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STORY ON page 18

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## Democratic Primary 2020



STORY ON page 18

## Pelosi gets revenge against Rep. Kathleen Rice



Agencies-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi exacted revenge against one of her most outspoken detractors Tuesday night, blocking Rep. Kathleen Rice from landing a seat on the high-profile House Judiciary Committee.

Pelosi lobbied for other members to join the panel over Rice, leaving the third-term New York Democrat off a list of her preferred members for the committee during a tense closed-door meeting Tuesday night, according to sources. The effort came despite a full-court push from the New York delegation to secure a spot for Rice, a former prosecutor, on the panel that oversees everything from impeachment and guns to immigration. **Cont on page 19**

### Doctor Rajendra Bothra charged in \$464 million healthcare fraud



Agencies-A 77-year-old Indian-American doctor, indicted in one of the largest healthcare fraud cases in the US history involving a US \$464 million conspiracy, was freed on a record-setting US \$7 million bond. Rajendra Bothra, who was awarded Padmashri, India's fourth-highest civilian award, was indicted along with five other physicians in the alleged US\$464 million healthcare fraud conspiracy, which the federal government said fuelled the opioid epidemic. **Cont on page 19**

### Sham marriages in Europe 17 Pakistani citizens arrested



STORY ON page 19

## Gurmeet Ram Rahim verdict Dera chief gets life imprisonment in murder of journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati

Panchkula: A special CBI court has sentenced Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh to life imprisonment after being found guilty of the murder of journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati. The self-styled godman who is currently serving 20 years at the Sunaria prison in Haryana for the rape of two of his female disciples, appeared before the court via video-conferencing.

The other three accused in the case have also been awarded life imprisonment. The court has also imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on the each of them. The sect chief along with three of Dera's followers namely Kuldeep Singh, Nirmal Singh, and Krishan Lal was convicted for the death of the Sirsa-based scribe by the special court on January 11. **(Contd on page 19)**



# Insurance

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# The Oath ceremony for India Association of Long Island held



(Insider Bureau)-The Oath ceremony for India Association of Long Island Elected Executive officers 2019 alongwith Executive Council members with Ad-hoc Committees members was held on Friday, January 11th, 2019 at Executive & Legislative Building 1550 Franklin Avenue, Mineola, NY 11501.

History was created by India Association of Long Island by having Oath Ceremony in Nassau County Legislative Building. There were more than 200 guests present to witness this ceremony. Among the guests there were Hon. Richard Nicoletto Presiding Office, Nassau County Legislature, and Mr. Jack

Schliemann – Nassau County Comptroller and Past Presidents of IALI.

At 6:00 p.m. guests were served appetizers and tea. At 7.00 pm program started in the Chambers hall with the welcome speech by Mr. Zahid Syed Commissioner of Human Rights Nassau County. After Mr. Syed speech, Indu Gajwani, the Cultural Chair of IALI 2019 welcomed all the guests and congratulated the Elected President Lalit Aery, EC team and committee members. The presentation began with Seeking God's blessings "Ganesh Vandana dance by Tara Chaudhary", followed by National anthem (both Indian and Star

spangled Banner) by Nipun Marwaha. Mantra enchanted by Mr. Narinder Kapoor 'chair Meditation Forum' created a pious atmosphere. Dr. Anila Midha Past President IALI did the honors by introducing newly elected president Mr. Lalit Aery. Mrs. Gunjan Rastogi 'Past president 2018' was presented a Plaque. Mr. Lalit Aery thanks to the past presidents & all the guests who graced the ceremony by their presence. In his speech Mr. Lalit Aery highlighted some of the plans his team will be working on to serve the community and helping in the progress of IALI. Oath was taken

by President Lalit Aery, Vice President Shashi Malik, Secretary Har Govind Gupta, Treasurer Rajeev Chaudhary, EC members: Kuljeet Ahluwalia, Sushil Khanna, Neeru Bhabri, Ravi Kanta Verma, Deepa Goyal, Dr. Ramesh Gupta, Neelam Srivastava. Followed by Advisory committee members; Dr. Anila Midha & Mrs. Bina Sabapathy. The Oath ceremony continued with swearing in of Chair Persons and committee members: Indu Gajwani, Jyoti Bhatia Gupta, Anju Sharma, Narinder Kapoor, Harsha Padmanabhan, Mohan Sharma, Suresh Bansal, Veena Sareen Lamba, Rashmi Mittal, Anjana Kashayap,

Shobha Prakash, Sunita Jain, Mukesh Modi, Rakesh Jaggi (Pinki), Kiran Gupta, Rizwana Malik, Sanju Sharma, Jagmohan Kalra, Yogita Puri (Sonia), Anu Thapar, Renu Kapoor, Kiran Arora, Sushma Kaushik, Vijay Goswamy & Balaji Nagraj. The program ended with vote of thanks by Mr. Hargovind Gupta. Mrs. Indu Gajwani gave thanks to the media both T.V. Channels and Press for their help. Without their help it will be impossible to reach out to the community. About 5 TV channels and various Newspapers provided services for the coverage of this ceremony. At the end Dinner was served to all the guests.

## MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO LAUNCHES "WORST WORKPLACES FOR WOMEN WATCHLIST

*Watchlist to track sexual harassment complaints, pay gaps, staff diversity, sick leave and more*

### Public Advocate candidate Mark-Viverito: "We're tired of being disrespected, harassed and paid less than men"

(By a Staff Reporter) New York— Public Advocate candidate Melissa Mark-Viverito today launched her plan for a "Worst Workplaces for Women Watchlist." The watchlist will use a multi-pronged formula including sexual harassment complaints, pay gaps, staff diversity, family leave policies, and more to determine which workplaces — both public and private sector — are worst for women. The list will then be used as a tool to create incentives for improvement in workplace culture, leave policies and organizational diversity to better support the working women of New York City. "Every woman knows the drill: A creepy comment. A passed-over promotion. A

meeting filled with men who just won't stop talking over you. We all know what it's like to work somewhere that treats women terribly. Now we're making sure this information is public, easily accessible, and known to all," said Public Advocate Candidate Melissa Mark-Viverito. "Women in this city are tired of being disrespected, harassed, and paid less than men. It's 2019, and we've waited long enough. We're not letting these workplaces hide in the shadows anymore." "Women in New York deserve a compassionate and strong leader who will fight for solutions that will directly improve their lives. Melissa has created a plan to fight workplace harassment, discrimination, and

pay inequality that will shed light on an issue that affects millions of women across this city. The Worst Workplaces for Women Watchlist will create better work environments and make sure that no workplace gets away with discrimination of any kind," said Council Member Margaret Chin. "From being the first woman to represent her district to becoming the first Latina Speaker of the City Council, Melissa has always been a history maker dedicated to improving the lives of women across this city. The Worst Workplaces for Women Watchlist will expose workplaces that fail to respect women and finally hold them accountable. I look forward to the



implementation of this plan when Melissa becomes Public Advocate," said former President of NOW-NYS Zenaida Mendez. "A 2018 analysis found women working for the City make 18% less than men. A recent report found the City has no consistent method to monitor sexual harassment across agencies, making the data difficult to

analyze. And a national survey found about four-in-ten working women (42%) in the U.S. say they have faced discrimination on the job because of their gender; one-in-four working women (25%) say they have earned less than a man who was doing the same job; and 30% of women said they have received unwanted sexual advances at work.

**Hempstead Supervisor to propose outside audit of Town's building department**



(Agencies)- Hempstead Town Supervisor Laura Gillen will call for an outside operational audit of the Town's Building Department on Wednesday, January 16th, 2019 at 11 AM at Town Hall (1. Washington Street, Hempstead NY 11550) "The Town's building department processes, on average, over 9,000 applications each year for new and existing homes, and is the first line of defense for property owners when it comes to safety code compliance and permitting for ongoing repair work due to Superstorm Sandy." "The proposed auditors, chosen by a bi-partisan committee and subject to a Town Board vote, will be tasked with trying to optimize one of the busiest Building Departments in the nation.

**CAPAC Chair Judy Chu Statement on Federal Court Blocking Trump's Citizenship Question on 2020 Census**

(Insider Bureau) – Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) Chairwoman Judy Chu (CA-27) released the following statement following a federal court ruling to block the Trump Administration from adding an untested citizenship question to the 2020 Census: "It is critical that we have an accurate census so we can know who is in our country, where they live, and what their needs are. But with this citizenship question, Trump tried to twist the 2020 census into just another weapon in his war on immigrants, aiming to drive down responses and intentionally leading to a less representative government by hiding millions." "It was clear to any observer that the citizenship question was included for partisan reasons, and over the objections of experts who warned that it would lead to inaccurate census results.

I even asked Secretary Ross about the origin of this question in the Ways and Means Committee, but he gave an untruthful answer, making it harder for us to truly judge the merits of this question. I'm glad the court has intervened to stop this hastily crafted and dangerous question from distorting our census."



**Borough President Katz on Federal Judge Blocking proposed 2020 census citizenship question**

(News Agencies)– Borough President Melinda Katz stated the following in response to a federal judge's ruling today blocking the federal government from including a citizenship question on the 2020 Census form: "The legal battle is likely far from over, and Queens will continue to speak out against the proposed Census citizenship question for as long as there is active litigation. But today's court ruling is a tremendous victory in the fight against a reckless policy targeting our thriving immigrant communities in Queens and across the country," said Borough President KATZ. "Including a citizenship question would undermine the goal of the Census: a complete count of all persons living in the United States. Here in Queens, a borough of nearly 2.4 million people of all races, ethnicities and faiths, an undercount would lead to fewer federal dollars for countless vital programs and initiatives." "Judge Jesse Furman's ruling is consistent with the borough's belief that everyone living in Queens deserves to be accurately and fairly counted," Borough President KATZ continued. "We are hopeful that any potential court decision in the

future will cement this belief." "In January 2018, Borough President Katz began her exhaustive effort to avoid an undercount by announcing her plan to convene a Queens Complete Count Committee — a group of trusted community leaders and activists tasked with learning about key 2020 Census issues and strategizing how to ensure everyone in Queens is counted accurately." "In August 2018, Borough President Katz submitted the following comment in the Federal Register blasting the proposed citizenship question, saying it could lead to potentially damaging consequences in Queens: "As President of the Borough of Queens, New York, I am submitting this comment to express my strong opposition to the inclusion of a citizenship question in the 2020 Census. Queens is one of the most diverse regions in the United States, where 2.4 million people coexist regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or legal status," Borough President Katz wrote. "It is more important than ever for an area like Queens to be as fully counted as possible. Including a citizenship question would undermine the primary goal of the Census: a complete and accurate count of

all persons living in the United States." "Borough President Katz hosted a comprehensive Census Town Hall in November 2018 — featuring presentations from Deputy Mayor J. Phil Thompson, Department of City

Planning Population Division Director Dr. Joseph Salvo, Census Bureau New York Regional Director Jeff T. Behler and others — to keep the public informed as the 2020 Census nears. "The decennial Census

determines the borough's representation in the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as how much federal funding Queens receives for schools, infrastructure, health services and more.

**DA Madeline Singas Kicks Off Reelection Campaign with \$962,702 On Hand**  
**Singas pledges to run on her record, including record low Nassau County crime statistics**

(By Our Staff Reporter)- Nassau County District Attorney Madeline Singas will kick off her reelection campaign with \$962,702 on hand, following the January campaign filing, her most successful filing period of her first full term. Singas raised \$417,974 during this six-month period. "Singas has pledged to run for reelection on her record, including the record-low crime rate in Nassau County. During her time as DA and as Acting DA before that, Singas has taken down major MS-13, prosecuted corrupt public officials regardless of their party, and enacted an all-in approach to fighting the heroin epidemic - including



enforcement, treatment, and education." "Four years ago, I campaigned on a simple premise: that the Nassau DA should be an experienced prosecutor, not a politician," DA Singas said. "We've taken on government corruption, MS-13, and the heroin epidemic,

and crime in Nassau County has fallen to historic lows." "I am grateful to our law enforcement partners who have helped keep our community one of the safest large counties in America, and to all those who have supported my campaign."

# On its fourth birthday, Mayor de Blasio and First Lady McCray announce IDNYC adds third Gender Designation

**“IDNYC, which will continue to be free in 2019, is also adding new benefit partners, including Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art and People’s United Bank**

(By Our Staff Reporter)- Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray recently announced that transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming New Yorkers can now affirmatively select a gender identity that more closely reflects to how they identify or express their gender on their IDNYC. Since its launch in 2015, the IDNYC program has always let cardholders to self-designate their gender or choose not to declare a gender. Current cardholders who want to change the gender designation on their IDNYC can do so at no cost. “IDNYC is also announcing today a number of new benefit partners, including the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, and a new financial institution partner, People’s United Bank. In addition, building upon previous work with NYC Health + Hospitals, cardholders can now link their IDNYC cards with their hospital/clinic registration records at all NYC Health + Hospitals facilities. Now in its fifth year, IDNYC is the largest and most successful municipal ID program in the country with over 1.25 million cardholders. “In the fairest big city in America, we have a

mandate to further our commitment to justice and access for all transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming New Yorkers,” said Mayor de Blasio. “With an IDNYC, more of our neighbors will be able to get the services they need, and take advantage of exclusive benefits and discounts to some of our City’s most iconic landmarks and institutions. We are sending a clear message that all New Yorkers, of all gender identities and expressions, belong and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. “Giving people the opportunity to indicate their gender expression is inclusive, affirming and the right thing to do.” said First Lady Chirlane McCray. “All New Yorkers should be valued and respected in their interactions with government. Dignity is central to the efforts of IDNYC. “It is great to see that the IDNYC card program in its fourth year will expand its benefits and will be more inclusive by adding the third gender category so every New Yorker can reflect their true selves,” said Council Speaker Corey Johnson. “In today’s climate, this program is more

important than ever and the Council is committed to its success. “Transgender, gender non-conforming and gender non-binary New Yorkers are our neighbors and our coworkers and they should feel safe and validated in their interactions with local government,” said Deputy Mayor Phillip Thompson. “IDNYC is the key to the City, the one card that shows everyone that you are a New Yorker and one of the key programs of the de Blasio Administration to making sure every single community that calls our city home has equal access to benefits and services. I look forward to continue to work with this program to expand access to opportunities for vulnerable communities across the city.” “The third gender option builds upon both IDNYC’s proud legacy of inclusion and the City’s reaffirmation of the rights of transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming New Yorkers. Under the leadership of the Mayor and the City Council, New York City has joined progressive cities and states across the country—including California, Oregon, Washington

State, and Washington, D.C.—including a third gender option for official government documents. As of January 1, transgender and non-binary New Yorkers can amend their birth certificates to request and alternative option. From the start, IDNYC applicants and cardholders could choose to self-designate their gender as male or female, or to opt not to designate any gender, recognizing some New Yorker’s wish to not indicate their gender on their ID, their right not to identify with binary gender options. Following NYC law, applicants are not required to submit proof of gender identity when selecting, changing, or removing a gender designation. Now, IDNYC applicants and cardholders can affirmatively choose a third gender option, denoted as “X,” for their official municipal identification card. “Beginning in 2015, IDNYC partnered with NYC Health + Hospitals to serve as a registration card, helping improve patients’ experience with our public hospital system. Patients could link their IDNYC card number to their Health + Hospitals registration record to speed new patient registration and expedite the check-in process for medical visits; nearly 5,000 cardholders have taken advantage of this benefit already. Initially rolled out at NYC Health

+ Hospitals/Coney Island, as of the end of 2018 IDNYC numbers can be incorporated within the patient’s record at over 70 NYC Health + Hospitals locations—including hospitals, community health centers, and long-term care facilities—making it easy to access those records using the IDNYC number. This integration is just one example of how IDNYC helps New Yorkers access services and realize better outcomes. “IDNYC comes into 2019 with many new benefit partners. Cardholders can receive a 1-year free membership at 40 excellent cultural institutions across the five boroughs – including at Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, IDNYC’s newest cultural institution partner. “IDNYC is also pleased to announce People’s United Bank as the newest financial institution partner. Alongside over a dozen other financial institutional partners, cardholders are now able to use their IDNYC card as primary ID to open a bank account with People’s United Bank, in addition to other required documentation. With 12 branches across the City, this partnership provides cardholders with greater access to financial services. This addition is part of the City’s ongoing commitment to increase financial access for all New Yorkers, particularly the unbanked and underbanked.

# Kahaniyaan by Vicky Kohhli Trending on YouTube

(By a staff reporter) New York-Kahaniyaan is the hot independent latest hindi song release from Bollywood singer and artist Vicky Kohhli. “Being an independent release it is hard for a single to get noticed but the new hip-hop, rock inspired single ‘Kahaniyaan’ by renown bollywood artist Vicky Kohhli paired with the newly released official music video has already created a small buzz on social media and reached some of its potential listeners having over 700k plays on Youtube alone and this is only the start of what is to come for the Single release. “The Single ‘Kahaniyaan’s new hip-hop and rock inspired sound and has been climbing social media like wild fire with shares and likes due to the success of his

previous Single which generated over a million plays and has the definite potential to go viral for this SPRING 2019. “The Single ‘Kahaniyaan’ is also climbing the ranks on youtube being ranked the 20-30th search for ‘top 5 bollywood songs 2019’; in youtube and shows no signs on slowing down proving to be popular amongst groups of young boys and girls. “Be sure to keep up to date with trending Bollywood Singer and Artist Vicky Kohhli on his various social media accounts as he creates new sounds of Bollywood, rock and hip-hop inspired music for the year 2019. “The Single ‘Kahaniyaan’ by Vicky Kohhli is now available to stream online via Youtube and other streaming platforms and is available to purchase on all major digital stores.

# Raj Shah, first Indian-American to be White House spokesperson, leaves

**Shah stepped down earlier this month as principal deputy press secretary, a position that had made him deputy to Press Secretary Sarah Sanders, in which capacity he and held briefings for the White House media in her absence, speaking for President Donald Trump.**

(By Our Staff Reporter)- Raj Shah, the first Indian American to take the lectern in the White House media room as spokesperson, has left to join a lobbying firm, after months of speculation about his impending departure.

"I'm excited to join Brian, Jamie and the top-notch team to launch Ballard Media Group," Shah said in a statement released Monday by the company, which also announced a new venture that he will chair with Jamie Rubin, a Clinton administration alumnus. It is called the Ballard Media Group, after Brian Ballard the president of the umbrella company, Ballard

Partners.

Shah stepped down earlier this month as principal deputy press secretary, a position that had made him deputy to Press Secretary Sarah Sanders, in which capacity he and held briefings for the White House media in her absence, speaking for President Donald Trump.

He was the first Indian American ever appointed to the position and was also among a bunch of Indian American appointed by the president to senior positions in his administration. Nikki Haley became the first American of Indian descent to hold a cabinet position as ambassador to the

United Nations. She left last December. Others who are still there include Ajit Pai, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission and Seema Verma, who heads the medicaid and medicare sections at the department of health.

Among Shah's more high-profile assignments was successfully shepherding the senate confirmation process of Brian Kavanaugh, the president's nominee as a Supreme Court justice, last September.

Around that time, however, word was getting around of Shah's departure. Reports had suggested Sanders was leaving as well, but she is still around.



