did the Bank of England. The U.K. Treasury, which is responsible for hiring the next governor, declined to comment on who had applied by last week's deadline. Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond has stressed the need to look internationally for the next appointment, though it's not clear if he will still be in his job when the decision is made. What is clear, though, is that Rajan has the right sort of track record. He was chief economist of the IMF from 2003 to 2006, and then worked as an adviser to the Indian



government before Lehman Brothers becoming governor of the Reserve Bank of India in 2013. At the elite Jackson Hole annual economic gathering in 2005 when he was at the IMF, Rajan warned that risks were building up in the global financial system. At the time, former U.S. Treasury secretary Larry Summers criticized Rajan as a "luddite." Three years later, Rajan introduced inflation targeting and led an effort to clean up bad loans in the banking industry. He remained for just one three-year term running India's central bank after heavy criticism from segments of the government for offering opinions on matters unrelated to monetary policy.

Hong Kong markets tumble amid China extradition protests

The Hang Seng Index was 1.6% lower as of the midday break, with local property developers among the biggest losers, while the Hong Kong dollar strengthened as much as 0.15%, the biggest gain in six months.

(Agencies)- Hong Kong stocks tumbled and the currency soared as interbank interest rates jumped amid protests that closed roads in the city's financial district.

The Hang Seng Index was 1.6% lower as of the midday break, with local property developers among the biggest losers, while the Hong Kong dollar

strengthened as much as 0.15%, the biggest gain in six months. The one-month interbank borrowing cost, known as Hibor, rose 29 basis points to about 2.42%, the highest since 2008.

While some analysts attributed the tighter liquidity to seasonal demand for cash such as

dividend payments, others said the protests -- aimed at preventing the passing of a bill allowing Hong Kong to extradite its citizens to mainland China -- could be spurring concern about potential capital outflows. The squeeze has driven up the cost of shorting the Hong Kong dollar, which also contributed to the one-day jump.

"Recent political events in Hong Kong are affecting investors' confidence on the future of the city," Springwaters Financial Securities Ltd. Hong Kong-based strategist Sam Chi Yung said by phone. "A stronger local dollar may hurt exporters while surging Hibors mean higher funding costs for companies with more



debt." The city's legislative chief postponed Wednesday's debate to a unspecified time after thousands converged on Hong Kong's legislature, blocking roads in tactics similar to 2014 Occupy demonstrations. U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi threatened legislative action in Congress to 'reassess' whether Hong Kong is sufficiently autonomous.

Jet Airways shares slump after report that Hinduja, Etihad may not invest

Middle Eastern carrier Etihad, which owns about 24% stake in Jet, had submitted a bid for the Indian airline last month, while family-run Hinduja Group was said to be considering putting in an offer.

(Agencies)- Shares of India's Jet Airways Ltd crashed to record lows on Tuesday, after a report that Hinduja Group and Etihad Airways may not invest in the cash-strapped airline which was forced to stop all flight operations nearly two months back.

Middle Eastern carrier Etihad, which owns about 24% stake in Jet, had

submitted a bid for the Indian airline last month, while family-run Hinduja Group was said to be considering putting in an offer.

The Mint newspaper reported that Hinduja had decided to halt negotiations for buying a stake in Jet while Etihad had put its plan on hold to invest further.

Promoters of Hinduja expressed concerns over

ongoing government investigations into Jet and insolvency pleas submitted by its creditors, Mint reported, citing a source familiar with the matter.

Jet and Hinduja did not comment on the matter, while Etihad, and SBI Capital Markets, the unit of State Bank of India (SBI) overseeing the sale of the stricken carrier, were not immediately available for comment.



Jet shares, which had shed of Monday's close, 14.8% to an all-time low of nearly 69% in one year as slumped as much as 106.3 rupees.

Long Hours, Working Holidays. Amit Shah's Home Ministry Is Different

Work hours at North Block, the headquarters of the home ministry in Delhi, have stretched, not because of longer days in summer but because of a "workaholic" Home Minister.

Amit Shah arrived at his office before 10 am on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. On Thursday, he was in by 9.40 am and stayed till late.

I have been covering the Home Ministry now for a decade and I have observed four home ministers. Amit Shah is the first to spend his entire day in office and leave after 8 pm. The result is that not just officers, even the two junior home ministers work long. Unlike his predecessor Rajnath Singh, the home minister does not go home for lunch. Lunch comes to him in a neatly wrapped basket, everyday by 12.45 pm. Even on Eid, Wednesday, Amit Shah showed up at work. On cue, so did his two deputies and most senior officers, who had assumed it was a holiday. "If the senior minister is in office we have to be around. And this is just the beginning as he often works during late hours too but we are used to it," discloses one of his junior ministers. Many

BJP leaders recall they would keep a pen and paper by their bed before sleeping, ready for any phone call from Amit Shah. The party chief used to call them up, often late at night, and give tasks and set deadlines too. "Our minister can tackle 80 committees, let alone eight," the minister of state chuckled. Even officials are trying to keep pace with the 30th Home Minister of the country.

The previous minister, Rajnath Singh, often worked from home after completing the first half of the day at his Raisina Hills office. Most of his important meetings, even political, were held at his residence. The new home minister schedules almost all his meetings at North Block. From Governors to Chief Ministers to Cabinet Ministers, to the state BJP and its allies, everyone has a new destination. Many paramilitary chiefs have been able to meet him but state police chiefs are still in queue. They have been told the minister is "busy". Which he definitely is, as he takes briefings on various wings in his ministry. There are 19 departments and each has



been asked to prepare a presentation for the minister.

There are indications that the Amit Shah-led home ministry will be a major power centre. He figures in all eight cabinet committees; even Prime Minister Narendra Modi is named in six. Rajnath Singh was included in only two in the first list put out on Thursday. By evening, he had been added to six of them. Is Amit Shah the new de facto Deputy Prime Minister?

The bureaucracy is abuzz with this topic. "He is positioning himself like that and babus are also falling in line on key issues. As no one wants to tell him no or give a counter point of view," states an officer in ministry.

Some bureaucrats say the

debutant union minister, credited with crafting the BJP's incredible victory run, is the rising star in Modi era 2. The fact that Amit Shah is also in committees that have nothing to do with the Home Ministry - the new ones on jobs and growth being two clear examples - indicate his importance in the government. "The fact that Rajnath Singh is listed as number two minister is most of these committees does not diminish Shah's importance," an official said.

The role of National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval in the new government of PM Modi is also fueling talk. "In internal security matters, earlier the NSA used to call

the shots. But Amit Shah cannot be discounted by any bureaucrat," states another officer. Another most-talked about subject in the power corridors is the Cabinet Committee on Security, which has a very important role to play as the government is going to focus on national security in the Modi 2 era. The panel always features the government's top four, and new Foreign Minister S Jaishankar is a part of it.

Mr Doval's elevation to cabinet rank, officials speculate, was only to bring him on par with Mr Jaishankar as it was felt that a constant comparison would be made between the two.

"Extreme" Weather Too Abnormal Even For Residents Of India's Hottest City

As almost always this season, it's a hot day in Rajasthan's desert district Churu. But with just hours to go before his wedding, Akash Kumar seems to be on top of the situation.

As he sits under the shade of a tree in the compound of his home at Kalyanpura village near Churu, a water sprinkler is in operation, constantly cooling the ground around him.

"I am happy that my friends and close relatives are sitting with me in the open at 2 pm, when the heat is at its peak," he tells PTI. "It is kind of a facility for the guests," he says, talking about the sprinkler.

It helps that the guests around him are likely from Churu itself, infamous for the heat.

But it's a tougher summer this year, people say.

The bridegroom's uncle Harlal has been doing the rounds of the village, meeting people at their homes and reminding them about the wedding procession

that will set off in the evening.

"Roads wear a deserted look, no one comes out of their home because of the extreme heat," he says.

"Of the 10 rooms, we have ACs in two and some coolers also. But the number of guests is large. So we have made this arrangement to counter the heat to some extent," he says.

The maximum temperature on Akash Kumar's wedding day is 47 degree Celsius. But the mercury has crossed 50 degrees thrice this season.

The highest day temperature so far this summer in Churu was 50.8 degrees on June 1, beating the 49.8 degree record set in 1993, according to the weather department.

Churu town resident Rajveer Singh says the summer this year has been more severe than the ones they normally face.

"We are used to facing 47-48 degree temperature in summers and below freezing point in

winters. But the intense heat that we are facing this time is unprecedented," he says.

"We start our day quite early, because by the time its 8 or 9 am it starts sizzling. Farmers too start their work by 4 am and finish by 8 am, and they go to the fields again after 6 or 7 pm," Singh adds.

"The AC and the cooler fail when the temperature is above 45 degree Celsius. The fans too throw hot air. The only natural method to contain the heat is to splash water on the floor to make the place a bit cooler," he says, covering his head with a piece of wet cloth.

"We consume a lot of liquids and avoid heavy meals to beat the heat," he says.

In Churu, ice cream sellers and sugarcane juice vendors do well during the evening hours when most people begin stepping outdoors.

Many shopkeepers keep their shutters down from about 1 pm to 4 or 5 pm when the heat is



unbearable, and people walk around with their heads covered. Churu's chief medical officer, Dr Manoj Sharma, says the government health centres have made special arrangements, including separate wards, to deal with the heat.

There is some increase in the number of patients suffering from dehydration, but no cases of heat stroke so far, according to him.

Some blame deforestation for the searing heat in the district, which falls in the Thar desert.

"Only 0.44 per cent of the total area of Churu is covered by forest," forest officer Banwari Sharma says.

His department plants and distributes saplings during the monsoon, but a small number of them survive to grow into trees.

According to Jaipur's meteorological department director Shiv Ganesh, a combination of anti-cyclonic circulation, clear weather conditions and dry summer winds blowing from the west keeps Churu sizzling in summer.

\$9M to quarantine fruit flies? Anti-government waste group exposes billions in pork-barrel spending

An anti-government waste group has identified millions of taxpayer dollars allegedly frittered away on "absurd nature-related earmarks," including \$9 million to "quarantine fruit flies" and \$13.8 million to "manage wild horses."

Those revelations are inside the 2019 Congressional Pig Book released Wednesday by Citizens Against Government Waste. That report identifies what it describes as egregious examples of pork-barrel spending in Congress, drawn from fiscal 2019 appropriations bills. This year, the group said it identified \$15.3 billion in earmarks, an increase of 4.1 percent from the \$14.7 billion last year.

"Pushing pork does not drain the swamp and it won't restore integrity to Washington," Tom Schatz, the president of Citizens Against Government Waste, said in a statement. Schatz wrote in an op-ed for Fox Business Network that "perhaps the most flagrant earmark" this year is \$16.7 million for a research organization called the East-West Center, added by Hawaii Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii. "His earmark represents the center's entire budget, keeping it alive even though its counterpart, the North-South Center, stopped receiving federal funding in 2001," the group's president said. "The East-West Center should be able to stand on its own without

taxpayer support as well." The report identifies other pricey earmarks, including \$65 million to help recover Pacific Coastal Salmon, \$12 million to control aquatic plants, \$7.9 million to purchase fish screens and \$863,000 to eradicate brown tree snakes in Guam. The fruit fly program apparently was resumed after a 10-year pause. Further, according to the report, the \$9 million earmarked this year for the program represents an 1,819 percent increase over the roughly half-million dollars set aside for "fruit fly research, eradication, or quarantine" a decade ago. "It is also the third-largest earmark ever for this purpose," the report said. Schatz said these examples



show that "earmarks still corrupt Congress, waste taxpayer money and erode trust in government." The group advocates enacting a permanent, statutory ban on earmarks. But the group attributes the recent increase in pork-barrel spending to the 2018 passage of the Bipartisan Budget Act, which obliterated 2011 spending restraints. The group also ripped the seven earmarks totaling \$1.8 billion for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, including eight Air Force planes, six Navy planes and two for the Marine Corps.