Shah had also been singled by the president's mercurial temperament, as had all other White House staffers at one stage or another. "I don't speak to Raj," the president told Bob Woodward about latter's upcoming book then - in May - as to why the legendary Washington Post journalist had not interviewed him for the book. Woodward had said he made numerous requests through members of the president's staff, and Shah was one of them. But, unpredictable as ever, the president was effusive in his praise of Shah as well. "Deputy White House Press Secretary,

Raj," the president said introducing him at a White House Diwali event last November. "Good job. Raj has been with us for a long time, and what a great job he does." Shah exited the White House weeks later, in January.

Shah entered the Trump orbit in 2016 along with a group of Republican party officials led by Reince Priebus, who then went on to take senior positions in the administration. Priebus became the president's first chief of staff, Sean Spicer became press secretary, and Katie Walsh was deputy chief of staff.

## Ivanka Trump backs Pepsi ex-CEO Indra Nooyi for top job at World Bank

*The New York Times, which first reported this move, said Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter and adviser, had floated Nooyi's name for the position and that it was not yet clear if the former Pepsi CEO will accept, if offered*

(Insider Bureau)-The Trump White House is considering Indra Nooyi, the former Indian American CEO of Pepsi, to head the World Bank as president to succeed Jim Yong Kim, who has announced he is stepping down in February.

The New York Times, which first reported this move, said Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter and adviser, had floated Nooyi's name for the position and that it was not yet clear if the former Pepsi CEO will accept, if offered.

Ivanka Trump is among the three people conducting the search for a successor to Kim, who resigned earlier this month. The other two are Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney.

Others in the race include David Malpass, the under secretary of treasury, and Ray Washburne, who is heading the Oversea Private Investment Corporation. Both of them had served as advisers to President Donald Trump's campaign. With Ivanka Trump's backing her, however, Nooyi could stand the best chance, given how close the president is to his first daughter,

who has called Nooyi a "mentor".

She wrote in a tweet last August, "The great @IndraNooyi is stepping down as PepsiCo CEO, after 12 yrs. Indra, you are a mentor + inspiration to so many, myself included. I am deeply grateful for your friendship. Thank you for your passionate engagement on issues that

benefit the people of this country, and beyond." It wasn't clear yet if Nooyi will take the nomination. She had faced criticism for joining the president's business advisory council that was disbanded later. And there had been no statement from the White House confirming the report, or denying it. A nominee of the United States is guaranteed to get the position. The World Bank has been headed always by an American - Kim, the outgoing president is Korean-American - in an informal arrangement that leaves the sister world body, the International Monetary Fund to Europeans, the current managing director Christine Lagarde is French and succeeded another French, Dominique Strauss-Kahn.



## Indian arrested with 27 Thai women in fake marriage scam in Bangkok

*The man identified as Wikrom Layerhi was arrested on charges of being a broker to arrange for Thai women to register fake marriages with Indian nationals.*



(News Agencies)-The Thai police have arrested an Indian man and 27 Thai women in connection with a fake-marriage registration scam that enabled Indians to get residential visas in the country.

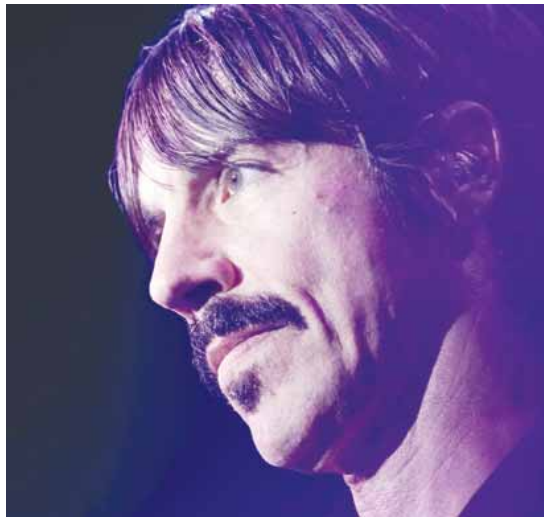
The Indian man, Wikrom Layerhi, was arrested on charge of being a broker to arrange for Thai women to register fake marriages with Indian nationals, the National daily cited Lt. Gen. Surachate Hakpal, Immigration Bureau Chief and Deputy Head of the Technology Crime Suppression Centre, as saying on Monday.

Surachate said that the arrested women were hired for 8,000 to 10,000 bahts each, adding that these women never stayed with the Indians with whom they had registered their marriages.

One of the women was 70 years old and had a family, including children, Surachate said.

Police officials said they checked more than 8,000 Indians living in Thailand and found that 127 of them unlawfully obtained residential visas, which have been revoked.

Thirty-six of the 127 men had been deported, according to authorities.



# Anthony Kiedis: 'California Is on the Front Lines of the Climate Crisis'

*"We need to come together and help solve the greatest threat to humankind and embrace our responsibility to be good stewards of the planet for future generations," singer writes in op-ed*

(Insider Bureau)-In the aftermath of the deadly and devastating rash of wildfires that swept through Northern and Southern California, Anthony Kiedis co-penned an op-ed that warns fellow Golden State citizens that they reside in "the front lines of the climate crisis."

The op-ed, which the Red Hot Chili Peppers singer co-wrote with documentary filmmaker Rory Kennedy (Ghosts of Abu Grahb, Last Days in Vietnam) and the Malibu Foundation's Trevor Neilson, also focuses on an upcoming resolution to declare a climate emergency in California, how elected officials can take action as well as an all-star benefit concert this weekend to help those

affected by the wildfires. California is on the front lines of the climate crisis. In 2017, Ventura was hit with the state's then-largest wildfire burning nearly 300,000 acres. In early 2018, 23 people died in the Montecito mudslides. Later in the year, the Camp Fire left the town of Paradise in total ruin, killing 86 people. At the same time, the Woolsey Fire destroyed 1,643 structures, killed three people and prompted the evacuation of more than 295,000 residents. These extreme weather events are going to accelerate if we don't act now. The toll on human life and the

environment is unfathomable. These events also come with a monumental price tag. New figures released this week show 2018 global disasters cost \$160 billion. A third of that total came from just four events in the U.S., with California's Camp Fire being the costliest disaster of 2018 at \$16.5 billion. As direct victims of the Woolsey Fire, we saw firsthand how extreme weather events disproportionately impact low-income residents. We launched the Malibu Foundation to provide emergency relief assistance to people in need, help the community rebuild and

put pressure on elected officials to take climate action now.

Since our federal government is failing us, we must rely on our state and local governments to lead the charge.

On Sunday, the Malibu Foundation and The Climate Mobilization are bringing together artists, climate experts and victims of the recent wildfires to call on the state of California and its cities to pass legislation declaring a climate emergency - an all-out effort to transition society and the economy at rapid speed.

State Sen. Henry Stern is expected to respond by

announcing a resolution endorsing a declaration of a climate emergency for the state of California. If passed, this resolution will urgently address the threat of climate change in an aggressive way. It will call on the state to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions towards zero net emissions, quickly adopt resilience and adaptation strategies, put vulnerable communities at the forefront of climate mobilization efforts, transition from industrial agriculture to regenerative farming and overhaul the transportation system, among other things.

Stern is also expected to make an announcement Sunday at the Malibu Love

Sesh, a benefit concert for the Malibu Foundation, featuring the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Beck and St. Vincent. It's time for our state and local governments to step in. According to the landmark report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, we have only 12 years left to mitigate climate change.

The clock is ticking. We need to come together and help solve the greatest threat to humankind and embrace our responsibility to be good stewards of the planet for future generations. Join us by pressuring your elected official to declare a climate emergency in your state and city.

## ***Brexit: There are no easy choices for Theresa May***

**Only two of the following three can be achieved: no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, an unqualified Brexit and the sanctity of European Union's single market**

(Insider Bureau)- Theresa May, the British prime minister, is in an unenviable position. On the one hand, a big chunk of her own party MPs won't agree with her Brexit plan and, on the other, they wouldn't even let her leave 10 Downing Street. Her Brexit withdrawal plan, negotiated over a two-year period, was rejected by 432 votes (with only 202 in her favour) in the House of Commons on Tuesday. However, the Conservative MPs who voted against her Brexit deal looked likely to support her in a no confidence motion moved against her by the Labour party leader, Jeremy Corbyn. And if she survives this vote, she will have to submit an alternative Brexit

plan very soon before the British Parliament. It is unclear what concessions the European Union (EU) will be willing to offer. Even if the EU offers some, would those be enough? Because if they are not, the road ahead becomes a lot trickier. It could mean a second Brexit referendum - which, frankly speaking, doesn't sound as absurd as it once did- or a no deal Brexit. The latter will be disorderly and chaotic, leaving businesses in the United Kingdom vulnerable to a range of problems in the short to medium term. Meeting the March 29 Brexit deadline will require some herculean effort from here

on. At the heart of the tussle is the "backstop" - an arrangement to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. The latter continues to remain an EU member. If the UK and the EU do not agree to a trade deal during the transition period after Brexit is triggered, the backstop in Ms May's plan would entail Northern Ireland remaining in a single customs territory with the EU. This effectively undermines, pro-Brexiters argue with some justification, the entire Brexit push. Moreover, the UK cannot leave the backstop without



the EU being on board. The EU, too, is hardly wrong in insisting on the backstop because any trade across the Irish border without checks cannot be allowed without Northern Ireland following some of EU's regulations. Effectively, only two of the following

three can be achieved: no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; an unqualified Brexit; and the sanctity of EU's single market.

This, indeed, is a complex trilemma, one which the British people were mostly

unaware of when they voted for Brexit on June 23, 2016. This tells us something about the usefulness of calling referendums with binary choices on extremely complex issues. The entire world should learn from the UK's experience.

## Schellenberg death sentence: Canadian's verdict will backfire on Beijing

The death sentence imposed on Canadian Robert Lloyd Schellenberg by the Dalian Intermediate People's Court in north-eastern China is an immense blow for the convicted drug smuggler and his family. China argues it is a simple matter of sentencing a felon according to the Chinese code. The death sentence imposed on Canadian Robert Lloyd Schellenberg by the Dalian Intermediate People's Court in north-eastern China is an immense blow for the convicted drug smuggler and his family. China argues it is a simple matter of sentencing a felon according to the Chinese code. But for the rest of the world, including Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the decision is far more sinister. Following the arrest of Huawei's chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou in Vancouver in late 2018, Chinese state media warned Canada that Beijing may "take revenge" if she is extradited to the US. Schellenberg's death sentence, along with the detainment of two Canadians on suspicion of "activities that endangered China's national security," appears to confirm this theory. Schellenberg's plight will backfire on Beijing, however. On the defensive over many issues, China needs to win more hearts and minds. Instead, the ruling will only push away friendly countries and stiffen the unity and resolve of those voicing deep concerns with Chinese actions. China is a growing but lonely rising power and is widely distrusted. It has few enduring allies and supporters. It could be bad faith or bad timing. But sentencing a Canadian to death has only raised collective suspicion and deepened its isolation. Consider the serious road bumps many countries have had with Beijing in recent years. It is enduring a serious and deepening trade war with the United States on a wide-range of complaints over China's trade practices. Washington claims Beijing seeks to dominate the most important and high-technology sectors of the future through unfair advantages given to its state-owned companies and other national champions. It also alleges that Chinese state actors conduct and enable the theft of trillions of dollars in intellectual property from American and other advanced economy firms. The European Union and Japan have expressed similar concerns, especially with respect to intellectual property theft.

Numerous countries have expressed concerns with President Xi Jinping's flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). An increasing number of experts and diplomats accuse the BRI of imposing "debt traps" on vulnerable economies. They point to countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia,

Mongolia and Djibouti as examples of these countries forced to concede aspects of their sovereign decision making to China once they become incapable of paying back the exorbitant loans. Then there are other once friendly countries which have felt China's economic wrath after making sovereign political or strategic decisions which displease Beijing. "Unofficial" economic sanctions against South Korea were applied by Beijing after Seoul made the decision to install the American THAAD anti-missile defense system in the face of North Korea provocations, resulting in a sharp drop in Chinese tourists and difficulties for South Korean firms operating inside China.

In late 2017, relations between Australia and China grew frosty, after Canberra announced multiple new laws aimed at tightening the country's security and electoral processes, including a ban on foreign donations, a move widely seen as attempting to curtail the influence of China. The following year, reports surfaced that Australian ministers had been refused Chinese visas. The underlying takeaway in all these examples are that the reach of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is far and deep and its political objectives prevail above all other considerations. Economic and other activities conducted by Chinese entities and individuals can never be taken at face value because they can be compelled to serve the demands of the Party. Despite almost four decades of reform, the hand of the Party on all tools of national power is as strong as ever. Given this, the burden of proof falls upon China to dispel the argument that Schellenberg's fate is tied to that of whether Meng is extradited to America to face trial -- with the guilt or severity of the crime only a secondary consideration.

If China cannot discharge that burden, the perceived link between Schellenberg's sentence to Meng's fate will only strengthen the case made by Western intelligence agencies that Huawei is not an ordinary private company, that Huawei receives special support from and protection by the CCP. Patronage is never free in authoritarian politics and the case will only grow that Huawei advances Party and state objectives in return. Indeed, the death sentence only increases the likelihood that Huawei will be increasingly locked out of the Five Eyes economies -- the US, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand -- including the roll-out of their 5G networks. That would be pivotal. Japan would certainly follow, and perhaps the EU.

The arrest of a Huawei employee in Poland over charges he was spying for the Chinese government won't help dispel these beliefs either.

## Human trafficking is a global epidemic. And we can all help fight it

Jane Mosbacher Morris is author of Buy the Change You Want to See. She is the former director of Humanitarian Action for the McCain Institute. Prior to joining the Institute, she worked in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism as an advisor and in the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues as a detailee. The opinions expressed in this commentary are her own. Human trafficking is an estimated \$150 billion industry, and one of the fastest-growing transnational criminal activities of the 21st century. Trafficking may seem like a distant problem or one that doesn't touch us personally, but we are unwittingly involved any time we buy something made by exploited labor.

Human trafficking is the word used to describe people being forced to work against their will in inhumane conditions, for little or no pay - whether in a factory in China, trash heap in India or private home in New York. It's also used to describe those held through coercion, fraud, force or the threat of force in the sex trade or in combat. Victims are often lured by false promises of decent work. Traffickers often take passports and money, and make threats against victims or their families if they try to escape. As consumers, we inadvertently participate in this tragedy when we buy or use something made by these captives. While in the past, people made their own clothes or knew the seamstress who sewed them, and maybe lived down the street, today, the vast majority of clothing is manufactured outside the United States. Computer parts, too, come from all around the world. This means we literally do not see our products being made - or the conditions in which the producers work. Child labor trafficking in particular plagues many of the products we use today. The U.S.

Department of Labor lists 148 goods made in 76 countries that are at significant risk of being made with child labor, including tobacco from Brazil and cotton from Burkina Faso.

While this sounds like a depressing aspect of globalization and an area out of our control, we can actually make a real difference in people's lives through our behavior as consumers. Tweaking what we buy and who we buy it from is surprisingly easy - and cost-affordable - and can have a real impact on producers here and around the world.

I first discovered the power of "conscious consumerism" in 2013, when I met former sex trafficking victims in India. These women had escaped exploitation and were now gainfully employed, doing dignified work in a sewing cooperative in Kolkata. I was traveling with the McCain Institute, a nonprofit I'd gone to work for after nearly a decade spent focusing on anti-terrorism and global women's issues in the U.S. Department of State. As I'd seen again and again, women who escaped or were rescued were vulnerable to re-exploitation if they couldn't find a good job.

In India, we tromped up a concrete stairway into Sari Bari, a social enterprise started by volunteer-turned-entrepreneur Sarah Lance. What I saw blew me away. The pride on the faces of the women, the atmosphere of safety - and the beautifully sewn and screen-printed bags and purses they were selling - was like nothing I'd seen in all my years on this issue. Everyone in our group wanted a bag or purse. The products practically sold themselves. Since then, I've gone on to meet so many women and men who have finally found employment through socially conscious businesses and nonprofits like Sari Bari.



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# The US-China trade war is an opportunity for India

**With a large labour force, India is well positioned to capture the market of larger firms exiting China for more economic pastures. While the government must offer a strong commitment and support, the Shenzhen-type special governance zones should have institutional and economic autonomy.**

Uncertainty regarding the future of global trade due to US-China trade tensions has presented India with an opportunity to position itself as a key player. India has a number of advantages. It is a thriving democracy with a young workforce; it is strategically located; and it acknowledges the importance of a relatively open economy with strong public institutions. However, a number of essential conditions crucial for attracting private and global investment, such as a skilled workforce, good infrastructure, protection of private and intellectual property rights, credibility in honouring commercial contracts, and timely

resolution, are either weak or missing. Given that an overhauling reform is likely to be gradual and uneven, special governance zones - founded on robust legal and administrative institutions - can play a major role in the country's transformation. India's experiment with special governance zones began with the enactment of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Act in 2005. The major focus of this legislation was to incubate export-oriented industries within exclusive zones by granting them special concessions. Studies show poor performance of SEZs, especially in investment growth and employment generation. This, it seems, is a consequence of the legislation establishing these zones. The SEZ

Act exhibits an inherent aversion to institutionalised legal as well as regulatory reforms, reducing these zones to mere tax havens for rent-seeking industries. For special governance zones to thrive, India needs to cast aside this approach for a more holistic one with a focus on rule of law and governance that can unleash economic freedom. China experimented with this model in Shenzhen, which was a small fishing town in the late 1970s. Shenzhen was carved out as an experimental ground for capitalism with flexible governance and legal framework. It started out as a centre for export activities and moved up the value chain by initiating

institutional reforms. Now, on Shenzhen's 40th anniversary, it is commemorated as the moment China committed to reforming its economy, which embarked on its historic growth trajectory. One contemporary example of a functional and more encompassing special governance zone is the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC). In a region simultaneously characterised by civil law and Shari'a, Dubai has created a common law framework, which is more market-friendly. The major institutional reforms within this zone are the creation of independent civil and commercial courts, a robust financial services authority and a world-renowned arbitration centre. Backing these institutions are legislation, modelled on common law, covering several economic aspects such as contracts, data protection, employment,

insolvency, and securities. Hong Kong as well has been successful in attracting businesses having an open and competitive business environment, a sound regulatory system, in addition to a low corporate tax rate. Owing to its status as a Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), first with the UK, and now as part of China, it was able to formulate monetary and financial policies to promote entrepreneurship and market growth as directed by its constitution. This idea has gained momentum in the Indian policy space as well. Arvind Panagariya, former Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog, advocated the setting up of such zones along coastal areas to take advantage of their location and existing connectivity to boost employment and exports.

## The Indian State must scrap the sedition law

Nearly three years ago, a crowd in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was heard protesting what it called the "judicial killing of Afzal Guru and Maqbool Bhatt" - two terrorists executed by the Indian State upon being handed the death sentence after full hearing by the courts of law. The chants in support of terrorists and against the Indian Union were condemnable but the question for the Indian authorities was: How should a liberal democracy react to such events? Unfortunately, India decided to unleash the repressive might of the State against the accused. The Delhi police has filed a charge sheet on Monday, slapping sedition, among other charges, on

10 protesters, including three student activists - Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid and Anirban Bhattacharya. Whether these students were indeed chanting those slogans is for the courts to adjudicate on, but the use of a colonial-era sedition law on free citizens of the Indian republic is disconcerting. Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code was an instrument used by the colonial administration to repress the voices in the freedom movement. Recognising the potential for its misuse, the Supreme Court in 1962 had restricted its usage to cases in which there was a clear incitement to violence. However, police forces

across India continue to use this law to arrest hapless citizens. In 2016, there were 33 cases reported under Section 124A, 12 of these in Haryana alone. In 2015, 73 were arrested on the charge of sedition, 40 in Bihar alone. The number of people arrested under this section in 2014 was 55, with Bihar and Jharkhand accounting for 46 of them.