Israel warplanes strike Gaza bunkers, first since early May



Israeli warplanes bombed bunkers at a Hamas base in Gaza early Thursday following the first rocket fire from the territory since early May, the military said.

Israeli aircraft targeted "underground infrastructure" at the base in the southern Gaza Strip, it said in a statement. The strike came after Israeli air defences intercepted a rocket launched from the territory, the first since hundreds were fired in early May in a two-day flare-up which killed four Israelis and 25 Palestinians.

On Wednesday evening, Israel announced it had banned all fishing off Gaza in retaliation for the launch of more incendiary balloons from the enclave.

"Due to the continuous launching of incendiary balloons and kites from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, it has been decided tonight (Wednesday) not to allow access to Gaza's

maritime space until further notice," the Israeli defence ministry department responsible for Palestinian civil affairs, COGAT, said.

The move came after COGAT said on Tuesday it had reduced the extent of the fishing zone to six nautical miles offshore from 10 nautical miles, having downscaled it from 15 nautical miles a week ago.

A spokesman for the Israeli fire service said incendiary balloons from Gaza caused seven fires on Tuesday alone.

In the past year, Palestinians have succeeded in setting fire to large areas of farmland in southern Israel.

Israel had only restored the fishing limit to 15 miles on June 4, after a previous cut in response to fire balloons.

Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza, run by Islamist movement Hamas, have fought three wars since 2008.

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'We want access to every part of the moon, at any time'

Fifty years after the Apollo moon landing, should America focus its space efforts on returning humans to the moon? Or should it concentrate on exploring new worlds, like Mars?

NASA chief Jim Bridenstine says we don't have to choose.

President Donald Trump is asking the American space agency to land humans back on the moon by 2024, four years earlier than previously planned. The job of selling that mission to the American public - and persuading Congress to fund it - belongs to Bridenstine, a former Republican congressman from Oklahoma with little prior space experience who took over as head of the agency in April 2018. In some ways, Bridenstine was an unusual pick for the job. Prior to leading NASA and serving three terms in Congress, Bridenstine was a Navy fighter

pilot who flew combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and served as executive director of the Tulsa Air and Space Museum. He is the first person to lead the agency who isn't considered a space professional.

Amid deep discord in the aerospace world about the value of returning to the moon versus pushing on to Mars, Bridenstine is charting a middle course, making the argument that the two goals don't need to be in conflict. In an interview with POLITICO in NASA's headquarters in Washington, D.C., Bridenstine argued that going to the moon will pave the way to Mars safely and sustainably, which he stressed is still the long-term goal of the agency.

"The most important reason to go to the moon is because it is the best way to get to Mars," he said. "We have to figure out how

we live and work on another world using the resources of that world for long periods of time. The moon is the proving ground for that."

Bridenstine doesn't think much of the argument that the government should be spending more to improve the lives of those on Earth instead of exploring space; investment in space has paid dividends in fields ranging from medicine to communications to agriculture, he insisted.

"We are increasing crop yields right now, and we're going to be able to feed more of the world than ever before because of NASA technology," Bridenstine said, referencing how farmers can use imagery from space to track crop health. "My message is, a small investment in NASA has implications for humankind generations from now."

Jim Bridenstine: First, there's a lot of scientific value. We know more about the moon today than we did in the 1960s and the 1970s. For example, back then,



we thought the moon was bone dry. We learned in 2009 that there's hundreds of millions of tons of water ice at the south pole of the moon. Water ice represents water to drink. It also is hydrogen and oxygen, which is rocket fuel. It's the same rocket fuel that powered the space shuttles. It's the same rocket fuel that will power the rocket that will take us to the moon to begin with. Second, because the moon does not have an active atmosphere, an active geology, or an active hydrosphere, it is a repository of

billions of years of activity that is frozen in time. We can get the science that tells us how our solar system got formed. We can learn a lot about the sun from the moon, because we have subatomic particles that are impacting the moon all the time. The far side of the moon is extremely quiet from an electromagnetic spectrum perspective, which means we can use large wire antennas that would be able to see very, very low frequency radio waves from deep space.

Ted Cruz and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez team up outside of Twitter



They're not just tweeting - they're talking IRL. In recent weeks, Texas Republican Ted Cruz and New York Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have exchanged a series of friendly tweets on issues where the conservative senator and liberal representative have common ground - including easier access to birth control and banning members of Congress from lobbying after they leave office. But Cruz said Thursday that the conversations have gone beyond tweets. The lawmakers' staffs are currently working together and he hopes to soon introduce legislation born from their alliance. "Our staff is working together collaboratively to try to reach agreement," he said without going into detail about the actual legislation. "I substantively agree with the positions that she had tweeted and where we agree on policy we should work together across party lines." A

spokesman for Ocasio-Cortez, Corbin Trent, said in response they're "absolutely excited to work with any Senate partners we can find to combat corruption in our institutions." The Cruz-AOC partnership drew renewed attention this week when Cruz responded to Ocasio-Cortez's tweet that "birth-control should be over-the-counter, pass it on." Cruz responded: "I agree" and suggested teaming up again on a clean bill. But Ocasio-Cortez said she's skeptical Republicans will sign on to her birth control bill because of a provision that guarantees full insurance coverage of birth control without a prescription. "They just want to do a clean, over the counter bill but they don't want to make adjustment for affordability," she said. "So right now I have more hope on the lobby ban - to be honest, when it comes to bipartisan support - than the over-the-counter bill."