Clearly, the dilution introduced by the Supreme Court in 1962 has not deterred the administration and police forces from arresting citizens. This law now needs to go. A mature, liberal democracy cannot fight its own citizens. If there is a bona fide conspiracy against the Indian State,



there are enough laws in the statute book to look into them. In 1989, a landmark case, Texas v. Johnson, was decided by the US Supreme Court. The court ruled that Gregory Lee Johnson's act of burning the US flag was protected under freedom

of speech. Most notably, Justice Anthony Kennedy said: "It is poignant but fundamental that the flag protects those who hold it in contempt." It is high time the Indian police, judiciary and legislature learnt from Justice Kennedy.

## The CJ and Supreme Court must walk their talk on transparency

Today marks one year of the press conference by four senior judges of the Supreme Court, laying bare the improprieties in the highest echelons of the judiciary before the nation. The aftermath of the meeting was pregnant with possibility. Would Chief Justice Dipak Misra (now retired) resign? Would Parliament, which had been angling to pass a judicial accountability law, do so? Above all, would it mark a new beginning for the Supreme Court itself as an introspective institution, candid about its faults and open to being scrutinised by noisy journalists, as the judges at the

press conference were? One year on, none of these possibilities have come to fruition. While it would have been naïve to expect a structural transformation of the Supreme Court to take place overnight, the stasis that followed was equally unexpected. The basic grievance at the press conference - Justice Misra was not functioning independently - was not addressed in any meaningful way. His absolute discretion as master of the roster to allocate cases to different benches was not substantively reformed. While the collegium worked overtime in making several recommendations,

this had much to do with the dynamics of the judges who comprised the collegium. With a different combination, there is little guarantee that such efficiency won't unravel. An impeachment motion, hastily put together and ill-conceived, was nipped in the bud. With Justice Misra retiring, to many, the problems had solved themselves. The lack of any meaningful structural change demonstrates the bleak political economy of judicial reform. It was apparent in the aftermath of the press conference that the Supreme Court was a divided institution. A stronger collective with greater zeal

for restoring the public confidence in the judiciary would have spoken decisively in a single institutional voice and taken control of its own destiny. The full court of judges failed to do so then and continues to fail to proactively introduce any genuine reform measure. Absurdly short tenures of successive chief justices might have much to do with this seeming lack of institutional cohesion. The government, like most governments before it, was content in observing the in-fighting of the judges from the sidelines. Serious questions of corruption and lack of independence of judges were sidestepped. This general

inclination towards a convenient inertia was strongly espoused by influential voices of the Supreme Court Bar. Fali Nariman recommended to judges who gave the press conference to "lump it" and wait for the chief justice to retire. Soli Sorabjee accused them of squabbling like company shareholders. The status quo of an administratively creaking, functionally opaque institution with the possibility of nefarious dealings at the very top had to be lumped lest public in-fighting reduced the majesty of the institution and made it more transparent and, worse still, all-too-human.

# New H1-B visa rule

## change to impact IT companies, hiring of Indians

**Under the proposed amendments, USCIS would first select the 65,000 visas from the cumulative pool of regular as well as advance degree holder applicants and 20,000 highly skilled H1-B visas would then be allotted among the remaining pool of unselected advance degree holder applicants.**

(Agencies)-A recent policy change favouring advanced degree holders for visas in US will lead to a hit on IT companies' profitability as the number of H1-B visas approved gets reduced, a report said. In December 2018, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) proposed reversing the process for H1-B selection favouring advance degree holders. This is likely to lead to 10 per cent reduction in H1-B visa approvals for

regular applicants, where the applicant is without an advance degree masters or higher from US universities, ratings agency Icra said. Increased onshore hiring associated with higher wage bill along with factors such as pricing pressure on commoditised services, wage inflation and lower revenue growth will negatively impact the margins going forward, it said.

Even though the companies have other factors to restrict the

impact, overall operating margins are still expected to decline from 22.1 per cent in FY18 to 20.8 per cent in FY21, it said.

Under the proposed amendments, USCIS would first select the 65,000 visas from the cumulative pool of regular as well as advance degree holder applicants and 20,000 highly skilled H1-B visas would then be allotted among the remaining pool of unselected advance degree holder applicants, domestic

rating agency Icra's vice president Gaurav Jain said.

"This will work against the Indian IT services sector (H-1B dependent employers) as their share of masters degree or equivalent for H-1B visas approved was approximately 27 per cent compared to 55 per cent for non-H-1B dependent employers," he said.

An entity is defined as H-1B dependent if more than 15 per cent of its employees are on an H-1B visa.

The agency, however, said that credit profiles of



players will remain stable as companies will be able to sustain free cash flows despite pressure on revenue growth and margins.

At present, when sufficient number of petitions needed to reach the regular cap or advanced degree exemption are received, USCIS selects qualifying position towards the H1-B advance degree exemption first through lottery and the unselected advance degree applications are merged with the pool of regular applicants for selection process towards cap of

65,000, it said.

Indian companies have started to ramp up onshore hiring with the visa issuance norms being tightened by restricting the entry of entry-level programmers earlier coupled with increasing compliance requirements adding to cost pressures, it said.

In its sample of companies, Icra said the share of offshore revenues reduced from 43.2 per cent in FY16 to 40.3 per cent in FY18, and has subsequently increased to 42.2 per cent in H1FY19.

# U.S. troop deaths revive anger over Trump's Syria withdrawal plan

(Agencies)- A suicide bombing in Syria killed four Americans and wounded three more on Wednesday, raising questions about the terror group's resilience and reviving the pitched debate around Donald Trump's plan to withdraw American forces from the country.

The Islamic State, also known as ISIS, claimed credit for the attack in the northern city of Manbij, which went unmentioned in a speech hours later by Vice President Mike Pence, who declared that "[t]he caliphate has crumbled and ISIS has been defeated."

In a statement, the Pentagon said that two U.S. service members, one Department of Defense civilian employee and one American contractor were killed in the attack. Three troops were also injured in the blast during what the Pentagon called a routine patrol.

By late Wednesday afternoon President Donald Trump himself had not commented on the attack, although Pence condemned it in a statement issued shortly after his speech. That statement said

the U.S. has "crushed the ISIS caliphate and devastated its capabilities," but it did not repeat the word "defeated." Pence also suggested that the troop withdrawal Trump announced in mid-December will continue even as the U.S. remains vigilant against the terrorist group.

"As we begin to bring our troops home, the American people can be assured, for the sake of our soldiers, their families, and our nation, we will never allow the remnants of ISIS to reestablish their evil and murderous caliphate - not now, not ever," Pence said.

Democrats were quick to pounce on the attack as evidence that Trump's talk of withdrawing the 2,000 U.S. troops stationed in northern and eastern Syria - on an unspecified timeline - is reckless.

"The fight against ISIS is clearly not over," Sen. Bob Menendez, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, said in a statement, calling the attack "a stark reminder that the Trump Administration needs a clearly developed and articulated strategy to secure

the gains we have made in the fight against terror."

"This administration's distortion of reality is dangerous," declared a statement from the Democratic National Committee. "Despite being told by military leaders on the ground in Syria that ISIS was not entirely defeated, Trump and his administration continues to lie to the American people."

At least one Republican also sounded a note of criticism. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), who has been a critic of Trump's Syria withdrawal plan, suggested during a Wednesday Senate hearing that Trump's talk had emboldened ISIS.

"My concern, by the statements made by President Trump, is that you set in motion enthusiasm by the enemy we're fighting,"



Graham said. "I hope the president will look long and hard at what we're doing in Syria." Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan told reporters at the Pentagon that "our thoughts and prayers to the families and

team members of those killed and wounded during today's attack in Manbij," according to a pool report. "Our fight against terrorism is ongoing and we will remain vigilant and committed to its destruction," he added.

## Jay Jacobs Tapped To Lead NY Democratic Committee

(Agencies)-Nassau County Democratic Chairman Jay Jacobs is slated to begin his second stint as leader of the New York State Democratic Committee, officials announced Monday. Gov. Andrew Cuomo recommended that the party make their next leader Jacobs, who helped unseat three Republicans in the November elections, flipping the chamber

Democratic control. "Jay Jacobs is an outstanding champion for Long Island with an unparalleled record of bringing Democrats together to win historic victories," Cuomo said. "I am excited to work with him to further strengthen our party and elect even more Democrats up and down the ballot." Jacobs would replace outgoing state Dem chair Byron Brown. Jacobs, who became county chair in 2001, last held the state leadership post

from 2009 to 2012. President Barack Obama also recommended he serve as an at-large member of the Democratic National Committee. Jacobs, who runs a half dozen camps as his day job, is married with two daughters, two grandchildren, and lives in Laurel Hollow. The governor credited Jacobs with helping make history in getting Laura Curran elected as the first female Nassau County executive in 2017, among other local firsts. "In this

consequential time for our party, our state and our country I am honored to have been asked by Governor Cuomo to once again serve as New York State Democratic Chair," Jacobs said. "After so many progressive achievements I am appreciative and excited for the opportunity to work with him and our state party once again as we continue to fight for a progressive agenda and marshal our resources for the upcoming challenges ahead."



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# First plants on moon, China says it has done the job

**Pictures sent back January 12 showed plant shoots growing well nine days after the experiment was initiated, Chongqing University, which led the biological project, said in a briefing .**

(Insider Bureau)- Chinese scientists say they have grown the first plants on the moon as part of the country's lunar mission.

Pictures sent back Jan. 12 showed plant shoots growing well nine days after the experiment was initiated, Chongqing University, which led the biological project, said in a briefing Tuesday.

The biopsy test load carried cotton, canola, potato, Arabidopsis, yeast and fruit fly. Crops were exposed to high

vacuum, temperature differences, and strong radiation. After becoming the first country in the world to land a spacecraft on the far side of the moon, China is planning four more missions to get samples back before studying the feasibility of a lunar research base.

China plans to launch the Chang'e-5 probe to the moon later this year, with three more in the offing, said Wu Yanhua, vice administrator of the China National Space Administration, at a briefing in Beijing on Monday.

At least two of them will land on the moon's south pole and conduct research, he said.

"We will use the Chang'e-8 to test certain technologies and do some preliminary exploration for jointly building a research base on the moon," Wu said.

The world's second-biggest economy is doubling down on its space program as the race with the U.S. to explore Mars and beyond heats up at a time both the powers are vying for economic, technological and military dominance. With an



annual space budget of \$8 billion, second only to the U.S., China is also looking to send a probe to the red planet by the end of this decade and build its own space station by 2022.

## McDonald's loses European Union trademark for 'Big Mac' to Irish chain Supermac's

**Supermac's said it can now expand in the United Kingdom and Europe. It said it had never had a product called "Big Mac" but that McDonald's had used the similarity of the two names to block the Irish chain's expansion.**

(Insider Bureau)- McDonald's Corp <MCD.N> has lost its rights to the trademark "Big Mac" in a European Union case ruling in favour of Ireland-based fast-food chain Supermac's, according to a decision by European regulators.

The judgment, provided to Reuters by Supermac's, revoked McDonald's registration of the trademark, saying that the world's largest fast-food chain had not proven genuine use of it over the five years prior to the case being lodged in 2017.

The Spain-based EU Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) did not respond to phone calls and emails requesting comment.

McDonald's was not immediately available to comment on the decision, which the company can still appeal.

The ruling allows other companies as well as McDonald's to use the "Big Mac" name in the EU.

Supermac's said it can now expand in the United Kingdom and Europe. It said it had never had a product called "Big Mac" but that McDonald's had used the similarity of the two names to block the Irish chain's expansion.

"Supermac's are delighted with their victory in the trademark application and in revoking the Big Mac trademark which had been in existence since 1996,"

founder Pat McDonagh told Reuters in an email.

"This is a great victory for business in general and stops bigger companies from "trademark bullying" by not allowing them to hoard trademarks without using them." McDonald's, which sells its flagship "Big Mac" burgers internationally, submitted printouts of European websites as evidence, as well as posters, packaging, and affidavits from company representatives attesting to "Big Mac" sales in Europe.

The EUIPO said the affidavits from McDonald's needed to be supported by other types of



evidence, and that the websites and other promotional materials did not provide that support.

From the website printouts "it could not be concluded whether, or how, a purchase could be made or an order could be placed," the EUIPO said. "Even if the websites provided such an option, there is no information of a single order being placed."

McDonald's has historically been "extremely litigious" in

the area of trademark law and typically does not lose, said Willajeanne McLean, a law professor at the University of Connecticut.

In 1993, McDonald's won a court order blocking a dentist in New York from selling services under the name "McDental."

In 2016, McDonald's defeated an effort by a Singapore company to register 'MACCOFFEE' as an EU trademark.

## YouTube to ban dangerous prank videos after Bird Box challenge gets viral

(Agencies)-YouTube on Tuesday clarified rules against posting videos of dangerous pranks, as risky "challenges" prompt people to video themselves doing things like biting into laundry soap or driving blindfolded.

The company already forbids content inciting dangerous activities likely to result in serious harm.

But the clarifications "make it clear that challenges like the Tide pod challenge or the Fire challenge, that can cause death and/or have caused death in some instances, have no place

on YouTube," the company said in a blog post.

"We've made it clear that our policies prohibiting harmful and dangerous content also extend to pranks with a perceived danger of serious physical injury," said YouTube, which like other social networks is trying to show that it is better tackling problematic content.

It made clear the updated policies ban pranks that trick people into thinking they are in danger, such as fake home invasions or drive-by shootings. "YouTube is home to many

beloved viral challenges and pranks, like Jimmy Kimmel's 'Terrible Christmas Presents' prank or the water bottle flip challenge," said YouTube, owned by Google's parent Alphabet.

"That said, we've always had policies to make sure what's funny doesn't cross the line into also being harmful or dangerous." While playful or goofy challenges or pranks have become raging trends online, with video shared at YouTube or Facebook, some "memes" have put people in jeopardy.

A "Fire Challenge" dared people

to put flammable liquid on their bodies then ignite it, while a "Tide Pod Challenge" involved people, typically teens, biting or chewing the encapsulated candy-colored laundry detergent.

A "Bird Box" thriller released on Netflix a month ago inspired a challenge for people to do things blindfolded, mimicking characters in the original streaming film.

A US teenager over the weekend crashed while driving with her eyes covered, taking part in a challenge inspired by the hit

Netflix show, according to media reports.

YouTube policy also bans pranks that cause children trauma, for example the fake death of a parent or severe abandonment, according to the firm. Accounts that post videos violating policies on pranks will get a "strike" that will limit some features such as live streaming.

A second strike within three months will result in even more limited use of YouTube, while accounts getting three strikes in that time period will be terminated.

(By Our Staff Reporter)-Vowing "I will not be bullied," President Donald Trump's nominee for attorney general asserted independence from the White House on Tuesday, saying he believed that Russia had tried to interfere in the 2016 presidential election, that the special counsel investigation shadowing Trump is not a witch hunt and that his predecessor was right to recuse himself from the probe. The comments by William Barr at his Senate confirmation hearing pointedly departed from Trump's own views and underscored Barr's efforts to reassure Democrats that he will not be a loyalist to a president who has appeared to demand it from law enforcement. He also repeatedly sought to assuage concerns that he might disturb or upend special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation as it reaches its final stages. Some Democrats are concerned about that very possibility, citing a memo Barr wrote to the Justice Department before his nomination in which he criticized Mueller's investigation for the way it was presumably looking into whether Trump had obstructed justice.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, told Barr the memo showed "a determined effort, I thought, to undermine Bob Mueller." The nominee told senators he was merely trying to advise Justice Department officials against "stretching the statute beyond what was intended" to conclude that the president had obstructed justice.

Though Barr said an attorney general should work in concert with an administration's policy goals, he broke from some Trump talking points, including the mantra that the Russia probe is a witch hunt, and said he frowned on "Lock Her Up" calls for Hillary Clinton. Trump has equivocated on Russian meddling in the 2016 election and assailed and pushed out his first attorney general, Jeff Sessions, for recusing because of his work with the Trump campaign.

Barr stated without hesitation that it was in the public

# Donald Trump's attorney general nominee William Barr says he 'will not be bullied'



*Though Barr said an attorney general should work in concert with an administration's policy goals, he broke from some Trump talking points, including the mantra that the Russia probe is a witch hunt, and said he frowned on "Lock Her Up" calls for Hillary Clinton.*

interest for Mueller to finish his investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with the Kremlin to sway the presidential election. He said he would resist any order by Trump to fire Mueller without cause and called it "unimaginable" that Mueller would do anything to require his termination.

"I believe the Russians interfered or attempted to interfere with the election, and I think we have to get to the bottom of it," Barr said during the nine-hour hearing.

He said that, at 68 and partially retired, he felt emboldened to "do the right thing and not really care about the consequences." If a president directs an attorney general to do something illegal, he said, an attorney general must resign.

"I will not be bullied into doing anything that I think is wrong by anybody, whether it be editorial boards or Congress or the president," Barr told the hearing.

Consumed by the partial government shutdown, Trump remained out of sight at the White House but also kept an eye on the news coverage of the hearing and told aides he was pleased with how Barr was handling himself, said two White House officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were

not authorized to discuss internal conversations.

On other topics, Barr echoed in part the president's hardline immigration stance and said the Justice Department would not go after marijuana companies in states where the drug is legal. He also would not rule out jailing reporters for doing their jobs, saying he could envision circumstances

where a journalist could be held in contempt "as a last resort."

Barr's hearing continues Wednesday with a lineup of character witnesses, including former Attorney General Michael Mukasey.

Barr's confirmation is likely, given that Republicans control the Senate. Even some Democrats have been looking

to move on from acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker, who declined to remove himself the Russia probe and has faced scrutiny over his private dealings.

But he nonetheless faced skeptical questions from Democrats over whether he could oversee without bias or interference the remainder of Mueller's probe.

## Donald Trump sends letter to Kim Jong-un amid talks of a second summit: Report

(Agencies)-Donald Trump has sent a letter to Kim Jong-un, a media report said Tuesday, days after the US President said he received a "great letter" from the reclusive North Korean leader, amid talks about a second summit between them on denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

Kim and Trump held a historic meeting in Singapore on June 12 last year where they issued a vague goal for the "complete denuclearisation" of the Korean Peninsula without describing when and how it would occur.

The letter delivered over the weekend comes after President Trump said early this month that he had received a "great letter" from Kim and was looking forward

to meet the North Korean leader for a second time in the "not-too-distant future".

The letter comes as the two sides negotiate details of a second meeting between the two leaders. It was flown to Pyongyang and delivered by hand, the CNN reported, quoting a source familiar with the ongoing talks between Washington and Pyongyang on denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea's former spy chief Kim Yong Chol - one of Pyongyang's top negotiators - could visit Washington as soon as this week to finalise details of the upcoming summit, it said.

The CNN previously reported that US scouting teams had visited Bangkok, Hanoi and Hawaii as they search for a

location for the second summit.

Last week, South Korean President Moon Jae-in threw his support behind another Trump-Kim meeting, saying it - along with a visit by Kim to Seoul - would be a turning point "that will firmly solidify peace on the Korean Peninsula", the report said. "We will not loosen our guard until the promise to denuclearise the Peninsula is kept, and peace is fully institutionalised," Moon said.

Trump's announcement of receiving a letter from Kim had come after the North Korean leader warned that Pyongyang may change its approach to nuclear talks if Washington persists with sanctions.

## Recognition of degree, skilled jobs: UK to open doors for more Indians after Brexit


**The UK also wants to ink a pact with India similar to the one New Delhi has with France, treating each other's academic degrees as equivalent for higher studies and jobs**

(By Our Staff Reporter)- An unlimited number of highly-skilled Indian workers will be able to migrate to the UK under new proposals that could come into effect in 2021, with a senior British minister on Wednesday saying that in the new system the country will be open to the "best and brightest" from India. The UK also wants to ink a pact with India similar to the one New Delhi has with France, treating each other's academic degrees as equivalent for higher studies and jobs, sources said. The post-Brexit visas and immigration strategy, set out in an immigration White Paper, was tabled in the House of Commons last month by UK Home Secretary Sajid Javid. It proposes removal of cap on highly-skilled migrants from anywhere in the world and improves the post-study work offering for international students. The UK officials on Wednesday visited New Delhi for the Migration Dialogue with the Indian government about a month after the British

government unveiled its post-Brexit visas and immigration strategy that seeks to remove cap on highly-skilled migrants. The discussions signalled a new phase of cooperation and acted as a forum to discuss opportunities to strengthen the bilateral relationship, a statement said. "The UK is committed to building relationships across the globe which is why officials visited New Delhi and met the government of India today," UK Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes was quoted as saying in a British High Commission statement. The UK already issues more skilled worker visas to Indian nationals than to the rest of the world combined, she said. "Under the new system, operating from 2021, we will always be open to the brightest and best from India, who wish to come to live and work in the UK," Nokes said. The proposals for the skills-based immigration system, operating from

2021, will allow people from across the world to come to the UK for work or to study and to visit. These proposals will mean that there would be no limit on the number of skilled people, such as engineers, doctors and IT professionals, who can come to live and work in the UK, the statement said. The Migration Dialogue allowed for the UK government officials to engage directly with their Indian counterparts on the UK's plans for a new single, skill-based immigration system after Brexit, it said. The UK government delegation also held round-table events with key figures from the corporate, business and education sectors in India, to gather insight and highlight how the new system will benefit them. At the talks, the UK government emphasised that the new skills-based immigration system offers a significant opportunity to Indian nationals, particularly skilled workers and students.





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# 'Humiliated': British press says Theresa May 'crushed' by Brexit defeat

**British newspapers said May's deal was sunk after the huge vote against the agreement struck between May's government and Brussels, as she prepared to fight a no-confidence motion on Wednesday.**

(By Our Staff Reporter)-Prime Minister Theresa May was left "crushed" and "humiliated", Britain's newspapers said Wednesday as they raked over the fallout from parliament's huge rejection of her EU divorce deal. Daily papers said May's deal was sunk after the huge vote against the agreement struck between May's government and Brussels, as she prepared to fight a no-confidence motion on Wednesday. The Daily Telegraph's front page read: "A complete humiliation", following the 432 to 202 vote by MPs to reject the deal. Its editorial said May had misjudged parliament and the EU had failed to understand the "essential issues of sovereignty and freedom" behind the Brexit vote. "The government must regain the confidence of the house, rethink the agreement and go to the Europeans with a united

front. Whether or not Mrs May leads that effort is a decision upon which she will now have to think very hard." The broadsheet's parliamentary sketch writer Michael Deacon said May's pre-vote plea to MPs "had all the brio of a mouldy gym sock". "She sounded as winningly persuasive as a mother snapping at her children to eat up their cabbage or go to bed hungry." "Brextinct" said The Sun tabloid's front page. "May's Brexit deal dead as a dodo", said Britain's biggest-selling paper, with a mock-up picture of the PM as the extinct flightless bird. 'Zombie PM' The Times columnist Matthew Parris said it was time for senior MPs to take over the Brexit process. "There exists no leadership in either the government or the opposition capable of taking

us through this mess," he wrote following the vote. Theresa May isn't any good; she doesn't have a fiendish, secret strategy... she doesn't know what to do. Parliament must wrest control from a zombie prime minister, a zombie cabinet and a zombie opposition." The Daily Mirror's front page said: "No deal, no hope, no clue, no confidence". The tabloid called her "the humiliated PM". The Daily Mail's headline said: "Fighting for her life". The tabloid said the defeat left May's power "hanging by a thread", calling it a "devastating result, which threatens to plunge the Brexit process into chaos". The Financial Times newspaper ran a headline reading: "May's defeat spells trouble for the EU's Brexit approach." "Huge loss leaves PM in race against time," the broadsheet said.



"Don't fail us!"

The Daily Express headline said "Dismay". "Now it's time for MPs to do their duty and work with Theresa May for a deal that satisfies the 17.4m who voted for Brexit... Don't fail us!" it said on its front page. The Scotsman's front page headline simply said: "Crushed". "May suffers historic defeat as Tories turn against her," said The Guardian's front page.

"The PM leads a party that is divided and a country stockpiling food and medicines as if preparing for war. She needs to humbly reach out to her opponents and find a way to prevent Britain crashing out of the EU," its editorial said. "The country now faces a situation without precedent in its constitutional history: how to reconcile the sovereignty of the people with the sovereignty of parliament."

## Chinese man who sold kidney to buy iPhone, iPad now bedridden

*In 2012, a total of nine individuals connected to the organ harvesting case were jailed for their involvement. Five surgeons involved with the procedure were among those convicted, according to Newsweek.*



(Agencies)-A Chinese man who sold his kidney as a teenager to buy the latest Apple iPad and iPhone in 2011 is now bedridden with organ failure, the media reported. Wang Shangkun was 17 years old when he made the decision to undergo surgery and sell his right kidney in the black market to buy the Apple products. Shortly after the illegal surgery, he began suffering from a decreased level of kidney function, news.com.au reported late on Monday. "Shangkun had sold his kidney to black market organ

harvesters in April 2011 where he received \$4,500 Australian dollars. He purchased an iPhone 4 and iPad 2 with the funds," the report added. The man suffered renal failure in his second kidney after having one removed. It is said that it was due to the unsanitary conditions where the surgery took place. In 2012, a total of nine individuals connected to the organ harvesting case were jailed for their involvement. Five surgeons involved with the procedure were among those convicted, according to Newsweek.

## Coming to Canada 'worth the risk,' says teen who fled Saudi Arabia

**Rahaf Mohammed Qunun grabbed international attention last week after she barricaded herself in a Bangkok airport hotel room to resist being sent home to her family, which denies abusing her. Qunun refused to meet her father and brother, who arrived in Bangkok to try to take her back to Saudi Arabia.**

(Agencies)-Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun plans to pursue an education, get a job and "live a normal life" in Canada - things she said she could not do in her home of Saudi Arabia, which she fled fearing for her life, she told Canadian media on Monday. Being in Canada is "a very good feeling," she told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation two days after arriving in Toronto from Bangkok. "It's something that is worth the risk I took." Qunun grabbed international attention last week after she barricaded herself in a Bangkok airport hotel room to resist being sent home to her family, which denies

abusing her. Qunun refused to meet her father and brother, who arrived in Bangkok to try to take her back to Saudi Arabia. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees granted her refugee status, and Canada agreed to take her in. Canada's decision to grant Qunun asylum comes at a delicate time. Relations between Ottawa and Riyadh have been tense after Canada demanded the immediate release of jailed rights activists last year. Saudi Arabia retaliated by freezing new trade with Ottawa and forcing many of its students to return to the kingdom. Qunun's case has drawn

global attention to Saudi Arabia's strict social rules, including a requirement that women have the permission of a male "guardian" in order to travel, something rights groups say can trap women and girls as prisoners of abusive families. In her CBC interview, Qunun said: "I felt that I could not achieve my dreams that I wanted as long as I was still living in Saudi Arabia." Having come to Canada, "I felt that I was reborn, especially when I felt the love and the welcome," she said. In her new home, "I will try things I haven't tried. I will learn things I didn't learn. I will explore life. ... I will have a job and live a normal life."

# Facebook brings stricter ads rules to India ahead of general election

**As the largest social media service in nearly every big country, Facebook since 2016 has become a means for politicians and their adversaries to distribute fake news and other propaganda.**



(By Our Staff Reporter)- Facebook Inc told Reuters on Tuesday that it would extend some of its political advertising rules and tools for curbing election interference to India, Nigeria, Ukraine and the European Union before significant votes in the next few months.

As the largest social media service in nearly every big country, Facebook since 2016 has become a means for politicians and their adversaries to distribute fake news and other propaganda. Buying Facebook ads can widen the audience for such material, but some of those influence efforts may violate election rules and the company's policies.

Under pressure from authorities around the world, Facebook last year introduced several initiatives to increase oversight of political ads.

Beginning on Wednesday in Nigeria, only advertisers

located in the country will be able to run electoral ads, mirroring a policy unveiled during an Irish referendum last May, Katie Harbath, Facebook's director of global politics and outreach, said in an interview.

The same policy will take effect in Ukraine in February. Nigeria holds a presidential election on Feb. 16, while Ukraine will follow on March 31.

In India, which votes for parliament this spring, Facebook will place electoral ads in a searchable online library starting from next month, said Rob Leathern, a director of product management at the company. "We're learning from every country," Leathern said. "We know we're not going to be perfect, but our goal is continuing, ongoing improvement."

Facebook believes that holding the ads in a library for

seven years is a key part of fighting interference, he added.

The library will resemble archives brought to the United States, Brazil and Britain last year.

The newfound transparency drew some applause from elected officials and campaign accountability groups, but they also criticized Facebook for allowing advertisers in the United States to obfuscate their identities.

The Indian archive will contain contact information for some ad buyers or their official regulatory certificates. For individuals buying political ads, Facebook said it would ensure their listed name matches government-issued documents.

The European Union would get a version of that authorization and transparency system ahead of the bloc's parliamentary elections in May, Leathern said.

The ad hoc approach, with varying policies and transparency depending on the region, reflects local laws and conversations with governments and civil society groups, Harbath said.

That means extra steps to verify identities and locations of political ad buyers in the United States and India will not be introduced in every big election this year, Leathern said.

In addition, ad libraries in some countries will not include what the company calls "issue" ads, Leathern said.

Facebook's U.S. archive includes ads about much-debated issues such as climate change and immigration policy even though they may not directly relate to a ballot measure.

Australia, Indonesia, Israel and the Philippines are among nations holding key votes this year for which Facebook said it is still weighing policies. Leathern and Harbath said

they hoped to have a set of tools that applies to advertisers globally by the end of June. They declined to elaborate, saying lessons from the next couple of months would help shape the worldwide product.

"Our goal was to get to a global solution," Harbath said. "And so, until we can get to that in June, we had to look at the different elections and what we think we can do."

Other Facebook teams remain focused on identifying problematic political behavior unrelated to ads.

Last month, researchers working for a U.S. Senate committee concluded that the Russian government's Internet Research Agency used social media ads and regular posts on inauthentic accounts to promote then presidential candidate Donald Trump to millions of Americans. Russia has denied the accusation.

## After Alok Verma's exit, PM-led panel to meet on Jan 24 to select new CBI chief

**Two days after he was conditionally reinstated by the Supreme Court as the CBI director (CBI), Alok Verma was on January 10 removed from the agency again by the high-powered selection committee and M Nageswara Rao again named interim director**

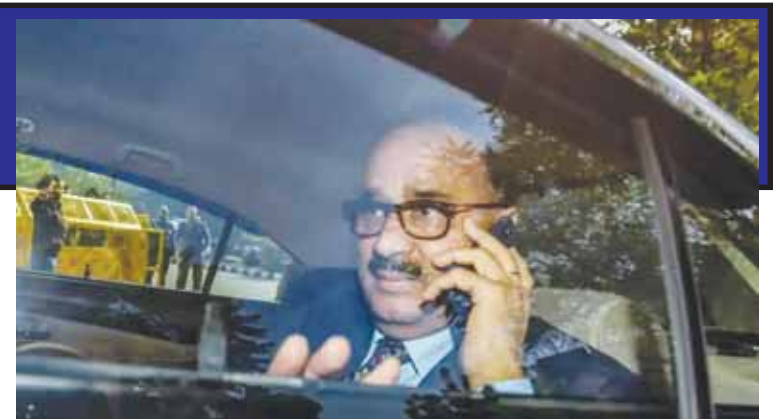
(Agencies)-The panel led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi (or his nominee) and leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, as its two other members, will meet on January 24 to finalise the name of the next chief of the Central Bureau of Investigation, people familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity.

After Alok Verma's contentious ouster from CBI on January 10, the agency has been working under interim director M Nageswara Rao. Rao is an additional director in the agency and has been appointed as the interim

director till the government selects a regular director. "The government initially proposed that the meeting be held on January 21, but after consultations between members, finalised January 24 as the date for the meeting to select the new CBI director," said one of the people cited above, a government official. The move to hold the meeting of the PM-led panel comes even as the Supreme Court has agreed to hear a petition challenging the appointment of Rao as interim director.

The petitioner, NGO Common Cause, claim Rao's appointment was not based on the recommendation of the selection panel and, thus, in

complete contravention of the law. The petitioners have sought appointment of a regular chief of the agency. The petitioners also want all records of deliberations and rational criteria related to short-listing and selection of the CBI director to be made available under the transparency law. They have also asked for the entire process of selection, including composition of the panel, its mandate and minutes of the meeting of the search committee to be made public. The court is yet to fix a date for hearing, but said on Wednesday that it is likely to schedule it for next week. Alok Verma took charge as



the CBI chief on February 1, 2017 and his formal tenure was supposed to end on January 31, 2019. CBI chiefs get a fixed two-year term by law. Verma and his deputy, CBI special director Rakesh Asthana, were engaged in an internecine feud that affected the agency's functioning. In August, Asthana levelled charges of corruption against Verma in a letter to the cabinet secretary. In October, the CBI filed a first information report

(FIR) against Asthana. On the intervening night of October 23 and 24, the government divested both of their powers. Rao took charge as the interim director for the first time on the intervening night of October 23 and 24. Verma challenged the government order in the Supreme Court and the court conditionally reinstated him as the CBI chief on January 8, saying that only the selection panel could remove him.



## Leopard snatches 3-year-old girl from mother's arms in Bengal tea garden, body found 3 km away

Pranita Oraon was taken away from the lap of her mother, Pooja, who was cooking outside their home in Garganda tea estate, where the woman works as a labourer. On Wednesday morning, Pranita's body was found about three km away from her home

(Agencies)-A leopard killed a three-year-old girl after snatching her from her mother in a tea garden in West Bengal's Alipurduar district, officials said Wednesday. She was the third child killed by leopards in the area since December 12. Pranita Oraon was taken away from the lap of her mother, Pooja, who was cooking outside their home in Garganda tea estate, where the woman works as a labourer. The leopard crossed a fence to enter their premises.

On Wednesday morning, Pranita's body was found about three km away from her home in Birpara Police Station area of Alipurduar, 683 km from Kolkata.

"She (Pooja) was cooking in front of her house and the child was with her. As the leopard took away the kid, the mother ran after the animal and her shouting attracted other villagers," said Sibu Chhetri, a local school teacher. He said Pooja's husband has gone to Kerala in search of livelihood. "The head and all four limbs were torn off from the body," said a forest officer on conditions of anonymity.

Tension mounted at the tea estate as hundreds of locals prevented the authorities for hours from taking away the body of the child whose head was separated from her body. "The forest department officials eventually assured the Oraons of a job following which the villagers allowed the body

parts to be lifted," said Bulu Lama, a local resident around midday.

In December, two boys aged 6 and 12 years were killed by leopards in Ramjhora and Dhumchipara tea gardens in Alipurduar.

Chhetri said that people have stopped venturing out of their homes after dark.

Referring to the leopard snatching the child from her mother's lap, Ujjawal Ghosh, chief conservator of forest, wildlife (North) said, "I have never heard of such an incident in northern parts of Bengal. Government officials are negotiating with the agitating villagers to take away the body."

He said the leopard population is increasing fast



in the area.

The gardens that belonged to the Duncan Group has been closed for years and have been overrun by bushes making the area a safe haven for leopards.

Incidentally, in Garganda tea estate, two leopards were also killed in the area by villagers in December.

The agitating villagers alleged that the officials of the forest department were not sensitive to the attacks of the leopards in the villages.

It is estimated that more than 4,000 leopards inhabit the districts of Darjeeling, north Bengal.

Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar that is dotted with 283 tea gardens and large swathes of forest, national parks, wild life sanctuaries and tiger reserve.

In December, an old man was also injured by a leopard at Ramjhora tea estate.

On July 10, 2018, a 50-year-old woman was killed by leopard at Betguri Tea Garden's Factory Line under Malbazar police station.

Leopard attacks are also regularly reported from Lankapara, Tulsipara, Gangenda, Dhumchipara and Ramjhora tea estates in districts of Darjeeling, north Bengal.

## Sabarimala tense after 2 women, dressed as men, try to enter shrine

(By Our Staff Reporter)- Protesters forced two women in their 30s to turn back halfway from the hilltop shrine of Sabarimala in Kerala's Pathanamthitta

on Wednesday, days after two others became the first to offer prayers at the shrine in centuries. Reshma Nishanth and Shanila Sajesh, residents of Kannur, covered almost half of the 5.5-kilometre trek to the temple but were intercepted by angry devotees in the morning. Live Updates

Dressed in men's clothes, they used the lean time early in the morning to dodge protesters and started trekking at 5am. Both of them said they came after police promised protection. They managed to trek for some time but were identified and encircled by the protesters as they walked up. Police then arrested five of the protesters and the women continued trekking for some time. They were stopped in Neelimala as large numbers of protesters lay on the path leading to the temple to stop them from going further. The drama continued for two hours and police removed them forcibly.

Police pleaded helplessness as the situation turned tense, saying it was beyond their control and took the women to Pambha, the base camp, after they were blocked. State's temple minister Kadakampally Surendran said preventing the women, who came after taking the vow and fasted for the pilgrimage, was "really deplorable". Surendran said the government did not want to create a scene so police took utmost restraint in handling the protesters. "We don't need any certificate from Prime Minister (Narendra)

Modi whose party is on a mission to annihilate people in the name of the cow," the minister said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on Kerala government on its handling of the Sabarimala controversy, saying the Communists didn't respect India's culture and spiritual traditions. He also slammed the Congress for taking multiple stands on the issue. Modi hit out at the LDF government led by chief minister Pinarayi



Vijayan and the opposition same coin. "We know that the spearheaded by the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in the state, said both the fronts were two sides of the

Communists do not respect India's culture, history, and spirituality," Modi said at a public meeting in Kollam.

## On row over award, marketing guru Kotler lists reasons for picking Modi

(Agencies)-Amid row over Prime Minister Narendra Modi receiving the Philip Kotler Presidential Award, the marketing guru, after whom the award is named, listed the reasons why the Indian leader was chosen.