'Let me make something 100% clear': FEC chair lays down the law on foreign help

The head of the Federal Election Commission released a statement on Thursday evening reiterating, emphatically, that foreign assistance is illegal in U.S. elections.

"Let me make something 100% clear to the American public and anyone running for public office: It is illegal for any person to solicit, accept, or receive anything of value from a foreign national in connection with a U.S. election," wrote Ellen Weintraub, chairwoman of the FEC. "This is not a novel concept."

She also sent the statement via Twitter with the introductory line: "I would not have thought that I needed to say this."

Weintraub's statement comes after President Donald Trump told ABC News that he would probably hear out opposition information offered by a foreign national if given the chance in 2020. He also said he might not tell the FBI about it, even though bureau Director Christopher Wray said such assistance would need to be reported.

Trump's comments garnered fierce backlash from



Republicans, Democrats and former law enforcement officials, who disputed the president's assertion that accepting opposition research from foreign sources is a common practice among members of Congress. Trump made the comments while responding to attention over his son Donald Trump Jr., who met in Trump Tower with Russian nationals offering dirt on then-Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton in the lead-up to the 2016 election.

Trump told ABC News' George

Stephanopoulos that hearing out foreign election information was not election interference, but rather "oppo research."

Weintraub was clear in rebutting that characterization.

"Anyone who solicits or accepts foreign assistance risks being on the wrong end of a federal investigation," she said in her statement. "Any political campaign that receives an offer of a prohibited donation from a foreign source should report that offer to the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

India can lead the way in nutritious, sustainable diet, say experts

Food, mostly red meat, production has emerged as the biggest cause of land-use change, biodiversity loss, and natural water depletion and accounts for about a fourth of greenhouse gas emissions.



Traditional Indian food that is largely plant-based with some red meat and fish can show the world how a nutritious and sustainable diet can be provided to the world's projected population of 10 billion people by 2050 without environmental degradation, said global experts who drafted the world's first scientific targets for sustainable nutrition within planetary

boundaries at EAT Stockholm Food Forum 2019 on Wednesday. "Grain-fed beef industry is the beginning of the end and India can show the world how traditional diets high in seeds, nuts, vegetables, whole grains and legumes can provide sustainable nutrition without wrecking the planet," said Johan Rockstrom, director, Potsdam

Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany. Rockstrom, along with Dr Walter Willet, Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition at Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, is a co-author of the EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health report that draws on inputs from 37 experts from 16 countries, including India, to conclude

that providing nutrition and sustainability is achievable only by transforming eating behaviours, improving food production, and halving food waste.

Food, mostly red meat, production has emerged as the biggest cause of land-use change, biodiversity loss, and natural water depletion and accounts for about a fourth of greenhouse gas emissions. "As nations urbanise and people become wealthier, traditional meals are being replaced by Western-style resource-intensive foods high in calories, protein, and animal-based foods," said Rockstrom.

Dominant diets and food

production are not nutritionally optimal. At least 820 million people are hungry worldwide, and close to 2 billion people are overweight or obese because they eat the wrong food.

The EAT-daily dietary plate consists of approximately 35% of calories from whole grains and tubers, protein from plant sources and 500g of vegetables and fruits a day, and 14 gm of red meat.

South Asia, including India, is an exception to meat consumption, with the majority eating half of the recommended amount.

Countries in the North America, by comparison, eat almost 6.5 times the recommended amount of red meat.



Use high-tech to stay hydrated this summer season

Make a water schedule this summer. Now you can with the smart tools available



It's that time of the year when temperatures soar high and your body tends to lose a lot of water due to excessive sweating.

These nifty tools and utilities remind you to stay hydrated all the time and keep a check on your water intake.

If you use a Fitbit (or some other fitness tracker), logging your water intake is quite seamless - so you know how much you've

had and how much you still need to drink, based on a customizable target that you can set. While you can do this via the Fitbit app on your phone, on some top-of-the-line models, you can log water on the smartwatch itself.

If you are an Apple Watch user, you can use an app like WaterMinder to quickly log your water intake. There's also the Hydro Coach app that syncs with both Fitbit and Google Fit.

Of course, you'd not buy a smartwatch specially to keep a check on your water intake but if you already use one, this is a handy feature. These apps work similarly with iPhones or Android smartphones in isolation and remind you to stay hydrated and allow you to

track your progress.

Manually logging your water intake each time you take a sip can be a little overwhelming, and that's where the new-age smart water bottles come handy.

There are bottles like HydraCoach that keep a tab on how much water you've been drinking, or you could go a step up and get one like the Bluetooth-enabled Hidrate Spark that glows to remind you to drink water and comes with a companion mobile app to monitor your hydration goals. Bonus Tip: If you think you don't need all the tracking, you can keep it simple and use Google Assistant or Siri on your smartphone to set up a reminder for drinking water at regular intervals throughout the day.

6 tips for dressing smart at the office

The real parameters to determine the right kind of outfit are our own confidence and comfort levels.

Almost everybody wants to know the secret to the perfect attire at the workplace. The kind of outfit that exudes the confidence we wish to project. However, there's no checklist where you can tick off things to decode the ultimate work outfit. The real parameters to determine the right kind of outfit are our own confidence and comfort levels.