Philip Kotler wrote that Prime Minister Modi stood the highest in the criteria used to select a winner. "He has improved his country's image and visibility on the global stage. A committee voted on possible leaders given the criteria. The

final decision was mine", he wrote after political sparring followed in India following the announcement of the award. Tweeting the link of his interview "to clear all the confusion over the award" presented to Modi, Kotler listed the criteria used for the selection. He wrote, the Kotler leader is one who: believes in representative government and in social justice.

believes that a good society will build a healthy business

climate.

oencourages businesses to practice the triple bottom line, namely to balance profits, people, and the planet in their deliberations.

osincerely and wholeheartedly works for the Common Good.

Kotler's post came after Congress President tweeted a tongue-in-cheek congratulatory message. "In fact it's (the award) so famous it has no jury, has never been given out before and is backed

by an unheard of Aligarh company," Rahul Gandhi posted.

Union Minister Smriti Irani bristled back pointing out the Gandhi family gave all awards to themselves. Prof. Philip Kotler is a world renowned Professor of Marketing at Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management. Owing to his ill-health, Jagdish Sheth of EMORY University, Georgia, US, was deputed to confer the award.

# Politics 2020 Democratic Primary Leaderboard

Elizabeth Warren officially took the plunge into 2020 waters. Julián Castro jumped in after. The Democrats' campaign for president is officially underway. This second installment of our Rolling Stone primary leaderboard finds Warren the big mover, surging six places to number two - on the strength of a seamless rollout and a wide lead in a new straw poll of Democratic activists. Dropping in our rankings this round: Joe Biden who declared he has "no empathy" for the struggle of the kids these days, and Bernie Sanders who responded unsteadily to revelations of pay discrimination and sexual harassment on his 2016 presidential campaign. We wanted to dock Beto O'Rourke more for growing a goatee and livestreaming his trip to the dentist, but the Texas Democrat's decision to leave behind the dysfunction of Washington - just as it's become gridlocked by an endless shutdown - is looking like a minor stroke of genius. The field has also begun to winnow: Billionaire Tom Steyer has removed himself from the 2020 crowd, and former Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams is actively exploring a Senate bid, so we've moved her from number 5 into our "wild cards."

1) Kamala Harris Harris is set to announce her 2020 candidacy, reportedly over the Martin Luther King Day weekend in Oakland, California. The 54-year-old senator, who battled big banks and for-profit colleges as California's attorney general, stands astride the tectonic plates of the Democratic Party. She's an establishment politician who has adopted a platform responsive to the passion of the grassroots, advocating for Medicare-for-All, free college and criminal justice reform. Black women are the heart of the Democratic Party, and seeing themselves reflected in the Howard University-educated Harris (born to Jamaican and Tamil Indian parents) could give her an advantage in a field chock full of white men. A straw poll asked women of color active in politics to rank their top three presidential contenders - Harris appeared on 71 percent of ballots. Harris also ranked third in a new, 35,000-vote straw poll of the Daily Kos community, a rough proxy for the Democratic activist base. Harris has a prodigious West Coast donor network and has reportedly been hitting up would-be backers on Wall Street. (Her connections to big money, as well as her past as a prosecutor, could cause headaches.) With California moving its primary up to Super Tuesday, on March 3rd, she could bank a delegate lead that proves difficult to overcome. 2) Elizabeth Warren

Warren was the first top-tier candidate out of the gates, launching a presidential exploratory committee on the last

day of 2018, and she surges in our rankings. Her campaign forays in Iowa and New Hampshire have been eagerly attended, and she's debuted a passable talking point on her DNA debacle: "I am not a person of color. I am not a citizen of a tribe," she said. "Tribal citizenship is very different from ancestry." The Massachusetts senator, 69, brings trademark policy chops to the race, with an ambitious progressive agenda on everything from foreign policy and pharmaceuticals to student debt and political corruption. Unlike democratic socialist Bernie Sanders, who idolizes Eugene Debs, Warren is a capitalist at heart - but has made a career of trying to make it less cruel for working people. Warren ranked first in the DailyKos straw poll at 22 percent, with a seven point margin over Beto O'Rourke. Previous Ranking: 8

3) Sherrod Brown The senior senator from Ohio announced he'll be traveling to the early-voting states on a "Dignity of Work Tour," and he's vowed to make a decision on a 2020 run "within a couple months." A proven Democratic winner in reddening Ohio, Brown is skilled at debunking the lies Trump tells to "Trump Country" and able to connect with working class voters who are white and of color. In a recent interview with the Washington Post, Brown touted a proposal to boost the incomes of 47 million lower-wage Americans with a \$1.4 trillion expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, a wage subsidy. Like Sanders, he's a champion of labor and a prescient critic of the dangers of unfettered free trade. The 66-year-old's voice may be raspy and his wardrobe rumpled, but Brown is a persuasive campaigner - his messaging aided by Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and wife Connie Schultz. Previous Ranking: 6

Previous Ranking: 6

4) Beto O'Rourke He stole progressive hearts and built a nationwide fundraising network attempting to oust GOP megavillain Texas Sen. Ted Cruz. Beto raised \$60 million for the fight and pushed Texas ever closer to swing-state territory, but the erstwhile Foss bassist has faltered a bit since losing his longshot Senate bid. He's been memed mercilessly for everything from a new goatee to broadcasting a teeth cleaning on Instagram. (The latter was part of a series on Insta Stories about life on the border, but nobody can make a trip to the dentist cute.) Can a high-profile one-on-one interview rekindle Beto-mentum? The 46-year-old is sitting down with Oprah on February 5th. Previous Ranking: 3

Previous Ranking: 3

5) Joe Biden The former vice president's big challenge as a 76-year-old is connecting with a new generation of activists and voters. Doing himself no favors, Biden dismissed struggles of millennials - that is to say, voting-age Americans under 40 - in an interview with the Los Angeles Times. Playing up the Civil Rights struggles, the Vietnam War and the Kent State massacre of his young adulthood, Biden said: "The younger generation now tells me how tough things are. Give me a break. No, no, I have no empathy for it. Give me a break." (Biden is partly responsible for the woes of the kids these days, helping pass a 2005 bill under George W. Bush that makes it nearly impossible to discharge student debt through bankruptcy). Still, Biden offers an appealing narrative: a reset from the Trump catastrophe. And he benefits from a potent combo of experience, name ID and a populist touch that resonates in the industrial Midwest. If Democrats don't fall in love with a new hope, they may fall in line behind Biden.

Previous Ranking: 2

6) Bernie Sanders When allegations of sexual harassment and unequal pay from his 2016 campaign surfaced in recent weeks, Sanders stumbled, suggesting he'd been too "busy" campaigning to know about or police the misbehavior. (Sanders has also apologized and promised to "do better" moving forward.) Sanders takes a hit in our rankings, but the 2016 campaign still gives him advantages, including a prodigious nationwide grassroots

network that backed him with \$228 million. This machine began gearing up in mid January, with more than 400 house parties across the 50 states calling on Bernie to join the 2020 fray. Sanders will no longer have the left lane to himself, instead jockeying in a field of progressives who have embraced his proposals. But the democratic socialist has shown he can be pretty nimble for a 77-year-old, yoking himself to the youthful insurgency embodied by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

## Gurmeet Ram Rahim verdict

In its chargesheet against the accused, India's premier investigating agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) indicated how the order to murder Chhatrapati was known to the sect chief. Carpenters with the Dera, Nirmal and Kuldeep Singh were given a walkie-talkie and a gun, which belonged to Krishan Lal, said the investigating officials. Following the orders to murder Chhatrapati who was the editor of a regional evening daily called 'Poora Sach' at the time, the two carpenters shot the victim at point-blank range right outside his residence in Sirsa. It is believed that Chhatrapati was murdered after an anonymous letter published by him in his daily prompted the Punjab and Haryana High Court to launch an inquiry into allegations of sexual exploitation against the self-styled godman and Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. After he was shot on 24 October 2002, Ram Chander Chhatrapati was shifted to Apollo Hospital in New Delhi where he succumbed to gunshot wounds on 21 November 2002. His family

sought a CBI inquiry into his death in 2003 which led to the premier agency probing Chhatrapati's death. CBI filed a chargesheet in this regard in July of 2007.

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## New Yorker Prashantt Guptha to make Hollywood debut with A NEW CHRISTMAS

Agencies-2019 is on to an excellent start for actor Prashantt Guptha. Originally from New York and now a Mumbai resident, the actor has earlier done prominent roles in Bollywood features. He has now been cast as the lead in this American feature, called A NEW CHRISTMAS.

Having just returned to Mumbai from the States after completing the first schedule of the movie, he is supremely elated on his Hollywood debut. When asked about how this breakthrough is significant, Prashantt replied, "Having grown up in New York, Christmas has always been my favourite holiday. This is one major step forward toward a lifetime dream of wanting to work in both Indian movies and Hollywood." The film revolves around a first-generation Indian American who overcomes inner turmoil when a tourist girl from Africa rekindles his spirit during Christmas. Produced by Los Angeles based Mulberry Films, A New Christmas is helmed by New York based director Dani Tenenbaum. Says Dani about his

Indian lead actor, "Prashantt's dedication, professionalism, precision, vision, and attention to details made me understand from the beginning that I'm working with a pro who takes his work very seriously. It is rare to work with an actor who can see the big picture the way Prashantt did and it made the whole collaborative process a successful experience." Head of Mulberry Films Rashaana Shah further added, "Prashantt has the best of both worlds. A New Yorker with a penchant for Bollywood, he can look rich, poor, a badass, intellectual, street romeo, anything. He has ten or more films behind him, but hasn't lost his innocence or freshness."

Prashantt earlier played the baddie opposite Prateik Babbar in Issaq, a pivotal role in Sonam Kapoor starrer Neerja and he has recently shown his singing prowess with the recreation of a Kishore Kumar classic, O Rahi, which has been released by Saregama and garnered over 150,000 views



in a month. Apart from that, a new short film he stars in, TU, was recently released and trended globally for its motivational message.

# Pelosi gets revenge against one of the Dem rebels

The push by Pelosi was seen as payback by many in the room after Rice was one of the main megaphones behind a campaign to block the California Democrat from becoming speaker again.

"She was boxed out and the result was cooked before we walked in the room," said a source in the room who requested anonymity to speak candidly. "If you went by seniority then yes [she would have got the position]. But that's not what happened. Scores being settled was first priority."

But the decision by Pelosi to block Rice from the committee and instead recommend several freshmen to fill open slots on the panel, sparked outcry from members of the New York delegation, who felt that Rice deserved the position as the more senior lawmaker.

Pelosi argued that New York was already well-represented on the panel, with both its chairman, Rep. Jerry Nadler, and House Democratic Caucus Chairman

Hakeem Jeffries. But Rice backers asked: If that's the case, why did Pelosi recommend Florida Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell, a freshman lawmaker with far less seniority than Rice, for the panel when two other Floridians, Reps. Ted Deutch and Val Demings, sit on the committee.

It was the latest slight for New York members, who were still upset that another member of their delegation, freshman Rep. Anthony Brindisi, was blocked from the Armed Services Committee on Monday night.

Brindisi, one of nearly two dozen freshmen Democrats in districts won by President Donald Trump, was also a Pelosi critic on the campaign trail, vowing to oppose her for speaker. Brindisi followed through with his campaign pledge, voting for former Vice President Joe Biden earlier this month instead.

Brindisi being blocked from the Armed Services Committee angered some of his fellow New

Yorkers, according to Democratic sources, but not enough to force the issue because he is a freshman. Still, the New York delegation held a late-night conference call Monday and vowed to push harder for Rice when the steering committee, which oversees committee assignments, reconvened Tuesday night.

Pelosi's move to block Rice comes despite a promise to rebels trying to oust her this winter that she would not seek to retaliate against them. As part of a deal that won the Californian the last votes needed to claim the gavel, Pelosi vowed not to take revenge against the group that tried to push her out of leadership.

But people in the room saw something else happen Tuesday night.

After Pelosi announced her recommendations for the Judiciary Committee on Tuesday night, a slate that noticeably did not include Rice, other

lawmakers started to speak up. Rep. Gregory Meeks of New York and Jeffries spoke on Rice's behalf during the meeting, according to sources. Jeffries praised Rice as an effective legislator and argued she'd be a strong addition to the panel.

Rice also had a letter signed by a majority of New York Democrats supporting her bid to get on the committee.

Lawmakers in the room requested a vote on each member who was trying to get onto Judiciary, with the thinking that Rice would have enough support to win one of the spots that way. But instead the panel held an up-or-down secret ballot vote on Pelosi's slate, one the speaker won 27-21, according to multiple sources in the room.

"It was taken to a recorded vote and she lost," said a Democratic aide who was in the room. "Not every member gets what they want."

The vote was unusually close for

the steering committee, a panel that Pelosi stacks with her allies, according to these sources, and shows the support that Rice, who was not present, had within the meeting.

In total, nine Democrats will be joining the Judiciary Committee, which will be staging ground for the barrage of investigations Democrats are expected to launch into Trump, his personal life and his administration.

California Rep. Lou Correa and freshman Reps. Mary Gay Scanlon and Madeleine Dean of Pennsylvania, Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia of Texas, Lucy McBath of Georgia, Mucarsel-Powell, Joe Neguse of Colorado and Greg Stanton of Arizona were picked to join the panel.

"There were two New Yorkers who didn't get what they wanted. One was Kathleen Rice, the other was Brindisi," said a Democratic lawmaker in the room, adding the two "left themselves exposed" after voting against Pelosi for speaker.

## Indian-origin doctor charged in healthcare fraud in US freed on record \$7 million bond

US District Judge Stephen Murphy granted the bond for him despite the government's concern that the doctor has hidden money that could bankroll an escape to his native India.

Bothra, of Bloomfield Hills, who will be released on home confinement and tracked by a GPS tether, must identify all assets under penalty of perjury, The Detroit News reported.

Being the lead defendant in one of the largest healthcare fraud cases in the US history, he must liquidate a US \$8.5 million retirement account to cover the bond, a process that could take three days, it reported.

His wife and daughter, who attended the hearing Tuesday, will surrender their passports to alleviate concerns that the family might flee while Bothra awaits trial in July.

Bothra has deep ties to India, including investments and several siblings.

He is one of the most high-profile Indian-American Republican Party activists and fundraisers. In the 1980s and early 1990s, he hosted major fundraisers for former president George H W Bush and other senior Republican lawmakers.

Apart from his professional achievements in the field of

medicine in the United States, Bothra has been active in working for the poor and sick in India.

For about eight weeks each year, Bothra leaves his general surgery practice in Warren and travels to India at his own expenses to work with Indian organisations to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS and drug, tobacco and alcohol addiction.

He holds regular lecture tours in India to educate professional and lay audiences on health issues. Bothra has worked with the Nargis Dutt Foundation to produce two documentaries, one on AIDS and another on tobacco abuse.

The Indian government also lauded him for being instrumental in gifting of sophisticated American medical equipment to Indian hospitals and assisting in the rebuilding of hospitals in Latur, Maharashtra after a severe earthquake.

Meanwhile, prosecutors have been unable to pinpoint Bothra's net worth, which could be as high as US \$35 million.

Assistant US Attorney Brandy McMillion noted that Bothra owns a real-estate company that owns 22 properties across Metro Detroit, including US \$2.8 million worth of condominiums and

commercial buildings in downtown Royal Oak.

Prosecutors are trying to identify whether the properties were purchased with proceeds from the alleged criminal activity. US

Attorney Matthew Schneider attended the brief court hearing Tuesday and said his team of prosecutors will meet and decide whether to appeal the bond.

Bothra, jailed since last month

when he was indicted alongside five others, is accused of fuelling the nation's opioid epidemic, cheating Medicare and subjecting patients to needless, painful back injections.

## Sham marriages in Europe: 17 Pakistani citizens arrested

A cross-Europe investigation into men entering into bogus marriages for immigration purposes has led to the arrest of 17 Pakistan citizens, officials of European agencies Europol and Eurojust announced on Tuesday. The men belonged to what officials called an 'organised crime group' that recruited dozens of European women into sham marriages. The arrests were carried out following the investigation by Belgian authorities and the Portuguese Immigration and Borders Service. "The criminal group was involved in the facilitation of illegal immigration by organising sham marriages, predominately between Portuguese and Pakistani nationals. Portuguese women were recruited to marry Pakistani men they had never met," Europol said. "In return, the



women received a cash payment of thousands of euros. The couples then travelled to Belgium, where the wives were soon employed by (allegedly bogus) Belgian companies." By purchasing shares in the companies, the husbands were permitted to stay in the European Union, obtain resident permits and then illegally profit from social and other benefits. The shares were later transferred between the wives, allowing new recruits to become partners of the companies. The women usually

travelled back to Portugal, and would occasionally return to Belgium for police and immigration checks, European officials said. The investigation started in Belgium in 2015 when authorities discovered a suspicious increase in the number of mixed marriage certificates in leper, Belgium. Criminal groups chose small municipalities to commit their crimes in, making perpetrators difficult to detect and prosecute, the officials added.

Swanky cars and smart sports utility vehicles (SUVs) zip around on the chequered steel plate-lined temporary streets of Kumbh Nagri, or the tent city that has come up on the banks of the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna rivers and the mythical Saraswati



(Agencies)- A section of the banks of the Sangam, ascetics can be seen taking the luxurious way to travel this Kumbh Mela, courtesy high-end vehicles.

Swanky cars and smart sports utility vehicles (SUVs) zip around on the chequered steel plate-lined temporary streets of Kumbh Nagri, or the tent city that has come up on

the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna rivers and the mythical Saraswati. The tent city has been set up to accommodate saints, seers and pilgrims during the Kumbh Mela, which began on Tuesday and will continue till March 4.

Holy men and their organisations have fleets of

## Seers, saints and their swanky rides on high-end vehicles in Kumbh city



these luxury cars and high-end SUVs at their service.

However, there is hardly any seer or office-bearer of any akhada (Hindu

monastic order) ready to go on record on the issue. Refusing to be named, many seers and saints claim that barring a few, most of these luxury

vehicles belong to different akhadas or their disciples. They have been bought and made available to the seers for their use, these saints say.

Many of these vehicles belong to senior seers holding the post of peeta dheswars, mahamandaleshwars, mahants and mandaleshwars. Others are said to belong to their disciples and followers.

Most such vehicles sport wide nameplates, proudly announcing the posts of the seers or the organisations to which they belong.

Symbols of opulence, these vehicles dazzle passers-by and stand in stark contrast to the thousands of other saints whose tales of self-sacrifice and simplicity can well set examples in the tent city, where millions are observing austerity in quest of salvation at the Kumbh.

Although these luxury vehicles can be spotted all over the sprawling 3200-hectare Kumbh Mela area and its 20 sectors, most are visible on Triveni Marg and Kali Marg that happen to be the VIP streets of the tent city.

It is here that large camps of the 13 akhadas have

been set up. These luxury vehicles range from Mercedes Benz SUVs (approximate price range Rs 59-65 lakh), Pajero Sports (Rs 28.5-31 lakh), Ford Endeavour, Toyota Fortuners (Rs 27.5-33 lakh), Innovas (Rs 16-23.5 lakh), Mahindra Xylos (Rs 9.5-12 lakh) and Tata Safaris (Rs 10.90 lakh-15.98 lakh). They can be seen throughout the day near the camps, especially in the mornings and evenings when these seers meet visitors and disciples alike. Vehicles like Mahindra Scorpios (Rs 10-16.37 lakh), Boleros (Rs 7.45-9.12 lakh) and Honda City (Rs 9.75-13.74 lakh) are a dime a dozen here. During a visit to sectors 15, 16, 14 and 12 of the tent city, one is sure to come across these good looking but expensive vehicles.

One thing is common to most of these vehicles: their colour. Most seers prefer either white or saffron. A saint from Kanpur, Sant Chinmayanand, said that as these two colours were commonly associated with the seers, most prefer these hues. He conceded that it was owing to this very reason that he himself chose a white Ford Endeavour.

## 49 people injured on day one of Jallikattu festival in Tamil Nadu

*Nearly 500 bulls and a similar number of "tamers" were involved on the opening day of the festival in Madurai on Tuesday.*



(Agencies)-Forty-nine people were injured on the first day of the traditional Jallikattu festival in Tamil Nadu that has attracted the ire of animal activists, officials said Wednesday. Nearly 500 bulls and a similar number of "tamers" were involved on

the opening day of the festival in Madurai, said S Natarajan, district collector of the city.

"Forty-nine people were injured yesterday. Nine were taken to hospital for minor injuries," he told AFP.

Wednesday's festivities will

see almost double the number of bulls and competitors in the ring, Natarajan added.

In past years, competitors have been gored to death by bulls.

The Supreme Court outlawed Jallikattu in 2016 after a plea by animal

rights groups but Tamil Nadu insisted Jallikattu was a crucial part of its culture and identity.

Growing tensions in the state capital Chennai, and other cities, led Prime Minister Narendra Modi to issue an executive order that the centuries-old festival go ahead.

During the festival in Tamil Nadu bulls festooned with marigolds are released from pens and men try to grab their horns to win prizes such as scooters and whitegoods.

Critics say the bulls are fed alcohol and chilli powder is thrown in their faces to agitate them before the clash. Organisers insist the animals are not mistreated.

## Left with 2 seats, RLD's Jayant Chaudhary meets Akhilesh, talks seat sharing in UP

**Chaudhary and Akhilesh Yadav's meeting comes after both the SP and BSP agreed to contest on 38 seats each in UP, leaving 'ally' RLD? only two seats to contest from though it had wanted five seats.**

(Insider Bureau)-Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) vice-president Jayant Chaudhary and Samajwadi Party (SP) chief, Akhilesh Yadav, met in Lucknow on Wednesday without making much headway on any seat-sharing formula for the national polls this summer, according to people familiar with specifics of the meeting.

Chaudhary called the talks "very positive" as the two parties were expected to finalise the formula in the days to come along with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). He had last week, too, met Yadav before the SP and the BSP announced their electoral alliance on January 12.

The SP and BSP have agreed to contest 38 seats each in Uttar

Pradesh, which has the most - 80 - Lok Sabha seats. They have left two seats each for other allies and the Congress - Amethi and Rae Bareli. Congress president Rahul Gandhi represents Amethi while his mother, Sonia Gandhi, is a Parliament member from Rae Bareli.

The Bharatiya Janata Party had returned to power in 2014 at the Centre after sweeping elections in states like Uttar Pradesh, where it won 71 out of the 80 seats. The BSP failed to win any seat while the SP managed five and Congress two. The rest of the two seats went to the BJP's allies.

Chaudhary said the outcome of his talks with Yadav would be

known very soon. "We had a very nice meeting. The issues we discussed last time were carried forward today. We are sure an effective alliance against the [ruling] BJP's anti-farmer policies will be in place in the country. We have made a good beginning in this regard in Uttar Pradesh," said Chaudhary after the 90-minute meeting. He parried a question on seat-sharing. "It is not an issue. The main concern is of trust and relations and both are very strong," he said. "The fight is not mine but ours. And we will fight it together."

Yadav is expected to discuss the matter with BSP chief, Mayawati, before making the formula public. People aware of



the developments said the RLD was initially demanding half-a-dozen seats but could now settle for three. The SP and BSP had hinted at leaving two seats for RLD. "While we have already been offered Baghpat and Mathura, we want Muzaffarnagar, too," an RLD leader, who did not wish to be named, said.

He said seats beyond the two they were supposed to get would be given from the SP quota as Mayawati has made it clear

that she would keep her share of 38 seats. "There is also the possibility of the SP fielding its candidate on RLD's symbol on one or two seats as they did in Kairana Lok Sabha and Noorpur assembly [by] elections [in May]," he added.

Chaudhary did not rule out this formula being replicated on certain seats. "We did it successfully in Kairana and Noorpur without considering whose candidates they were," he said.

## 'One gave 4 Gandhis, other 3 Modis': BSP leader's twin attack on Cong, BJP

**Bahujan Samaj Party leader Vijay Yadav attacked both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at a rally in Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh.**

(Agencies)-Bahujan Samaj Party leader Vijay Yadav on Tuesday launched a scathing attack at both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at a rally in Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh.

Speaking about the new Samajwadi Party and the BSP alliance in the state, Yadav said that both the Congress and the BJP are now getting sleepless nights because the SP-BSP alliance in the state.

Yadav attacked both the Congress and the BJP, saying, "The most corrupt party in the

country is the BJP. What did the Congress give us? Four Gandhis - Indira, Rajiv, Sonia and Rahul. And what did BJP give the country? Modi. Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi and Narendra Modi."

Promising a victory for the SP-BSP alliance in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, he said that the alliance would defeat the BJP easily. "Inn BJP waalon ko toh dauda dauda kar maareng. Ghabrane ki zaroorat nahi hai. (We'll chase and thrash the BJP, there is no need to worry.)," he said.

Saying that both Congress and

BJP are having sleepless nights because of the SP-BSP alliance, he added, "Aaj inhe nani yaad aagai hogi, mari hui nani, ki SP-BSP ek hogaye (They must have remembered their dead grandmother because SP-BSP have joined hands)," he said.

Yadav's speech came on the day Mayawati asked the alliance partners and the workers to gift an electoral victory to her as a birthday present. She had also exhorted the alliance workers to forget the past and instead work together for the alliance's victory. Both BSP Supreme Mayawati



and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav had announced a tie-up between the two parties on Saturday to fight the BJP. The two Uttar Pradesh leaders have decided to contest on 38 seats each leaving just two

seats for the Congress. However, soon after the two leaders made the announcement, the Congress said it would contest all 80 seats on its own in the state.

## Cows made to walk on fire as a ritual in Karnataka's harvest festival

**The age-old Kicchu Hayisuvudu ritual is believed to bring good fortune and keep cows, which are sacred to Hindus, and other livestock and crops from harm's way.**

(News Agencies)-Devotees led decked-up cows over burning hay to celebrate the Hindu harvest festival in a ritual, called Kicchu Hayisuvudu, seeking good fortune and protection from harm.

The Makar Sankranti festival marks the advent of spring and is celebrated by kite-flying and other regional festivities in the

month of January.

In the southern city of Bangalore, men decorated the cows with garlands and bells and walked them over hay set ablaze.

The age-old ritual is believed to bring good fortune and keep cows, which are sacred to Hindus, and other livestock and crops from harm's way.



## American hunter pays \$100,000 to kill rare Himalayan 'screw-horned' goat, Pakistan's national animal

**Officials say money from hunting licences goes to support local communities, but an animal rights group calls it a 'complete shame'**

(By Our Staff Reporter)-An American trophy hunter has paid \$100,000 (£78,000) to kill a rare markhor or "screw horn" goat, the national animal of Pakistan. Fewer than 6,000 markhors exist in the wild, most living among the mountains between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the animal features on the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species. Nonetheless, local officials in Gilgit-Baltistan have issued permits for hunters to kill four Astore markhors - a subspecies with trademark flared horns - during the current season. The American hunter was named

in Pakistani media as John Amistoso, and local newspapers ran photographs of Mr Amistoso posing with a dead markhor. The hunt, which took place last Saturday in the Bunji area some 60km from the regional capital Gilgit, was "the season's first hunt of markhor", wildlife department official Mujeeb Sardar told The Express Tribune. Another 50 ibex and 12 blue sheep, a mountain goat also only found in the Himalayan ranges, have been killed since the season began in November, the official said. The Gilgit-Baltistan government

auctioned a range of hunting permits for rare animals in October, starting the bidding at \$100,000 for a markhor, \$8,000 for a blue sheep and Rs100,000 (£560) for an ibex.

It says that the hunting quota is set each year based on surveys conducted by wildlife experts. The Dawn newspaper quoted an unnamed official as saying that only the hunting of "overage" and "oversize" animals was allowed. As much as 80 per cent of the money raised from the permits would go back to the community in the mountainous region where the goats were hunted, officials



said. The rest would go to the local government.

Some on social media criticised the killings. One well-followed animal rights page on Facebook, Saving Wildlife Pakistan, described Saturday's hunt as "a complete shame".

It was not the first markhor shot by Mr Amistoso, according to numerous Facebook posts appearing on the page of the Grand Slam Club, which

describes itself as "an organisation of hunter/conservationists dedicated to improving and perpetuating wild sheep and goat populations worldwide".

Posts from 2017 and 2018 show Mr Amistoso posing with the bodies of two other subspecies of markhor - the Suleiman and Kashmir varieties. The page describes Mr Amistoso as "a life member".

## US seeks Pakistan's help for coaxing Taliban back into talks

(By Our Staff Reporter)- US Special Envoy for Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Amb Zalmay Khalilzad, who too was due in Islamabad, could not reach here because of changes in his itinerary. Amb Khalilzad in his latest trip to the region has faced several unexpected changes. He is currently in Afghanistan. "His schedule has been fluid all week," a diplomatic source said, adding that the special envoy was likely to visit Islamabad in the next few days. No details about Ms Curtis' meetings were publicly available. She is believed to be here to push for resumption of engagement with the Taliban in addition to

certain bilateral issues. Pakistan last month facilitated a meeting between the US special envoy and Taliban representatives in Abu Dhabi. UAE and Saudi officials attended the meeting as observers. It was agreed at the Abu Dhabi meeting that the process would continue and another meeting would be convened, but no date and venue for the next interaction has been set so far. A diplomatic source said: "The Taliban are refusing to talk to the Afghan government. The US wants Pakistan to pressure Pakistan-based Taliban leadership to accept direct

negotiations with the Afghan government." The Pakistani government, he further said, was insisting that it had little control over the Taliban. Prime Minister Imran Khan, meanwhile, talking to president of the East-West Institute and former US ambassador to Pakistan Cameron Munter said: "Pakistan fully supports a political settlement in Afghanistan which is the only viable option to end this conflict." Mr Khan emphasised the need for ensuring regional security so that economic progress could take place. Mr Munter said he continued to



advocate strong relationship important country of the region between Islamabad and and critical to US national Washington as Pakistan was an security objectives.

## China has economic aims as it quietly builds bonds with Afghanistan

(Insider Bureau)-China is making quiet approaches to Afghanistan, with the aim of expanding its influence in geopolitically important South Asian region at a time when the U.S. is planning to drastically cut back its military forces in the country. Afghanistan's national security adviser Hamdullah Mohib met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on Jan. 10 to discuss how China could assist the "long term stability" of the war-ravaged country. Mohib's visit coincides with an ongoing push by the administration of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to end

the country's bloody conflict with Taliban militants, almost 17 years after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Meanwhile, China has been pushing for increased engagement with the Taliban as well. "In 2018 alone, there were indications of at least two visits by the Taliban to Beijing," said one senior diplomat in Islamabad. "China definitely sees its interests in Afghanistan." For China, strengthening ties with Afghanistan and helping to stabilize the country would have two major objectives, experts

said. In the short term, Beijing wants to permanently block contact between the Taliban and China's Muslim Uighur militants. The Uighurs are seeking independence from Beijing for the predominantly Islamic western region of Xinjiang which shares a border with Afghanistan. "In the past, Beijing has been troubled by reports of the Uighurs going to Afghanistan for [armed] training with the Taliban" said Qazi Humayun, a former Pakistani ambassador to Afghanistan, in an interview with the Nikkei Asian Review. The Chinese authorities have been

accused of brutally repressing the Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang province. China is also driven by economic interests in seeking stability in Afghanistan. "In future, the Chinese want to extend the China Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan as well," noted Humayun. CPEC is a series of Beijing-led Belt and Road Initiative projects worth \$62 billion that include a network of highways, railways and energy infrastructure that spans the whole of Pakistan. Taken together, they are designed to connect Xinjiang with Pakistan's southern port city of Gwadar.

"China's end game is economic," the former ambassador added. China has frequently urged the Taliban to consider Afghanistan's future prosperity once peace is assured. "The Chinese keep on telling the Taliban of how their country will change once there is peace," said a senior Pakistani foreign ministry official. "Afghanistan can become the main link between the [former Soviet] central Asian republics and CPEC," he said referring to the possibility of large revenues generated from transit trade connecting central Asian countries and Pakistan's Gwadar.

Islamabad is evaluating Chinese projects seen as 'expensive and not necessary' in an effort to 'save public money', says government source

# Cash-Strapped Pakistan Asks China to shelve US\$2 Billion Coal Plant



Pakistan has officially asked China to shelve a joint US\$2 billion coal power project from the US\$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure project, claiming it will be too expensive and should not be an immediate priority.

The request was made when Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtyar, Pakistan's minister for planning and development, travelled to Beijing in December for a CPEC coordination meeting, according to a government official not authorised to speak publicly on the matter.

The government is evaluating some of the Chinese projects, which are more expensive and not necessary at the moment to save public money," the official said. "We have to focus on our priorities, including the development of Gwadar port and the western route of CPEC, which connects the hinterlands of Baluchistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provinces."

The official said government advisers had pointed out there was more power generation capacity coming online from other projects.

Bakhtyar did not respond to inquiries on Tuesday. He first revealed last September the government's intention to give up on imported coal energy projects, including the Rahim Yar Khan Coal power project in Punjab province. Then, Yao Jing, China's ambassador to Pakistan, said Beijing was open to changes proposed by the new government and "we will definitely follow their agenda".

Lijian Zhao, the deputy chief of mission at the Chinese embassy in Islamabad, on Tuesday said the decision to "abandon" the power plant project was made long ago and by the previous government.

Pakistan's finance minister Asad Umar told reporters: "The CPEC is now moving from an infrastructure and energy phase

to trade and industry sectors." The plant, included in the CPEC in January 2016, would have added 1,320 megawatts of energy to the national grid, addressing Pakistan's electricity shortage. Officials in the previous government led by Nawaz Sharif tried to shelve it due to heavy expenditures but Chinese officials successfully protested. The CPEC, launched five years ago as part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, was designed to connect China's far west region of Xinjiang with Gwadar port in Pakistan via a network of motorways, railways, oil pipelines and trading hubs. It is expected to be finished by 2030, providing China with an important

trading route to the Middle East and Africa. Since he took office in August last year, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's government has tried to scale back the CPEC, claiming the country cannot afford all the projects and calling for a greater focus on expanding agriculture and job creation for young people. Pakistan is confronting a balance of payments crisis, after the rupee lost 25 per cent of its value against the US dollar in 2018. Khan's government has approached Saudi Arabia, China, Abu Dhabi and the International Monetary Fund for help. Beijing has reportedly pledged to lend Islamabad US\$4 billion.

"Pakistan at the moment is

interested in liquid cash instead of investment due to the balance of payment issue and Khan's government is interested in cash in return for shelved Chinese power projects," said Qamar Cheema, a political analyst based in Islamabad. "Building infrastructure is not a priority of Khan's government as they have reduced and stopped public sector development projects," Cheema said, adding Pakistan had benefited from the CPEC's focus on infrastructure projects. Michael Kugelman, a senior associate for South and Southeast Asia at the Washington based Woodrow Wilson Centre for Scholars, explained Pakistan's focus on cutting costs.

## Bank of China offers \$300m loan to Sri Lanka

Bank of China, one of the country's biggest lenders, has offered a loan of \$300m to Sri Lanka's government, with the option of increasing the amount to one billion dollars.

The offer came as Colombo faces an economic crisis triggered by political uncertainty in the South Asian island nation.

Eran Wickramaratne, Sri Lanka's junior finance minister, told the Reuters news agency on Tuesday that Sri Lanka was considering the Chinese offer. He also confirmed that Sri Lanka had started negotiations to increase the amount of a swap deal with India's central

bank to one billion dollars, up from a previously negotiated \$400m. A series of credit rating downgrades amid a political crisis have made it harder for Sri Lanka to borrow as it faces record high repayments of \$5.9bn this year, \$2.6bn of which are due in the first three months.

"It's extremely difficult to tap the international market due to tight conditions and rating downgrades," said Wickramaratne, who is the state minister of finance.

"A government subcommittee will assess and negotiate on the tenure, size, and the price of this loan (with Bank of China). The cost of political crisis is high."

There was no confirmation from Bank of China about the loan offer.

Investor confidence took a hit when President Maithripala Sirisena abruptly sacked Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in October and replaced him with pro-China former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and dissolved the parliament.

Sri Lanka's top court then ruled the dissolution of parliament illegal and Wickremesinghe was restored to power in December.

But the seven-week-long crisis hurt the rupee and drove sovereign bond yields higher, straining state finances.

'Debt trap'

By the end of 2018, nearly a quarter of Sri Lanka's total foreign debt was owed to China, which has lent some eight billion dollars while building ports and highways and planning other major investments in the island state as part of its drive to build a 21st-century "Silk Road" across nations and shipping lanes.

A source with knowledge of the Bank of China offer told Reuters on Tuesday that Sri Lanka's cabinet had already asked Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera to negotiate the loan. It has to be repaid within three years, the source said.

Chinese President Xi Jinping

launched the "One Belt, One Road" project in May 2017, pledging tens of billions of dollars to build ports, highways and power grids in about 60 different countries, linking China to much of Asia, Europe and Africa. China is already one of the biggest investors in various infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka. But there has been criticism, both locally and internationally, and growing concerns that China has lured Sri Lanka into a debt trap. Despite security concerns and demonstrations, the two countries signed a \$1.12bn agreement, giving China a 70 percent stake in a major port in Sri Lanka - Hambantota.

# Nepal's Hydropower Boom

*Needs strategic assessment and public oversight*

(Agencies)-In 2017, I visited 1,200 MW Budhi Gandaki hydropower project, 70 kilometers from Kathmandu, and found many similarities with the Egiin Gol hydropower project in Mongolia, long monitored by our RwB Coalition. Both projects were designed in the 1970s Soviet-school mega-hydropower planning style, both have not progressed in 40 years. In both cases, the international consultancy Tractebel Engineering proposed to increase dam height and reservoir volume beyond limits considered economically feasible by local experts. In both cases the same

main contractor China Gezhouba, was assigned to build the dam without a proper international tender, but the projects were soon stopped due to major changes in decision-making. Egiin Gol Hydro remains part of the Mongolian government's plans, but a soft loan from China EximBank approved for the project was later redistributed to seven more sustainable and much needed projects, from a wastewater treatment plant in Ulaan Baatar to higher education programmes.

The Budhi Gandaki contract, cancelled by outgoing government in late 2017, was then reinstalled by new Maoist-led government. However Nepalese experts I spoke to did not believe this dam would be completed in the foreseeable future. Many factors are similar with our experience in Mongolia: prohibitively high costs for a small country, coupled with an uneconomical design; little capability to ensure proper compensation to affected communities; and huge potential impacts on downstream World Heritage sites that will require costly mitigation.