Picking the right variety

The kind of outfit we wear is a huge giveaway of where we are headed. While heavy ethnic wear usually brings weddings to mind, business formals bring huge Multi-National Corporations to mind. An outfit also defines the kind of behaviour we project by affecting us subconsciously. Wearing work attire automatically puts us in a zone where we wish to look sharp and project the best version of ourselves- in terms of confidence and reliability. Smart casuals are also taking over the work sphere with the advent of startups. This adds the element of being comfortable to the table.

Silhouette and fit

There's no perfect fit or silhouette

for any outfit. The determinant of that is solely based on the wearer's comfort zone and preferences. While some people would like a more flattering fit, others may prefer more relaxed or even boxy fits. Anybody who is uncomfortable about the silhouette or fit of the garment will never be as confident as they might be otherwise. The uncertainty can be a deterrent. So, the best bet is to pick silhouettes we like in a fit that not only looks good but also makes us feel good about ourselves.

Pick colours wisely

All colours have certain emotions or perceptions associated with them. Subconsciously or consciously they affect how we behave and how others interact with us. For example, red might be perceived as confident by some and flashy by others. The key is to find the perfect colour based on your need. Pick from a palette of colours you usually gravitate towards- your palette may include, navy, white, grey, amber, maroon and black, for example. From these, eliminate



the colours that might be seen as too simple or too neutral. Finally, from amongst the remaining three- navy, amber and maroon, pick the one that makes you feel the best about yourself as per the situation. If you feel that wearing maroon will make you look professional and give you a boost of confidence for your appraisal, pick an outfit in that colour.

Fabric matters too

While the fabric of your garment is something only you are privy to, it does impact the impression you make. A crisp oxford shirt or even a linen dress that keeps you comfortable can drastically affect how you feel about

yourself. This increases your level of confidence, thus helping you appear more relaxed and in control during your meeting. Also, a fabric that looks shabby or worn out can have a negative impact on the impression you are trying to make. So, try to pick fabrics that retain their shape when ironed and wouldn't crease easily or at least end up looking shabby.

Accessorise smartly

Accessories are the small details that say a lot about our personality and add to our character. Pick a watch that resonates with you- a smart watch indicates a tech savvy person and a classic analogue

shows someone who likes timelessness. Cufflinks can indicate a lot about your personality too as they come in a lot of quirky designs. Belts and shoes should match or at least coordinate well. Scarves and jewellery shouldn't overpower but should definitely depict your personal aesthetics.

Stay well groomed

Even a perfect outfit can end up looking shabby if you don't pay attention to these details. While women should ensure that their hair is in place and their hands and feet well neatly kept, men should ensure the same. Beards especially should be neatly trimmed and well kept.

Dolphins form friendships through shared interests, just like humans: Study



The study provides new insight into homophilous behaviour in the social network of tool-using dolphins.

Dolphins form close friendships based on shared common interests, just like humans do, a study claims. Shark Bay, a World Heritage area in Western Australia, is home to an iconic population of Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins, and the only place where dolphins have been observed using marine

sponges as foraging tools. This learnt technique, passed down from generation to generation, helps certain dolphins, "spongers", find food in deeper water channels. While the tool-using technique is well-studied in female dolphins, the researchers from University of Bristol in the UK and University of Zurich in

Switzerland study looked specifically at male dolphins. Using behavioural, genetic and photographic data collected from 124 male dolphins during the winter months in Shark Bay over nine years (2007 to 2015), the team analysed a subset of 37 male dolphins, comprising 13 spongers and 24 non-spongers.

Male spongers spend more time associating with other male spongers than they do non-spongers, these bonds being based on similar foraging techniques and not relatedness or other factors. "Foraging with a sponge is a time-consuming and largely solitary activity so it was long thought incompatible with the

needs of male dolphins in Shark Bay - to invest time in forming close alliances with other males," said Simon Allen, a senior research associate at University of Bristol.

"This study suggests that, like their female counterparts and indeed like humans, male dolphins form social bonds based on shared interests," said Allen.

The study provides new insight into homophilous behaviour in the social network of tool-using dolphins.

"Male dolphins in Shark Bay exhibit a fascinating social system of nested alliance formation. These strong bonds between males can last for decades and are critical to each male's mating success," said Manuela Bizzozzero, from the University of Zurich. "We were very excited to discover alliances of spongers, dolphins forming close friendships with others with similar traits," said Bizzozzero.

I Am Mother movie review:

Has Netflix found the new Christopher Nolan? Hilary Swank thinks so

I Am Mother movie review: Hilary Swank says that working with debutante director Grant Sputore reminded her of working with a young Christopher Nolan. Rating: 4/5.

I Am Mother

Director - Grant Sputore

Cast - Clara Rugaard, Rose Byrne, Hilary Swank

Rating - 4/5

The central plot twist in *I Am Mother* would arrive towards the end in most other films -- when the villain has finally received their comeuppance, and the hero has triumphed. But here, in a film that has no heroes or villains, it arrives at the end of the first act. This is just one of the many ways in which debutant director Grant Sputore's science-fiction film, out now on Netflix, turns the tables on tropes.

His star, Hilary Swank - the most recognisable face in a film that has only three characters - compared him to Christopher Nolan in an interview during the Sundance Film Festival, where *I Am Mother* premiered earlier this year. She enjoys

championing talented first-time filmmakers, she said, and Sputore's understanding of both the technical and thematic demands of storytelling reminded her of Nolan, whom she worked with years ago on *Insomnia*.