However there is one drastic difference: while the Egiin Gol hydropower project is one of three equally risky options for large

hydro in water-scarce Mongolia, the dam on the Budhi Gandaki River is just one of 400 planned hydropower plants for which licenses have been issued to various entities by Nepal. A third of the dams are planned in the Gandaki-Narayani transboundary



river basin where there has been no assessment of the cumulative impacts on the ecosystem and local communities, as well as huge implications for management of the transboundary river shared with India.

More dams, more grief?

While abundant water is Nepal's blessing, haphazard hydropower planning is likely its major curse. Nepal derives most of its electricity from hydropower and was part of a global study by Benjamin Sovacool and Gotz

Walter published at the end of last year, looking at the economic, environmental and social impacts of hydropower. Their statistical analysis supports the "hydroelectric resource curse" hypothesis - arguing that hydropower states



have shown significantly worse performance than other nations in dealing with poverty, economic growth, public debt and corruption.

Nepal's century of painstaking hydropower development, which has resulted in less than 1 GW of installed capacity and significant power deficit, is a lively illustration for this abstract statistical analysis.

There are many signs in Nepal that uncoordinated development of hydropower projects inevitably leads to:

" the construction of

inferior projects, rather than more efficient designs on the same river; extreme fragmentation of river basins, decline in fish diversity, encroachment into protected areas and destruction of important wetlands; encroachment on areas traditionally used by indigenous peoples and marginalised groups, for example, see the report on the Upper Trishuli-1 dam by the Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples. haphazard mass resettlement (the Budhi Gandaki dam alone will affect 45,000 people);

## Nepal hosts ancient bull fighting to observe Maghe Sankranti festival

(News Agencies)-Nepal on Tuesday hosted a bull fighting festival dating back to the 19th century to mark the Maghe Sankranti festival.

Coinciding with the annual winter celebrations as per the lunar calendar, bull fighting was organized in Nuwakot and Dhading, districts that adjoin the Kathmandu valley.

Hundreds of people gathered in Taruka village of Nuwakot district, some 75 km from the capital city, to witness the fun-filled bull fight.

The event was inaugurated by Nepali Minister for Youth and Sports Jagat Bahadur Bishwakarma, who said it is important to preserve such fiesta carrying rich history and culture.

The bull fighting is believed to

have been started in Taruka village some 200 years ago for entertainment purpose.

Unlike in other parts of the world, Nepali bull fighting includes both bulls and oxen in the field from different owners. At least 22 pairs of bull competed this year in Taruka, where the bulls continuously fought for over an hour in the dusty playground.

According to locals, the competing bulls were selected on the basis of their physical fitness including length, height and age. The bulls used for tilling lands are set free on this particular day for the event.

When the bulls went wild and rowdy during the warm winter afternoon, people screamed and cheered for their favorites.

"This is my first time to witness bull fight, and I found it totally



amazing," Dipen Shrestha, a Nepali photojournalist who participated in the event, told Xinhua. As per the tradition, the fight ends once a bull is tired and gives up. The owners of the best bulls were awarded with cash prize and certificates.

The bull fight was organized in at least four other villages in Nuwakot district. People from various districts and foreign tourists thronged the venues to watch the rare activity. The program also featured cultural shows by locals.



# US military ordered to begin planning to withdraw about half the troops in Afghanistan

(By Our Staff Reporter)-The US military has been ordered to begin planning to withdraw about half the troops in Afghanistan, a US defense official with direct knowledge of the matter told CNN on Thursday.

The official said planning is underway, and it could take months to withdraw the nearly 7,000 troops.

The decision was made Tuesday, at the same time as President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the US military from Syria -- moves that precipitated Defense Secretary James Mattis' resignation announcement on Thursday.

The Wall Street Journal was first to report the plan for the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Several US defense officials told CNN that Trump wants to draw down US troops in Afghanistan. Two administration officials told CNN that Trump wants the plans drawn up in hopes he could announce the drawdown in his State of the Union speech, which is traditionally at the end of January or early February.

CNN reported earlier Thursday that officials throughout the administration were bracing

themselves for Trump to make an announcement about the US presence in Afghanistan.

Multiple officials told CNN the military decisions were a factor in Mattis' decision to resign.

Gen. John Allen, a former commander of NATO and US forces in Afghanistan, told CNN on Thursday that a drawdown in Afghanistan would be a mistake. "Pulling out right now, just the announcement would create chaos in the strategy," Allen said. The US has about 14,000 troops in Afghanistan, most of which are present as part of a larger NATO-led mission to train, advise and assist Afghan forces. Any withdrawal would be complicated by the fact that the United States is part of NATO's Resolute Support mission.

Trump has long been critical of the US presence in Afghanistan, which began after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. But lawmakers have echoed Allen's concern about a hasty departure. South Carolina GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham told CNN's Kate Bolduan on Thursday that "according to our military commanders and everybody I know, we want to withdraw from

Afghanistan with honor and do it based on conditions on the ground."

"Based on my assessment in Afghanistan, if we withdrew anytime soon, you would be paving the way for a second 9/11," Graham said.

Graham noted that Trump has said he wants other countries to do the fighting.

"Since August of 2017, 5,600 Afghans have died fighting the Taliban and ISIS," he told Bolduan. "Eighteen American killed in combat, four killed through accidents. God bless the 22."

Just two weeks before the news of the withdrawal plan, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joseph Dunford, said at a Washington Post Live event that he "had not recommended" that the US withdraw.

"I had not recommended that we leave Afghanistan because, again, in my judgment, leaving Afghanistan not only would create instability in South Asia, but in my judgment would give terrorist groups the space within which to plan and conduct operations against the American people, our homeland and our



allies," Dunford said. "And that really is the problem we are trying to solve."

The same day news broke of the Afghanistan decision, the Department of Defense released a report on "enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan."

The report cited a ceasefire, statements of religious scholars and recent talks with the Taliban as evidence of progress.

"The combination of military escalation and diplomatic initiative have made a favorable political settlement more likely than at any time in recent memory," the report said.

Since his election, the President has made his frustration with the continued military presence clear.

Outlining his strategy for the country in an August 2017 address, the President said, "I share the American people's frustration. I also share their frustration over a foreign policy

that has spent too much time, energy, money -- and, most importantly, lives -- trying to rebuild countries in our own image instead of pursuing our security interests above all other considerations."

In an interview with The Washington Post last month, Trump laid out his rationale for keeping US troops in the country in a way that made clear the impetus to remain wasn't his.

"We're there because virtually every expert that I have and speak to say if we don't go there, they're going to be fighting over here," he said.

Nearly two decades in, a "stalemate"

More than a year after Trump announced his administration's new strategy for achieving success in Afghanistan and the wider region, the situation remains decidedly mixed, with the conflict at a "stalemate."

## Afghanistan: 'Naive, Reckless' Tourists Couchsurfing In War-Torn Nation

(News Agencies)-Many take their chances by staying with Afghan strangers they find through the Couchsurfing network, rather than paying for a room in a hotel protected by armed guards and bullet-proof doors.

Seeking an "authentic" experience as he backpacked through war-torn Afghanistan, Dutch tourist Ciaran Barr searched the Couchsurfing website for locals to stay with. He found an astonishing number of potential hosts.

Despite the country's decaying security nearly 2,000 Afghans -- the vast majority of them men -- have signed up to host guests on the social networking platform, which connects travellers around the world with locals who are willing to put them up for free.

"You feel like you get a more authentic feel for the city so you

don't get trapped in tourist hotspots," Barr, 24, tells AFP in heavily-militarised Kabul, where he spent several nights sleeping on a thin mattress on the floor of his Afghan host's bedroom.

"Not that there are any in Afghanistan," he adds wryly.

Once a popular stop on the well-worn hippy trail between Europe and South Asia in the 1970s, Afghanistan has seen the number of foreign travellers crossing its borders dwindle in the past four decades of almost non-stop conflict.

But dozens still make the dangerous journey every year, ignoring clear warnings from their own governments to stay away from a country infested with suicide attackers, kidnappers and armed robbers, and which by some estimates is now the world's deadliest conflict zone. Many take their chances by

staying with Afghan strangers they find through the Couchsurfing network, rather than paying for a room in a hotel protected by armed guards and bullet-proof doors.

"Staying with people and dressing to blend in a bit makes it possible to travel in Afghanistan with not too big of a risk," says Barr, who -- with his dark hair and beard, and dressed in the baggy pyjama-style shalwar kameez favoured by most Afghan men -- stands out less than most foreigners.

"You have to be smart" Couchsurfing's concept is like a modern-day version of Afghanistan's tradition of hospitality, which obliges Afghans to provide food and shelter to strangers.

But it is risky. Couchsurfers only have their host's online profile



and references to judge their character.

In a country where kidnappings remain common and foreigners are highly-prized targets, they have no way of knowing if their host is connected to criminals, who may see a chance to get rich by abducting them or giving them up to militants.

"You can end up with the Taliban," says a diplomat in Kabul, who has been involved in negotiations to rescue kidnap victims.

"It's naive and reckless."

That is what happened to North American couple Caitlan Coleman and Joshua Boyle, who were kidnapped while

backpacking in Afghanistan in 2012.

They were freed from the Taliban in 2017, along with their three children who were born in captivity.

But Norwegian tourist Jorn Bjorn Augestad, who has couchsurfing in Iraq and the Central African Republic, tells AFP in Kabul that government warnings exaggerate the dangers.

"They are too careful. You have to be smart about a lot of things, having contact with a local is the best way to stay safe," says Augestad, who is on a mission to visit every country in the world, including Syria, before his 30th birthday this year.

## Malaika Arora's sheer black gown is perfect for festive formal parties.

**Malaika Arora is known for taking some serious risks with her fashion, and we think this one is our favourite. This dress is super fitting for Malaika's personality - classic, with a dash of dramatics.**

Malaika Arora never disappoints, and you'll definitely be adding her black gown to your wardrobe wish lists. On Monday, at an event in Hyderabad, the reality TV judge and former VJ looked elegant as ever. Malaika Arora was working an Antonio Riva gown with voluminous long sleeves, a mermaid fit, and a sheer neckline so she could better show off her stunning emerald bead and diamonds necklace from luxury jewellery designer, Renu Oberoi. Malaika's hair was styled in loose waves and came down past her waist.



The red carpet pro expertly paired her strands with some soft blush, bright eye shadow, pink lip gloss, and thick, full brows. We can totally tell that Malaika felt glamorous. Just look at these photos of her posing:

Even if you do not have black tie events in the pipeline, you can still take a tip from Malaika Arora on how to master the dress code. The key is to opt for elegance without flashing too much flesh, and floor-length gowns are the most suitable attire for such a do. However, formal doesn't need to equal boring, as Malaika Arora's pick proves. Her black gown has just the right amount of detail to keep things interesting. The dramatic frills on Malaika's sleeves added a lot of drama to the whimsical look, while still remaining on the acceptable side of daring.



## Airport looks 2019

*Take style cues from Ranbir Kapoor, Ranveer Singh, Vicky Kaushal and Varun Dhawan from their recent Delhi visit*



baby blue suit by Manish Malhotra and Bhumi Pednekar's orange and brick salwar kurta set looked simplistic yet trendy, something most of us would want to add onto our (hopefully) thriving wardrobes. It is the men whom we spotted in a mix of formal and casual wear that deserves a fair mention. Starting with Ranbir Kapoor, who is

barely spotted publicly, was a treat to look at (at the risk of making him sound like a snack). He wore a wine coloured velvet jacket over a cotton tee and jeans, paired with nude shoes that completed the look so well. Ranveer Singh, on the other hand, chose a bandhgala worn in angrakha style that he accessorised with a pair of

metallic spectacles. Ayushmann Khurrana went experimental with his look like he does with his choice of scripts and this too, an all-white tuxedo, was a smart avatar. Varun Dhawan brought a sense of comfy fashion despite his formal avatar in a blueish tuxedo. His printed tie added to this subtle fashion turnout. Director Rohit Shetty too kept it formal in a black kurta and white pyjama, paired with a smart jacket that added character to the complete look. Sidharth Malhotra wore a blazer over their casual tee shirt and Vicky Kaushal went all casual with this airport look of his in a striped sweater with jeans. Rajkumar Rao's tuxedo was a smart wear for a day event or can be added to your wardrobe for office wear. Karan Johar stayed safe with his favourite colour - black. His broad-rimmed specs brought out the nerd-look and we loved it.



Some keep it casual, some go all-out formal, while some strike a balance and keep it a nice blend of smart casuals. Bollywood is always top-notch with its fashion and the airport is one of the most interesting places to spot fashion and the latest trends. Recently, when B-towners were getting set to board their flight to Delhi to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we noticed a variety of styles. The women by and large wore traditional wear. Alia Bhatt's

of smart casuals. Bollywood is always top-notch with its fashion and the airport is one of the most interesting places to spot fashion and the latest trends. Recently, when B-towners were getting set to board their flight to Delhi to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we noticed a variety of styles. The women by and large wore traditional wear. Alia Bhatt's

# Decreased deep sleep may signal Alzheimer's disease: Study

The brain changes that lead to Alzheimer's, a disease that affects an estimated 5.7 million Americans, start slowly and silently.

The brain changes that lead to Alzheimer's, a disease that affects an estimated 5.7 million Americans, start slowly and silently.

Up to two decades before the characteristic symptoms of memory loss and confusion appear, amyloid beta protein begins to collect into plaques in the brain.

Tangles of tau appear later, followed by atrophy of key brain areas. Only then do people start showing unmistakable signs of cognitive decline.

The challenge is finding people on track to develop Alzheimer's before such brain changes undermine their ability to think clearly. For that, sleep may be a handy marker.

To better understand the link between sleep and Alzheimer's disease, Lucey, along with David Holtzman, a professor at Washington University, and

After controlling for factors such as sex, age and movements while sleeping, the researchers found that decreased slow-wave sleep coincided with higher levels of tau in the brain and a higher tau-to-amyloid ratio in the cerebrospinal fluid. "The key is that it wasn't the total amount of sleep that was linked to tau, it was the slow-wave sleep, which reflects quality of sleep," Lucey said. "The people with increased tau pathology were actually sleeping more at night and napping more in the day, but they weren't getting as good quality sleep," he said.

colleagues studied 119 people 60 years of age or older.

Most -- 80 per cent -- were cognitively normal, and the remaining were very mildly impaired.

The researchers monitored the participants' sleep at home over the course of a normal week.

Participants were given a portable EEG monitor that strapped to their foreheads to measure their brain waves as they slept, as well as a wristwatch-like sensor that tracks body movement.

They also kept sleep logs, where

they made note of both nighttime sleep sessions and daytime napping. Each participant produced at least two nights of data; some had as many as six.

The researchers also measured levels of amyloid beta and tau in the brain and in the cerebrospinal fluid that bathes the brain and spinal cord.

Thirty-eight people underwent PET brain scans for the two proteins, and 104 people underwent spinal taps to provide cerebrospinal fluid for analysis.

Twenty-seven did both.



Older people who get less deep sleep have higher levels of the brain protein tau, a sign of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease, according to a study. Slow-wave sleep is the deep sleep people need to consolidate memories and wake up feeling refreshed, said researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in the US. The findings, published in the journal *Science Translational Medicine*, suggest that poor-quality sleep in later life could be a red flag for deteriorating brain health.

"What's interesting is that we

saw this inverse relationship between decreased slow-wave sleep and more tau protein in people who were either cognitively normal or very mildly impaired, meaning that reduced slow-wave activity may be a marker for the transition between normal and impaired," said Brendan Lucey, an assistant professor at the Washington University.

"Measuring how people sleep may be a non-invasive way to screen for Alzheimer's disease before or just as people begin to develop problems with memory and thinking," Lucey said.

## HealthWise:



Neglect, abuse, domestic violence, poor parental health, lack of support system, father's alcoholism and lack of brain stimulation lower children's growth and development at an early age, according to a largest population-based study done in Haryana that demonstrates children are never too young to understand and absorb what is happening around them. Each adversity lowered the child's growth and development by the age of 18 months, with cumulative exposure leading to developmental inequities from the start of life, found a study of 1,273 infants at 12 and 18 months in

the Rewari district of Haryana. Each child was assessed on speech and comprehension, cognitive and language, motor skills, social skills at the age of 12 months and 18 months. Most children faced one or more adversity, with close to 50% facing four or more. "The key finding was that each extra increase in childhood adversity was associated with both poorer growth and development measured at 18 months, a crucial time for optimal brain development and a key predictor of future health and wellbeing," said study co-author Gauri Divan, a developmental paediatrician

## Neglect, domestic violence lower children's development

Each child was assessed on speech and comprehension, cognitive and language, motor skills, social skills at the age of 12 months and 18 months.

associated with a non-governmental organisation, Sangath.

"Children can build resilience against one adversity, we know children from poor socio-economic homes with supportive families and good education can thrive. But multiple adversities can have a compounding effect on their physical, mental and social development," said Diwan. The study was published in *PLoS One*.

Children with a unhealthy start in life suffer a loss of about a quarter of average adult income per year, leading to the countries they live in forfeiting up to twice their current GDP expenditures on health and education, estimated public health experts in *The Lancet Early Childhood Development Series*.

At least 250 million children under-5 years do not receive the appropriate care and support to

become physically healthy, mentally alert and emotionally secure. These children - a staggering 43% of the global under-5 population - risk of nutrition, stunting and suboptimal brain development, which leads to lower learning and poor adult income.

"The findings of this landmark study demonstrate the astonishing levels of childhood deprivation in these rural communities, barely a three-hour drive from our national capital, with profound implications for lost potential to fulfil personal and societal development goals in later life. They point to the single greatest public health emergency this country is facing, and call for urgent, national action to promote child development and wellbeing", said Vikram Patel, professor of global health, department of global health

and social medicine, Harvard Medical School.

Early child development stimulates the child's desire and ability to learn and becomes the first defence against delays in learning, growth and emotional security and is critical to ensure children reach their full learning and development potential to become productive adults that participate in economic and social growth.

"Improved child development leads to better health and wellbeing across the lifetime and increases years spent in school, which builds skills, increases income and reduces poverty. Studies of children in Jamaica who have now been followed into adulthood show the effects of early-years interventions are sustained in terms of increased employment and earnings," said Divan.



# SLOVENIA

Where nature comes alive

**Slovenia is a small country that packs in a lot of delights - from a lively, picture-perfect capital city to castles and magnificent nature at every turn.**

Slovenia is probably one of the most underrated countries when it comes to holiday and travel in the whole of Europe. It's a small country that packs in a lot of delights - from a lively, picture-perfect capital city to castles and magnificent nature at every turn. Thanks to the mountains, lakes, wine valleys, Slovenia was a perfect destination for rejuvenation. It is a country where the locals' joke that in May you could spend the morning skiing on the snowy peaks and the afternoon swimming in the sea. I started my journey in Slovenia from Ljubljana. Ljubljana means 'beloved,' and it did not take me long to fall under its charm. The gorgeous cobbled part of the city is sandwiched between the imposing hill-top castle and the Ljubljanica River. It's like someone decided it'd look

nice as a backdrop to the city when they built it. I set off to reach the Dragon bridge. Ljubljana's dragon is comfortably the city's most recognisable resident. Not only does it perch with teeth bared and wings spread on all four corners of the bridge, but its image also appears on the town's coat of arms, flag, manhole covers and even on the crest of the local football team. If stories are to be believed, then Mythological Greek hero Jason and his Argonaut comrades stole a Golden Fleece from the King of Colchis on the Black Sea. The Argonauts fled their pursuers and found themselves at the mouth of the River Danube instead of going back to their Greek homeland. There was no way back, so they went on, up the Danube and then along

the river Ljubljanica. They stopped at the source of the river and overwintered here. They came across a large lake with a marsh dragon that Jason killed after a heroic struggle. This monster is believed to be the Ljubljana dragon.

#### Tolmin Gorge

The weather was stunning the next morning and the plan was to drive to Tolmin, located in the southern part of Triglav National Park. The drive through the winding roads of the national park was quiet and breathtaking.

The gorge is enchanting with a boardwalk running along the clear blue water and little waterfalls. The moss-covered rocks and narrow passages gave it a mysterious vibe. A little fun fact, the two turquoise rivers namely Soca and Tolminka meet along the

gorge.

#### Lake Bled

I was a little heartbroken to leave Tolmin. Fortunately, the next stop was Bled — a picturesque town at the foothills of the Julian Alps. As I crossed the lake in a Pletna towards the island, which is also home to a church, I was captivated by the story of the bell that lies below the emerald green waters. It is believed that once upon a time, there lived a young widow in the castle of Bled. Robbers killed her husband and dumped his body into the lake. She was sad and visited the chapel on the island every day to offer her prayers. One day, she gathered all her gold to commission a bell for the chapel. During the transport of the bell, there was a storm, which sank the boat. On clear nights, people say we could hear the bell ringing from the deep waters of the lake.

Years later, the Pope blessed the chapel with another bell. It is to this blessing that a wish will be granted to anyone who rings the bell. A little research about the place, got me to do the Ojstrica hike. If it is the best "value" hike you're looking for (best reward per amount

of physical turmoil), then this one is your best bet. I have to admit, spotting where to begin the hike was tricky. But once I found it, I began climbing the steep uphill (611m). I walked on a dirt path surrounded by trees until I reached the signpost.



## The Accidental Prime Minister movie review:

# Anupam Kher delivers an appalling performance. 1 star

**The Accidental Prime Minister movie review: All is unsubtle, everyone's a lookalike in this film and yet manage to outperform the man in the lead -- Anupam Kher who stars as former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.**

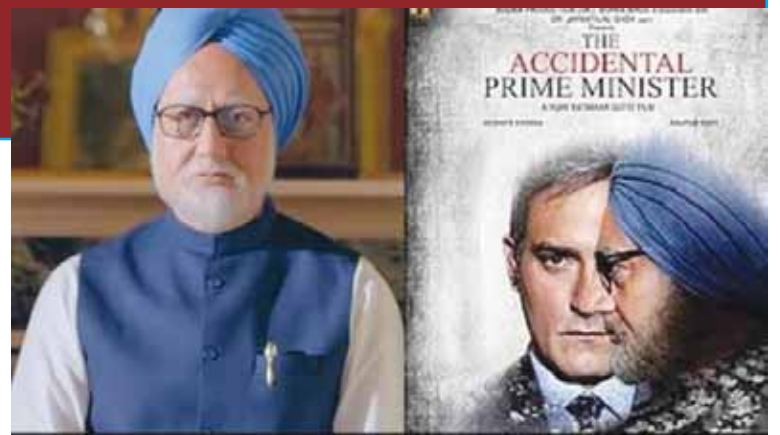
The Accidental Prime Minister  
Director: Vijay Ratnakar Gutte  
Cast: Anupam Kher, Akshaye Khanna

Rating: 1/5

I've been thinking about a film called Ramgarh Ke Sholay. Made in 1991, it was a tacky, no-budget parody inspired by The Three Amigos, where Amjad Khan, gamely reprising his role as Gabbar Singh from the classic Sholay, was surrounded by various Hindi movie lookalikes - from a duplicate Dev Anand to an artificial Anil Kapoor - as they tried to save the titular village. Vijay Ratnakar Gutte's heavily publicised new film, The Accidental Prime Minister, based on the book by Manmohan Singh's former media advisor Sanjaya Baru, feels rather improbably like that Sholay spoof. All is unsubtle, everyone's a lookalike. The barrier to entry, however, is substantially lower than the film that starred professional duplicates. Here if you have a beard, you can play Vir Sanghvi. Have white hair? You can play Naveen Patnaik, chief minister of Odisha. Many of these folks,

chosen mostly on the basis of their hairlines, outperform the man in the lead: Anupam Kher who stars as former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Kher's version of Singh speaks like a freshly bitten squeaky-toy, slides inconsistently in and out of a Punjabi accent, and, every now and then, remembers to move his hands jerkily, as if urgently (yet discreetly) trying to dry nail-paint. It is a profoundly, disappointingly silly caricature from a veteran surely capable of better. Accidental? In an attempt to laugh at the subject, Kher portrays him as a slightly mental Prime Minister. He routinely breaks off conversations at his desk, mid-thought, to stand pensively at the window, like it were a teleprompter. (Perhaps it was.) Dr Singh was mocked for his silence, but his staunchest political rivals wouldn't have called him lacking in dignity. Here, in a film where irony dies a million deaths, Kher chides his ally by saying "Please don't be overdramatic," and then prances out of the room walking like a marionette. The clumsiness of this performance is thrown into

sharper focus when the film - set from 2004 to 2014 - haphazardly splices in actual news footage featuring Dr Singh, showing us both how far Kher has fallen short, and how unwilling the actor is to let his version of the former PM smile. Kher wreathes his character in a state of constant helplessness, a one-note riff that never lets the character feel alive. An actor would have spent longer preparing. Gutte appears to be trying to make an episode of Yes Minister with a Priyadarshan-style background score, where lines aren't allowed to remain dry and every eyebrow is arched with innuendo. There is amateurishness at every bend: shots cut off abruptly, some fade randomly to black, some characters speak without their lips moving at all, and the boom mic makes at least two appearances. The only things in the film's favour are the lavish palatial rooms, and the smashing shirts worn by the man playing Singh's aide. Akshaye Khanna plays Sanjaya Baru by frequently breaking the fourth-wall and speaking to the audience as if he's letting us in on the joke. It is he who has the film's few finely honed lines - "It's been a while since we



had a Prime Minister who didn't have family members in real estate," he smiles - but so drunk is Khanna on smugness that it feels like somebody told him, before the shoot, that this film is already a monster success. He's the most unbearable kind of know-it-all: one who really doesn't see what's going on. Early on, there is a hint of some cleverness afoot. The actor playing Rahul Gandhi speaks to the actress playing Sonia Gandhi in Italian, as if he needs a secret language to communicate with his mother in front of her venomous entourage. This is a film transparently motivated to point out how lethal dynasty politics can be, and comes to us a few months before a general election. The one-sided intent of The Accidental Prime Minister may have appeared more insidious had it felt like an actual motion picture. Instead, we have an apparently

political film that borrows its background score occasionally from Kal Ho Na Ho. With all its hamhanded recreations and incessant news-channel roundups, this resembles an episode of Savdhaan India. Yet what is it warning us about? We are shown a purportedly weak man in power who, nevertheless, believes in facing press conferences without hesitation, tells his advisor not to pass judgement, and declares that his is not a one-issue government. Hmm. It is a film where names like Swaraj and Sibal are muted by the censors, but Dr Singh himself is not known to have voiced any objection. The existence and unimpeded release of this film is one in his win column, and hopefully it will give rise to genuinely powerful and incisive political cinema in this country.

## Bumblebee movie review:

# The best Transformers movie in over a decade

Bumblebee

Director - Travis Knight

Cast - Hailee Steinfeld, John Cena, Jorge Lendeborg Jr, John Ortiz, Pamela Adlon

Rating - 3.5/5

To call Bumblebee the best movie in the Transformers series wouldn't be a stretch. But it would be damning with faint praise - like saying that Baby is the best Justin Bieber song, or that frying is the best way to cook a horse's intestines. For over a decade, the metal monsters have clashed and clanged on the big screen for our enjoyment, to decidedly diminishing returns and set to an increasingly 'leery, laddish' tone, as critic Mark Kermode describes it. And along comes Bumblebee, a spin-off with the heart of a Miyazaki movie and the innocence of a bygone era, just

about tolerable enough for you to not actively dislike it. Not only will it be nostalgic for the children of the '80s - a decade that is currently experiencing a cinematic resurgence - but it also holds an unmistakable fondness in its heart for the first Transformers movie, which was instrumental in breeding a whole new generation of fans. For all his faults - and there are so many - director Michael Bay's original Transformers film remains my favourite movie of the lot; a loud, emotional adventure with stunning action and a terrific central performance by Shia LaBeouf. Even the most annoying of Bay's tendencies - rancid humour, cringeworthy product placement, lurid visuals - were ignored. There can be no defence, however, of his terrible follow-ups, which hit rock bottom in 2017 - exactly a decade after the first film - with the almost unwatchable

Transformers: The Last Knight. For years, Bay has adamantly refused to relinquish his throne as the overlord of the Transformers universe. Until now. When his last film suffered the only sort of blow that is considered irrecoverable in the movie business - a poor showing at the box office - Bay was forced to vacate his position. No longer bound to his immature vision, Paramount hired the unlikely Travis Knight to direct the first in a planned series of spin-offs, intended to distance the future of the franchise from its past. Knight's affection for the world of the Transformers - particularly for the toys that he grew up playing with - is palpable in his film. Certainly, it hits many of the same marks as Bay's first movie - it could even be argued that Bumblebee is a better thought-out remake - but crucially,



has an entirely different tone. A misfit teenager does stumble across a ramshackle, unwanted car; villains arrive on Earth like meteors from outer space; and cartoonish government agents chase everyone around - but on no occasion does someone get peed on, and there is not a single masturbation joke in sight. The Oscar-nominated Hailee Steinfeld plays

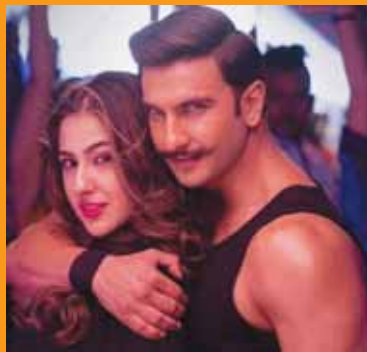
Charlie Watson, a 17-year-old (going on 18) still in mourning for her dead father, and unable to accept just how quickly her mother (Pamela Adlon) has moved on. She'd much rather spend her time tinkering in the scrapyard, listening to The Smiths, than learning to smile from a guidebook gifted to her by her mother's new partner.

## Simmba box office

# Collection crosses Rs 350 cr mark globally, is Ranveer Singh's biggest solo hit

Ranveer Singh's *Simmba* is having a great run at the box office. The film has crossed the Rs 350 crore mark internationally and informing this was one of the film's producers Karan Johar.

Actor Ranveer Singh and director Rohit Shetty's *Simmba* is roaring at the box office. The film, which has already made more than Rs 200 crore domestically, has now grossed Rs 350 crores globally. Sharing this news was the film's producer Karan Johar. Karan put out a tweet which simply said, "Simmba" and had several fire emojis. However, the poster said many more things: that the Ranveer starrer had crossed Rs 350 crores internationally, that it was Rohit's eighth consecutive Rs 100 crore film and that it the director's third Rs 200 crore film. That's a lot of money, seriously. It also said that the film was the highest grossing film ever for



Reliance Entertainment, Rohit Shetty Picturez and Dharma Productions. Incidentally, it is also Ranveer's biggest solo hit. Meanwhile, trade analyst Taran Adarsh said that despite the film getting hit by the release of *Uri - The Surgical Strike* and *The Accidental Prime Minister*, the film still boasted of healthy numbers at the box office.

He wrote: "#Simmba gets affected by multiple new releases... Despite reduction in screen count, posts a healthy number on third Fri... Third Sat and third Sun should again witness growth... [Week 3] Fri 2.60 cr. Total: Rs 215.03 cr. India biz." *Simmba*, a remake of hit Telugu film *Temper* starring Jr NTR in the lead role, tells the story of a bent police officer who has a dramatic change of heart when a woman, known to him, is raped. The cop, then, goes on a rampage. The film has, of course, been treated in the Rohit Shetty way and that may have something to do with its stupendous success. The film also stars Sara Ali Khan and Sonu Sood in significant roles.



## Total Dhamaal first look



Actor Ajay Devgn is all set to return to comedy with his upcoming film, *Total Dhamaal*. Amid the countdown to the film's trailer, the makers have released the first look of the actor along with his co-star - a monkey who had earlier starred in *Hangover 2*. The first look has Ajay with the monkey dressed in shirt and trousers. The makers announced the Bollywood debut of the monkey, Crystal, who has *George of the Jungle* and *Night at the Museum* in its filmography along with *Hangover 2*. Just a few days ago, Shah Rukh Khan had also released a poster of his film *Zero* featuring a chimpanzee. Talking about *Total Dhamaal*, the film is a multi-starrer that brings back the superhit pairing of Anil Kapoor and Madhuri Dixit after a gap of 18 years. They were last seen in *Pukaar*. Actor Esha Gupta plays the second female lead in the film. The starcast also includes Riteish Deshmukh, Arshad Warsi, Javed Jaffrey, Boman Irani, Sanjay Mishra, Mahesh Manjrekar and Johny Lever. Actor Sonakshi Sinha has also performed a special dance number 'Mugda' for the film. The song was originally picturised on Helen in the 1971 film *Inkar*. Sonakshi had earlier told *Mumbai Mirror* about the song, "It has the potential of becoming a chartbuster again. The makers are shooting it on a lavish scale, making everything larger than life. I am super excited about it."

## "Apna Time Aayega" Gully Boy song

### Ranveer Singh raps like a pro, romances Alia Bhatt.

The first song from the upcoming film *Gully Boy*, titled *Apna Time Aayega*, has been released. Featuring Ranveer Singh as an up-and-coming Mumbai rapper, the song is a rage anthem. Listen here. Ranveer Singh has shared the first song from his upcoming film, *Gully Boy*.

*Apna Time Aayega* is a rage anthem that provided the hook in the recently released trailer for the film, based in part on the lives of Mumbai rappers Divine and Naezy, and the city's underground hip-hop scene. The song is performed by Ranveer, and composed by



Divine and Dub Sharma, with lyrics by Divine & Ankur Tewari. *Apna Time Aayega* borrows a key lyric from Divine's recent song, *Teesri Manzil*. The video shows Ranveer's character, the titular 'Gully Boy' performing on stage and leaving the crowd in raptures with his rap skills. "Tu nanga his toh aaya hai, kya ghanta le kar jaayega? (You were born with nothing, what the hell will you take with yourself when you die)," he says, as the crowd goes nuts. The two-and-a-half minute video also offers new

glimpses from the film, notably of Alia Bhatt's feisty character, who is apparently a romantic interest to Ranveer's rapper. We also see quick shots of Ranveer practising his rapping with a mentor-like figure, who warns him at the beginning of

the video of the many traps he must avoid as a rapper. New details about Ranveer's character, such as his job as a driver - remember, his father is also a driver, according to the trailer - and his attraction to a

life of crime, are seen. It is also implied that he is lured by money and attention when Kalki Koechlin's character enters his life. Speaking at the recent trailer launch event for the film in Mumbai, Ranveer said, "When somebody told me about the script of *Gully Boy*, I told them that it is my film. If any other actor would have been a part of this film instead of me then I would have got burnt with jealousy. I was born to do *Gully Boy* and I knew only I can pull off this character."





## Dancing On Ice viewers claim Megan Barton Hanson looks like a 'scorned ex'

**after beau Wes' partner Vanessa SPLITS from boyfriend amid concerns she is 'too close' to the Love Island star**

Dancing On Ice viewers have suggested Megan Barton Hanson looked less than impressed as her beau Wes Nelson took to the rink with his newly-single partner Vanessa Bauer.

During Sunday night's episode of the show Megan sat in the audience showing her full support for her boyfriend, however some fans hinted that she wasn't happy with some of the comments made by the judge's surrounding Wes' partnership. This comes after it was revealed that Vanessa, 22, has split with her boyfriend Louis Nathaniel after he became concerned about her 'growing closeness' to Wes, reports the Sun.

The Love Island star, 24, appeared stoney-faced after Christopher Dean commented on what a lovely looking couple Wes and Vanessa were, adding: 'If you could choose two people on the ice this would be it.'

As the camera panned to Megan's blank expression, viewers were quick to comment on the situation,

claiming that her face was 'picture' as it all played out. One viewer commented that Megan looked like a hurt ex girlfriend, saying: 'Wes might wanna re-couple with the dancing on dancing on ice!! Megan is watchin lookin like a scorned ex #DancingOnIce.'



While another said: 'I can't even imagine Megan's face after Chris said Wes and Vanessa were a beautiful couple.'

Another eagle-eyed viewer suggested that Megan appeared to be watching the routine very closely, tweeting: 'Lol hahaha Megan's face is a f\*\*\*\*g picture watching Wes have his hands on Vanessa #DancingOnIce.'

Wes, who began dating Megan after they met on last year's series of Love Island, insisted earlier in the show: 'It's important you have chemistry but not too much chemistry as I have a girlfriend.' Ahead of the performance, Megan told Phil and Holly: 'I think he's going to be so nervous and he has put so much work in. He's with Vanessa and she won last year.'

## It's a tie!

With so many incredible performances, it is surely hard to decide just who gets your vote.

And sometimes even the pros can't pick, with Amy Adams and Patricia Arquette tying for the Best Actress in a movie/miniseries made for TV category at the Critics' Choice Awards on Sunday night. They were not alone, with Lady Gaga and Glenn Close also tying for Best Actress.

Amy, nominated for Sharp Objects, and Patricia, up for Escape At Dannemora, beat out Connie Britton, Carrie Coon, Laura Dern and Anna Deavere Smith in their category. Amy was first up on stage, insisting 'I want the other girl up here. The other woman! Can I read it?'

She then gushed: 'I actually can't think of a more beautiful thing than a tie, because there really isn't a winner when we get to do such great work and we

have such wonderful opportunities.'

Both winners then took it in turn to give their thank you speeches, Amy standing with an arm around Patricia as they shared the microphone between them.

'I'm overwhelmed,' said Amy. 'I have so many people to thank, but I don't want to take it up.' Patricia thanked Ben Stiller: 'Our incredible, courageous director who really let us explore and remove the yoke from my neck that I felt I've carried my whole career of, "But is she likable?" Thank you for taking that off my neck. It was really heavy for me to carry that long.'

And she spoke of her role as Tilly Mitchell, saying: 'A lot of friends of mine who might be bigger body type said, "Thank you. For once in my life, I got to see a bigger boned woman or a different body type woman

**Amy Adams and Patricia Arquette BOTH win Best Actress in a TV movie at Critics' Choice... and gush 'I can't think of anything better'**

be sexual, unapologetic and not have it be a fetish or a joke'. Patricia ended by shouting 'I love my kids', while Amy gave a shout out to husband Darren and daughter Aviana.

Last week, Patricia beat Amy in the same category, at the Golden Globes.

As for Lady Gaga and Glenn Close, the two accepted





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