She's quite right. *I Am Mother* is a tense little sci-fi thriller, featuring strong performances and an uncommonly intelligent script. Not only does it aim higher than the average genre film, it frequently hits its ambitious targets. The Nolan comparison might be a little generous, but Sputore displays a control over the tone and the characters that reminded me of a young Ridley Scott, or James Cameron. Certainly, how he handles the central theme of motherhood - in all its flawed and complicated beauty - will remind many viewers of Cameron's *Aliens*, a sequel to Scott's pathbreaking original film. It's set almost entirely inside a

bunker, after an extinction level event has wiped out all humanity. A robot named Mother has been made in charge of re-population, which she commences by growing an embryo and nurturing the child over several years. Mother teaches the child - a girl - moral and ethical lessons, and trains her in ballet. When the child grows up, she wonders why Mother only chose to grow one embryo. Mother says she needed to practice first; to make sure that she is capable of raising a child at all.

During one of their ethics lessons, Mother presents a thought experiment to the child, whom she has started calling 'Daughter'. There are five patients on the verge of death, Mother begins. Each of them can be saved by replacing one damaged organ. A sixth patient - also near death - arrives. The new patient has all the necessary body parts



than can save the other five, but by donating them, the sixth patient will die. Who will you save, Mother asks Daughter; the sixth patient, or the five older ones.

I won't spoil the answer that Daughter gives, but I will say that it reflects the film's higher than usual intellect. How refreshing! But in addition to being a fine sci-fi movie, *I Am Mother* is also a rather slick home invasion thriller. At the risk of revealing a potential twist, Hilary Swank arrives onto the scene, an external threat invading Mother and Daughter's familial bliss. She is a survivor, she says. There are

others out there, and a whole new world to explore. Daughter needn't stay with a robot any longer; humanity perseveres.

Despite being confined to a bunker, *I Am Mother* never feels claustrophobic. I'm not entirely sure if it is meant to. Like *Daughter*, we come to accept our surroundings. The supposedly uninhabitable outside world is not worth pining for. And as it is, humanity is inherently limited in its imagination; we believe what we are told. And how could we not, when the teller is as convincing as Mother, voiced by a very warm Rose Byrne.

Devi 2 movie review

This Prabhudeva starrer is a lousy sequel with no redeeming moments

Devi 2 movie review: Devi 2 is neither entertaining nor engaging. Despite sincere performances by Tamannaah and Prabhudeva, the film has been let down by its poor writing. Rating: 1/5

Film: *Devi 2*

Director: AL Vijay

Cast: Prabhudeva, Tamannaah Bhatia, Nandita Swetha and Kovai Sarla

Rating: 1/5

Tamil cinema's tryst with horror-comedy continues with AL Vijay's latest offering *Devi 2*. Like most films in this genre in the recent past, it has nothing working in its favour. The film leaves one wondering as to why a sequel was even commissioned. Everything that worked in the first part, including the horror sub-plot with decent comedy, falls flat in the sequel. This film is mostly unbearable and has absolutely no redeeming moments.

Devi 2 is centred around Krishna (Prabhudeva), who is possessed by two spirits while his wife Devi

(Tamannaah) tries to deal with the situation with the help of a friend (Kovai Sarla). In order to save her husband, Devi signs an agreement with the spirits and, in return, is assured of Krishna's well being and services. On paper, it sounds like wacky idea and could've been fun but in reality it barely works.

In the first part, Tamannaah gets possessed by the spirit of a failed actress called Ruby. *Devi 2* is set in Mauritius because Krishna is told by a god-man that if he finds a place that's surrounded by water from all sides, no spirits can bother him or his wife. The idea of a soul with unfulfilled wish taking over a new identity to live her dream was well presented in *Devi* and so it worked. By flipping the idea on

its head and using it on Krishna and expecting the same result is silly and that's one of the primary reasons why *Devi 2* is neither entertaining nor engaging.

Tamannaah, despite her earnest efforts to carry the film on her shoulders, can't save *Devi 2* from going down the drain. If there's one person who deserves to be blamed for this blunder, then it has to be Vijay whose form is getting worse with each film. It is time he took a break and delved deep into his work to understand what's going wrong. Prabhudeva plays his part aptly and as the hapless husband possessed by two spirits, he brings out versatility in his performance but at the cost of some dreadful writing. Nandita Swetha has little to



contribute as she plays a character that's mostly seen walking around throughout the film. *Devi 2* is proof to Vijay's poor form and an inability to write something original and interesting. The mash-up of old

scenes from other popular films in the second half of *Devi* clearly is an indication of dearth of originality. Vijay borrows scenes from Arjun Reddy and Ghajini and these tracks leave no impact whatsoever.

Shah Rukh Khan's kids Suhana Khan and Aryan Khan spend some quality time together

Shah Rukh Khan's daughter Suhana Khan and son Aryan Khan are in India and are spending some quality time together.

Shah Rukh Khan's daughter Suhana Khan is in India these days and is making the most of the opportunity to spend quality time with her family. A new picture of the 19-year-old with her brother Aryan Khan was shared online.

While Suhana is dressed in a white top and shorts and is smiling to the camera with her hair let loose, Aryan is a contrast in a black hoodie and denims and focuses away from the lens.

Suhana already has a huge fan following on the social media due to her glamorous public appearances. The fans couldn't stop praising the picture of the two siblings and dropped several fire emojis in the comments section. A fan wrote, "Fantaaaasticcc pic.." Another wrote, "Awesome both of u." The two were recently spotted on a



fun outing with friends Ananya Panday, her cousin Ahaan Panday and Shanaya Kapoor. Both were twinning in black along with Shanaya who was in a black top and denims. While Suhana was in a black LBD, Aryan was in a black tee and trousers.

Suhana recently attended her cousin's wedding with mother Gauri in Kolkata. Pictures of her in an olive green sari during one of the wedding functions were shared online. Suhana is currently pursuing higher studies in London while Aryan is studying filmmaking at the University of Southern California. She was earlier studying at the Ardingly College in the UK. A video of her partying at the college party in London had surfaced a few days ago. Gauri had earlier shared pictures from the same party on Instagram. She had visited England to spend time with her daughter.



Salman Khan says he gets scared when critics give his films good reviews

'Their thinking never matches audience's'

Agenceis - Actor Salman Khan says his validation of doing a good film comes solely from the box office collections but when critics praise his movies, he feels "scared". The actor, who had a major career turnaround with Wanted in 2009 which was followed by Dabangg, said public acceptance is the ultimate verdict for him. "My validation comes from the box office collections... that the people have liked or not liked a film. It doesn't make a difference if someone (a critic) has given it so many stars (ratings) or ridiculed the film. 'It's their bread and butter. God bless them, give them two more (slices of) bread,'" Salman said in a group interview. Asked how he feels when the critics give glorious reviews to his films, the actor said he is unable to wrap his head around it. "I get scared. That why did they give (those star ratings) because their thinking never matches with the audience. Then I wonder 'oh what if this doesn't do well'. But the reason I do the kind of movies I do is because I loved the scripts. 'I want people to come inside the theatre and forget about their life. Enjoy the film. Take away the heroism or leave the theatre becoming a good person. These are the things I follow while doing a film,'" he said. Salman is currently elated with the response to his



latest, Bharat which released last week on Eid. Directed by Ali Abbas Zafar, the film also features Katrina Kaif and Sunil Grover. The 53-year-old actor said it is the "best Eidi" his fans have given him. "I am very happy with the film

doing really well and everyone's work is being appreciated... Success of every film is very

important. 'Bharat' is a film that we have given our lives for, like every other film." The film, a remake of the 2014 Korean drama "An Ode To My Father", is set against the backdrop of Partition 1947. Salman said the emotions in a scene must speak to him in order for him to be able to make the audience believe in it. "There are lots of times when a scene is written, I don't feel it. Then I sit with the writer, director and work on the scene till I don't feel it. This is the quality of a bad actor," he said. "If you give Mr

(Amitabh) Bachchan, Yusuf sahab (Dilip Kumar) any scene, may be the most ridiculous scene, they'll own their scenes, make them believable.

They will get that amount of heroism, emotion or comedy from a bad scene. For me, I really have to work on these things," he added.



Kim Kardashian flaunts her cleavage in tiny patterned bikini while climbing out of pool

Kim Kardashian is feeling the heat of a Los Angeles June. The 38-year-old reality TV star showed off her astonishing bikini body on Wednesday with a sizzling Instagram snap of her climbing out of the pool. Accentuating her unmistakable features with makeup, the wife of Kanye West opted for a two-piece with a mismatched snakeskin print. Kim has been open about her psoriasis, and in a new preview clip of *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* she can be seen turning to an unusual source of help. 'I am all about mediums. I'm so obsessed. Anyone that knows me knows I love connecting to the spirit world,' said the aspiring lawyer. She consulted Medical Medium author Anthony William, who has written for Gwyneth Paltrow's infamous wellness website Goop. Anthony waved his arms around Kim and advised her: 'With you, it's definitely the liver. You have really high deposits of copper.' His website says: 'Psoriasis is a combination of approximately three-quarters copper with one-quarter mercury with a virus, most commonly EBV.' Anthony happens to be the founder of

something called the Global Celery Juice Movement, and it was this beverage that he prescribed Kim for her psoriasis. The clip comes a month after Kim and Kanye welcomed a son called Psalm - their fourth child overall and second born via surrogate. Kim carried her daughter North, five, and son Saint, three, but the proud parents turned to surrogacy for Psalm and their one-year-old daughter Chicago. Kimye's youngest entered the world on May 9 in Los Angeles, with the time of birth being 7:02pm, according to a birth certificate obtained by TMZ. The couple named their new baby Psalm after Kanye drew attention for his Sunday Services, which recently played host to a performance by Sia. Ever the enterprising businesswoman, Kim has begun the legal proceedings to copyright her new baby's name, according to a report from TMZ.



Another reason why Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh are doing 83

With Kabir Khan's '83, Bollywood actors Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone will be seen together for the fifth time in a film; the couple has earlier done Sanjay Leela Bhanali's *Ram-Leela*, *Bajirao Mastani*, *Padmaavat* and Homi Adajania's *Finding Fanny*. However, Ranveer is delighted that finally they are doing a film together in which they "don't die in the end". Deepika will play Ranveer's onscreen wife, Romi Dev, in the film where he is essaying the role of legendary cricketer Kapil Dev. '83 is based on India's first win at the cricket World



Cup in 1983. Deepika announced the beginning of her shoot schedule for the film with, "& on to the next...Thank You @kabirkhankk for this incredible honour...! #RomiDev #Day1 @83thefilm @ranveersingh". Ranveer had a wonderful response: "and this time we don't die in the end! Yay!" he wrote on her post. Ranveer and wife Deepika have previously featured in three Sanjay Leela Bhansali films - *Ram Leela*, *Bajirao Mastani* and *Padmaavat*. All the three movies had a tragic ending with lead couple or one of them dying in the climax.

Emily Atack cheekily admits that her male co-stars usually get 'too excited' when filming racy sex scenes with her

She soared to fame as school hottie Charlotte 'Big Jugs' Hinchcliffe in *The Inbetweeners*. And Emily Atack has now admitted that her male co-stars usually end up getting 'excited' while filming racy sex scenes with her.

Speaking to Keith Lemon on his *Shopping* series, the actress, 29, admitted all the boys usually tell her 'Look, I'm sorry if it happens and I'm sorry if it doesn't' ahead of filming. Emily is most famously known for her sex scene with co-star Simon Bird in the E4 sitcom, *The Inbetweeners*. And when asked by Keith about the potential awkwardness surrounding those scenes, Emily explained: 'I don't mind doing scenes like that at all, you just get to lie in bed all day with a nice boy, it's great!'

Keith quizzed her: 'But what happens if the boy gets a happy on?' Emily quipped back: 'Well do you know what they say, the men, when you're about to do a sex scene, they go, "Look, I'm sorry if it happens and I'm sorry if it doesn't." They don't want you to be

offended if it doesn't happen, because I would be f***ing livid,' she joked.

When Keith asked her if her male co-stars usually do get a 'happy on', Emily hilariously admitted: 'Yeah!'

Talk quickly moved on as she revealed she has 'spent 90% of her sex life faking orgasms.'

When a shocked Keith asked her why, Emily detailed: 'I fake it all the time because, number one, I don't want them to feel bad.'

It seems that her new beau Rob Jowers, who she went public with in April, has a lot of pressure on him.

Before revealing who he was, the *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!* star posted a loved-up selfie of herself sharing a tender kiss

with the hunk. The star had hinted she was dating someone new after saying that she was off the market and 'thinking about someone.' Back in February revealed that there was a new man in her life, though insisted at the time she was still single.



'If both govts decide, Kashmir issue can be solved', says Pak PM Imran Khan



(News Agencies)- The two countries should focus on peace and resolving their differences through dialogue, and even issues such as Kashmir can be resolved if the two governments decide to tackle it, Khan said in an interview with Russia's state-run Sputnik news

agency Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has said he hopes his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi will use the big mandate he won in the recent elections to improve relations between the two countries and usher in peace in the region.

The two countries should focus on peace and resolving their differences through dialogue, and even issues such as Kashmir can be resolved if the two governments decide to tackle it, Khan said in an interview with Russia's state-run Sputnik news agency.

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U.S. says Iran removed unexploded mine from oil tanker



(News Agencies)- The U.S. military on Friday released a video it said showed Iran's Revolutionary Guard removing an unexploded limpet mine from one of the oil tankers targeted near the Strait of Hormuz, suggesting the Islamic Republic sought to remove evidence of its involvement from the scene. The U.S. Navy rushed to assist the stricken vessels in the Gulf of Oman off the coast of Iran, including one that was set ablaze Thursday by an explosion. The ships' operators offered no immediate explanation on who or what caused the damage against the Norwegian-owned MT Front Altair and the Japanese-owned Kokuka Courageous. Each was loaded with petroleum products, and the Front Altair burned for hours, sending up a column of thick, black smoke. Iran has denied being involved in the attack, calling it an "unfounded claim" in the U.S. "Iranophobic campaign." However, Iran previously used mines against oil tankers in 1987 and 1988 in the "Tanker War," when the U.S. Navy escorted ships through the region.

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Thank you PM Modi, tweets Netanyahu on India's rare vote for Israel at UN



(News Agencies)- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has thanked his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi for voting in favour of a decision introduced by the Jewish state that objected to granting consultative status to a Palestinian group at the UN's Economic and Social Council. In a rare move, India on Tuesday voted in favour of Israel in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to deny the Palestinian non-governmental organisation 'Shahed' the observer status, after Israel said the organisation did not disclose its ties with Hamas.

"Thank you @NarendraModi,

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Trump rushes into damage control after saying he'd accept foreign help in 2020

(News Agencies)- President Donald Trump and his senior advisers moved quickly on Thursday to downplay and muddle his explosive assertion that he might not report to the FBI offers of election help from a foreign entity. As Trump's Democratic opponents eviscerated him and one of his leading Republican supporters called his comments a "mistake," the president tried to recast his remarks, drawing a misleading comparison between accepting dirt from a foreign agent and his recent conversations with Queen Elizabeth and other world leaders. "I meet and talk to 'foreign governments' every day. I just met with the Queen of England (U.K.), the Prince of Wales, the P.M. of the United Kingdom, the P.M. of Ireland, the President of France and the President of Poland. We talked about 'Everything!'" Trump wrote on Twitter across a pair of tweets, correcting an initial misspelling of Wales. "Should I immediately call the FBI about these calls and meetings? How ridiculous! I would never be trusted again." Every president regularly communicates with other heads of state. Accepting negative information from a foreign agent about a campaign opponent is a different matter, however. It is a crime for a campaign to solicit or accept something of value from a foreign entity, which some lawyers say could apply to information. Amid the firestorm, Trump and his top aides also turned to a familiar tactic: blaming the media. They argued that the president's comments were



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Ponty Chadha's son held for 'cheating homebuyers'



(News Agencies)- Manpreet Singh Chadha, the son of murdered liquor baron Ponty Chadha, was arrested from the Delhi airport on Wednesday for allegedly cheating 29 people to the tune of Rs 4.5 crore by promising them flats at a township project in Ghaziabad and failing to deliver them. Manpreet, the vice-chairman of the Wave group, was arrested by sleuths of Delhi police's economic offences wing (EOW) when he was about to board a flight to Phuket, Thailand. He was sent to judicial custody after he was denied bail by a Saket court. Additional commissioner of police

(EOW) Suvashish Choudhary said Chadha, promoter-director of Uppal Chadha Hi-Tech Developers Pvt Ltd, was arrested in a case registered against him in January last year. "The complainants had alleged that the company launched a project in 2006 at NH 24 in Ghaziabad," he said. In 2003, the Ghaziabad Development Authority formulated a policy for the development of a Hi-Tech city thereby providing a platform to the real estate developers to develop smart townships with modern facilities," Choudhary said. He said, in 2005 the agents and

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